

ABSTRACT

Transforming Views of Baptist Ecclesiology: Baptists and the New Christendom Model of Political Engagement

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While most twentieth century commentators on Baptist distinctives note well the commitment to religious liberty, the context of the discussion typically treats religious liberty as a natural right secured through the emergence of the modern liberal democratic state. This view tends to interpret the concept of “religious liberty” as a univocal term throughout Baptist history, assuming that the meaning of this idea has been consistent during four centuries of Baptist presence within the Western world. Religious liberty has thus come to be understood as the securing of a natural right dependent for its preservation upon a form of liberal democratic polity. In this dissertation, however, I will argue first that Baptist conceptions of religious liberty and their concomitant views on the relationship between Christians and the state have not been univocal throughout Baptist history. In particular, I will suggest that contemporary Baptist models share significant foundational theological presuppositions concerning the realms of the secular and the religious with the New Christendom model of twentieth century Roman Catholicism. Second, having argued for the shared convictions between both models, I will then note

the challenges from within Catholic theology to the New Christendom model and its failures, and by correspondence, suggest that similar shortcomings may be present in Baptist models. As a response to the critiques offered, it will be suggested that the church should instead imagine itself as an alternative body politic to the liberal democratic nation-state. This dissertation is therefore concerned with the development of a Baptist ecclesiology and concomitant social theory.

Transforming Views of Baptist Ecclesiology:
Baptists and the New Christendom Model of Political Engagement

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Whenever one discusses Baptist distinctives and historical Baptist commitments, very close to the top of the list is the advocacy of religious liberty. This commitment has been a hallmark of Baptist conviction from the emergence of Baptists in seventeenth century England to the present day with organizations such as the Baptist Joint Committee and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention advocating in Washington on religious liberty issues. Baptist historian Bill J. Leonard suggests that Baptists have been the “most outspoken advocates of religious liberty in modern Protestant history,” with the distinction of being “the first English-speaking religious communion to advocate complete religious liberty” for all varieties of belief and unbelief.¹ Indeed, Baptists in the United States are quick to point to the efforts of Isaac Backus and John Leland to secure universal religious liberty during the formative years of the emerging nation. In recent decades, there has been significant disagreement among Baptists, particularly those associated with (or formerly so) the Southern Baptist Convention on how to best preserve and define the historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty. Yet despite differences in understanding to what extent the church and state may interact (if at all), largely for Baptists, the theological presuppositions informing their commitment to religious liberty are shared in common.

¹Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 157. Robert N. Bellah, in his plenary address to the American Academy of Religion meeting in San Francisco in 1997, comments, “What is so important about the Baptists, and other sectarians such as the Quakers, was the absolute centrality of religious freedom, of the sacredness of individual conscience in matters of religious belief.” “Is There a Common Culture?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 617.

While most twentieth century commentators on Baptist distinctives note well the commitment to religious liberty,² the context of the discussion typically treats religious liberty as a natural right secured through the beneficence of the modern liberal democratic state. This view tends to interpret the concept of religious liberty as an univocal term throughout Baptist history, assuming that the meaning of this idea has been consistent during four centuries of Baptist presence within the Western world. Religious liberty has thus come to be understood as the securing of a natural right dependent for its preservation upon a form of liberal democratic polity. In this dissertation, however, I will argue that Baptist conceptions of religious liberty and their concomitant views on the relationship between Christians and the state have not been univocal throughout Baptist history. In particular, I will suggest that contemporary Baptist models share significant foundational theological presuppositions concerning the realms of the secular and the religious with the New Christendom model of twentieth century Roman Catholicism, a

²It must be noted here that I am not suggesting that all would recognize “religious liberty” as *the* Baptist distinctive or defining characteristic. As Bill J. Leonard notes, “describing particular distinctives that typify Baptist identity requires extensive qualification. Numerous scholars have sought to delineate the essence of the Baptists, with their conclusions often being as diverse as the distinctives they sought to define.” *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 2. Rather, religious liberty is usually included in any listing of distinguishing Baptist beliefs, even when it is derived from “. . . a core value or a single hermeneutical motif around which one can cluster and interpret the several Baptist distinctives.” Walter B. Shurden, “The Baptist Identity and The Baptist *Manifesto*,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 322. For example, Leonard includes it as one of his “eight dialectics” that inform Baptist identity. *Baptist Ways*, 6-10. Shurden suggests that religious liberty is an aspect of freedom (his core value for Baptists) that should define all Baptists. See “How We Got That Way: Baptists on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State,” in *Not An Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2005), 48-63. H. Leon McBeth lists religious liberty as one of the characteristics that define the Baptist faith in the second chapter of *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 85-86. Derived from his conviction of soul competency, for E. Y. Mullins, religious liberty becomes one of the axioms of religion (“a free church in a free state”). *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908). William Brackney also includes religious liberty as one of the five “vertices which are important to all Baptists.” *The Baptists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), xii, 87-107. Robert Baker also includes a chapter on religious liberty in his work, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People: 1607-1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 59-74. Robert G. Torbet also includes religious liberty as a key principle of Baptists. *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1950).

model most identified with Jacques Maritain. Significantly for Baptists, and those professing a political theology fundamentally in agreement with Baptists, such shared convictions with New Christendom, by correspondence, leave them vulnerable to similar critiques and challenges as have been leveled against the Catholic political theology. It is hoped that in examining these criticisms, some few ideas for a renewed Baptist ecclesiology and conception of the social realm may be offered. As a response to the critiques offered, it will be suggested that the church should instead imagine itself as an alternative body politic to the liberal democratic nation-state. This dissertation is therefore concerned with the development of a Baptist ecclesiology and concomitant social theory.

The early seventeenth century framers of Baptist thought in England called upon King James and Parliament to recognize the liberty of conscience of each individual to respond freely to the call of Christ in the Gospel, and consequently to lay aside all religious oaths and persecution in the name of the established Church of England.³ The theological presupposition informing these calls recognized the complete sovereignty of God to draw people to faith apart from the coercion of legal oaths or membership in a national church. Over a century later, in the newly established United States, Baptists were again at the forefront of calls for religious liberty and the disestablishment of religion. Yet in this later context, the warrants for this position shifted, grounded not in

³Cf. Leonard Busher, "Religions Peace: or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience, 1614," in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (1846; New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 41. Busher comments, "Therefore persecution for difference in religion is a monstrous and cruel beast, that destroyeth both prince and people, hindereth the gospel of Christ, and scattereth his disciples that witness and profess his name. But permission of conscience in difference of religion, saveth both prince and people; for it is a meek and gentle lamb, which not only furthereth and advanceth the gospel, but also fostereth and cherisheth those that profess it."

God's sovereignty, but in a foundational anthropology which underwrites liberal democratic theory and natural human rights.

While Baptists in the contemporary context continue to affirm their historical commitment to religious liberty, in the United States they have increasingly propounded an inherent tie between religious liberty and the advancement of the modern liberal democratic state. As a result, among both conservative and moderate Southern Baptists it is often argued that there is a necessary Christian underpinning to democracy that corresponds with the Baptist notion of soul competency.⁴ While the institutions of church and state are to be separate, conservatives generally argue that culture itself needs religious values to keep society morally ordered.⁵ They thus are open to allowing government actions in favor of Christianity so long as no coercion of belief is involved. That is, separation is preserved so long as coercion of belief is absent from state actions supporting certain Christian practices since these actions are in line with the view that Christian morality shapes democratic foundations. Symbiotically, churches are dependant upon the liberal democratic state for their continued liberty.⁶ Conversely, Barry Hankins notes that moderates are concerned to avoid any state aid that might

⁴Mullins argues that "democracy in church government is an inevitable corollary of the general doctrine of the soul's competency in religion." Furthermore, he suggests that Baptists provide the "spiritual analogues of our entire political system." For Mullins, Baptist ideals have been the most significant in the shaping of the American political system, and that the democratic ecclesial polity demanded by soul competency has been reproduced in the American democratic government. *Axioms of Religion*, 55, 270.

⁵Barry Hankins notes, "Al Mohler likes to say, the moderates rightly recognize the danger of culture religion, but in stripping that away, they were rendering the public square antiseptic as far as religion was concerned. 'We are now seeing the debris left when there is an attempt to separate the Christian moral heritage from the society and still try to keep some kind of democratic experiment.'" *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 120.

⁶Brackney comments: "Unaware of their basically liberal heritage in matters pertaining to religious liberty, many modern Baptists are not as concerned about freedom as with their task to create a cultural Christianity. Similarly, some Baptists make a strong case for their involvement in political affairs while eschewing altogether government intrusion into the affairs of the church." *The Baptists*, 105.

accrue to religion, thus crossing the “wall of separation.”⁷ For both groups, however, the realms of church and state are kept distinct, such that Christians exist in two realms: the secular under the purview of the state, and the spiritual which is the sphere of the church. Therefore, one measure of the divergence among conservatives and liberals is the degree of interaction between the state and churches, and the role of government policies in aiding the formation of a state marked by the Christian conscience.⁸

The most familiar terminology used to express this difference in openness to government aid towards religious organizations is that of “accommodation” and “separation.” The accommodationist position follows a narrow interpretation of the Establishment Clause arguing that the framers of the Constitution intended “to prevent governmental establishment of a single sect or denomination of religion over another.”⁹ Accommodationists, therefore, are open to government aid to religious organizations so long as it is offered without discrimination and does not abridge religious liberty by discriminatory practices that favor one denomination or religion over others. Separationists, conversely, appeal to a broad interpretation of the Establishment Clause, arguing for a strict separation between religion and the state. As a result, they reject any form of government aid to a church or religious group, a view they believe to be consistent with the intent of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.¹⁰ Within such a terminological context, conservative Baptists such as those associated with the present

⁷Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 137. This imagery of a wall was first used by Roger Williams whose theology will be considered in chapter three.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Derek Davis, *Original Intent: Chief Justice Rehnquist and the Course of American Church/State Relations* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991), 48.

¹⁰Ibid., 48.

leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention are categorized as accommodationists.

Moderate Baptists, largely supportive of the work of James M. Dunn and the Baptist Joint Committee, are seen as separatists.¹¹

Martin McMahon has argued that such a simple categorization fails to adequately account for the nuances of viewpoints among Baptists, and instead suggests a divergence among Baptists following the differing trajectories set by Isaac Backus and John Leland, eventually appearing in two main streams after the Civil War.¹² Though divergent in their view of how churches and the state are to engage, each trajectory claims a commitment to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. McMahon instead applies the typologies offered by Carl Esbeck as a more nuanced categorization allowing for a better picture of divergent Baptist beliefs about the relationship between religion and the state.¹³ Esbeck's five categories are: strict

¹¹Richard Land, speaking as the public policy voice of the conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention (Land serves as the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention), argues that "we do not want any entanglement of the institution of the state with the institution of the church." This is a view that would be accepted by James Dunn and other "separationists." Where the divergence comes is with Land's "however." He continues, "However, we must accommodate, acknowledge, accept, and understand the right of individual believers to the full 'free exercise' of their religious convictions. For instance, if we are going to require our children to be on public-school property for most of their waking hours, for most of the months of their formative years, then they must be free to exercise the religious convictions that they bring with them from home and from church." Richard D. Land, "Responses," in *Disciples and Democracy: Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics*, ed. by Michael Cromartie (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 103. Land and other conservatives reject the separationist position as espoused by Dunn and others as hostile to religion and a favoring of secularism. For a detailed discussion of these differences, see chapter 4, "The Search for a Useable Past" in Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 107-138.

¹²Martin Lydon McMahon, "Liberty More Than Separation: The Multiple Streams of Baptist Thought on Church-State Issues, 1830-1900," (Ph.D. Dissertation: Baylor University, 2001). McMahon suggests that in an examination of the nineteenth century, "It is religious liberty, and not separation, that emerges from this research as the common thread in nineteenth-century Baptist thought" (277). While some Baptists saw religious liberty as requiring separation of church and state, others saw that state support for religion could still allow for liberty so long as that support was not favoring any particular denomination. McMahon notes that there was a third stream of Baptists who "believed the nation should be intentionally and legally Christian" (277).

¹³See, *Ibid.*, 8-12.

separationist, pluralistic separationist, institutional separationist, nonpreferentialist, and restorationist.¹⁴

Strict separationists argue for the complete insulation of government affairs from any religious influence, to the extent that they seek separation of religion from all civic matters.¹⁵ Religion is to be a private matter without any influence in the secular realm. Pluralistic separationists desire a “neutral” state in which the state “avoids taking sides for or against religion and religious organizations.”¹⁶ Pluralistic separationists also hold to a dichotomy between the religious and the secular, but, in contrast to the strict separationists, they allow that “religious values may influence government policy if the policy concerns a ‘public’ matter.”¹⁷ The wall of separation remains between the religious and the state, particularly in terms of financial interaction, but pluralistic separationists recognize that religious values do have a place in influencing public discussion. Institutional separationists see interaction between the church and state as “inevitable and desirable as each pursues its own proper objectives.”¹⁸ Both institutions are divinely ordained and exist under the will and rule of God with neither dominating the other. For institutional separationists, there is an inherent transcendent underpinning to the state in terms of its ethical system that is to be acknowledged. While reference to God is always generic in public discourse, there is certainly the connection with the historical concept of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

¹⁴Carl Esbeck, “Five Views of Church-State Relations in Contemporary American Thought,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 37 (1986): 375-376.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 380-81.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 389-390.

The final two groups, not receiving the moniker “separationist,” allow significantly more engagement between the two realms. Nonpreferentialists seek a nonsectarian state, but in so doing, they also affirm that religion in general is crucial for the public interest. Religion is the key to strong morality and developing persons able to function in a liberal democratic state. Therefore, as Esbeck writes, “the state may aid religion because the public interest in a stable, democratic government is thereby served.”¹⁹ Nonpreferentialists are open to government aid for religion as long as that aid is not sectarian, but aids all religious groups in their task of forming solid citizens. Finally, restorationists argue that the foundation of the United States was upon Christianity and that Christianity must be restored to its proper place of influence within the nation. Yet, in this, restorationists do not seek a Constantinian state in which there is one head over both state and church, and where one religion is enforced. Rather, state and church have their own spheres, and each must hold to its own role. Esbeck writes, “the state is to provide a social environment where religious claims are more plausible and conversion therefore more likely.”²⁰ Christianity is to be overtly supported, but not such that other religions lose their freedom to practice and speak freely.

What is consistent throughout these five types, however, is the commitment to an ecclesiology which presupposes the existence of two distinct realms: the public realm of the political and the private realm of the religious. In each type, the religious is a particular aspect of private life that may or may not have place within the larger public realm. Therefore, the question of religious liberty involves to what extent this private aspect of life may make incursion into the public arena. Noting the resemblance of the

¹⁹Ibid., 394.

²⁰Ibid., 399.

underlying theological presuppositions and acknowledging the diversity in understanding the limits of engagement between church and state, it can be argued that both conservative and moderate Baptists may claim to hold to traditional Baptist convictions concerning religious liberty and yet be quite diverse in understanding how that commitment is to be expressed. Across this spectrum, however, it will be suggested that amid the diversity in understanding the expression of religious liberty, there is a shared family resemblance that informs and directs this commitment to religious liberty. Moreover, it will be argued that this theological presupposition has not been consistent throughout Baptist history, and that contemporary Baptists hold a theological commitment that significantly differs from those of their first English forefathers.

Purpose

This dissertation first intends to examine the concept of religious liberty among the earliest seventeenth century Baptists and among their American descendants almost two centuries later during the formative years of the fledgling democracy. The seventeenth century English Baptists affirmed the legitimate authority of earthly rulers as being established by God and thus worthy of obedience, and while they acknowledged kingly rule as evidenced in scripture, they did not limit the form of government to any particular model. That form established by the people for each nation was that which God's providence had instituted and would use for legitimate governance.²¹ The function of government was the protection of the good and the punishment of evil doers. In so

²¹Thomas Grantham develops this argument among the early English Baptists in the seventeenth century. *The Loyal Baptist: or an Apology for the Baptized Believers* (London: Thomas Fabian, 1674), 28-30.

doing, the legitimately functioning government opened the space whereby evangelism might most effectively take place.²²

Among Baptists in America, a gradual movement occurred from grounding religious liberty in an ecclesiology focused on God's sovereign action to call people into the true church, to a foundation of liberty upon natural human rights. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the foundation for religious liberty was no longer recognition of God's sovereign action towards people, but instead a commitment to liberal democracy in which freedom of conscience became the inherent right of the individual.²³ For Isaac Backus, and particularly for John Leland, the securing of religious liberty was now intimately tied with the emergence of liberal democratic principles. Humans are free, not to respond without coercion to God's calling, but to pursue their own ends free of compulsion from any person or authority.²⁴ As such, the government becomes the guarantor of these rights, a view both Backus and Leland affirmed despite differing views

²² Philip E. Thompson states, "The theology and practices of seventeenth-century Baptists revealed a guiding conviction that God must be free to exercise divine prerogative in salvation. Their critique of and resistance to the state church were rooted in this theological intuition." "Sacraments and Religious Liberty," in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003), 43.

²³ Thompson argues, "Language concerning religious liberty has come to have a different grounding among Baptists in America since the American Revolution. Rather than approaching religious liberty from concern for the freedom of God, Baptists in America have largely adopted an anthropocentric calculus. ... Unsuspectingly legitimating the liberal democratic state in the name of religious liberty, they have effected a union of sorts between the earthly and heavenly cities." "Sacraments and Religious Liberty," 49-50.

²⁴ John Leland, "A Blow at the Root: being a Fashionable Fast-Day Sermon, delivered at Cheshire, April 9, 1801," in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 239. Leland draws upon the term 'inalienable right' to express foundation for a freedom of conscience: "To be definite in expression, by the liberty of conscience, I mean, the inalienable right that each individual has, of worshipping his God according to the dictates of his conscience, without being prohibited, directed, or controlled therein by human law, either in time, place, or manner." Evidenced in this quote is the anthropocentric foundation of worship contrasted with the earlier emphasis on God's sovereign activity.

on the role of the church in public activity.²⁵ As a result, it became essential for Christians to become upholders and supporters of the liberal democratic state. This is seen especially among Baptists in the South, conservative and moderate, where Christians were the key supporters of the status quo.²⁶

The second purpose of this dissertation is to argue that there are inherent similarities between contemporary Baptist thought in the United States concerning the foundational theological suppositions of religious liberty and what is called the New Christendom model of twentieth century Catholicism. This political theology was most clearly articulated by Jacques Maritain, who argues that, due to distinction between the spiritual and temporal realms, the Christian engages the state not as a Christian as such, but as an individual inspired and informed by the Christian faith.²⁷ Political activity is

²⁵Concerning the differences between Leland and Backus, William G. McLoughlin, writes, “Though Backus’ views on church and state are often equated with those of Leland, it is clear that the two had distinctly different positions on many aspects of this question.” William G. McLoughlin, ed., *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1968), 51 n. 33. Ediwyn Guastad also notes, “Not the thoroughgoing Jeffersonian that Leland was, not the zealous purist regarding the church and its ministry that Roger Williams was, Isaac Backus fought for a liberty within limits—limits essentially of a Protestant province. It is a distinction, and it does make a difference.” “Religious Liberty: Baptists and Some Fine Distinctions,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 6 (December 1987): 220. See also Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 128ff.

²⁶David Stricklin notes particularly of Baptists in the South: “They became more respectable and more powerful as they became more numerous in southern society, becoming in the process also a subculture of accommodation to the larger culture of southern life. Baptists preserved their determination not to allow government interference in matters of the faith. But now, instead of conflicting with the power structure as they had during the colonial period, in many communities they constituted its core. They abandoned virtually any trace of their former critical stance toward coercive political and economic forces and instead focused their criticisms of society on untoward personal behavior. They came to stand for a determination to defend the status quo, not just in racial matters but in other political, social, and economic issues and concerns as well. As a society built on rigid racial, socio-economic, and gender hierarchies, the South bothered most Southern Baptists not at all. They had contributed greatly to the ways that society was structured, the ways it operated, and the ways people understood it. They had done much to create that society, and they liked it the way it was. To them, the South was the ‘Baptist Zion,’ the promised land.” *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 11.

²⁷Maritain’s most significant development of his New Christendom model is found in his work, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (South Bend, University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).

outside of the realm of Christianity *qua* Christianity since the political is within the temporal realm. Yet, in a true democracy, one which recognizes the leavening for democracy in the Gospel, humans are opened to fraternal love and justice in the temporal realm. Therefore, democracy, even when its roots in the Gospel are forgotten, is precious and its relationship with Christianity must be nurtured.²⁸ By allowing this earthly common good to be an “infravalent end,” Maritain allows for the autonomy of the temporal realm with its own proper, though not finally ultimate, good.²⁹ Christians then as individuals are called to help establish the temporal good through the transformation of the state, and in so doing also open space for the achievement of the ultimate end for persons in God.

The image of space that is opened here is not to be confused with that of the earliest English Baptists. In the latter case, within the realm of life there was to be an opening to allow the opportunity for free response to the sovereign activity of God without coercion. Maritain’s view accepts the idea of a real space created for the pursuit of varied temporal goods, any of which may be considered ultimate within the temporal realm without relation to the spiritual. This view suggests two distinct planes of life: the temporal/natural plane, and the spiritual/supernatural plane. The result is that Christianity becomes the caretaker of the spiritual in humans while the state has charge of everything else.

²⁸Matthew J. Mancini offers an excellent description of Maritain’s emphasis on democracy in his essay, “Maritain’s Democratic Vision: ‘You Have No Bourgeois,’” in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 133-151. See particularly pp. 144-148.

²⁹Ibid., 176.

While Maritain's work often has been critiqued in the decades since its publication, one of the most powerful criticisms has been offered by William Cavanaugh, a Catholic theologian who has focused on the limitations of Maritain's New Christendom model and displayed its inherent dangers as revealed during the bloody dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte in Chile during the latter half of the twentieth century.³⁰ His research into the failure of the church to counter adequately the state reveals that an approach that leaves the church as nurturer of the spirit while the state has control of the body can deprive the church of its prophetic voice. Because the church's proper concern—according to the model—is reduced to the spiritual, it cannot act to counter the state's injurious control of the larger activities of the temporal life. Due to the similarities between Maritain's views and the views of twentieth century Baptists on the relationship between the church and the state, the critique leveled against the New Christendom model also may be brought to bear upon Baptist views.³¹ Cavanaugh's critique challenges the church instead to function as an alternative body politic to the modern nation-state, engaging the whole life of believers, and challenging the state's hegemony.

In the end, the purpose of this research is not to remain within the rather narrow confines of the Baptist family, simply offering another consideration of the Baptist emphasis on, and commitment to, religious liberty. Such Baptist historiographies already

³⁰William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998). See in particular, chapter 4, "A Distinction of Planes," for Cavanaugh's articulation of Maritain's work and the results in Latin America.

³¹In Baptist life, one may point to the example of Douglas Hudgins as pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi during the turbulent years of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Decrying the church's involvement in the political, Hudgins refused to speak against racial segregation and violence, focusing instead on what he believed was the church's role in developing the interior piety and holiness of the individual man. See Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 82-115.

have been ably pursued.³² Nor will this work comprise a comprehensive accounting of Baptist history. It will instead consider key Baptist figures at various points throughout Baptist history as a means of highlighting the shifts in theological orientation in different periods that may be seen as Baptists progress into the contemporary context. The goal of this work is that by challenging the reading of religious liberty as being univocal throughout Baptist history—an approach that makes the notion almost completely ahistorical—and instead considering the theological rules shaping Baptist doctrines throughout the centuries, a new view of Baptist community will emerge. That is, in bringing to light and critiquing the dualistic narrative that separates the religious from the secular in the modern liberal democratic state, a narrative that now informs Baptist theologies of religious liberty, one is able to discover a different narration of the theological foundations for religious liberty among early seventeenth century Baptists. The implications reach beyond Baptists, though, as a means is sought that allows for an understanding of religious liberty and engagement with the state that is not hindered by a dualistic divide in the person that is foreign to Christian thought prior to the modern world. The concern of this research, then, is not religious liberty per se, but instead to

³²Sammie Pedlow Strange, Jr. most recently has traced the divergent development of Baptist thought on religious liberty. “Baptists and Religious Liberty: 1700-1900,” (PhD diss.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006). See also, Brackney, *The Baptists*; Isaac Backus, *A History of the New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2 vols. (1871; repr., New York: Adorno Press, 1969); Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2003); H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987); H. Leon McBeth, *English Baptist Literature on Religious Liberty to 1689*, (New York: Adorno Press, 1980); William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1620-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971); William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists’ Struggle in New England, 1630-1833* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brown University Press and University Press of New England, 1991); Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*; A. H. Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in America* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894); Robert B. Semple, *History of the Baptists in Virginia* (1810; revised by G. W. Beale, 1894; repr., Lafayette, Tennessee: Church History Research and Archives, 1976); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Religious Liberty* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1997); Edward B. Underhill, *Struggles and Triumphs of Religious Liberty* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1851); A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1947).

offer a different understanding of the ecclesiology and social theory which informs the diverse Baptist understandings of church-state relations.

Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation will challenge the assumption of univocal theological presuppositions informing Baptist views of religious liberty between the seventeenth century and the contemporary context. Much of twentieth century church-state models embraced by Baptists tend to accept a method that separates the public and the private spheres in which the religious is banished from the public square and relegated to the realm of the private. This account, adopted by liberal democracy, suggests that there is a dualistic nature to the individual such that the state has authority over the body while the church may speak only to the spirit. This creates two distinct planes of life: the autonomous natural realm and the God-graced supernatural realm, each with distinct ends—a conception inherent in both New Christendom and contemporary Baptist models of church-state relations. The result is then that the institution shaping and defining most of life experience, beyond the purely “religious,” is that of the nation-state. The Christian practice is not definitive of life in the public realm, but instead, for the Christian, Christianity becomes just another aspect of life in society.

This dissertation will draw on a method of study according to which the Christian faith functions not as an aspect of an individual’s life, but as normative for all facets of life. Thus, Christianity is not located at the margins of society and relegated to the merely “religious,” but instead is embodied in an alternative body politic, from which

theology “provides its own account of the final causes at work in human history.”³³ Such an approach is dependent upon a social theory which understands a distinct Christian practice emerging within the context of a particular historical circumstances; that is, actual, not ideal, Christian communities.³⁴ Doctrine emerges as the explication and reflection on this particular practice.

This methodology draws upon the work of George Lindbeck who challenges the view that doctrines express propositional truth claims about objective realities or that they are discursive expressions of a priori religious experiences.³⁵ Lindbeck offers an alternative to these two approaches, suggesting instead what he terms a “cultural-linguistic” view which asserts that religious experience is the product of a learned culture and narrative which gives meaning to experiences. The cultural-linguistic context is formed prior to the ability of the individual to comprehend experiences, and provides the language and symbols which give meaning to experience.³⁶ For Lindbeck, then, doctrines function not as propositions describing ontological reality, but as grammatical rules defining the limits within which Christians may speak “Christianly” of God. As

³³John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 380.

³⁴Milbank writes, “This is not, however, to propose a tridentine deduction of Christian social teaching from Christian doctrine. On the contrary, there can only be a distinguishable Christian social theory because there is also a distinguishable Christian mode of action, a definite practice. The theory explicates this practice, which arose in certain precise historical circumstances, and exists only as a particular historical development.” *Theology and Social Theory*, 380.

³⁵George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 16.

³⁶Lindbeck writes, “[Religion] is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.” *Ibid.*, 33.

second order statements, doctrines set the bounds for Christian practice by reflection on the first order narrative and practice.³⁷

This dissertation will contend that the commitment to religious liberty originally grew out of the unique contextual narrative that was formative for Baptist doctrine and practice in seventeenth century England. The question becomes not simply whether the earliest Baptists espoused the concept of religious liberty, but what cultural context informed this commitment. Therefore, the grammar of religious liberty used in a twentieth century liberal democracy will not necessarily share the same basis as that of seventeenth century England. In the latter, one must account for a pre-Enlightenment narration of church-state interaction that differs significantly from that of an American context informed by the philosophy of John Locke. The context of seventeenth century Baptists should be considered as a transformative point between a medieval polity and the modern world of liberal democracy from which emerged the American experience.

The Church as “Public”

Before proceeding further, some definition of terms must be offered that will be foundational for the development of the argument in this dissertation. Barry Harvey notes that in the ancient world, the *polis* was the “dominant form of ordered social life, and so in the Greco-Roman world it came to signify the entire mode of living that made for a truly human existence.”³⁸ When one speaks of politics, then, it is not simply the art of statecraft or a publicly reasoned debate concerning the activity and potentiality of the

³⁷Milbank challenges that though Lindbeck hopes to establish a metanarrative to regulate and interpret all other stories, his account leaves the metanarrative “dangerously ahistorical.” Milbank attempts to correct this by arguing for the narrative relationship between Jesus and the Gospels and the continuing story of the Church, a story that subsumes each of the narratives. *Theology and Social Theory*, 382-388.

³⁸Barry A. Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 16-17.

nation-state. The polis encompasses all aspects of life that engage the community and the relation of persons in community to one another and their world. Most important for the Christian tradition was the idea that the fullness of human life within the polis could only be realized through participation in the triune God.³⁹ Following this understanding, then, the church is not a social group that must refrain from involvement in the political, the church itself is a body politic. Harvey notes that the early Christians could have accepted designation under Roman law as a *cultus privatus*, suggesting a commitment to the development of “personal piety and otherworldly salvation,” but they instead chose in declaring Christ as king to renounce their loyalty to Caesar.⁴⁰ In doing so, the early Christians proclaimed themselves as other and in contrast to Roman society. Reinhard Hütter notes that in this, “The church is not just another instantiation of the overarching genus ‘polis.’ It is, rather, a public in its own right in such a way that the character of its public nature is not defined by the genus ‘public’ but by its own very particular and concrete designation.”⁴¹

For Hütter, this designation as *ekklesia* is a rejection of what he believes to be the ancient dichotomy between the *polis* and the *oikos*. Following Milbank, he argues that the *oikos* was the place to which those disenfranchised from the *polis* were relegated.⁴²

³⁹Harvey notes that the art of politics considers all that is involved in both “the actuality and the possibility of human life, which according to Christian tradition is realized only through participation in the divine life of the triune God.” *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹Reinhard Hütter, “The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit,” *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (Summer 1994): 352.

⁴²Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 364. “[T]he polis itself . . . was partly constituted as a machine for minimizing the *oikos*, or as a kind of cultural bypass operation to disassociate continuity and succession from wombs and domestic nurture. Hence a virtue (like Christian virtue) that can also be possessed by women, and be exercised as much in the homes as in the forum (and perhaps also as much by

Those of the *oikos* had no place in the politics and society of the *polis*. He sees in Ephesians 2: 19 the image of the church's contrast with that of the Roman *polis*: "So then you are no longer strangers (*xenoi*) and aliens (*paroikoi*), but you are citizens (*sympolitai*) with the saints and also members of the household (*oikeioi*) of God" (NRSV). By drawing in those who were excluded from the Roman *polis* (women, children, slaves) and proclaiming them "citizens" in the "household of God," a new public is formed which contrasts sharply with that of the Roman *polis*. God's salvific activity which ultimately culminates in the eschaton of a new heaven and a new earth begins to be tangible in this unique space. This public is bounded by and constituted in God's household rule (*oikonomia*), in which baptism serves as the symbol of citizenship.⁴³

By understanding the *oikos* of God as a challenge to the Roman *polis*, in our modern context the distinction between what is public and the private is overcome. Elizabeth Newman states, "The *oikos* of God . . . explodes the modern dichotomy between private and public that so readily tames religion by privatizing it. This *oikos* is not the private place from which we seek to be relevant to the public square."⁴⁴ Rather, since all who by baptism become *sympolitai* ("citizens") of God's household, a unique public is created. This particular public is then constituted around a common good of divine love and grace.

Therefore, rather than accepting a modern, liberal democratic definition of "public" as that space specifically demarcated by reasoned discourse without reference to

the immature as the mature) cannot be 'virtue' in the same 'political' sense at all: it must be an entirely transvaluated virtue."

⁴³Hütter, "The Church as Public," 353.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 52.

private, “religious,” grammar and vocabulary, Hütter follows Hannah Arendt in seeing the “public” as a space “of and for *praxis*, made possible by rules and norms which are precisely not the product of this *praxis* but precede and frame it.”⁴⁵ With this understanding in mind, one is then able to recognize that possibility of multiple publics, not simply that one defined by the nation-state. The church as constituting its own public thus challenges the modern assumption of the religious as something to be relegated to the private and personal, in which Christians as members of the larger society have as an aspect of their private lives a commitment to an institution known as “church.” The presuppositions of a privatized “religious” and a neutral public reason inherent in the modern account find their basis in the formation of the nation-state and the politico-theological ideology supporting the emergence of the modern liberal democracy.

The Mythology of the Modern State

The mythos of modern political theory suggests that the state has been a constant throughout history, and that it is constituted by a particular society which shapes it. The modern concept of the “state” carries the connotation of the bearer of legitimate authority within a specifically defined geographical region.⁴⁶ Contained within this idea is the recognition that the state’s legitimate authority may not be challenged by any lesser authorities within its geographical boundaries. Thus the state has claim to all lawful use

⁴⁵Ibid., 347.

⁴⁶Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2: 352-353. Skinner notes that the modern concept of the state is quite distinct from that of the Medieval concept such that the term *status* used by Medieval writers must not be assumed to be univocal with the modern “state.” The Medieval concept referred to the condition in which the ruler found himself or the condition of the realm as a whole. He writes, “What was lacking in these usages was the distinctively modern idea of the State as a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory.”

of force over against any others who would desire to enforce their own authority within the region.

Joseph Strayer argues that the state, particularly the modern state, has not always existed, and that in rather recent history, peoples were organized not according to their relation to the framework of the state, but instead by their commitment to family, community, religion, or lord.⁴⁷ Prior to the emergence of the modern state, feudal relationships defined the extents of power and control, not geographical boundaries. That is, a particular ruler's ability to impose his will was determined by the relationships of fealty which he was owed (and which he himself owed). Kings ruling prior to the emergence of the modern state were dependent upon the military support of vassal lords and princes whose obligations to that individual meant their support in times of need. The rule of local dukes, lords, and other nobility was usually of far greater significance in a region than the voice of the king. As the modern state began to emerge during the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, one of the driving factors was the development of persistent institutions of governance, particularly law courts and apparatuses for the effective procurement of tax revenue.⁴⁸ By becoming the source for the dispensing of justice between competing claims of nobility, the kings found their own power was increased. This also opened new sources for revenue, and particularly as war became increasingly costly and widespread during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, rulers found that the need to increase profits also led to expanded war-making abilities, in turn expanding their authority.

⁴⁷Joseph R. Strayer, *The Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

⁴⁸Ibid., 28-29, 61, 69.

Charles Tilly suggests that at the heart of the formation of the modern state was the monopolization of violence within a given region. War-making and state-making proceed hand-in-hand for Tilly.⁴⁹ By maximizing the profit received from offering protection through the removal of competition—other feudal lords and authorities who might control their own military forces—kings were able to accumulate a monopoly on the war-making apparatuses while beginning to delineate those internal and external to their control. Yet, likewise, as Tilly notes, the resistance of ordinary people, usually in alliance with remnants of the ruling class, led to concessions in terms of rights and representative institutions that helped to constrain the form that the state-making path would take.⁵⁰ Even with these concessions, however, the emergence of the modern state seems tied with the means of waging war and expanding areas of influence in order for a ruler to maximize the revenue from tribute paid by those receiving his protection. Finally, Tilly points out that the ending of wars from 1648 onwards, the peace making, became a more significant time of state-making as the nations of Europe would gather to redraw the borders of the belligerents. He writes, “From each large war, in general, emerged fewer national states than had entered it.”⁵¹

Such a developmental history of the modern state would suggest that the state is not a basic universal institution for humanity. The modern state’s emergence is intimately tied with the monopolization of violence and the desire of rulers effectively and efficiently to secure the resources necessary for both war making and, more

⁴⁹Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Reuschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169-191.

⁵⁰Ibid., 183.

⁵¹Ibid., 184.

importantly, accumulation of profits. Thus, the emergence of bureaucracies, judicial institutions, and other civil government offices, all aspects that Strayer notes are the signs of the formation of the modern state, are necessary for the coalescing of power within the hands of the ruler within any given area.⁵² The benefits of the emergence of the modern state in the medieval period accrued, however, not to the common people, but instead to the elites whose grants of power to the ruler brought their own concessions. Strayer writes, “[Medieval states] had acquired their power largely by developing their judicial institutions and by protecting the property rights of the possessing classes.”⁵³ In the emergence of the modern state, there is no consideration of the common good. The state was not the institution that secured the common peace, but was instead the purveyor of war as it sought continually to increase tax revenue to sustain its monopoly on violence. Therefore, Tilly suggests

a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives: the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers, the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government.⁵⁴

The modern state in this view cannot be seen as the inevitable product of people living in society.

Such a narration of the emergence of the modern state also challenges the assertion that the state is the product of a unified society. By arguing that the modern state developed through the consolidation of power in the hands of a centralized

⁵²Strayer, *Medieval Origins*, 6-8.

⁵³Ibid., 61.

⁵⁴Tilly, “War Making and State Making,” 169.

authority, there is the implicit assertion that this authority was gathered up from divergent bearers. As Cavanaugh notes, “In the crucial period of state formation, the state either absorbed rights previously resident in other bodies (guilds, manors, provinces, estates) or eliminated them altogether, as in the enclosure of common lands.”⁵⁵ This usurpation of authority from other bodies has two significant results. First, the individual is now directly subject to the central authority of the state. That is, rather than persons being interconnected through various local bodies which bore authority and sought to regulate various aspects of life—community, family, church, guild, local lords—all persons now relate to one another through the central institution of the state. The picture shifts from a patchwork quilt of inter-related groups through which a person conducts and is regulated in life, so that now the picture is of a wheel in which all spokes relate through the hub. The individual is loosed from the confines of local social groups, and “freed” to be in relation to the state directly.⁵⁶

The second result of the absorption of rights from traditional social bodies by the state is the creation of a single society bounded by geographical the borders of the state and ruled by a central authority whose power is extended by a network of bureaucrats. That is, from a plurality of *societates* in the medieval world, in which there were complex relations of overlapping loyalties and sources of authority for persons, the emergence of the modern state requires the creation of a single society in which there are no conflicts of

⁵⁵William T. Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is Not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004), 249.

⁵⁶Robert Nisbet notes that for Rousseau, the real oppressors in life were those institutions of traditional society: class, church, school, and patriarchal family. Individual freedom was to be increased by the releasing of these constraints to the “single, impersonal structure of the General Will arising out of the consciousness of all persons in the State.” *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1990), 96.

loyalty or authority.⁵⁷ Therefore, to suggest that the state is a product of or institution within a given society is to fail to recognize that the designation of a unified society within a particular set of geographical boundaries is the product of, rather than the stimulus for, the modern liberal democratic state.

Finally, consideration must be given to the question of the pursuit of common goods. As noted above, the avowed purpose of the modern state, particularly in its liberal democratic manifestation, is not to pursue any particular end good, but to create space whereby individuals, now freed from the demands of family, church, guild, or university in the defining of goods to be sought, might seek their own self-determined goods. The modern liberal democratic state does not establish goods to be pursued by its citizens, but instead seeks to create space in which each individual might pursue his or her own goods—so long as those pursuits do not conflict with another’s. For many, a commitment to liberal democracy entails a concomitant commitment to toleration as the means for dealing with the differences competing within the public marketplace. As Kristen Deede-Johnson notes, toleration is viewed by many as “the rightful reigning ‘value’ of our day,” and “the necessary culmination of centuries of liberal political thinking, theorizing, and implementation.”⁵⁸ In contemporary political thought, what toleration comes to imply is the necessity for individuals to leave aside all that differentiates and seek to converse in the public square around a set of concepts and ideas to which all can agree without regard to divergent discourses or grammars learned in

⁵⁷Cavanaugh notes, “the state ‘creates’ society by replacing the complex overlapping loyalties of medieval *societates* with one society, bounded by borders and ruled by one sovereign to whom allegiance is owed in a way that trumps all other allegiances.” “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 251.

⁵⁸Kristen Deede-Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

distinct cultural-linguistic settings. That is, public discourse is to be conducted by means of that which all can agree is reasonable.⁵⁹ In such a system, however, it is the state which must bring unity in the midst of diversity. Though claiming to be devoid of *telos* or end good, it is in fact the state which becomes an end in itself since the diversity of goods pursued by all individuals must constantly be subsumed under the unity of the state. Modern liberal democratic theory, then, posits its own secular eschatology in which the temporal peace of the state is achieved through the mediation by the state of the diverse individual pursuits of perceived goods.

What is being suggested is that the foundation of the modern liberal democratic state is laid upon the rejection of all other social bonds that would challenge the priority/supremacy of the relation of the individual to the state. Particularly for Christians, this relegates commitment to Jesus Christ to the realm of the “religious” since the narration of the particularity of the Gospel has no place in “public” discourse. Like all other narratives and authorities, it is subsumed under the narrative and authority of the state. Yet in challenging the story of the formation of the modern state as being both the product of society and the guarantor of peace, the door is opened to read commitment to religious liberty not as that protected and provided by the state, but instead as a means of engagement among diverse *societates*, in which definition and pursuit of the common good occur within a community of persons. Such a reading may allow for a different interpretation of early Baptist texts composed during the period of the formation of the modern state prior to the modern distinction of public and society from the private and

⁵⁹One of the primary proponents and current developers of this approach is John Rawls. Deede-Johnson offers a valuable summary and explication of his work as well as presenting current critiques of his ideology in *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 29-67.

religious. What this may allow is the development of a different ecclesiology which conceives of the church as an alternative body politic.

Plan

The dissertation will be composed of six chapters. The first chapter has offered an introduction to the main thesis of the work and established the contemporary relevance of the study, setting the historical context leading to that within which this particular Baptist ecclesiology emerged.

In the second chapter I propose to examine the thought of English Baptists John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, John Murton, and Leonard Busher, who, contrary to contemporary Baptists, locate the warrants for religious liberty in God's sovereignty. They acknowledge their subservience to the legitimate functions of government, yet without suggesting that any particular form of government is itself ordained as the principal means whereby liberty is secured. This chapter will also consider the 1644 London Confession produced by Particular Baptists in the generation following the emergence of the General Baptists.

The third chapter will turn to the American colonies, examining of the works of Roger Williams and John Clarke who both remain in continuity with English Baptists and begin to set a trajectory of thought that will draw Baptists closer to liberal democratic theory which will emerge late in the seventeenth century. Their work, along with the influence of John Locke, will help establish the foundation upon which the key American Baptist figures of the Revolutionary era, Isaac Backus and John Leland, will build their theology of religious liberty. It will be argued that Backus and Leland, while defending a certain conception of religious liberty, started down a path that would effectively relegate

the church to a segregated realm outside of the public square by tying religious liberty with liberal democracy, anticipating the New Christendom of the twentieth century.⁶⁰

The fourth chapter will explicate contemporary Baptist viewpoints on the relation of religious life to the secular realm. This chapter will argue that contemporary Baptists have been significantly influenced both by epistemological foundationalism, with its concomitant individualism, and the mythology of the Lost Cause in the South. These factors combined to create in Baptists a theology supporting their calls for religious liberty that imagines the social in a completely different way than did the seventeenth century English Baptists. The resultant social imagination is tied to a thin ecclesiology that conceives of the church as solely concerned with the spiritual without competency in the political realm. Thus, Baptists have lost the prophetic voice of the Gospel. Thus, figures such as E. Y. Mullins, George W. Truett, and Douglas Hudgins will be considered as formative for current thinkers like Richard Land and James M. Dunn.

The fifth chapter will then turn to the work of Jacques Maritain, offering both a summary and explication of his New Christendom model and its influence in twentieth century Catholic political thought. In addition, a critique of the New Christendom model and its theological foundations will be presented. Starting with the challenge offered by Gustavo Gutierrez, attention will then turn to include the work of Radical Orthodox theologians Daniel Bell and William Cavanaugh. As an aspect of critique, it will be necessary in this chapter also to present their own views which challenge the ecclesial conceptions of the modern liberal democratic state.

⁶⁰Edwin S. Guastad notes, “But the question remains: how to scale this wall of separation? how to bring the Christian conscience into the public forum? how to enable Christ to transform culture? For these questions Backus and Leland do not provide clear answers. The corruption and abuse of Christian power is of more immediate and pressing concern than the constructive application of that witness.” “The Backus-Leland Tradition,” *Foundations* 2 (April 1959): 150.

Finally, the sixth chapter will draw together the arguments of the previous chapters and will draw out the inherent similarities and theological presuppositions shared by both Maritain and contemporary Baptists. Also it will work to suggest a Baptist ecclesiology that images itself as an alternative body politic to the liberal democratic state. It might then formulate a commitment to religious liberty without accepting an ecclesiology that emerges from a secularized anthropology. Consideration will be given to how Baptists may move forward in shaping their theological presuppositions informing their commitment to religious liberty to avoid the pitfalls of the New Christendom model.

The caveat should be offered that in dealing with contemporary Baptists, this work will focus primarily on the theology of white Baptists in the South. As those suffering oppression and the painful segregation of the status quo, African American Baptists preserved a more prophetic theology that largely rejected the distinction of natural and supernatural that it will be argued affected white Baptists. In many ways, African American churches provide a helpful image of the church as alternative polis that this dissertation will argue white churches need to become.

CHAPTER TWO

Foundations of Religious Liberty

The Historical Origins of Baptists

The General Baptists

Baptist historian William H. Brackney comments at the beginning of his work *The Baptists* that one of the difficulties encountered when trying to establish a Baptist identity is a question of origins. That is, Baptists have “differed widely” concerning their historical emergence and the roots from which their family tree has grown.¹ Yet from a variety of suggestions, the major consensus among Baptist historians traces the origins of the movement to the English Separatists of the early seventeenth century.² The most significant figure in the emergence of Baptists as a unique congregation distinct from Separatists is John Smyth, a graduate of King’s College, Cambridge University and an ordained Anglican priest.

In 1606, Smyth, becoming increasingly critical of the Church of England and being heavily influenced by his teacher Francis Johnson, who himself would later lead a Separatist congregation, separated from the state church to establish a congregation of those sharing his convictions. The congregation was formed in Gainsborough, and

¹William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), xvii.

²H. Leon McBeth, states, “The Baptist denomination, as it is known today, emerged by way of the English Separatist movement. The best historical evidence confirms that origin, and no major scholar has arisen this half century [latter half of the twentieth century] to challenge it.” *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 31. There are, however, a growing number of voices who argue for Anabaptist influence on the earliest Baptists. One could note particularly the work of Glen Stassen, James McClendon, and William Estep.

included in its leadership John Robinson, William Brewster, and William Bradford who together would later lead a group when the church split for safety concerns.³ The church rejected the traditions and forms of the Church of England, instead, joining themselves “by a covenant of the Lord into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all His ways, made known or to be made known unto them.”⁴ This was to be a covenant among consenting adults who freely professed their own faith.

Facing Anglican persecution, Smyth, along with Thomas Helwys, led their portion of the now divided Gainsborough church to Amsterdam in 1607 and joined in fellowship with other exiled English Separatists. Soon, however, Smyth began to have serious doctrinal disagreements with the other English congregations. Because of his desire for Spirit-led spontaneity in worship, he objected to the use of English translations of Scripture in worship (he felt these translations were less than the word of God), the reading of sermons, and prepared prayers. He argued for complete spontaneity in worship so as not to rob the Holy Spirit of its leadership.⁵ Smyth’s driving concern seemed to be the “right establishment of the visible Church of Christ upon earth”—that is, the church patterned according to the New Testament.⁶ As such, Brackney notes, “To

³Ibid., 33-34.

⁴W. T. Whitley, quoted in Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 23.

⁵McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 34-35. McBeth points to Smyth’s arguments stated at the beginning of *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*. Smyth argues that proper New Testament worship is spiritual, so that “reading out of a booke . . . is no part of spirituall worship.” Thus, in both prophesying and singing, “it is vnlawfull to have the booke before the eye.” John Smyth, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, in *The Works of John Smyth Fellow of Christ’s College, 1594-8*, ed. W. T. Whitley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I: 273.

⁶Barrington Raymond White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. ed. (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 18.

no one's surprise, Smyth continued to search the Scriptures and came to the question of baptism."⁷

Smyth's movement towards believer's baptism raises the question of the amount of influence the Dutch Anabaptists had upon his thought. B. R. White suggests three elements in the background of Smyth and his followers that would have led to their conviction of baptism for believers only. First, among English Separatists, there was a "longstanding unease" with the baptism received from the Church of England, an institution which they considered apostate. Second, Smyth and his followers were pursuing continuous Bible study in a desire to model their visible church on what they believed was the apostolic ideal. Third, the Dutch Mennonite practice of baptism likely would have shown a possible solution to their questions about baptism.⁸

By 1609, having become convinced of the necessity of believer's baptism and rejecting as a false baptism that received in the Church of England, Smyth and his followers decided to disband their congregation and reconstitute it on the basis of believer's baptism.⁹ McBeth notes, however, that Smyth's group was faced with a twofold problem: all of their baptisms had been received as infants and from what they

⁷Brackney, *The Baptists*, 4.

⁸White, *English Baptists*, 19.

⁹Henry Martyn Dexter writes of this event, "The first step, naturally, was properly to clear the ground of all rubbish of the past. This was done by formal disavowal of the old baptism, and express dissolution and renunciation of their former church estate, including the abdication by its officers of all their functions and official character. They seem to have agreed together, and declared, that they were no longer members of Christ's Church; no longer baptized people; no longer pastor, deacons, and flock; but simply individual believers desiring church fellowship and privilege according to a new manner which their more enlightened consciences could approve." *The True Story of John Smyth, the Se-Baptist, as told by himself and his contemporaries with an inquiry Whether Dipping were a New Mode of Baptism in England, in or about 1641; and some consideration of the historical value of certain extracts form the alleged "Ancient Accords"* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1881), 29.

considered to be a false church.¹⁰ Smyth's solution was to first baptize himself, and then baptize his followers in turn.¹¹ Though he was familiar with the Mennonite practice of baptism, he did not at the time regard them as a viable option for true baptism.¹² However, McBeth suggests that within a matter of months, Smyth had come "to regret his se-baptism as hasty and disorderly. Perhaps he had come to regard the Mennonites as a true church from whom [his congregation] might have had baptism in orderly succession."¹³ Smyth and a large portion of the church repudiated their baptism and sought to join the Mennonites. Those remaining in the church now led by Thomas Helwys sent a letter to the Mennonites cautioning them about receiving of the group.¹⁴ Apparently in response to the warnings, the Mennonites proceeded slowly, so that upon his death in 1612, Smyth had not been received into the Mennonite congregation.¹⁵ On

¹⁰McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 36.

¹¹Dexter comments that the method of baptism was most likely that of affusion, or pouring, accompanied by the act of rubbing to symbolize the washing of the body clean from the stain of sin. See his argument in *The True Story of John Smyth*, 23-26.

¹²White comments, "it seems that at the time Smyth believed the Mennonites to be in error on other doctrinal matters and therefore that he could not turn to them for baptism." *English Baptists*, 19.

¹³McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 37.

¹⁴The Latin text of this undated letter (written sometime around 1610) can be found in Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the light of recent research (1550-1641)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912): 2: 181. An English translation can be found in James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1991), 171. Helwys's group urges the Mennonites not to receive those whom the Baptists feel they have rightly expelled for their sins—apparently their rejection of the baptism they received at the hands of Smyth.

¹⁵The dating of Smyth's death to 1612 follows McBeth, who gives the date of August 20. *The Baptist Heritage*, 38. Dexter concurs with the 1612 dating, though suggests a date of September 1 instead. *Life of John Smyth*, 37-38. Brackney places his death in August of 1616. *The Baptists*, 5. A. C. Underwood simply states that Smyth was dead before he was forty-five. *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Baptist Union Publication Department, 1947), 45.

January 21, 1615, his followers were finally welcomed into the Mennonite fellowship and ceased to be an independent body.¹⁶

With the departure of the larger portion of the fledgling Baptist congregation, Helwys and about ten others remained as constituting the first Baptist church, separating from their brothers and sisters in 1611. Helwys's wife and child had remained in England when he fled to the Netherlands with Smyth and his followers, and English authorities had imprisoned her. Therefore, in 1612, Helwys and those with him determined to return to England "knowing full well the dangers they ran."¹⁷ Their return and the establishment of their congregation at Spitalfields near London is considered the first Baptist church on English soil. The polity of the congregation was based upon lay leadership and their doctrine reflects the Arminian position Smyth had espoused in response to his engagement with the Mennonites. The Baptist churches that emerged from this theological tradition are known as General Baptists for their commitment to the doctrine of Christ's atonement as being open to all who will believe.

One of Helwys's most significant achievements occurred in the same year as the congregation's return to England: the publication of his work, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. In this work, besides a strong polemical attack on the Church of England, Helwys presents the first demand in English for universal religious liberty. Helwys attempted to present a copy of the work to King James I, and upon failing to do

¹⁶McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 38. A. C. Underwood notes that Helwys's hesitance related to his questions about Mennonite Christology. For his part, Smyth produced a document of his group's faith in one hundred propositions. Underwood adds to Helwys's opposition, the necessity of the Waterlander Mennonites to consult with other Mennonite churches as reason for the delay in Smyth's acceptance into fellowship. *A History of the English Baptists*, 39-40.

¹⁷Underwood, *History of the English Baptists*, 46.

so penned a personal note to the king on the flyleaf and sent him a copy.¹⁸ Helwys's ideas led shortly to his imprisonment where he would remain until his death in 1616.

Upon Helwys's death, leadership of the church fell to John Murton who had originally joined the Smyth church in 1608 and traveled with the congregation to Amsterdam. Like Helwys, Murton penned treatises calling for religious liberty, and for so doing, shared the same fate as his predecessor. In spite of the pressure placed on its leadership, the Baptist church "apparently thrived and was the catalyst for at least four other congregations about London, which by 1626 claimed to be General Baptists."¹⁹ Rapid growth continued among the General Baptists so that by 1650, there were at least forty-seven such churches.²⁰

The Emergence of Particular Baptists

Often receiving less attention than the General Baptists, Particular Baptists emerged a generation later, not from a divide with General Baptists, but as "Baptists of a significantly different kind."²¹ Unlike the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists held to Calvinist doctrine asserting that Christ's atoning sacrifice was limited to the elect. Thus, they rejected the idea of a general atonement to all people, accepting that the sacrifice was only to those who had been particularly elected by God. White traces their emergence as a distinct group to the 1644 publication of their Confession in London,

¹⁸Only four first edition copies of the work remain. The copy in the Bodleian Library, Oxford contains the handwritten note (assumed to be Helwys's own handwriting) with the dedication to King James. Underwood, *History of the English Baptists*, 48.

¹⁹Brackney, *The Baptists*, 5.

²⁰McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 39.

²¹Ibid., 39.

though their roots can be traced back to the Separatist church of Henry Jacob.²² Jacob was a “moderate separatist,” differing from the stricter Separatism of Helwys.²³ Unlike other Separatists, Jacob accepted that the Church of England was a true church of Christ, yet hoped that he and his followers would be able to establish a different pattern of church and worship yet still share communion with the Church of England. He desired a church led by pastors, elders, and deacons instead of bishops. As McBeth notes, though he professed to desire continued communion with the Church of England, Jacob’s result was “practical separation.”²⁴

After living with other Separatists in exile in Holland for a time, Jacob returned to England in 1616 and formed a church in the Southwark section of London. The church formed is commonly known as the JLJ Church after its first three pastors: Henry Jacob, John Lathrop, and Henry Jessey. After Jacob moved to North America in 1622, Lathrop became pastor in 1624. During his tenure as pastor, the church was joined by a small number who were more rigorously Separatist than most of the congregation. Around 1630, a group of its members complained about others in the congregation who had had their children baptized in their local parishes. In 1633, a group of members who leaned towards stricter separation left the church to form their own congregation led by Samuel Eaton. At least some in this group were known to support baptism by immersion. By 1638, another group left the JLJ church to join with Eaton’s church, which seems now to have advocated baptism of believers only. This year is generally accepted to mark the

²²White, *English Baptists*, 59.

²³Slayden A. Yarbrough quoted in McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 40.

²⁴Ibid., 42.

beginning of the first Particular Baptist Church.²⁵ In 1644, seven Particular Baptist Churches in and around London issued a joint confession of faith. This confession sought to distinguish the views of the Particular Baptists from those of both the General Baptists and the Anabaptists.²⁶ In its articles, this confession affirms immersion as the proper mode of baptism, holds to a moderate Calvinism, and advocated for religious liberty. Though the General Baptists emerged earlier and in larger numbers, it would be the Particular Baptists who would ultimately become the most numerous and who would provide the greatest influence upon later Baptists.

The Religious Environment in England

The turmoil of the English Reformation existed in a tenuous peace during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and her *via media*, the so-called “Elizabethan Settlement.” During her reign, Elizabeth held to a firm middle ground between the reform-minded in England and those longing for a return to the Catholic Church. The Church of England presented a compromise between Protestant theology and Catholic liturgy, with Elizabeth changing the ecclesial title of the monarch from “supreme head” to “supreme governor” of the church on earth in England.²⁷ It was during her reign that

²⁵McBeth notes that in the minutes from 1633, there is a statement suggesting that Eaton and those with him received a “further Baptism,” though there is no elaboration. He further comments that the notes concerning the 1638 division state that those leaving were of the “same Judgment with Sam. Eaton.” These it is clear were separating for the sake of baptism of believers, and thus raises the question of the nature of Eaton’s group in 1633. This second group joined a church led by John Spilsbury—he either leading Eaton’s church while the latter was in prison or having established his own church. The conclusion is that definitely by 1638, and possibly as early as 1633, there was a Particular Baptist Church in England. *Baptist Heritage*, 44. Torbet follows the 1638 date and holds that Spilsbury had taken leadership in Eaton’s absence. *History of the Baptists*, 71-72. W. R. White accepts the 1638 date as being a point when Eaton’s group had definitely accepted believer’s baptism, though he notes it is unclear how early they might have come to this conclusion. *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 60.

²⁶William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 145.

²⁷Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 22.

those who felt Elizabeth had not gone far enough with reform began to reject many of the requirements of her settlement, becoming known as Puritans and Separatists. Upon her death, her cousin James Stuart (James I) came to the throne in 1603 to rule an England beset by dissatisfaction with the Church of England. He was immediately met with myriad calls for reform, most of which he rebuffed. McBeth writes, “James was obsessed with the idea of religious uniformity, intensified perhaps by evidence of increasing differences. Much of James’s reign was spent in making good his threat to harass and exile those who refused to conform to the Church of England.”²⁸ It was within this volatile time that Baptists emerged.

Norman Jones suggests that the English Reformation produced a logical quandary during the sixteenth century for the Church of England.²⁹ The English reformers accepted the Protestant conviction that the conscience of the Christian is freed from civil and moral law, and yet they freely subjected themselves to civil and ecclesial authorities. In 1559, royal injunction required that catechism be done every other Sunday before evening prayer in order to form the next generation of believers in the Church of England. One of the primary tools used was Alexander Nowell’s *Catechismus Puerorum*, produced in 1562 as an extended catechism built on that in the *Book of Common Prayer*.³⁰ The textbook affirmed that “obedience to God and the prosperity of the state were intimately linked,” so that students were to acknowledge their obedience to

²⁸McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 100.

²⁹Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 171-95. Jones develops this idea in his chapter entitled “Learning Private Virtue.”

³⁰Ibid., 172.

anyone to whom God has given authority over them.³¹ The problem, as Jones notes, is that students were taught that ultimate authority derived from God and was expressed in the conscience as directed by Bible reading and prayer. Consequently, the individual's conscience would seem to have been given a greater authority than the magistracy. Jones writes, "This created a dichotomy in Elizabethan culture that could not be easily resolved."³²

The result of the dichotomy was the emergence of two views on the authority of the Christian conscience. One view held that the individual conscience was to be followed in all questions, while the other suggested that it be applied for personal life, but big issues such as church governance need not be the concern of every man. These two positions also created a political gulf. The first view "empowered conscience and transcended rank, class, and order, permitting individual Christians to ignore social and political structures if their consciences demanded it." The second view "identified the highest virtue with obedience to God's ordained state and system."³³ The tension between these views can be evidenced in the emergence of Puritans and Separatists in their opinions on how church reform was to proceed. That there was to be a state church, however, seemed for most not to be in question. Even among the Separatists, McBeth points out that they were of two kinds. The first was those who separated out of pragmatic concerns for working to establish reform, though they would prefer to remain a part of the Church of England. Only the second kind separated out of principle, having

³¹Ibid., 172.

³²Ibid., 172.

³³Ibid., 187.

come to the conviction that the church should be free of government connection.³⁴ It was this latter viewpoint which would have the greatest impact upon the emerging Baptists. One whose views called for separation was John Smyth, an Oxford trained theologian whose journey of faith led him from the Church of England to a final home among Dutch Mennonites.

John Smyth

The difficulty that arises when discussing the theology of John Smyth is that one is attempting to hit a moving target. As has been seen, during the course of his lifetime, Smyth was successively a Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, and finally an Anabaptist. In his 1608 work, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, Smyth acknowledges his fluctuation of theology, and asks his reader not to count it as a fault. He notes, “rather it should be accounted a vertue to retract erroers: Know therefor that latter though[t]s oft tymes are better then the former: & I do professe this . . . that I will every day as my erroers shalbe discovered confesse them & renounce them.”³⁵ His theological convictions live up to this confession as he progresses throughout his life towards his final end with the Waterlander Mennonites.

Smyth’s beginning point in his movement places him firmly within the Puritan view in his conviction that the magistrate has a definite role within religious affairs. In his 1607 work, *Principles and inferences Concerning the visible church*, Smyth states that “the erecting of visible Churches apperteyneth to princes and private persons. Princes must erect them in their dominions & command all their subjects to enter into

³⁴McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 25.

³⁵Smyth, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, I: 271.

them, being first prepared and fitted thereto.”³⁶ At this point, as W. K. Jordan notes, “While strongly asserting the liberty of the individual congregation, he had not yet reached the point of denying completely the power of the ruler in religious affairs.”³⁷

In his 1605 work, *A paterne of true Prayer*, Smyth affirms the accepted view among the English dissenters, Puritan and Separatist alike, of the relation between the church and the state. His theological conviction is that the Kingdom of God is aided in its establishment by the activity of the magistracy. He writes, “Wee pray in this petition that the godly Magistrates may make godly lawes, and establish the whole truth of the word, and see that both the tables of the Commandements be obserued.”³⁸ With this in mind, he further adds, “Thus we pray for Magistracie and Ministrie, which are the two generall and maine pillars of Gods kingdome.”³⁹ These two work together such that by

godly Magistrates inacting wholesome lawes and causing due execution of them: and by godly Ministers powerfully exercising their ministerial actions, men may bee reformed from their errors and misdemeanour, and bee truly conuerted to the faith, and brought to repentance out of the snare of the deuill, or at least by the outward punishment from the Magistrate and ecclesiasticall censures from the Ministrie be restrained and repressed, so as they breake not out to open prophanenes.⁴⁰

As late as 1609, Smyth published a letter to Mr. Richard Bernard in which he continues to affirm that it is the role of the magistrates to uphold both tables of the Ten

³⁶John Smyth, *Principles and inferences Concerning the visible church*, in *The Works of John Smyth Fellow of Christ’s College, 1594-8*, ed. W. T. Whitley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I: 267. All subsequent references to Smyth’s writings, unless otherwise designated, will be from Whitley’s two volume collection. Notes will therefore give Smyth as the author, followed by the title of his work, but with volume and page reference to Whitley. (ex. Smyth, *Principles and inferences*, I: 267.)

³⁷W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England: From the Accession of James I to the Convention of the Long Parliament (1603-1640)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936), 269.

³⁸John Smyth, *A paterne of true Prayer*, I: 161.

³⁹Ibid., I: 163.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Commandments.⁴¹ Though this letter was likely written in 1607, he includes it in the 1609 publication clarifying his positions and answering his critics.

In these years prior to his move towards Baptists beliefs, Smyth is very negative towards Anabaptist teachings, noting particularly their rejection of the magistracy as aiding the church. From the dating of the works, it is likely that Smyth had contact with Anabaptists prior to his move to Amsterdam in 1608. William Estep affirms that “it seems more than plausible that there was considerable Anabaptist influence in England in the sixteenth century,” and argues that it had more than a slight influence on English Separatism.⁴² Having likely encountered Anabaptist claims for a rejection of the use of civil power in punishing ecclesial offenses, in *A paterne of true Prayer* Smyth writes, “For it is a thing that the diuell would wish principally that Magistracie were abolished, and therefore hee hath inspired that diuellish doctrine into the confused heads of the Anabaptists who take away all rule and authoritie and all superioritie among men.”⁴³ He further suggests that without the proper fear of punishment from the magistracy and the hope of reward from the ministry, “the two sinews of the Common-wealth,” people would turn to depraved behavior “whereby the kingdome of God should be banished out of the world.”⁴⁴ For Smyth at this point in his life, the power of the state is necessary for the continued advance of the Kingdom of God. At the end of the medieval world, he

⁴¹John Smyth, *Parallels, Censures, Observations*, II: 519.

⁴²William Estep, “Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism and the Puritan Connection: reflections upon Baptist origins,” in *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, ed. Paul Toews (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1993), 2.

⁴³Smyth, *A patern of true Prayer*, I: 165.

⁴⁴Ibid.

continued to conceive of one society where the religious and the state cannot be entirely separated.

As a Separatist, however, Smyth was already moving towards a position that recognized the true church as being composed of regenerate believers. James Coggins points out that the Separatists were heavily indebted to Calvinist theology in which Christ is recognized as prophet, priest, and king within the church. The true church would then display corresponding signs to these three roles: word, sacraments, and discipline.⁴⁵ For the Separatists, it was the lack of discipline that led to their departure from the Church of England. It properly preached the word and administered the sacraments rightly. That it allowed notorious sinners and those who did not hold to the true faith to partake of the sacraments, however, showed its failure to uphold discipline, and resulted in the accusation of the Church of England as a false church to which true Christians could not remain associated.⁴⁶ In “A Lettre written to certaine brethren in S.” which Whitley dates with some question to 1606, Smyth begins to express his Separatist conviction that the Church of England is apostate. Most conspicuous among his arguments is that the Church of England “consist not of Saints only,” but is “framed according to the invention of man.”⁴⁷ Secondly, the Church of England is to be rejected because “the true ministerie

⁴⁵James R. Coggins, “The Theological Positions of John Smyth,” *Baptist Quarterly* 30, no. 6 (April 1984): 248.

⁴⁶Ibid. Not all Separatists conformed to the Reformed ecclesiology Coggins notes. Jason K. Lee points out that Henry Barrow offers four basic reasons that the Church of England was apostate. 1) The Church of England had replaced the scriptural pattern of worship with the *Book of Common Prayer*. 2) The Church required no repentance for membership, but all within the realm were received into the Church. This charge corresponds to that noted by Coggins. 3) Barrow argues against the episcopal form of government retained by the Church of England after her break with Rome. 4) The lack of church discipline evident in the Church of England that refused to follow the pattern of discipline established in the New Testament. *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2003), 13-14.

⁴⁷John Smyth, “A Lettre written to certaine brethren in S.” II: 558.

of the Apostolic institution was by election, approbation, & ordination of that particular holy people wherto they did administer.”⁴⁸ Smyth here rejects the episcopal governance of the Church of England favoring instead the local election of pastors and elders. He argues, “For the Prelates & ther officers [of the Church of England] are not those Christian Bishops of the Apostolique institution, elected by & placed over one particular Church of the Saynts, but are a devised Tyrannical Lordship ruling hundredths of parishes by ther owne devised Canons.”⁴⁹

This rejection of the Church of England led Smyth to the formation of his own Separatist congregation at Gainsborough around 1606, though he does not yet seem to have arrived at the point of holding believer’s baptism. Key in Smyth’s ecclesiology is the idea of covenant. William Bradford paraphrases the covenant which Smyth drew up in constituting the new church:

They shooke of [sic] this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as ye Lords free people, joyned them selves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.⁵⁰

Smyth’s idea that the true church is a covenanted community is very much in line with the thought of the Separatists.⁵¹ This covenant ecclesiology is taken from Matthew 18: 20—“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”

⁴⁸Ibid., II: 559.

⁴⁹Ibid., II: 561-62.

⁵⁰William Bradford quoted in *The Works of John Smyth Fellow of Christ’s College, 1594-8*, ed. W. T. Whitley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I: lxii.

⁵¹See Lee’s chapter “Smyth’s View of Covenant” in *The Theology of John Smyth*, 127-165. Coggins also develops this idea in “The Theological Positions of John Smyth,” op. cit.

(NRSV).⁵² Separatist Covenant ecclesiology is to be distinguished from Reformed covenant theology in that the former argues that the visible church is to be formed on the basis of a covenant among its members. Hence, Smyth writes,

We say the Church or two or three faithful people Separated fro the world & joyned together in a true covenant, have both Christ, the covenant, & promises, & the ministerial powre of Christ given to them, & that they are the body that receive from Christs hand out of heaven, or rather from Christ their head this ministerial powre.”⁵³

Smyth’s Separatist covenantal ecclesiology qualifies Reformed covenant theology by suggesting that those who are gathered together to form a church are then given God’s covenant promised to his people.⁵⁴

This is not to suppose, however, that Smyth imagines the church as an institution formed by human means, only to subsequently receive the ministerial power of Christ. The previous quote is set within a context of an argument in which Smyth is denying that ministerial power comes through the succession of bishops. Rather than succession and the laying on of hands, Smyth contends that “the Ministerial powre of Christ must needes be given primarily to the body of every visible Church, though they be but two or three in number.”⁵⁵ That the ministerial power is not a human endowment is clear, but the question remains as to the formation of the church itself. Smyth seems to answer this

⁵²Coggins notes that Roman Catholic ecclesiology is based partly on the Old Testament while Calvinist ecclesiology is drawn from the Pauline epistles. By appealing to Matthew, the Separatists admit a unique ecclesiology distinct from either episcopacy or Reformed theology. “The Theological Positions of John Smyth,” 250.

⁵³Smyth, *Parallels, Censures, Observations*, II: 403.

⁵⁴Lee develops this point and develops the connection between the two ideas of covenant in Smyth’s theology. He argues that the two cannot be confused or separated in Smyth’s thought. Lee comments, “As the church agrees together in a local covenant, then God fulfils His part of the covenant by granting that congregation the power of Christ to govern the church.” *The Theology of John Smyth*, 143. For a full discussion of the relation of the two covenant ideas, see pp. 139-145.

⁵⁵Smyth, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, II: 406.

question as he continues his argument: “therfor Christs ministerial powre is givē to the body of the Church, viz: to two or thre faithful people joyned together into an Ecclesiastical politique body by the true covenant, or new testament of Christ Jesus.”⁵⁶ The formation of this body that receives Christ’s ministerial power is in its very act of formation receiving the activity of Christ to bring it to existence. The church, in Smyth’s view, is a new community brought about through the power of Christ by joining in covenant to one another those who have acknowledged Christ’s authority. Christ then is the initiator and head of the community who in turns grants it power.

When Smyth rejects infant baptism and turns to believers’ baptism, he also begins to modify his covenant ecclesiology and place more emphasis on baptism as the symbol of God’s eternal covenant.⁵⁷ In his debate with the Separatist Richard Clifton over Smyth’s rejection of infant baptism, Smyth turns to typology to defend believers’ baptism. There are in Smyth’s estimation, two covenants: the carnal with Abraham and his fleshly progeny, the sign of which is circumcision; and the spiritual made with Abraham and his spiritual descendants, the sign of which is the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ He contends that Abraham first believed and was sealed with the Spirit before receiving the sign of circumcision. Therefore, in the New Testament, “the spiritual children must be Spiritually circumcised, that is in hart, & then be admitted by baptisme into the Church of

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Coggins states that “[Smyth] now equated the covenant with believers’ baptism. In fact, believers’ baptism was becoming a substitute for the covenant as the true constitution of a true church.” “Theological Positions of John Smyth,” 253. Lee suggests that Coggins perhaps overstates his case against covenant in Smyth’s later theology, though he notes that Coggins does moderate his view some in later works. *The Theology of John Smyth*, 159-161.

⁵⁸John Smyth, *The Character of the Beast*, II: 579.

the New Testament.”⁵⁹ By contrasting the carnal and the spiritual covenants, Smyth argues that infant circumcision cannot be equated with infant baptism, but instead that only those who are regenerate may receive the seal of the spiritual covenant, the Holy Spirit, and be welcomed into the true church through baptism. Smyth retains his Separatist view that the true church is comprised of the regenerate, but has moved in his thought so that the right constitution of the church is through baptism. Thus, Smyth rejects the Church of England in which membership is without differentiation between reprobate and regenerate, but as well rejects the Separatists who fail to recognize that infant baptism is not valid for the constituting of the true visible church. Foundational to calls for believer’s baptism is the understanding that infants are incapable of affirming the covenant that makes them a part of the church.

In his 1609 published response to Mr. Bernard, Smyth challenges the view of Mr. Bernard arguing that a falsely constituted church is an idol, pointing to his agreement with the Separatist Henry Ainsworth.⁶⁰ Smyth argues that the saints are kings and priests to God, and as such, “submit their consciences to be wrought vpon. & seing the conscience must bow only to the Lord, & not to man otherwise then in the Lord, therfor in matter of Religion the conscience is not to yeeld to any thing devised by man: but must alwayes have the Lord for the leader & Governor therin.”⁶¹ Keeping in mind the previous distinction that Smyth considers the church an institution of divine origin, it would seem unlikely here that Smyth’s emphasis on the conscience would suggest individualism in Christian faith. Rather, noting Smyth’s constant concern to reject the

⁵⁹Ibid., II: 582.

⁶⁰Smyth, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, II: 345-46.

⁶¹Ibid., II: 346.

Church of England and its hierarchy supported by the civil magistrates, he might be better understood as rejecting attempts to force the conscience to bow to civil authority in its spiritual discernment. People should still submit to legitimate authority within the church that functions with the ministerial authority given to the church by Christ. Smyth's emphasis on God's authority over the human conscience in light of the establishment of the true visible church consisting of the regenerate hints at the basis for his transformation to a position of religious liberty in the Baptist and Mennonite stages of his life.

As noted above, Smyth's conviction, even through his Separatist years and as late as 1609 was the idea of a godly magistracy. In *Parallels, Censures, Observations*, he affirms "That a Prince hath powre in a particular visible Church, to punish any wickednes any one committeth: and to cause that visible Church to assume & practise any truth Gods word teacheth."⁶² Lee states, "Smyth held there should be limited separation between matters of church and state. However, he still held firm to the idea that there was no room for religious tolerance."⁶³ Leon McBeth sees a "perceptible moderation" of Smyth's view of the role of the magistrate with the later 1609 publication, *The Character of the Beast*.⁶⁴ In this work, Smyth continues to affirm the role of the magistrates as "the ordinance of the L. that every soule ought to be subject vnto thē."⁶⁵ Thus, magistrates are to provide for the public welfare through the punishment of evil doers, and therefore all citizens should honor and pray for them, pay taxes and avoid speaking evil of them.

⁶²Ibid., II: 519-520.

⁶³Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth*, 260.

⁶⁴Leon McBeth, *English Baptist Literature on Religious Liberty to 1689* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 23.

⁶⁵Smyth, *The Character of the Beast*, II: 572.

The change that McBeth notices, however, is found in Smyth's statement concerning magistrates who have been converted and admitted to the church: of these "ther may many questions be made, which to answer neither wil we if we could, neither can we if we would."⁶⁶ There is for Smyth still "no fundamental conflict in the two spheres of authority, spiritual and civil, and that ultimately civil power shall enhance the glory of God."⁶⁷ The moderation of his view that McBeth notes is in Smyth's refusal to answer the question concerning the place of a *Christian* magistrate. He would seem to be questioning at this point whether a Christian may indeed serve as magistrate, a conflict likely raised in his mind through contact with the Anabaptists. It remains the case, though, that religion, for Smyth, is not relegated to a private sphere outside of the public marketplace. Rather, the religious is very public, but the question he is attempting to answer concerns the role of magistrates in relation to the church. He regards two sides to the religious: that which has civil interest (God's ordination of the magistrates for public good), and the ecclesial (the practice and discipline within the true visible church of the redeemed).

McBeth suggests that one can discover an emerging tendency towards toleration as early as 1608 in Smyth's *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*.⁶⁸ His pressing concern, however, is to answer charges that he denies authority of magistrates.

⁶⁶McBeth, *English Baptist Literature*, 23-24; Smyth, *The Character of the Beast*, II: 572.

⁶⁷McBeth, *English Baptist Literature*, 24.

⁶⁸McBeth points to Smyth's statement, "and lett no man bee offended at us for that wee differ from the auncient brethren of the separation in the Leitourgie Presbyterie & Treasure of the Church: for wee hold not our fayth at any mans pleasure or in respect of persons, neyther doe wee bynd our selves to walk according to other mans lynes further then they walk in the truth." *English Baptist Literature*, 25 (Smyth, *Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, I: 271-72). Jason Lee suggest, however, that even in Smyth's "Epistle" at the beginning of *The Character of the Beast*, there is evidence that Smyth has not changed his views on toleration. Lee points to Smyth's rejection of the Separatists as a false church, categorizing them as a "harlot" with both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. *The Theology of John Smyth*, 261.

Thus, in 1609, he inserts into “The Epistle to the Reader” at the beginning of *The Character of the Beast* the statement that, “concerning Magistrates, we acknowledg them to be the ordinance of the L. that every soule ought to be subject vnto thē: that they are ministers of God for our wealth: ... that they are the ministers of God to take vengeance on them that do evil.”⁶⁹ While this statement continues to affirm the significance of the magistrate in civil affairs, Smyth seems to be beginning to doubt the place of a Christian magistrate wielding power over ecclesial issues. It is immediately following this statement on the role of magistrates as ministers of God that Smyth refuses to answer the question of the Christian magistrate. It would seem that a measure of doubt has been raised in Smyth’s thought as to the involvement of Christians with the civil government.

The final transformation of Smyth’s ideas concerning the engagement of the church with the civil government is seen shortly after his self-baptism. At this point, Smyth began to question his decision, and turned to the Waterlander Mennonites as a church of proper succession with which he and his followers could join in good conscience. It is through his engagement with the Mennonites that Smyth comes to his final position on the role of the magistrate. In 1610, the Mennonites supplied Smyth and his followers with a reproduction of a confession composed in 1580 by de Ries and Gerrits.⁷⁰ Smyth and approximately forty followers signed this “Short Confession.” Concerning the role of the civil government and the place of Christians in it, article thirty-five of the confession states,

Wordly authority or magistracy is a necessary ordinance of God, appointed and established for the preservation of the common estate, and of a good, natural,

⁶⁹Smyth, “The Epistle to the Reader,” *The Character of the Beast*, II: 572.

⁷⁰For a discussion of these events and the text of the confession, see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959), 102-113.

politic life, for the reward of the good and the punishing of the evil. . . . This office of the worldly authority the Lord Jesus hath not ordained in his spiritual kingdom, the church of the New Testament, nor adjoined to the offices of his church.⁷¹

At this point Smyth has adopted the Mennonite rejection of the magistrate's role in the ecclesial life. When his followers publish their own statement of faith, *Propositions and Conclusions*, in 1612, a document likely originally drafted by Smyth before his death, the view of the magistracy is definitely that of the Mennonites. Article eighty-three states, "That the office of the magistrate, is a disposition or permissive ordinance of God for the good of mankind."⁷² Smyth and his followers here continue to allow that the office is established by God because of human perversity, suggesting that it is a necessity because of the Fall, and may even serve to further God's work.

The following article, eighty-four, is where the distinction from Smyth's earlier views can be discerned. McBeth calls this article "the first major landmark among Baptists, and indeed among English speaking peoples, of the doctrine of absolute religious liberty."⁷³ The article states,

That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James iv. 12).⁷⁴

⁷¹Ibid., 111.

⁷²Ibid., 139.

⁷³McBeth, *English Baptist Literature*, 26.

⁷⁴Ibid., 140. J. Stephen Phillips challenges that articles 83-85 represent a developed view of religious liberty such as Baptists would affirm. He writes of article 84, "This statement would *appear* to be a fully developed concept of religious liberty in society. Upon reading this statement in the context of the full confession, however, one reaches a different conclusion. Article 83, for example, stated that the magistrate was only a 'permissive ordinance of God . . . that one man like the brute beasts devour not another.' In other words, civil government had no gracious aspect, and no jurisdiction over anyone in the separated spiritual community, only over the evil world. Article 85 also made this clear. If the magistrate

McBeth would seem to overstate his case, however. While Smyth is certainly appealing for religious liberty to a degree, it is questionable whether Smyth indeed envisions “absolute religious liberty.” His affirmation is to “leave Christian religion free.” Unlike Helwys who will offer his own calls for universal religious liberty, Smyth does not indicate that he seeks to extend this liberty to all peoples regardless of faith or creed.

While this is an important statement in regards to a measure of religious liberty and displays Smyth’s monumental shift from his Puritan/Separatist viewpoint, the significant statement in terms of his theological position is found in the last phrase. Smyth’s conviction that Christ only is “king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience” reveals that his commitment to religious liberty is not based in the modern appeal to natural right or individual conscience. Rather, Smyth rejects the authority of the magistrate to enforce religious conversion and practice because he regards such acts as the purview of Christ alone.⁷⁵ That the religious is left to “every mans conscience” is not to suggest that it is a private matter for individual deliberation. Rather, the conscience is under the authority of Christ so that it is Christ’s prerogative to call individuals into the redeemed community. Certainly there is a sense in which it is the individual who responds to the calling apart from coercion, but it is a calling into a community of the

were to follow Christ, he must forego the sword; in other words, no Christian could serve in civil government. Thus, Smyth did not argue for freedom of worship *in society*, but for freedom to *separate from it*.” “Thomas Helwys and the Idea of Religious Liberty,” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1998), 213-214. Phillips presents a compelling case in which he takes account of Smyth’s commitment to Anabaptist ecclesiology. If Phillips’ is correct, however, about Smyth’s emphasis on the freedom to separate from society as the Anabaptists do, this does not conflict with the suggestion that he does not hold to a distinction of planes between the religious and the temporal.

⁷⁵In discussion the Mennonite influence on Smyth’s rejection of Christian magistracy, Lee inexplicably turns to a 20th century political philosopher, Desmond Clarke, to express the idea of individual faith in the seventeenth century. Clarke’s language concerns “personal choice” and individual “moral obligation.” He seems to completely disregard Smyth’s emphasis on Christ’s lordship over conscience, and instead overlay modern liberal democratic categories without question upon Smyth’s seventeenth century theology. *The Theology of John Smyth*, 275-76.

redeemed. There is not the sense of an isolated individual alone with his or her conscience. Because the church is a covenanted community, it is not superfluous to one's salvation, being the community in which the Christian life is practiced. Thus, coercion by magistrates is a usurpation of Christ's authority.

Finally, it would seem that Smyth does not regard the religious as relegated to the individual's private life distinct from the public life. In the "Short Confession" of 1610, Smyth accepts the Mennonite position that Christians are not to be magistrates because "neither hath he burdened or charged them to assume such offices, or to govern the world in such a worldly manner."⁷⁶ Instead, Christians are called "to the following of his unarmed and unweaponed life, and of his cross-bearing footsteps."⁷⁷ Smyth is suggesting a public life lived according to a very different standard, one impossible for a magistrate who must administer civil laws. For Smyth, one who becomes a Christian enters a community whose politic is distinct from that of the civil society around it, and which exists as a unique body politic. In *Propositions and Conclusions*, article eighty five recognizes that a magistrate who chooses to follow Christ will find his obedience to Christ incompatible with the tasks required of him as a magistrate.⁷⁸ The new community of which the magistrate is now a part stands not as an aspect under the larger umbrella of society, but constitutes its own body politic. Religious toleration is therefore not through the removal of religion from the public square to a private realm, but the

⁷⁶Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 112.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸"That if the magistrate will follow Christ, and be His disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ; he must love his enemies and not kill them, he must pray for them, and not punish them, he must feed them and give them drink, not imprison them, banish them, dismember them, and spoil their goods; he must suffer persecution and affliction with Christ, and be slandered, reviled, blasphemed, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, imprisoned and killed with Christ; and that by the authority of magistrates, which things he cannot possibly do, and retain the revenge of the sword." Ibid., 140.

product of recognizing God's sovereignty to call people into a new community over against civil society.

Thomas Helwys

When John Smyth sought to associate his new congregation with the Waterlander Mennonites after he began to question his group's lack of succession, Helwys and a small number of the new Baptists refused to follow and wrote to the Mennonites asking them to reject Smyth's petition for membership.⁷⁹ Helwys felt that the baptism received from Smyth was valid and that it was not necessary to have a succession of elders to constitute a true church.⁸⁰ Helwys also rejected Smyth's acceptance of the Anabaptist disavowal of the place of the Christian magistrate. In his 1611 work, *An Advertisement or admonition, unto the congregation, which men call the New Fryelers*, Helwys contends "that King, Princes, and Magistrats, ruleing & governing by the power of god, with the sword of Iustice, may be members of the church of Christ retayning their Magistracie."⁸¹ As he affirmed in his "Declaration of Faith," "Magistracie is a Holie ordinance off GOD, that

⁷⁹For an English translation of the text of the letter, see James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1991), 171.

⁸⁰In his "Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland," Helwys states in article twenty one that the officers of a congregation are to be chosen from those qualified "By Election and approbacion off that Church or congregacion whereoff they are members." Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 122.

⁸¹Thomas Helwys, *An Advertisement or admonition, unto the congregation, which men call the New Fryesers in the Lowe Countries, wrirten in Dutche aud published in Englis wherin is handled 4 principall points of religion* (n.p., 1611), 55, in Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home> (accessed October 24, 2007). This same idea is echoed in his "Declaration of Faith": "And therefore [Magistrates] may bee members off the Church off CHRIST, reteining their Magistracie, for no Holie Ordinance off GOD debarreth anie from being a member off CHRIST'S Church." Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 122-23.

every soule ought to bee subject to it not for feare onlie, but for conscience sake.”⁸²

Helwys was seeking clearly to dissociate his congregation from accusations of Anabaptism and the perceived rejection of civil authority.⁸³

Helwys presented a far more positive view of the state than that espoused by Smyth at the end of his life with the Mennonites, and it is Helwys’s view that seems to have had the most significant influence on Baptists. Jordan suggests that “Helwys’s outstanding contribution lay in the fact that he dissociated completely the magistrate from the religious life of the nation.”⁸⁴ Helwys’s famous inscription to King James on the flyleaf of his 1612 work, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, offers the clear admonition of the separation of the magistrate from the religious realm: “The king is a mortall man, & not God therefore hath no power over ye immortall soules of his subiects, to make lawes & ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them.”⁸⁵ This oft quoted admonition to James I suggests the autonomy of the spiritual from the temporal.

In denying the king’s or magistrates’ authority over religious issues, Helwys is clear that he is not denying the legitimate actions of the civil government. The common perception among the English was that the Anabaptists rejected the authority of the civil government when they refused to exercise the power of the civil sword. This led to a stigma that these were anarchists who refused to subject themselves the king’s legitimate

⁸²Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 122.

⁸³W. K. Jordan writes, “Helwys, and the other Arminian Baptist leaders, were anxious to divest their Church of the natural suspicion that it entertained the revolutionary sentiments of the continental Anabaptists respecting the civil power of the prince.” *The Development of Religious Toleration in England From the Accession of James I to the Convention of the Long Parliament (1603-1640)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 274-75.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 274.

⁸⁵A copy of this note appears in the 1998 edition edited by Richard Groves. Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612)*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), vi.

authority. Thus, where Smyth seems to follow the Anabaptists in having Christians not exercise the power of the civil sword, Helwys seeks to overcome the negative perceptions by arguing that Christians are to be subject to the king's authority in civil affairs. While in fact, neither Smyth nor Helwys sees that identification with the Christian community implies a rejection of civil obedience, Helwys is willing to acknowledge as well that one may render legitimate service to the civil authorities, and in fact, that it is one's Christian duty to do so. In his "Declaration of Faith" he notes that magistrates "beare the sword of GOD,--which sword in all Lawful administracions is to bee defended and supported by the servants off GOD that are vnder their Government with their lyves and al that they have according as in the first Institucion off that Holie Ordinance."⁸⁶ He states in *The Mistery of Iniquity*, "Our lord the king has power to take our sons and our daughters to do all his services of war and of peace, yea, all his servile service whatsoever." To this he adds that the king may take lands and goods, as well as servants and livestock (quoting 1 Samuel 8:11-18). He concludes, "In all these things our lord the king is to be submitted unto and obeyed."⁸⁷

Helwys is not, however, distinguishing a temporal realm from a religious realm in allowing bodies be given over to the king. Rather, he still seems caught up in a medieval Christendom in which the social is still very much religious. Helwys argues that, as ordained by God, all the power of the king has been given by God, and extends to all the goods and bodies of his subjects.⁸⁸ It is the king's prerogative on whether he chooses to

⁸⁶Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 123.

⁸⁷Helwys, *Mistery of Iniquity*, 33.

⁸⁸"Thus has God given our lord the king all worldly power which extends to all the goods and bodies of his servants." *Mistery of Iniquity*, 33.

limit his power through contract or conditions with his people. In all the wielding of the king's earthly power, all people are bound to obey the laws established by the king.⁸⁹ Helwys describes the king's role in being given his power as a "minister of God" whose purpose is "to take vengeance of them that do evill, and to praise them that do well."⁹⁰ For this reason the king has been given the sword. Particularly, this work of the king is to the benefit of the Christian. Thus, affirming the role of kings and magistrates, Helwys writes, "And in all this they are the ministers of god for good & for the good of gods children especially."⁹¹ Unlike Smyth, Helwys does not distinguish between the Christian community and the larger society in terms of the working of the civil authorities. That is, the bearing of the sword is not simply because of the base nature of fallen humanity, but it has positive benefit for Christians, and as such should be supported.⁹² Helwys is willing to extend this support even to the point of taking up arms for the defense of the king and his realm, for it is a defense of the "sword of justice." It is particularly Christians who are most fit for this very duty.⁹³

Having seen Helwys's commitment to the importance of the place of the magistrate in society and his call for Christians to actively participate in this office, it would seem fair to agree with Timothy George in his assessment of Helwys's understanding of the place of civil government: "the English Baptists assumed that

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Helwys, *An Advertisement*, 56.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Note the contrast in this approach with that of Smyth who seemed to see the role of the sword only in the negative light of restraining the brute nature of unredeemed humans. See note 71 above.

⁹³Helwys argues, "for who are fitter to support and mainteyne the holy ordinance of god then they that professe to be the children of god, and who are fitter to feight iust and good battells then good and iust men.." *An Advertisement*, 76.

magisterial coercion was necessary for the life of society and declared their willingness to participate in such coercion as dutiful and obedient subjects.”⁹⁴ The revolutionary aspect of this idea put forth by Helwys was that this coercion did not extend to ecclesial issues. George writes, “The Baptists claimed that religious persecution resulted from the confusion of the temporal and the spiritual realms.”⁹⁵ Helwys’s allowance of the magistrate to be a Christian means that this one may continue to bear the sword in civil affairs, but may not use it in relation to ecclesial issues. George concludes:

By maintaining a fundamentally positive view of the state, while at the same time sharply separating the spiritual and temporal realms, the Baptists positioned themselves between the radical pacifism of the Anabaptists and the Calvinist tradition of magisterial reformation. The juxtaposition of civil loyalty and religious conviction enabled the Baptists to work for positive change within the political system.⁹⁶

George’s argument for the strict separation of the spiritual from the temporal realms seems to assume the modern understanding in which the temporal functions autonomously without reference to the divine. Indeed, George adds, “While separation of church and state barred the magistrate from intrusion into the domain of religion, it also created a like barrier to the penetration of the church into the secular world.”⁹⁷

Is George correct, however? Does Helwys envision a dichotomy between the temporal and the religious such that there is a secular realm that lacks reference to the divine? That is, is there a dichotomy in a person between public, civic engagement

⁹⁴Timothy George, “Between Pacifism and Coercion: The English Baptist Doctrine of Religious Toleration,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 1 (January 1984): 37.

⁹⁵Ibid., 41.

⁹⁶Ibid., 48.

⁹⁷Ibid.

within a spiritually neutral realm, and private, spiritual reference where personal convictions have free play?

It is suggested here that such a reading of Helwys imposes modern liberal conceptions of secular and religious upon a seventeenth century context that did not share such presuppositions. As has been noted, Helwys considers the magistracy to be an ordinance of God that receives its power from God. Helwys reminds the king in *The Mystery of Iniquity* that Christ refused to destroy the Samaritans who did not accept him (Luke 9: 52, 56) because “Christ will have no man’s life touched for his cause.”⁹⁸ Consciences cannot be coerced by force into acceptance of Christ, and since Christ himself refused to compel conformity, neither should the king. Forced conformity through the earthly sword leaves people “to worship and to eat and drink their own damnation” since they do so against their consciences.⁹⁹ The coercion of conscience is beyond magisterial authority, and to attempt to do so is to usurp the prerogative of God who seeks to call people to repentance in their conscience.

The temporal realm is also a place of God’s activity. Helwys’s concern simply was to preserve the freedom of the ecclesial sphere from coerced practice which infringed upon God’s sovereignty over human conscience. Helwys’s Christology reveals this view. He rejects the almost docetic Christology that many of the Waterlander Mennonites (and Smyth) had adopted from the Melchiorites and Schwenkfeld.¹⁰⁰ Phillips argues that it is

⁹⁸Helwys, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 38.

⁹⁹Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁰Phillips, *Thomas Helwys*, 188. Phillips argues that Helwys identified three Christological views among the Mennonites: the Melchiorite view that Christ brought his flesh from heaven, the Schwenkfeld view that Christ’s flesh was created within Mary, and those who claimed an inability to understand the mystery. Helwys’s eighth article in the “Declaration of Faith” seems to be an explicit counter to the Christology that he heard from some of the Waterlander Mennonites. Particularly, he affirms that Christ is

unclear to what extent Helwys fully realized the theological issues involved in the Christological conventions of Chalcedon; however, it was important for him to establish Christ's physical nature in order to develop his idea of religious liberty.¹⁰¹ Phillips writes, "If Jesus Christ, both God and man, could enter the world and engage in all types of human pursuits, without being defiled by sin, then Christians could and should do the same."¹⁰² Certainly what Phillips is noting is Helwys's rejection of the Mennonite refusal to take up the civil sword, committed to the establishment of a distinct society of saints who affirm peace as a mark of the Kingdom of God. Helwys did see a role for Christians in engaging with the larger society and sharing in civic duties with redeemed and unredeemed alike. He did not accept that the employment of the sword at the behest of the state failed to distinguish the church as a distinct society. The example of Jesus shows that he was able to engage in all spheres of human life, and yet remain without sin. That Jesus's activity brought him into the public square invites his followers to do the same.

What seems telling for Helwys, though, is that while there is certainly specified ecclesial practice (in *An Advertisement* he follows his argument against docetic Christology with an argument for the necessity of honoring the Sabbath), the living of the Christian life is not relegated to a particular sphere of the religious. Phillips notes, "*Helwys maintained the concept of the state as being subject to God and his laws, and at*

from the flesh of Mary. "That IESVS CHRIST, the Sonne off GOD the second Person, or subsistence in the Trinity, in the Fulness off time was manifested in the Flesh, being the seed off David, and off the Isralits, according to the Flesh. Roman. I.3 and 8.5. the Sonne off Marie the Virgine, made of hir substance, Gal. 4.4." Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 119.

¹⁰¹Phillips, *Thomas Helwys*, 189-190.

¹⁰²Ibid., 190.

the same time did not require the state to compel faith or establish the church."¹⁰³ If the state is subject to God, it cannot be an autonomous sphere of activity that exists as a neutral field of individual pursuits. Helwys did not want to create an autonomous environment in which all freely pursued individual goods as they deemed worthy. Instead, he wanted to prevent civil coercion of faith so that all could freely respond to God's sovereign calling to pursue their rightly ordered end in God. This could not happen so long as the magistrates sought to coerce belief, for coercion can never lead a conscience to accept salvation and obedience to God. Consciences must be free to respond to God's calling apart from any coercive hindrance.

General Baptists in England

The English congregation led by Thomas Helwys remained in Amsterdam for another two years following their break with the Smyth group. In 1612, the group returned to England and established a small church at Spitalfields just outside of London. Helwys brought with him copies of *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* which was published in English in 1612, a copy of which he apparently attempted to present to the king.¹⁰⁴ Ernest Payne suggests that the English Baptists in Amsterdam were moved by the persecution being suffered in England by dissenters, noting specifically the burning of Bartholomew Legate in March, 1612.¹⁰⁵ Helwys and his group returned to an environment hostile to dissent, and his bold publication of the *Mystery of Iniquity* with its calls for universal religious liberty could not be ignored by the authorities. Therefore,

¹⁰³Ibid., 208 (italics original)

¹⁰⁴See above n. 85 which describes Helwys's handwritten note to King James included in the flyleaf of one of the extant copies of the work.

¹⁰⁵Ernest A. Payne, *Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England*, 2nd ed. (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1966), 8-9, 11-12.

shortly after establishing the congregation on English soil, Helwys was arrested, and would apparently remain in prison until his death.¹⁰⁶

John Murton

The leadership of the new congregation in England would fall to John Murton who had been with Helwys in Amsterdam. Murton was a furrier from Gainsborough who had traveled with the congregation to Amsterdam in 1608. Murton's leadership of the congregation and continuing affirmation of Helwys's ideas landed him in Newgate prison by 1613. From Newgate he would continue to write and offer leadership for the Spitalfields congregation.

There is considerable question regarding which works should be attributed to Murton. Stephen Wright notes that in the eight years following the publication of Helwys's *Mystery of Iniquity*, five works were produced by the Baptists in London: "A most Humble supplication of divers poor prisoners" (1613), *Obiections: Answered by way of dialogue* (1615—republished in 1662 as *Persecution for Religion Judg'd and Condemn'd*), *A very plain and well grounded treatise concerning baptisme* (1618), *A most Humble Supplication of many of the King's Majesty's Loyal Subjects . . . who were persecuted (only for differing in religion)* (1620), and, in the same year, *A Description of What God hath Predestined*.¹⁰⁷ Wright only accepts *Description* as the work of Murton.¹⁰⁸ Payne accepts both *Objections Answered* and *A Most Humble Supplication* as

¹⁰⁶The dating of Helwys's death is uncertain, though it would seem that he must have been dead by 1616. It is in this year that his uncle Geoffrey Helwys bequeaths ten pounds to Thomas's widow. See Underwood, *History of the English Baptists*, 48, and Payne, *Thomas Helwys*, 12.

¹⁰⁷Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2006), 45.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

the product of Murton's pen, for the latter attribution depending on the statement of Roger Williams who claims the work was written in milk and smuggled out of Newgate prison.¹⁰⁹ Edward Underhill, in his volume containing the work in question, attributes *Objections Answered* and *A Most Humble Supplication* to the same author whom he declares is doubtless a member of the Helwys congregation that returned to England.¹¹⁰ Underhill argues that these are not the works of Helwys, instead suggesting that *Objections* bears considerable resemblance to a work attributed by John Robinson to Murton. As such, Underhill opts for Murton as the likely author of *Objections Answered* as well as *An Humble Supplication*.¹¹¹ It is likely best to follow Jordan who accepts that *Objections Answered* is an anonymous tract, and acknowledges that tradition has attributed the authorship of both works to Murton.¹¹²

Regardless of authorship, it would seem that scholarly consensus places *Objections Answered* within the context of the Helwys congregation shortly after its return to England. As such, this work in its 1662 form as *Persecution for Religion* can be considered within the present study at this point prior to turning to *An Humble Supplication* with its more certain authorship of John Murton.

In the opening "Epistle" to the reader, present is the affirmation consistent with Helwys's teaching that the civil government is an ordinance of God which has received

¹⁰⁹Payne, *Thomas Helwys*, 14.

¹¹⁰Edward Bean Underhill, ed., *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661* (1846; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 87.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 89.

¹¹²Jordan expounds on his statement in a footnote, noting that most attribute the authorship of *Objections* to Murton, though some have claimed Helwys's authorship. He contends that textual examination rules out Helwys as the author, though there is no definitive proof of Murton's authorship either. He attributes the authorship of *A Humble Supplication* to a group of Baptists, "of which Murton was the guiding genius." See Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, 198-199, n. 3.

all earthly authority. Such authority requires obedience from its subjects with the added note that failure to submit results not only in the punishment of the civil authorities, but also God's displeasure. The caveat offered by the writer is that this authority must not contravene God's right in being lawgiver for the soul.¹¹³ Here again is the acceptance of the legitimate place of civil authority in not only the punishment of wrongdoing, but in the management of the needful activity of the state. For this Baptist writer, though, it is important to note that, like Helwys, civil activity is not outside of the purview of God, yet civil activity does have its limitations where ecclesial practice is concerned. God alone has sovereignty to establish and coerce religious activity. The religious is not a private realm apart from the public, but that sphere of activity under which the civil government does not have legitimate authority.

Objections Answered proceeds as a dialogue between *Christian*, representing the Baptist position, and *Antichristian*, who speaks the view of the Church of England and the magistrates, with the occasional interjection from *Indifferent Man*. One of the foundational ideas that will drive the argument in both this work and *An Humble Supplication* is the commitment to the idea, drawn from John 4: 24, that because God is Spirit, right worship must be offered with a right spirit. Thus, an individual's worship is only worthy if that one is worshiping in line with his or her rightly convicted conscience. To perform the acts of worship without faith that those forms are truly ordered by God

¹¹³“We do unfeignedly acknowledge the authority of earthly magistrates, God's blessed ordinance, and that all earthly authority and command appertains unto them; let them command what they will, we must obey, either to do or suffer upon pain of God's displeasure, besides their punishment: but all men must let God alone with his right, which is to be lord and lawgiver to the soul, and not command obedience for God where he commandeth none.” *Persecution for Religion Judg'd and Condemn'd*, in Underhill, in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (1846; New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 100.

brings one under condemnation.¹¹⁴ Antichristian responds to this argument by suggesting that Christian's line of reasoning could lead to a situation in which "every man worship God as himself pleaseth."¹¹⁵

Christian's response to Antichristian reveals that the early Baptist call for freedom of conscience in religious practice is not identical with the modern liberal democratic freedom to choose one's own good to pursue. Christian does not accept that one's conscience must be free to pursue whatever it deems to be good, but instead that the conscience must be free so that it may rightly pursue the one good. He states, "[Antichristian's] conclusion I aim not at; for I acknowledge, that there is but *one* God, so there is but *one* way of worshipping him, out of the which way, whosoever is, and repenteth not thereof, shall pay a dear price."¹¹⁶ Here again is reaffirmed the early Baptist conviction that freedom of conscience is necessary so that people may come to faith in order that their worship of God is acceptable. For Christian, even rightly ordered worship, if compelled against one's conscience, is displeasing to God.¹¹⁷

Like Helwys, the author here establishes that the magistrate's legitimate authority is enforced by the power of the sword. The authority of the magistrate is over body, goods, life, and all that belongs to the "outward man." However, it is the inward man, the heart, which is required by God.¹¹⁸ Yet, to make such a distinction is not to relinquish the outward man wholly to the civil authorities since it is God who has given their authority

¹¹⁴Ibid., 103-104.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 104.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷"... whatsoever I have not faith in, in worshipping God, although it were undoubtedly true, I may not offer it up unto God, for it is displeasing to him, and it is sin against him." Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 108.

and ordained the magistracy as a particular ministry. Nor is it to relegate all matters spiritual to the inner life apart from any public engagement. The limitation of the magistrate's authority to the worldly is not because of a relegation of the religious to a private realm apart from public activity, but instead acknowledges that the conscience remains unaffected by the power of the sword. God alone has authority in matters of conscience, so that compelled worship contrary to the conscience cannot be offered to God, but must, as Christian implies, be instead compelled worship towards the one who forces the outward man.¹¹⁹ Because this is an infringement on the authority of God by earthly rulers beyond that authority which has been given them by God, freedom of conscience in matters of religion is a right acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.

One of the suppositions of those who support the magistrate's use of the sword to compel religious practice is that without forced conformity, the result would be anarchy in the state.¹²⁰ In answer to this charge, Christian offers two responses. First, he notes that God is a god of peace and order, and to be obeyed. Second, he argues that if just laws are enacted that allow for freedom of religious practice, one of the key components of these laws is allegiance to the king in civil affairs.¹²¹ Noting particularly the case of the Roman Catholics who suffer under significant suspicion because of their allegiance to the Roman pontiff, Christian argues that it is likely that the chief cause of their treasons "hath been because of all the compulsions that have been used against their consciences,

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Antichristian voices this view: "If it were as you would have it, that all religions should be suffered, how dangerous would it be to the king's person and state. What treacheries and treasons would be plotted!" Indifferent Man acknowledges and seconds Antichristian's concern over this issue. Ibid., 113-114.

¹²¹Ibid., 114.

in compelling them to worship practised in public, according to the law of this land.”¹²²

Christian suggests that without such coercion, the Catholics in England would be peaceable and accepting of the king’s legitimate authority. The argument from the Baptists is that civil obedience and submission to the legitimate functions of state authority depend not on conformity of ecclesial practice, but are more likely assured when consciences are not coerced to conformity by means of earthly power.

Christian refutes Antichristian over the question of the punishment of those who hold to heretical ideas and thus sin against God. Christian states that such punishment rightly belongs to God alone, and is not an aspect of God’s ordained role for the magistracy. In developing this argument the writer of *Objections Answered* treads similar ground as Murton in *An Humble Supplication* (no doubt one of the numerous similarities leading many to assume Murton to be the anonymous author of *Objections Answered*), and will serve as a bridge between the two works.

Christian argues that the state’s use of corporal punishment to punish heresy stands contrary to the stated will of God that would have “*no man to perish, but would that all men whatsoever should come to repentance.*”¹²³ He says that in putting to death those who refuse to be conformed to the state church through the sword of the state, “you seek to destroy their bodies whilst they remain in their errors.”¹²⁴ The argument turns to the parable of the wheat and the tares which are to grow together. Christian argues that nowhere does the New Testament teach compulsion for those who have not repented. This parable appears to have been an important text for the General Baptists in arguing

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., 119. The biblical reference is to 2 Peter 3: 3. (Italics original)

¹²⁴Ibid.

their case. Murton in *An Humble Supplication* draws upon this same parable, arguing that Christ commands that both wheat and tares be left alone to grow until the end of the world.¹²⁵ He concludes,

... they that are now tares may hereafter become wheat. ... they that are now no people of God, nor under mercy, as the saints sometimes were, may hereafter become the people of God, and obtain mercy, as they. Some come not till the eleventh hour: if those that come not till the last hour should be destroyed because they came not at the first, then should they never come, but be prevented. And why do men call themselves Christians, and do not the things Christ would?¹²⁶

The importance of religious freedom for these early Baptists lay not in the inherent right of an individual to choose his or her own ends to pursue, but was instead founded upon evangelistic concern. As previously noted, the Baptists affirmed that there was one God to whom true worship was due. Their contention against the use of the earthly sword to punish heretics and compel their conformity was that it prevented true repentance and conversion. The General Baptists' commitment to Arminian theology was key in forming this conviction. Jordan notes, "The Calvinist could in logic put a blasphemer or an heretic to death with the assurance that God's will and purpose would not be thwarted."¹²⁷ The execution in no way infringed upon God's predetermined state of grace for that individual. Jordan continues, "But to the Arminian Baptist the execution of a man who was evidently unregenerate was a hideous possibility. Every human being, no matter how deeply mired in error, had within him the potentiality of grace."¹²⁸

Because Murton and the Baptists were committed to the establishment of a visible church

¹²⁵John Murton, *An Humble Supplication to The King's Majesty; as it was presented 1620, in Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (1846; New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 214.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 215

¹²⁷Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, 305.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

of the redeemed within the present social order, to use the sword of the magistrate to cut off those who had not yet come to faith was contrary to the heart of the Baptist ecclesiology.

As did the writer of *Objections Answered*, Murton in *An Humble Supplication* notes that the persecution of the Baptists is a result of their rejection of worship according to a faith that they do not have. He prefaces this by noting, “Our miseries are long and lingering imprisonments for many years in divers counties of England, in which many have died and left behind them widows, and many small children.”¹²⁹ In the same vein of the previous work, and in accord with the common refrain among Baptists, Murton calls for the judgment as to the value of the use of civil authority to coerce religious practice to be based upon the Scriptures as opposed to the rulings and teachings of the bishops of the Church of England and their magistrates.¹³⁰ Murton argues that the interpretation of Scripture is opened to all through the Holy Spirit, and suggests that the learned teachers who uphold the Church of England’s commitment to religious persecution fail to see this in Scripture because “these learned would lose their honours and profits, in being lords and law-makers over the conscience and souls of men.”¹³¹ For Murton, again recognizing the sovereignty of God over the conscience, these “learned” men cannot free a person from God’s wrath or deliver souls from damnation, and thus, must not be given authority to enforce any particular practice of worship.

In this argument against compelled worship apart from faith, another support for the supposition that these early Baptists do not distinguish distinct realms of the

¹²⁹Murton, *An Humble Supplication*, 190.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 191.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 212.

autonomous temporal and the spiritual can be seen. Murton is clear that there are distinct realms of activity in which there is proper application of authority. The king and magistrates wield authority in the worldly realm, claiming body and goods of all peoples subject to them. Conversely, within the spiritual realm, the magistrates do not have legitimate authority to bear the sword, but authority in this realm is God's alone. However, Murton's argument (as well as that of the author of *Objections Answered*) denies the notion that these realms are autonomous such that the worldly realm functions without reference to the divine or that faith belongs solely in the spiritual realm. For Murton, the bodily practice of worship is intimately related to one's faith. To participate in a worship service to which one cannot assent in faith is a sin and offense against God, suggesting that the early Baptists did not allow for a rigid dualistic divide between the body and the spirit. While the state certainly had legitimate claim to a believer's body and material goods, even his professed allegiance in civil affairs, this claim is still to be understood as granted by God and tied with spiritual practice. One's faith was not left in a private realm of the spiritual, but related to and demanded right bodily practice within the public sphere.

Murton concludes his arguments in *An Humble Supplication* by drawing the king's attention to the nations around England and the fact that where religion is tolerated, "yet no trouble of state, no treason, no hinderance at all of any good; but much prosperity brought unto their countries, they having all one harmony in matters of state, giving unto Caesar his due, and for religion they suffer one another."¹³² He offers again that civil laws are for the maintenance of civil peace and welfare within the realm, and rejects the notion that present kings might be compared with the kings of Israel. Murton

¹³²Ibid., 225.

wants to show that in allowing religious freedom and refusing to compel religious practice, kings do not lose any of their power. Rather, the implication that Murton offers is that kings will find their subjects who are not compelled in matters of religious practice will give of their earthly goods and possessions to the crown with a free conscience that is obedient to legitimate authority. He concludes by noting that this preservation of the welfare and peace of the civil state is in turn a blessing to the church.¹³³

Leonard Busher

Along with Helwys and Murton, the third significant Baptist figure to return from Amsterdam and publish a call for religious liberty was Leonard Busher. Little is known about Busher save what can be surmised from his work, *Religions Peace: or, a plea for liberty of conscience*. Burrage suggests that Busher was a member of a third company of English Anabaptists in Amsterdam that was separate from both Smyth and Helwys.¹³⁴ Thomas Lyon adds that though he led this third group, Busher returned to London with Helwys.¹³⁵ Unlike Helwys and Murton, however, Busher seems to have survived the early years of the Baptists' return to England, though he would be forced into exile again. Jordan points to a letter written in 1642 by Busher to a Dutch friend asking for financial assistance. In the letter, Busher describes himself as "far into 71 years," thus suggesting

¹³³“In which preservation [of peace and welfare of the state], the church of Christ hath a special part, when their outward peace is thereby preserved from the fury of all adversaries; in which respect princes are called nursing fathers, as many are at this day.” *Ibid.*, 230.

¹³⁴Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, 1: 243, n. 2.

¹³⁵Thomas Lyon, *The Theory of Religious Liberty in England 1603-39* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 124. W. K. Jordan notes that there is no evidence that Busher did in fact return to London as part of the Helwys congregation, though he admits that this is unlikely. *Development of Religious Toleration*, 285, n. 1.

a birth date of sometime around 1571.¹³⁶ *Religions Peace* would seem to be his only published volume, lacking funds to publish two other works: *A Scourge of Small Cords* and *A Declaration of certain False Translations in the New Testament*.¹³⁷

Religions Peace was published in 1614, likely while Helwys and Murton were both in prison on account of their Baptist faith. Lyon writes of the work, “That this should have been the earliest pamphlet in England to devote itself wholly to arguing the cause of religious liberty is a testimony of the increasing importance that toleration was assuming in Baptist eyes.”¹³⁸ Following an appeal to the king, Busher begins his text by listing seventeen arguments against religious persecution, and pursues his case by developing arguments along the lines that have already been noted in Murton. Prominent in driving the arguments is the conviction that conscience cannot be compelled to true worship by earthly power. It is this conviction that drives much of Busher’s appeal for an end of religious persecution.

Busher commends in his introduction to the king the distinction between the authority of kings and magistrates and those of bishops and ministers. He states,

Kings and magistrates are to rule temporal affairs by the swords of their temporal kingdoms, and bishops and ministers are to rule spiritual affairs by the word and Spirit of God, the sword of Christ’s spiritual kingdom, and not to intermeddle one with another’s authority, office, and function.¹³⁹

¹³⁶Jordan, 285, n. 1.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Lyon, *Theory of Religious Liberty*, 124. Underhill clarifies that “Though not the first of the noble band who manfully claimed liberty of private judgment in divine things for himself and for all others, Busher’s work remains to us as the *earliest treatise known to be extant* on this great theme.” Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, 6.

¹³⁹Leonard Busher, *Religions Peace: or A Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661*, Edward Bean Underhill, ed. (1846; New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 23.

Busher offers first a clear distinction between the divergent functions of the civil authorities and the ecclesial authorities such that the distinct powers are to remain separate. What is also important to note is Busher's description of the sword of the ecclesial authorities: "the word and Spirit of God." He will argue later in the work that all should be allowed to argue for their diverse religious positions so long as their appeal is to Scripture alone (thereby discounting reference to the Church Fathers or Tradition).¹⁴⁰ At this point, Busher would seem to call into question the leadership of the Church of England as true bishops and ministers of Christ since they do not depend upon the spiritual sword alone in defending the faith, but instead turn to the princes and magistrates to compel religious practice. He argues, "And he is a true bishop who is unprovable, and that is able to stop the mouths of his adversaries by God's word and Spirit only, and whose faith and discipline agree with the prophets, Christ, and his apostles, and maketh no contradiction."¹⁴¹ True ministry, and the true constitution of the church, is found where Scripture is employed to convince by the Spirit of God those who are without to join in worship according to the pattern seen therein.

The thirteenth of the seventeen reasons against persecution challenges that the use of the temporal sword to force the conscience to a particular form of worship is to "tyrannize over the soul, as well as over the body."¹⁴² Like Murton, Busher does not allow for a dualistic divide between body and soul, material and spiritual. The compulsion of conscience affects both soul and body. A line of demarcation cannot be drawn, then, between what is properly spiritual and material within the person. That is, if

¹⁴⁰See *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 34.

the body is assumed to be public, while the spiritual is relegated to the private, Busher's argument here suggests that the two cannot be so easily separated into different spheres. Tyranny in one area is tyranny in the other as well.

Much of Busher's argument in *Religions Peace* is developed along the lines of practical implications. His next reason claims that persecution by the Protestants of dissenters in England justifies the persecution by the Roman Catholics against the Protestants. He further adds that the Roman Catholics in turn justify and show the Turks and pagans "in such like cruelty and tyranny."¹⁴³ Busher notes the irony of the Protestants protesting against the Catholic persecution when they themselves commit the same abuses on others. He follows this idea by noting in his fifteenth reason that the king and Parliament would not like their consciences compelled by Rome, so they should recognize the same sentiment among their subjects. Again, betraying the place of the divine within the civil sphere, Busher adds that, "according to the law Christ hath enjoined Christians, not by persecution to force other men's consciences against their wills."¹⁴⁴ Christ has established the law to which even the civil sphere is to be subject.

Busher then posits an argument which Murton will take up in slightly altered form: persecution compelling religious practice "cause men and women to make shipwreck of faith and good consciences, by forcing a religion upon them even against their minds and consciences."¹⁴⁵ Busher here seems to be suggesting the idea Murton makes explicit: that to perform even right acts of worship apart from faith conviction brings damnation. Busher ties this idea with the practical implication that if persecution

¹⁴³Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

is employed against those who refuse to conform, citing their “heresy,” then hanging and burning “also do send them quick to the devil in their errors.”¹⁴⁶ As Murton will do, Busher leans on his Arminian theology to argue that the very purpose of salvation for all is thwarted if heretics (be they legitimate or Baptists) are killed before their consciences can be convinced by the Word of God to join in the true worship in the true church.

This concern for salvation drives much of Busher’s thought in *Religions Peace*.

He will tie it with the necessity of universal religious liberty, arguing that

if persecution be not laid down, and liberty of conscience set up, then cannot Jews, nor any strangers, nor others contrary-minded, be ever converted in our land. For so long as they know aforehand, that they shall be forced to believe against their consciences, they will never seek to inhabit there. By which means you keep them from the apostolic faith, if the apostolic faith be only taught where persecution is.¹⁴⁷

Once again, here is the Baptist insistence that the conscience is under God’s sovereignty, and the imposition of civil governments upon that sovereignty works contrary to the ends of God. That is, in speaking to a king and state church that believed they were defending the Kingdom of God by compelling worship and combating heresy, Busher instead argues that they are doing the converse. The establishment and civil support for a state church only hinders those who are outside of the Kingdom from having their consciences swayed and convinced.

Behind Busher’s reasoning is his unstated conviction that the visible church is to be composed of baptized believers. He hints at this in a critique of the state church in which the thought is to bring all in. He writes,

Also, if all within the land be forced to be of the church, as the bishops and their ministers would still have it, then there would be no world in the land, but all the

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 28.

land would be the church, which is absurd and contrary to the scriptures. And great ignorance do the bishops and their ministers show, when they think the whole nation of people is the church of Christ: for then it cannot be said, out of Great Britain, *the Lord added to the church, from day to day, such as should be saved*; seeing, within the land there would be none without to be added.¹⁴⁸

Busher's ecclesiology holds that "they that will be of the true faith and church, must be called thereunto out of the world, by the word of God, in every nation."¹⁴⁹ Thus, "church" and "world" designate for Busher divergent polities where Christ's authority is either accepted or rejected by people's consciences. Busher points out that it is through the preaching of the Gospel that the Spirit of God convinces the conscience so that people may move from the world into the church. The work of the church is the preaching of the Gospel so that those of the world can become part of the church. Therefore, the church positions itself as a distinct body politic within the land, one which seeks to continually expand as people are free to respond to the sovereign calling of God. Here is seen a Baptist push against the medieval and Magisterial Reformation social imagination which conceives of the church and state together as encompassing a single society.

Finally, as with Helwys and Murton, Busher acknowledges that Christians are to submit themselves to the earthly authorities in all civil matters. Speaking of the king he writes, "For whom also, and for the whole commonwealth of all his kingdoms, we ought to be diligent, and ready to hazard and lay down not only our goods, but also our lives, at all times and occasions."¹⁵⁰ This submission to civil laws, however, excludes such laws that infringe upon the proper authority of the church. Busher argues that Christians have been freed from ecclesial laws which Christ has not demanded in the New Testament,

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 56.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 55.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 67.

noting specifically the Old Testament commandments. What he does not agree, though, is that Christians are freed from all ecclesial laws as if the church were without any disciplinary power. He is clear that the ecclesial laws from which the Christian is set free are “the ecclesiastical laws and ordinances of antichrist.”¹⁵¹ Throughout *Religions Peace* he has consistently referred to the bishops and ministers of the Church of England who rely upon the sword of the magistrates to compel worship as antichrists. It must be read in this instance, then, that Busher is rejecting the ordinances of the hierarchy and civil engagement of the Church of England, not all ecclesial laws of any church.

Busher concludes that allowing freedom of conscience will be to the benefit of the kingdom as a whole contrary to the dire predictions of treason and anarchy. In repealing what Busher calls the “popish laws and canons,” those which compel religious practice by the power of the earthly sword, he interestingly desires “to see the moral and judicial law of God both firmly enacted and carefully practised, after the mind of Christ.”¹⁵² As is now clear, Busher does not desire any sort of theocratic rule, but he does seem to hold that the divine is not relegated to a private engagement with the individual outside of the public square. Indeed, he argues that Christ’s spiritual authority acknowledged in the consciences of people will lead to the flourishing of the nation and the benefit of the king.¹⁵³ Without religious persecution, Busher envisions a sort of utopian existence as all people will come to Christ apart from compulsion and, with consciences convinced, live

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid., 69.

¹⁵³Busher writes, “And then shall Christ’s spiritual throne, be established in the hearts and consciences of both king, prince, and people, so as the church, Christ’s spiritual kingdom, shall increase in knowledge of faith, and obedience thereof, with all love, peace, and charity one towards another; and the commonwealth of his majesty’s kingdoms will flourish and prosper, and also his throne be constantly established, both to him and his heirs, throughout all his dominions, in a sure land of peace and love the one with and towards another, to the glory of God, and the comfort of his majesty and all his subjects.” Ibid.

justly and righteously under the ordinances drawn from the New Testament. This will include Jews who, no longer being compelled to Christianity, will find their hindrance to acceptance (namely, the very compulsion that seeks to bring them to the church) removed and will turn to the Gospel.¹⁵⁴ Busher's ecclesiology and social theory would seem to hold that the freedom for God to have sovereignty over conscience will result in the expansion of the church and the transformation of the nation by the presence of this growing, free, body politic.

Thus, the early General Baptists, Smyth, Helwys, Murton, and Busher, initiated the calls for religious liberty grounded in a theology that viewed God as sovereign over the conscience, and as such argued that any attempts by the civil authorities to compel the conscience was a usurpation of God's power. Their desire was to allow freedom for God to move in the lives of people to call them by the preaching of the Gospel into the church. At the heart of these early Baptist calls for religious liberty was the conviction that God desired all people to come to salvation, and religious persecution impinged upon God's timing and activity to call the world into the true church, that one which exhibited right doctrine and practice.

These convictions formed the basis for the General Baptists' commitment to religious liberty as they emerged at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A generation later, and in a very different political climate, the Particular Baptists arose with similar calls for freedom from religious persecution. Before closing this chapter, it is needful to consider then the basis of their calls for religious liberty.

¹⁵⁴Busher describes the righteous and just life that would ensue should "the holy laws of God's word be practised and executed after Christ's will," He notes particularly the positive effect of the removal of the hindrances to belief for the Jews. *Ibid.*, 69-71.

The Particular Baptists

Emerging from Separatist congregations in England in the 1630s—particularly from the JLJ Church¹⁵⁵—Particular Baptists distinguished themselves by affirming the necessity of baptism for professed believers. By 1640, there existed seven Particular Baptist churches in and around London. England was at this point largely convinced of the validity of Calvinism, so this group of Baptists found a much more favorable hearing than the General Baptists who emerged a generation earlier and were then the most numerous of the Baptists.

As they separated from the JLJ Church, some Particular Baptists, like the General Baptists, had constituted themselves as a church through the administration of self-baptism, an action their critics did not allow to pass unnoticed. White notes that the Separatist Praisegod Barbone attacked this practice in his pamphlet, *A discourse tending to prove the baptisme in, or under the defection of Antichrist to be the ordinance of Jesus Christ*. Barbone argues, “For a man to Baptise himselfe, and so to begin Baptisme is so singular a course, and so differing from the way and practice of the Saints, that it discovereth it selfe to be erroneous and not of God.”¹⁵⁶ To this charge, and those like it, White argues that the Baptists provided two lines of answers, drawing both from eventual signers of the 1644 *London Confession*.

The first answer is provided by Thomas Killcop who addresses Barbone in his pamphlet, *A short treatise of baptisme*. Killcop argues that if Scripture gives warrant for the reconstitution of the church to supplant a false church that has been set up, as the

¹⁵⁵For a discussion of the JLJ Church, see the section on the Particular Baptists earlier in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶Praisegod Barbone quoted in White, “Doctrine of the Church,” 574.

Separatists hold, then it must also allow for the reinstatement of baptism that is necessary for such reconstituting. Killcop writes, “That every Scripture that gives you warrant, or any of your judgement, to erect a Church state, gives us the same warrant to erect baptisme, sith the one cannot be done without the other, for none can put on Christ (that is visibly by outward profession), but such as are baptised into Christ.”¹⁵⁷ For Killcop, it is the authority of the Word of God that provides warrant for the establishment of the church through baptism. This would suggest that the formation of the church is more than a human activity since the authority is found apart from human willing. Also telling is that baptism in his description carries a sacramental character since it ties salvation as a visible effect to this visible practice.

The second response to those like Barbone who challenged the baptism of the Baptists was offered by John Spilsbery. White notes that Spilsbery’s answer is drawn from the point of view of the authority given to the congregation. Spilsbery argues that because God has ordained the proper administration of the ordinances in the church, he has also given in Scripture the fountainhead from which these ordinances are to be drawn should they not be rightly practiced in any established church. Spilsbery can then argue that Scripture allows for the reconstitution of the ordinances should the proper practice have been lost. He ties the power of God to the Word, so that God’s power works through Scripture to open up for his people a new beginning of the practice in question. The key for the present question is that Spilsbery views God as having chosen a people and constituted them as a church by uniting them to Christ. This body constituted by God is then the institution where the ordinances may rightly be received, and it is as the church rightly practices the ordinance that salvation can be effected to those who seek to

¹⁵⁷Thomas Killcop, *A short treatise of baptisme* (London, 1642), 10.

join.¹⁵⁸ The religious is not a privatized, wholly internal act, but is tied in a sacramental way to the practice and liturgy of the church. It is for Spilsbery, God's prior action of calling and uniting a people to Christ that constitutes the local church and not the product of human activity alone.

Spilsbery, unlike Killcop, does not approve of self-baptism, and instead allows for one who is unbaptized to offer baptism to others. In this he points to the example of John the Baptist.¹⁵⁹ Wright argues, "For Spilsbury, scriptural principles, and not the ordinance of baptism, were the indestructible foundations of the true church."¹⁶⁰ Yet Wright may have neglected the extent to which Spilsbery does affirm the importance of the baptismal act. Spilsbery argues that "matter and form" constitute the church, with the matter being the "company of Saints, or persons professing faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and living accordingly, that is, in holiness of life." The form of the church is that which is from God. Spilsbery writes, "The forme is that by which these are united and knit up together in one fellowship, and orderly body, and that is the covenant of grace that lies between God and his people, by which God visibly becomes the God of such persons, and they his people above all other."¹⁶¹ Spilsbery was not as interested in right succession of baptism—and thus the perceived need felt among some Baptists for self-baptism—as he was in noting that the constitution of the church was accomplished

¹⁵⁸ "...for though God hath joyned his word and ordinances together, yet he hath also ordained an orderly way for his people to come to enjoy them, which orderly way I conceive to be only in the Church of God, wherein is the power of Christ to set afoot his ordinances, as when God shall please to take a people to himself, and by the power of his truth unite them to his Son, and so into an orderly body among themselves, now such a people, so constituted, have right unto all such priviledges, ordained and appointed by God, for their mutual comfort and well-being." John Spilsbery, *A treatise concerning the lawfull subject of baptisme* (London, 1643), 38.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 39.

¹⁶⁰Wright, *Early English Baptists*, 106.

¹⁶¹Spilsbery, *Treatise*, 40-41.

through God's activity in creating a body joined around covenant with God—a covenant evidenced in the ordinance of baptism.¹⁶² Thus, Spilsbery could find his authority to baptize by immersion, even though he was not so baptized, by virtue of the authority found in the community established by God as discovered in Scripture.

Though there is certainly some tension in understanding whether the constitution of the church is through baptism or the scriptural warrant for a covenanted community, in either case, it would seem that the Particular Baptists did not conceive of the church as solely a human institution. Rather, the formation of the church body was a divine act into which people were called together, and did so in the divinely mandated practice of baptism given to the community. Instead of succession, Baptists accounted for the constitution of this divine community in their reading of Scripture which for them pointed to God's sovereignty to call persons from the world apart from civil coercion.

The political climate in England likely played no small part in the timing of the Particular Baptists' desire to present a confession of their beliefs. In 1640, Parliament had refused to disband in conflict with the command of Charles I, instead remaining in session to pass a series of laws to curtail royal power. In December 1640, Parliament passed the Root and Branch Petition with the intention of abolishing the Church of England with its episcopacy of bishops. Parliament's actions led the king to raise an army of royalist supporters in an attempt to preserve what was left of royal power. After

¹⁶²Spilsbery does, however, acknowledge that baptism is “one branch of the covenant, an “essential truth,” which comes with the form of covenant. He therefore distinguishes between the truth in the doctrine of baptism and the outward administration of it. That is, baptism is an essential aspect of the constitution of the church through God's covenanting establishment of the church, so it can be rightly said that there can be no church without baptism. Yet, Spilsbery is clear that the actual application of baptism is always subsequent to the member's assent to the doctrines and teachings of the church which bring him or her under the covenant. Thus, one is baptized as a testimony to one's membership within the covenant community, but baptism itself, as an ordinance of the church, is necessarily an ordinance without which the church cannot be understood. *Ibid.*, 141.

two decisive victories, the parliamentary armies secured victory and Oliver Cromwell rose to prominence. McBeth states that “Parliament was unable to deal with victory as effectively as with conflict” when faced with the task of devising religious settlement.¹⁶³ Parliament established the Westminster Assembly of Divines to deal with the question of establishing the new form of church in England. Baptists were pushing for religious liberty, yet were also fighting to avoid being identified with antinomian groups and others considered heretical. As McBeth notes, however, “Most Englishmen at the time could not conceive of an orderly society without an official state church.”¹⁶⁴ Religious liberty was seen as a dangerous alternative that one Presbyterian minister identified with “the grand designe of the Devil, his Masterpeece and chiefe Engine he works by at this time to uphold his tottering Kingdom.”¹⁶⁵ The task for the Particular Baptists was to present their beliefs so as to show their orthodoxy and their commitment to the good of the state. Thus, by 1644,

the time was ripe for the Baptists to proclaim their right to congregate on the basis of moderately expressed doctrine and practice, enforced by a voluntary association of churches. This would firmly dissociate them from the more disruptive and disreputable lay preachers, and from accusations of social radicalism and theological unsoundness.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, they would publish in this year a confession of faith to which the seven Particular Baptist churches in and around London adhered.

¹⁶³McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 106.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Thomas Edwards quoted in McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 107.

¹⁶⁶Wright, *Early English Baptists*, 132.

The 1644 London Confession

The Particular Baptists were motivated to present a confession of faith largely by apologetic concerns. In the introduction to the *London Confession* of 1644 they comment that they have been accused of “holding Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne, disclaiming of Magistracy, denying to assist them either in persons or purse in any of their lawfull Commands, doing acts unseemly in the dispensing of the Ordinance of Baptism.”¹⁶⁷ Their desire with the publication of their statement of faith was to distance themselves from both the General Baptists and the Anabaptists. In reference to the latter, the title of the confession designates it as being from “those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists.”¹⁶⁸ White comments that “the leaders of their [Particular Baptist] congregations had determined to publish their *Confession* in order to manifest their substantial agreement with the prevailing forms of Calvinistic orthodoxy.”¹⁶⁹

Concerning the confession itself, McGlothlin states, “The Confession, as will be seen on examination, was not very carefully drawn, and is moderately Calvinistic.” Yet he also adds, “It is perhaps the most independent of the Baptist Confessions, and is one of the noblest productions ever put forth by them.”¹⁷⁰ This being stated, it must be added that the *London Confession* of 1644 is also not a work of *creatio ex nihilo*. It is widely

¹⁶⁷Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 154-155. All references to the London Confession of 1644 will be to the text reprinted in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, *op. cit.* Page references will be to that volume.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁶⁹B. R. White, “The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 19, no. 2 (October 1968): 571.

¹⁷⁰W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 169, 170.

acknowledged that the authors drew heavily upon outside sources, most notably, the English Separatist Confession of 1596 produced in Amsterdam, commonly known as the *True Confession*.¹⁷¹ Stanley Nelson notes, “Twenty-five or possibly twenty-six articles in A True Confession [1596] were in some degree contained in the London Confession; though not one article from the 1596 A True Confession was brought unaltered into the London Confession.”¹⁷² As White convincingly shows, however, “The 1644 *Confession* . . . was brought out with different motives and in very different circumstances” than the 1596 *True Confession*.¹⁷³

Philip Thompson suggests that apocalyptic eschatology was one of the driving features of Separatist thought at the end of the sixteenth century, and it was this eschatology that the Particular Baptists avoided in their borrowing from the *True Confession*.¹⁷⁴ Though not devoid of a significant eschatology of their own—see Article XX—the Particular Baptists attempted to moderate any language which might suggest violent establishment of Christ’s Kingdom on earth. Therefore, Nelson notes that the Baptists also had to distinguish themselves from the negative perception of the

¹⁷¹White suggests that this connection was first noted by W. T. Whitley in *A History of British Baptists*. He also points to the work of Glen Stassen, “Anabaptist influence in the origins of the Particular Baptists,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (October 1962), who suggested a connection with the work of William Ames. White, “Doctrine of the Church,” 576, n. 1; 575-76, n. 3. The connection with Ames was also developed by Stanley A. Nelson, “Reflecting on Baptist Origins: The London Confession of Faith of 1644,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 29, no. 2 (April 1994): 33-46. In this article, Nelson also notes the connection with the 1596 Confession. Jay Travis Collier offers a survey of the various documents to which dependence has been suggested, and sets key passages from each side-by-side with articles from the London Confession. “The Sources Behind the First London Confession,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 2002): 197-214.

¹⁷²Nelson, “Reflecting on Baptist Origins,” 34.

¹⁷³White, “Doctrine of the Church,” 579.

¹⁷⁴Thompson writes, “While the Baptists borrowed verbatim much of the language of *A True Confession* in the *London Confession*, even in the articles dealing with the Kingdom, the church, and eschatology, we may observe this distancing in the way in which the Baptists utilized the predecessor document.” Philip E. Thompson, “Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 29, no. 4 (2002): 339.

Anabaptists, particularly after Münster. He writes, “When any allusion to the church’s militancy or negative references to the established church appeared in *A True Confession*, these writers [of the 1644 *London Confession*] modified that statement in their rewriting.”¹⁷⁵ The Particular Baptists sought to affirm their orthodoxy and argue for their own ecclesiology in contrast to the Separatist groups that were gaining ascendancy in England in the 1640s.

The *London Confession* begins its consideration of ecclesiology in Article XXXIII. Like article 17 of the *True Confession*, this article begins: “that Christ hath here on earth a spirituall Kingdome.” From here, however, the differences begin. The *True Confession* asserts that there is “æ canonicall regiment in his Church ouer his servants” and “notwithstanding manie hypocrites do for the tyme lurk emongest thē.”¹⁷⁶ By contrasts, the Baptists assert,

Christ hath here on earth a spirituall Kingdome, which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed unto himselfe, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joynd to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement, in the practical injoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King.¹⁷⁷

Ensclosed in the formative statement on ecclesiology for the Baptists is not only a rejection of a state church by virtue of their claims to a visible body of saints, but there is also the commitment to the church as a distinct community that in its existence professes the Gospel by being joined to God and one another. Philip Thompson, referencing this

¹⁷⁵Nelson, “Reflecting on Baptist Origins,” 36.

¹⁷⁶Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 87. All page numbers to the *True Confession* will follow the pagination in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 165.

passage, notes, “The church for the early Baptists was the earthly arena in which the reign of Christ was embodied, and as such was the interruption and delegitimization of the idolatrous politics of the state.”¹⁷⁸ Here is no thin conception of the church, but rather a robust ecclesiology in which the church in its visible presence exists as the manifestation of God’s Kingdom on earth. One’s life of faith is necessarily lived out within this community joined to God and each other.¹⁷⁹

Article XXXV envisions the church such that each believer presents body and soul to God. One’s religious practice is not relegated to the merely spiritual, but involves the whole of lives given to God so that they may be “bestowed in their severall order, peculiar place, due use, being fitly compact and knit together, according to the effectuall working of every part, to the edification of itselfe in love.”¹⁸⁰ Article XXXVI argues that every church has been bestowed the power to choose its own leaders. Article XXXVIII

¹⁷⁸Philip E. Thompson, “Sacraments and Religious Liberty: From Critical Practice to Rejected Infringement,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003), 46. Thompson argues that the early Baptist commitment to God’s sovereign authority to call persons to faith led them to see in the established state church an idolatry that usurped what was God’s prerogative. Thus, by affirming adult baptism as an ordinance that set the boundary for entry into the church, the Baptists were critiquing the politics of England and the Anglican church.

¹⁷⁹Nelson argues that this particular aspect of Baptist ecclesiology and its break with the True Confession model was drawing upon the work of William Ames (*The Marrow of Theology*). Nelson suggests that the Baptists were appropriating Ames’ two marks of the church to modify the ecclesiology of the True Confession to their emphasis on the visible church. Ames’ two marks are: personal profession of faith and being joined together in covenant. Nelson notes that the profession of faith was “more doctrinal than experiential.” Concerning the joining together, Nelson quotes Ames: “This bond is a covenant, expressed or implicit, by which believers bind themselves individually to perform all those duties toward God and toward one another which related to the purpose [ratio] of the church and its edification.” Nelson notes, however, that the Baptists placed baptism between these two marks, suggesting that baptism served as the initiation into the believing community. Nelson further comments that Ames and the Baptists were making use of Covenant Theology in developing this ecclesiology. Of particular interest in this is that “in covenant theology, the church was the location for experiencing the redemptive act of God.” Nelson adds, “The new covenant was operative upon individuals, but belonged to the church.” He concludes, “Article XXXIV accepted covenant theology’s understanding of the visible church as the arena for the ratification of God’s presence, love, blessing, and protection for believers.” It would seem that in this view, the church is not secondary or simply a voluntary association, but is divinely constituted and essential to the believer. Nelson, “Reflecting on Baptist Origins,” 39-40.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 166.

rejects governmental taxation to pay ministers' salaries. Article XXXIX presents the Baptist conviction that baptism is "to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith."¹⁸¹

The *London Confession's* ecclesiology presents the church as a divinely ordained body which is given powers to function as a whole. That is, the ecclesiology does not seem to admit a rank individualism which imagines the church as nothing more than a voluntary gathering of individuals who happen to worship together in one place. Article XLII states that the whole church, and not one particular person, has been given the power of excommunication. Article XLIII follows this assertion with the exhortation that all particular members are subject to this censure, excepting no one. Finally, article XLVII states:

And although the particular Congregations be distinct and severall Bodies, every one a compact and knit Citie in it selfe; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all meanes convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affaires of the Church as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head.¹⁸²

This article is lifted almost verbatim from the *True Confession*, the Baptists having passed over numerous articles critiquing the Church of England and its constitution. Though one may easily point to the autonomy of the local congregation as established in this article, it is also important to acknowledge the tension between the local church's self-governance and its connection to the larger body of Christians. The churches

¹⁸¹Ibid., 167. Interestingly, the word "onely" will be dropped from later editions of this Confession after criticism from Daniel Featley, a clergyman in the Church of England who was imprisoned for suspicion of disloyalty. Featley devoted the last chapter of his book, *The Dippers dipt. Or, the Anabaptists duck't and plunged Over Head and Eares, at a Disputation in Southwark* (1645), to the London Confession. His critiques led the Baptists to produce a new edition of the Confession in 1646 which tried to use language which would be more acceptable to Featley. For a discussion of the effects of Featley's attack, see William J. McGlothlin, "Dr. Daniel Featley and the First Calvinistic Baptist Confession," *Review and Expositor* 6, no. 4 (October 1909): 579-589.

¹⁸²Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 168-69.

acknowledge abiding by the same “rule” and working to share “counsel and help” in affairs of the church as “members of one body.” Also, the reference to the church as a “Citie” suggests a view of the church as a distinct politic, not to be relegated to functioning as an aspect of a larger society. Finally, this article points again to the Baptist conviction that Christ alone is to have sovereignty over church affairs.

Beginning with article XLVIII, the *Confession* begins to consider the role of the magistrate and the relation of the church to the state. Once again, the Baptists break with their dependence upon the *True Confession* of the Separatists a half century earlier. Like their General Baptist cousins, they affirm “That a civill Magistracie is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evill doers, and for the praise of them that doe well.”¹⁸³ Similarly, they contend that in all legitimate and lawful commands of the magistrates, they are to subject themselves so that “we may live a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty.”¹⁸⁴ In article XLIX, they state, “The supreme Magistracie of this Kingdome we beleeve to be the King and Parliament freely chosen by the Kingdome.” Thompson suggests that this may have been for the Baptists “an interesting hedging of bets, since those two were at war with each other at the time.”¹⁸⁵ He also posits, though, that in clearly designating the rule of *England* by king and Parliament, that the Baptists could have been “relativizing ... both by placing the politics of the church outside a sphere ruled by King or Parliament.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³Ibid., 169.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Thompson, “Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions,” 340.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

Thompson's proposal is interesting and goes to the heart of the argument this chapter is attempting to make. Certainly the Particular Baptists see the church as constituted by God and significantly more than an institution of human design secondary to the profession of faith. It has also been noted that they called upon believers to present bodies, not only souls, to God for formation in the congregation to be used by each particular "citie" as God chooses. Thus, the Baptists did not conceive of the religious as a separate sphere concerned only with the spiritual. The whole of the person was engaged, and the life of the church seemed to comprise a distinct community that involved the movement of the believer from the society of the world into the particular society that was the church, a movement accomplished in the initiatory practice of baptism. Yet, it is also clear that the Baptists understood themselves as still engaged with the state, and as a body of believers subject to the legitimate authority of the civil magistrates. Indeed, at the end of article XLIX, they acknowledge that they may be required to suffer on account of ecclesial laws established by the king and Parliament because they cannot rightly submit their consciences to such laws. They conclude, "yet are we bound to yeeld our persons to their pleasures."¹⁸⁷ They do allow that their bodies are subject to the authority of the state, but only insofar as there is legitimate authority. The body is not the state's realm exclusively. The use of their body is still subject to the conscience which is under the sovereign authority of God alone.

Conclusion

Both General and Particular Baptists emerged in seventeenth century England with calls for universal religious liberty. They founded their calls upon a conviction of

¹⁸⁷Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 169.

God's sovereignty and the freedom of conscience. That is, they argued that the coercion of religious practice by use of civil power amounts to a usurpation of God's authority in calling men and women to faith. In acknowledging the civil authorities as an ordinance of God, they not only profess their submission to their legitimate authority, but also affirm God's sovereignty over all realms of life. The divine is not to be kept out of the public square because the very authority that has precedence in that square is given by God. What the Baptists did reject is the encroachment of the civil authorities into the spiritual life of persons such that they compel people to a practice of faith to which their consciences have not been persuaded. For the Baptists, to perform the practices of a faith without the conviction of conscience is a sin of the highest degree. Thus, with the imposition of test oaths and the establishment of state churches, the civil authorities compel practices that bring persons under condemnation.

The desire of the Baptists in rejecting the authority of the civil magistrates to compel religious practice is to allow space for God's sovereign activity of calling consciences to affirmation of his authority. The driving factor for Baptists is not a concern for inherent rights of individuals to choose any particular good they so desire—a very modern conception of freedom—but instead, by removing civil coercion, to open space where people are free to be persuaded by God to the true faith. Concern with salvation, therefore, lies at the heart of the early English Baptist calls for religious liberty. The end goal is not an open marketplace devoid of the divine because it has been relegated to the private, individual, interior life, but the establishment of a particular society transformed by God's sovereign calling on free consciences in which the spiritual informs and shapes all of life. That is, the whole world hopefully is to be finally brought

into the unique community of the church, not by coercion with the sword, but through freely persuaded consciences called by God.

In accord with this commitment to God's sovereignty to call people to faith is the early Baptists' view that the church is called together by God and thus exists as a divine institution. God empowers and covenants with congregations, and as such, congregations have the authority to call ministers and discipline members. Thus, the church is understood to be more than secondary to conversion and simply a human institution. It embodies a particular community whose head is Christ, and initiation into which occurs through baptism. In this initiation, the individual whose conscience has been swayed by God enters a distinct community separate from the world. Here again, the Baptists did not conceive of the spiritual as being relegated to the private or interior life, but the spiritual instead informed the living out of all aspects of life, even life within the public square, under the sovereign reign of God.

Though these early English Baptists do not seem to conceive of the religious as relegated to one's private, inner life apart from engagement in the public sphere, it is not as certain that in their very language they have not opened the doors to such a modern conception. Both the General and Particular Baptists seem to envision the church as a distinct society functioning within the larger English society, and affirm that one's initiation into the church suggests a unique life shaped by that community. However, in allowing the "outward" person to be subject to the rule of the civil sword, even to the extent of bearing the sword, giving God command of the "inner" man, they have begun to blur the distinction between the church as society and church as an institution of society. The Particular Baptists' commitment to Calvinistic church-state theory in which the

bearing of the sword in the defense of the state is affirmed as the Christian's rightful duty to the authority of prince/magistrate begins to suggest that the Christian faith itself is to be privatized. The result of this privatization is that formation of one's outward person is to be left to the direction of the state while the inner life may be formed by the spiritual. Such a conception would be viewed as alien by the early English Baptists, but with the emergence of modern political theory in the writings of John Locke, Baptist vocabulary could easily allow for the transformation of their views into just such a modern imagining.

Having established a picture of the first English Baptists in the seventeenth century and the ecclesiology, soteriology, and social theory that shaped their conception of religious liberty, it is now possible to turn to the Baptists in North America and examine the theology that gives shape to their view of the relation of the church to the state.

CHAPTER THREE

Early Baptists in North America

Even as the Particular Baptists were beginning to arise in England, in North America Baptist ideals were sprouting from the rich soil of a land where the hope of freedom had drawn many religious dissenters. Finding the longed for freedom unwelcome in Puritan and Separatist Massachusetts, those seeking freedom from persecution established Rhode Island as a haven of religious liberty. The ideals set forth by its two leading figures, Roger Williams and John Clarke, would be the well from which later Baptists would draw and drink deeply of the idea of universal religious liberty. This chapter will consider the theology informing the call for liberty of conscience in the works of Williams and Clarke, and then turn to two later Baptist figures, John Leland and Isaac Backus, who were instrumental in the establishment of religious liberty as a foundational principle of the new United States.

The Life of Roger Williams

Roger Williams was born in a London suburb in 1603 to lower middle class parents. As a young man, Williams was employed as a scribe by Sir Edward Coke, a lawyer who defended those who were tried for religious dissent in the infamous Star Chamber. Coke was so impressed by Williams that he arranged for the young man to study at Cambridge. Williams earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1627 and began work on his Master's, the coursework for which was completed in 1629. He would never be awarded the degree, however, likely because he refused to subscribe to the revised

thirty-nine Articles which Charles I had published in January 1629.¹ Williams was able, likely with the help of Coke, to secure a position as a private chaplain at Otes, the estate of Puritan leader Sir William Masham. This appointment placed Williams in the heart of Puritan opposition to the crown.²

After serving as private chaplain for two years and desiring the promised Puritanism of the New World, Williams embarked with his wife for the American colonies in December 1630, arriving in Boston on February 5, 1631.³ Upon his arrival, Williams was immediately offered the pastorate of the Boston Church, but declined the position after discovering that it was not completely separated from the Church of England and allowed the magistrates to punish citizens for violating commandments found in the “First Table” of the Ten Commandments. This latter offense would have been a surprising accusation for the Puritans who understood this practice to be well in line with Calvin’s teachings and accepted it as commonplace. Williams proved to be the exception to the rule as a Calvinist who did not follow Calvin’s teachings on church-state

¹L. Raymond Camp, *Roger Williams, God’s Apostle of Advocacy: Biography and Rhetoric* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1989), 82-83. Camp notes that Williams had signed the Pembroke subscription book in 1627, but after Charles I revised the Articles adding new clauses on clerical discipline and vestment rules, his conscience would not allow him to subscribe. Thus, though well into his Master’s studies, he left without receiving the degree.

²Sammie Pedlow Strange comments, “Masham would later be a significant Puritan leader during the English Revolution. Williams’ contact with Masham and his friends during the two years he served at his estate would prove to be invaluable. During this time period, Williams met or came in contact with a number of important Puritan leaders in England. These contacts would later prove valuable in helping him secure the charter for Rhode Island in 1644. Additionally, during this time, Williams became acquainted with his New England adversaries, John Cotton, John Winthrop, and Thomas Hooker.” “Baptists and Religious Liberty: 1700-1900” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 121, n. 68.

³Lawrence Holiday Harris adds, “The most impelling reason for immediate flight to New England was a note signed by ‘A Friend,’ warning that Williams had been identified by Archbishop Laud as an enemy of the king and the Church of England and that steps were being taken to bring him to trial before the King’s Council.” *The Origin and Growth of Baptist Faith: Twenty Baptist Trailblazers in World History* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company Publishers, 2001), 70-71.

relations, but had a greater affinity with the early English Baptists in refusing the right of the magistrates to coerce religious practice.⁴

After rejecting the position in Boston, Williams took a similar position in Salem, but only remained there a few months before differences with the Massachusetts Bay leadership forced him to move. He settled in Plymouth, which was not under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, and served for two years (1631-33) as assistant minister of the church there while farming and developing trade with the Native Americans. In 1634, with the death of the pastor at Salem, Williams was offered the pastorate of that church, which he accepted. This was a fortuitous move because Williams was beginning to become unpopular in Plymouth. During his two years in Plymouth, Williams had continued to voice challenges to numerous colonial policies. The Massachusetts leadership, who closely observed all the happenings in that colony, though without direct control, was pressuring Plymouth leaders to act against him. Particularly, Williams had challenged the land grant from the crown which provided for both colonies, charging that the land rightfully belonged to the Native Americans. Salem, however, did not prove to be a refuge, for he lasted only a short time in Salem before he was dismissed from his position.

Williams had proved himself dangerous with the 1633 publication of his *Treatise* questioning the right of the English to the land. That his agitation came at the time when King Charles and Archbishop Laud were planning to revoke the colony's charter and place it under royal control—and thus conformity to the Church of England—made him

⁴Stephen Phillips writes of Williams the Calvinist, "As such he had much in common with the Puritans and Calvinist Separatists, except in this view of church-state relations, which was saying a great deal. Somehow he had harmonized his Calvinism with the radical political ideas—not apolitical—of early English Baptists." "Roger Williams and the Two Tables of the Law," *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 557.

particularly dangerous.⁵ This agitation combined with Williams's continual opposition to the Massachusetts magistrates' claim to authority to punish violations of the First Table of the Law finally pushed them to act, and on July 5, 1635 he was charged with four offenses (none of which was new, each having already been debated concerning him among the magistrates): his rejection of the magistrate's right to punish First Table offenses, the right of the magistrate to administer an oath to an unregenerate man (Williams believed that oaths were an act of worship), Williams's rejection of the prohibition against praying with an unregenerate person, and his rejection of the prohibition against giving thanks after a meal.⁶ When Williams refused to repent of his position on these issues, the Salem church shifted their support from Williams, leading Williams to no longer have communion with them.

Williams's refusal to turn from his position, rejecting overtures from John Cotton and failing to be convinced in a debate with Thomas Hooker, led to his conviction by the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony on October 9, 1635. The verdict reads:

Whereas Mr. Roger Williams, one of the elders of the church of Salem, hath broached & dyvulged dyvers newe & dangerous opinions, against the auctoritie of magistrates, as also writt l[ett]res of defamacon, both of the magistrates & churches here, & that before any conviccon, & yet mainetaineth the same without retraccon, it is therefore ordered, that the said Mr. Williams shall dep[ar]te out of this jurisdiccon within sixe weekes nowe nexte ensueing, wch if he neglect to p[er]forme, it shalbe lawfull for the Govrn^r & two of the magistrates to send him to some place out of this jurisdiction, not to returne any more without licence from the Court.⁷

⁵The text of the *Treatise* has been lost, but parts of it have been preserved in outline from the writings of John Winthrop. For a discussion of Williams's charges, see Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Master Roger Williams: A Biography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 107-114.

⁶Winslow offers this summary of the charges against Williams. *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷Quoted in Winslow, *Roger Williams*, 119-20.

True to form, Williams could not remain silent, and was expelled from the colony. Before he could be sent back to England, Williams fled into the wilderness during the dead of winter. After proper negotiations and compensation, he received from the Narragansett Indians a grant of land on which he would establish the colony of Rhode Island, firmly committed to the idea of liberty of conscience in matters of religious belief.

Historian Leo Pfeffer comments on Williams's experiment in the wilderness:

In Rhode Island, ... religious liberty was not a practice forced on an unwilling leader by the accident of history, but an ideal founded on the concept which a century and a half later was to achieve its fullest expression in the American Constitution—the concept of the mutual independence of religion and government.⁸

Winslow suggests that the Williams who fled into the wilderness to found a new colony allowing each person's liberty of conscience was only at the beginning of his full development of the concept. There were hints of it present in the charges against him, but "he was approaching it negatively, as was entirely natural in a restless time."⁹ That is, Williams appears to have been reacting to the persecution he discovered, and endured, more than working from a determined theology. What was most troubling for the New England Puritans was Williams's rejection of what was considered to be the traditional and conventional interpretation of Calvin's thought on church-state issues.¹⁰

⁸Leo Pfeffer, *Church, State, and Freedom*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 84.

⁹Winslow, *Roger Williams*, 121.

¹⁰Phillips writes, "Thus, when Roger Williams challenged these ideas [magistrates' right to enforce the First Table of the Law], he was seen as not only rejecting tradition, but the most developed biblical models for church-state relations." "Roger Williams," 558.

Calvin argued that the jurisdiction of the magistrate extended to both Tables of the Law, and that the foundation of any polity must be in piety.¹¹ Phillips notes, “It is important to understand that Calvin’s view of enforcement of both Tables of the law was both fundamental and comprehensive—it was a major function in the exercise of God’s sovereignty in a sinful world.”¹² The Puritans, in developing and expanding Calvin’s thought had extended the implications of the enforcement of the law to the Mosaic code, and sought to establish this as the law of the land in New England. Therefore, civil government was required to “punish sedition, idolatry, and blasphemy, secure Sabbath worship, and establish a pure worship of God.”¹³ For the Puritan leaders of Massachusetts, in rejecting this authority, Williams was effectively questioning God’s sovereignty within the world.

Following Perry Miller, Phillips challenges that Williams’s reasoning “is not an ideology of absolute independence of conscience centered in the individualism of modern liberalism,” but is instead founded upon a particular reading of Scripture.¹⁴ David Little offers a slight corrective to this reading of Williams, pointing out that Miller perhaps overcompensated for earlier distorted readings. Little writes, “Williams’ [sic] thought may be remote, but it is not archane. It may be religiously oriented, but it is not, therefore,

¹¹“The duty of magistrates . . . extends to both tables of the law, did Scripture not teach, we might learn from the profane writers; for no man has discoursed of the duty of magistrates, the enacting of laws, and the common weal, without beginning with religion and divine worship. Thus all have confessed that no polity can be successfully established unless piety be its first care, and that those laws are absurd which disregard the rights of God, and consult only for men.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), Bk. 4, Ch. 20, Sec. 9.

¹²Phillips, “Roger Williams,” 551.

¹³Ibid., 558. Winslow notes, “Had Roger Williams’ view prevailed, the magisterial figure of colonial times would have lost much of its terror, and the Monday morning victims for the whipping post, the stocks and the cage would have dwindled to a minority.” *Master Roger Williams*, 117.

¹⁴Phillips, “Roger Williams,” 563.

insensitive to political and social affairs.”¹⁵ Though Williams certainly draws upon a great deal of the arguments from the English Baptists for liberty of conscience, he also exhibits in his writings an anticipation of the ideas of Locke concerning the nature of the state.

Williams’s Liberty of Conscience

Williams’s most developed presentation of his arguments for liberty of conscience and rejection of religious persecution appear in his work, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace*. The work was published in London in 1644 even as Williams was boarding a ship back to New England with his newly secured charter for Rhode Island in hand. It is a collection of writings including a work attributed to Murton, *A Most Humble Supplication*, John Cotton’s letter evaluating that work, as well as *A Model of Church and Civil Power*, a publication by the New England churches describing their view of church-state relations. *Bloody Tenent* proceeds as a discussion between Peace and Truth who evaluate the different perspectives on the matter, explicate Scripture, and offer a presentation as to the biblical and rational foundation for religious liberty. It will be from this work, as representative of the breadth of his writings, that the bulk of Williams’s views will be drawn.

Williams shares with the English Baptists the desire to preserve the independence of the religious from the coercion of the civil magistrates. Unlike the Massachusetts leadership who saw the role of the civil magistrates in helping to establish and enforce

¹⁵David Little, “Roger Williams and the Separation of Church and State,” in *Religion and the State: Essays in Honor of Leo Pfeffer*, ed. James E. Wood, Jr. (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1985), 6.

conformity to their vision of the true church, Williams held with the Baptists that a conscience coerced to worship was guilty of sin.¹⁶ Though one may participate in right worship in a properly separated church, if this worship is performed because of coercion, all validity is lost. Thus, arguing in the same vein as the earlier Baptists, Williams has Truth contend:

Again, it is necessary, honorable, godly, etc., with civil and earthly weapons to defend the innocent, and to rescue the oppressed from the violent paws and jaws of oppressing, persecuting Nimrods. (Psalm 73; Job 29)

It is as necessary, yea, more honorable, godly, and Christian to fight the fight of faith with religious and spiritual artillery, and to contend earnestly for the faith of Jesus, once delivered to the saints, against all opposers, and the gates of earth and hell, men or devils, yea, against Paul himself, or an angel from heaven, if he bring any other faith or doctrine (Jude 4; Galatians 1:8)¹⁷

The civil sword has a purpose in terms of protecting the bodies and goods of the weak from evil doers, but it is limited in its ability to transform conscience.¹⁸ Only the Gospel can bring transformation of the spiritual convictions. Thus, Williams distinguishes the work of the civil magistrates and preserves the autonomy of the religious sphere, displaying a marked distinction from the New England Separatists at this point.¹⁹

¹⁶“...whatever worship, ministry, ministration, the best and purest are practiced without faith and true persuasion that they are the true institutions of God, they are sin, sinful worships, ministries, etc.” Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience discussed in A Conference between Truth and Peace*, ed. Richard Groves (1644; repr. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001), 9. Page numbers given in references to this work will correspond to the current volume. To ease the reader who may have a different volume, when applicable, chapter numbers will be given before the page numbers. Hence, for example, V: 36.

¹⁷Ibid., II: 30-31.

¹⁸“An arm of flesh and sword of steel cannot reach to cut the darkness of the mind, the hardness and unbelief of the heart, and kindly operate upon the soul’s affections to forsake a long-continued father’s worship, and to embrace a new, though best and truest. This work performs alone that sword out of the mouth of Christ, with two edges. (Rev. 1,3)” Ibid., CXXB: 219. In Williams’ original volume, there were two chapter CXXs, so the editor of this volume has designated this chapter CXXB, that is, the second of the two.

¹⁹Hugh Spurgin writes, “Williams advocated a complete independence of the spiritual and natural worlds, rather than withdrawal from only one specific church.” *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 125.

Particularly, God's sovereignty is preserved, not by the use of the civil sword to enforce right practice, but by leaving the conscience free to God's electing.

In taking up the parable of the tares, Williams first answers John Cotton's interpretation of the tares as hypocrites or false doctrines in the church before arguing that they must be those who are not Christians.²⁰ Williams's Calvinism is present when he explains the parable: "But the Son of man, the meek Lamb of God—for the elect's sake which must be gathered out of Jew and Gentile, pagan, anti-Christian—commands a permission of them in the world until the time of the end of the world, when the goats and sheep, the tares and wheat, shall be eternally separated each from other."²¹ This task of reaping, he is clear, is given to the angels. In the meantime, Williams calls for the tares to be let alone if their offense is of a spiritual nature: idolatry, false worship, or being against Christianity. This allows them "to grow and fill up the measure of their sins, after the image of him that has sown them, until the great harvest shall make the difference."²²

With concern for the civil state, Williams argues that offenses against the welfare or peace of the civil state are to be punished, if those tares attempt to infringe upon such.²³ This is the purpose of the civil sword. Contrary to the prevailing thought of his opponents, he suggests that "obedience to the command of Christ to let the tares alone will prove the only means to preserve their civil peace, and that without obedience to this command of Christ, it is impossible ... to preserve the civil peace."²⁴ That is, he affirms

²⁰Williams, *Bloudy Tenent*, XVIII-XXVIII: 55-69.

²¹Ibid., XXI: 59.

²²Ibid., XXIV: 62.

²³Ibid., XXVI: 63.

²⁴Ibid., XXVI: 64.

that contention over religious issues by the use of “spiritual artillery” does not break the civil peace.²⁵

Williams and Political Theory

It is in arguing for the civil peace that Williams begins to appear to anticipate the modern liberal thought that will be enunciated most notably by John Locke, marking a transition point in Baptist thought from the theology of the earlier English Baptists. He affirms that the civil peace can be established apart from reference to or engagement with God, drawing upon the example of the Native Americans who lack a true church, and yet keep a civil peace—though a peace that is not spiritual.²⁶ In continuing his argument, though, he presents an image of the church that is distinctly modern in its appearance. He likens it

unto a body or college of physicians in a city, like unto a corporation, society or company of East India or Turkey merchants, or any other society or company in London, which companies may hold their courts, keep their records, hold disputations, and in matters concerning their society may dissent, divide, break into schisms and factions, sue and implead each other at the law, yea, wholly break up and dissolve into pieces and nothing, and yet the peace of the city not be in the least measure impaired or disturbed, because the essence or being of the city, and so the well being and peace thereof, is essentially distinct from those particular societies.²⁷

One may read this passage with Lockean glasses, supposing that Williams is hinting at a modern conception of the church as an institution within the civil society. Thus, in this discussion Williams conceives of the church as a particular organization subsumed under the overarching institution of the city (state). Rather than being a distinct community into

²⁵“Peace” comments, “With a clashing of such arms am I never wakened.” *Ibid.*, II: 31.

²⁶*Ibid.*, VI: 39.

²⁷*Ibid.*

which persons are initiated and transformed, the church is instead likened to a corporation or club, though one admittedly concerned with the spiritual, whose existence is incidental to the city within which it exists. Yet, one could also read this passage with the assumption that Williams had Augustine in mind when speaking of the church as a particular society. It may be best to read Williams as standing between these two poles, not yet entirely grasping the modern conception of church as an institution of society, nor fully remaining committed to an Augustinian view.

What further stands out is that the city has precedence: “The city was before them [these societies and corporations to which the church is likened], and stands absolute and entire when such a corporation or society is taken down.”²⁸ Williams is clear that the church is distinct from both city and corporations, yet the point remains: the city is prior to the church and functions to maintain its own civil peace. Beginning to draw very modern categories, Williams, referencing the seven cities in Revelation, notes: “Thus in the city of Smyrna was the city itself or civil estate one thing, the spiritual or religious state of Smyrna another; the church of Christ in Smyrna distinct from them both.”²⁹ Once again, Williams appears to be traversing a middle ground between Augustinian conceptions of the church as a distinct society within the state, and the modern concept of the church as an institution of those who are members of the civil society. In Williams’s conception, the religious is marginalized from the politics of the city, and though he maintains the church as a distinct third thing, it would seem that it practically shares a category with the religious.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., VI: 40.

The driving concern for Williams is to preserve the purity of the church from the contamination of the world. As he argues against the notion that all magistrates must be members of the church or drawn from the church, he contends that demanding magistrates be Christians and so function to preserve the church in the civil state risks confusing the church and the world. Concerning this demand he writes,

... I ask, if this be not to turn the world upside down, to turn the world out of the world, to pluck up the roots and foundations of all common society in the world, to turn the garden and paradise of the church and saints into the field of the civil state of the world, and to reduce the world to the first chaos or confusion?³⁰

He desires to preserve the uniqueness and distinction of the church, and contends that having civil magistrates drawn only from the folds of the church confuses the two realms, destroying the distinctiveness of the church.

In the same year as the publication of *Bloudy Tenent*, Williams also published a response to John Cotton, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*. In this work, Williams offered the metaphor of the wall of separation which was to become instrumental in United States' jurisprudence. Here as well he is concerned to preserve the purity of the church. He writes,

And that when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildrenes of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall it selfe, removed the Candlestick, &c. and made his Garden a Wildnesse, as at this day. And that therefore if he will ever please to restore his Garden and Paradice again, it must of necessitie be walled in peculiarly unto himselfe from the world, and that all that shall be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the Wildnes of world, and added unto his Church or Garden.³¹

³⁰Ibid., CXXXVII: 257.

³¹Roger Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*, in Publications of the Narragansett Club, 1st ser. (Providence, Rhode Island: Providence Press, 1866), 1: 108.

Here Williams indicates that it is God's ordination that has separated the two spheres of influence, the church and the state, and that any breach of the wall results in God's rejection of that church so that the church is left to become like the world. God establishes his church where there is clear distinction from the world. Williams's language here is much more reminiscent of the early English Baptists who saw in liberty of conscience the means whereby the church was to grow and become a distinct community. He does not appear in this instance to display a concern for a particular political theory of separation that will be the concern of modern theorists. His writing seems more occasional, founded upon his concern more for a pure church than a secular political system.

In a sense, Williams's concern with magistrates having authority to prosecute ecclesial offenses is logistical. He objects that this situation places the magistrates in the position of judging spiritual truth and who it is that truly fears God. In such an instance, this could mean a magistrate who does not fear God passing judgment on another's fear of God.³² Further, if the civil magistrate is to be the judge of spiritual matters, what is to be done in the case when it is the magistrate who has been accused? Who then is to judge? Williams says that it would be one and the same person who must then be both at the bar and on the bench.³³ Williams sees this as an irreconcilable incongruity into which the affirmation of the magistrate's power to enforce both tables of the Law leads.

Williams did not object to magistrates being Christian, only that it not be an inviolable ordinance requiring that they be such. The magistrates' charge regarding religion was determined by public utility: they "should permit liberty to the free and

³²Ibid., LXXIXA: 131.

³³Ibid., LXXXV: 141-42.

voluntary spiritual meetings of their subjects.”³⁴ To compel people to a particular (or any) worship is beyond the authority of the civil government. This authority, for Williams, is that given by the people. Williams writes, “Kings and magistrates must be considered, as formerly, invested with no more power than the people betrust them with.”³⁵ With this conception of the civil government, Williams evinces a view much more akin to modern liberal democratic thought than that seen in the earlier Baptists who held that civil power was given by God. Williams stands in tension between medieval understandings of kingly authority derived from the consent of the people, and the emerging modern view of government as compact between people. In explaining this investment of power, he offers this caveat: “But no people can betrust them with any spiritual power in matters of worship; but with a civil power belonging to their goods and bodies.”³⁶ Thus, for Williams, the foundation for religious liberty is that no people can offer a power to the civil authorities, namely that of compelling religious adherence, which is not within their ability to offer since it is not able to be given. They can only offer their bodies and goods. In this way, Williams, like the English Baptists before him, seeks to preserve God’s sovereign authority to call to conscience.

Williams’s Ship of State

In January 1654/5, Williams sent a letter to the town of Providence in which he describes the role of the civil magistrates in governing purely civil affairs, particularly in

³⁴Ibid., CXXXIII: 248.

³⁵Ibid., CXXXVIII: 259.

³⁶Ibid.

terms of the limits of liberty of conscience.³⁷ The occasion of the letter would seem to revolve around the issue of conscientious objectors to the colony's initiation of compulsory militia service in the winter of 1654/55.³⁸ Several of these objectors, including a Baptist minister, Thomas Olney, asserted "that it was blood-guiltiness, and against the rule of the gospel, to execute judgment upon transgressors, against the private or public weal."³⁹ The protestors seem to base their objections on liberty of conscience, so that Williams appears to send the letter as a clarification of the limits of the liberty of conscience.

Williams draws upon the imagery of a ship at sea on which there are many of various religious persuasions. Many go to sea on the one ship, whose "Weal and Woe is common; and is a true Picture of a Common-Wealth, or an human Combination, or Society."⁴⁰ Honoring liberty of conscience, none on this ship "be forced to come to the Ships Prayers or Worship; nor, secondly, compelled from their own Prayers or Worship,

³⁷Glen W. LaFantasie, "The Ship of State Letter, ca. January 1654/55, Editorial Note," in *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, ed. Glenn W. LaFantasie (Providence, Rhode Island: The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1988), 2: 419-423. notes that the dating of this letter is uncertain, though its attribution to January 1654/55 has become accepted. The earliest copy appears in the history of Providence serially published in the *Providence Gazette* by Stephen Hopkins in 1765. Though it would seem he is drawing upon the original document, Hopkins does not include a date for the letter (whether by omission or because Williams himself did not date the writing). Backus offered the date of 1654/55, and Samuel Brockunier's research has offered evidence that such a dating is credible.

³⁸Samuel Hugh Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1940), 225-228. Brockunier argues for this historical context from hints in the letter and relating it to known struggles in the winter of 1654/55. LaFantasie accepts this contextualization, and includes it in his editorial introduction. LaFantasie, "Editorial Note," 421.

³⁹Quoted in Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat*, 225.

⁴⁰Roger Williams, "To the Town of Providence, ca. January 1654/55," in *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, ed. Glenn W. LaFantasie (Providence, Rhode Island: The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1988), 2: 424.

if they practice any.”⁴¹ With this liberty in mind, however, the ship’s commander had authority to

command the Ship’s course; yea, and also to command that Justice, Peace, and Sobriety, be kept and practised, both among the Seamen and all the Passengers. If any Seamen refuse to perform their Service, or Passengers to pay their Freight;--if any refuse to help in Person or Purse, towards the Common Charges, or Defence;--if any refuse to obey the common Laws and Orders of the Ship, concerning their common Peace and Preservation;--if any shall mutiny and rise up against their Commanders, and Officers;--if any shall preach or write, that there ought to be no Commanders, nor Officers, because all are equal in CHRIST, therefore no Masters, nor Officers, no Laws, nor Orders, no Corrections nor Punishments;—I say, I never denied, but in such Cases, whatever is pretended, the Commander or Commanders may judge, resist, compel and punish such Transgressors, according to their Deserts and Merits.⁴²

Williams thus sets limits on the liberty of conscience should one’s religious beliefs or religiously motivated actions interfere with the exercise of the proper activity of the civil government. This letter evidences the tension in Williams between his occasionalism and his commitment to religious liberty. The implications of the letter, according to LaFantasie, are clear: “it was a mistake to assume that liberty of conscience granted anyone the power of choice to sacrifice the common welfare by placing the rights of the individual above the rights of society.”⁴³ Where one’s liberty of conscience evokes actions which come into conflict with the activity of the state, the state’s authority trumps liberty.

Williams is not so much asserting political theory as confronting issues within the life of the colony. As LaFantasie notes, “Williams confounded his purpose, for he neglected to draw a precise line between the realms of the church and the state and relied

⁴¹Ibid., 2: 424.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” 423.

instead on his extended metaphor of the ship at sea to define the authority of the civil government over the sanctity of individual conscience.”⁴⁴ If one reads Williams narrowly, his language could suggest that persecution for sedition could be allowable even for conscientiously held religious views. With this in mind, Williams initiates a trajectory for later thought that will lead to the relegation of the religious to the spiritual realm to be privatized apart from public activity. As Phillips notes, “In Williams’s ship of state, the final authority was the state, not God, or even human rights.” He continues, adding that the implications are “chilling,” because “Williams justified that which would be considered persecution (by those falling under his ban) on civil grounds alone.... In Williams’s state, religious claims become irrelevant if they clash with public policy.”⁴⁵ Though Williams did not follow this route in his conflict with the conscientious objectors, preferring conciliation to persecution, his argument offered a basis for relegation of the religious to the interior life where it has no play in the public sphere. This conception of the authority of the civil state would seem to suggest that the good of the state becomes the highest end, to which all other goods must be subsumed.

Implications of Williams’s Thought

Williams likely did not foresee the full implications of his thought in terms of marginalizing the religious and relegating the church to be an institution within the larger society. His driving concern, like the Baptists before him, was preserving the sovereignty of God in matters of the conscience. He sought to bring consistency to the thought of Calvin, who could on the one hand argue that “if [human laws] are imposed for the

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Phillips, “Roger Williams,” 565.

purpose of forming a religious obligation, as if the observance of them was in itself necessary, we say that the restraint thus laid on the conscience is unlawful.”⁴⁶ For Calvin, in matters of the worship of God, the conscience must be free from compulsion, for “God being the only lawgiver, it is unlawful for men to assume that honour to themselves.”⁴⁷ Yet Calvin could also charge that the civil magistrates were bound to enforce both Tables of the Law. By denying the authority of magistrates to punish First Table offenses, Williams sought to correct this contradiction in Calvin, and establish the liberty of conscience as a response to God’s sovereignty.

Williams would appear to stand as a bridge between two eras. On the one side stood the early English Baptists who affirmed the liberty of conscience as demanded by God’s sovereignty, and though affirming the legitimate authority of the civil magistrates, still appeared to conceive of the church as a distinct community apart from the society in which it existed. On the other side of Williams, and in many ways building upon the groundwork which he laid, stands the modern liberal democratic state which saw liberty of conscience as a natural human right and the religious as privatized and subsumed under the common good of the state. Spurgin contends, “Williams conceived a fresh understanding of the origin, nature, role, and purpose of the body politic. For him the modern state is a secular, utilitarian institution based on a non-religious covenant; thus it lacks any divine role or significance.”⁴⁸ In this, though, Spurgin may be reading too much into Williams’s thought. Unlike modern liberal democratic theory, Williams’s does not seem to envision the society which grants power as being itself formed by

⁴⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. 4, Ch. 10, Sec. 5.

⁴⁷Ibid., Bk. 4, Ch. 10, Sec. 8.

⁴⁸Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism*, 124.

contract. This is a step he does not take. The people who grant power to civil magistrates offer this power as a people without explanation as to how they exist together. Williams is not concerned with the concept of social contract, only the recognition that the power of conscience cannot be given by any people to a government because this is to offer that which belongs to God alone.

James McClendon offers the reminder that Williams was not yet completely modern:

Our liberty is the gift of God. Therefore, it is presumptuous for governments, preempting God's place, to cancel those gifts. Thus Williams believed we dare not, on the grounds of God's sovereignty, set up any part of our society in the place of God to rule over the human spirit. His doctrine of religious liberty was not a theory of human rights, it was merely a doctrine of the inability of men and their government to occupy the throne of Deity.⁴⁹

It would be a century and a half before Williams's ideas would be the basis for the institutionalization of religious liberty as a founding commitment in the birth of the United States. In this later context, human rights, and not God's sovereignty, would be the key element. Before turning to those who would appropriate the work of Williams, it is necessary first to examine the thought of Williams's contemporary and fellow Rhode Islander.

John Clarke—Physician, Minister, Statesman

Though less well known than Roger Williams, his fellow Rhode Islander, John Clarke—physician, minister, and statesman—arguably had greater lasting significance for the establishment of religious liberty in North America and his imprint upon Baptist

⁴⁹James Wm. McClendon, "The Mennonite and Baptist Vision," in *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, ed. Paul Toews (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1993), 220.

life.⁵⁰ George Selement notes, “Historians have been enamored with Roger Williams to such an extent that John Clarke’s contributions to the development of religious toleration in Rhode Island have tended to be overlooked.”⁵¹ Sydney V. James points out that “his modest fame rests on dim and somewhat inaccurate knowledge of only two of his accomplishments: founding the first Baptist church in Newport and winning the royal charter for Rhode Island in 1663.”⁵² Throughout his life, Clarke served the cause of Rhode Island first in securing its charter, and then in helping it to maintain its “lively experiment”⁵³ during the final years of his life. Clarke, no less than Williams, was the primary proponent of religious liberty in the fledgling colony. And, unlike Williams, Clarke would remain a committed Baptist until his death in 1676.

Clarke was born October 8, 1609 to an English family of some means, the fifth of seven children. That his family had Puritan leanings is surmised from the fact of his birth being recorded in the family’s new copy of the Geneva Bible that had been printed the year before.⁵⁴ Clarke’s education is remarkable for what is known of his family’s socio-economic level. He appears to have been the only child to receive such extensive

⁵⁰Edwin S. Gaustad noted in 1989 that “In this century, more than twenty doctoral dissertations have been written about Roger Williams, none about Clarke.” “John Clarke: ‘Good Newes from Rhode Island,’” *Baptist History and Heritage* 24, no. 2 (October 1989): 20. A search of ProQuest’s online database of dissertations and theses yielded only two hits for “John Clarke,” and neither consisted of a dissertation focused on Clarke alone. Proquest Dissertations and Theses, <http://proquest.umi.com/login?COPT=REJTPUcyODcrM2IxMCZTTUQ9NCZJTIQ9MCZWRVI9Mg==&clientId=45950> (accessed December 14, 2007).

⁵¹George Selement, “John Clarke and the Struggle for Separation of Church and State,” *Foundations* 15, no. 2 (April-June 1972): 111.

⁵²Sydney V. James, *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island 1638-1750*, ed. Theodore Dwight Bozeman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 1.

⁵³Quoted in Selement, “John Clarke,” 122. This term is used in Clarke’s petition to King Charles II to describe the idea of Rhode Island as a realm of “full liberty in religious concerns.”

⁵⁴James, *John Clarke*, 3. The Geneva Bible quickly became the translation of choice among English Puritans and Separatists.

schooling. Not only was he trained as a physician, but he also seems to have been well-versed in Hebrew, suggesting a significant university education. The specifics as to where he was schooled are uncertain, though Cambridge, Oxford, and Leyden have all been suggested.⁵⁵ In 1634, Clarke married Elizabeth Harges, a young woman who was certainly of higher social status than he, but perhaps her family imagined her to be marrying an up-and-coming young English physician. If this was the case, the course of the rest of Clarke's life would have severely tempered this impression.

Clarke arrived in Boston harbor with his wife in 1637, and found a Massachusetts Bay Colony embroiled in conflict over the teachings of Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson pressed hard for a view of extreme grace that challenged the relationship between grace and works, a view many took as antinomian. Clarke writes of his introduction to New England:

I was no sooner on shore, but there appeared to me differences among them touching the Covenants, and in point of evidencing a mans good estate, some prest hard for the Covenant of works, and for sanctification to be the first and chief evidence, others prest as hard for the Covenant of grace that was established upon better promises, and for the evidence of the Spirit, as that which is a more certain, constant, and satisfactory witness.⁵⁶

Clarke's sympathies lay with the Hutchinson group, and he seems to have involved himself rather quickly in the fray. Tellingly, Clarke comments on the conflict with an insight that reveals the conviction that will drive many of his efforts throughout his life on behalf of Rhode Island. He notes, "I thought it not strange to see men differ about matters of Heaven, for I expect no less upon Earth: But to see that they were not able so

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England* (1652; repr. in *Colonial Baptists: Massachusetts and Rhode Island* [New York: Arno Press, 1980]), 23. Pagination references the Arno Press edition which was copied from the Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, 1854.

to bear each with other in their different understandings and consciences, as in those utmost parts of the World to live peaceably together.”⁵⁷ Finding the climate of Massachusetts Bay unwelcoming, Clarke, having visited with Roger Williams, led a group to settle in Rhode Island. Thus, he describes life in the community:

“notwithstanding the different understandings amongst us, without interruption we agree to maintain civil Justice and judgement, neither are there such outrages committed amongst us as in other parts of the Country are frequently seen.”⁵⁸

When Clarke became a Baptist is uncertain. McBeth notes that there are a variety of suggestions ranging from Clarke becoming a Baptist in England or Holland before coming to North America, to those who argue for a conversion after his arrival sometime in the 1640s.⁵⁹ In Portsmouth, a church was established by 1638, though again, the nature of the doctrine is unclear. McBeth points to two factions: the Hutchinson group focused on the inner light and few outward ordinances, and the Clarke group focused on the authority of the Scriptures.⁶⁰ By 1641, the Clarke group had broken from the Portsmouth church and established a new congregation at Newport. When this congregation became distinctly Baptist is unclear, though records show that it definitely identified itself as Baptist by 1648, and possibly as early as 1644.⁶¹ Clarke would pastor

⁵⁷Ibid., 23-24.

⁵⁸Ibid., 25.

⁵⁹McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 137-138.

⁶⁰Ibid., 138.

⁶¹Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists*, 2nd ed., ed. David Weston (1871; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 125. Backus argues for the 1644 date, referencing a manuscript of Samuel Hubbard from 1648 claiming 1644 as the origination for the church as Baptist. Backus continues, saying, “It appears as likely to be earlier as later than that time.”

this church until his death, save only the twelve years he spent in England seeking a new charter for the colony.

Ill Newes From New England

Clarke makes his case for freedom of religious practice in his 1652 work, *Ill Newes from New-England*. In the work, Clarke recounts the persecution suffered by himself, Obadiah Holmes, and John Crandall at the hands of Massachusetts authorities when the three men sought to fellowship and worship with a Baptist layman in Lynn in 1651. Each man was sentenced to either a fine or whipping, with Clarke and Crandall having fines paid, and only Holmes refusing payment to suffer lashes. During the course of the events recounted, Clarke repeatedly sought public debate on the issues with the Boston ministers. Notable among the issues he hoped to discuss along with baptism by immersion was his conclusion that

no such believer, or Servant of Christ Jesus hath any liberty, much less Authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow servant, nor yet with outward force, or arme of flesh, to constrain, or restrain his Conscience, no nor yet his outward man for Conscience sake, or worship of his God⁶²

At what point Clarke comes to affirm the view that compulsion of conscience in matters of religion is to be rejected is as uncertain as his turn to Baptist beliefs. However, he will consistently defend this position for the rest of his life and seek its institution in the constitution of Rhode Island.

Clarke's defense of the liberty of conscience is in many ways not unlike that of the English Particular Baptists considered at the end of the last chapter. This is not unsurprising given the fact that Clarke includes copies of correspondence from Obadiah Holmes to the Particular Baptists in London (naming specifically John Spilsbury and

⁶²Ibid., 37.

William Kiffin) in *Ill Newes*, offering evidence of contact between the colonial Baptists and those in England. Further, during the twelve years Clarke was in England seeking a charter for Rhode Island he associated with English Particular Baptists, participating in Henry Jessey's church and later the congregation of Kiffin and Spilsbury.⁶³ Clarke's connections with the English Baptists may hint at a theology shaped more by medieval views of church-state relations than the emerging modern concept seen in Williams.

Clarke prefaces *Ill Newes* with three introductory notices to the various readers he anticipates: Parliament, the magistrates, and the true Christian reader. In the dedication to Parliament, Clarke contends that as civil rulers, they are the "Sword-bearers" of Christ, even as was Caesar, but have been wrongly convinced that their role is to bear the sword for coercion in matters of religion.⁶⁴ What Clarke states he would like to show is that in being given all power on earth, Christ has chosen to wield that power by a "two fold administration ... suitable to the two fold state or being of man."⁶⁵ The sense of dualism in this perspective is moderated by Clarke's assumption that all power is Christ's. Like his English Baptist brethren, he does not vacate the divine from the temporal realm creating a neutral public space distinct from the religious. Rather, the wielding of the temporal sword is given by Christ to "an outward and carnal end."⁶⁶ This end, Clarke describes as "righteous, just, and good, which being diligently attended to tends to the

⁶³James, *John Clarke*, 54. James notes that Clarke was involved with Baptists of different stripes at various times, both General and Particular.

⁶⁴Clarke, *Ill Newes*, 4.

⁶⁵Ibid., 4-5.

⁶⁶Ibid., 5.

peace, liberty, and prosperity of a civil State, Nation and Kingdom so far as it concerns the outward man and visible state thereof.⁶⁷

Clarke sets an interesting trajectory with this argument in suggesting that there is a carnal end directed to the good of the State that is distinct from the spiritual end. In this he is like Roger Williams, and at points even sounds like Jacques Maritain in the twentieth century. Unlike Williams, though, Clarke will maintain that this temporal sword is an administration of Christ's power given to the civil authorities to punish those who would do evil to their neighbors. In so doing he continues to affirm that this dualistic image of the human as outward and inward man does not imply a removal of the work of Christ to the inward alone. However, by allowing that there is an end good that relates to the State distinct from that end in Christ, an end good to which the outward man could theoretically be inclined simply in relation to the carnal, Clarke has opened a door by which the divine could be ushered out of the carnal to have care of the spiritual alone. That is, the religious is one aspect of the larger society which receives benefit as the state is prosperous.

Clarke will not follow the ramifications of his argument to this point, however. Like the English Baptists, Clarke will argue that the civil sword is given by Christ for the punishment of evil and the maintenance of justice. He argues,

the Sword and power of the Magistrate, which although it be a good Ordinance of God in this present evill World, to restrain the oppressor, and let the oppressed goe free, and so approved and owned by Christ and all true Christians, ...yet it was never appointed by Christ ... to inform and rectifie the minds and consciences of men in the worship of God, in that great mystery of Godlinesse, and in those mysticall matters concerning the Kingdom of Christ, that being a matter that onely belongs to the Holy Spirit of Promise, and to the Sword of that Spirit, which is the Word (not of man, but) of God, to effect; much lesse to

⁶⁷Ibid.

conform their outward man, contrary to their minds and consciences in the Worship of God.⁶⁸

In this description of the power of the magistrate, Clarke is in accord with what has already been seen of Baptist views in England. The earthly sword is unable to compel conscience, and God's sovereignty is preserved in matters relating to the conscience. Also like the English Baptists, Clarke ties the outward man to the conscience in terms of worship, so that the compulsion of the outward man in matters of the Kingdom of Christ allows connection between the outward and the inward. The end that Clarke desires, echoing what has already been encountered, is that people will be led by the Spirit "to the true Worship, and service of God."⁶⁹ Despite his acknowledgement of a carnal end, his implication is not a validation of any worship, but that rightly ordered by God's sovereign calling people come to the one true worship.⁷⁰

Clarke's View of the Church

Clarke does seem to preserve a sense in which Christians remain a distinct body within the world. In the long concluding section of *Ill Newes* that Clarke presents as the convictions of Holmes, Crandall, and himself, after affirming that the kings of the nations are Christ's sword-bearers, he challenges that Christ's Kingdom is not to be established

⁶⁸Ibid., 41.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Timothy Dwight Bozeman, "John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty," *Church History* 75, no. 1 (March 2006): 69-93. Bozeman will challenge Clarke's commitment to religious liberty on these grounds. Bozeman suggests that Clarke's commitment to one true worship and the preserving of the tares so as not to harm the wheat before judgment brings into question Clarke's commitment to true religious liberty. The question that could be raised with Bozeman is whether true religious liberty, as he envisions it, requires a commitment to pluralism and universality, that is, a modern liberal democratic commitment to a relativization of ends. That Clarke envisions a time when all will be subjects to Christ in the eschaton does not necessarily mean he is not committed to full religious liberty in the present age.

by their swords.⁷¹ Clarke's emphasis is on preserving God's sovereignty over the spiritual, and defending it from encroachment by earthly authorities. He describes it thusly:

For the nature of the household of Faith, they are a company of faithfull ones, that are bought with the price of his blood, knit together in one by his Spirit, founded wholly upon himself, built up by him to be a holy habitation of God, and therefore not in the least measure to be defiled with the inventions and commandments of men, ... so that by this it evidently appears, that there is none that hath so much right unto this household of Faith by way of ordering it, nor yet freedom in it by way of commanding, as hath Christ Jesus the Lord.⁷²

This household would then indicate a distinct people formed by repentance and acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ as the director of their true worship. This worship is spiritual, and those are true worshipers whose consciences have responded to the Sword of the Spirit. Rather than seeking to develop a comprehensive political theory of church-state engagement, Clarke's concern is with a theology of the true church, and the establishment of the true church in the world.

In this description, Clarke once again sounds very much like the English Baptists, and yet he also opens the door to an individualism that would seem to be a step removed from their theology. Clarke argues that the spiritual worshipers are those directed by the spiritual law, "spoken unto, or rather written in the heart of a Christian by the Spirit of Christ, by reason whereof he obeyes from the heart, readily, willingly, and cheerfully that form of doctrine which is engraved and laid up therein, *Heb. 8.10. 2 Cor. 3.3. Rom. 6.17.*"⁷³ Again, however, he tempers this movement in his discussion of the visible saints

⁷¹Ibid., 79-80.

⁷²Ibid., 80.

⁷³Ibid., 81.

who are to be baptized, noting that baptism is to be reserved for those who are disciples.

Those who have been made disciples—through teaching of the Gospel—

should then be baptized, and so visibly planted into Christ . . . and having so received him, should walk in him, observing all things whatsoever he had commanded, the first thing whereof as touching order was, to be added or joined one to another in the fellowship of the Gospel by a mutual professed subjection to the Scepter of Christ ...⁷⁴

Clarke on the one hand uses language that suggests a strongly individualistic approach to the practice of faith, and yet returns to a conception of the Christian life that places the church central to one's identification with Christ. He continues his description of the church as "being a company thus called out of the world, from worldly vanities, and worldly worships, after Christ Jesus the Lord (which is the proper English of these words the Church of Christ, and is in other terms called the household of faith)."⁷⁵ From here he proceeds to describe the activity of the church as continuing in the Apostles' doctrine, including reproof and instruction, fellowship, which he describes as "mutual support both inward and outward," the Lord's Supper, and to nourish one another in the Spirit to eternal life.⁷⁶

In his description of the church, Clarke does seem to present the idea of a distinct community that forms and shapes its members for the living of life. By describing this formation and aid as being both "inward and outward," it would seem he is not limiting this formation to the merely spiritual. Again, though, there is present an individualizing aspect to his conception in which there is also the sense that it is the doctrine convinced within the believer's heart. While Clarke would seem still to conceive of this as being

⁷⁴Ibid., 90.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

doctrine formed by the teaching of the church, the seeds may be seen of later individualistic views of the Christian life. Like Williams, Clarke seems to be standing between the medieval world and the modern world, in some ways anticipating the latter, though seemingly more at home in the former.

Clarke's Defense of Religious Liberty

Like the General Baptists, Clarke turns to the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13) as a proof text for religious liberty. With his more Calvinistic leanings, though, Clarke is not so much concerned with allowing the fullness of time for as many tares as may to become wheat, but instead shows greater concern for the wheat. In explicating the text, he notes that Jesus referred to the tares as “children of the wicked one,” whom the devil sowed in the field.⁷⁷ Since Christ has deemed that the harvest is at the end of the world, and that the reapers are to be the angels, the tares and the wheat are to be allowed to grow up together so that the wheat is not inadvertently rooted out with the tares. At the end, the tares will be bundled up and burned. Thus, though he draws upon the same parable as do the General Baptists to argue for religious liberty, Clarke's motivation is not so much allowance for as many to be converted, but instead to prevent a misguided persecution of the wheat by one bearing the earthly sword who is mistaken in his identification of wheat from tares. In the end, however, the conclusion is the same: use of the sword in the sphere of the spiritual usurps the prerogative God has reserved for God's self.

Clarke closes *Ill Newes* with eight arguments against religious persecution. The final argument states:

⁷⁷Ibid., 106.

That which of it self is inconsistent with the civil peace, liberty, prosperity and safety of a Place, Commonwealth or nation, no servant of Christ Jesus can have liberty, much less authority from his Lord to do. But this outward forcing of men in matters of conscience towards God to believe as others believe, and to practice and worship as others do, cannot stand with the Peace, Liberty, Prosperity, and safety of a Place, Commonwealth, or nation. Therefore no servant of Christ can have any liberty, much less authority so to doe.⁷⁸

While upon first consideration, this argument seems to issue the familiar refrain in the calls for religious liberty, there is within this statement a move away from the theology that has founded the calls noticed in the earlier English Baptists. The compulsion of conscience in matters of worship is now not argued against on the basis of God's sovereignty, but instead within the context of the preservation of the state. Enforcement of religious practice is contrary to the goods of the state: civil peace (as opposed to the peace of Christ?), liberty, prosperity, and safety. Taken in the context of the fullness of Clarke's arguments against religious persecution, it is apparent that Clarke is not founding his calls for liberty of conscience upon modern liberal democratic principles. However, one could see in this final argument the anticipation of later calls for liberty in which the language of liberal ideals comes to dominate.

Clarke concludes *Ill Newes* by showing that the forcing of people's consciences in matters of religion does not benefit the peace, liberty, prosperity, and safety of a state. Drawing upon apocalyptic imagery from Revelation, Clarke suggests that the use of the carnal sword to compel religious conformity is a handing over of power to the Beast. In terms that evoke Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, Clarke argues that where coercive power is used to enforce conformity in religious matters

what hopes are hereby begotten and nourished in some? what jealousies, suspitions and fears in others? what revengefull desires in most? yea, what plottings and contrivings in all? and as a fruit and effect thereof, what riding?

⁷⁸Ibid., 108.

running? Troublesome, and tumultuous assemblings together, and sidings? yea, outrageous murderings and bloodshedings are hereby produced in a Nation, to gain that power and sword to their party, either to crush, suppress, or cause the other to conform, or at the least and best to save themselves from being crushed, suppressed or forced to conformity?⁷⁹

Clarke is not here suggesting the necessity of government to restrain such actions, but instead that when temporal power is used to compel religious conformity, that power thereby becomes something desirous such that it incites violence among people and groups. For Clarke, temporal power rightly limited to the functions for which God ordained and gave it results in peace within a nation. Once again, it is recognition of God's sovereignty to call to conscience, not a public realm from which the religious is to be removed, that drives Clarke's thought.

For Clarke, the foundation for religious liberty and freedom of conscience rests upon a theology that continues to affirm the sovereignty of God and God's authority in both the temporal and spiritual realms. With the earlier English Baptists, he recognizes that the church somehow constitutes a distinct community from the world, a community marked by true worship to which it is hoped all will eventually submit—though, only as coming about apart from coercion with earthly power. Yet, from his position, one can begin to ascertain the beginnings of a movement towards the Lockean conception of the civil realm where people compact together in order to secure their own proper temporal goods: peace, prosperity, and liberty in the state to which the religious is subject. His language begins to open the door for modern liberal democratic conceptions of religious liberty founded not upon God's sovereignty, but upon the constitution of the state as the guarantor of this liberty for its own prosperity. With Locke, a distinct line will be drawn between the religious, which is concerned with spiritual salvation, and the civil, which

⁷⁹Ibid., 109-110.

seeks to secure the body and possessions for those who are bound under the state. These ideas were emerging within the realm of political thought during Clarke's lifetime, and doubtless he would have had some engagement with them within the context of daily living and discussion. However, though he appears to have appropriated some language, his thought seems to remain in the line of the early English Baptists. Yet, his writings established a trajectory that will lead later Baptist calls for religious liberty more towards modern liberal democratic theory.

Excursus on John Locke

Standing between Williams and Clarke on the one side, and John Leland and Isaac Backus on the other, is the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). It was in the writings of Locke that the leaders of the American revolutionary movement found much of their philosophical basis. Even more, as Henrik Syse notes, "It can fairly be said that Locke laid the foundations for much of what we commonly refer to as liberal politics: the right to private property, popular sovereignty, toleration, and the right to resist an unjust government."⁸⁰ Significantly for this research, because of Locke's importance in providing the philosophical basis for the formation of liberal democratic theory and the emphasis placed on his thought by the framers of the new United States, his philosophy would color political thought in the emerging republic. Among those influenced will be Leland and Backus.

Winthrop Hudson argues that "John Locke was made to order for those who sought to defend the rights of American colonists in the years preceding the American

⁸⁰Henrik Syse, *Natural Law, Religion, and Rights: An Exploration of the Relationship between Natural Law and Natural Rights, with Special Emphasis on the Teachings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 188.

Revolution.”⁸¹ He suggests, first, that Locke was acceptable in America because his work offers a restatement of principles that would have been familiar to the English Calvinist dissenters whose ideas permeated the colonies. Second, Locke was the apologist for the Glorious Revolution in England and was thus eminently respectable to the English. Hudson notes that the colonial propagandists were aware of the sources from which Locke had drawn his material, but recognized that referencing Puritan writers would have raised the troubling image of rebellion from the English civil wars.⁸² Locke was, theologically and philosophically, “the heir of Puritan rationalism,” for whom God was not absent from the civil order.⁸³ Locke was obviously not original in his assertion of religious liberty; this call had been developing with English Separatists for over a generation before him. Hudson adds, though,

The parallels with the thought of Roger Williams ... are so close that it is not an entirely implausible conjecture to suggest that Locke’s major contribution may have been to reduce the rambling, lengthy, and incoherent exposition of the New England ‘firebrand’ to orderly, abbreviated, and coherent form.⁸⁴

Hudson’s conjecture is interesting, though without any definitive proof. He does offer, however, three principles concerning toleration that Locke shares with Puritan thought in general and Williams in particular. The three are: the principle of fallibility, the principle of segregation, and the principle of consent.⁸⁵ The principle of fallibility affirms that humans may err in their understanding of God, and thus dissenters must be

⁸¹Winthrop S. Hudson, “John Locke: Heir of Puritan Political Theorists,” in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 108.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., 110.

⁸⁴Ibid., 117.

⁸⁵Ibid., 113.

tolerated because they may in the end be right. The principle of segregation understands that the realms of church and state are to be distinguished. Because the life of grace is only attainable for the elect, a national church is not a proper expression of Christian life together. Instead, Christians must join in a voluntary community where they can conform their lives to their profession. Likewise, because grace is beyond the capacity for the non-elect, life in the larger community is to be guided to its God-given end of the preservation of bodies and goods by the civil sword. Yet, in the realm of the church, the civil sword has no power to lead to the end of peace with God. Finally, the principle of consent acknowledges that coercion cannot lead anyone to Christianity, and so ecclesial life must be beyond the purview of the magistrates (obviously a limitation that those in New England wrestled with greatly).⁸⁶

Each of these principles is evidenced in Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, written in 1685 and published in 1689. The principle of fallibility is seen in play when Locke argues against magistrates being able to prescribe the proper faith for their regions. He notes that there are a variety of ways which humans believe lead them to eternal happiness, and of these ways, magistrates are no more able to discern the right than any other person.⁸⁷ Likewise, Locke rejects the church as an infallible guide for the magistrate, since it will only be the opinion of the particular church that happens to support that magistrate. Even more, he argues that the church is more often influenced by the magistrates than the magistrates by the church.⁸⁸ He concludes that even were the

⁸⁶Ibid., 113-117.

⁸⁷John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Treatise of Civil Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Charles L. Sherman (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1937), 188-189.

⁸⁸Ibid., 189-191.

magistrate to lead in the proper path of worship and faith, fallibility comes into play. As with the Baptists already considered, in matters of conscience Locke affirms that “if I be not thoroughly persuaded thereof in my own mind, there will be no safety for me in following it.”⁸⁹

In regard to the principle of segregation, Locke states that “the Church itself is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth.” In this he argues that ecclesial authority must remain within the bounds of the church, so that between the two realms are preserved the “fixed and immovable” boundaries.⁹⁰ Locke suggests that the use of the magistrate’s sword to punish ecclesial crimes is not so much evidence of zeal for souls, as it “betray[s] their ambition and show[s] that what they desire is temporal dominion.”⁹¹ All this helps to confirm what Locke had stated earlier in the letter agreeing with the principle of consent: “A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such a manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.”⁹² Coercion cannot ever lead one to a true church.

Locke’s Dualism and Natural Law

Locke has a dualistic view of the human in which there are two distinct ends. For the soul, the end is found in eternal happiness in relation to God, an end reserved for the elect. However, for the temporal life of the person, there is a temporal end which seeks

⁸⁹Ibid., 192.

⁹⁰Ibid., 184. One wonders whether the imagery of “fixed and immovable” boundaries that Locke has in mind do not recall Williams’s imagery of a wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.

⁹¹Ibid., 186.

⁹²Ibid., 175.

the securing and preservation of one's body and goods. It is the distinguishing of these two aspects of the human which founds Locke's arguments for civil government, and the limits imposed upon it.⁹³

Locke argues that humans are all naturally in a state of perfect freedom in which they have the right "to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man."⁹⁴ Within this state of nature in which humans find themselves, Locke also acknowledges that it is a state of equality such that no one has more power or jurisdiction than another. This state of nature is governed by a Law of Nature, which as defined by Locke is Reason.⁹⁵ It is the Law of Nature which restrains the liberty found within the natural state so that it does not become a state of license. Reason teaches "that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions."⁹⁶ For Locke the implications of this law are that all people ought to preserve their own lives, and because it is part of their own preservation, to seek to preserve the lives and goods of others. The limitation given to this preservation is when one brings justice upon another who has not honored this law. In such a case, the offender has removed himself from the natural state, and is out of bounds of the natural law.

⁹³A similar understanding will be seen in the political theory of Maritain in the fifth chapter as Maritain argues likewise that there are proper temporal ends for humans apart from their supernatural end.

⁹⁴John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2.4: 269. In referencing this work, I will give first chapter number, then section number, and finally page numbers in accord with this volume.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 2.6: 271.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

What is essential to Locke's argument for the natural law, however, and what reminds the reader that the temporal is not a realm devoid of the divine, is that Locke is dependent on the existence of God as lawgiver. Locke notes that the only basis for one being superior to others would be if God were to so will such a declaration.⁹⁷ Reason itself is tied with God as the "one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker." As such, "All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's Pleasure."⁹⁸ For Locke, natural law is not possible without the existence of God. Syse concludes, "Thus, to the extent that Locke is a natural-law thinker, he fits into the *voluntarist* tradition of natural law; i.e., he stresses that the will of God is the ultimate basis of the law of nature."⁹⁹ God's will bounds the temporal realm, and to the extent that God's will informs the natural law, it produces true liberty for humans within the natural state.

This idea of God's will as the basis of law in nature also allows Locke to argue for the formation of societies. Since every individual is "*bound to preserve himself*" as Reason directs each to understand the natural law, each will likewise realize that one's preservation of himself is best served by the preservation of all humanity.¹⁰⁰ Thus for Locke, any trespass against one individual by another individual is seen not simply as a wrong done to one (therefore, individuals in conflict), but is instead "a trespass against

⁹⁷Ibid., 2.4: 296.

⁹⁸Ibid., 2.6: 271.

⁹⁹Syse, *Natural Law, Religion, and Rights*, 206.

¹⁰⁰Locke, *Second Treatise*, 2.6: 271. (Italics original)

the whole Species, and the Peace and Safety of it.”¹⁰¹ As Richard Ashcraft notes, this idea of a wrong being committed not just to an individual, but to society “is crucial to [Locke’s] concept of power that it be inextricably linked to acting for the common good in the state of nature.”¹⁰² For Locke, the power of individuals to punish offenses and so preserve the common good in the state of nature is the basis on which municipal laws are established. The laws of the commonwealth, Locke writes, “are only so far right, as they are founded on the Law of Nature, by which they are to be regulated and interpreted.”¹⁰³ The same power given to individuals to preserve self and humanity is the power with which commonwealths are invested for the preservation of the common good.

The formation of a commonwealth, then, is for the purpose of securing one’s life and goods, and is accomplished as individuals divest themselves of their individual natural liberty.¹⁰⁴ Locke sees the impetus for forming such compacts and thereby giving up freedom as being the uncertainty of life in the natural state where others may take property and goods.¹⁰⁵ Locke writes, “The great and *chief end* therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, *is the Preservation of their Property.*”¹⁰⁶ Were it not for the degenerate nature of humans, however, humans

¹⁰¹Ibid., 2.8: 272.

¹⁰²Richard Ashcraft, “Locke’s Political Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 240.

¹⁰³Locke, *Second Treatise*, 2.12: 275.

¹⁰⁴“The only way whereby any one devests himself of his Natural Liberty, and *puts on the bonds of Civil Society* is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties.” Ibid., 8.95: 330-31.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 9.123: 350.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 9.124: 350-51. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke writes, “The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own

would remain living in the state of nature, preserving one another, within the one community of all humanity. Thus, the formation of civil societies as smaller communities distinct from the common community is necessitated by corruption.¹⁰⁷ Humans then give up the power of determining the best means of preserving their own lives and the power of punishing trespasses when they enter into civil compact. Yet, by this divestiture of power to the civil government, individuals assure the preservation of their liberty and property.

Locke holds, then, that because the power granted by individuals to the community is the power of the preservation of body and goods, limitation is therefore placed on the institution of laws by that society. In exchanging their rights for greater security, the multitude of individuals constitute a body that then acts for its own preservation and good, even as individuals would do for themselves and humanity in a state of nature.¹⁰⁸ With this in mind, then, the laws established by this body must “be directed to no other *end*, but the *Peace, Safety, and publick good* of the People.”¹⁰⁹ Locke can conclude in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* by stating:

This is the original, this is the use, and these are the bounds of the legislative (which is the supreme) power in every commonwealth. I mean, that provision may be made for the security of each man’s private possessions; for the peace, riches, and public commodities of the whole people; and, as much as possible, for the increase of their inward strength against foreign invasions.¹¹⁰

civil interests.” He continues, “Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.” *Letter*, 172.

¹⁰⁷Locke, *Second Treatise*, 9.128: 352.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 8.96: 331.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 9.131: 353.

¹¹⁰Locke, *Letter*, 208.

Thus, in Locke's dualistic conception of the individual, the power given over to the commonwealth is limited to that which concerns the temporal good. It has no reference to the eternal happiness of the spiritual realm.

The liberty secured by individuals who have granted their power within the natural state to the commonwealth is most importantly their liberty of conscience. Locke writes, "And it is also evident what liberty remains to men in reference to their eternal salvation, and that is, that every one should do what he in his conscience is persuaded to be acceptable to the Almighty, on whose good pleasure and acceptance depends their eternal happiness."¹¹¹ Ideally, for Locke, then, a magistrate acting with the public good in mind will not enact laws which would infringe upon one's conscience or require one to contradict some convinced belief. Since the public good is concerned solely with the preservation of bodies and goods, Locke notes that speculation in religious matters in no way injures another or destroys his property. As long as this remains the case, the magistrate has no need to concern him/herself with such questions. To this Locke adds, "For the truth certainly would do well enough if she were once left to shift for herself."¹¹²

Locke places limits on the extent that toleration may be allowed within this commonwealth, again with the public good in mind. First, he excludes from toleration those who refuse to tolerate, or more precisely, who would abrogate to themselves rights or authority in civil matters on the basis of their orthodoxy or belief that they would deprive rights from others.¹¹³ Second, he rejects any church that would require its members to acknowledge the authority of a foreign prince over their lives. In this he

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., 205

¹¹³Ibid., 211-212.

seems to be referencing the Roman Church and the authority given to the pope as a foreign power to the domestic magistrate.¹¹⁴ Finally, Locke argues that atheists are not to be tolerated. In this argument, he affirms again the necessity of belief in God for the foundation of natural law. He writes, “Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.”¹¹⁵ He does allow, however, that opinions which do not seek to establish dominion over another can be tolerated.¹¹⁶ Locke’s great concern in rejecting these groups as not to be tolerated seems to be the danger they pose to the good of the commonwealth. Each of the groups he rejects he sees as threatening to the good of the civil state, whether by seeking unwarranted privilege, divided loyalty, or lacking basis for observing common morality. With the good of the commonwealth as the end goal of civil society, any individual or group who threatens that good must not themselves be tolerated.

With the establishment of this ideal of the preservation and well-being of the civil society argued, and having rejected any that could be a danger to that end, Locke is able to offer the positive argument in favor of toleration. In doing so, he sounds once again very much like the earlier Baptists already discussed. He challenges magistrates to offer toleration to dissenters, and in so doing they will find that these groups will no longer appear so dangerous. In a refrain from the early General Baptists, Locke notes that it is not religion that leads to sedition, but instead “oppression raises ferments and makes men

¹¹⁴Ibid., 212. Locke rejects the “frivolous and fallacious distinction between the Court and the Church.” He notes that “both the one and the other are equally subject to the absolute authority of the same person.”

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 213.

struggle to cast off an uneasy and tyrannical yoke.”¹¹⁷ Toleration in the civil state regarding differences of religious opinion becomes a means to the end of securing the preservation of the state. Though Locke’s argument is similar to the earlier Baptists, here is seen a significant step away from them and towards modern liberal democratic theory. Toleration is for the security of the state, not primarily an acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty to call people to true worship (though Locke still remains cognizant of God’s sovereignty over conscience).

In defending the importance of toleration, Locke notes that by magistrates granting toleration to the diverse religious groups, they will secure the continued support of these groups for the established government. Locke writes,

Take away the partiality that is used towards them in matters of common right; change the laws, take away the penalties unto which they are subjected, and all things will immediately become safe and peaceable; nay, those that are averse to the religion of the magistrate will think themselves so much the more bound to maintain the peace of the commonwealth as their condition is better in that place than elsewhere; and all the several separate congregations, like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy—that is, an equal condition with their fellow-subjects under a just and moderate government.¹¹⁸

For Locke, then, the church which is tolerated becomes a church willing to support and uphold the status quo. The civil government becomes the guarantor of liberty of conscience as a right that must be preserved through the support of the state. What Locke particularly describes is the effective policing of the church by itself in that the church,

¹¹⁷Ibid., 215. The seventeenth century English Baptist author of *Objections Answered* (traditionally attributed to John Murton) argues that fears of Roman Catholic sedition would be put to rest if they were to be granted religious liberty and freed from religious compulsion in England. The author suggests that it is religious oppression through the established church that leads to much civil unrest on the part of those who face persecution. With liberty and freedom of worship, they would be accepting of the civil government’s legitimate authority. See the discussion on General Baptists in England in chapter two.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 216.

recognizing the benefits of the state towards it, refuses to challenge the civil establishment and works to form good citizens for the state. Such a policed church will be the critique offered in the fourth chapter against contemporary Baptists who are de facto supporters of the liberal democratic status quo. The state gains all the support of body and goods, leaving the spirit(ual) alone as the territory of the church, so long as what is “spiritual” does not challenge the ideology of the state. This conception will imbue that political theory that will drive the formation of the United States, and will help to shape the understanding of the state that is seen in later Baptist thinkers.

Isaac Backus and John Leland

At this point, the discussion shifts from an English context to the distinctly North American context of the emerging United States. Certainly the excursus on Locke was engaging a key figure in English philosophical thought. Both Roger Williams and John Clarke, though, could also be seen in many ways as still within an English context—granted one that is shaped by colonial experience. Now, however, with Isaac Backus (1724-1806) and John Leland (1754-1841), the context of the discussion engages figures who are not only consciously Americans, but who are also writing within the milieu of the burgeoning liberal democratic experiment that was the United States of America.

No two figures in Baptist life in the United States are more closely associated with the efforts to secure religious liberty in the new country than Isaac Backus and John Leland. Though born a generation apart, the lives of these two Baptists overlap and their ministries were known to one another. Because of their contributions and their recognition in the early political life of the nation, Backus and Leland are claimed as patron saints of Baptist political theory, and contemporary Baptists claim to stand in line

with the tradition of thought which these two established. Problematic with this appeal to a unified tradition from Backus and Leland is that these two do not represent a single tradition of thought on the relation of the church to the state.

William McLoughlin has argued convincingly that Backus and Leland do not share the same view on the question of the issues of religious liberty.¹¹⁹ He notes that Backus was more representative of his contemporary Baptists, while Leland was considered a bit of a scandal among the Baptists of New England.¹²⁰ Each supported calls for and struggled to make religious liberty a reality in the United States, and so each could be portrayed as defending a separatist position. As McLoughlin contends, however,

Backus insisted that the United States of America was and should be a Christian nation. Thomas Jefferson said it was definitely not a Christian nation. Backus wanted friendly cooperation, not a rigid wall of separation between church and state, and he had a very fuzzy view of precisely where the civil enforcement of Christian morality ended and the religious freedom of Christ's kingdom began.¹²¹

Backus's energy was spent seeking an end to the financial support to churches received from the state government. He was not necessarily opposed to government taking a friendly stance towards the Christian religion. Leland, on the other hand, opposed any sort of government involvement or support in favor of the Christian (or any) religion. This divergent tradition regarding the extent to which church and state are to engage is

¹¹⁹See William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1883: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1971), 2: 928-935.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 928-929. Andrew Manis attempts to ease this view of Leland by arguing that though he was a scandal in New England, in Virginia he was within the mainstream of Baptist thought. "Regionalism and a Baptist Perspective on Separation of Church and State," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2 (September 1983): 213-227. Martin McMahon notes, however, that Manis never quite shows whether the Virginia Baptists truly agreed with Leland's positions on Sabbath laws, chaplains, and the idea of a Christian nation as all these concepts were published after Leland's return to New England. "Liberty More Than Separation: The Multiple Streams of Baptist Thought on Church-State Issues, 1830-1900," (PhD diss.: Baylor University, 2001), 37-38.

¹²¹William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630-1833* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brown University Press, 1991), 245-46.

why contemporary Baptist conservatives and moderates who often find themselves at odds on church-state issues, can each claim to stand within the line of Baptist tradition on the idea of the separation of church and state. The thought of each of these men shall be examined in turn before considering what theological tradition they may share in common.

Backus on Religious Liberty

In Massachusetts, Backus was originally drawn into the public spotlight as an advocate for religious liberty as Baptists sought exemption from taxation to support standing ministers in their local communities. McLaughlin notes, however, that prior to 1773, Baptist efforts were “essentially a self-centered and denominationally oriented goal rather than an absolute or clearly enunciated principle.”¹²² Even as the Baptists would begin to press for liberty of conscience as an inherent right given to all, their concern remained with the ending of religious taxation. In advocating for religious liberty, Backus did not appear to go as far as Roger Williams in the previous century, nor fully accept the commitment of Jefferson and Madison to a public sphere free of the religious. Backus instead argues that religion is a necessary component for the well-being of human society.¹²³ As such, Backus can affirm in his 1783 pamphlet, “A Door Opened,” that “no man can take a seat in our legislature till he solemnly declares, ‘I believe the Christian religion and have a firm persuasion of its truth.’” This statement is made as one of several reasons Backus gives which convince him that “God has now set before us an

¹²²Ibid., 255.

¹²³Isaac Backus, “Policy as Well as Honesty,” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968), 371.

open door for equal Christian liberty which no man can shut.”¹²⁴ Similarly, though not agreeing with compulsory worship attendance on Sundays, Backus’s reaction to such laws as were made was rather tame. He writes, “We believe that attendance upon public worship and keeping the first day of the week holy to God are duties to be inculcated and enforced by his laws instead of the laws of men, but we have no controversy with our rulers about that matter.”¹²⁵ Perhaps the lack of enforcement is what tempered his ire.

Stanley Grenz works to show that Backus is in essential agreement with Roger Williams in terms of commitment to religious liberty. Grenz points to Backus’s praise for Williams’s Ship of State analogy as clearly depicting the difference between civil and ecclesial affairs, and between good government and tyranny.¹²⁶ What Backus and Grenz fail to acknowledge is the context within which this analogy was made, particularly those who refuse military service as an act of conscientious objection. Grenz continues his argument, however, noting that Backus charges that Williams limits too much of what is natural religion to the realm of revealed religion (activities such as prayer and days of thanksgiving).¹²⁷ Backus writes,

Daily prayer to God for what we need, and praises for what we receive, are duties taught by reason as well as revelation; and every person is inexcusable that neglects the immediate practice of those duties.... But the ordinances of special

¹²⁴Isaac Backus, “A Door Opened,” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968), 436. Stanley Grenz argues that this rather conservative sounding statement is to be read in light of Christ’s headship in the church and the new context in New England. No longer do legislators swear allegiance to the King of England as the source of their power. “Isaac Backus and Religious Liberty,” *Foundations 22* (1979): 355-56. Grenz fails to offer an adequate explanation, though, for Backus’ affirmation of test oaths for legislators. Certainly he is correct that they no longer acknowledge the king’s authority as a source of power, but he does not account for the demanded declaration in favor of the Christian religion.

¹²⁵Backus, “A Door Opened,” 433. Backus points out in a footnote that such a law was made the previous year, but it was generally being disobeyed.

¹²⁶Grenz, “Isaac Backus and Religious Liberty,” 357-58.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 358.

communion in the Christian church, are only known by pure revelation, which requires previous personal qualifications before any may partake therein. But Mr Williams . . . blended these two kinds of duties so much together, as to oppose the inculcating of prayer upon the unregenerate, as well as the immediate practice of church communion.¹²⁸

Grenz rightly points out that Backus is concerned with the differing understandings between Williams and himself concerning the extent of what may be known by natural religion. Backus believes prayer to be an aspect of natural religion that would be common to all citizens. Grenz must concede that Backus could have supported legislation calling for mandated school prayer, a position that likely would have been abhorrent to Williams.¹²⁹

McLaughlin argues that in 1773, Backus was working to express a social theory that mediated between the conflicting aspects in Calvin and Locke.¹³⁰ The tension was especially great in New England prior to the Revolution as Baptists “faced a conflict between their inherited New England belief that a strict corporate system was essential to control man’s selfishness and their new evangelical conception that a voluntaristic system was essential because it left salvation to the personal responsibility of each individual.”¹³¹ Following his Calvinist theology, Backus held to human depravity and believed government to be instituted by God to provide civil peace until all were reconciled to divine law. Civil government, therefore, is to restrain the acts of evil doers and provide

¹²⁸Isaac Backus, *A History of New England With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Newton, Massachusetts: Backus Historical Society, 1871), II: 2.

¹²⁹Stanley Grenz, “Isaac Backus and his vision of church-state relationships: ‘Sweet Harmony,’” *Report from the Capital* 40 (March 1985): 5.

¹³⁰William McLaughlin, “Editor’s Introduction to ‘An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty, Boston 1773,’” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968), 306. I am indebted to this essay for its engagement with Backus’ theological support for his understanding of liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

for the good of the commonwealth. Magistrates are to leave spiritual matters to each individual's conscience and God's sovereign activity of reconciliation.

McLaughlin argues that liberty of conscience was an “ambiguous ‘right’ for it was both a ‘charter right’ given by the King and a divine right commanded by God’s higher law.”¹³² In this sense, it might also be considered a transition point in the development of political theory as the idea of the natural human right was emerging as something inherent as opposed to something bequeathed by the state.¹³³ McLaughlin comments that in “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty” in 1773, Backus would make use of both aspects of liberty of conscience depending on his need—either to be a patriot and appeal to divine right while still arguing that his fellow patriots were tyrants in denying liberty, or praise the King for his charter right, while yet accusing him of being tyrannical. McLaughlin states that with the outbreak of violence by the king in the colonies, however, Baptists rallied to the American side, though they still opposed the standing order of churches in New England and religious taxation. Importantly, he adds that with this turn, the Baptists “generally adopted the natural rights philosophy of Locke.”¹³⁴ Thus, one can read in this particular pamphlet Backus’s argument that the people “arm the magistrate with the *sword* that he may be a minister of God *to them for good* and might execute wrath upon *evil doers*,” language reminiscent of Calvin and

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the idea of a natural right is a fiction, belief in which is “one with belief in witches and in unicorns.” He argues that the concept of the natural right was “generated to serve one set of purposes as part of the social invention of the autonomous moral agent.” *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 68-70. Contemporary Baptists it will be argued, turned from liberty of conscience as a recognition of God’s sovereignty to religious liberty as a natural human right. With this turn, these Baptists were also becoming increasingly committed to modern individualism and the foundationalism that informed it.

¹³⁴Ibid., 307.

earlier Baptists.¹³⁵ Yet, at the end of the pamphlet, in language evoking Locke, Backus argues:

And if a man has a right to his *estate*, his *liberty* and his *family* notwithstanding his non-conformity to the magistrate's way of worship, by what authority has any man had his goods spoiled, his land sold, or his person imprisoned, and thereby deprived of the enjoyment both of his liberty and his family for no crime at all against the peace or welfare of the state but only because he refused to conform to, or to support an *imposed* way of worship, or an *imposed* minister.¹³⁶

Though not expressing a compact theory of government, Backus has nonetheless imbibed of the ends of a commonwealth as understood by Locke.

Backus's commitment to the freedom of conscience and religious liberty is founded upon both his strong Calvinist theology as well as his familiarity with a Lockean concept of the ends of the commonwealth. In terms of the formation of the new United States, Backus would have been in practical agreement with Jefferson that church and state needed to be institutionally separate. The essential basis for this commitment between the two, however, would be very different. Whereas Jefferson placed reason as the adjudicator of truth in the public square, Backus was committed to revelation and God's activity of calling the repentant into a voluntaristic church. McLaughlin adds that "Backus would never have agreed with Jefferson that the United States, or any one of them, was not a Christian country."¹³⁷ Noting a 1779 letter to the Boston *Independent Chronicle* attacking the proposed third article of the Massachusetts constitution, McLaughlin argues that Backus, writing as the spokesmen for New England Baptists, rejects any system in which the state directly supported religion. He does, though, seem

¹³⁵Backus, "An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty," in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968), 314.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 341.

¹³⁷McLaughlin, *New England Dissent*, I: 605.

to believe that the state must encourage religion indirectly. This is in line with the idea noted earlier that Backus held that religion was necessary for the well-being of the civil state. The state is to help maintain a climate in which the true religion could flourish. Thus, as McLaughlin notes, Backus seems to give tacit approval to the teaching of the *Westminster Catechism* in public schools, laws against profanity, blasphemy, gambling, theater going, and desecration of the Sabbath.¹³⁸ McMahon concludes, “Most of the New England Baptists ... seemed to believe that the government had some responsibility to maintain Christian principles, but they also believed that the state should have no part in forcing persons to support a particular church.”¹³⁹

John Leland’s High Wall of Separation

While most New England Baptists saw little contradiction between their calls for religious liberty and an affirmation of the government’s responsibility to maintain Christian principles, John Leland proved to be a scandal to their sensibilities with his calls for complete separation. Though he lived most of his life in Massachusetts, he spent a notable fifteen years in Virginia where he became acquainted with both Jefferson and James Madison. Like Jefferson and Madison, Leland desired to preserve a high wall of separation between the church and the state. Leland believed that the payment with public funds of chaplains both in the military and civil government was a breach of religious liberty.¹⁴⁰ Likewise, he argued against tax exemption or exemption from

¹³⁸Ibid., I: 606.

¹³⁹McMahon, “Liberty More Than Separation,” 34.

¹⁴⁰John Leland, “The Virginia Chronicle,” in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (1845; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 119.

military service for ministers.¹⁴¹ He also opposed compulsory Sunday attendance, Sabbath Laws, and particularly, attempts to halt postal delivery on Sundays.¹⁴² Where Backus saw benefit for the church in benign, non-preferential support on behalf of the civil government, Leland believed that the two must remain absolutely distinct. He argues, “Religion, in its purest ages, made its way in the world, not only without the aid of the law, but against all the laws of haughty monarchs, and all the maxims of the schools. The pretended friendship of *legal* protection, and *learned* assistance, proves often in the end like the friendship of Joab to Amasa.”¹⁴³

McLaughlin argues that Leland’s birth, a generation after Backus, meant that he missed the pietistic intensity of the Great Awakening.¹⁴⁴ As such, he did not share the same view of the eventual creation of a Christian social order. Likewise, Leland was not as strongly schooled in Calvinist theology, but was instead focused upon the salvation of individual souls. His approach to church-state relations therefore was more pragmatic and seems to have derived a great deal from the Jeffersonian tradition. The state has no claim upon the conscience, and the “legitimate powers of government extend only to punish men for working ill to their neighbors.”¹⁴⁵ Leland thus argues that the error of legislators is “confounding *sins* and *crimes* together—making no difference between *moral evil* and *state rebellion*: not considering that a man may be infected with moral

¹⁴¹Leland writes of ministers, “The law should be silent about them; protect them as citizens, not as sacred officers, for the civil law knows no sacred religious officers.” “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and, therefore, Religious Opinions Not Cognizable by Law; or, The High-Flying Churchman, stripped of his legal robe, appears a Yahoo,” in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (1845; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 188.

¹⁴²See Greene, *Writings of John Leland*, 224-25, 240, 440-46.

¹⁴³Leland, “Virginia Chronicle,” 118.

¹⁴⁴McLaughlin, *New England Dissent*, II: 929.

¹⁴⁵Leland, “Virginia Chronicle,” 118.

evil, and yet be guilty of no crime, punishable by law.”¹⁴⁶ This distinction between moral evil and state rebellion offers a basis for rejecting any laws seeking to support Protestant practices in the civil realm.

Leland presents his view of civil government in decidedly Lockean terms. At the beginning of his 1791 work, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” Leland offers a hypothetical situation in which a man finds himself alone upon an island of which he takes peaceable possession. In this case, his will is law. After a time, he has ten sons, and so long as each of these sons is virtuous, they remain free and sovereign. The problem arises if one son turns to robbery of the others. In this case, the other sons are forced to enter a compact in which they join together to defend themselves and their possessions from the one. This, Leland argues, is the basis of democratic government. Representative democracy emerges as the nine become nine thousand. Among the conclusions that Leland draws from this parable are the ideas that government is created because of disobedience, people must part with some liberties in order to preserve other liberties, power is from the people, and government is founded upon compact.¹⁴⁷ In “A Blow at the Root,” Leland states, “Perhaps the legitimate designs of government cannot be better defined, than by saying, ‘it is to preserve the lives, liberties and property of the many units that form the whole body politic.’”¹⁴⁸ As with Locke, the purpose of government is to secure physical well-being and one’s material goods.

¹⁴⁶John Leland, “The Yankee Spy: Calculated for the Religious Median of Massachusetts, but will answer for New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Vermont, without any material alterations.” in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (1845; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 221.

¹⁴⁷John Leland, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 179-80.

¹⁴⁸John Leland, “A Blow at the Root: being a Fashionable Fast-Day Sermon, delivered at Cheshire, April 9, 1801,” in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (1845; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 238.

Government and Conscience in Leland's Thought

By making the civil government responsible for those material goods related to human rights, Leland has affirmed that the government is to be guarantor of rights in Lockean fashion. Leland follows the previously quoted statement with the implications of this idea of government for those who are subject to this compact. He writes,

For these valuable purposes, individuals have, in certain cases, to expose their lives in war to defend the state—to give up a little of their liberty, and be controlled by the general will, and part with a little of their property to compensate those who should be employed to secure the rest.¹⁴⁹

Within his conception, then, one's obligation to the state for the securing of one's material goods and bodily well-being is a particular allegiance to that state in terms of taxation and service towards the preservation of the state. Thus, body and goods are the proper concerns of the state, both in its role as protector and, because some liberty is given up to the state, in calling upon individuals to act in accordance with its demands. Thus Leland can make the divide between the church and the state. The conscience remains free and cannot be compelled by the state. Therefore, for Leland, "religion is a matter entirely between God and individuals."¹⁵⁰

The conscience is outside of the purview of the state, and thus there can be no compulsion of religious belief. He defines liberty of conscience as "the inalienable right that each individual has, of worshipping his God according to the dictates of his conscience, without being prohibited, directed, or controlled therein by human law, either in time, place, or manner."¹⁵¹ Of conscience, Leland writes, "The word *conscience*,

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Leland, "Virginia Chronicle," 108.

¹⁵¹Leland, "A Blow at the Root," 239.

signifies *common science*, a court of judicature which the Almighty has erected in every human breast: a *ensor morum* over all his conduct.”¹⁵² It is the responsibility of individuals to determine truth and right belief. Leland will acknowledge that the conscience will judge right when rightly informed,¹⁵³ though he also admits that because of the mar of sin, conscience can judge wrongly.¹⁵⁴ He concludes, “Though conscience should be free from human control, yet it should be in strict subordination to the law of God.”¹⁵⁵ In the end, however, his desire is to ensure the freedom of the individual to adjudicate matters of religious belief by the dictates of that one’s own conscience and reason. In this, he seems to be drawing from the rationalist thinking prevalent in the Jeffersonian tradition.

Leland’s Freedom of the Individual

One of the most dominant themes in Leland’s writing is the preeminence of the individual and the necessity of guarding individual conscience against any attempt to subordinate it whether it be from the civil government or an ecclesial body. Edwin Gaustad points to Leland’s sharp critique of the formation of national societies for religious purposes, especially the formation of missionary societies. As an itinerant evangelist, Leland was certainly not opposed to the spread of the Gospel. Rather, Gaustad suggests that for Leland, such an organization had the potential of being co-opted by the state: “If it was national, there was the danger of a group becoming powerful

¹⁵²Leland, “Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 180. Compare with Leland, “Virginia Chronicle,” 123.

¹⁵³Leland, “Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 180-81.

¹⁵⁴Leland, “Virginia Chronicle,” 123.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

enough to serve, once again, as an instrument through which the government may express its will.”¹⁵⁶ Gaustad suggests that Leland, greatly influenced by Jefferson’s dictum that government is best which governs least, saw in the formation of national societies a threat to the conscience of the individual believer. He writes, “If churches were to surrender their economic independence, congregational polity would soon vanish. If presidents and directors grew in number and in power, the equality of the believer would have no meaning.”¹⁵⁷ Leland was committed to a strong individualism that was to be preserved in the face of any attempt to impose conformity through established religion or even an independent national church body.

Like Baptists before him, Leland argues that uniformity in matters of religion is not necessary to the well-being of the state. He writes, “Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men, than it has with the principles of mathematics.”¹⁵⁸ The government’s role is to protect an individual’s right to variety of belief, and to allow the truth or falsity of that belief to be shown by whether that one’s arguments stand or fall. The outcome is immaterial to the civil state. So long as religious belief does not lead to rebellion or a hindrance to the ability of the state to preserve the good of the commonwealth—bodily well-being, property, and other liberty—religious conviction can be of any sort. Thus, that religion is acceptable to the civil society—and the good of the soul—which remains private.

Leland’s concern was to preserve the freedom of the individual in regard to that one’s relationship to God. Even in a society composed entirely of Christians—a

¹⁵⁶Edwin S. Gaustad, “The Backus-Leland Tradition,” *Foundations* 2, no. 1 (January 1959): 144.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁵⁸Leland, “Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 184.

Christian commonwealth—he contends that “should they be formed into a society by law, that society could not be a Gospel Church, but a creature of state.”¹⁵⁹ For Leland, the imposition of civil government into any aspect of religious practice is destructive to the church. In line with Roger Williams, Leland would see any tie between the state and the church, even benign involvement, as detrimental to the garden of the church. What Leland fails to see the full implications of, however, perhaps because his particular context was so rooted in a conflict with established religion, was that his commitment to religious individualism leaves one’s Christian faith superfluous to the daily practice of life in the commonwealth. Because one’s faith becomes entirely a private affair, a spiritual matter only, control of the body and material goods is ceded to the state. Salvation becomes an eschatological issues divorced from the present concerns of economics, war-making, and or the politics of justice.

The Backus-Leland Tradition?

Do then Backus and Leland ultimately represent different Baptist traditions? Though they must certainly be read as diverging significantly in their understanding of the relation of the church to the state (Backus seeking “sweet harmony”; Leland a high wall of separation), it would seem that behind these differences is a common ecclesiology informing their conception of the church’s role as a social body. Each is willing to privatize the religious and vacate the church from the political sphere. While Backus was well-schooled in Calvinism, particularly the works of Jonathan Edwards, Leland, by his own admission at his baptism when asked if he believed the “Calvinistical doctrine,”

¹⁵⁹ Leland, “Virginia Chronicle,” 107.

admitted, “I did not know what it was, but I believed in free grace.”¹⁶⁰ Both, however, were committed to the preservation of the liberty of the individual soul apart from any coercion. It was to the individual conscience that God’s call came, and thus it was the individual conscience, not civil law or a church hierarchy, which accepted grace and led to one’s entrance into the Kingdom of God. Tied with this focus on individual conscience was a converse de-emphasizing of the church. Gaustad comments, “In the Backus-Leland tradition the church occupies a secondary position. That is, the fundamental relationship between God and the person whom he calls to salvation is prior to the fellowship of the church, both in time and in significance.”¹⁶¹ Both Backus and Leland affirmed a Lockean conception of the church: every church was to be a voluntaristic organization composed of those who with free conscience have chosen to join with others of a like mind. Each was driven by a concern that nothing come between the individual conscience and God, not only civil compulsion of religious practice that is contrary to one’s conscience, but even the church itself.

What was unforeseen by each of them as an implication of their strong individualism was that privatizing faith and making the concern of the state the preservation of bodily well-being and the securing of material possessions led to a dualism that left one’s faith incidental to the affairs of life in this world. The concern of the church was with spiritual affairs. For Backus and Leland, the immediate context of combating the abuse of power wrought by the established church was their primary emphasis. As such, they could not express how there might be a unified witness of the

¹⁶⁰John Leland, “Events in the Life of John Leland: Written by Himself,” in *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (1845; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 16.

¹⁶¹Gaustad, “Backus-Leland Tradition,” 136.

church in the world. It was to be the task of Christians as individuals with freely formed consciences to engage matters of ethics and politics. To suppose that the church could speak with a unified voice carried too much fear of establishment and religious oppression. Therefore, for Backus and Leland, though divergent in understanding the extent to which the church may relate to the state, the religious is privatized such that the only concern of the church is the spiritual. Politics, economics, matters of public debate, all those concerns of the commonwealth related to the securing of life, liberty, and property are beyond the scope of the church, and so the individual Christian finds him/herself living a life of dual allegiance: in the spiritual realm to Christ, and in the world to the state.

Conclusion

Baptists arrived in the North American colonies early in the life of New England bringing with them their commitment to liberty of conscience and calls for religious liberty. Roger Williams and John Clarke seemed to be living between two different worlds. To one side was the fading medieval culture in which commitment to Christ led to a Christianized social order where there was no differentiation of the world from the church—to be part of the society was to be Christian. On the other side was the modern world in which the religious was relegated to the fringes of society and privatized so that there was a divergence of ends between the spiritual and the material goods of the commonwealth. Williams in particular seemed to anticipate much of the political theory of the modern world, though it would seem his intention was more to ensure a true church than to establish any sort of comprehensive political statement. His writings would anticipate much that John Locke would later articulate in calling for a compact

theory of government in which the civil state had the role of protecting the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property.

A little over a century later, Isaac Backus and John Leland would play key roles in securing religious liberty as a fundamental tenant of political life in the new United States. Both of these men reveal the influence of modern liberal political theory in their thought. The individual conscience becomes sovereign as the adjudicator of truth, and commitment to the individual highlights their calls for religious liberty. What seems to distinguish Backus and Leland from their Baptists predecessors, however, is that commitment to Christ no longer seems to suggest initiation into a distinct community. One chooses to be part of a voluntaristic organization, but an organization concerned with spiritual matters. Life in the present world continues to be driven by commitment to the civil state which is the guarantor of not only body and goods, but the very liberty to believe as well. It is this individualistic trajectory, informed by Lockean political theory, which will largely determine the shape of Baptist life in the United States until the present.

CHAPTER FOUR

Contemporary Baptists and Church-State Relations

The Contemporary Context

Baptists in the contemporary context continue to affirm religious liberty as a key Baptist distinctive. Yet such continued affirmation leads to widely different perspectives on how religious liberty is to be understood. Historian Bill Leonard notes, “At the beginning of the twenty-first century Baptists in the United States may have been more polarized by questions of religious liberty than by any other religious issue.”¹ As evidence of this division, it is not necessary to look any further than the presence of two Baptist lobbying bodies in Washington, D. C. One, the Baptist Joint Committee For Religious Liberty (BJC), is supported by fourteen national and state Baptist conventions, and has been active since 1942 defending religious liberty issues. In 1990, the conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention, concerned over the BJC’s perceived liberal stance on church-state issues—opposition to prayer in public schools, school vouchers, and a proposed constitutional amendment to public prayer—withdraw funding from the BJC and established its own body in Washington: the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Though both groups operate with the ostensible mandate of preserving the traditional Baptist commitment to the separation of church and state, how they understand this separation often finds them on opposite sides of political issues.

¹Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 157.

As described in the introductory chapter, the terms “separationist” and “accommodationist” do not provide the necessary nuance to express the varying points of view held by those who consider themselves defenders of religious liberty. Instead, the terminology proposed by Carl Esbeck was offered as providing a more refined understanding of the spectrum of viewpoints of those who argue for church-state relations.² To return to terms from the previous chapter, those who support a “high wall of separation” and those who look for “sweet harmony” can both affirm their position as seeking to preserve religious liberty. Likewise, as discovered as well in the discussion of Backus and Leland, both positions can also claim precedent from Baptist history.

While contemporary Baptists are divided over various issues that touch upon questions of separation and accommodation—school prayer and school vouchers as two glaring examples—each side claims it is being true to the Baptist heritage of religious liberty in arguing its position.³ The purpose of this chapter is not necessarily to pursue these different viewpoints and their proponents left and right. Rather, this chapter will suggest that despite fundamental disagreement over the implications of church-state relations as diverse as pluralistic separationists to nonpreferentialists, by and large these divergent positions share a foundational theology which at its root is thoroughly modern and individualistic—a theology which is the product of Baptist moves traced in the preceding chapters. Regardless of position, the majority of Baptists end up supporting a theology that isolates the spiritual from the temporal realm and divides the believer’s

²Esbeck’s five types as discussed in chapter one are strict separationism, pluralistic separationism, institutional separationism, nonpreferentialism, and restorationism.

³Two studies that offer nice summaries of the debated positions and their historical development among Baptists, see Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 157-181, and C. C. Goen, “Baptists and Church-State Issues in the Twentieth Century,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (December 1987): 226-253.

allegiance between Christ who speaks to the spirit and the state which controls the body. Working in harmony with this theology is a particular social theory that emerged in the South following the Civil War in which Baptists saw the Gospel as intimately tied with the established Southern culture. A thin ecclesiology combined with a spiritualized Gospel left the Baptists in the South committed to being the upholders of the status quo.

This chapter will first consider the foundationalist theology driving much twentieth century Baptist thought, and its particular emergence as thoroughly individualistic. Then, attention will turn to Baptists in the South and their commitment to the narrative of the Lost Cause of Southern society. It will be noted that their theological affirmation of Southern culture caused Baptists to become not only the established church of the South, but the maintainers of the status quo. In particular, their ecclesiology that left the church superfluous to faith meant that Christianity became little more than an eschatological salvific hope, leaving the church without voice in questions deemed “political”—i.e. civil rights, poverty, segregation. This is not to suggest that individual Baptists, or even Baptist groups, did not engage social issues, but instead is to argue that the church itself is institutionalized such that it is a part of society and loses its ability to imagine itself as a distinct society from the civil body politic.⁴ It will be suggested that

⁴One of the best counter examples to this individualism and acceptance of the status quo is seen in the life and ministry of Clarence Jordan. During the middle of the twentieth century after earning a Ph.D. in New Testament Greek from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jordan established Koinonia Farm outside of Americus, Georgia as a means of intentional Christian communal living where whites and African Americans could live, work, worship, and eat together. One of those who came to live at the farm was Millard Fuller who would later begin Habitat for Humanity. Another significant Southern Baptist figure who challenged Baptist individualism and contentment with the status quo was Carlyle Marney. Certainly numerous other figures could be put forth as counter examples to the theology being explicated, but they are all the more striking because their presence does stand out so starkly against the prevalent view of the majority of Baptists, particularly in the South. Even many who dissent from the status quo, do so from entirely modern categories and remain beholden to an individualism that distinguishes the spiritual from the temporal—for example Walter Rauschenbusch at the turn of the twentieth century.

this particular Baptist theological turn remains influential, and continues to provide a dangerous precedent that silences a once prophetic Baptist voice.

Theological Foundationalism Among Baptists

Winthrop Hudson argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, Baptist ecclesiology was built on a substructure of theology that was being greatly weakened by frontier and Enlightenment individualism, most clearly expressed in the political and cultural traditions of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy.⁵ This individualism became a significant Baptist commitment, particularly in the theology of E. Y. Mullins where it appeared as the competency of the individual soul before God. Hudson writes,

To the extent that Baptists were to develop an apologetic for their church life during the early decades of the twentieth century, it was to be on the basis of this highly individualistic principle. It has become increasingly apparent that this principle was derived from the general cultural and religious climate of the nineteenth century rather than from any serious study of the Bible.⁶

This individualism which became so significant in Baptist life is rooted in certain philosophical and theological turns that mark the modern era. As Curtis Freeman argues, “the definition of Baptist theology in terms of libertarian notions of autonomy is a modern account.”⁷

This modern account was the product of the attack upon traditional authorities, particularly the church and tradition, which marked the Enlightenment. Though the established churches of Europe were primary targets, in the United States where

⁵Winthrop S. Hudson, “Shifting Patterns of Church Order in the Twentieth Century,” in *Baptist Concepts of the Church*, ed. Winthrop S. Hudson (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 200.

⁶Ibid., 215.

⁷Curtis Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology be Revisioned?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (1997): 273.

Protestantism had become the de facto established religion, the implications of this challenge were no less felt. Freeman writes,

A sustained assault against the church was eventually mounted by intellectual, political, and economic powers driven by the forces of rationalism and secularism. The common goal was to banish the Christian religion to the backwaters of modern culture and to create secular nation-states as alternatives to the fragmented kingdoms of Christendom.⁸

In rejecting the long accepted authorities of church and tradition, Enlightenment thinkers instead adopted a foundationalist theory of knowledge which demands that all beliefs be founded upon a class of beliefs that are unquestioned. Christian theologians, both conservative and liberal, sought to adapt their theology to foundationalism, and built systems of doctrine founded upon what they believed were unquestionable principles.

Nancey Murphy traces the development of modern foundationalism to René Descartes.⁹ Descartes' challenge to provide a solid foundation for his entire system of belief led him to call all knowledge into question. Descartes finally turned to that which he could not doubt as the foundation for all knowledge: his own existence and reason. Murphy notes, "If human reason was a faculty shared universally, then a new structure built on the deliverances of human reason must garner universal assent."¹⁰ Thus, the focus of the human quest for knowledge was now driven by a search for the universal which could be apprehended by all on the basis of reason.

Following Descartes, John Locke continued the foundationalist tradition arguing for three kinds of knowledge: empirical science, indubitable knowledge based in

⁸Ibid., 277.

⁹For this tracing of the development of foundationalism and its separation into both conservative and liberal branches, I will follow the work of Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1996), 11-35.

¹⁰Ibid., 13.

deductive reasoning, and revelation. Following Locke, David Hume challenged the arguments for the existence of God that served to found part of Locke's basis of knowledge. In response to the work of Hume, foundationalist thought would branch into two paths: one following Thomas Reid into Princeton Theology and eventually modern fundamentalism; the other following Immanuel Kant through Friedrich Schleiermacher to modern liberalism.¹¹ The first path sought to found knowledge of God upon revelation so that Scripture becomes the basis of all knowledge of God if rightly read and understood. The second path turns to universal religious experience as the foundation for all knowledge of God. In this case, Scripture and doctrine are reflections on, and attempts to express, what is universally perceived by all.

Liberalism

The second path, founding theology upon religious experience, took its impetus from the work of Schleiermacher who argues that the essence of all religion is a feeling or awareness of dependency. Murphy writes, "Schleiermacher's achievement in the systematic theology of his later years was to show that all legitimate doctrines were derivable from this foundational experience."¹² This experience must be universal and cannot involve particularities that would limit it to one particular religion. It must be able to be apprehended in all cultures and times to make it an adequate foundation. Therefore it cannot require mediation or interpretation, otherwise it would be dependent upon something prior and, thus, not foundational.

¹¹Ibid., 5-6. Mark Noll calls this first path following Reid the "*didactic* Enlightenment," which he deems largely to be a product of Scotland. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 84.

¹²Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 22.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, there were Baptists, particularly in the North, who pursued this course of founding theology upon experience. Prominent among these Baptists are Shailer Mathews, professor of theology at the University of Chicago, and Harry Emerson Fosdick, the well-known pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. Mathews argues that “religions spring from human needs.”¹³ As such, with each generation, there must be an application of religious awareness to new needs. Dogmatism of doctrine stales religion and hinders it from its role in the world. He suggests that Christianity has been able to stay fresh as it continues to respond to needs, and so contends that “Christians have never had a static system of philosophy or a finished theology.”¹⁴ Because of this, the Bible is the result of reflection on Christian response to perceived needs: “The Bible sprang from our religion, not our religion from the Bible.”¹⁵ It is the experience of God on the part of humans that draws forth Scripture, though it must be understood that the Bible is “a trustworthy record of a developing experience of God which nourishes our faith.”¹⁶ It is the experience of God that is the norm of faith, and from that experience springs all attempts at expressing God’s activity in the world.

Fosdick likewise approaches religion from the basis of experience. Noting that humans have come out of bondage from previous ways of thinking, he looks to an understanding of the Gospel that makes sense in the modern world. He writes,

All doctrines spring from life. In the first instance men have experiences with their own souls, with their fellows, with their God, which, involving mental

¹³Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), 2.

¹⁴Ibid., 3.

¹⁵Ibid., 50.

¹⁶Ibid., 51.

elements as all sane experiences must, are nevertheless primarily valued for their contribution to the practical richness of life. Unable, however, to deny their intellectual necessities, men carry these experiences up into their minds and try deliberately to explain, unify, organize, and rationalize them. They make systematized doctrines out of their experiences. And when the formula has been constructed, they love it because the experience for which it stands is precious.¹⁷

With the coming of a new generation, the older formulas do not work with new ways of thinking and new ideas that have come with modernity. This leads to theological discord.

Fosdick concludes,

The way out leads inevitably through liberalism. Some men, to be sure, impatient with the incredible formula, throw over all religion, ...but other souls cannot do that; religion means too much to them. They discover that their religion does not consist in the formula but in the experience of which the formula was a transient phrasing. They become liberals by retreating from the formula into the experience behind it, by translating the formula back into the life out of which it came.¹⁸

Religion is prior to Scripture, though Scripture has its place. It is, though, the experience, ever felt anew, that must constantly be the measure of doctrines, and allow for a universal foundation for all religions.

Fundamentalism

After Hume's critique of Locke, another path emerged seeking to found knowledge of God upon revelation. Following the common-sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, American theologians, notably those associated with Princeton, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), and Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), saw God's revelation in Scripture as a repository of universal knowledge open to anyone. Freeman argues that the Princeton theologians adopted the scientific

¹⁷Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), 185.

¹⁸Ibid., 185-86.

view of Francis Bacon which saw science as induction from verified facts.¹⁹ Thus, all persons were able to apprehend the truth of God should they scientifically examine the Bible. Charles Hodge states, “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is the store-house of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.” With this in mind, “the duty of the Christian theologian is to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to Him. These facts are all in the Bible.”²⁰ Interpretation of the Bible is then not a product of church doctrine and tradition, but is instead a scientific study that can be approached by individuals through the engagement of right reason.

Among Baptists, A. H. Strong (1836-1921), longtime professor of theology and president of Rochester Theological Seminary, can stand for the type. He opens his *Systematic Theology* by stating, “Theology is the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe.”²¹ Telling in this comment is that theology is not tied to the particular of the Christian faith, but theology is a universal endeavor, a science that can be investigated with the same rationality as other subjects. Strong writes,

Systematic Theology takes the material furnished by Biblical and by Historical Theology, and with this material seeks to build up into an organic and consistent whole all our knowledge of God and of the relations between God and the universe, whether this knowledge be originally derived from nature or from the Scriptures.²²

¹⁹Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology be Revisioned?” 284-85.

²⁰Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872), 1:10-11.

²¹August Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 1: 1.

²²*Ibid.*, 1: 41.

Strong does in a sense mediate between conservative evangelical orthodoxy and emerging modern ideas. As Freeman notes, Strong even “affirmed the creative activity of God within and through the process of evolution.”²³ His work, however, still founds knowledge of God upon the objective facts of Scripture.

Murphy notes that an interesting feature of biblical foundationalism is the claims that are made about Scripture by conservatives. She writes, “One of the central tenets of fundamentalism is the verbal inspiration of Scripture and its complete inerrancy.”²⁴ The reason for these commitments can be understood as necessitated by the very implications of foundationalism: “if Scripture is to provide an *indubitable* foundation for theological construction, then all of its teachings must be free from error, lest the theologian make erroneous judgments in distinguishing true teachings from false ones or essential teachings from incidental cultural assumptions.”²⁵ Though not all biblical foundationalists will insist on these tenets, the biblical witness will still remain a source to be mined for truth over against the particularities of doctrine and tradition.

An important development tied with the emergence of foundationalism is its concomitant outgrowth of individualism. With the Enlightenment’s turn from traditional authorities (church, family, community, guild, etc.), authority came to be located in the individual’s foundational beliefs. Particularly in political theory, “political authority

²³Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology be Revisioned?” 287.

²⁴Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 16.

²⁵Ibid., 17. Noll adds that this need had been latent in this particular line of tradition since the revolutionary era in the United States. He writes, “The answer to this puzzle [why Americans would embrace the Scottish/conservative branch of Enlightenment thought finding a foundation in Scripture] is that the Scottish Enlightenment offered evangelicals and other Americans exactly what they needed to master the tumults of the Revolutionary era. In the midst of an era marked by a radical willingness to question the verities of the past, the intuitive philosophy provided by the Scots offered an intellectually respectable way to establish public virtue in a society that was busily repudiating the props upon which virtue had traditionally rested—tradition itself, divine revelation, history, social hierarchy, an inherited government, and the authority of religious denominations.” *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 87.

came to be based upon the consent of individuals, and moral authority was ceded to the individual rational will.”²⁶ Ontological individualism became a key component of modern political thought as the value of the individual was elevated over that of the group.²⁷ Individualism would be essential in articulating a social contract theory of government. As noted in the previous chapter in the excursus on Locke, individuals compact together as a way of preserving life, liberty and property. Thus, the individual has ontological priority over the collective. As Murphy and McClendon state, in social contract theory “society is at root a collection of individuals united for their mutual benefit.”²⁸ For Locke, this ontological individualism would be the basis of his argument in favor of democracy. It is individuals who cede some power to the state for mutual defense and preservation of the commonwealth. In the end, the benefit to the state is to the benefit of individuals.

John Leland, as previously noted, sounded a clarion call for the rights of the individual and fought against attempts to establish any sort of national Baptist convention for fear of the trumping of the rights of individual conscience. Nathan Hatch writes of Leland,

John Leland is also important because he turned a quest for self-reliance into a godly crusade. He believed that individuals had to make a studied effort to free themselves of natural authorities: church, state, college, seminary, even family. Leland’s message carried the combined ideological leverage of evangelical urgency and Jeffersonian promise. Using plain language and avoiding doctrinal

²⁶Nancey Murphy and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., “Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies,” *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (April 1989): 196.

²⁷Murphy and McClendon write concerning the thesis of the priority of the individual: “the individual has ontological priority over the collective—only individuals are ‘real’; the group is nothing more than its members.” *Ibid.* Jacques Maritain will hope to counter this hyper-individualism with his integral humanism in which persons only come to full human being as they are in communion with other persons and God. Maritain’s ideas will be examined in the next chapter.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 197.

refinements, he proclaimed a divine economy that was atomistic and competitive rather than wholistic and hierarchical. This kind of liberal individualism could be easily embraced at the grass roots. Ordinary people gladly championed the promise of personal autonomy as a message they could understand and a cause to which they could subscribe—in God’s name, no less.²⁹

Ontological individualism became ensconced in the Baptist mentality in such a way that it was tied with liberal democracy as a divine right that must be preserved as a highest good. In this move towards individualism, then, Baptists began to be wedded to the preservation of democracy as the divinely ordained vehicle through which the freedom of the individual conscience was preserved. Even ecclesiology came to reflect this turn, as the church as voluntary society became secondary to the faith of the individual believer. As Freeman notes, “In time, the democratic language of rights became so identified with the religious convictions and practices that subsequent generations of Baptists failed to distinguish between the two.”³⁰

E. Y. Mullins

By the late nineteenth century, foundationalism and individualism had become entrenched in Baptist thought. Nowhere is this better seen than in the thought of the “Godfather” of (Southern) Baptist theology, Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928). Mullins served as professor of theology and president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1899-1928. During this time, he also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1921-1924) and president of the fledgling Baptist World Alliance (1923-1928). During his years at the forefront of Baptist life, controversy raged as the denomination was being rocked by the fundamentalist-modernist debates. As a

²⁹Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 101.

³⁰Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?” 283.

consummate denominational politician, Mullins sought a mediating path through controversy, a pattern he would follow in most theological controversies.³¹ The best leaders in doctrinal issues, he notes, are those men “who have sympathy on the one hand with those who are perplexed by the difficulties to faith occasioned by modern science and philosophy, and on the other are resolved to be loyal to Christ and his gospel.”³²

Mullins took a moderating position between the two branches of foundationalism. In his work, *Freedom and Authority in Religion*, Mullins summarizes his understanding of the Bible: “Being the literary expression of living experience in the religious life, the spontaneous and free output of that experience under the guidance of God’s Spirit, it is precisely adapted to reproduce that experience in men today.”³³ While Mullins emphasizes the authority of Scripture, it is in relation to religious experience. That is, the Bible expresses the account of religious experience, and does so in such a way that continues to speak to the foundational religious experience of men and women in the present day. Taking up the issue of biblical infallibility, Mullins suggests that a defense of the Bible’s authority does not require answering all the objections that could be raised to claims of infallibility. The Bible’s authority is discovered not by proofs, but by demonstration. He writes, “It is the life in him which answers to the life the Scriptures

³¹Edgar Young Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908), 14. This idea is clearly exemplified in this statement from the beginning of *Axioms of Religion*: “The lines of doctrinal cleavage are as radical as at any time in the past, but the issues are new. As usual the extreme parties are doing most of the harm. On one side is the ultra-conservative, the man of the hammer and anvil method, who relies chiefly upon denunciation of opponents, and who cannot tolerate discussion of a fraternal basis; on the other is the ultra-progressive whose lofty contempt of the ‘traditionalist’ shuts him out from the ranks of sane scholarship and wise leadership. The really safe leaders of thought, however, are between these extremes.”

³²Ibid.

³³Edgar Young Mullins, *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1913), 402-03.

reveal which convinces him.”³⁴ He concludes that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God’s grace, and the Scriptures serve as the authoritative source of knowledge of that revelation. For the individual Christian, it is his or her experience with grace in the depths of his or her soul which allows that one to know Christ and understand the Scriptures. Thus, he offers what he terms “objective” and “subjective” foundations which work in harmony: objective Scriptures confirmed by subjective experience.³⁵

For Mullins, the Christian experience could not be completely identified with that of others in the liberal tradition who sought a universal experience that was free from particularity. Mullins describes the Christian experience as “the totality of the experience which becomes ours through our fellowship with God in Christ.”³⁶ There is a particularity to it in that it is the experience of conversion, regeneration, and all that properly belongs to life in Christian community. Yet, Mullins does attempt to universalize this experience, noting that the Christian experience of Christ is related to the “natural life of man,” so that “it is the unifying bond of all human experience.”³⁷ Thus, the Christian experience of Christ can be universalized to express a foundational epistemology which can be evident to all humans.

Mullins does draw upon the image of axioms from geometry, self-evident truths, to serve as a foundation as well for all religion. These axioms he puts forth to answer the

³⁴Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Roger Williams Press, 1917), 10. This work served as the text for theology classes at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for several decades.

³⁵Ibid., 11.

³⁶Ibid., 18.

³⁷Ibid., 19.

question, “What is the distinctive message of the Baptists to the world?”³⁸ He writes concerning the axioms, “It is the aim of this book to show that these universal and self-evident truths are simply the expression of the universal elements in Christianity and thus serve as the best statement of what the religion of Christ is in its essential nature.”³⁹ Mullins argues that the primary significance of Baptists is “the competency of the soul in religion.”⁴⁰ Because of the soul’s competency under God, “religion is a personal matter between the soul and God.”⁴¹ While this statement implies a strong individualism, Mullins does attempt to moderate this position by pointing out that soul competency embraces social relations as well as individualism. His assertion is that soul competency allows for individuals to sustain one another toward their mission and end. Yet, such social relations do not overcome the individual’s “right of private judgment as to the meaning of the Bible,” a key corollary to soul competency.⁴²

With Mullins, then, both foundationalism and a strong individualism are tied together in Baptist thought. Interestingly, Mullins attempts to stand upon both the liberal and the fundamentalist foundations, experience and the Bible, though it would seem experience does the lion’s share of the work in affirming and understanding Scripture. Soul competency is deemed the preeminent Baptist contribution to Christianity, and is defined such that it is the individual alone who stands before God, and under the unmediated leadership of the Spirit determines the interpretation of Scripture. Thus, for

³⁸Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 26.

³⁹Ibid., 50.

⁴⁰Ibid., 53.

⁴¹Ibid., 54.

⁴²Ibid., 56.

Mullins, the church exists as secondary to the individual Christian. He does not wish to deny the significance of the church, but for him it is a voluntary collection of like-minded individuals. The church is the product of individuals who have responded to God and are “inevitably drawn together by spiritual affinity into fellowship with each other through Christ.”⁴³ Keeping in mind his commitment to experience, he thus describes the church: “It is the social expression of the spiritual experiences common to a number of individuals.”⁴⁴

With soul competency as the key affirmation, Mullins is then able to develop his axioms as corollaries to this principle. His religio-civic axiom calls for a “free church in a free state.” This axiom he sees as readily understood and accepted by all people in the United States.⁴⁵ As such, this axiom evidences its universality and self-evident nature as people understand that church and state are to be distinct. He develops the Baptist understanding of this axiom by noting that church and state have different allegiances: the church to God and the state to law. He writes, “One is for the protection of life and property, the other for the promotion of the spiritual life.”⁴⁶ With this final move, Mullins has displayed his acceptance of the distinction of the spiritual from the temporal, such that the body becomes the concern of the state and the church only has concern for the spiritual.

⁴³Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 185.

⁴⁶Ibid., 196.

Southern Baptists after Mullins

In May 1920, the perceived deep connection between Baptist views of soul competency and religious liberty and American democracy were famously presented by George W. Truett on the steps of the United States Capitol during the Southern Baptist Convention being held in Washington, D.C. Truett calls religious liberty the “supreme contribution of the new world to the old,” quickly adding that it was the Baptists who were pre-eminent in pushing for this contribution.⁴⁷ Truett contends that the lordship of Christ is the essential principle from which all other key doctrinal points emerge, including religious liberty. Knowledge of Christ and his will for humans is found in the Bible. He writes,

Baptists hold that this law of Christianity, the Word of God, is the unchangeable and only law of Christ’s reign, and that whatever is not found in the law cannot be bound on the consciences of men, and that this law is a sacred deposit, an inviolable trust, which Christ’s friends are commissioned to guard and perpetuate wherever it may lead and whatever may be the cost of such trusteeship.⁴⁸

The Bible serves for Truett as the epistemological foundation from which knowledge of Christ’s will can be derived by all reasonable men. He specifically excludes traditions, councils, creeds, or other ecclesial impositions. From one’s reading of scripture alone religious liberty can be discovered as a principle of faith.

Significant to Truett’s argument is his contention that throughout the New Testament, the greatest emphasis is given to the individual.⁴⁹ This individual emphasis is concerned primarily, as it was with the earliest English Baptists, to affirm individual

⁴⁷George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” in *The Inspiration of Ideals*, ed. Powhatan W. James, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1950), 86.

⁴⁸Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹Ibid., 91.

accountability before God. Neither state churches nor infant baptism can account for the need for individual repentance. Truett's argument, however, reveals the turn that has been made in American Baptist theology that differentiates it from the earliest English Baptists who were concerned to preserve God's sovereign right to call people into his Kingdom. Truett writes, "The right of private judgment is the crown jewel of humanity, and for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown rights of the Son of God."⁵⁰ What Truett exemplifies is the Baptist failure to distinguish individual accountability before God from individuality in all aspects of faith. More importantly for Truett, individuality must be inherently tied with democracy, both in religious polity and civil political theory.⁵¹

Truett affirms that Christians are "members of two realms, the civil and the religious," and as such are to render proper service unto each.⁵² There is in this a call to good citizenship, which Truett notes has been the hallmark of Baptists: "Their love and loyalty to country have not been put to shame in any land."⁵³ What Truett cannot seem to conceive, however, is a circumstance in which "love and loyalty to country" place Christians in conflict with one another at the behest of their civil governments.⁵⁴ Thus for Truett, the cause of the democratic state rightly becomes the cause of the Christian.

⁵⁰Ibid., 92.

⁵¹C.f. Ibid., 97-98.

⁵²Ibid., 102.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴With this address following closely upon the close of World War I, Truett was not unaware that the combatants on each side were largely Western countries who comprised the "Christianized" world. Yet, he saw the war as one of ideology: the ideals of freedom and democracy (not the least of the principles being religious liberty) that were inculcated in the Christian schools of America against the ideals of tyranny and religious oppression taught in the schools of Germany. See Ibid., 107-108.

He determines that among those things of supreme value, “the integrity of one’s country is worth dying for. And, please God, the freedom and honour of the United States of America are worth dying for.”⁵⁵ The dualism of body and soul which has been previously noted is here evident in Truett’s contention. The church is to have charge of the spiritual while the state has claim to the body. What is becoming evident in Baptist theology as revealed in Truett’s statement is that it is viewed as one’s Christian duty to preserve the United States which is seen as a divinely inspired instantiation of the principles of individualism and democracy found in the Bible—a refrain that will be echoed by Jacques Maritain among Roman Catholics in subsequent decades.

Herschel H. Hobbs later in the twentieth century would take Mullins’s mantle as the pre-eminent Southern Baptist spokesman. Hobbs produced a short work entitled *What Baptists Believe*.⁵⁶ This work was published a year after adoption of the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* by the Southern Baptist Convention, a statement of faith for which Hobbs was the primary architect. In *What Baptists Believe*, Hobbs elaborates on the various statements in the BF&M. He is clear that his work does not represent “an official statement” of Southern Baptist belief, instead affirming that his “are the efforts of one Baptist to set forth what he believes that the Scriptures teach about certain elements of the Christian faith.”⁵⁷ Here again is affirmed the individualism and foundationalism already noted as becoming a hallmark of Baptist theology in the United States.

⁵⁵Ibid., 105.

⁵⁶Herschel Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964).

⁵⁷Ibid., 7.

When Hobbs speaks of the church, he describes it as a “divine institution,” built by and founded upon Christ.⁵⁸ The local church is “made up of baptized believers who are banded together to observe the ordinances, exercise spiritual discipline, and carry out the Great Commission (Acts 2:41-42; Matt. 28:18-20).”⁵⁹ On the issue of ordinances, Hobbs names two as significant for Baptists: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both are merely symbolic with baptism being an initiatory act performed upon a believer and the Lord’s Supper being a repetitive act of communion between humans and God.⁶⁰ As to the latter, Hobbs states that the act does not have a communal function among believers.⁶¹ Hobbs’s ecclesiology seems unable, however, to suggest any ontological connection between those who are gathered together beyond a shared commitment to Christ (even in this, because of Baptist individualism, that shared commitment may be variously understood and interpreted by all individuals present). Further, he leaves unstated how any church discipline is to be determined when such individualism leads to no basis on which to offer judgment. The purpose of the church, then, is the propagation of the Gospel, but it would seem that this mission becomes the only basis of unity for those gathered together. Unity is a practical result instead of any sort of ontological reality.

In turning to the implications of Baptist theology in terms of church-state relations, Hobbs returns to the idea that the civil ruler “renders a divinely ordained

⁵⁸Ibid., 77.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Baptists’ anti-sacramentalism has come into question in recent years as various Baptist scholars have begun to challenge the historicity of claims that Baptists have always rejected sacramental theology. For a collection of essays considering this issue, see Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Pater Noster Press, 2003).

⁶¹Hobbs writes, “Baptists are sometimes called ‘close communionists.’ This is a misnomer. The ‘communion’ is not between men but between God and man (1 Cor. 10:16). Here the communion is with Christ, not man.” Ibid., 85.

service,” so that “Government ... is elevated to the religious sphere.”⁶² In this, Hobbs shows similarities to the early English Baptists in recognizing civil government—whether democratic or not—as a divine ordinance. He affirms a “dual obligation” for the Christian both to God and to the state, with first allegiance being to God while recognizing legitimate functions of the civil government.⁶³ This idea of “dual obligation” seems to be different from Truett’s understanding of the Christian existing in two realms, and as such suggests a nuance in conceiving of religious liberty that has not always been observed by Baptists in America.

Hobbs does not appear to separate out the religious sphere from the civil sphere, or at least does not draw as hard of a line as had become common among previous Baptists in America. In the end, however, Hobbs betrays the founding theology upon which his conception of religious liberty rests, and in so doing, appeals not to God’s sovereignty, but to a strong anthropology. He writes that religious liberty “is based upon the dignity of each individual made in the ‘image of God’ (Gen. 1:27) and his competency to stand before God without the mediation of earthly priest or king (1 Tim. 2:1-6).”⁶⁴ With this, religious liberty is also “freedom for inward determination,” so that it is the individual who freely chooses to practice or not practice faith.⁶⁵ Though Hobbs draws upon earlier Baptist thinking to an extent, his reasoning is fully modern in that the individual human reason becomes the arbiter of truth.

⁶²Ibid., 120.

⁶³Ibid., 121.

⁶⁴Ibid., 124.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Though certainly not accounting for all Baptists, the preceding has displayed that for significant Baptist thinkers, those who shaped much of contemporary Baptist thought, epistemological foundationalism and individualism were driving factors in the formulation of their theology. This turn to modern thought took them away from the theology that earlier founded calls for religious liberty and helped to isolate the spiritual from the public realm, leaving the individual believer hopelessly divided between soul and body. Another contributing factor which aided in making Baptists upholders of the status quo and inherently bound to liberal democracy must now be considered: the mythology of the Lost Cause in the South.

Mythology of the Lost Cause

With Robert E. Lee's surrender and the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865, Southerners were forced to come to terms with the apparent failure of Southern virtue in "their moral-religious crusade against the atheistic North."⁶⁶ Their solution was to turn to the myth of the Lost Cause, the belief that Southern culture would yet persevere and be preserved as a bastion of civility, chivalry, and honor. Samuel S. Hill writes, "In a word, many southern whites have regarded their society as God's most favored. To a greater degree than any other, theirs approximates the ideals the Almighty has in mind for mankind everywhere."⁶⁷ Despite the loss of the Civil War, Southerners, particularly Southern ministers, began to focus on the possibility of spiritual victory, a preservation of all the richness of Southern culture in spite of the military defeat of the Confederacy.

⁶⁶Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 8.

⁶⁷Samuel S. Hill, *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 36.

With the myth of the Lost Cause, religion and culture became intimately entwined in the South, so that Southern culture and the Christian religion were almost indistinguishable. Thus, for ministers in the South the preservation of Southern culture became a fight to preserve God's ideal for humanity. The Lost Cause became focused on the necessity of preserving Southern identity in the face of industrialized, commercialized (Northern) society. The decline from past "virtue" became the evidence of the need to stem the loss of Southern identity with Northern advance to the South during Reconstruction. This became the social religion of the South. Wilson writes, "By maintaining Confederate virtue in the postbellum world, the South would be an example to the North in future days of reform. This was a Southern mission worth achieving."⁶⁸ Particularly, it was a mission to which Southern ministers could focus their preaching and around which they could build a Southern morality.

Bill Leonard describes the great Southern myth as this: "the genteel society—educated, erudite, and thoughtful; the relationship between the sexes, that is, chivalrous gentlemen and graceful ladies; the sense of neighborliness; and the nurturing of children to civic responsibility."⁶⁹ Walker Percy, the great Southern novelist and essayist, adds, "For Southern society was above all a society of manners, an incredible triumph of manners, and a twilight of manners seems a twilight of the world."⁷⁰ Particularly important to the maintaining of the right order was the proper places of the races. White Southerners continued to see the African-American as their charge as an inferior race,

⁶⁸Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 81.

⁶⁹Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 13.

⁷⁰Walker Percy, "Life in the South," in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 86.

one whose spiritual health was dependent upon the ministry of whites. As Rufus Spain points out, in the Southern mentality, emancipation of slaves came “because Southern slaveowners had failed in their duty to evangelize their servants. No evil was abolished by emancipation. Southern whites, therefore, still had the same obligation to the freedmen.”⁷¹ Therefore, as John Lee Eighmy concludes, through the end of the nineteenth century “Southern Baptists assumed the role of a cultural establishment by sanctifying a secular order devoted to states’ rights, white supremacy, laissez faire economics, and property rights.”⁷²

At the beginning of the twentieth century, and throughout the majority of the century, Southern Baptists as a whole continued to be defenders of the status quo in the South. Spain argues that “their importance as a social force was in supporting and perpetuating the standards prevailing in society at large.”⁷³ By identifying the instantiation of the Gospel with Southern culture and Southern standards of morality—including social and racial hierarchies—Baptists in the South tacitly denied that the Gospel instantiated its own culture. That is, the Gospel did not account for a particular practice and formation of a distinct society, but was ahistorical such that its ethic served only to inform the social mores of the already existing culture. By and large, the Gospel as it was understood among Baptists was concerned only with spiritual issues.

This is not to suggest that Baptists in the South were unconcerned with social issues, but rather that “the social issues over which Baptists were most concerned were

⁷¹Rufus Spain, *At Ease In Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961), 19.

⁷²John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, rev. and intro. Samuel S. Hill (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), xviii.

⁷³Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 214.

those which had some moral or religious implication for the individual or some significance for the denomination.”⁷⁴ Eighmy contends that Social Gospel concerns that originated in the North did have an influence on twentieth century Southern Baptist thought, but that such influence resulted in a divided interpretation of the church’s mission. On the one hand were those who continued to affirm that the church’s primary concern was to individual reformation, and thus tended to support the existing social order. On the other hand were those who stressed the Gospel’s concern for humans’ earthly welfare. Eighmy notes that these two themes competed throughout the decades of the twentieth century, with the latter winning favor in seminaries and among the cultural elite, while the former maintained sway with the masses of the denomination. He points to the democratic polity of Baptists as well as a continuing heavy emphasis on aggressive evangelism as the two factors that contrived to prevent the social consciousness from breaking the close connection between the Baptist churches in the South and the prevailing social order.⁷⁵

Southern Baptist churches placed themselves as upholders of the status quo in the South because in preserving the mythology of the Lost Cause, the great cultural heritage of the South, they were seeking to preserve what they believed to be God’s ideal for society. Particularly in the face of mounting modernism and liberalism that they perceived in the North, their fight was to maintain a culture that displayed all the ideals they felt exemplified the Gospel call. The result of this, however, was that the Baptist churches of the South offered little in the way of critique of the culture that they believed was God’s “Last and Only Hope.” They focused their ministry on personal evangelism

⁷⁴Ibid., 213.

⁷⁵Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, xviii-xx.

that saved souls and continued to propagate the culture of the South as God's ideal for humanity, including racial and economic inequality.

The Lost Cause and the Nation

The outbreak of World War I and particularly the election of Woodrow Wilson as president of the United States offered a connection for the South with the rest of the nation. Wilson was a man who had been raised in the South as the son of a Presbyterian minister. His election as president was confirmation for many Southerners that God was using now a product of Southern culture to influence the nation beyond the borders of Dixie.⁷⁶ Southerners began to see Wilson as God's instrument in leading the United States to defend the great virtues inculcated in the South against all the forces arrayed against democracy and Christianity in Europe. In this transformation, the mythology of the Lost Cause was also changed. Throughout the end of the nineteenth century, the Lost Cause had been imbued with a sense of tragedy, a failure of arms that left the South fighting to preserve a fading culture attacked on every side.⁷⁷ The World War I era, however, transformed the myth of the Lost Cause "into a more typically American

⁷⁶Wilson writes of Woodrow Wilson, "All along, then, God's destiny for the South included providing the nation with leaders, and Wilson was the most important of them all. Through him, the South's destiny and the nation's symbolically were one." *Baptized in Blood*, 178.

⁷⁷Walker Percy refers to this as the Stoicism of the South. He suggests that Southerners in the twentieth century see the crumbling of their culture and know that the days of the great Southern heroes and virtue have been "lost and lost for good." Concerning this, he adds, "For the Stoic there is no real hope. His finest hour is to sit tight-lipped and ironic while the world comes crashing down around him." "Life in the South," 86. Ralph Wood argues that Percy has perhaps misnamed his Stoic. He should instead be identified as a Catonist, following Cato the Younger who laments the fallen glory of Rome. Wood quotes this description of the Catonist from Richard King: "The Catonist fears the encroachment of alien values and impersonal forces which disrupt an aristocratic and organic order cemented by ties of family, status, tradition, and, sometimes, race or nationality." Ralph C. Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists* (Nortre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 139.

success story.”⁷⁸ Yet in this very transformation, Charles Wilson charges that the Lost Cause had failed because it had lost its prophetic aspect where it had been the voice of the defeated South lamenting the loss of virtue. He writes, “As it had unquestioningly defended the inherent virtue of the Confederacy, the ministers of the Lost Cause now almost blindly endorsed the sanctity of the American mission in World War I.”⁷⁹

Southerners began to identify themselves with the nation as a whole and the cause of the American destiny in spreading democracy around the world.

After World War I, there was great disillusionment in the South when the high ideals of the war were not achieved. The Lost Cause once again retreated into the South and a provincialism that held Southern culture as once again a remnant hope for the world. As modernity progressed and America continued its industrialization and urbanization, Southerners continued to hold to their ideas of the South as a distinctive culture that must be preserved against the creeping corruption of the modern world. Thus, Southern churches, and most prominently the Baptists, preached the ideals and morality of Southern culture as the ideals and morality of Christianity. They continued to support the status quo and affirmed the social order as it existed as that established by God.

The Case of Douglas Hudgins

Perhaps the clearest example of the disconnect between the church’s spiritual emphasis in the South and its tacit support of the status quo is seen in Douglas Hudgins,

⁷⁸Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 178.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Mississippi's most influential minister in the middle of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ From his position as pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (1946-1969), Hudgins not only held the most influential pastorate in the state, but he also served numerous civic organizations extending his influence beyond the Southern Baptist world.⁸¹ His tenure at FBC, Jackson came during the height of the Civil Rights movement, and many of the most influential segregationists were prominent members of his congregation. Notable among these was Ross Barnett, governor of Mississippi from 1960 to 1964 who defied the Justice Department's order that James Meredith be enrolled at the University of Mississippi. Also in the congregation were Thomas and Robert Hederman, owners of the state's two largest newspapers, both of which were used to espouse segregationist viewpoints. Another member, Tom Etheridge, was the Jackson *Daily News's* primary political columnist who used his column to lambaste civil rights workers as communists and atheists.⁸²

Beholden to the individualism that had come to dominate Baptist theology and wrapped in the mythology of the Lost Cause, Hudgins preached a Gospel of individual salvation. As such, the Gospel for Hudgins was solely concerned with individual salvation, not social matters deemed civil problems, particularly the agitation of the Civil

⁸⁰Ann Washburn McWilliams "W. Douglas Hudgins: The Man Of The Hour For Mississippi Baptists," *The Baptist Record*, January 30, 1969, 1. McWilliams writes of Hudgins upon his assuming the post of Executive Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, "Hardly a major news story has appeared concerning Mississippi Baptists in the past twenty years that did not somewhere carry the name of W. Douglas Hudgins."

⁸¹McWilliams notes that he was chaplain for the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol, chaplain of the Mississippi Wing of the Civic Air Patrol, president of the Jackson Rotary Club, and director of the Jackson Chamber of Commerce. "The Man Of The Hour," 5.

⁸²Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 89. Much of the information and analysis of Hudgins is dependent upon the work of Marsh in his chapter on Hudgins.

Rights movement.⁸³ When the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down in 1954, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a motion in support of the decision and calling on Baptists to work with the implications of the decision. At the convention meeting, Hudgins left a vote against the proposal, but had departed the convention floor to avoid casting it publicly.⁸⁴ He would explain to his congregation that the Convention's resolution was non-binding for any local church because Baptist polity held each local church autonomous. Marsh notes, however, that "the heart of Hudgins's remarks was his claim that the Supreme Court decision was 'a purely civic matter' and thus 'not appropriate nor necessary before a religious body.'"⁸⁵ Hudgins's theology, drawn from modern individualism and the removal of the spiritual to the religious realm outside of the public sphere, saw no place for issues of justice or civil rights within the concern of the Gospel. Individual salvation of the soul was the sole objective. The Gospel had nothing to say in civic matters.

During the height of the civil unrest in the 1960s, Hudgins continued to preach an otherworldly Gospel that focused on preserving the order and security of the individual soul. More importantly, Hudgins in preaching this Gospel tacitly approved of the provincial Southern social stratification that seemed to provide order and security for a way of life that those proponents of the Lost Cause believed was God's last hope. Even as violence increased, and members of his own congregation stoked the fires with segregationist writings and language, Hudgins refused to speak against the state of the

⁸³Marsh writes, "Hudgins preached a gospel of individual salvation and personal orderliness, construing civil rights activism as not only a defilement of social purity but even more as simply irrelevant to the proclamation of Jesus Christ as God." Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., 98-99.

⁸⁵Ibid., 100.

social divide in Mississippi. Such issues were not the concern of a Gospel that was concerned only with the soul. Marsh writes, “Hudgins was retreating to a piety that disconnected language from reality, which fashioned a serene, self-enclosed world, undisturbed by the sufferings of blacks and Jews.”⁸⁶ With other religious leaders throughout the South, Hudgins’s theology divided the spiritual from the temporal, silencing the church’s prophetic voice and thereby tying the church with the status quo.

Southern Baptist Theology Leaves the South

Historian Barry Hankins notes that throughout much of the twentieth century, Baptists in the South “had come to identify with southern culture and feel comfortable in their role of supporting and perpetuating its norms and mores.”⁸⁷ The Lost Cause mythology and modern individualism and foundationalism had shaped much of Baptist theology. Yet Baptists, even in the South, were never unified in how these ideas should necessarily work themselves out in practice. As has already been noted, the response to modernity followed distinct, though parallel, traditions: biblical foundationalism and experiential foundationalism. Within Baptist life there were both Social Gospel liberals and Landmarkists. A commitment to the denominational machinery and mission preserved the tenuous unity constantly threatened from the extremes of both conservatives and liberals. The “Grand Compromise” imposed by moderates at the center held the convention together through most of the twentieth century, allowing Southern Baptists to persevere without division for almost a half century longer than most denominations after the fundamentalist-modernist debates of the early twentieth

⁸⁶Ibid., 106.

⁸⁷Barry G. Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 1.

century.⁸⁸ The sense of regional unity and commitment to evangelism provided a unifying force that kept the convention intact despite threats from both extremes and the constant pull of individualism and local church autonomy.

The beginning of the end of the Grand Compromise came in 1979 when a group of Southern Baptist conservatives began to implement a plan for a take over of the Southern Baptist Convention as a means of halting what they believed to be a liberal drift in leadership and convention direction. There is no need here to retell the narrative of the denominational battles that consumed the 1980s and much of the 1990s, resulting in a sharp rightward turn for the SBC and the splintering of the compromise. This task has already ably been accomplished by others.⁸⁹ What is significant in the transformation of the SBC is the impetus behind the development of the theological consciousness of Southern Baptist conservatives. As Hankins notes, these conservative leaders “are convinced that American culture has turned hostile to traditional forms of faith and that the South has become more like the rest of the United States than ever before.”⁹⁰ As these conservatives began to recognize that the South was not immune to the pluralism and secularism that was affecting the rest of the nation, they turned to resources outside of the South to help give voice to their convictions.⁹¹

⁸⁸See Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope*, 31.

⁸⁹See Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope*; Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), David Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

⁹⁰Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 2.

⁹¹Nancy Ammerman notes that as early as the 1960s, conservatives “looked at the seeming chaos of the cities and the apparent impotence of liberal denominations, and they perceived a coming disaster if Southern Baptists did not remain vigilant. If Southern Baptists did not remain true to the Bible and committed to evangelism, they might end up like the liberal mainline churches and the unchurched millions that surrounded them.” *Baptist Battles*, 63.

Hankins argues that the key leaders in the conservative movement in the SBC “moved outside the South intellectually, and in some cases even geographically, and began to adopt an evangelical critique of American culture.”⁹² Prior to the emergence of these new Baptists conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s, Southern Baptists had resisted being labeled with the moniker “evangelical.”⁹³ Many in the moderate leadership who had controlled the centrist direction still associated evangelicals with the older fundamentalism, failing to realize that new evangelicals were emerging in the middle of the twentieth century who combined zeal for biblical authority with serious academic study. There is diversity among evangelicals, but as James Tull states, “new Evangelicals appear to remain united in their affirmation of the Lordship of Christ, of the necessity of an experience of regeneration, and of the supreme authority of the Scriptures.”⁹⁴ The new evangelicals rejected the separatism of the early twentieth century fundamentalists and sought to “critically reengage culture in an effort to have a broader influence in American life.”⁹⁵ It was with these new evangelicals that Southern Baptist conservatives

⁹²Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 2.

⁹³The classification of Southern Baptists as evangelicals has been cause for vigorous debate among Baptists in the last several decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, two books appeared focused on this particular issue: James Leo Garrett, Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), and David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993). See as well, Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Indicative of the Southern Baptist rejection of the label is the statement of Foy Valentine, former head of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. He states in response to President (and Southern Baptist) Jimmy Carter’s depiction as an evangelical, “Southern Baptists are not evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word. They want to claim us because we are big and successful and growing every year. But we have our own traditions, our own hymns, and more students in our seminaries than they have in all theirs put together. We don’t share their politics or their fussy fundamentalism, and we don’t want to get involved in their theological witch-hunts.” Quoted in Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 17.

⁹⁴James Tull, “The Shape of the Question,” in *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, 27.

⁹⁵Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 21.

would resonate and appropriate the theology and language of the culture war the evangelicals were waging, thus taking the ideology of the Lost Cause from the South and applying it to American culture as a whole.

The Southern Baptist conservatives influenced greatly by the northern evangelicals, particularly Francis Shaefter and Carl F. H. Henry, began to fear that American culture was becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity. Particularly, they began to question the moderate leadership of the SBC and their social agenda. As Hankins argues, the moderate leadership of the SBC during the turbulent years of the Civil Rights movement recognized that the tie between Baptists and Southern culture had allowed for the continued support of segregation and shameful views on race relations. From the conservatives' view, in being right on this issue, Baptist moderates "drew some very bad lessons. Essentially, they bought in to the whole progressivist impulse, not realizing that part of this agenda was the uprooting of religion from its historic place within American culture."⁹⁶ During the 1960s and 1970s, the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention focused on issues of peace, hunger relief, and economic justice, not only the traditional issues of alcohol, gambling, and pornography. Likewise, the Baptist Joint Committee continued to push for pluralistic separation of church and state. One issue in particular, that of school prayer, called forth strong opposition from the BJC, a stance which angered many conservatives.⁹⁷

Conservative leaders point to abortion as the key issue in signaling the larger problem with American culture as they saw it, and the need for theological conservatives

⁹⁶Ibid., 43.

⁹⁷Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 99-100.

to respond in ways progressive moderates were not.⁹⁸ The abortion issue was the watershed moment revealing for conservatives that moderates were unwilling or unable to recognize the deteriorating cultural landscape in America, yielding the field to liberal progressives. For Baptist conservatives, the heart of the issue it would seem is that in American society in the late twentieth century, there has been an increasing bias among the cultural elites against people of faith so that God has been removed from public discourse. Richard Land, director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission argues that what is taking place is "a titanic clash of the worldviews masquerading as a political correctness debate about whether I have the right to impose my religious views on you, or whether you have the right to tell me what I can and can't say or do when I step into the public square."⁹⁹ He calls for accommodation, which he describes as a neutral playing field in which all positions are on equal footing. That is, religion is not to be excluded from the public square in debates concerning moral and ethical issues and legislation.¹⁰⁰ Land suggests that excluding religious convictions from public debate excludes the majority of Americans from being able to express their convictions on issues of civil legislation. Even more, such exclusion of the religious is considered contrary to the founding principles of the country: "what we had in the formation of our country was an attempt to wed Judeo-Christian values with Enlightenment theories of self-government."¹⁰¹ For Land, the religious has historically been significant in American public dialogue and decision making. Conservatives want

⁹⁸Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 43-45.

⁹⁹Richard D. Land, *The Divided States of America? : What Liberals AND Conservatives are missing in the God-and-country shouting match!* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 15.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 147-153.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 163.

to assure that the religious remains in the field of play. What this implies from this view is an openness to school sponsored prayer, school vouchers, and other forms of aid to religious organizations, so long as such aid is nonpartisan. Thus, Land's accommodation may be equated with Esbeck's nonpreferentialist position.

Pointing to progressive evangelical Jim Wallis, Richard Land notes his agreement with Wallis that in the context of public debate, "somebody's moral values are going to get imposed." What distinguishes Land and the Southern Baptist conservatives from moderate and progressive evangelicals—and Baptists who share their convictions—is that though each side acknowledges that biblical values must come into play, they disagree over "how those values ought to be implemented and to what degree the government should be the agent of implementing them."¹⁰² Each side can appeal to the Baptist tradition of separation of church and state while supporting opposing positions on various church-state issues, traditions that can be traced back to Backus and Leland as noted in the previous chapter.¹⁰³

What is shared between both Baptist conservatives and moderates, however, is a commitment to liberal democratic political theory. Despite contentions over the nature of the engagement between the church and state, most contemporary Baptists share a theology that undergirds the present social order. Speaking from a position of pluralistic

¹⁰²Ibid., 142. For his part, James M. Dunn shares a similar perspective: "The political activism of right-wing Christians is not the problem. It is not that they are wrongly active but that they are actively wrong." "Christian Citizenship and Political Advocacy in the United States of America," *The Baptist Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (April 1999): 85.

¹⁰³Ammerman notes that during James Dunn's tenure as director of the Baptist Joint Committee when it was still funded by the SBC, Dunn opposed conservative calls for prayer in public schools during the Reagan administration, pointing to the historic Baptist rejection of such mixing of church and state. *Baptist Battles*, 99. Richard Land, however, includes as an appendix in *The Divided States of America?* a proposal for allowing prayer in public schools that he argues does not amount to state establishment of religion. *The Divided States?*, 245-47. Land is writing (and lobbying) as the director of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC, the institution established by Southern Baptist conservatives when they decided to defund the BJC.

separation, James M. Dunn expresses a sentiment that would likely be acceptable to most contemporary Baptists when he writes, “Not to take a stand in the political context is to support the status quo. To accept things as they are is to indicate either that one is satisfied with present policies, that the situation is hopeless, or that one’s religion has nothing relevant to say.”¹⁰⁴ Dunn, like Land, wants Christians to be involved in the political process as informed citizens. And, like Land, he does not believe that the religious is to be excluded from the public debate.¹⁰⁵ His fear is that in the contemporary setting there has been a “merger of a sort of fuzzy Judeo-Christian consensus with patriotic Americanism” to produce “a civil religion that constitutes a challenge to Church-State separation.”¹⁰⁶ This civil religion he sees as a rejection of the Baptist heritage of the institution of the church separated from that of the state. Yet, in the end for Dunn, “A certain political activism is Christian virtue.”¹⁰⁷

The Modern Social Imaginary

For contemporary Baptists in America across the political spectrum, the positions of Land and Dunn may be seen as typologies for views of church-state engagement with varying shades of understanding separation between them (and a few beyond them). Yet presupposed by each of these positions is, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor, a particular social imaginary. A social imaginary is for Taylor much more than simply a

¹⁰⁴Dunn, “Christian Citizenship,” 85.

¹⁰⁵“Religiously active people will not check their most deeply held beliefs at the door as they enter the arena. Rather, with all the risk involved, the demands of conscience informed by religion will be constitutionally brought to bear on public policy decisions.” James M. Dunn, “The Christian As Political Activist: an address delivered at the Faith and History Conference, October 19, 1984,” *Fides et Historia* 18, no. 1 (January 1986): 8.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

social theory. It is rather the way that people imagine their society, how it is to operate, expectations of it, and the “common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life.”¹⁰⁸ It is the way that the vast majority of the people in a particular society imagine their society to function and how they view their reality together. For Taylor, the modern social imaginary is that initiated by Hugo Grotius and brought to fruition by Locke. Taylor describes the picture of modern society in this way:

The picture of society is that of individuals who come together to form a political entity against a certain preexisting moral background and with certain ends in view. The moral background is one of natural rights; these people already have certain moral obligations toward each other. The ends sought are certain common benefits, of which security is the most important.¹⁰⁹

Taylor suggests that the Lockean idealization of political society allows for the conception of a “place to stand, mentally, outside of the polity, as it were, from which to judge its performance.”¹¹⁰ That is, Taylor suggests that Locke’s contractual image of society allowed for the creation of the concept of the public sphere—a space that transcends all topical spaces where many topical spaces are knit together and impartial debate is carried on rationally as to the proper activity for the republic. He notes that this is distinguished from older instances of the republic because debates carried on outside of the governing assembly in the ancient context were by those who would ultimately decide within the decision-making body. In the modern public sphere, the debate is “self-consciously seen as being outside power.”¹¹¹ It carries an extra-political status. This

¹⁰⁸Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 89.

extra-political status is viewed positively as then being free from partisan spirit and therefore solely rational. Thus, the public sphere “enable[s] the society to come to a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power.”¹¹²

Taylor suggests that this modern conception of the public sphere is distinguished from all that precedes it by noting two key steps. First, the members of the society come together in their pursuit of a common end (for Locke, this being happiness and the securing of bodily and material goods) and so form an association. The association so formed is seen as not being constituted by its political structures, but existing prior to and independent of them.¹¹³ Again, though, this extra-political association was not entirely new, but could be seen in such earlier concepts as the Stoic cosmopolis or even the Christian Church. The second step is that it is seen as completely secular, with nothing outside of the common action of the association that constitutes it. There is no reference to the divine as establishing the group or even to a set of laws that define the particular society. The society exists prior to the formation of the body politic, coming together on the basis of mutual obligations of service to one another, and so the compact to establish a political structure. The public is then the space where the society rationally engages questions that the political structure must engage. This, Taylor says, is uniquely modern and distinguishes the concept of the public sphere from all conceptions that preceded

¹¹²Ibid., 91.

¹¹³Ibid., 92. Maritain will present a similar conception of the “community” that gives rise to the “body politic.” Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1-15.

it.¹¹⁴ As Taylor writes, “An extrapolitical, secular, metatopical space: this is what the public sphere was and is.”¹¹⁵

Contemporary Baptists function out of this social imaginary such that individual Christians and the churches to which they voluntarily offer their membership see themselves as functioning within this “public sphere.” That is, the church is an institution of the preexistent society which has formed the particular body politic to which inherent, individual authority has been granted. Thus, it is the responsibility of the churches to produce good citizens who participate in this metatopical space to help shape “public policy” in ways that achieve the natural ends of this society: the good of security, property, and happiness. Christians are then to offer as private citizens their views, formed by their privatized Christian faith, of the ways to achieve these secular, natural, agreed upon ends. Barry Harvey writes, “The de facto social mission of the church is to help the state and the secondary associations of civil society maintain a harmonious equilibrium within the status quo. For some that means pursuing a ‘progressive’ political agenda, while others press for ‘traditional family values.’”¹¹⁶ While the means of achieving the ends of the liberal democratic state may be questioned—progressive social politics or family values—what remains unchallenged is the very imaginary that the church functions as an aspect of society, and that the preexistent society is that starting point from which the church is constituted. Most importantly, the church refuses to

¹¹⁴Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁶Barry Harvey, “Round and Round About the Town: The Ecclesial Dimension of Living in the Truth,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 108.

challenge the imaginary since the liberal democratic state has been tied with God's last hope of the Lost Cause.

It is imagining the social in this modern light that differentiates contemporary Baptists from their earliest forefathers. The early English Baptists stood at a transition point between the medieval world and the modern world. Taylor describes the medieval social imaginary as being hierarchical in which various classes worked to complement one another, but all recognized an order in which the spiritual was not separated from the temporal. The various classes provided mutual service to one another such that the "mutual service that classes render to each other when they stand in the right relation includes bringing them to the condition of their highest virtue."¹¹⁷ With the early English Baptists then, a challenge is seen to the order in which there are those set aside to pray (the clergy) while others are set aside to work (the laity). Yet it would seem that they do not imagine so much an ending of this order where spiritual and temporal integrate, but instead imagine that the hierarchical nature is to be questioned. In envisioning themselves as being called by God's sovereignty from the world into the true church (the Baptist argument for liberty of conscience as noted in chapter two), they are expanding the idea of the order that is given to bring God's Kingdom. It is not simply the priests, but all called by God who constitute a new society contrary to that of the world. They are not an institution of society, but rather a complementary society whose role is to work to bring the earthly society to its highest end through the partial instantiation of the Kingdom of God accomplished in their worship and practice.

As this chapter has argued, Baptists in the American context have functioned within the modern social imaginary theorized by Locke and exemplified in the political

¹¹⁷Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 11-13.

polity of the United States. The modern social imaginary starts with individuals who exist together in society constituted by a “debt of mutual service” to one another.¹¹⁸ In order to preserve the natural ends of property and security, they compact together to form a body politic. As Taylor notes, “In the modern ideal, mutual respect and service is directed toward serving our ordinary goals: life, liberty, sustenance of self and family.”¹¹⁹ Contemporary Baptists for the most part function within this social imaginary. The Baptist social conception is shaped by foundational theology and individualism that affirms the imaginary of a public space in which the individual is to work for the proper temporal ends of the state. Thus, these ordinary goals are proper ends to which society is to strive and which individual Christians, informed by their faith, should help to instantiate as members of society.

By functioning within the modern social imaginary, the church fails to imagine itself as its own body politic that calls people from one society into another. The religious is privatized and individualized in this imaginary, such that one’s Christian practice becomes extraneous to the one’s conception of temporal reality. It serves only to inform one’s engagement in the public square over questions of the best means to secure the natural ends of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Robert Wuthnow presents the imaginary clearly: “religious organizations have been widely seen as an example of the kinds of civic associations in which citizens’ values are mobilized and brought to bear on the public sphere.”¹²⁰ The church in this imaginary is not public, but is an aspect of

¹¹⁸Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America’s Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 107.

the individual's private life which then informs public activity. The public purpose of the individual Christian is to push to create in the one public society an ethic in line with one's private ideals about the moral order. Lost is the sense of the church itself as a society whose very presence calls forth people from the society of the world to discover their true end in the Kingdom of God.

To return then to Richard Land and James M. Dunn as typologies of Baptist church-state thought, it can be argued that though they often stand at opposite poles in terms of church-state issues, they do finally remain entrenched in the same social imaginary that informs their theology. For both, the desire is to encourage Christians to participate in the public world of politics, allowing their religious values to inform their activity. Neither, in fact, is opposed to religious values in the public sphere, so long as they are the values of individuals who act as such in engaging the political process. What neither seems to recognize, however, is that the Gospel itself calls for a distinct politic and that the liturgical activity of the church forms a distinct society. For contemporary Baptists, the Gospel is accommodated to the culture in which it finds itself, so that it must be translated for each particular political society. They do not understand that in the church the Gospel is performed as a unique politic, a practice not informing a society, but one creating a society. Land and Dunn each hold that Christianity must function within the social space of the state, where the church is that institution of society concerned with spiritual issues and morality. They cannot imagine that the church has its own politics that are counter to the politics of the state, sometimes working in harmony with the state's politics, and sometimes issuing forth in a prophetic counter-practice. This is the

product of the contemporary Baptist ecclesiology that relegates the church to the care of souls while leaving the body as the concern of the state.

Conclusion

What is being challenged is the Baptist social imagination. Baptists in the contemporary context do not share the same social imaginary that Baptists in seventeenth century England shared, and because of this, the understandings between the two time periods of the idea of liberty of conscience and religious liberty are not univocal. Seventeenth century Baptists, though in a time of transition to modern imaginaries, still held a sense in which the church itself was a society which stood counter to the society of the world. They did not share the modern conception of the preexistent society in which individuals compact together and institute a body politic. In their imagination, the church was not an institution of the foundational society, but they recognized the existence of a variety of societies. More importantly, the early Baptists still seemed to hold to a view that the ends to be achieved were all divinely appointed. They did not hold to the conception of ordinary ends that could be achieved apart from reference to the divine. The modern goal of security, property, and self happiness as temporal ends distinct from supernatural ends in God would have been foreign to early Baptists. Yet, contemporary, modern Baptists, beholden to the modern social imaginary espousing liberal democratic theory, confirm the church as an institution of society whose end is to serve the modern liberal democratic state in the production of good citizens, all the while policing any challenge to this imaginary.

The following chapter will examine the work of the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, and consider his political theory which shares many similarities with

contemporary Baptist thought. Maritain, like modern Baptists, affirms the temporal ends and the support of the modern liberal democratic state, yet he also faces significant critique from Radical Orthodoxy theologians.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jacques Maritain and the New Christendom

Introduction

While many Baptists and Catholics in recent years have found themselves politically aligned on issues with particular ethical slants—for instance, the abortion debates and gay marriage—based on their conservative values, historically they have been at odds in terms of political theory. Baptists as the strident supporters of religious liberty have viewed Catholics with suspicion because of the allegiance given to the pope and the remembrance of the persecution inflicted by Catholics on various dissenting groups throughout church history. Such concerns were reinforced in the mid-nineteenth century when Pius IX published the encyclical, *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), in which he condemned a variety of errors of modern thought. His syllabus included many of the key ideas supporting the separation of church and state and modern liberal democratic society.¹ Yet by the end of the century, Leo XIII would strike a much more conciliatory tone in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), acknowledging the right of private property and affirming that government should be to the benefit of the people.² While Catholics became more accommodated to liberal democracy, Baptists still viewed them as being distinctly different and worlds apart in terms of political theory.

¹This encyclical can be accessed at Papal Encyclicals Online: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>.

²This encyclical can be accessed at Papal Encyclicals Online: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113rerum.htm>.

In the twentieth century, one major stream of Catholic political theory attempting to affirm Christian presence while still supporting a separation of church and state would draw Catholics even closer to Baptist views. Particularly in a similar fashion to Baptists, this theory saw an inherent connection between the Gospel and democracy, holding that democracy was drawn from the very principles of the Gospel. This work would be accomplished primarily in the person of a French Catholic lay philosopher, Jacques Maritain. Maritain's philosophy would seek to found a pluralist democratic state on a Christian secular conception of the temporal realm. Maritain envisions a distinction between the spiritual plane and the temporal plane, the realm of the church and the realm of the state. His philosophy served as one of the significant tutors for Latin American political theory in the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in the church's engagement with the Latin American states.

This chapter will focus on Maritain's political philosophy and its implications for the church's relationship to the democratic state. After an examination of Maritain's key ideas, the critiques of his work offered by Gustavo Gutierrez and Radical Orthodoxy theologians Daniel Bell and William Cavanaugh will be considered. Particularly, it will be the critique of Maritain's distinction of planes separating the temporal from the spiritual that will be most significant. In the final chapter, it will be argued that this distinction as the foundation for ecclesiology and church-state relations bears striking resemblance to the Baptist social imagination discussed in the previous chapter and suggested that similar critiques may apply.

The Primacy of the Spiritual

Jacques Maritain was born in Paris in 1882 to a Catholic father and a Protestant mother. Following his parents' divorce when he was young, Maritain was baptized in the French Reformed Church, though throughout the years of his youth he considered himself an unbeliever.³ In 1906, together with his wife Raissa, a Russian Jew, Maritain converted to Roman Catholicism after a long search for truth. In 1910, following his wife's urging, Maritain began his study of the works of Thomas Aquinas. He declared, "Woe is me if I do not thomisticize."⁴ Maritain's philosophy would be driven by his Thomism, though some would argue that he often uses traditional Thomistic teachings and categories "to argue to a conclusion that would have horrified Saint Thomas."⁵

Through much of the 1920s, Maritain was involved with Action Française, the traditionalist political movement in France seeking to re-establish the monarchy and the traditional authority of the Catholic Church. The movement was led by Charles Maurras, an agnostic whose concern was not so much for the Catholic Church as it was for what he believed were the traditional values of the French nation that had been lost in the Revolution. Maurras, though an unbeliever, "cast himself in the role of a defender of Catholicism as a national tradition, a component part of French civilization."⁶ The crown and the church were for Maurras the means to the end of the true political order that he

³For a brief biography of Maritain's life, see Patrick McKinley Brennan, "Jacques Maritain (1882-1973): Commentary," in *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 108-113.

⁴Quoted in McKinley, "Commentary," 110.

⁵Paul E. Sigmund, "Maritain on Politics," in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. Deal Hudson and Matthew Mancini (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 161.

⁶Samuel M. Osgood, *French Royalism Under The Third and Fourth Republics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 106.

envisioned. Because of its perceived desire for the return of the Catholic Church to its traditional standing in the French political order, Action Française received the support of many conservative French Catholics and served as an outlet for their political activity. As such, Rome had taken notice of the movement and watched with concern as French Catholics, lay and cleric alike, swelled the ranks of Action Française.

In late 1926, Pope Pius XI became more stringent in his warnings against Catholic involvement in Action Française, stating, “In no case is it permissible for Catholics to belong to organizations in any way connected with the teachings of those who place party interests above religion.”⁷ This statement led many French Catholics to feel the pope was overstepping his authority, and planned to defy his warnings. The response from Maurras, thought to have had the aid of a French Jesuit Father in its production, was in part:

In view of France’s present situation, to kill the Action Française is not purely, or even primarily a religious act. It is a political act which would not only harm, but would actually deal a deathblow to France. To acquiesce to this deed would be treason. We shall not betray our country.⁸

Following this response from the leadership of Action Française, Pius XI officially condemned the movement on January 6, 1927. Though Maritain had spent much of the 1920s involved with the movement, he submitted to the pope’s authority and recognized the danger to the church in Maurras’s philosophy.

Maritain was one of the most significant French Catholic intellectuals to support the papal position. In 1927 he published *Primaauté du spirituel* (published in English as

⁷Quoted in Osgood, *French Royalism*, 110.

⁸Charles Maurras and Philippe Daudet, *Non Possumus*, quoted in Osgood, *French Royalism*, 111.

The Things That Are Not Caesar's).⁹ This work argues that the pope's action was a religious act and not a political one because his concern was with souls of Catholics. This work marked a key point in the emergence of Maritain's philosophy of the relation of the secular to the sacred, and the temporal to the spiritual. And, as Oscar Arnal concludes, "The shift of [Maritain's] intellectual skills to the Vatican camp constituted a serious blow to the Action Française and marked his emergence as the leading papal theologian in France."¹⁰

Primauté du spirituel served as Maritain's initial work in the realm of political theory, but he would continue to develop his political thinking in more systematic ways from this initial foray. Following a series of lectures in Spain in 1934, Maritain produced in 1936 what is perhaps his most important work, *Humanisme intégrale; problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (first published in English in 1938 as *True Humanism*, and later republished in a new translation as *Integral Humanism*).¹¹ In this work, Maritain argues for what he terms a theocentric humanism and proposes the formation of a new Christendom with the recognition of a Christian secular space. *Integral Humanism* would remain his most influential work on political theory until the 1951 publication of *Man and the State*, a work growing out of the Walgreen Lectures he presented at the University of Chicago in 1949.¹² This later work "included one of the

⁹Jacques Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931).

¹⁰Oscar L. Arnal, *Ambivalent Alliance: The Catholic Church and The Action Française 1899-1939* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1985), 128.

¹¹Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, trans. Margot Adamson (New York: Scribner's, 1938). The work was later retranslated as *Integral Humanism*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner's, 1968). All references to this work will follow the 1968 version.

¹²Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951).

most influential modern restatements of the Thomistic theory of natural law,” a theory Maritain links closely with natural rights.¹³ It will be to these two works that primary attention is given to summarize Maritain’s political philosophy in this chapter.

Integral Humanism

Maritain’s criticism of the modern world is that it has come to be dominated by what he describes as a secular, anthropocentric humanism. He points to a medieval understanding in which Catholic theology began to posit a realm of pure nature distinct from the supernatural. Once this division is accomplished, Maritain argues, “Man and human life are ordered to two different absolutely ultimate ends, a purely natural ultimate end, which is perfect prosperity here on earth, and a supernatural ultimate end, which is perfect beatitude in heaven.”¹⁴ This medieval conception, wrongly developed, left humans divided in two such that they only have need of reason for gaining the natural end, while their “believing double” has worship and prayer for gaining heaven. For Maritain, this mitigated humanism is only a short step to absolute humanism which throws off the supernatural entirely.¹⁵

Maritain charges that it was Protestantism’s overemphasis on original sin that created a pessimism that was countered in the Renaissance’s optimism towards the ability of human reason. This second move in the Renaissance is what led to the emergence of an anthropocentric humanism which “believes that man himself is the center of man, and therefore of all things.” This modern humanism is to be contrasted with a theocentric or

¹³Sigmund, “Maritain on Politics,” 155.

¹⁴Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 22.

¹⁵Ibid.

truly Christian humanism which recognizes God as the center of man; “it implies the Christian conception of man, sinner and redeemed, and the Christian conception of grace and freedom.”¹⁶ Anthropocentric humanism is for Maritain the tragedy of a modern humanism because it finally leads to atheism as God is distanced more and more from the temporal world, a move most evident in Marxism.

For Maritain, theocentric humanism is an integral humanism in that it recognizes with Thomas Aquinas that humans need not be divided between the spiritual and the temporal. Rather, the fullness of the temporal “is invaded, traversed, imbued even to its slightest actualization by creative causality.”¹⁷ Maritain believes that the new Christendom which will emerge following the modern anthropocentric humanism, will be a recognition of not only human frailty and sinfulness—the emphasis particularly of Protestant Reformed theology—but also of the image of God that remains in humanity—an image overdrawn in modern rationalism. Thus, humanism will be integral in its recognition of both supernatural grace and temporal activity in creating a full humanity. Such a view will overcome what Maritain argues is a dualism that has divided humans in Christian theology. He points to a dualism that “has obeyed two opposite rhythms, a religious rhythm for the time of the Church and of worship, a naturalist rhythm for the time of the world and of profane life.”¹⁸ It is how Maritain seeks to harmonize these two rhythms that will define his new Christendom and an integral humanism.

Tied with this idea of integral humanism is Maritain’s Thomistic distinction between the individual and the person, a distinction based on the tension of the material

¹⁶Ibid., 27-28.

¹⁷Ibid., 75.

¹⁸Ibid., 78.

and the spiritual. Drawing on Aquinas's conception of being, Maritain contends that individuality is rooted in materiality. That is, an individual is a particular instance of matter being shaped by a "form" or "soul" and thus constitutes a substantial unit distinct from other individuals.¹⁹ In this, Maritain rejects Descartes' view—the basis for the modern concept of the human—of the soul as thought existing separately from the body. Maritain follows Aquinas in holding that the soul and body together constitute the individual, so that the individual is individualized by the very fact of its limitation to a particular space by matter. Personality on the other hand is related to the full expression of human being. Maritain writes, "Personality is the subsistence of the spiritual soul communicated to the human composite."²⁰ Personality reaches beyond the individualism and particularism of the material and the soul to express itself in knowledge and love. Thus personality also requires communication with others and the divine. It is finally in personality that the human resembles God and participates in the life of God as well as life in community.²¹

Maritain is attempting to overcome the modern dualistic conception of the individual as autonomous thinking mind divorced from a material body. To this extent, he hopes that his integral humanism will preserve a sense of graced nature, such that the temporal realm is not completely divested of the divine. It will be shown later that he does offer autonomy to the temporal, but yet even as he will argue for temporal ultimate ends, he will continue to point to an absolute end in God. By making use of the

¹⁹Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 25.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 31.

²¹Sigmund, "Maritain on Politics," 159. Sigmund notes, "Personality is thus rooted in a transcendent and spiritual conception of humanity that will affect the way the society is organized, leading it to recognize the rights of persons as beings who are free, social, and spiritual."

Thomistic idea of participation in the divine by all persons, however, he is attempting to combat what he considers both Protestant and Machiavellian views of the human that ultimately lead to the modern concept of the individual as an autonomous thinking self. As noted, the Protestant view, in Maritain's understanding, crushes the human under the weight of sin to the point where grace is something added secondarily, but not part of one's constitution. Machiavelli's philosophy is anthropocentric in its concern for power to the extent that there is no place for the divine. It is humans grasping for their own ends. By arguing that personality is tied to participation in the divine Maritain can relate the temporal to the supernatural, though ultimately allowing for ends distinct to each realm.²²

The Things of Caesar and the Things of God

Maritain describes the modern age as a secular age, but this description is not necessarily for him a negative portrayal. Earlier ages were defined as sacral in that there was little distinction between the state and the church. He notes particularly the medieval period as a sacral age, characterized "by the fact that the unity of faith was a prerequisite for political unity, and that the basic frame of reference was the unity of that social body, religio-political in nature, which was the *respublica Christiana*."²³ The secular nature of the modern age is characterized by the temporal society gaining "complete differentiation and full autonomy," an order called for by Christ when he distinguished the things that

²²Charles A. Fecher, *The Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1953), 164. Fecher notes that the unique contribution of Maritain the relation of the individual and the person. In describing this he writes, "It is perfectly licit to regard man purely from the standpoint of individuality, with all the limitations that that implies; it is just as licit to consider him purely from the standpoint of the person, with all of the freedom and relative perfections that personality carries in its train. Confusion and difficulty can arise *only when the properties of the one are mistaken for the properties of the other.*" (Italics original)

²³Maritain, *Man and the State*, 157.

belong to Caesar from the things that belong to God.²⁴ Thus, for Maritain, while the autonomy of the temporal realm is a characteristic of the divine order, he argues that the process of differentiation in the modern world was “spoiled ... by a most aggressive and stupid process of insulation from, and finally rejection of, God and the Gospel in the sphere of social and political life.”²⁵ The folly of the modern age is in imagining the autonomy of the secular order as implying that it can function without the leaven of the Gospel. For Maritain, the idea of freedom that drives the modern secular world is a product of the implicit working of the Gospel in the world.²⁶

There is a definite hierarchy for Maritain in the relation of the temporal and the supernatural, a hierarchy that keeps the temporal from finally being completely autonomous from the supernatural. The attempt by humans to completely divorce the temporal from the divine is marked by the dualism of the modern world in which the material is separated from the spiritual in the human. Maritain argues, however, that reason only functions rightly as a control of the senses when it is rightly subjected to God. Thus, the modern hope of establishing peace, justice, and freedom through the dominance of reason is not entirely misguided, but reason itself is to be subjected to God. Thus for Maritain, this dominion of God over reason “is the essential condition of order and peace in the human being, and this can only be achieved through faith and

²⁴Ibid., 159.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶William J. Nottingham, *Christian Faith and Secular Action: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Jacques Maritain* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1968), 116. Nottingham writes, “Maritain admits that the gospel often has been misunderstood and disfigured, but he insists that the active inspiration of the gospel has awakened in the secular conscience not only the dignity of the human person but also the higher values of life in the world: liberation from misery, servitude, and the exploitation of man by man; in a word, freedom.”

supernatural love.”²⁷ Maritain’s concern is to provide autonomy for the temporal sphere where political activity takes place apart from direct church activity; however, he does not wish to void the temporal of the divine dominion completely. The supernatural retains dominion over the temporal, even while the temporal is granted a measure of autonomy.²⁸

In his defense of Pius XI’s condemnation of Action Française in *The Things That Are Not Caesar’s*, Maritain argues that the pope did not *directly* involve the church in the political realm, but only exerted an *indirect* power by consequence of his direct activity in the religious realm. This is an important distinction for Maritain who asserts that the distinguishing of the two powers, spiritual and temporal, “is the achievement of the Christian centuries and their glory.”²⁹ He notes in the preface to the English edition that following the work’s original publication, he received public criticism for attempting to read present doctrine back into the past.³⁰ He argues, however, that though it would appear that the church of the Middle Ages interacted with the state on the basis of a different doctrine—so that the church affected coercive control over the state—this is in actuality the difference of “modalities” of engagement, not a different doctrine. The

²⁷Jacques Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar’s*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), xxv.

²⁸John P. Hittinger, “The Cooperation of Church and State: Maritain’s Argument from the Unity of the Person,” in *Reassessing the Liberal State: Reading Maritain’s Man and the State*, ed. Timothy Fuller and John P. Hittinger (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2001), 186. Concerning the relation of the temporal to the spiritual, Hittinger writes, “So the autonomy of the temporal sphere is recognized and even celebrated, and the influence of the Church is to stimulate within the very political order its own proper excellence and achievement of its own proper end. It requires a distinct metaphysical conception, analogous to the relation of nature and grace—that grace does not destroy but rather builds upon and perfects nature. . . .The temporal itself bears within itself the mark of the divine, a *quid divinum*.”

²⁹Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar’s*, 1.

³⁰Maritain points to a review article by Karl Winter, “Kritische Bemerkungen zu Jacques Maritains Lehre von der *Potestas indirecta*,” *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 9:1 (October 1929). See *The Things That Are Not Caesar’s*, vi-vii, particularly n. 1.

doctrine of the spiritual's ultimate authority over the temporal has remained the same, always affirming that its influence in the temporal be indirect.³¹

Building on the doctrine of the two swords, Maritain argues that the church's role is to exercise direct power only in the spiritual realm; that is, concerning the order of salvation, faith and morals, administration of sacraments, and the religious discipline of the clerics and laymen alike.³² The temporal sword has legitimate authority to wield its power in the political realm and to be independent of the spiritual sword. Because the spiritual and the temporal realms are autonomous, but not completely separate,³³ and because the temporal is ultimately subject to the spiritual, in acting with direct authority in spiritual issues, the church may wield indirect power in the temporal realm. Such an influence occurs when the church speaks to issues that are properly spiritual, but have bearing upon temporal affairs. Maritain writes, "The Church has thus a right of authority over the political or temporal itself, not because of political things, but because of the spiritual principle involved."³⁴ In answering the charges put forward by Action Française that the pope was overstepping his authority by condemning what was a political enterprise, Maritain responds that the condemnation was not a result of the pope opposing a particular political party—an action that would have constituted direct power in the

³¹Maritain acknowledges that the medieval world and modern world inhabit vastly different circumstances. However, he contends, "The Church, therefore, in our day, in her relations with States, acts according to modalities very different from those of the Middle Ages. The error in this case would be to think that, because the contingent modalities of practice vary, the doctrine determining the supreme spiritual standards of that same practice also similarly varies." Ibid., vii-viii.

³²Ibid., 8-9.

³³In using the language of "autonomous" and "separate," I am attempting to remain faithful to the translator's choice of vocabulary in *Integral Humanism*. In describing the distinct planes of activity between the spiritual and the temporal, Maritain will argue that the temporal is autonomous and "distinct," but not "separate." See *Integral Humanism*, 292. The autonomy of the temporal will be in relation to its common temporal end, a point to be dealt with later in this chapter.

³⁴Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, 12.

political realm. Instead, the basis of the papal intervention was “the prohibition of erroneous teaching threatening the integrity of the Catholic faith and morals and the rectitude of the Catholic mind.”³⁵ The church action was driven by its concern for the spiritual, though its indirect effect was felt in the political sphere.

The Spiritual and the Temporal

The intersection of the temporal realm and the spiritual realm is found only within the human person. Maritain suggests that persons are to be simultaneously members of two states: the terrestrial state and the universal state of the church. The terrestrial state allows for the normal development of our nature, but the supernatural grace found within the church is needed for our full participation in our humanity (here again relying on his distinction between an individual and a person).³⁶ Most importantly for Maritain’s political theory is his contention that human life has two ultimate ends: “an ultimate end *in a given order*, which is the terrestrial common good, ... and an *absolute* ultimate end, which is the transcendent, eternal common good.”³⁷ What Maritain strives to offer is an accounting of life that continues to affirm the Thomistic idea that the end of human life is found in God, while yet providing a basis for allowing autonomous temporal ends related to the good of the state. Yet, the temporal ultimate end that is aided by culture and civilization remains subordinate to the absolute spiritual end in that ideally the temporal

³⁵Ibid., xii.

³⁶Ibid., 4-5. Normal development is to an extent different from one’s participation in full humanity which requires the grace found only in the church.

³⁷Maritain, *Man and the State*, 62. Italics in the original.

good will help to facilitate a person's pursuit of the absolute end.³⁸ It may be said then that the temporal political order in seeking the end of the good life for individuals in the body politic therefore performs its proper subordinate role to the spiritual realm by facilitating the formation of an efficacious space in which persons might seek their ultimate eternal end.

For Maritain, a proper Christian doctrine of the temporal world does not leave it void of the divine, but neither does it confuse the world with the church as happened in the Middle Ages. He argues that the world is rightly seen as a disputed realm, torn between three different claimants: God, man, and the devil. Man's task is to wrest the world from the devil, an unending task in the present age, but a task undertaken with the knowledge that the world is saved "in hope" by God as it is "on march toward the kingdom of God."³⁹ The world is distinguished from the church in that the church, also on march towards the kingdom, is holy. Because both world and church have their absolute end in the Kingdom, however, it is incumbent on the Christian to work to realize "a refraction in the world of the Gospel exigencies," even though the realization will always be deficient.⁴⁰ Because the world is both the realm of God and the devil, even as it is on march towards the Kingdom, it is also on march towards reprobation. Thus, the Christian is to work not to make the world the Kingdom, but to make of the world, within the historical context in which this one finds him/herself, a place of "a truly and fully

³⁸Maritain writes, "In the eyes of the Christian, culture and civilization, being ordered to a terrestrial end, must be referred and subordinated to the eternal life which is the end of religion, and must procure the terrestrial good and the development of the diverse natural activities of man according to an efficacious attention to the eternal interests of the person and in such a manner as to facilitate the access of the latter to his supernatural ultimate end." *Integral Humanism*, 97.

³⁹Ibid., 108.

⁴⁰Ibid.

human earthly life.” This means the Christian is to strive for a world “whose social structures have as their measure justice, the dignity of the human person, and fraternal love.”⁴¹

As the temporal has the absolute end in the Kingdom, it shares the same end as the spiritual to which it is subordinate. This sharing of absolute end keeps the two realms from finally being distinct or in conflict. Yet, the temporal is also granted by Maritain certain ultimate ends proper to its nature, and it is to this end apart from the supernatural that the world also strives. Within the temporal world, Christians are called to work for the attainment of this distinct worldly end. By recognizing the Christian’s call to work for the transformation of the temporal order by allowing the legitimacy of its ultimate ends, Maritain conceptualizes a secular order with ends ordered to human activities opposed to an order whose ends are consecrated towards the preaching of the Word and distribution of Sacraments. They are not two orders opposed as evil to good. Both can have properly good ends, both of which ideally tend towards sanctity. As Maritain concludes, “For Gospel justice demands of its very nature to penetrate everything, to take possession of everything, to make its way into the innermost recesses of the world.”⁴² Christians are to work for a proportionate realization of the Gospel exigencies in the world, though it will always be finally unrealized because of sin that mars the secular order.

⁴¹Ibid., 111.

⁴²Ibid., 125.

The Distinction of Planes

The summary thus far leads now to a clear explication of Maritain's conception of how his understanding of two realms corresponds to the activity of Christians in the world. Maritain suggests three distinct planes of Christian activity. The first plane is that of the spiritual where Christians "act as members of the Mystical Body of Christ."⁴³ Such activity relates to liturgical and sacramental practice, works of mercy, or development of virtue, anything that has as its determining object God, eternal life, and the redemptive work of Christ. "This," Maritain describes, "is the plane of the Church itself."⁴⁴

The second plane is the plane of the temporal in which the Christian acts as a member of the terrestrial city and engages in the activities ordered to human life. This includes aspects of intellect and morality, as well as scientific, artistic, social and political engagement. Maritain argues that such activity, "while always, if it is right, being turned toward God as its final end, has as its direct determining aim goods which are not eternal life, but which concern in a general way the things of time, the work of civilization or of culture."⁴⁵ This plane of activity engages the temporal order as the plane of the world.

Maritain asserts that these first two planes of activity are clearly distinct, and must be so. He returns again to Jesus' statement concerning the things of Caesar and the things of God. The spiritual order "should vivify to its most intimate depths the order of terrestrial civilization," but the orders remain distinct.⁴⁶ With this stated, however,

⁴³Ibid., 291.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 292.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Maritain argues that the planes of activity cannot be separated, for to do so would divide the Christian person. One half would be dedicated to eternal things, while the other half would be given to earthly things. Such a division of the person would not affirm the fully integral humanism that Maritain espouses. This splitting, he argues, is the very fault of much modern practice—a philosophy he traces to Machiavelli, the Protestant Reformation, and Cartesian separatism—where the individual is expected to have a religious life separated from his/her life in civil society.⁴⁷ Rather, the Christian transformed by grace understands that action reveals being, so that “if grace takes hold of us and remakes us in the depth of our being, it is so that our whole action should feel its effects and be illuminated by it.”⁴⁸ Thus, even when one is acting fully within the realm of human activity in the temporal realm—say in politics or house building—one’s activity is always informed and directed by Christian faith and wisdom from the spiritual realm.

In showing that the planes of activity remain distinct, though the temporal is always subordinate to the spiritual, Maritain is led to a key distinction which will inform his theory of church-state relations. Maritain argues that when a person is acting within the spiritual plane and speaks of things relating to the church and salvation, this one is acting *as a Christian as such*, engaging Christ’s church. When, however, the Christian is acting within the temporal plane that one acts *as Christian*, engaging only him/herself, not for or as the church. That is, acting as Christian entails to *act Christianly*, informed by the principles of the Gospel, but not in one’s activity as Christian committing the

⁴⁷Ibid., 292-93. Maritain says that such a conception is to have the “new man” created in Christ strike a bargain with the “old man” such that the latter continues to serve Mammon.

⁴⁸Ibid., 293.

church to a particular action in the temporal realm.⁴⁹ Here, though, is where Maritain's integral humanism becomes evident. In acting within the temporal realm, one acts as a whole self not divorced from his/her Christianity, even though not acting as a Christian as such. To act as Christian is to act as one "who by my faith, my baptism, and my confirmation . . . have the vocation of infusing into the world, wherever I am, a Christian sap."⁵⁰ Thus, Maritain can argue that one acting as Christian does not imperil the world in a new sort of medieval Christendom in which all is subjected to "the dark perils of a catastrophic *supernaturalism*" that oversteps the rightful activity of the church.⁵¹ Yet, in the same way such a distinction in activity does not leave Christians separated from the temporal plane, but calls them to Christianly informed activity and concern for the world.

There is, however, a third plane of Christian activity as well, one which Maritain argues is only accidentally distinct from the first plane. In this third plane, the Christian acts as a Christian as such, and to this extent his activity engages the church. What distinguishes this plane from the first plane is that this activity has connection to the second plane in the effects of the activity. Maritain posits two ways in which activity in the third plane touches the second. First, there are revealed truths of which the church has deposit, "which direct from above the temporal thought and activity of the Christian."⁵² Maritain points to encyclicals by Leo XIII and Pius XI that express "the principles of a Christian political, social, and economic wisdom" which as theological

⁴⁹In using the terminology of "as a Christian as such" and "as Christian" I am again following the translator's word choice to distinguish the two modes of action between the spiritual and the temporal realms.

⁵⁰Ibid., 294.

⁵¹Ibid., 295.

⁵²Ibid., 296.

doctrines offer foundation for the contingencies of temporal activity.⁵³ Second, are those questions that relate to particular matters of the temporal order, but which directly or indirectly concern the issues of salvation. Such questions would relate to issues like marriage and education, which, though relating to the temporal order, must be primarily considered in their spiritual relation to salvation. For Maritain, the earthly will suffer detriment should the temporal aspect of such questions not take account of the supratemporal good of the human person as it relates to the questions.

The practical implication of this distinction of planes for Maritain is that the first and the third planes should be characterized by unity of Christians (or more accurately, Catholics). In the first plane, which is that of the church where a Christian acts as a Christian as such, because the activity relates to the church and issues of salvation, Christians are to be unified in belief and practice. Likewise, in the third plane where the activity is again as Christians as such, though such activity engages temporal issues, because the end good is still tied with salvation and the defense of religious interests, once again unity is required. It is on the second plane, however, the temporal realm where the direct end good is related to human activities that diversity is the rule.

Maritain writes,

When the objective is the earthly life of men, when it concerns earthly interests, earthly goods, this or that ideal of the earthly common good and the ways and means of realizing it, it is normal that a unanimity whose center is of the supratemporal order should break up, and that Christians who receive Communion at the same table should find themselves divided in the body politic.⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid., 296-97.

⁵⁴Ibid., 301.

Thus Maritain envisions that Catholics who find a spiritual unity in the church may likely discover themselves facing off as members of different political parties contesting the issue of the earthly common good.

The Democratic State

The question of the earthly common good leads to Maritain's conception of the democratic state. Maritain's foundational idea driving his discussion of the relation of the church to the state is his conviction that democracy is the fruit of the Gospel, and modern democracies have failed in their full realization of the democratic ideal by losing sight of the fact that democracy needs a religious underpinning.⁵⁵ He turns again to the idea of Christianity as leaven in the world, not so much that Christianity must be tied to democracy, but that democracy is tied to Christianity. It is necessary, then, to affirm "that democracy is linked to Christianity and that the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel."⁵⁶ Maritain is rejecting here again modern democratic thought that marks out the political realm as ultimately separate from the religious. Because democracy is the temporal manifestation of the Gospel, it is the case that Christians engage this temporal realm as Christians, autonomous persons who hold Christian faith, and necessarily so since their informed Christian consciences help continue to shape the democratic ideal.

Yet, Maritain also affirms that the temporal realm has its own ultimate end which is the common good of the body politic. While this good will ultimately aid in the

⁵⁵Maritain writes, "This form and ideal of common life, which we call democracy, springs in its essentials from the inspiration of the Gospel and cannot subsist without it." *Christianity and Democracy*, trans. Doris C. Anson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 27.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 37.

orientation of individuals to the absolute end in God, it is not directly oriented to that latter end. Thus, the common temporal good of the secular order is determined by the body politic, and here is where Maritain rejects the Christian involvement as such. For to seek Christian activity as such would return to a medieval Christendom that often lost sight of the things that are Caesar's as being distinct from the things that are God's. Rather, Maritain argues that modern democracy, renewed from its nineteenth century rationalist separation from Christian inspiration, will be pluralistic. The implication of this pluralism does not disregard that the democracy recognizes its Christian inspiration, but that the body politic recognizes that people who hold different religious and philosophical creeds "could and should cooperate in the common task and for the common welfare, provided they similarly assent to the basic tenets of a society of free men."⁵⁷ In Maritain's New Christendom, it is not the religious that secures unity for the body politic, but a pluralistic democracy will understand that even persons from differing religious traditions can agree to certain temporal common end goods so long as the reasons for their agreement are not considered.

Even as the church serves to universalize in the spiritual realm, the particularity of the body politic takes on a unifying role within the pluralism of the temporal realm. Maritain argues that the preservation of the democratic ideal requires a "civic or secular faith," which provides "a fundamental agreement between minds and wills on the bases of life in common." Such agreement means that the democracy "is aware of itself and its principles, and it must be capable of defending and promoting its own conception of

⁵⁷Maritain, *Man and the State*, 109. Later in this work, Maritain adds, "The unity of religion is not a prerequisite for political unity, and men subscribing to diverse religious or non-religious creeds have to share in and work for the same political or temporal common good." 160.

social and political life.”⁵⁸ While various parties within the democracy may disagree as to how this particular end is to be achieved, all must hold to the idea that the ideal of freedom and democratic practice is valid and to be upheld. This must be the temporal good to which all other temporal ends are subordinated, so that in spite of religious creed or lineage leading to different views as to the means to the end, the end must be seen as ultimate. Education becomes the primary means of inculcating this secular faith, so that “the goal aimed at by the educational system and the State is unity—unity in the common adherence to the democratic charter.”⁵⁹ Even within this educational system, however, the pluralistic nature of the state remains evident as teachers are free to express their own convictions that inspire their teaching of the democratic charter.

The actual engagement of Christianity with the state is then not a relation between the church and the state since these two institutions occupy distinct realms. Rather, the influence of the spiritual in the temporal happens by way of Christians acting as Christians within the body politic—acting as persons whose consciences are informed by the Gospel. Christian citizens who are members of the church have an impact on the common good as they participate in the various institutions of the body politic that seek to determine and establish the temporal common good. For Maritain, the church is in the body politic to the extent that its members are active in temporal institutions. He adds:

While being *in* the body politic—in every body politic—through a given number of her members and her institutions, the Church as such, the Church in her essence, is not a part but a whole; she is an absolutely universal realm stretching all over the world—*above* the body politic and every body politic.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ibid., 110, 109.

⁵⁹Ibid., 122.

⁶⁰Ibid., 152.

The church acts as “vivifying inspiration” to the body politic through the activity of its members informed by Christian conscience. In such a way the church exerts moral influence while eschewing civil power in seeking to rightly shape the common temporal good by virtue of the church’s superior position in the spiritual plane.⁶¹ Yet these Christian citizens remain free in their consciences to make judgments informed by the enlightenment of the church on each matter pertaining to the common good, and such judgments may differ. Here again, the Christian acts in the temporal plane as a Christian, but not as a Christian as such, thus diversity is possible.

To return again to Maritain’s idea that democracy needs Christianity, this inspiration of Christians within the body politic becomes a necessity for democracy to function as it should. Though the political is related to matters of the world, to an earthly common good, such a good finally cannot be attained apart from the virtuous formation of persons. Virtue is the necessary value of citizens so that they function within the democracy to seek a common good. Maritain writes, “Politics deal with matters and interests of the world and they depend upon passions natural to man and upon reason. But the point I wish to make here is that without goodness, love and charity, all that is best in us ... turns in our hands to an unhappy use.”⁶² The implication of this statement could suggest that the church provides spiritual formation to create good citizens for the democracy: those who rightly pursue the temporal common good of the body politic and affirm the civil religion of the state. In the negative sense, the church would also take on

⁶¹Ibid., 162. Maritain in describing this moral influence of the church suggests that this modality of exerting authority is a break from the pattern established in the “Christian Empire of Constantine.”

⁶²Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 63.

the role of policing its members who would choose to dissent from the body politic or challenge the idea of the temporal common good.

Natural Law and Human Rights

As noted earlier, the temporal state's function is to allow for the normal development of human nature, distinct from our supernatural accomplishment of full humanity tied to grace. Within the natural realm, all things are directed to a natural end in accordance with their essences, and humans are no exception. Natural law for Maritain is nothing more than the normality of functioning which is in line with a thing's nature. Thus, Maritain allows for humans the particular natural end that is in line with their essential nature of being human.⁶³ Ideally, the state when functioning properly will work to create the space in which humans can rightly pursue their natural end.

Maritain does allow that while the legislation enacted by the state should be in line with natural law, there may be occasion in which "this legislation could and should

⁶³Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 34-37. For Maritain, the natural law is not a product of the Enlightenment, but can be traced back through Grotius, Aquinas, Augustine, the church fathers, even to Cicero, and finally to Antigone. Natural law is the unwritten law which is the order which leads man to his necessary end in virtue of being human. Maritain writes, "But since man is endowed with intelligence and determines his own ends, it is up to him to put himself in tune with the ends necessarily demanded by his nature. This means that there is, by virtue of human nature, *an order or a disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the necessary ends of the human being. The unwritten law, or natural law, is nothing more than that.*" What Maritain allows is that humans know this law to greater and lesser degrees owing to "innumerable accidents [that] can corrupt our judgment." The only practical aspect of the law that is known inherently by all is that "we must do good and avoid evil," though how humans do this obviously leads to differences of opinion. Human knowledge of the natural law is in process of development, and according to Maritain, will continue to grow, though always remaining imperfect until "the Gospel has penetrated to the very depth of human substance." Only then "will natural law appear in its flower and its perfection."

Maritain, *Man and the State*, 96. What must not be assumed, however, is that Maritain holds natural law to be somehow independent of the divine order. For Maritain, the natural law is only law because "it is a participation in Eternal Law." The very Divine Reason that establishes an order of reason which allows humans to know natural law reveals that the latter must likewise participate in Eternal Law. Once again, then, Maritain, while holding to a distinction of planes continues to assert that superiority of the spiritual to the temporal, such that the autonomy of the latter is given by its very participation in the former.

*permit or give allowance to certain ways of conduct which depart in some measure from Natural Law.*⁶⁴ Such departure is allowed when the prohibition of conduct contrary to the Natural Law would somehow impair the common good. This impairment could come because legislation in line with the Natural Law would be contrary to the code of practice of a community whose presence is necessary for the achievement of the common good of the body politic, or because enforcement of legislation according to the Natural Law would result in worse conduct which could disturb or disintegrate the body politic.⁶⁵ Such an argument, Maritain acknowledges, is in line with his pluralistic idea of the state, as well as a principle of the lesser evil.⁶⁶ He does not ground such legislation in the concept of a human right. This is because Maritain sees rights in connection to Natural Law in that if one is morally obligated to seek his/her proper end as determined by the nature of being human, then one must correlatively have the right to pursue this end.⁶⁷ By tying rights to Natural Law, Maritain is again seeking to reject modern liberal democratic notions of autonomous individuals subject to nothing other than the desires of their own wills.⁶⁸ It is the leaven of the Gospel within the temporal realm that serves to awaken humans to the rights inherent in the Natural Law.

⁶⁴Maritain, *Man and the State*, 168. Italics original.

⁶⁵Ibid., 168.

⁶⁶This principle can provide the basis for Catholics to accept civil legislation allowing abortion, a practice that could be regarded as against the Natural Law but is the lesser evil for the temporal state.

⁶⁷Maritain, *Rights of Man*, 37. Maritain writes, "If man is morally bound to the things which are necessary to the fulfillment of his destiny, obviously, then, he has the right to fulfil [sic] his destiny; and if he has the right to fulfil his destiny he has the right to the things necessary for this purpose."

⁶⁸Ibid., 38. Maritain points to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as offering the philosophy basing rights on freedom of humans to obey only their wills. He adds, "This philosophy built no solid foundation for the rights of the human person, because nothing can be founded on illusion." This illusion was that the very right itself was divine without any limitation and left no obligation on one individual towards others.

The Common Good

What then, finally, must be understood by Maritain's concept of the common good? For a proper grasp of this idea, it is necessary to begin with Maritain's idea of the integral person, that person who is whole in both his/her temporal and spiritual self. This person is a social unit by virtue of whose intelligence and love requires communication with other persons and with God. Society then is "born, as something required by nature, and ... as something accomplished through a work of reason and will, and freely consented to."⁶⁹ Persons become fully human as they interact in communion with other persons, and their very humanity overflows in the act of communication with others.⁷⁰ The common good is the end of the social whole. Maritain is clear that this common good is neither simply a collection of individual goods, nor is it the proper good of the whole (as in the case of bees who have one good for the hive to which individuals may be sacrificed). Rather, the common good Maritain envisions is "common to both *the whole and the parts* into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it."⁷¹ All persons should receive the benefit of the common good even as they participate in the achievement of that good.

Maritain does not want to leave the common good as something simply material. While the common good certainly does have to do with public commodities and services such as the maintenance of roads, ports, and schools as well as the benefits of a strong

⁶⁹Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 38. "It is not by itself alone that [the human person] reaches its plenitude but by receiving essential goods from society."

⁷¹Ibid., 41. Italics original.

military and sound fiscal policy, the common good must also have an intrinsic morality that aids in persons becoming fully human. So, Maritain adds,

It includes the sum or sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues and sense of right and liberty, of all the activity, material prosperity and spiritual riches, of unconsciously operative hereditary wisdom, of moral rectitude, justice, friendship, happiness, virtue and heroism in the individual lives of its members.⁷²

The common good of the society (most rightly termed “commonwealth”) is then all that goes into achieving a truly human life for each of its members, and they in turn submit themselves to this common good as their ultimate temporal end. Because it involves living a full human life within the present world, Maritain can then hold that this temporal end is truly ultimate and distinct from one’s spiritual end in God.

A final important issue related to the common good is that of authority. Maritain argues that the common good “is the foundation of authority” in a society.⁷³ Certain ones must be endowed with authority to lead the society towards the common good, so that “the directions which they determine, the decisions which they make to this end, be followed or obeyed by the other members of the community.”⁷⁴ He does wish to distance this authority from absolutist forms by noting that such authority applies to free men, and that the dominion be wielded for the good of the whole, not simply the one holding power. The implication of Maritain’s call for submission to authority in the name of the common good is that society then has justification for policing its members and demanding obedience from all without dissent from a particular conception of the common good. This very principle proved a dangerous precedent in Latin America as

⁷²Ibid., 42.

⁷³Maritain, *Rights of Man*, 9.

⁷⁴Ibid.

submission to the ruling authorities for the common good became the basis for significant abuses.

Maritain's Social Imaginary

To draw from Charles Taylor's language in the last chapter, what may be said about Maritain's social imaginary? Maritain begins *Man and the State* with an extended discussion in which he clarifies the use of terms significant in discussions of political theology: community, society, nation, body politic, and state. While in common language, these terms are often used interchangeably, Maritain feels that lack of precise definition has been "a woe to modern history."⁷⁵ He begins his analysis by offering a distinction between community and society. Community he deems a "work of nature," while society is a "work of reason."⁷⁶ The key for Maritain in this distinction is the *object* "around which the relations among human persons are interwoven."⁷⁷ The community is an objective fact of human relations before any conscious intellectual reflection on it or willing of its formation. Community as prior to human act creates its own "common unconscious psyche, common feelings and psychological structures and common mores."⁷⁸ Families, clans, tribes, language groups, and social classes all exist as communities by virtue of a common sort of heritage that is shared a priori.

In a society, on the contrary, the object is the end to which human intellect and will are aimed, and this object is brought about by the activity or consent of the people. The objective of these people who come together in the society is determined by that

⁷⁵Maritain, *Man and the State*, 2.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸Ibid.

particular association; it is not a prior fact which has already bound them. Thus, businesses, labor unions, and the body politic are all societies. A society may give rise to community, such as in the case of an industrial community which has arisen around a particular business (i.e. a coal mining town). However, the community that emerges will still emerge from nature, in that the people, though placed together by a business society, will share a given historical environment that creates a community. Therefore, in a community, social pressure derives from imposing patterns of conduct consistent with the community. A society applies social pressure through the imposition of law and regulations in accord with the object of the society.

The nation is the community writ large, “perhaps the most complex and complete community engendered by civilized life.”⁷⁹ Like the community, the social relations in the nation are determined by prior bonds of commonality in historical heritage, traditions, common conceptions and manners, and a variety of other ethico-social factors. Maritain writes, “A nation is a community of people who become aware of themselves as history has made them, who treasure their own past, and who love themselves as they know themselves and imagine themselves to be, with a kind of inevitable introversion.”⁸⁰ A nation, however, is decentralized, lacking a ruling authority or governing institutions. It is a people with a common sense of their own connection, but it does not have any common good or rational coherence to its form. While a political society may differentiate itself within the nation, the nation itself cannot transform into a political society. For Maritain, “The idea of the body politic belongs to another, superior order.

⁷⁹Ibid., 4-5.

⁸⁰Ibid., 5.

As soon as the body politic exists, it is something other than a national community.”⁸¹

The confusion of the nation with the state leads to an exasperation of the will to power of the state, such that it seeks to impose its own type on all other nations and communities.

The body politic/political society is the highest form of society, and like all societies, is brought into being by reason and intellect. It is a human work aimed at the common good and encompasses the whole man. Maritain writes, “Justice is a primary condition for the existence of the body politic, but Friendship is its very life-giving form.”⁸² The body politic is the society in which the common good itself is the end. The formation of a body politic requires humans to commit themselves to the pursuit of that end. Necessary in the pursuit of the common good which is the end of the body politic is the seeking of justice. There can be no common good that is truly good for both persons and the society as a whole that does not emphasize the creation of a just society. To this end goal of the body politic Maritain asserts: “[Humans] are ready to commit their own existence, their possessions and their honor for its sake. The civic sense is made up of this sense of devotion and mutual love as well as the sense of justice and law.”⁸³ The very preservation of the body politic depends upon its ability to create a national community that feels tied to this political society. The body politic then fosters a sense of devotion among its members to the very institutions that sustain it, and it creates a sense of heritage and unquestioned allegiance to the structures of the society. While a nation may not be able to evolve into a body politic, the survival of the body politic depends upon its creation of a nation to which its members completely identify.

⁸¹Ibid., 7.

⁸²Ibid., 10.

⁸³Ibid.

The state is the highest part of the whole of the body politic. The state is that part of the body politic concerned with “the maintenance of law, the promotion of the common welfare and public order, and the administration of public affairs.”⁸⁴ As the topmost part of the whole, the state consists of the institutions of the body politic which work to serve the interests of the whole; that is, the ensuring of the common good—for Maritain, both material and moral. As the highest part, the state is superior to all other parts of the body politic, the other institutions that work to shape and encourage the common good. It is superior to every other society within the body politic and all these therefore are called upon to submit to it. Maritain, however, does not allow that the state is superior to the body politic itself. The state exists to serve the body politic, and thus it is for the good of the human persons who form the political society.⁸⁵ This position of the state is often lost in the abuses of power that tend to arise because of the temptation of those who have power. The state “tends to ascribe to itself a peculiar common good—its own self-preservation and growth—distinct both from the public order and welfare which are its final end.”⁸⁶ Such an ascription is contrary to the idea of the state as a means to the common good, though it is often the case in the modern world.

Thus, in Maritain’s social imaginary, in the temporal realm, the body politic is the most comprehensive social account of human relations. All other societies are subsumed under the body politic in their role of working within the body politic to achieve the

⁸⁴Ibid., 12.

⁸⁵Ibid., 16-17. Maritain sees his position as different from the political thinkers like John Austin, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who posit an absolutist state. For Maritain, the state is not a metaphysical monad that is supreme in its unity and individuality such that all becomes subsumed by it. He likens talk of the state to how one speaks of “twenty head of cattle” when twenty cows are meant. The state is not to overwhelm the persons who comprise it, but instead represents them.

⁸⁶Ibid., 14.

common good. Particularly the state is that institution at the top of the body politic to which all other institutions submit, though the state is not co-extensive with the body politic. It is the body politic that gives account of the temporal common good, and thus it is to the body politic that humans give temporal devotion to the end of the common good that is both communal and personal. Interestingly for Maritain, the church has no place in this social imaginary. It may rightly be argued that the church is itself a society, but because the church does not essentially inhabit the temporal plane, it does not have to do with this social imaginary. Individual Christians are for Maritain members of two societies—that temporal society in which they seek the temporal common good, and the eternal society of the church in which they seek their ultimate end in God. These Christians, however, act as members of both societies, and particularly as members of the earthly society seek its common good as their own temporal good, informed by their Christian faith, but owing temporal allegiance to their particular state. Thus, as Christians in the temporal plane, they function as citizens of their temporal states, and may find themselves at odds with other Christians similarly beholden to their particular earthly states.

Maritain in Latin America

Maritain's political influence was at its height in postwar Europe and Latin America as his writings provided the ideological basis for the emerging Christian Democratic parties.⁸⁷ His works provided an important tutelage for a generation of young Catholic students who had been formed in Catholic Actions groups. Catholic

⁸⁷Sigmund, "Maritain on Politics," 165. Sigmund points out that while his writings during this time were not directly concerned with politics, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s proved to be the height of his political influence.

Action was a lay organization which emerged under the leadership of Pius XI who propagated a “social Catholicism” or “New Christendom.” Its purpose was to provide an outlet for lay Catholics to involve themselves in the church’s social ministry in the world. Under this new movement, the papacy changed its approach to politics—a move Maritain took up and for which he became the chief philosopher. Daniel Bell writes, “Having lost confidence in the ability of confessional political parties to advance the Church’s mission, [Pius XI] shifted the Church’s energies to its social rather than political witness. Henceforth, the Church would approach politics indirectly.”⁸⁸ Trained in Catholic Action, these Christians would be prepared to enter the social world of political action, economics, and other areas of temporal activity as Christians and put their Christian values and principles into action. The emphasis on New Christendom, both in papal encyclicals and the work of Maritain, was an attempt to create a distance between the church and the conservative political parties to which the church traditionally had aligned itself.

One of the most significant outcomes of the New Christendom approach was that space was opened in the church for progressive and reform minded voices. Many of the Catholics who would populate these parties had become disenchanted with the conservative parties that were confessionally Catholic.⁸⁹ Bell writes, “It ushered in an era

⁸⁸Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The refusal to cease suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

⁸⁹Jorge Iván Hübner Gallo, “Catholic Social Justice, Authoritarianism, and Class Stratification,” in *The Conflict Between Church and State in Latin America*, ed. and trans. Frederick B. Pike (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 199-200. Gallo was a leading spokesperson for the Conservative Party in Chile when he produced this essay. In it he notes that the National Falange (the forerunner of the Christian Democratic Party) emerged as young idealists in the Conservative Party began to push a differing position from that of the party, though Gallo notes that “Neither at that time nor subsequently have they been able to formulate a concrete plan of action ... on economic and social issues.” Instead, he charges that they “began by professing a true idolatry of democracy, liberty, and human rights, inspired directly by secularist

of cooperation between the Church and the state, whereby the Church, assuming an apolitical position, encouraged the state and urged Catholics to cooperate with national and international development efforts.”⁹⁰ Where the older medieval Christendom imagined a social reality in which the church had dominion over the state, New Christendom’s idea of cooperation sought proper spheres of activity for each, so that there could be cooperation for the common good of humanity.

Many of those attracted to New Christendom in Latin America were encouraged by their concern with social issues to begin challenging the economic inequalities perpetrated against so many on the continent. The Christian Democratic parties that emerged in Latin America as a result of this movement were therefore “centrists and reformists” who recognized some of the evils of capitalism and hoped to correct them, while continuing to affirm capitalism itself.⁹¹ Many saw a hope in capitalism for drawing benefits to the poor by increasing economic opportunities. However, too often reform movements simply produced a new bourgeois class who sought “to renegotiate the condition of economic dependence with the imperialist powers, seeking to capture greater room for its own involvement in internal markets.”⁹² Drawing on Maritain (who visited and lectured in Latin America in 1936 and 1938), they desired an autonomous temporal

liberalism.” The program he charges with is one that “rejects the ideals of the Catholic state as anachronistic and totalitarian, and wishes to have nothing to do with a frankly confessional system like that of Franco’s Spain today.” Their system “affirms the necessity of building a profane society, fraternal and pluralistic, in which all ideologies and creeds will coexist in harmony, and in which the Catholic Church will enjoy no special consideration.”

⁹⁰Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 46.

⁹¹Carlos Alberto Torres, *The Church, Society, and Hegemony: A Critical Sociology of Religion in Latin America*, trans. Richard A. Young (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1992), 100.

⁹²Ibid.

political realm in which democracy and capitalism offered a temporal hope for the development of a prosperous state from which all would theoretically receive the benefit.

Maritain's distinction of planes would provide the philosophical foundation of New Christendom since it allowed for a secular temporal realm free from direct control of the church, while yet giving place for Catholic influence among the body politic. Particularly in positing a temporal common good as the end for the body politic and the means to that end in an affirmation of democracy as the temporal outworking of the Gospel, Maritain's philosophy created the necessary space for the development of an autonomous public square that could be distinct from the supra-temporal church. Christians could be politically active for the ultimate good end of the church without drawing the church directly into the political realm.

Gutierrez' Critique of New Christendom

Before turning to the challenges to Maritain's philosophy posed by Radical Orthodoxy theologians, the critique that was offered by Liberation Theology is worth noting. In his seminal book, *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez first describes New Christendom and Maritain's distinction of planes as the Catholic Church's response to new historical situations encountered in the twentieth century as a result of Enlightenment philosophy. His fifth chapter, "Crisis of the Distinction of Planes Model," argues that Maritain's philosophy of a temporal realm and a spiritual realm has failed the church on two levels: a pastoral level and a theological level.⁹³ As to the first level, Gutierrez notes that in Maritain's model, Catholic lay people are to involve themselves in the political order as Christians, though without directly involving the church. Thus, he

⁹³Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, ed. and trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 63-77.

summarizes, the mission of lay apostolic organizations was “to evangelize and inspire the temporal order, without directly intervening.”⁹⁴ The problem, Gutierrez argues, is that these organizations found themselves continually pushed beyond their mandated bounds by social situations. They found that as they took stands on particular social issues, the members felt the need to become more deeply committed, and it became difficult to hold the firm distinction of planes. Gutierrez writes, “This necessarily led to a political radicalization incompatible with an official position of the church which postulated a certain asepsis in temporal affairs.”⁹⁵ Tension therefore developed between the lay members and the Catholic hierarchy over differing ideas about Catholic involvement.

The greater pastoral problem for Gutierrez, though, was that lay Catholics had become increasingly “aware of the scope of misery and especially of the oppressive and alienating circumstances in which the great majority of mankind exists.”⁹⁶ What had become apparent for those involved was that a large part of the church had been directly linked to those who held economic and political power, and that the church’s position in countries rich and poor alike had tied it to the oppressive classes. Gutierrez charges that the policy of indirect action had been applied selectively. The church, alleges Gutierrez, had not held to its position of non-involvement when it was a question of maintaining the status quo, a situation that was favorable to the hierarchy’s continued lifestyle. However, when there had been a question of a lay movement or a group of priests becoming subversive to the established order, the policy had been wielded heavily. Thus, Gutierrez concludes, “Concretely, in Latin America the distinction of planes model has the effect of

⁹⁴Ibid., 64.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

concealing the real political option of a large sector of the Church—that is, support of the established order.” Ironically, he adds, “Until a few years ago [the distinction of planes] was defended by the vanguard; now it is held aloft by power groups, many of whom are in no way involved with any commitment to the Christian faith.”⁹⁷ What was meant to foster political and economic reform became an aid to maintaining oppressive systems that were the status quo.

Turning to a consideration of theological reflection, Gutierrez suggests that Maritain’s distinction of planes model has been eroded in two ways that are apparently contradictory. First, Gutierrez notes that the contemporary world is going through a process of secularization, such that the world is acknowledged as “autonomous with regard to both ecclesiastical authority and the mission of the Church.”⁹⁸ The secularization of the world is a clear separation of the temporal from any tutelage or connection with the supernatural. Where Maritain sees the spiritual continually drawing forth the good of the temporal, modern secularization rejects any need for the spiritual at all. The positive in this for Gutierrez is that this process is in line with what he sees as a Christian conception of man: “an agent of history, responsible for his own destiny.” Secularization then “favors a more complete fulfillment of the Christian life insofar as it offers man the possibility of being more fully human.”⁹⁹ Anthropology is the emphasis of secularization such that man becomes the lord of creation, and for Gutierrez, this is in line with God’s distinction of himself from the creation.

⁹⁷Ibid., 65.

⁹⁸Ibid. 66.

⁹⁹Ibid., 67.

The key ramifications of secularization for the church are that the world is no longer seen in terms of the church, but as Gutierrez argues, it is now necessary to view the church in terms of the world. Rather than asking how the world is to serve the ends of the church, the question becomes how to use the influence of the church for the transformation of earthly social structures. Latin Americans in recognizing that the world is not to be defined by the church are instead taking charge of their own liberation and freeing themselves from defining reality in terms of a religious practice that has sided with the status quo.

The other theological reflection leads to a rejection of the dualism of a temporal-spiritual, or natural-supernatural distinction. These distinctions, developed from an inadequate Thomism that allowed for a realm of pure nature, located salvation solely within the church and developed a strong ecclesiocentrism.¹⁰⁰ Gutierrez notes that in modern theological discussion, there has been a return to the idea that in man there is an “innate desire to see God.”¹⁰¹ Disregarding the concept of temporal ends and supernatural ends, Catholic theology again affirms that “there is but one vocation: communion with God through grace.”¹⁰² All are invited to communion with God and all are affected by grace. The implication from this, as Gutierrez argues, is that the church cannot be the sole repository of grace, but grace must be found throughout the world

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 69. Gutierrez argues that the idea of “pure nature” which makes the supernatural gratuitous can be traced back to Cajetan’s interpretation of Aquinas. For a similar critique of Maritain’s misreading of Aquinas, see also William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998), 183-184. Both Gutierrez and Cavanaugh acknowledge the work of the twentieth century French Catholic theologian, Henri De Lubac who showed that the idea of a pure nature and a finite human temporal end could not be found in the work of Thomas Aquinas. See his work, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid., 70.

because all are naturally oriented to God.¹⁰³ If the whole world is graced, then Gutierrez asserts that the human vocation is not so much to salvation as it is to convocation. People are called to meet God in community, not in an abject spiritual individualism. Thus, all human work in history to build a more just society is in fact work for the Kingdom of God—whether those striving for such a society recognize Christ’s authority or not. The supernatural work cannot be distinguished from the natural.

John Milbank notes that the Liberation theologians were rightly critiquing the distinction of planes in seeking to follow the logical conclusions of the “integralist revolution” embraced by Vatican II. Integralism refers to the rejection of the concept of a realm of “pure nature” that exists apart from the activity of divine grace.¹⁰⁴ Integralism argues that all persons have already been acted upon by divine grace so that the natural and the supernatural cannot be distinguished. Milbank argues that there were two sources for the integralist revolution, and while the Latin American Liberation theologians are correct in challenging the idea of pure nature, their approach is only one of the two possible routes. He describes their particular approach as “naturalizing the supernatural,” a movement he argues finds its impetus in Karl Rahner before being appropriated by Liberation theologians. Concerning Liberation theologians, Milbank writes,

In Latin America, what has long been sought for is the elusive goal of ‘development’, although the liberation theologians hope that industrial and economic progress can occur in that continent without the retreat from religious observance that has been its accompaniment in western Europe. However, this does not mean that they resist secularization: on the contrary, they pay obeisance to an autonomous sphere of secular power/knowledge. Their conception of

¹⁰³Ibid. Gutierrez draws upon Rahner’s idea of “transnatural” man: “Devoid of supernatural life, man is nevertheless oriented to it by necessity.”

¹⁰⁴John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), 206.

remaining ecclesial influence therefore appears to be one in which Church leaders exercise power and influence over essentially secular processes.¹⁰⁵

By following this particular course, Liberation theology does not overcome the rationalism of the Enlightenment so much as it becomes fully trapped within it. As a result, Milbank argues, “the social is an autonomous sphere which does not need to turn to theology for its self-understanding, and yet it is already a grace-imbued sphere, and therefore it is upon a pre-theological sociology or Marxist social theory, that theology must be founded.”¹⁰⁶ The church in this conception remains extraneous to the actual business of politics.

There is another approach to integralism, however, one which Milbank traces through French theology as arising with Maurice Blondel and being worked out in Henri de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie*. This French move “supernaturalizes the natural.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike the Liberation theologians, in the French line, the salvation of the social is inherently tied to the activity of a particular community, the supernatural community of the church in which the historical narrative of the Gospel in its particularities of place and time is the normative account of full human being. Peace and justice in the natural world cannot be achieved apart from reference to the church and the working of divine grace that is actuated in the formative liturgical practices of the community of Christ. The church as society becomes the salvific hope for the transformation of the social. This is the line followed by the Radical Orthodoxy theologians to whom the discussion now turns.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 223, 228-232.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 208.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 207.

Politics not Statecraft: The Critique of Daniel Bell

Daniel Bell's critique of New Christendom ironically derives from his challenge to Liberation Theology, which he argues emerges "*out of* and not simply *in opposition to* the problematics of New Christendom."¹⁰⁸ Bell summarizes the New Christendom method thusly:

At the heart of this vision was the desire to sever the ties between the Church and the status quo by withdrawing the Church from direct involvement in the political realm. As a consequence of the Church's evacuation of the temporal realm in favor of an indirect, moral influence, the state was left as the uncontested overseer of the political realm. Politics was a matter of statecraft.¹⁰⁹

Like Milbank, Bell argues that for all that the Liberation theologians rejected of New Christendom and its continuing affirmation of the church as the sole repository of salvation, "the liberationists did not reject New Christendom's attempt to depoliticize the Church."¹¹⁰ Rather, in arguing that all of nature is already graced, the lines between the church and the world are blurred to the extent that "the Church has become indistinguishable from the world insofar as the world is gracefully oriented towards a future promised by the Lord."¹¹¹ Because grace is already present in the temporal realm, the Liberationists maintain the autonomy of the political since the church is not required for the world's orientation to God. In this way, Liberation Theology has actually reinforced and advanced the distinction of the planes propounded by New Christendom, not overcome it.

¹⁰⁸Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 51.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 62. C.f. Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 56. Gutierrez affirms that the assertion of an autonomous temporal realm had the positive result of leading "many Christians to commit themselves authentically and generously to the construction of a just society."

¹¹¹Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 63.

For Bell, the most problematic result of the distinction of planes is that the church vacates the political realm so that “the state assumes control of the temporal realm.”¹¹² The state is left as the primary agent of political and social order. In such a distinction of planes, New Christendom assumes politics to be simply a matter of statecraft. Bell argues that the idea of statecraft is too often misunderstood. Statecraft is frequently, though incorrectly, equated with “production, distribution, ecological conservation, garbage collection, education, care of sick and elderly, and so forth.”¹¹³ What statecraft is, according to Bell, is instead the way social space is construed and how that space is governed. Bell argues, “Statecraft is about, among other things, the ascendancy of a sovereign state over social life and the state’s rule of that space through the extension of a monopoly on the use of violence.”¹¹⁴ He suggests that even where the Liberation theologians critique the state, it is not so much a critique of the state as the sole purveyor of power, but rather the way in which that power is used by the controlling classes at the expense of the poor.¹¹⁵ Following the distinction of planes, the church has no place in the political realm, but is relegated to an apolitical, spiritual realm. Thus, Gutierrez only intensifies the distinction of planes, and offers no way to finally engage divine grace for the transformation of the social.

Bell wishes to challenge the New Christendom distinction of planes model (unwittingly appropriated by Liberation theologians) which asserts that the church is not

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Daniel M. Bell, Jr., “What Gift Is Given? A Response to Volf,” *Modern Theology* 19, no. 2 (April 2003): 275.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 63. He suggests that such a critique has an instrumentalist view of the state in which the state is merely a neutral collection of institutions that may be used for good or ill depending upon who is at the controls.

to be an immediately political agent, and that the Christian faith has no directly political option. If one is to define politics as statecraft, the usage of coercive power, then certainly the history of Christendom has shown that the church is to have no place in such politics. However, if politics is not reduced to only statecraft, but does concern issues of production, distribution, care for the sick and elderly, education, and conservation, then the church has a history of involvement in these very activities, and must remain political. For the church to simply inspire morality or concern for the poor, Maritain's indirect activity, is not enough in the face of the challenges posed by modern consumerist politics that disciplines desire.¹¹⁶ Bell suggests that instead of accepting the church as an apolitical body removed from the politics of temporal life, the church must instead conceive of itself as political. The desacralization of the church was not a move towards freedom as viewed by Maritain, but was "a crucial moment in the containment of the Church, the stripping of Christianity's social and political presence, the deprivation of the faith of resources for the struggle."¹¹⁷

Maritain's distinction of planes which affirms a social imaginary in which the church as such has no place in the body politic does not free the church as Maritain hoped from political corruption and coercive power—the dangers that too often plague statecraft—but prevents the church from imagining itself as "a public in its own right."¹¹⁸ The church as public "is not just another lobbying group or non-governmental

¹¹⁶Ibid., 71-72. Bell's primary concern is to challenge capitalism as a system which corrupts and distorts desire by making selfish gain the end goal so that even success is a desperate failure. He argues that capitalism establishes a particular way of life that must be countered not only for the poor, but for all people whose end is to be in God. He notes particularly that modern capitalism "manipulates human desire so that it is amenable to the demands of production for the market." Capitalism creates and orients human desire to production so humans are distorted as to their proper desire for their divine end in God.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 71.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 72.

organization.” Instead, “the Church embodies a de-centralized, participatory politics that defies the discipline of the state and its civil society.”¹¹⁹ Bell challenges that the church is to resist being relegated to the apolitical, and thus being disciplined by society so that its worship and practices amount to little more than spiritual exercises that fit into the accepted status quo. The church as public engages in a politics and economics that is expressed in its doctrine and practice so that the distinctions of “public” and “private,” “religious” and “political” are exploded. He argues that practices such as sheltering aliens, feeding the hungry, and worshiping with AIDS victims challenges the orders of “political” and “religious.” Activity in one is activity in the other. Likewise, baptism, usually relegated to the “private” or “spiritual” realm challenges the “public” and “political” by breaking down barriers and political loyalties. He concludes, “All of this is to say that the Church is a public that, short of emasculation, cannot inhabit the private, apolitical space assigned to it as a prison cell by modernity.”¹²⁰

The Church as Counter-Performance: The Critique of William Cavanaugh

William Cavanaugh also challenges Maritain over the issue of depoliticizing the church, though his critique is far more detailed than that of Bell. In his work, *Torture and Eucharist*, Cavanaugh considers the situation in Chile under the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, particularly the use of torture as a means of social discipline aimed at the separation of individuals from any significant associations.¹²¹

¹¹⁹Ibid., 73.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 21-71. In his chapter, “Torture and Disappearance as an Ecclesiological Problem,” Cavanaugh argues that torture was used by the Pinochet regime not primarily as an information gathering program, but instead as a social discipline. He describes tortures as a type of liturgy, or more properly, anti-litugry, “because it involves bodies and bodily movements in an enacted

What makes Chile such an intriguing test case is that the project of New Christendom had taken deep root in the country throughout the middle part of the twentieth century.¹²² Thus, with the advent of the junta, the church saw great positives in the promises of a renewed democracy after the chaos of the elected Marxist Allende government that preceded it.¹²³ Even more, the political ideologues of the junta were deeply indebted to the thought of Maritain,¹²⁴ continuing to publicly affirm a New Christendom type model of church-state engagement. Cavanaugh notes that “Maritain’s ideas and vocabulary leap off every page of the Junta’s Declaration of Principles,” and the military’s goal was to create a state that recognized the dignity of each human and seeks the common good—“the total of social conditions which permit all Chileans and each Chilean to reach their

drama which both makes real the power of the state and constitutes an act of worship of that mysterious power” (30). In a particularly macabre rendition of modernity, “Torture breaks down collective links and makes of its victims isolated monads” (34). Fear and isolation result as the state extends its power and performs its liturgy so that there is anxiety over any attempt to create associations that might be suspected of subversion and bring torture to members. In such a way, the state assures that individuals’ only significant relationships are with the state or mediated through the state.

¹²²Pablo Richard, “Political Organisation of Christians in Latin America: from Christian Democracy to a New Model,” in *The Church and Christian Democracy*, ed. Gregory Baum and John Coleman (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1987), 16-17. Concerning the church’s turn to New Christendom in Latin America, Richard writes, “the Church could take up an attacking, reforming ideology consistent with the social teaching of the Church but without breaking with the Capitalist system. Before, the Church had lived on the margins of the State ...; now, the new democratic-populist State sought the support of the Church, took up its social teaching and assured all its civil and social rights.”

¹²³Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 287-294. Smith notes that in the first seven years of the Pinochet regime, the church hierarchy had an ambiguous and inconsistent record of opposition to the junta. He documents numerous statements of affirmation of the military’s efforts to restore democracy to the country. One such statement, issued by Cardinal Silva and the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference on September 13, 1973, just days after the coup, affirmed the church’s “trust in the ‘patriotism and selflessness’ of the military junta, and asked all citizens to cooperate with them so as to ‘return soon to institutional normality.’”

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 197-202. Cavanaugh points specifically to Jaime Guzmán Errázuriz, who was the chief ideologue for the Pinochet regime. While a student, Guzmán had studied under Jaime Eyzaguirre, the a historian at the Catholic University who was an early follower of Maritain. Through this connection, Maritain would be the most important philosophical influence on Guzmán. For this connection, see Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 139-40, n. 26.

full personal fulfillment.”¹²⁵ The government was to be a neutral arbitrator of conflicts that happened in civil society, and theoretically was divesting itself of power as it “marketized” the economy and allowed lower organizations to handle most issues.¹²⁶ As Cavanaugh points out, however, “The central contradiction of this scheme is that what goes under the guise of devolving power from the state to a variety of lesser social bodies occurs under the aegis of a ruthless authoritarian dictatorship.” The irony of this move is “the ostensible desire to limit the state’s power over the person masks an individualization of the social and an increase in state power.”¹²⁷ Thus, the military government was able to uphold a Maritainian like political theory that affirmed the final common good of the body politic while continuing to solidify its power over the people.

Not only was the government in Chile heavily influenced by Maritain’s thought, but the Catholic Church itself was also deeply shaped by Maritain’s influence. It accepted the distinction of planes model such that the church imagined itself as the spiritual/moral inspiration of an autonomous social order. Cavanaugh argues that Maritain’s conception had the effect of “setting up the Gospel as something essentially alien to ‘culture’ which must come at it from afar, and second, in leaving the impact of the Gospel on culture indirect and maddeningly vague.”¹²⁸ Because the Gospel’s effect on culture is always indirect, to consider the specific practices of Jesus in the historical communities of the New Testament would be a fruitless endeavor. The Gospel, for

¹²⁵Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 198-99.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 199. The “principle of subsidiarity” called for higher powers to avoid taking tasks for themselves that could be done by lower powers. The ideal was a divestiture of power from centralized authority to various other lesser authorities. Once again, following Maritain, such a principle is dependent upon a view of the government as a neutral power.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 186.

Maritain, does not have its own cultural forms. It can only magically inspire already existing cultures. Therefore, Maritain turns to the idea of a secular faith that instills the secular common good that is constantly informed by the Christian faith. The distinction of planes, then, becomes the guarantor of the separation between the religious and the secular.¹²⁹ The distinction, however, can easily become confused so that the secular faith as an account of life in the temporal becomes fully religious as an account of all of doctrine and life as a whole. Cavanaugh challenges that Maritain “does not fully appreciate to what extent many modern states have already replaced, or at least displaced, other religions, including Christianity, either through the privatization of religion or the hostility of an ever-expanding state.”¹³⁰

Cavanaugh argues that the key for Maritain’s thought is the distinction of planes between the temporal and the spiritual with the point of intersection in the individual. For Maritain, then, the desacralization of the state following the Reformation is the fulfillment of Jesus’ statement, “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” While it took many centuries for the full implication of this statement to come to fruition, by an unfortunate turn, just as the church was freed from the state, the notion of the absolutist state emerged at the same time during the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. Cavanaugh writes, “The world still awaits, says Maritain, the full realization

¹²⁹Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 407. Milbank finally traces the distinction of planes, or at least its roots, back to Aquinas. He argues, “It is true that Aquinas, like Augustine, does not recognize any real justice that is not informed by charity, and that he has, in consequence, moved not very far down the road which allows a sphere of secular autonomy; nevertheless, he has moved a little, and he has moved too far. By beginning to see social, economic and administrative life as essentially natural, and part of a political sphere separate from the Church, Aquinas opens the way to regarding the Church as an organization specializing in what goes on inside men’s souls; his affirmation, for example ... that the new law of the Gospel adds no new ‘external precepts’, seems to tend dangerously in this direction.”

¹³⁰Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 186-87.

of the Gospel ideal of the properly profane state well-tamed by the spiritual order.”¹³¹ Unfortunately, Cavanaugh argues, the ecclesiology of New Christendom rests on a “very influential, and an entirely spurious, fairy tale.”¹³² Maritain’s reading of Jesus’ admonition to the Pharisees must not be read with the idea of distinct realms of the religious and the political in mind. Such a reading is entirely anachronistic, since this distinction would have been unthinkable in the first century. Even more, Cavanaugh contends that the parable makes no sense “unless the reader assumes some overlap or competition between the things that are Caesar’s and the things that are God’s.”¹³³ The distinction of planes makes conflict with authorities incomprehensible, and the cross becomes very problematic in the Gospel narrative.

Cavanaugh further challenges Maritain’s assertion that the best of liberal freedoms and universal human rights are the product of the Gospel’s inspiration in Western culture. Cavanaugh charges that Maritain never offers any compelling argument to verify this assertion. He writes, “In the face of evidence that those ideas originated in the Enlightenment context of *explicit rejection* of Christianity and the church, Maritain sprinkles a bit of holy water on them and declares that what is good in them is due to the

¹³¹Ibid., 190.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid. For a fuller development of this argument, see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 52-53. Yoder places this parable within the larger section of Luke 19:47-22:2. He argues that every periscope in this section “reflects in some way the confrontation of two social systems and Jesus’ rejection of the status quo.” Concerning this particular parable, Yoder writes, “Once again, the ‘spiritualizer’s’ picture of a Jesus whose only concern about politics was to clarify that he was not concerned for politics is refuted by the very fact that this question could arise.” Jesus’ ascription of Caesar’s things and God’s things “points rather to demands or prerogatives which somehow overlap or compete, needing to be disentangled. What is Caesar’s and what is God’s are not on different levels, so as never to clash; they are in the same arena.” Cf. Spencer Kennard, Jr., *Render to God: A Study of the Tribute Passage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches*, trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (London: SCM Press, 1955), 112-137.

Gospel's invisible influence."¹³⁴ According to Cavanaugh, Maritain fails to acknowledge that the desacralization of the state is inseparable from the privatization of Christianity and the ambition for power of the rising nation-states.¹³⁵ Contrary to the idea of a Gospel-inspired move, Cavanaugh points to Enlightenment political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, who "saw and explained quite clearly that the state's power is *predicated on* the domestication of the church and an unfettered resort to the means of violence." Likewise, as noted in chapter three, Locke completely privatized religion, making it a matter of interior belief. On the one hand, this was the basis of his argument that the state cannot coerce religious belief. Yet on the other hand, on this same basis, Locke denies the political embodiment of the church within the social, defining it as an association of like-minded individuals. Therefore, as Cavanaugh notes, "When Locke's ideas were enshrined in England's Toleration Act of 1689, Catholics were explicitly excluded from the Act, precisely because they had as yet refused to interiorize the church and transfer their ultimate loyalty to the sovereign."¹³⁶ Contrary to Maritain, Cavanaugh challenges that the distinction of planes is not the outworking of the Gospel in temporal life, but is instead a product of the privatization of the Christian faith required by the emerging nation-states to ensure their authority cannot be challenged in the lives of individuals.

¹³⁴Ibid., 191.

¹³⁵For a fuller account by Cavanaugh of this movement towards privatization of religion and the rise of state powers, see "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 1995): 397-420; *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (New York: Continuum, 2002); "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 243-74.

¹³⁶Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 191-92.

Rights are, for Maritain, the means of protecting the individual from the state and from one another. The trouble, as Cavanaugh suggests, is that the state aggrandizes power to itself as it seeks to develop a large enough bureaucratic apparatus so that it can police the ways in which people can interfere with one another's rights. Rights effectively build a protective wall around individuals, a wall for which the state offers surveillance. Cavanaugh notes that as Rousseau recognized, the result "is that the object of the state is to make citizens as independent as possible from each other and as dependent as possible on the state."¹³⁷ Thus, the end product of the state's preservation of rights is the very individualization that Maritain hoped to overcome with his integral humanism.¹³⁸

More importantly, and the point of Cavanaugh's connection with Chile, is that in divesting the secular of the church's presence and the individualization accomplished through the state serving as the guarantor of rights, the security of the state becomes the required end of society. Cavanaugh writes,

Maritain may declare that only God, and not the state, is truly sovereign, but once the church has been individualized and eliminated as Christ's body in the world, only the state is left to impersonate God. As the state itself becomes the guarantor of rights, human rights become tied in bitter irony, to the security of the state.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Ibid., 192.

¹³⁸Such an account of the nation-state's mediating role among individuals brings to mind Alasdair MacIntyre's memorable quote concerning the claims of the nation-state: "The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf [I]t is like being asked to die for the telephone company." "A Partial Response to my Critics," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 303.

¹³⁹Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 193.

In pointing to the need for security of the state, Pinochet's Junta was able to find justification for the "disappearing" and torturing of citizens. The security of the state had to be maintained, and it did not matter whether one was guilty or not. As stated previously, torture, as Cavanaugh argues, is not about obtaining information, but instead creates a collective imagination of fear that isolates and leaves the state as the only significant relation people have. Thus, "the security of the state was made to depend on the insecurity of its citizens. The citizens became self-disciplining, avoiding organizing groups and taking refuge in private life."¹⁴⁰ The isolation of the individual inherent in the protection of rights is the same isolation achieved through torture. That is, one is primarily related to the state, and only through the state to others since both the preservation of rights and torture serve to break the primary ties of communal relationships.

Cavanaugh argues that the very ecclesiology of the Chilean church, dependent as it was upon Maritain's distinction of planes and the church only functioning as the inspiration of temporal society, meant that when it was confronted with the torture of citizens at the hands of the government, the church had no way to respond. The implication of Maritain's making the church an apolitical, atemporal supernatural body in which the Gospel is privatized and individualized is that the soul becomes the province of the church, while the state has charge of the body. As the "soul of society," the church was "effectively handing the bodies of Christians over to the state."¹⁴¹ In Chile, because the church had vacated the temporal realm, it could only offer suggestions as to right

¹⁴⁰William T. Cavanaugh, "Making Enemies: The Imagination of Torture in Chile and the United States," *Theology Today* 63 (2006): 312.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 322. See also, Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 195.

moral practice. Thus, a Catholic bishop could seek to prick the conscience of a Catholic soldier, but could not override the soldier's orders from his superiors to torture fellow Christians. According to Cavanaugh, in this case, "The army functions as a true body, a *corpus verum*, but the church, according to this conception, does not."¹⁴² With Maritain, Christians are called to support the good of the nation-state, assuming the Gospel inspired democratic spirit creates a neutral civil government that calls forth Christian allegiance. This is the allegiance of the body to the state, and is not connected with one's allegiance to the church. Indeed, in the temporal realm, this allegiance to the state supersedes all other claims on one's body, even should such claims lead to the torture or killing of other Christians.

Like Bell, Cavanaugh challenges that Liberation theologians have not adequately moved beyond a distinction of planes social imaginary in their critique of Maritain inspired Latin American political theory. With Bell, he wants to point to the true hope of liberation from oppression as being found in a conception of the church as a "*contrast*

¹⁴²Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 196. *Corpus verum* in this sentence refers to the "true body" of Christ. Cavanaugh has been greatly influenced by the work of Henri de Lubac on the significance of this term. De Lubac has shown convincingly that while modern theology understood *corpus verum* to refer to the Eucharist, prior to the middle of the twelfth century, it was the church and not the Eucharist that was most commonly referred to by this term. De Lubac argues that in describing the church as the *corpus mysticum*, the "mystical body" of Christ, meaning has been weighed too heavily towards something that is invisible or only supernatural. He notes, though, that in the early church, the mystery was connected with the visible church on earth. The visible church was the true body of Christ as it was formed in the Eucharist. De Lubac writes, "Thus, the Mystical Body is the Body par excellence, that with the greatest degree of reality and truth; it is the definitive body and in relation to it the individual body of Christ Himself may be called a figurative body, without any detraction from its reality." *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1963), 74-78. By seeing the church as a mystical body only, devoid of its visible, presence as Christ's body, the church becomes solely supernatural, so that Christians may be said to be united spiritually, while in the temporal world be torturers and victims. However, if the church is the true body of Christ, the church's visible manifestation means that our temporal activities do affect our relations with one another as fellow Christians. It is a means of overcoming the temporal-spiritual divide. (I am grateful to my colleague Scott Bullard for bringing this passage to my attention through his own doctoral research considering the Eucharistic theology of Henri de Lubac.)

society, a counter-performance of the body to that of the state.”¹⁴³ He suggests that the church is a social body in its own right, not an interiorized “spirituality” that offers only supernatural, atemporal unity. Contrary to Maritain, Cavanaugh argues that the Gospel has “its own bodily performances, its own ‘politics,’ its own set of social practices which are neither purely otherworldly nor reducible to some ‘purely temporal’ discourse.”¹⁴⁴ For Cavanaugh, a truly Christian social imagination cannot separate the temporal from the spiritual. One’s belief is enacted in and formed by the very liturgical practices of the faith that create a distinct community of persons. To give the body over to Caesar is to give what is rightly God’s.

The point is not for the church to attempt to reclaim coercive physical power. Cavanaugh charges that what is at stake is not the power of the spiritual versus the power of the temporal, but instead, “competing types of soul/body disciplines, some violent and some peaceful.”¹⁴⁵ Christian liturgical practices such as communion and baptism are not simply matters of the soul, but discipline the body as well, and so produce particular actions, habits, and practices that are visible to the world. When the church in Chile recognized this view of itself as its own social body, as a counter-politic to the state, it was able to stand against torture.¹⁴⁶ The church began to imagine itself as a body formed

¹⁴³Ibid., 180.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 181.

¹⁴⁵Ibid. 197.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 253-277. Cavanaugh points to three key factors in this transformed understanding. The first is the use of excommunication against torturers, first issued by seven bishops in 1980. By refusing the Eucharist to those who were complicit in torture, the church was affirming that issues of sin and salvation were not personal, private issues, but related to the community of Christ as a whole. Second, the Vicariate of Solidarity was a movement begun by the Catholic Church in Chile to offer a wide range of assistance programs to those in need: job training, medical assistance, legal aid, soup kitchens, and more. “In a moment when the state had outlawed base-level organizations and was atomizing the body politic, the church provided a space in which organization could take place and social fragmentation could be

around the Eucharist, becoming the very body of Christ that could share suffering and so counter the isolation of torture. Not the soul of the state, a supernatural animator of the natural, but the church is the lived body of Christ shaped by the Gospel practices to enact a challenge to the present society and anticipate the Kingdom of God. Historical, political, and embodied, the church is counter to the modern nation-state, not its vivifying spirit separated from the activity of life in this present world.

Conclusion

Maritain's philosophical development of New Christendom depends upon a privatizing of the Gospel within individuals and a retreat of the church to the supernatural realm distinct from the temporal. In light of the modern challenges to the church as a political institution and the development of liberal democratic thought, Maritain hoped his distinction of planes would continue to provide a way for the Gospel to influence the present society while avoiding the pitfalls the church's purveyance of coercive power in medieval Christendom. Christians, thus, were called to act in the political realm as persons informed by their Christian faith, and yet recognizing that the church itself was only a spiritual universalizing body. Such a conception allowed Christians to find themselves on different sides of political issues, while still sharing the unifying meal around the communion table. Though Christianity was to be the spiritual influence of democracy, the church as such was vacated from the public square so that the state had

resisted." Finally, Cavanaugh notes the Sebastian Acevedo Movement Against Torture. He describes this movement as being composed of groups of priests, nuns, and laypeople who would appear in front of places of torture at prearranged times to make visible the torture that the government hoped to keep invisible. Cavanaugh writes, "The Sebastian Acevedo Movement against Torture in Chile was a group of priests, nuns, and laypeople who took this imagination of the body of Christ to the streets. At a prearranged time, they would appear in front of torture centers and government buildings, block traffic, pass out leaflets, and perform ritual actions denouncing torture. They made visible in their own bodies what the regime tried to conceal." "Making Enemies," 322.

need of a unifying secular faith to which persons of diverse religious traditions could adhere. This secular faith promoted the good of the temporal state as the highest temporal good. It became, then, one's Christian duty to work for the prosperity and security of the temporal state, because it was the state that became the guarantor of human rights and the keeper of the common good.

Liberation theologians, followed by Radical Orthodoxy theologians, challenged Maritain's distinction of planes as the twentieth century progressed. At the heart of their critique was a challenge to the very idea of separating the natural and the supernatural and relegating the Christian faith to a personal, private spirituality. Bell and Cavanaugh, however, argued that the Liberation theologians had not gone far enough in distancing themselves from the distinction of planes. Rather than seeing the church defined by a supernaturalized world—Gutierrez' idea of an already graced nature—Bell and Cavanaugh called for a conception of the church as its own public, a society formed and disciplined by its liturgical practices as a distinct body counter to the state. For Christians, politics is not reduced to statecraft, but is concerned with the very liturgical practices and works of mercy that form believers for the performance of the Gospel in the world. Christianity, then, is embodied, a lived, historical practice of community formation in the midst of this present life.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

From their beginnings in seventeenth century England to their contemporary prevalence in twenty-first century America, Baptists have almost without exception extolled religious liberty as a distinctive commitment of the denomination. Yet while Baptists have proclaimed this doctrine across the centuries, it has been the purpose of this study to argue that the theology founding calls for religious liberty has not remained the same. The earliest seventeenth century Baptists oriented their commitment to religious liberty around the idea of God's sovereignty. Their particular concern was that the use of the coercive power of the state to compel religious practice infringed upon God's sovereign authority to call persons to repentance. An important corollary to the theocentric basis for religious liberty was an ecclesiology established on the commitment to the creation of a true church. Such a church could only be comprised of those whose consciences had been convinced by God's call, not the coercion of the earthly sword. These Baptists, both General and Particular, were living within the context of a late medieval culture that was just beginning to question the Christendom model that had dominated social life for centuries. Therefore, they were not concerned with creating a space within civil society wherein the political could happen apart from direct involvement by church authorities. Rather, their theocentric emphasis hoped to create a space in which God's sovereignty could call people to be part of a unique community that was transformed by its relationship to Christ. The church was not thought of as an

association of like-minded individuals, but a particular society oriented around distinct practices and recognition of God's sovereign calling.

For the early English Baptists, the church is a divine institution that is called together by God. In this sense, then, it is more than a human association created as secondary to conversion, though there is certainly some tension in this understanding. What does seem clear, though, is that faith is not merely internal or relegated to a spiritual realm. Because they saw the church as a divine institution and a true community of faith formed of those who acknowledge God's sovereignty, the Gospel is to have place in the public square. This said, however, it would also seem that even as these English Baptists imagined themselves as a distinct community within the larger English society, their language of "outward" and "inward" person, and their desire to allow the state command of the outward person as a means of affirming their commitment to the crown set a linguistic trajectory which would allow for the shifting of Baptist imagination towards a view that distinguishes two distinct realms of Christian activity: the religious and the temporal.

Baptists from England brought their commitment to religious liberty and freedom of conscience to the American colonies. Even more so than their English brethren, however, Baptists in the colonies seemed to be living in tension between two social imaginaries: the fading medieval Christendom world and the emerging modern world. This tension was noted in the works of Roger Williams and John Clarke, the two key Baptist figures in Rhode Island during the formative years of the colony. Both Williams and Clarke continued to function within the concern to create a true church apart from the coercive power of the civil government in compelling religious practice. However,

Williams in particular seemed to be anticipating much of the political theory of the modern world. Though his writings were occasional rather than seeking to constitute a comprehensive political theory, there is evidence in his work of a conception of the religious as internalized and removed from the individual's participation in public or civic activities. Once again, however, his primary concern in pushing for religious liberty was not based in an anthropocentric concern for human rights, but remained with the ensuring of a true church.

The span of a little over one hundred years following the era of Williams and Clarke would see a significant transformation in Baptist thought concerning religious liberty. The key Baptist figures in the early years of the fledgling American republic were Isaac Backus and John Leland. It is to these two figures that Baptists in the United States point as the defenders of religious liberty who worked to have this Baptist conviction ensconced in the Bill of Rights. Yet, what distinguishes Backus and Leland from their English Baptist forefathers is that their calls for religious liberty no longer appear to be grounded in a theocentric concern for sovereignty, but instead display the influence of Lockean political theory. Religious liberty is now founded upon an anthropocentric emphasis on human rights which must be guaranteed by the civil state. Their ecclesiology betrays a similar modern influence in that each imagines the church as a voluntary organization of individuals. Granted, it is an organization that emphasizes spiritual issues, but it is internalized and distinct from one's life in the public square. With Backus and Leland, a clear trajectory is set, dependent upon an individualistic, spiritualized faith that imagines the church as one among a variety of institutions under the larger civil society.

Contemporary Baptists have largely accepted the modern liberal democratic social imagination in recognizing the church as an institution of society. Particularly this has been accomplished as Baptists accepted the privatizing of the Gospel resulting in an individualizing of faith. In the twentieth century, Baptists largely thinned out their ecclesiology so that the church became little more than an association of like-minded individuals whose privatized faith always exists prior to their joining an ecclesial community. The spiritual and the material were divided to the extent that the Gospel's concern was relegated to eschatological salvation. Political issues (and the body) were left to the state. Most importantly, because religious liberty was now based in human right, the liberal democratic state became the guarantor of that right, and as such, the preservation of this right was tied with political activity by Christians seeking the well-being of the nation-state. The church was left as an institution under the state, and with the ideology of Lost Cause and culture wars driving much Baptist thought, the Gospel became tied with the common good of the nation-state.

Though often taking opposing sides in church-state issues, contemporary Baptist figures such as Richard Land and James Dunn, favoring nonpreferentialism and pluralistic separation respectively, each would affirm the idea of religious liberty and the importance of the separation of church and state. Neither, however, desires that the religious be removed from the public square; their differences are over the extent to which the church is to be involved with the state in issues of public concern. Both of these men, and the positions that they represent, assent to the modern social imaginary in which the church is an institution of society. Thus, the involvement of the religious in the public square is within the context of individual moral consciences. Each calls for

Christians to be active in the political realm as Christians informed by the Gospel influence. The end goal for these Baptists is not an avowedly Christian America, but a temporal culture in which the leavening of the Gospel has worked itself into the public square through democratic processes. Spiritual issues, those pertaining to salvation, remain distinct from activity within the public square, relegated to the religious realm to which is assigned the activity of the church.

Baptists and Maritain

This Baptist imagination of the church in relation to the state displays a striking similarity with the twentieth century New Christendom model that dominated much of Catholic thought. Key to New Christendom was Maritain's distinction of planes which posited an autonomous temporal realm within which humans sought to achieve natural ends that were distinct from their supernatural end in God. This earthly common good was that for which grace was not directly required. Certainly Maritain wanted to maintain a relationship between the temporal realm and the spiritual realm, and so argued that the temporal common good made possible the living of a fully human life such that individuals could rightly pursue their supernatural end. However, he did not want the supernatural to seek domination in the earthly realm. Therefore, the church's only engagement with the temporal was through the political activity of individual Christians who acted freely out of the inspiration they received from the Gospel. The church as such did not have place within the civil society. It was a purely supernatural institution whose proper concern was with those things that pertained to salvation.

Maritain saw in democracy the secular outworking of the Gospel in the temporal realm. That is, democracy was the product of the ideals of the Gospel leavening the

secular culture, producing a fruit in which people of all religious faiths could come together to pursue the temporal common good. His great concern was to keep the Gospel inspiration, arguing that modern liberal democracy too often forgets its divine connection resulting in an anthropocentric humanism that seeks to remove God completely from the temporal. For Maritain, such humanism loses sight of the proper hierarchy of the two planes in which the spiritual remains over the temporal, offering its inspiration that allows for a proper pursuit of the earthly common good. To completely divorce the natural and the supernatural results in horribly divided humans who are trying to unnaturally split their lives between the spiritual and the temporal. An integral humanism allows for fully developed persons who recognize that their earthly activity and spiritual activity work together, realizing that their good end on earth is to help towards their supernatural end in God. They know which things are Caesar's and which are God's.

It is my contention that Baptists have adopted a distinction of planes conception of reality that informs not only their understanding of church-state relations, but also relates directly to their ecclesiology. For Baptists, separation of church and state has taken on a particular hue of distinct realms of influence. Christians speak in the public square informed by their Christian consciences, but the church as such has no place in the business of politics. Faith is internalized and individualized such that the Gospel has to do with spiritual things while the issues that relate to the body are rightly the purview of the state. By being removed to a supernatural realm, Christianity becomes little more than the moral conscience of civil society. The church as an empirical institution becomes in this social imaginary an institution of the larger society in which it resides. It is an institution particularly concerned with spiritual issues, but its members are primarily

members of the political society in which they reside. Thus, the church, as with all other institutions of a particular society, is to seek the common good of its body politic.

The great Baptist theologian of the early twentieth century, E. Y. Mullins contended that the democratic polity of Baptist churches and individual soul competency are the “spiritual analogues of our entire political system.”¹ Famed Baptist pastor George W. Truett, in a similar vein, claims of Baptists: “Their love and loyalty to country have not been put to shame in any land.”² Such affirmations of the connection between Baptists and the American democratic nation-state evidence the growing imagination of a theology that reduces the Gospel to spiritual issues while disciplining church members to be good citizens willing to sacrifice goods and body for the state. To be political is to engage in the issues that involve the good of the body politic, while to be religious is to be concerned with personal salvation. Because the democratic state is seen as the type of the Baptist archetype, the temporal application of the Gospel message concerns the production of good citizens whose earthly allegiance is to the American state.

What Maritain and contemporary Baptists have failed to understand is that in such a conception of the social, the security of the nation-state becomes the highest common good, such that all other claims upon individuals must be subsumed under that particular good. As Daniel Bell argues, politics becomes statecraft, the construction of particular ways of governing the social space and allocations of power. Politics as statecraft deals with questions of power, and particularly how such power is to be managed so that the nation-state remains ascendant within the body politic. Bell and William Cavanaugh,

¹E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908), 270.

²George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” in *The Inspiration of Ideals*, ed. Powhatan W. James (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1950), 102.

however, both challenge the idea of politics as statecraft. Politics does have to do with issues such as education, care for the poor and sick, conservation, and issues of distribution and consumption, but the use of coercive power and the monopolizing of power in the hands of the state are distinct from this. The issues of politics are the issues that the church has involved itself in throughout its history. The political has to do with the instantiation of the good within the social—a task vastly different from that of statecraft.

The great failure of New Christendom noted by Bell and Cavanaugh (as well as Gustavo Gutierrez) was that the distinction of planes, envisioning distinct realms of competency for church and state, depoliticizes the Gospel to the extent that the church's existence as a body politic in itself is lost. As evidenced by the church's abdication of its social presence in Latin America by privatizing the Gospel, the church becomes committed to the political status quo. Lost is the concept of a graced natural realm in which God is the only end for humans. By accepting temporal ends proper to an autonomous natural realm which are gained without reference to humans' supernatural end in God, the distinction of planes model creates a space that finally needs no reference to the divine so that the state becomes the sole arbiter of power. Because the state is the guarantor of rights in such a conception, the security of the state becomes the primary end to which all others must be subsumed, for only a secure state can protect rights and accomplish the "common good." Thus, the true common good becomes the state's security. With the body given over to the state, Christian temporal activity is pledged to the state's common good, and Christian citizens must be willing to suffer all for that supreme end. As was the case in Chile, torture can be a means to that end. With an

apolitical church that has abandoned the social realm, the Gospel has nothing to say against such practices.

Baptists in the United States who share a similar distinction of planes theology that privatizes the Gospel and imagines the church as an institution of society concerned only with the spiritual like the Catholic Church in Chile have found themselves lacking the theological resources to challenge the political status quo. In the South, Baptists who had affirmed the connection of the Gospel with the Lost Cause mythology that emerged following the Civil War tied the church closely with Southern society to the extent that Baptists by and large remained silent in the face of official segregation and Jim Crow laws. One of the most striking examples of this distinction of planes ideology is exemplified in the ministry of Douglas Hudgins, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Mississippi at the height of the civil rights movement. Among his church membership were key figures in the lambasting of the movement: politicians, media moguls, and newspaper editors. Hudgins's commitment to Baptist individualism and the wholly spiritual nature of the Gospel translated to an emphasis on individual salvation with no place for civil matters. The Gospel was otherworldly, and issues of racial segregation, lynchings, bombings, and corruptions of justice were outside of the church's sphere of influence. Hudgins's Christianity, and that of the majority of Baptists in the South, sought salvation in the eschaton. Good Baptists in the temporal world sought to preserve the order and peace that marked the status quo of the earthly state and remain silent on issues they deemed purely civil. For Hudgins, this meant refusing to condemn from the pulpit the actions of members of his congregation who were inciting violence and affirming the "goodness" of segregation.

Towards a Baptist Ecclesiology

Following Augustine, Cavanaugh argues that the nation-state is “a kind of parody of the Church” which creates a false sense of unity, primarily through the creation of enemies by war.³ While the state may offer certain goods and services that can contribute to a positive order, it cannot ultimately be the keeper of the common good. Cavanaugh suggests instead that “The Church must constitute itself as an alternative social space, and not simply rely on the nation-state to be its social presence.”⁴ For Cavanaugh, as a Catholic, such a suggestion has historical precedent in that Catholicism has traditionally held to more of a communal conception of faith. Among Baptists, however, to challenge the view of an individualized faith approaches heresy at worst, and at best is dismissed as against the historical identity of the denomination. As Philip Thompson has suggests, however, many Baptists “assume that Baptist theological identity as it is now is in basic continuity with Baptist theological identity throughout Baptist existence.”⁵ Yet, hopefully, this research shows that when speaking of theological identity, contemporary conceptions are not necessarily in continuity with those of the earliest seventeenth century Baptists. Though the vocabulary might be the same, the theology is significantly different.

Seventeenth century ecclesiology among English Baptists displayed an imaginary of the community of believers that was much closer to a society than to a simple gathering of like-minded individuals. There was a sense among these Baptists of the

³William T. Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 266.

⁴*Ibid.*, 267.

⁵Philip E. Thompson, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Analysis,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 287-88.

church's "social presence." Philip Thompson, also noting the theocentric focus of the early Baptists in contrast to an anthropocentric influence which emerged in the United States, wishes to "encourage awareness that Baptist doctrine and the life and identity of Baptist communities are connected."⁶ Thompson's interest is in the ecclesial practices of Baptists, "how Baptist identity is prayed and enacted in the gathered communities."⁷ He contends that the seventeenth century Baptists had a far richer understanding of the church's role in salvation as an affirmation of God's freedom to make use of creation for the work of salvation. The Gospel is not relegated to being wholly otherworldly. Thus, to propose a Baptist ecclesiology that moves beyond an account of church as an institution of those sharing similar "spiritual" concerns while the work of the Spirit remains solely internal is to allow that to follow Cavanaugh in imaging the church as its own body politic has historical warrant with Baptist origins.

The implications of the above are to suggest that Baptists must take up again questions of ecclesiology. Though often given only scant attention, and more likely ignored by Baptists in America, the development of a more robust conception of the church as the body of Christ is necessary to counter the individualism that has helped to foster a distinction of planes type theology. Baptists in America have become to a large degree stout defenders of the status quo, making the good of the state paramount in an imagined temporal realm relegating the church to little more than society's moral conscience. In noting the dangers such a social imaginary presented in Latin America,

⁶Ibid., 302. Thompson argues in this article for the same shift in theological perspective as suggested in this dissertation. However, he develops his argument largely by tracing changes in Baptist liturgical patterns. He notes that along with the move from "theocentric trinitarianism" is a concomitant rejection of creation by Baptists. I would contend that this latter development may be related to an acceptance of a distinction of planes model which places little value on the temporal world in regards to spiritual issues.

⁷Ibid.

Baptists would do well to consider carefully the critiques posed by Bell and Cavanaugh. An individualized ecclesiology that left the church as merely purveyor of the spiritual, abandoning the political realm to the state, resulted in a church that was unable to respond to mass torture under the Pinochet regime in Chile or mount a serious challenge to slavery and Jim Crow segregation in the United States. Because Christians in the natural realm saw the democratic state as the temporal expression of the Gospel, they were left unprepared to confront a state whose means to security violated their spiritual values, thus meaning that their only response was to accommodate the Gospel to the state's ethic. The church's prophetic voice was lost.

Following a similar ecclesiology as Cavanaugh outlined emerged in the Catholic Church in Chile, Baptists must as well imagine the church as a unique society with its own liturgical practices that form a particular community in its political activity. Baptist theologian Mikael Broadway, speaking of the spiritualized Christianity of twentieth century Baptist churches, comments, "The utterly spiritual church has little or nothing to say about the material existence of its members. On political, economic, and social matters it is irrelevant."⁸ In good Baptist fashion, he turns to scripture to support a vision of the church not unlike Cavanaugh's: "Jesus, according to the gospels, came proclaiming the Kingdom of God, a thoroughly social vision of a world renewed to be what God intended in creation. He not only offered personal forgiveness, but he also established a community with a way of life that all disciples are to share."⁹ In such a rich conception of the church, the liturgical practices are not accidental to the faith, but are the

⁸Mikael N. Broadway, "Preaching What We Practice: Churches Confessing the Whole Gospel," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002):, 394.

⁹*Ibid.*, 395.

expressions of and means for extending a social practice that marks a unique society that stands counter to that of the state.

Thus, a renewed Baptist ecclesiology must begin with a re-imagined view of the social. No longer can Baptists conceive of the church and state as two institutions of the same society. Nor can Baptists relegate the Gospel to a distinct spiritual realm that privatizes faith and depoliticizes the church. A renewed social imagination must envision the church as a distinct society that possesses its own social practices making it very much political. The church is then recognized as an alternative polis to the earthly city. This heavenly polis is that one which begins to enact the Kingdom of God in the present age. Yet such a conception of the church is not to imply returning to a different kind of exile, to a sectarian ghetto that isolates the church from the world. As a unique society constituted by God, the church must continue to live and function within the earthly society that surrounds it. It makes use of goods and services of that society—the fire department, mail delivery, roads, etc. The difference is that the church refuses to accept the simple conception of space between the secular realm and the spiritual realm. As Cavanaugh argues, the church must seek every opportunity to “complexify” space, “to promote the creation of spaces in which alternative economies and authorities flourish.”¹⁰ That is, Christians as the body of Christ, engage in economic practices that promote fair wages, challenge ideologies of consumption and desire, and promote community and justice between people. It is not that Christians only work with other Christians, but that in their daily activities of life, they choose options and promote activities that exemplify the Gospel lived out in the temporal world. Rather than being sectarian, the church is

¹⁰Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 267.

widely active, though politicizing its activity according to the politics of the Kingdom of God instead of by those of the state.

To re-imagine the social it will perhaps be necessary for Baptists to re-envision the church itself in its constitution and instantiation. Imagining the church as itself a society, Baptist ecclesiology will need to reflect a conception of what it means to be Christian that challenges the individualism that has been the hallmark of contemporary theology. This individualism, as Curtis Freeman describes, is “cloaked in the language of just-me-and-Jesus piety where freedom becomes confused with autonomy and religious language is infused with contractual and consumerist notions of the self and its associations.”¹¹ Such religious self-sufficiency becomes, in Carlyle Marney’s words, “bastard individualism.”¹² This individualism is evidenced in Baptist theology of the ordinances as mere symbols, personal memorials of a private experience with Christ. In such a conception, the activity of God’s grace is wholly privatized and separated from relation to the community of Christians.

Baptists may do well to reconsider their theology of baptism and the Lord’s Supper along more sacramental lines. Stanley Grenz suggests that the ordinances may be understood as “acts of commitment” or “community acts” such that “the two ordinances carry sacramental significance in that they are identity-conveying and identity-forming events.”¹³ The community as a whole participates in these events and in so doing is connected to one another and to God’s Gospel narrative. British Baptist Robert C.

¹¹Curtis Freeman, “Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Communion Ecclesiology in the Free Church,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 261.

¹²Carlyle Marney, *Priests to Each Other* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1974), 12.

¹³Stanley Grenz, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2003), 90.

Walton further argues that in their materiality, these ordinances remind that God's activity is within the material universe, and that the spiritual reality of God's grace is mysteriously present in the physical.¹⁴ Thompson argues that such a view is not necessarily alien to the earliest Baptists, and that in developing a more robust concept of the ordinances, Baptists might begin to express a theology much closer to that of their earliest forefathers than many contemporary Baptists might expect.¹⁵

How then might baptism in particular be conceived as a distinct sacramental practice that deepens Baptist ecclesiology and challenges the distinction of planes view that has come to predominate? Walton points to the Baptist commitment to believer's baptism as already holding the key to a sacramental understanding. By restricting baptism to those "who know that Christ has found them in the wilderness and has brought them into the fold,"¹⁶ Baptists affirm the practice as dominical in that it was instituted by Christ as an act of entrance into the community of believers. Walton argues that while it is a personal response of an individual to God, it is also communal in that "God deals with the soul through the holy community." So, "There is an overflow of grace to the Church which is made manifest in the joy of the congregation, in the deepening of its

¹⁴Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: Carey Press, 1946), 156. "The material universe is pregnant with spiritual meaning and there is reality hidden within the 'real' objects of earth and sky and sea, of man's physical body and mental life. ...The sacraments are another example of this principle."

¹⁵See, Thompson, "Sacraments and Religious Liberty: From Critical Practice to Rejected Infringement," in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2003), 36-54. Freeman suggests that there is a "sacramental trajectory" in John Smyth's theology that can be read in his covenantal view of the church. "Where Two or Three are Gathered," 265, see particularly n. 25 and 27. Walton interestingly will have a more negative reading of Smyth, noting Smyth's emphasis on "spiritual worship." Yet, he will note that even with this emphasis, Smyth still never envisions giving up the bread and the wine as material elements in worship. *Gathered Community*, 156-57.

¹⁶Walton, *Gathered Community*, 163.

fellowship and in its rededication to the tasks of Christian community.”¹⁷ Thus, for Walton, God’s grace is physically manifest to both the baptismal candidate and the congregation in the act of baptism, tying the community together.

Yet, it is possible to develop the sacramental nature of baptism even more in marking out a distinct society whose very liturgical practices are political. Thompson argues that for the early Baptists, there was a significant political aspect to baptism. He writes, “Baptism was the sacrament that set the boundary that situated and gave proper significance to all human bodies: individual, communal, or political.” This was for Baptists, “the relocation of politics from the state to church.”¹⁸ One’s well-being, purpose, and end now was discovered in the narrative of the Gospel which ordered and defined one’s life, not in the account of the nation-state and its construal of the end good. For the early English Baptists, it was not the state church that dispensed grace or lumped all in by citizenship. Rather, baptism affirmed God’s sovereignty to establish the presence of his Kingdom on earth and to call people to participation in the body of Christ. In the present context, then, baptism likewise challenges the narrative of the modern nation-state as the provider of a secular good. By seeing baptism as the initiatory sacrament into a distinct community that practices the politics of the Gospel and forms Christians through its liturgy, the church then challenges the modern narration of the distinction between public and private that was noted in chapter one. As Thompson concludes, Baptists with such a conception practice “baptismal anarchism.”¹⁹ Where the modern nation-state sought to distinguish those within from those without, baptism

¹⁷Ibid., 167.

¹⁸Thompson, “Sacraments and Religious Liberty,” 46.

¹⁹Ibid., 46.

challenges such accounts by affirming that one's fellow citizen is not only next door, but those whom the state would label as enemies. The politics of the Gospel then affirm mercy and grace over against the state's demand for violence. Thus, Baptists will again return to their roots as dissenters who stand prophetically counter to the politics of the state.

That Baptists continue to use the vocabulary of religious liberty does not mean that they necessarily remain in historical continuity with early Baptists. Instead, their unacknowledged theology betrays an imagination of the world that is thoroughly modern in the relegation of the spiritual to a distinct realm apart from the temporal world. This is a theology that shares significant affinities with the Catholic New Christendom model, and Baptists would do well to heed the dangers to the church painfully discovered by Catholics in Latin America. As with Catholics in Chile, Baptists in America may find the theological resources they need in a revitalized ecclesiology envisioning the church no longer as an institution of society, but as a unique divine society performing the Kingdom of God in this present age.

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