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To cite this article: Ian Birch (2013) 'THE COUNSEL AND HELP OF ONE ANOTHER', Baptist Quarterly, 45:1, 4-29, DOI: [10.1179/bqu.2013.45.1.002](https://doi.org/10.1179/bqu.2013.45.1.002)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1179/bqu.2013.45.1.002>



Published online: 12 Nov 2014.



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‘THE COUNSEL AND HELP OF ONE ANOTHER’ The Origins and Concerns of Early Particular Baptist Churches in Association Ian Birch

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 - *This essay won the Payne Memorial Essay Competition 2012. It explains the historical origins of Particular Baptist Associations, the nature of authority and accountability in their relationships, and the questions which drew them together for communal discernment.*
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THE ORIGINS OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS TO 1660

From the early 1640s Baptist ecclesiology, although determined by separatist and congregational principles, did not regard independence of the local gathered congregation as the ideal ecclesiological stance. In the terms of W.T. Whitley, Baptists ‘sought to maintain sisterly intercourse between local churches’.¹ Throughout the period 1640-1660 it is possible to trace the intentional organisation of a network of churches by which Particular Baptists related to one another, and their reasons for so doing.

Early attempts to explain the origins of Particular Baptist associationalism generated two historical theories. The first was Whitley’s in his *History of the English Baptists*, 1923,² followed later by R.G. Torbet in 1950, though he added little of substance to the main argument.³ The Whitley/Torbet theory states that Baptist ‘Association’ as an organisational idea was patterned after the formation of the county militia employed by Cromwell in the First Civil War. B.R. White regarded this theory unsatisfactory in a number of details.⁴

The second theory was put forward by White himself. He proposed a more organic, evolutionary process in which Particular Baptist associationalism was foreshadowed in the English Independency of Henry Jacob.⁵ This suggestion, for it was little more than this in White’s original paper, was developed into a full theory by Sladen Yarbrough.⁶ Yarbrough extended White’s thesis with the proposal that the Dutch English classis between 1621-1633 modelled Jacobean associational theory, and thereby provided a historical example of inter-church cooperation which the London Calvinistic Baptists incorporated into their Confession in 1644.⁷

THE ORIGINS OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS IN THE ASSOCIATION RECORDS

The attempt to explain the origins of the Particular Baptist Associations was given significant momentum in 1960 with the discovery by Geoffrey F. Nuttall of the records of, first, the Baptist Western Association 1653-8 in the Library of the Society of Friends in London and the library of the Bristol Baptist College.⁸ Subsequently, Ernest Payne located the records of the Berkshire churches 1652-60, of Wales, and of the English Midlands and Ireland.⁹

The South Wales churches owed their beginning to John Miles and his associates, who founded their first church in Ilston, near Swansea, on 1 October 1649. By August 1652 five congregations had been formed on the basis of ‘closed communion’, that is, membership restricted to those who had undergone believer’s baptism. The first joint meeting of South Wales’ churches took place on 6-7 November 1650 at Ilston and

comprised the members of two congregations, Hay and Lanharan.¹⁰ The second gathering at Carmarthen on 19 March 1651 added two churches, Ilston and Carmarthen, to the union.¹¹ The third meeting took place during the summer 1651, the fourth on 14-15 July 1653 when churches from Lantrissant and Abergavenny were represented for the first time,¹² and the fifth on 1-2 March 1654. The last recorded meeting was on 30-31 August 1654, at which it was agreed to hold a general meeting every six months thereafter.¹³

At the first meeting, to facilitate the cultivation of 'one minde and one heart', it was agreed that a 'declaration' from the Hay church would be considered by each congregation successively and questions arising would be discussed at a subsequent meeting convened for the purpose. No extant record of this 'declaration' remains, nor of any subsequent discussions; however, the detail indicates that the churches in fellowship sought a measure of unity and uniformity in doctrine and practice.¹⁴

At subsequent meetings discussions took place regarding the supply and remuneration of ministry to the various churches.¹⁵ Other matters of common interest were the manner of singing psalms, 'whether laying on of hands be an ordinance of Christ; and if it be so, then upon whom?'¹⁶ At the fifth meeting on 1-2 March 1654, the question of psalm singing was raised again, and the record provides an insight into the strength of relationships between the united churches. The congregation at Abergavenny was rebuked for failing to 'forbear to sing Psalms', and it was desired that 'satisfaction be made for the offence given the churches, in not asking their advice and counsel therein'.¹⁷ No explanation is given as to what 'satisfaction' might consist of, but presumably an apology was intended, and evidently Abergavenny was willing to submit to the collective discipline of the association.

During the sixth General Meeting, 30-31 August 1654, a question about the continuance of fast days, an initiative promoted by the Irish correspondence of 1653,¹⁸ reveals the extent of the Particular Baptist network developing throughout the three kingdoms by means of correspondence. The relevant answer was, 'It is judged, that the appointed fast days should be continued; for that is the agreement of the churches in England, Ireland, and Wales, and our promise to God and

them to observe it’.¹⁹ The desire for uniformity on this matter across national boundaries indicates a growing sense of denominational identity²⁰ and desire for interdependency among kindred churches.

The Association Records of the Calvinistic Baptist churches in the Abingdon region recount their meetings from 8 October 1652. Three churches from Abingdon, Reading and Henley first joined together in Wormsley to discuss matters of inter-congregational concern. At the next meeting, on 3 November, representatives from Kensworth in Hertfordshire and Eversholt in Bedfordshire attended. In March 1653 the church representatives, now called ‘messengers’, met at Tetsworth in Oxfordshire to sign ‘The Agreement of certain Churches’, setting out the basis for fellowship and co-operation in missionary activity:

true churches of Christ ought to acknowledge one another to be such and to hold a firme communion each with other in point of advice in things remaining doubtfull to any particular church or churches as also in giving and receiving in case of want and povertie of any particular church or churches and in consulting and consenting (as need shall require and as shall be most for the glory of God) to the joint carrying on of the worke of the Lord that is common to the churches.²¹

The messengers also agreed to hold in common principles and constitutions, and each committed himself to walk in these ways. They agreed to continue meeting together, and between meetings to correspond by letter, ‘as need shall require’.²² Hence, by means of messengers’ meetings and letters a relationship of mutual interest and joint activity was established and consolidated.

One other decision from this meeting in March 1653 is significant, namely the intention to refer matters agreed among the messengers back to the churches, ‘for their approbation therein’.²³ This protocol determined at the outset that while gatherings of church representatives might ‘discerne [whatsoever else] the word of God require[s] true churches to hold communion in’, their deliberations and decisions held ‘no coercive power’ over individual congregations.²⁴

At the following meeting on 10 June 1653 the messengers drafted a letter to fellow Baptists in London conveying news about the formation

of an association of congregations in and around Abingdon.²⁵ The letter set out the basis of communion and the intent of the churches so joined. At the tenth General Meeting of the Abingdon Association held on 26 December 1654, a letter was drawn up in response to a request from the church at Warwick seeking advice on how to form a new association of churches, 'neere unto them'.²⁶ The messengers' response at Tetsworth was threefold. First, they encouraged the Warwick church and others to bring to fruition their desires to enter into a solemn association with other churches that are 'rightly constituted and principled'. Second, they promised to send out papers stating 'on what grounds and after what manner we ourselves did enter into our association'. Third, they agreed to send representatives from the Abingdon Association churches to a meeting of the Warwick churches to assist them in any way that might be beneficial in forming an association. In particular, Abingdon proposed to have John Pendarves of the Abingdon church and Benjamin Cox of Dunstable attend the meeting, and requested Warwick to convene the meeting away from Easter or Whitsuntide.²⁷

At the eleventh General Meeting, 19-20 June 1655, the Association welcomed four further churches into membership: Wantage, Watlington, Kingston and Hadnam, an indication that the number of Baptist congregations was continuing to expand.²⁸ On 17 October of that year, Pirton was received into association.²⁹ At the meeting of 11 March 1656 the churches of Oxford³⁰ and Hempstead³¹ were added.³²

A significant moment in the life of the Association occurred on 16 October 1657. The churches at Kensworth, Eversholt, Pirton and Hempstead requested permission to meet as a district association on account of their distance from Tetsworth. They further suggested there were several other local congregations which might join a new association who were as yet unwilling to join the existing association. This request was unanimously approved by the messengers.³³ At the following meeting on 30 March 1658, being the start of the new year, 'the said messengers of the churches of Abingdon, Reading etc., did solemnly commit and commend the said churches of Kensworth, Eversholt etc'. to be henceforth a distinct association.³⁴ The amicable nature of the partition between the groups is confirmed by an agreement

to maintain relations through correspondence, and by continuing to send two messengers to the Abingdon Association meetings.³⁵

At the meeting beginning 14 September 1658 representatives of four additional congregations were present, Longworth, Andover, Newberrie and Thistleworth.³⁶ The meeting of 7 April 1659 affords a glimpse of developments in the sister association which met at Dunstable on 3 and 4 March. The original four churches had now become nine by the addition of Luton, Stukeligh, Watford, Newport Pagnell and Bedford. The meeting also considered an application from a recently formed congregation at Woolaston in Northamptonshire. It was agreed to receive the church into membership; however, Woolaston first desired to consider the sixteen articles of faith and order, together with the twelve conclusions, by which the association was constituted.³⁷

The final meeting of the period on 20 June 1660, only three weeks after the Restoration of the monarchy, records encouragement to the several churches to seek the Lord by prayer and fasting, ‘that they may be kept stedfast in the day of tryall’.³⁸ From each church only one representative was in attendance³⁹ which was almost certainly due to the anxiety generated by political developments. B.R. White speculates that already a number of Baptist leaders were in gaol.⁴⁰

In Ireland, the Baptist cause had been established as a result of the English military campaign from 1649.⁴¹ Significant numbers of Baptists in the New Model Army resulted in Irish garrisons forming their own Baptist congregations.⁴² In correspondence between London and the Irish churches in June 1653 a letter, with two accompanying documents, indicates the existence of ten Calvinistic congregations in Ireland, with named leaders,⁴³ in Dublin, Waterford, Clommell [*sic*], Killkenny, Corke, Lymrick, Galloway, Wexford, Kerry and Carrick Fergus.

According to document (i), ‘The agreement concerning matters requiring prayer by the churches’, the Irish congregations had already met on at least one occasion, since they describe their commitment to meet regularly for spiritual exercises:

[we] doe agree together, through the Lord’s assistance, to sett apart one day in every month, solemnly to seeke the face of our God and, by prayer and fasting, humbly to mourne before him for the things following which

is alsoe recommended to our deere frinds the churches of Christ in England and scattered brethren in severall places, who have obtained like pretious faith with us.⁴⁴

The first Irish letter to London gives further evidence of growing links between the Particular Baptist congregations and associations across the four kingdoms. The Irish speak first of the mutual benefit derived from correspondence between them:

The Lord haveing put it into the hearts of all his congregations in this Iland to keepe a more revived correspondency with each other by letters and loving epistles . . . in the practice thereof [we] have found great advantage not only weakning Satan's suggestions and jealousyes but it hath begot a closer union and knitting upp of heart.⁴⁵

Having profited so greatly from this union by letter, they ask the same of churches elsewhere:

Wee heerby earnestly request and begg the same brotherly correspondence with you and from you desireing the same things by your meanes with all the rest of the churches in England, Scotland and Wales whom we trust you will provoke to the same feelings and which wee hope, once in 3 months, may be mutually obtained.⁴⁶

The Irish churches also sought from the London leaders a list of congregations with whom they were in contact. They further desired the London churches to send out two or more competent leaders to the churches known to them throughout England, Scotland and Wales to 'visit, comfort and confirme all the flock of our Lord Jesus'.⁴⁷ There is no extant evidence that this visitation took place. However, it signifies the prominence of the London churches among British Particular Baptists, and the growing sense of union between such churches.

On 24 July 1653, the Glasshouse church wrote a covering letter to accompany the Irish correspondence they sent out to the congregations throughout the three kingdoms. In addition to the requests made by the Irish Baptists, the London leaders asked of the churches,

your care and paines in visiting the severall weake and scattered brethren in your parts, that from a thorough knowledg of, and acquaintance with, theire present standing, wee may receive information from you and our brethren in Ireland, according to their desires, from us.⁴⁸

The pastoral concern of the authors is to the fore, born of a sense of inter-relatedness among Baptists.

The records of the associational gatherings of Particular Baptists in the ‘county of Somerset and the counties near adjacent’ were kept and published, probably in 1658, by Thomas Collier.⁴⁹ They show that churches from Gloucestershire to Cornwall were linked together under the general oversight of Thomas Collier.⁵⁰ The first meeting took place on 8-9 November 1653 at Wells to discuss the practice of laying hands on all baptized believers, and whether this was an ordinance of Christ. It was decided that it was not. In the communication of this decision, however, greater attention was given to the matter of dissention within churches and the growing incidence of separation between churches over the practice, which was naturally considered most undesirable.⁵¹ The third part of the response warned churches that did not practise imposition of hands that they ought not to allow to preach in their pulpit a member from a church that did so practise, if they scrupled about this matter as a basis for fellowship. It is thus implied that the messengers regarded imposition of hands as an *adiaphora* or non-essential issue, and that union among the churches should not be jeopardised on account of the practice or non-practice of this custom.⁵²

‘Association’⁵³ amongst the Western churches was brought about by the efforts of Thomas Collier who in 1651 issued ‘A Second General Epistle to all the Saints’⁵⁴ to generate a sense of kinship among them.⁵⁵ Meetings began in 1653; thereafter the Messengers usually gathered twice a year, in autumn and spring. For the wider relations of the Western churches with the national Baptist constituency, a number of links are evident, through Thomas Collier’s contact with the London churches, London leaders and London theology.⁵⁶

In addition to correspondence with other Baptists that was positive in nature, and designed to encourage, the letter of the Western Baptists to the Irish churches, dated 18 April 1655, demonstrates a willingness to

chide. News had reached them of ‘things amiss’⁵⁷ in the Irish churches which they felt duty bound to address. These included ‘pride in apparel’, ‘dependency of the ministry on the maintenance of the magistrate’, both of which were deemed contrary to the Gospel constitution in 1 Cor 9.14, ‘they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel’.⁵⁸

The relationality underpinning this Western Association rebuke of the Irish churches was that of ‘faithful friends’.⁵⁹ They claimed: ‘we have not written these things to shame you, but to warn you not as having dominion over your faith but as helpers of your joy’.⁶⁰ Significantly it evidences a non-hierarchical pattern of inter-church relationship. One Association in Baptist ecclesiology had no ‘dominion’ over another Association or individual churches within them.⁶¹

In the period up to 1660 the fifth Association to form was the Midland, holding its inaugural meeting 2 May 1655 in Warwick.⁶² The churches of the Midland Association owed their existence to the evangelistic endeavours of Daniel King.⁶³ The evidence of his connections to four prominent London leaders, Thomas Patient, John Spilsbery, William Kiffen and John Pearson in his tract of 1650, *A Way to Sion*,⁶⁴ suggests that King had been commissioned by them to form churches and build up associations in the Midland region.⁶⁵ Although there were fourteen Particular Baptist churches in the eight counties, only seven were willing to associate in the first instance. These were, Warwick, Morton, Bourton-on-the-Water, Alchester, Teuxbury, Hook Norton and Derby, and they agreed to associate on the basis of a Confession of Faith comprised of sixteen articles.⁶⁶

One factor prompting the organisation of Association in the Midlands was the evangelistic activity of the Quakers. George Fox engaged Baptists in disputations at Biddesley, Warwickshire, in 1654, and at Sileby, Leicestershire in 1655.⁶⁷ This undoubtedly created a sense of urgency among messengers to protect the Baptist flock. At the second meeting of the Association in June 1655 the messengers agreed a statement of mutual recognition and the basis for co-operation,

[we] doe mutually acknowledg each other to be true churches and that it is their duty to hold a class communion each with other according to the rule of his worde and soe be helpfull each to other as God shall give

opportunitie and abillitie . . . and are faithfully to holde such communion each with other and to endever to be helpfull each to other.⁶⁸

The ways in which churches in association might be helpful to each other was set out in five articles of action.⁶⁹ First, giving advice in matters of controversy which one particular church could not settle alone, according to the pattern of Acts 15.⁷⁰ Second, alleviating the poverty of any church suffering financial want, according to the example of Romans 15.26.⁷¹ Third, the Midland churches agreed to send gifted persons to provide ministry in churches which lacked able leaders. This was deemed biblical on account of the example of Barnabas in Acts 11.22. Fourth, where ‘any worke of the Lord that is common to the churches’ might be undertaken jointly, as was taught in 2 Cor 8.19. Fifth, there was agreement to watch over each other, in order to maintain ‘puritie of doctrine, exercise of love and good conversation,’ since the churches are all members of the one body of Christ, according to 1 Cor 12.12, 29.⁷² The ecclesiology of ‘the body’ metaphor set Baptists apart from other forms of ecclesial relationships, especially the emerging Presbyterian hegemony, since the relationships between Baptist churches were based on a covenantal commitment of mutual fellowship.

This description of the formation of the associational relationships formed between groups of Calvinistic Baptist churches has made clear the organic, instinctive impulse towards networking that is characteristic of translocal Baptist ecclesiology. This provides a platform for considering the theological commitments which underpinned this significant and, for its time, unique development.⁷³

THE THEOLOGY OF PARTICULAR BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS

The primary rationale for the formation of Baptist church groupings was the need for small groups of believers, lacking professional clergy, to help and advise one another in regulating their affairs as true churches of King Jesus. The first *London* Confession of 1644 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 counsell and help one of another in all needfull affaires of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head.⁷⁴

From a simple and practical necessity of mutual assistance developed a theology of association among early Particular Baptists.⁷⁵

In chronological order, the first system of associationalism occurred amongst the Welsh churches. The business of the first General Meetings in 1650 and 1651 was to discuss the scarcity and remuneration of ministers in South Wales' churches.⁷⁶ In 1654 the General Meeting affirmed the 'common design [of Association] was the mutual edification and comfort of the churches',⁷⁷ which was regarded as consequent upon the provision of ministry to each congregation. There is scarcely any theological reflection regarding the basis and nature of the relationship between the churches, though a sense of obligation to assist one another is strong. It might be supposed that the extremity of the circumstances faced by the pioneering Welsh churches allowed little time for theological consideration. However, the 'Declaration' circulated among the churches to foster unity of doctrine and practice, showed that their mutual commitment was not lacking in conviction.

The records of the Abingdon Association contain the most mature thinking among early Particular Baptists on the nature, purpose and authority of translocal communion of congregations. In contrast to the Welsh records, the Abingdon churches had considerable interest in the theological rationale, as well as practical purposes, of links between the churches, and the messengers formulated three points in support of translocal relationship. In the first place, communion and help between the churches was grounded on biblical precedent. It is stated:

That perticular [*sic*] churches of Christ ought to hold a firme communion each with other in point of advice in doubtfull matters and controversies, Acts 15.1f., 6, 24, 28; 16.4f. Which scriptures, compared together, shew that the church at Jerusalem held communion with the church of Antioch affording help to them as they could.⁷⁸

According to the biblical pattern of the Council of Jerusalem independent churches may consult together on questions of mutual concern, without threat to the competence and liberty of each.

The second point agreed upon at Wormsley concerned the giving and receiving of financial assistance to churches in cases of poverty, according to the scripture, 1 Cor. 16.3.⁷⁹

The third point lays out the most extended reasoning about the basis of association in any of the records. Here it is stated that,

particular members of one and the same particular church stand bound to hold communion each with other . . . because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members of one church. For the churches of Christ doe all make up one body or church in generall under Christ their head as Eph. 1.22f.; Col. 1.24; Eph. 5.23ff.; 2 Cor. 12.13f. As perticular members make up one perticular church under the same head, Christ, and all the perticular assemblys are but one Mount Syon, Is 4.5; Song 6.9. Christ his undefiled [*sic*]is but one and in his body ther is to be no schism which is then found in the body when all the members have not the same care one over another. Wherefore we conclude that every church ought to manifest its care over the other churches as fellow members of the same body of Christ in generall do rejoyce and mourne with them, according to the law of their nere relation in Christ.⁸⁰

Here it is asserted that a parallel exists between a local church and an association of churches, since in both individual members together comprise the body of Christ, whether local or translocal. The assertion is clear enough; but is the parallel use of the body of Christ metaphor a valid juxtaposition of local church and association?

The question can be answered in the affirmative in regard to the messengers’ five stated intentions for associational communion. By means of relating one to another they believed churches might,

1. keepe each other pure and to cleare the profession of the Gospell from scandal, which cannot be done (1 Cor. 5.5) unless orderly walking churches be owned orderly and disorderly churches be orderly disowned, even as disorderly walking members of a perticular church.⁸¹

2. For the proove of their love to all the saints, perticular church communion being never appointed as a restraint of our love which should be manifest its selfe to all the churches.⁸²
3. The worke of God, wherein all the churches are concerned together, may be the more easily and prosperously carried on by a combination of prayers and endeavours.⁸³
4. From need they have or may have one of another to quicken them when lukewarm, to helpe when in want, assist in counsell in doubtfull matters and prevent prejudices in each against other.⁸⁴
5. To convince the world, for by this shall all men know by one marke that we are the true churches of Christ.⁸⁵

The West Country churches began to meet in association a year after Abingdon, and drew on the statements of the Berkshire brethren to establish their united gatherings on the same theological principle of the body of Christ.⁸⁶ When the messengers were asked to consider whether larger churches should send out preachers to assist congregations without officers, their agreement was based on the principle that, 'in all the churches all make up but one body though many, as members of that body they should assist one another, Acts 8.14, 11.22, 15.22 with 1 Cor 12.25f'.⁸⁷ Mutual assistance in ministry was the outworking of 'that common interest that all the churches have in the gifts of God given forth in the church it being but one in the Head'.⁸⁸

This dealt with a problem inherent in the sectarian form of church, namely that while churches regarded themselves as competent to be churches, yet some lacked members willing and capable of functioning as officers. Such churches did not have the means of hearing the word and receiving the sacrament from one of their own number and sought help from elsewhere. Clearly, the ecclesiological metaphor of the 'body of Christ' permitted Baptists to juxtapose theology and pragmatism to cover the embarrassment of 'a compact and knit citie' which could not provide for its own spiritual needs. In this scenario, the body of Christ metaphor is not merely *descriptive* of the relationship between the singular and plural expression of church, but also *prescriptive*, impelling

churches to assist one another in the ministry and mission of Christ. The messengers rationalised the issue in this manner, ‘so if God give plentifully in one, and but sparingly in others it may be for the tryal of the liberality of the one in the right use of it, and for the trial of the patience of the other, citing Eph 4.11f., 6.10’.⁸⁹ This principle did not apply only to the want and supply of ministry among churches but also to financial aid, according to II Cor 8.1-4, 14.⁹⁰

It is evident that early Particular Baptist ecclesiology functioned at two levels, local and universal. The body of Christ could equally be the local congregation as well as the translocal communion of churches. What is affirmed in the statement above is that while the local congregation is not deficient in anything that is required for it to be a local manifestation of Christ’s body, yet the single congregation cannot function in isolation from other believers in the universal body of Christ to which it is essentially joined.

In the 1650s this doctrinal commitment to the universal church did not always extend to fellowship with the National Church on account of ‘their pretended ministry being Babilonish, Rev.18.4’.⁹¹ Christian friendship with other Calvinistic Puritans might also be problematic since this would require joining with unbaptized believers, and in this respect ‘disorderly’ believers.⁹² The line could be drawn in such a way as to exclude the possibility of fellowship even with General Baptists on account of their doctrine of Free Will. The universal church to which the Particular Baptists of the Midlands felt essentially joined were those who shared a commitment to live under the rule of God’s word and consented to the truths contained in their sixteen articles of faith.⁹³ Their form of associational theology was unusually dogmatic and confessional.

What makes sense of this dual reality, of the visible church existing in local and universal expressions, is the Christological *a priori* that over each manifestation of the body is Christ the head of the church. Christ the cosmic Lord unifies all things in himself, giving primacy to the universal reality of the body of Christ, from which particular manifestations of the body derive their identity. This is affirmed in the reference to Eph 1:22-23 in the first basis of association: ‘and [the God of our Lord Jesus Christ] has put all things under his feet and has made

him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’.

The messengers also placed alongside this the reference to Col 1:24 which likewise describes the church as the body of Christ in universal terms. Thus, it seems that in the thinking of the early Baptists the universal church, as the body of Christ, was not comprised of the aggregate of local congregations here and there, but rather the local congregation is a manifestation of the one universal church of Christ on earth and in heaven. In the words of Paul Fiddes, ‘the small bodies exist as an “outcropping” of the whole of the whole body’.⁹⁴

The image of the Particular Baptist association as the translocal body of Christ also gives significance to words included in a letter to the London churches informing them of what had transpired in Abingdon. The messengers used the language of covenant in the report, ‘we solemnly entered into such an association each with other as this enclosed copie of our Agreement doth manifest’.⁹⁵ This statement evidences the strength of bond between individual congregations in communion with one another, the associational arrangement being a gospel imperative, not merely a voluntary arrangement of convenience. It was the covenantal dimension of the relationship between the churches, suggested by the word ‘solemnly’, that enabled them to function in the manner of a single church following the five principles above.⁹⁶ At translocal level they worked out in the following way.

First, the General Meeting might function like a local church in regard to discipline. In South Wales, the third General meeting held in the summer of 1651 was summoned to deal with Thomas Proud, minister of Cheriton in the Gower peninsula.⁹⁷ Proud was under discipline for preaching ‘mixed communion’, a form of open membership not requiring believer’s baptism of all welcomed to the Lord’s Supper. He had rejected the rebuke of his own church in relation to this issue and was called to account at a general meeting of the churches at Lanharan. When Proud did not attend he was excommunicated by his church, though he may have already departed from them.⁹⁸

As was noted previously, in 1655 the West Country association collectively rebuked the Irish churches for their ostentatious dress and

taking the king's shilling.⁹⁹ To the zealous English Baptists, these were not trivial matters but, 'iniquity', 'sin', a 'device of the devil', an 'offence' to other believers: they longed for the Irish to repent and change their ways. They pleaded, 'Dear brethren, we desire the Lord to teach you to deny yourselves in this case'.¹⁰⁰ A postscript to the letter of 18 April 1655 records: 'Our brethren in Ireland did never to this epistle return to us any answer which was our trouble'.¹⁰¹ It is probably a sign of graciousness on the part of the Irish Baptists, that they did not respond, nor tell the Western messengers to 'mind their own business'. Clearly, associational authority to administer discipline had its limits.

Second, churches should gather together to manifest love for one another in the translocal body of Christ. It is the *agapeistic* imperative that explains the word 'ought' in the third major theological basis for association¹⁰² which states, 'every church ought to manifest its care over other churches ... according to the law of their relation in Christ'. This emphasises the mutual obligation felt among Baptist congregations to be in communion with one another. It was inconceivable that churches would not want to be in fellowship since this was a *sine qua non* of their membership of the body of Christ, given with their 'relation in Christ'.

The notion of 'relation in Christ' appears in the Irish correspondence, evidencing a theology of associationalism based on the image of family. The Irish appeal for closer links between the churches of the four nations is addressed to 'scattered brethren in several places'. Their purpose in writing is 'to encourage mutual prayer in order that wee keepe the comfortable fruits of neere relations'.¹⁰³ This familial language locates the Irish ideology of inter-church communion in the same sphere as the *agapeistic* principle in the Abingdon records.

Third, frequently in the Association Records the messengers spent time in prayer and fasting for the prosperity of the work of God, signifying the spiritual nature of their work. A primary purpose of prayer was the felt need among these pioneering, fledgling groups of separatist believers to enquire of God how to form a true church. In the West Country records of 28 September 1655, the messengers' letter states that the purpose of their meeting is 'to enquire of the Lord and one another concerning the laws of his house'.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to the churches of 18

April 1657 Thomas Collier writes, 'our Prophet hath taken away the vail from off his people's faces in giving the knowledge of his will in the practical part of the Gospel, in his ordinances and matters of worship'.¹⁰⁵

The determination to be scrupulous in conforming the church to the primitive pattern of the first disciples required a discerning people able to apprehend and implement Christ's will for his kingdom. This required much time spent in spiritual exercises, as recorded for the Irish Churches: 'The churches of Christ in Ireland, walking in the faith and order of the Gospell, doe agree together, through the Lord's assistance, to sett apart one day every month, solemnly to seeke the face of our God, by prayer and fasting'.¹⁰⁶ In the Midlands the messengers wrote to the churches to explain their purpose for communal gatherings: 'Deare brethren, we have beene by the precious hande of God our Father brought together from severall partes according to our appointment to seeke the face of our God together by fasting and prayers'.¹⁰⁷ In the West Country, at the fifth General Meeting in 1655, out of four days available for discussion two were spent in fasting and prayer.¹⁰⁸

In General Meetings the work of discernment was a twin-track process enquiring both of the Lord, 'and 'one another', what Christ legislated for his house. The practice of double listening, to God and one another, was characteristic of early Baptist spirituality. Hence it is recorded that at the fourth General Meeting of the Midland messengers on 7/8 April 1656, 'they had joyned together in prayer to seeke the Lord for theyer direction in answer to these quires following'.¹⁰⁹

In addition to discernment of Christ's will, prayer was considered essential for church congregations and true Gospel ministry to flourish. The three messengers of the West Country state in a circular letter of April 1656,

Our heart's desire and prayers to God for you is that you may grow in grace, and that you may flourish in the Lord's house as plants of his own right hand's planting and that you may bring forth much fruit, and that your fruit may remain.¹¹⁰

No doubt, the precarious condition of a number of churches in the West Country,¹¹¹ lacking both congregational numbers and finance, meant

these sentiments were prayed with sincerity and urgency.

Fourth, associational meetings were contexts where the mind of Christ was sought on all aspects of church practice. Questions included whether it was permissible for small sub groups of a larger church to gather for ‘breaking bread together?’¹¹² Whether Christ had ordained New Testament churches to sing psalms and in what manner?¹¹³ Whether it is a duty required of an elder to anoint the sick with oil?¹¹⁴ ‘Whether astrology in matters of physick be lawfull?’¹¹⁵ Whether ‘it bee lawfull for a church of Christ to hold communion with soldiers?’¹¹⁶ Also discussed at association level was the desirability for the church at Kensworth to divide on account of it having grown large, the congregation being unable to settle the matter alone.¹¹⁷ In response the messengers often gave their advice from the pattern of New Testament practice; however, it was not uncommon to supplement their reply with words like, ‘we cannot at present determine this question but desire to waite on the Lord for further light in it’.¹¹⁸ The General Meeting, in the same manner as the local church, believed that Christ, the head of the Body, would make known to his people his mind and will for his people. The wider, translocal, communion of churches, like the single local church could then live experientially under the rule of Christ.¹¹⁹

Fifth, associationalism bore witness to those outside that independent separatist congregations were ‘true churches of Christ’.¹²⁰ From the perspective of the National Church, separatists were often viewed as sectarian, schismatic and fissiparous. Isolated congregationalism was of course an option for Baptists: there was, however, a recognition of safety and strength in communion. By joining together under the banner of theological orthodoxy, represented by the Confessions, the early Baptists intended to show they stood in the stream of historic, orthodox Christianity as true churches of Christ.

Although early Baptists, and notably the messengers, did not speak of associational gatherings, nor associationalism, as ‘church’, they did regard the nature and purpose of their joint meetings in the same terms as the local church. While on the one hand the messengers assiduously avoided any suggestion that General Meetings were a layer of ecclesiastical polity ‘above’ or higher than the local congregation, they

also affirmed that the local church was not the fullness of the visible church. Even as the individual believer requires the gathered fellowship of believers in order to be in Christ, so the local congregation needs to be in relation with other churches to be in the body of Christ.

ASSOCIATIONAL AUTHORITY AND LOCAL ECCLESIOLOGY

While the importance of Particular Baptist churches maintaining their independence is frequently affirmed by the common use of the adjective 'distinct',¹²¹ it has been shown above that Calvinistic Baptist churches rejected congregational isolationism. Their pattern of ecclesiology, holding in tension the first principles of Congregationalism with a doctrine of the translocal communion of churches, forced General Meetings to consider the question of authority between the two. The messengers' consistent, emphatic response affirmed that the association had no authority over the local church. This conviction had characterised the ecclesiology of Henry Jacob, a theological commitment the Particular Baptists were never likely to compromise. This asserted,

that every particular congregation and parish church should bee so absolute for the spirituall government of it self[f] as it should not bee subordinate, nor subject to any ecclesiasticall assembl[ly] to giue an account to them for anything they doe, or receive any ordinances from them, as hauing authoritie ouer them.¹²²

Evidence of this Jacobite principle in the records of the Particular Baptists is found in a number of sources. In the letter of the Somerset churches to those in Ireland in 1655 it is stated: 'But, dear brethren we have not written these things to shame you, but to warn you not as having dominion over your faith but as helpers of your joy'.¹²³ Similarly the letter of Thomas Collier, General Superintendent of the Western Churches from 1655, issued in the name of the 'general assembly' in Chard, to the churches in 1657 asserted, 'I have written these things unto you, not as one that hath dominion over your faith but as a poor helper of your joy'.¹²⁴ The locus of authority was not the General Meeting and its messengers, but was affirmed as in the local congregation: thus in the

letter from the Pettie France church in London to the Abingdon association who were seeking advice about the appointment of officers in their churches: ‘The apostles did not thrust the elders upon the churches through briberie or lordly superioritie, but chose and placed them by the voice of the congregation’.¹²⁵

In discussing the means by which elders and deacons should be appointed in a local congregation it is stated, ‘By all which it appeares where Christ hath placed the authoritie of tryall and electing, viz., in his church’.¹²⁶ That this position on authority was the settled conviction of the Particular Baptists, even at this earliest phase of associational development, is demonstrated by its consolidation in the second London Confession of 1677 which states:

In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of Doctrine, or Administration; wherein either the Churches in general are concerned, or any one Church in their peace, union, and edification; or any member, or members, of any Church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth, and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many Churches holding communion together, do by their messengers meet to consider, and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any censures over any Churches, or Persons: or to impose their determination on the Churches, or Officers.¹²⁷

This principle was re-affirmed by the General Assembly of Particular Baptists in London, September 1689. The first question discussed and resolved concerned associational authority. The first rule states,

we disclaim all manner of *superiority* and *superintendency* over the churches, and that we have no authority or power to prescribe or impose any thing upon the faith or practice of any of the churches of Christ. Our whole intendment is to be helpers together of one another, by way of counsel and advice.¹²⁸

The later affirmation of Congregational authority is important in the

light of the contrasting tendency among the General Baptists who, towards the close of the seventeenth century, issued a strikingly bold confession elevating the association above local churches.¹²⁹

Although there was no formal authority in the relationship between association and local church, as in the manner of the Presbyterian synod, this did not mean that associations had no legislative function vis-à-vis the churches. The Association Records, particularly in the West Country and Midlands, contain an extended series of questions posed by the churches with the messengers' answers. The result is a body of case-law for the guidance of congregations and individuals. Queries sent in from several congregations in the West Country concerned such matters as ecclesiastical practice,¹³⁰ personal conduct,¹³¹ and social responsibility.¹³²

Questions about doctrine are rare, but two examples are evident: 'Whether Christ Jesus our Lord dyed for all and every man or for the elect only, and if for all, then how far?'¹³³ This doctrinal commitment to particular redemption raised the pastoral question:

Whether a member varying from the faith which at his admission he profest, as in respect of free will, general redemption, and falling from grace, the church may proceed to reject him without some other occasion?¹³⁴

All these and many more questions were answered on the basis of biblical teaching and Apostolic practice. In some cases the messengers just advised the church to do what they judge best for themselves.¹³⁵ This is a clue to the sense of authority and legislative force that the didactic replies were considered to have in the churches.

In the letter sent by the messengers of the West Country Association following the meeting of 26-27 March 1654 the status of the answers to churches' questions, and the implied authority of the General Meeting is made explicit. Thomas Collier states, 'our answers . . . we commend unto your serious consideration desiring that it may be usefull unto you for the well ordering of the Lord's house'.¹³⁶ There is no suggestion that the answers are imposed as rules, or that the General Meeting possesses authority over its constituent congregations, except in cases of serious error. The only force the General Meeting seeks to employ is that of

moral appeal, trusting that the saints be a ‘willing people in every good work,’ and that ‘love and duty may engage your hearts to a holy, humble and obedient walking with God’.¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

What this study has shown is that from earliest times, on the evidence of the *Association Records of the Particular Baptists*, Calvinistic Baptists in England, Wales and Ireland associated together in translocal relationships. While early Baptist ecclesiology was sectarian and separatist relative to National Church structures, in relation to one another Baptist churches were closely interconnected.

B.R. White was correct to argue that associationalism developed organically among Baptist churches. The idea that association was a social or military model imposed upon a collection of churches is historically unsustainable. From earliest times Baptist churches associated for mutual support, to share resources, to establish credibility to be true churches, not merely schismatical groups with an obsession for immersionism. If the pragmatism of the earliest times explains the origins of association in South Wales, a theology of translocal ecclesiology soon emerged as an essential component of Baptist identity. By the 1650s associationalism was intentional. In the Midlands Baptist churches were founded and mutually related in one calculated campaign.

The association of early Baptist churches showed a willingness of members to receive as well as to give help and support from the wider constituency. The five articles of action which define the purposes of association amongst early Calvinistic Baptists suggest relationships of trust and openness between congregations, facilitated by their messengers. Advice about controversial matters, help in alleviating poverty, enabling ministry in churches lacking leaders, partnership in gospel work and evangelistic mission, watch-care and discipline were the business of association gatherings. Relationships were, in turn, informed by biblical precedent, such as the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, and biblical teaching about the body of Christ, which was applied to translocal reality of the church. In addition, associationalism was

motivated by a determination to fulfil the dominical command to love one another and to cultivate unity, an ordinance it was believed could not, and should not be limited to the local church. Nor can we ignore the commitment to united prayer as a means of communal discernment for strategic evangelistic decisions and the flourishing of churches.

In charting the origins and concerns of the early Particular Baptist churches in association, I have tried to show that the translocal relationality was fundamental to Baptist ecclesiology, and it is to be hoped that it might be so once again. There was a time when Baptist churches looked to one another for counsel and help in order to be the churches, and the people, of which King Jesus approved.

- 1 W.T. Whitley, *A History of the British Baptists*, (London: 1932), 86, hereafter *HBB*. For a wider historical and geographical perspective on associationalism see Ian M. Randall, ‘“Counsel and Help”: European Baptists and the Wider Baptist Fellowship’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 11.1 (September 2010), 25-35.
- 2 W.T. Whitley, *HBB* 86-91.
- 3 R.G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*³ (Valley Forge: Judson 1950), 43-45.
- 4 See B.R. White, ‘The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644-1660’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XVII.2 (October 1966), 209-226; *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 67-70; ‘The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* XIX pt.2, (1968), 585-589.
- 5 White, ‘Doctrine of the Church ...’, 582, 588-9; ‘English Particular Baptists ...’, 22. White also proposes that a debt to John Cotton’s influential work, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), may be evidenced in early Baptist writing on inter-congregational cooperation.
- 6 S.A. Yarbrough, ‘The Origin of Baptist Associations Among the English Particular Baptists’, *Baptist History and Heritage* 23.2 (April 1988), 14-24.
- 7 op. cit., 18. *Classis* refers to ‘a governing body of pastors and elders in certain Reformed churches, having jurisdiction over local churches’.
- 8 See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, ‘The Baptist Western Association 1653-1658’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XI (1960), 213-218.
- 9 White, ‘The Organisation ...’, 1644-1660’, 209-226.
- 10 B.R. White(ed.), *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, 3 volumes and index (London: BHS, 1971-77), 3. Hereafter *ARPB*.
- 11 *ARPB*, 4. 12 *ARPB*, 6. 13 *ARPB*, 9.
- 14 See *ARPB*, 4. 15 *ARPB*, 4-5.
- 16 *ARPB*, 16 n.47. 17 *ARPB*, 8.
- 18 See *ARPB*, 114 and 118.
- 19 *ARPB*, 9.
- 20 I am not suggesting that early Baptists were self-consciously setting up a rival to the National Church, but these gathered congregations had accepted the status of sectaries and were organising themselves in a manner necessary for their continuance. See Christopher Hill, ‘History and Denominational History’, *BQ* 22 (1967-8), 65-71, esp. 68.
- 21 *ARPB*, 129. 22 *ARPB*, 129.
- 23 *ARPB*, 130. 24 *ARPB*, 129.
- 25 This letter contains what is thought to be the earliest use of the term ‘association’ to

- describe a group of Calvinistic Baptist churches. *ARPB*, 131.
- 26 *ARPB*, 136.
- 27 *ARPB*, 136. In 1932 Whitley commented that while churches enjoyed ‘fraternal intercourse’ within associations, there was none between associations as such. This is now known to be incorrect. Whitley, *HBB*, 92; additional comment in White, ‘The Organisation ...’, 218 n.1.
- 28 *ARPB*, 139. 29 *ARPB*, 140.
- 30 In ‘Baptist Churches till 1660’, *TBHS* 2 (1910-11), 251, Whitley stated that the Oxford church joined the Berkshire Association in 1653, based on the Longworth Church book and transcribed in The Gould Manuscript. This has now been proved incorrect and the date of 1656 firmly established. See Larry J. Kreitzer, ‘1653 or 1656: When did Oxford Baptists Join the Abingdon Association’, in Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross, *Researching the Past or History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 207-219.
- 31 That is, Hemel Hempstead.
- 32 *ARPB*, 145. 33 *ARPB*, 180.
- 34 *ARPB*, 181. 35 *ARPB*, 182.
- 36 *ARPB*, 193. 37 *ARPB*, 193.
- 38 *ARPB*, 206. 39 *ARPB*, 193.
- 40 See White, ‘The Organisation ...’, 220.
- 41 See White, *The Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 80.
- 42 See Whitley, ‘Association Life’, 19.
- 43 *ARPB*, 115, 119-20.
- 44 *ARPB*, 118. As noted above, this suggestion was taken up by the Welsh churches, though its continuance was later questioned. See *ARPB*, 9.
- 45 *ARPB*, 114. 46 *ARPB*, 115.
- 47 *ARPB*, 115. 48 *ARPB*, 111.
- 49 *ARPB*, 53. These are the records discovered by Geoffrey Nuttall, see above.
- 50 See White, ‘English Particular Baptists ...’, 21.
- 51 *ARPB*, 54. 52 See *ARPB*, 54.
- 53 Collier did not use the term ‘association’ but spoke of ‘general meetings of Messengers’. See White, ‘The Organisation ...’, 221 n.4.
- 54 See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 200 n.37.
- 55 See Whitley, ‘Association Life’, 20.
- 56 The Somerset Confession of 1656, principally the work of Thomas Collier, was designed less to state the doctrinal position of the Western churches and more to show their theological consensus with London. See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 200-201.
- 57 *ARPB*, 73. 58 *ARPB*, 74.
- 59 See *ARPB*, 75. 60 *ARPB*, 75.
- 61 Polly Ha notes that congregational polity did not only develop in response to episcopacy but also in reaction to Presbyterianism. She cautions that neither system was rigidly fixed and there was ecclesiological ambiguity throughout this period. See Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640* (Stanford: SUP, 2011), 49.
- 62 *ARPB*, 20.
- 63 See White, ‘The Organisation...’, 223; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 196.
- 64 See the epistle dedicatory of, Daniel King, *A Way to Sion Sought out, and Found for Believers to Walke in* (London: 1649), n.p.
- 65 It is no surprise that a mission sponsored by London churches should be anxious about the formation of associations since they had enshrined this ecclesiology in the First London Confession of 1644. See below.
- 66 *ARPB*, 19-20. See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 198-200 for a full version.
- 67 See A.S. Langley, ‘Seventeenth Century Baptist Disputations’, 113-4. For wider discussion see T.L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb’s War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1997).
- 68 *ARPB*, 20-21.
- 69 *ARPB*, 21. The citation of biblical texts at every point was a deliberate attempt to

- prove that association was required of churches seeking to pattern their life according to the rule of scripture.
- 70 In the Abingdon records, the Abingdon church applied this principle of wider consultation to the question regarding the trial, election and ordination of elders and deacons. See *ARPB*, 172.
- 71 The issue of financial assistance for poorer churches was taken up in the Abingdon Association in response to a letter from the London leaders about the poverty of churches in the Western Association. News from Abraham Chayer (or Cheare) to the London leaders had resulted in a proposal to establish a central fund 'towards the maintenance of a Gospell ministrie abroad in the countreys'. The Abingdon Association was being asked to commend the relief fund scheme to their churches. See *ARPB*, 174-5.
- 72 *ARPB*, 21.
- 73 See Hugh Wamble, 'The Beginning of Associationalism Among English Baptists', in *Review and Expositor* 54.4 (October 1957), 544.
- 74 Article 47. In Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969), 168-9.
- 75 Randall, 'Counsel and Help': European Baptists', 26.
- 76 *ARPB*, 3-4. 77 *ARPB*, 8.
- 78 *ARPB*, 126. 79 *ARPB*, 126
- 80 *ARPB*, 126. Underlined sentence revised at the third meeting clarifying the original intention: 'And in his bodie there is to be no schism which is then found in the bodye when all the members have not the same care one over another'. *ARPB*, 128.
- 81 *ARP ARPB*, 126. 82 *ARPB*, 126.
- 83 *ARPB*, 126. 84 *ARPB*, 127.
- 85 *ARPB*, 127. The underlined 'all' is added from the later restatement of the principles at the third General Meeting, and emphasises the biblical thinking behind the formulation, showing it is dependent on John 13:35, the 'marke' being 'love'.
- 86 *ARPB*, 60. 87 *ARPB*, 60.
- 88 *ARPB*, 60.
- 89 *ARPB*, 60. The various spellings of 'tryal' and 'trial' are original.
- 90 *ARPB*, 62. 91 *ARPB*, 25.
- 92 *ARPB*, 25.
- 93 *ARPB*, 20. The 'Sixteen Articles of Faith and Order Unanimously Assented to by the Messengers Met at Warwick, the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month, 1655,' are to be found, with an introduction, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 198-200.
- 94 Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 198, acknowledges that the image of 'outcropping' derives from P.T. Forsyth. E.A. Payne earlier cited Forsyth in his description of Baptist Associations, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today*, enlarged edition (London: CKP, 1952), 29 n.6. Cf. P.T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London 1917), 66.
- 95 *ARPB*, 131.
- 96 See pp.16-17.
- 97 Biographical details are supplied by White, see *ARPB*, 14 n.16.
- 98 *ARPB*, 5-6. 99 See p.26
- 100 *ARPB*, 74. 101 *ARPB*, 76.
- 102 See p.27 above 103 *ARPB*, 117-118.
- 104 *ARPB*, 76. 105 *ARPB*, 89.
- 106 *ARPB*, 118. 107 *ARPB*, 35.
- 108 *ARPB*, 60. See also *ARPB*, 87 for another instant of the same is recorded for 1657.
- 109 *ARPB*, 24. The meeting proceeded to discuss a number of issues raised by the church for which they sought the advice and direction of the messengers.
- 110 *ARPB*, 78.
- 111 In 1657 the London churches established a fund for 'Gospell ministrie abroad in the countreys,' after learning of the dire state of churches and poverty of ministers in the West Country. *ARPB*, 174.
- 112 *ARPB*, 58. 113 *ARPB*, 58.
- 114 *ARPB*, 59. 115 *ARPB*, 65.
- 116 *ARPB*, 102. 117 *ARPB*, 146.

- 118 *ARPB*, 65. See also *ARPB*, 58 twice, 59.
 119 See Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 200.
 120 *ARPB*, 127.
 121 For example *ARPB*, 20, 77; First London Confession article 47, as above.
 122 This statement is derived from Jacob’s presbyterian examiners, including Walter Travis, when he submitted plans to found an Independent church in 1616, but there is no reason to doubt it was an accurate portrayal of his views. Cited in Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism*, 51.
 123 *ARPB*, 75. 124 *ARPB*, 92.
 125 *ARPB*, 171. 126 *ARPB*, 171.
 127 Second London Confession, Chapter XXVI.15. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 289.
 128 Rippon’s *Baptist Annual Register*, IV (1801-02), supplement, p.48. See also Wamble, ‘The Beginning of Associationalism ...’, 556f.
 129 ‘The Orthodox Creed’ (1678), Article XXXIX. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 327. This position was not universally accepted. In the same year Thomas Grantham published *Christianismus Primitivus* to show that according to the pattern of Acts 15 the superiority of Churches one above another is contrary to scripture. See also Wamble, ‘The Beginning of Associationalism ...’, 555.
 130 For example, ‘Whether it be an ordinance of Christ for disciples to wash one another’s feet, according to John 13.14?’ See *ARPB*, 60. Answer: disciples should serve each other humbly, and wash feet only as required. Or, ‘Whether a woman may speak in the church at all, and if at all, in what cases?’ See *ARPB*, 55, 28.
 The West Country answer was firmly negative, but the Midlands’ response was equivocal, ‘women in some cases may speake in the churches’.
 131 For example, ‘Whether it be lawfull for a believer in the order of the Gospel to marry one that is not in the same order?’ See *ARPB*, 55; also *ARPB*, 21 & 30f. A remarkable story of a Baptist church member from the Southwark church, marrying a ‘Friend’ in 1667, and immediately after changing his mind and seeking the marriage annulled on the basis that, ‘he was a believer, and she an unbeliever’, is recounted in *BQ* 7.7 (July 1935), 324. The Baptist church agreed to dissolution of the marriage; the man subsequently married a Baptist. A more alarming enquiry asked: ‘Whether a man in any case in ruling over his wife may lawfully strike her?’ See *ARPB*, 69. The reply instructs men to rule over their wives without striking since domestic violence has no biblical warrant.
 132 E.g. ‘What is the saints’ duty towards the magistrate at this day in this nation?’ See *ARPB*, 66, 30.
 133 *ARPB*, 61. It is affirmed that ‘our Lord Christ dyed for all and every man . . . Yet he died not intentionally alike for all’.
 134 *ARPB*, 57. The answer, that such a person should be rejected, is not surprising given West Country tendencies to compromise the Calvinism of the Particular Baptist Churches, a move resisted by issuing the Somerset Confession in 1656.
 135 See *ARPB*, 32 & 68f.
 136 *ARPB*, 72. 137 *ARPB*, 72.

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