

‘KOINONIA’ AND BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY

Self-Critical Reflections from Historical and Systematic Perspectives

We believe in the Catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit, so that though made up of many communions, organized in various modes, and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him. (From: ‘The Baptist Reply to the Lambeth Appeal, Adopted by the Annual Assembly, May 4, 1926’ and reproduced in E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers*, 1944, Appendix B).

It is in membership of a local church in one place that the fellowship of the one holy catholic Church becomes significant. Indeed, such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of God on earth and in heaven . . . The vital relationship to Christ which is implied in full communicant membership in a local church carries with it membership in the Church which is both in time and in eternity, both militant and triumphant. To worship and serve in such a local Christian community is, for Baptists, of the essence of Churchmanship. (From: ‘The Baptist Doctrine of the Church: A Statement approved by the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, March, 1948’ and reproduced in R. Hayden (ed.), *Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977*).

This paper intends to reflect upon some Baptist writings on the church in the light of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order working document ‘Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness’ and its invitation to consider the theme of koinonia as a focus for thinking about ‘where we are and where we are going’ (Preface). In pursuit of its goal this paper examines some early Baptist thought on the church in the light of the idea of koinonia. It then addresses a major criticism frequently levelled at Baptist approaches, its reputed ‘individualism’, and acknowledges the force of this criticism, in part by showing the self-critical stance of Baptists at this point. It goes on to examine how more recent Baptist thinking has developed the theme of koinonia as a corrective to individualism and as a means of remaining faithful to early Baptist insights. It then seeks to engage in some constructive theology in drawing out the relation between trinitarian koinonia and the church. Finally it offers tentative criticisms of some Anglican ecclesiology on the basis of the same theme and from a Baptist perspective.

I. In responding to ‘Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness’ the Baptist Union ‘strongly welcomed’ the choice of koinonia as a focus for further movement towards visible unity.¹ Not least, this positive response derives from the significant place that themes of ‘fellowship’, ‘communion’ and ‘covenant’ have occupied in traditional Baptist approaches to the doctrine of the church and from the consequent characteristic quality of fellowship to be found in churches of this faith and order.²

Baptists derive their primary origins from the phenomenon of Separatism which itself derived from the radical wing of Puritanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries. It is probable, and a much debated point, that they were also influenced in part by continental Anabaptism, though the historical link is not so clearly demonstrable here as in the case of Separatism.³ At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Separatist church founded at Gainsborough in 1606, from which the 'Pilgrim Fathers' emerged, gave rise to a group which followed the logic of separatism to a further conclusion, namely the renunciation of infant baptism in favour of the baptism of believers. This was accompanied by the rejection of church-state ties in favour of full religious liberty, also a position to which Separatism as a whole had not come. It may be said, therefore, with some justice that liberty and evangelism are the twin pillars on which the Baptist movement is based.⁴

Granted these origins, and in the light of the Puritan concern for the scriptural purity and right ordering of the church in the totality of its life, it is not surprising that the distinctive feature of Baptist thought and practice concerned the doctrine and ordering of the church. Keith Clements defines Baptist tradition according to the wider concern of the Reformation churches: 'The central and determinative belief for this tradition is that it is in Jesus Christ himself that God has established his covenant relationship with us, and calls us to live in community with one another and with God'.⁵ In reaction to the idea of the church as a great visible institution, centralized and authoritarian, Baptists stressed the invisible church, the company of the elect known to God and which found expression in local companies of believers on the pattern of Matthew 18.20.⁶ John Smyth, the founder of the first English Baptist church in Amsterdam in 1609, captures these elements, in language untypically generous for early Separatists and indeed of his own earlier writings, in affirming:

That all penitent and faithful Christians are brethren in the communion of the outward church, wheresoever they live, by what name soever they are known, which in truth and zeal follow repentance and faith, though compassed with never so many ignorances and infirmities; and we salute them all with a holy kiss, being heartily grieved that we which follow after one faith, and one Spirit, one Lord, and one God, one body, and one baptism, should be rent into so many sects and schisms: and that only for matters of less moment.⁷

According to the Baptist reading of Scripture, the basis of the early church was partnership in which there was difference of function but not ecclesiastical hierarchy. Baptists had a deep seriousness about the doctrine of the church. The church was not a corporation but a fellowship, not a national society but a community.⁸ Early Christianity was a social reality; a unique form of community life was built up within it in which the middle wall of partition was broken down. The sub-apostolic church failed to preserve these features.⁹

The primary ecclesiological concern of the early Baptists was faithfulness to Scripture. The church was to be ordered according to the New Testament pattern and this was conceived in unambiguous and for the most part inflexible terms. We look in vain therefore for the early Baptists to begin their reflection on the church where we would begin. Although orthodoxly trinitarian, the undoubted potential of

this doctrine for a congregationalist ecclesiology remained unexploited. Although keen to win converts, the idea of mission as a starting point for reflection on the church remained undeveloped. As did all Puritans,¹⁰ Baptists identified the church with the kingdom and therefore exalted their own way of being the church to a place of supreme importance. The church was Christ's spiritual kingdom.

In place of these insights of the contemporary theological consensus, the early Baptists began with the local congregation as a covenanted and committed band of believers determined to reproduce in their world the church which they believed they found in the New Testament. Modern British Baptists would take a more nuanced view of the extent to which this is possible. They would agree with the judgment that: 'Most modern Biblical scholarship of whatever tradition would hold the view that the New Testament contains hints of more than one type of Church polity . . . While there are undoubtedly in the New Testament evidences of a church order that we now characterize by the name Independency, there are also indications that lend support to some form of connexional organization, and even to some form of episcopal order, understood in the broadest sense'.¹¹ The congregational order is one legitimate way among others of expressing the fundamental idea of the church.¹² Despite this, the Baptist insistence would be that the theology of the New Testament, of which the early church's practice was an expression at a particularly formative point of history, still points in the general direction urged by the early Baptists and that their fundamental insights hold good.

Early Baptist ecclesiology, as we have seen, began 'from below'. This is its strength and its weakness. According to Dakin: 'Baptists start all their organization from the local church and it is this which causes our difficulties'.¹³ As a counterbalance to this, it must also be argued that the desire for a wider fellowship was present from the beginning. Early Baptists were conscious of the dangers of isolation and sought to guard against this by developing associations.¹⁴ The deeply rooted concept of communion between the saints in the local church was extended to a similar relationship between the churches.¹⁵ The need for inter-church communion is routinely expounded in early confessions and often rehearsed in modern Baptist statements on the church.¹⁶ The theological logic proceeds by analogy from the local church and can be seen most clearly in the beginnings of the Abingdon Association. There is the same relationship between the churches as exists between the members of particular churches. Churches should 'hold firm communion' with each other for the sake of mutual correction, to prove their love to all the saints, to work and pray together, to quicken the lukewarm, help those in need, give counsel in doubtful matters and convince the world by showing the signs of being true churches of Christ.¹⁷ The first Particular Baptist Confession of 1644 declared in Article 47 that the congregations should walk together 'as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head'.¹⁸ Associations of Baptist churches therefore developed early and accorded great spiritual authority to assemblies while consistently insisting that the acceptance of decisions by the particular churches must be voluntary.¹⁹

. . . from the seventeenth century Baptist have regarded the visible church as finding expression in local communities of believers who constitute themselves churches by the election of officers, the observance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and Christian discipline, and who find an extension and expression of their life in free association, first, with other groups of their own faith and order, but also with other groups of Christians loyal to the central truths of the apostolic Gospel. This, in outline, is the Baptist doctrine of the Church as visible.²⁰

Whereas the earliest Baptist confessions began their ecclesiology from below, it is noteworthy that from the 1670s there was a shift in Baptist confessions from starting with the local and working outwards to starting with the catholic church throughout the world.²¹ These were the years of persecution and discrimination in which Baptists were becoming more conscious of their solidarity with other Christians, especially with Presbyterians and Congregationalists.²² It is this more catholic approach which is reflected in the citation from the 1926 statement which heads this paper and was reiterated in the 1948 statement on 'The Baptist Doctrine of the Church'.²³

A further point is worth making concerning early Baptist ecclesiology and it relates to the ideal of a 'progressive covenant'²⁴ or the Separatist doctrine of 'further light'.²⁵ Baptists developed in the first instance from the Separatist congregation founded at Gainsborough under the leadership of John Smyth and associated with Thomas Helwys and John Robinson. This church was constituted as follows: 'As the Lord's free people, they joined 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'.²⁶ It ought to be clear from this that in principle Baptists are open to development, are not confessionalist and are theologically malleable, provided only they are convinced from the Scriptures, that more light and truth has broken forth. If it is the case that the 1670s witness a supplementing of an ecclesiology 'from below' by one 'from above', it is entirely consistent with this tendency. Within ecumenical discussion the same principle applies and Baptists remain open to change. It is in the area of catholicity that they perhaps have most to learn. 'Many of our modern developments - within the Baptist denomination and also in the wider ecumenical movement - are attempts, blundering perhaps, but sincere, to express in better fashion [the] New Testament conception of unity and to get away from the narrowness and poverty of an exaggerated and degenerate independency'.²⁷

II. It is to this latter point that we now turn: the tendency of Baptists to individualism and isolationism. Despite the aspirations towards a wider communion expressed in early Baptist life, Barrie White has pointed out that: 'Across three and a half centuries, if Baptists have had to choose between the independence of the local church and cooperation in fellowship with an association, they have chosen independence'.²⁸ It is surely also not without significance that the articles in early Baptist confessions dealing with association were routinely borrowed from somebody else's confessions, prompting the suspicion that there might not be the same intensity

or creativity of conviction among Baptists at these points!²⁹

Within recent Baptist literature there is reflected a grave concern over this criticism. The high Baptist ideals of independency³⁰ can lead to living without due reference to other churches. It is recognized that when the Baptist way fails it fails lamentably.³¹ In his book *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, Wheeler Robinson swiftly identified the weakness of individualism. He described Baptists as the extreme representatives of Protestant individualism.³² Their religious individualism is what gave them their passion for liberty³³ and their weakness is the reverse of their strength. The much-prized independence of the local church is the safeguard of liberty, but it can also become a form of selfishness alien to the Spirit of the Body of Christ. The churches are not self-sufficient.³⁴ There is a one-sided emphasis on the human response of faith in baptism so that it becomes possible to talk of faith as if it occurred in a vacuum and as if its unitary products then came together to form a church. Such a view ignores the fact that individuality and sociality grow together. The need of Baptists therefore is to discover a nobler church-consciousness.³⁵ They suffer from the lack of a connexional system.³⁶ Robinson stressed the church as arising from personal communion with God and as the community of the regenerate.³⁷ Baptists rejected institutional sacramentalism in favour of community.³⁸ Conversion leads to the discovery of God in others, to the social dimension.³⁹ Members do not join the church, they constitute it as a society of men and women drawn together by common convictions and needs and entering into a social experience of the Christian faith for which their individual experience has prepared them.⁴⁰ The emphasis is on the life of the Spirit rather than outer forms, on the presence of Christ in the midst as that which lends awe and mystery.⁴¹

Other Baptist writers agree on the temptation towards individualism. Walton argued that individualism invaded the church in the eighteenth century in the wake of the Enlightenment.⁴² Skoglund likewise traced its origins in American Baptist life to the writings of Locke and to Jeffersonian democracy. He sees it expressed in American Baptist history in extreme localism. 'When it is convenient, Baptists confess their relationship to others, at least in a "spiritual", holy catholic church that is one, but when confronted with the challenge to make a spiritual confession a visible reality Baptists quickly retreat into the isolation of local church autonomy'.⁴³ Baptists have at times made the local congregation the only visible manifestation of the church and so have adopted an unbiblical and unhistorical view of the church.⁴⁴

Yet Gordon Martin has claimed that individualism is inherently excluded from the Baptist understanding of the church because the church comprises believers and Christ.⁴⁵ Henry Cook argued that the stress on the prophetic function of the church had led to neglect of the sense of living partnership in the Body of Christ. The church had been made into a help rather than a necessity of the spiritual life.⁴⁶ Yet the church is properly to be seen as a unique, living organism.⁴⁷ The significance of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi was not to do with the primacy of Peter nor even with the content of his confession alone but rather with the confessing disciple, and those who follow after who are the rock upon which the church can be built.⁴⁸ The word 'catholic' was meant to be inclusive of all

confessing disciples and yet had been made an instrument of exclusion.⁴⁹ Unity and diversity are set against each other, but properly they interpenetrate. Religious differences go to the roots of human personalities and are ordained by God, so Christian unity should reflect that of the Godhead which sustains itself in diversity.⁵⁰

In his programmatic statement for the renewal of Baptist life, R. C. Walton argued the need for that understanding of the church which will chart a course between selfish individualism and being part of a soulless mass.⁵¹ The denomination had drifted off course because it developed an aggressive individualism in place of a unique form of community life.⁵² Baptism was to be seen not as an individualistic expression but as a sacrament of the community, an act of God through the church; the Lord's Supper as a community, fellowship meal.⁵³ In a crucial insight he summarized the early Baptist understanding of the relation of the particular church to the wider church 'as independence in regard to power but not in regard to communion'.⁵⁴

It is worthy of note that several books of the modern period are built around the general theme of *koinonia*. This is true of Payne's *The Fellowship of Believers* and Walton's *The Gathered Community*. Nowhere is it more clear, however, than in R. L. Child's article 'Ekklesia and Koinonia: An Essay in Understanding'.⁵⁵ Child, in this highly relevant essay, wished to stress the new element which emerged in the church and which he defined as *koinonia*. The first church had a term ready to hand to describe itself, namely *ekklesia*, a term which was all the more useful as it had been used consistently of Israel.⁵⁶ Yet on its own this term failed to do justice to the newness of the church, its distinctive nature as a sociological innovation in history. To capture this element the word *koinonia*, given in the New Testament a new depth of meaning, was necessary. Child's main point was that the church began as a fellowship, its innermost essence being unity with Christ, a fact which was proclaimed and renewed in the central act of Christian worship. The church may be described as *ekklesia* in the sense that it was a society inheriting and carrying forward elements from the ancient people of God. But before this, it was a *koinonia*, a distinctive corporate entity which, only when sure of this new reality granted to it by the Spirit in Jesus Christ could take up and use the heritage of the past. The intent of Child's argument is to show that the element of *ekklesia*, of existence as an external society, may be maintained while the inner reality of *koinonia* is lost. The actual loss of *koinonia* through much of the church's history is not unrelated to the neglect of the Holy Spirit. Neither is it insignificant that the rediscovery of both *koinonia* and of the Spirit coincided with the break-up of the old ecclesiastical order under the impact of the Reformation.⁵⁷ The balance between *ekklesia* and *koinonia* has been too heavily waited in favour of the former, with concern, for instance, with the safeguarding of the sacraments rather than their venturesome use as means of promoting *koinonia*. The evidence of the New Testament is that the church emerged as a *koinonia* of believers united in Christ who then drew freely upon the heritage of the *ekklesia* in organising itself adequately for the service of its Lord. His ecumenical conclusion is that *qua* *ekklesia* the church may be variously organized without this being a bar to the *koinonia* which is the

church's heart.⁵⁸

In the same way, for Neville Clark, *koinonia* and *agape* are the key words in understanding the church.

'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' because there has been granted to us 'participation (*koinonia*) in the Spirit'. As at Pentecost, it is the corporate sharing in the Holy Spirit that makes the people of God; and the 'fruit of the Spirit is love', that love which is the very nature of God and which has been 'poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit'. The Church for God is the fellowship of the Spirit, and therefore the fellowship of love. She exists for worship, to offer to the Father the praise which is his due, to glorify his name, to actualize in her own life and being the kingly rule of Christ, to manifest in space-time the reality of the new creation, to be the abiding pledge in history of the transformation of earth in the age to come, to mirror through communion the love that binds together the blessed Trinity.⁵⁹

There can therefore be no question of localism, the omniscience of the local congregation or the ultimate authority of the church meeting. Christ is Lord beyond these and this is expressed in association and national assembly.⁶⁰ This train of thought has led some Baptists to argue for a more synodical approach to church government with some decision-making delegated 'upwards'. More commonly, respect for the synodical process would be complemented by the insistence that judgments made at the wider level still need to be received and tested by each local community. But this is to present the discussion at its best. In practice there are always those for whom autonomy is to be defined as independence.

Despite this, it is in keeping with the statements indicated that the most recent writings by Baptist authors show a firm grasp of the significance of the church's existence as *koinonia*. A consistent theme in *A Call to Mind: Baptist Essays Towards a Theology of Commitment*⁶¹ is that of the centrality of human relationships and the value of persons (as distinct from individuals). A subsequent volume speaks for itself, *Bound to Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission*.⁶²

At the same time, while the concept of the 'fellowship of believers' may rank as the most familiar Baptist characterization of the church, it has drawn criticism from within that same tradition for saying nothing of the church's evangelistic commission.⁶³ The church, it is argued, is to be understood both in terms of its constitution and its mission. In its evangelistic mission, the church is constantly drawing into itself those who are not yet believers and yet who are in a creative relationship with the church. The practice of believer's baptism and a strong theology of conversion has led to perpetual Baptist uncertainty concerning the status of children in the church, the point at which, above any others, Baptists see some strength in infant baptism. Some would advocate at these points, the outsider on the way to faith and the presence of the child among the believing community, the rediscovery of the category of the 'catechumenate'. The comment follows that these groups 'are not of the "fellowship of believers" but they are in the fellowship with

believers and it is in the fruition of this relationship, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, that the Church's evangelistic task is brought to consummation. It is because there will always be persons in this tentative, incomplete, yet real relationship whenever the Church is fulfilling her evangelistic task that we cannot rightly think of the Living Church simply as a fellowship of believers. This phrase is at once a theological truth and a theological abstraction'.⁶⁴ As the church is never without the catechumenate, which may be likened to the womb of the Body, it can never be 'fully understood or comprehensively described without it'. 'The idea that the Church is the fellowship of believers has therefore to be expounded in such a way as to leave no doubt that there is another element in her life besides the fully committed body of believers'.⁶⁵ These comments need to be given their full weight. At the same time, a more adequate statement ought to be possible if it is borne in mind that it is the fellowship of believers in and with Christ which is the constituent element in the life of the church. This must inevitably include fellowship with him in his mission and in his presence amongst those whom he is drawing but who have not yet surrendered themselves to him in conscious manner.⁶⁶

It may be established therefore by reference to relatively recent Baptist theology that the theme of *koinonia* provides from this perspective a viable and fruitful basis for further ecumenical exploration.

Before passing on from our historical discussion it is appropriate to comment on the suggestion of 'Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness' that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed might serve as an ecumenical expression of the *koinonia* of faith shared by the churches. Although Baptists describe themselves as a 'non-credal' movement, it is a mistake to think that they have always eschewed credal statements or objected to subscribing to them.⁶⁷ Not only have Baptists never disowned the contents of the historic creeds, they have occasionally explicitly identified with them.⁶⁸ In the General Baptist 'Orthodox' Confession of 1678 the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds are specifically cited as 'thoroughly to be received and believed'. In keeping with this, the founding gatherings of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905 included the spontaneous recital of the Apostles' Creed.⁶⁹

III. Our interest passes at this point from the historical to the systematic and to the ways in which the theme of *koinonia*, rooted in participation in the life of the Triune God, may from a Baptist or Free Church perspective, serve our ecclesiology. Tim Bradshaw has drawn attention to the 'massive consensus' enjoyed by an 'ecclesiology of spiritual *koinonia*' which may be wholeheartedly affirmed by Anglicans.⁷⁰ The same is happily true for Baptists. The questions however now concern the ways in which this ecclesiology is to be developed and what the distinctive concerns of the traditions will be. I draw here for inspiration upon the article by Miroslav Volf, 'Kirche als Gemeinschaft: Ekklesiologische Überlegungen aus freikirchlicher Perspektive'.⁷¹ Volf writes as a Pentecostal theologian but cites Baptist and Congregationalist inspiration in addition to that of his own tradition. He is in agreement with the Orthodox claim that the church exists as a reflection and representation of the life of the Trinity. As the one God is a fellowship of divine persons, so the local church is a fellowship of particular persons and the universal

church a fellowship of particular churches. From the Pauline teaching of the universal distribution of charismata he builds a theology of the church as pneumatological community - decentralized, participatory, sharing common responsibility for the life of the church in mutual submission, in which the mutuality of charismatic gifting is integrated for the common good through the ministry of those recognized and ordained by the congregation. The ecclesiality of the church consists in the reality of Christ's presence among his people, only after which come ordination and the sacraments.

Of particular interest is his discussion of the 'institutionality' of the church. The *communio sanctorum* is visible only to the degree that the church lives as the *imago trinitatis*. The full experience of the church's integration into the life of God awaits the eschaton but is reflected and illustrated by the present reality of this integration in the church's life. The church is called to be an ikon of the Trinity.⁷² Yet this brings us to the issue of institution. Volf rescues this word from its negative associations by understanding it to mean the stable structure of social interaction without which nothing is possible. In this sense, the Trinity is an institution since there is a stable structure of interaction between the divine persons. For the church, therefore, the question is not whether it exists as an institution but what kind of institution it should be.⁷³

The issues here concern both the distribution of power and whether the cohesion of the institution is externally or internally guaranteed. The distribution of power may be distinguished as between symmetrical-decentralized and asymmetrical-monocentric institutional models. Cohesion may be guaranteed by external forces or by free, internal affirmation. All institutions exist somewhere in the matrix created between asymmetrical-monocentric/externally guaranteed and freely affirmed/symmetrical-decentralized poles. Volf's point is that the Trinity is indeed an institution, but decisively not of the former type. As a fellowship of love God exists according to the latter institutional model. Consequently, to the degree to which the church exists as an hierarchical organization it fails to represent the Trinity. The more the church is characterized by symmetrical-decentralized forms and by freely affirmed integration, the more it corresponds to the trinitarian communion.

Yet here the question is raised as to whether it is possible for a human social entity to achieve stable integration by freely affirmed interaction. To which Volf replies, that this is only possible if such an entity has some cognitive definition of reciprocal conduct which implies the responsibility of leadership to define the obligations, rights and tasks of a collectivity, recognising that such definitions will always be open to improvement.⁷⁴

Volf spells out the ways in which Free Church Christians, Baptist perhaps more than most, would want to work out the implications of the church's integration into the divine, trinitarian koinonia. His proposals take up in theologically more profound form the essential characteristics of Baptist ecclesiology and ground them afresh. Here we find the concern for relationship, for mutuality, the rejection of domination with the corresponding exercise of 'mono-symmetrical' power, the stress on free participation, the seriousness with which the form of the church is to be

treated, all rooted in the centrality of the one crucified and risen Lord, in fellowship with whom the church exists. It is such a model of *koinonia* for which Baptists will want to strive.

IV. Finally, some tentative reflections are ventured concerning Anglican-Baptist relations in the light of the above. The scope of these comments must of necessity be limited and for the sake of focus, they pick up elements of Tim Bradshaw's exposition in *The Olive Branch: An Evangelical Anglican Doctrine of the Church*.

It might readily be expected that there is a huge amount of agreement between such an Evangelical Anglican ecclesiology and that of the Baptists. Both are rooted in the Reformed tradition and affirm the priority of the Scriptures, the place of the covenant and the church's existence as the people of God. A Free Church ecclesiology is nearer to this aspect of Anglicanism than that may itself be to the Anglo-Catholic wing of its own communion. This fact is readily evidenced by the easy interaction of evangelicals across the historic divides, as well as by theological discussion and comparison. Two areas are worth singling out for contrast.

It is a characteristic Baptist concern that the form of the church is of considerable importance. The greater willingness to recognize New Testament diversity and for Baptists to speak more modestly of 'the Baptist way of being the church',⁷⁵ ought not to obscure the fact that Baptists find the form of the church to have its origin in the gospel, with the consequence that the way the church exists is not a lower-order issue in the hierarchy of Christian truths. The structures of the church must be related to the way in which the risen Lord continues to take form in human flesh and blood. The church bodies forth the fullness of Christ.⁷⁶ Consequently such issues do not belong to the *adiaphora*. The institutional form of the church grows out of the divine *koinonia*, as Volf has sufficiently shown. The very adaptability of the New Testament church (now made visible through scholarship and calling into question earlier Baptist notions of 'blueprints' and 'patterns revealed in the mount'), ought for the Baptist to indicate the great freedom the church may have in relating to its many contexts in ways which pragmatically serve the mission. If this is what Bradshaw means when he speaks of the freedom which pertains to the 'precise pattern' assumed by the church,⁷⁷ all well and good. But it ought to be clear from preceding arguments that Baptists believe the institutional forms of the church can serve or obscure the expression of the life of God through the church and so are legitimately the object of constant reappraisal and reform. This is the same area of discussion as between Anabaptists and Reformers. Anabaptists saw the Reformers as 'half-way men' precisely because while affirming the priority of Scripture they were not prepared to reform the inherited mediaeval structures of the church with sufficient rigour or consistency according to scriptural criteria. At this point Baptists would want to extend Bradshaw's argument that the church has authority to reform itself according to the 'principles of the gospel'.⁷⁸ For Baptists this would certainly mean that the church is composed of those who confess Christ freely, a need that Bradshaw acknowledges,⁷⁹ and that this gospel truth is obscured by the present and long-standing institutional arrangements of the Church of England. For the church to have integrity about who belongs to it and to exercise a wise discernment is not

to be dismissed by describing this as a 'geiger-counter approach'. From a Baptist perspective it appears that Bradshaw is still wanting to work with two models of church, one of the covenant people enjoying koinonia, the other of a national institution bearing a tenuous and not altogether clear relation to it.⁸⁰ The Baptist contention would continue to be that the latter is not truly church and a doctrine of koinonia consistently applied would show this to be the case. In most Anglican writings on this topic theological justification of this arrangement is lacking. Bradshaw's justification appears to be in terms of its just being there as an historically given fact and having some uses.

Nowhere is this more the case than in the existence of the Church of England as the established church. Profound folk-memories among Baptists about the oppressive power of nationalized religion, as well as convictions about church and state, point in a very different direction from the assumption of a benign and happy arrangement in Bradshaw's discussion.⁸¹ To argue that establishment may be justified because the New Testament offers no 'blueprint'⁸² for church-state relations is surely only to obscure the point. It is doubtful whether the New Testament offers any kind of 'blueprint' for any matter at all, doctrinal or ethical. This does not prevent there being a basic perspicuity to the biblical witness, as Bradshaw is very keen at other points to affirm. When Jesus proclaimed 'my kingdom is not of this world' he was directly approaching this issue, not claiming that his kingdom made no impact upon the social and political realms, but that it operated in a fundamentally different way from the coercive and fallen structures of human domination. It is this 'otherness' which establishment obscures in the mistaken belief that the alliance of church and state is somehow necessary to incarnate the fact that God is the 'God of society'.⁸³ It is precisely this false view of mission which Baptists would wish to question.

It is increasingly possible for Baptists to conceive of a functional, non-coercive episcopacy and of Christian initiation as a process which in the conscientiously informed eyes of some includes infant baptism. These no longer form insuperable barriers to some form of mutual, formal recognition. But it also increasingly appears that the greatest hurdle to such recognition is the alliance of church and state in a way which conflicts, in Baptist eyes, with the authentic existence of the church.⁸⁴ The whole notion of Christendom, and its vestiges in the Western world, requires a more self-critical critique or a more penetrating theological justification than is offered by Bradshaw. It is clear that at this point Anglicans and Baptists need to understand each other much better and this would be a good area for further discussion.

NOTES

- 1 'Towards Koinonia in Faith Life and Witness: Comments offered by the Baptist Union of Great Britain' (Unpublished paper of the Worship and Doctrine Commission of the Baptist Union) p. 1.
- 2 G. W. Martin, *The Church: A Baptist View*, 1976, p. 15.
- 3 The present state of this debate is summarized by K. R. Manley 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism -Separatism' in W. H. Brackney and R. J. Burke (eds), *Faith, Life and Witness: The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist*

- World Alliance 1986-1990*, Birmingham, Alabama, 1990, pp.56-69.
- 4 H. W. Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, 1927, p.164.
- 5 K. W. Clements in P. Fiddes *et al.*, *Bound to Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission*, 1985, p.57.
- 6 E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today*, 1944 and 1952, pp.22-3.
- 7 W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Valley Forge, 1910, p.79.
- 8 R. C. Walton, *The Gathered Community*, 1946, p.105.
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- 80 cp Christopher Morris: 'Anglicanism, as Hooker conceived it, made every Englishman a churchman, not excluding those whose ultimate salvation might be gravely doubted. For Hooker membership of Church and of Commonwealth was identical; Church and State were two complementary aspects of the same society.
- 81 Bradshaw, *op.cit.*, p.275.
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- 84 'It is certain that Baptists would find it impossible to 'unite' with a Church or Churches which maintained the present relationship of the Church of England to the State'. This in spite of the fact that 'many Free Churchmen have come to believe there may be some advantages in some modified form of religious establishment in view of the growth of secularism, humanism and anti-Christian ways of life' ('Baptists and Unity' in Hayden, *op.cit.*, p.p.176,177).

N. G. WRIGHT Tutor, Spurgeon's College

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SOCIETY NEWS: The Summer School, held at the United Theological College, Aberystwyth, 30 June to 3 July 1994, proved a happy weekend for those present. With the sun shining and the seafront just across the road, the time-table allowed time to relax between sessions. The Principal of the College, the Revd Dr Elfeyd Ap-Nefydd Roberts, spoke of the Welsh revival, while his colleague, Dr Hywel Davies, told of 'The American Revolution and the Baptist Atlantic'. Bernard Green shared his new-found enthusiasm for historical research on the Rushbrooke papers, focusing on J. H. Rushbrooke and religious liberty, while Douglas Sparkes addressed the story of Home Mission and related topics. David Milner introduced 'Benjamin Goodwin, 1785-1871: Baptist minister, tutor, lecturer and citizen'. David Bebbington presented a seminal paper entitled 'The Democratization of British Religion: The Baptist Case'. There was opportunity to visit the National Library of Wales, and to discuss future directions for the Society's work. The President, Dr Morris West, led much of the worship, and the Secretary, Dr Roger Hayden, preached on the Sunday morning. Most of the papers should appear in the *Baptist Quarterly* in due course.