Introduction

In 1641, Thomas Edwards wrote to members of the Long Parliament to alert them to what he considered the major issue of the time:

> Tis not unknown to You, Right Noble and Worthy Senators, that the Great and Present Controversie of these Times is about the Church, and Church Government.[1]

Edwards, an Anglican clergyman at the time but soon to become a virulent Presbyterian, recognized that the political instability of the early 1640s had provided an opportunity for religious sects, notably "Anabaptism, Brownisme, &c.,"[2] to flourish. The settling of a national church government was therefore a matter of urgency so not to incur Divine displeasure upon a nation which had known God's grace.[3] Edwards's appeal added to the growing momentum in Parliament for ecclesiastical reform.

In the eighteen months between the calling of the Long Parliament, in November 1640, and the outbreak of Civil War in August 1642, while most members of Parliament believed in the necessity of church reform few, if any, had a clear program for national church polity. Kirby observes, "[Puritans] were more accustomed to dissent, not to constructive thinking."[4] When asked what he would put in place of the bishops Oliver Cromwell replied, "I can tell you, sir, what I would not have, though I cannot, what I would."[5] A range of opinions were canvassed in a flurry of published pamphlets. Disenchanted Puritans had established contact with Scottish radicals

1. Edwards, *Reasons against the Independent Government*, Epistle Dedicatory.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., A3.
4. Kirby, "English Presbyterians," 420.
5. Kenyon, *Stuart Constitution*, 252.

and their agenda for reform had in view the Presbyterianism of the Scots. Robert Baillie came to London in 1640 to promote the Covenanter cause and agitate against episcopacy.[6] Less radical reformers in the House longed for a return to an idealized Jacobethan age of Prayer Book Protestantism. This moderate Anglicanism was represented in the *Grand Remonstrance* presented by the Commons to the King on 1 December 1641.[7] They stated,

> our intention is, and our endeavours have been, to reduce within bounds that exorbitant power which the prelates have assumed unto themselves, so contrary to the Word of God and to the laws of the land, to which end we passed the bill for the removing them from their temporal power and employments.[8]
>
> And we desire to unburden the consciences of men of needless and superstitious ceremonies, suppress innovations, and take away the monuments of idolatry.[9]

While the Grand Remonstrance expressed Parliament's intention to bring about church reform, it was equally clear that religious tolerance for sectaries was not intended. They stated,

> We do here declare that it is far from our purpose or desire to let loose the golden reigns of discipline and government in the Church, to leave private persons or particular congregations to take up what form of Divine Service they please, for we hold it requisite that there should be throughout the whole realm a conformity to that order which the laws enjoin according to the Word of God.[10]

For a moment it appeared that the momentum for ecclesiastical change was with the conservatives who favored a reformed Church of England with a modified episcopacy. Pym, the *de facto* leader of the opposition to the King in parliament, recognized that the unity of the Commons might be threatened by this article, and under his influence provision was made for an assembly to consider the question of reform of Church government:

> And the better to effect the intended reformation, we desire there may be a general synod of the most grave, pious, learned and

6. Coffey, "Toleration Controversy," in Durston and Maltby, *Religion in Revolutionary England*, 44.

7. See Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, 202–32.

8. Article 183. Ibid., 229.

9. Article 184. Ibid., 229.

10. Article 184. Ibid., 229. For the wider debate see Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 137–39.

> judicious divines of this island, assisted with some from foreign parts professing the same religion with us, who may consider of all things necessary for the peace and good government of the Church, and represent the results of their consultations unto the Parliament, to be there allowed of and confirmed, and receive the stamp of authority, thereby to find passage and obedience throughout the kingdom.[11]

By the mid-1640s three visions of the church were being worked out simultaneously, Presbyterianism, Independency and a variety of forms of sectarianism. This thesis is a historical and theological engagement with one element of the ecclesiastical controversies of the 1640s and 1650s, the emergence and polity of the sect later known as the English Particular Baptists.

In 1962 Glen Stassen, then a PhD candidate at Duke University, noted that Baptist historiography had largely ignored the origins and theology of the English Particular Baptists, a lacuna he judged to be a serious issue for Baptist confessional scholarship. He stated:

> Whatever the reason for this lack, its consequence is that the most profound Baptist theology of this period [the seventeenth century] just simply seems not to have been investigated. This injustice cries for righting.[12]

This present work is a contribution to this omission,[13] particularly in relation to the developmental phase of English Particular Baptist ecclesiology, 1640–1660. The approach is situated within the discipline of historical theology, and contextualizes the theology of the church developed and promulgated by the English Calvinistic Baptists within an account of their rise and consolidation.

Around the year 1640 a Calvinistic Independent congregation, led by Henry Jessey, generated a group of members who separated themselves from the main body in order to administer believer's baptism by immersion. By the time of the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, after a period of considerable growth, the English Calvinistic Baptists had established a strong sense of distinct identity, and were about to face renewed persecution as episcopacy was re-established as the national, compulsory form of

11. Article 185. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, 229.

12. Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence," 322.

13. Renihan has published a doctoral dissertation examining the later ecclesiology of the Particular Baptists, which discusses the subsequent phase of development—*Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675–1705*.

church.[14] These dates form the boundaries of this enquiry into the doctrine of the church in the thought and practice of the English Calvinistic Baptists.

This book concentrates exclusively on the ecclesial polity of the Calvinistic Baptists. This is for two primary reasons. First, the development of the General Baptists has been studied in some depth in recent work. Notably, Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603–1649*, James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, Stephen Bratchlow, "Puritan Theology and General Baptist Origins," Lonnie Kliever, "General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence," Mark Bell, *Apocalypse How?,* Barry White has written manifold articles.[15] Traditionally, the English Particular Baptists have received less detailed attention that the older General Baptists. Second, I have focused on only one Baptist group because despite having in common the practice of believer's baptism by immersion, and congregational church government, the two groups developed separately and independently throughout the period studied here.[16] Though similar in a number of features the two groups had little to do with each other.[17] At the individual level characters like Thomas Lambe defied theologically classification as either a General or Particular Baptist, though ecclesially he associated with the Generals.[18] At the level of organized communities convictions were forged separately, with little or no reference to the other.

The task of enquiring into early Calvinistic Baptist ecclesiology is made more difficult than chronicling contemporary alternative polities, for example, that of Presbyterianism or Independent Congregationalism, since the nature of their theological writings is non-systematic. The exception to this is the First London Confession of 1644, but even here articles of faith are brief, creedal statements, not developed theological argument. Baptists had no Baxter, Marshall or Owen. Baptist writings are occasional, often apologetic, and sometimes homiletic. The theology available in these sources is therefore not always fully developed. The investigation of this enquiry is

14. See Morrill, "Church in England," in Morrill, *Reactions to the English Civil War*, 89–114.

15. E.g. White, "English General Baptists," 16–27; see also *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*.

16. This was not an absolute demarcation, and there were exceptions to the general rule, especially in the early 1640s. See Wright, *EEB*, 94.

17. See Howard, *Looking-Glass*, 5–6. Howard reports that those who switched from the Particulars to the Generals, or *vice versa* were required to be baptized again, since they were regarded as having been baptized into the wrong faith. Brown, *Political Activities*, 4.

18. In *A Treatise of Particular Predestination* Lambe affirmed his commitment to both general redemption and particular election. Lambe, *Treatise*, 2–4.

therefore necessarily eclectic in its use of sources, drawing from a number of writers, preachers, and evangelists to identify theological commitments energizing their work of bringing into being new congregations, conformed to the Rule of Christ. The risk of this approach is assessing whether the views of one Baptist represent the views of the movement, or are only idiosyncratic. In regard to major issues of Baptist ecclesial polity I therefore seek to provide corroborating evidence.

The book divides thematically into three sections. The first section considers the historical context for the emergence of the English particular Baptists. Chapter 1 is foundational for later theological analysis, and explores the origins of Baptist churches derived from the semi-separatist congregation formed by Henry Jacob in Southwark in 1616, up to the Restoration of 1660. The theme is one of emergence and growth, in a period of relative religious freedom caused by political turmoil, especially from the calling of the Long Parliament. As Baptist churches were formed, divided, multiplied, and associated throughout this period, theological convictions both drove the process forward, and were further forged in debate and defense of their congregational ecclesiology. The first part of the chapter uses the Stinton manuscript[19] as a basis for describing the rise of the Calvinistic Baptists in London, and the second part of the chapter sets out the primary reason for their relative success in surviving persecution, spreading their ideas, and planting new congregations.

Chapter 2 builds on the historical foundation of the first chapter, and describes the theological features of Baptist congregationalism in its emergent phase. The Baptist form of church was typically sectarian and voluntarist, Reformed, congregational, prioritizing experiential faith and the visible church. Calvinistic in soteriology, Particular Baptists were committed to a church separate from state control, and state sponsored religious conformity. This apparent political posture was the result of conversionist experience, which inspired Baptists to acknowledge Christ alone as immediate head of every congregation, as of every believer. Spiritual conversion was an experience of the unmediated power of Christ to effect inner renewal of life. Sins were forgiven, assurance of salvation secured, without any human mediator or sacramental means of grace. Since Christ was immediately present to the soul of saints, surely his kingly presence must be likewise available to the church. Building on this personal, experiential, understanding of the Gospel Baptists determined to have a church conformed to the purposes

19. A full transcription of the so-called Stinton Repository with historical introduction is available in *TBHS* 1 (1908–9), 193–245. See White, "Who Really Wrote," 3–10, 14.

and precepts of King Jesus, that is, "the Rule of Christ,"[20] the immediate head of every congregation of saints gathered in his name.

Chapter 3 develops further the theological commitments of the Particular Baptists, focusing on what I consider to be their primary and controlling conviction, namely devotion to the kingship of Jesus over his people. In particular, attention is given to the influence of the *munus triplex* doctrine in shaping early Baptist Christology. This model provides the basis for speaking about ecclesiology in Christological perspective, a foundational principle in Particular Baptist ideology.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 consider the practical outworking of ecclesiological core beliefs in congregational life. The focus will be upon the formation of holy communities and the implementation of congregational discipline. Since Baptists rejected the *corpus mixtum* model of the Church, though affirmed in Reformed theology and operated by Anglicans and Presbyterians, in favor of a believer's Church, gathered under the reign of Christ, the question they faced was how to maintain the purity of the body of Christ.

In chapter 5, Baptist ecclesiology will be examined in relation to ministry. The variety of offices and organization of officers in Baptist congregations, as set out in their publications will be discussed in relation to other models of ministry functioning in the period. Finally, the Baptist understanding of church in trans-local reality will be surveyed. The primary basis for this analysis will be the *Association Records of the Particular Baptists*, a compilation of documents, mainly from the 1650s, providing access to the thoughts and processes of early Baptist leaders, churches and associations in the development of what was more accurately called *consociation*. This chapter brings to a conclusion the account of earliest Particular Baptist ecclesiology, which began with the independent church of Henry Jacob, and led to the formation of a number of sectarian congregations, but eventually settled into a denominational form of inter-related churches, sharing common convictions, expressed confessionally in subscribed documents of 1644 and 1687, by which they were bound together. By 1660 it can be said that the identity and unity of these churches was consolidated, ensuring their distinct identity through the persecution of the Restoration, and beyond the Act of Toleration.

Throughout the work I have adopted the contemporary style of dating. In the period covered in this thesis England was using the Old Style, or Julian calendar. The year officially began on 25 March. In this text, the Old Style is maintained in order to reflect dates given in original documents. Spelling, punctuation and formatting have followed the original sources in

20. For example, Kiffin, *Brief Remonstrance*, 6.

citations given in the text. This accounts for the variation in the names of Thomas Collier, sometimes spelled Colyer, and William Kiffin, sometimes spelled Ciffyn, Cufin, or Kiffen.[21] The spellings are used randomly in the original sources, since spelling in the seventeenth century was not standardized, therefore except for citations where I have remained true to the original text for the sake of accuracy, I have adopted the spellings "Collier" and "Kiffin." On occasions where discussion of sources takes place in the body of the material, modernization of spelling has been used to maintain the flow of the argument.

21. In the most detailed work on Kiffin to date, Kreitzer employs the spelling "Kiffen," however the majority of documents I have consulted, and the majority of modern commentators, use the spelling Kiffin. See Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and his World (Part 1)*, 8–9.