

# The Puritan Roots of the American Baptist Movement

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## INTRODUCTION

The fog around Baptist origins from Puritanism is created by a confluence of differences in defining “Puritan,” the chaotic jumble of early seventeenth century English ecclesiastical history, and basic historiographical issues on how to approach Baptist origins. To pierce through that fog in the confines of one article is a daunting task. But it can be done if we first adopt a clear definition of “Puritan,” then trace Baptists’ predecessors and pioneers in their historical environment, while keeping in mind the historiographical fact that the history of today’s American Baptists is not the history of whatever former churches baptized believers only, as some “successionists” treat it; it is the history of the chain of events that results in today’s American Baptist churches.<sup>1</sup> Once these three planks are nailed down—an agreed-upon definition of “Puritan,” an historiography based on demonstrable cause and effect and then tracing that chain of events, then we can see American Baptists relationship to Puritanism. That is what this essay is dedicated to demonstrating. In do so doing, we will see that the story of Baptist origins has been so consistently told as one of contrast to the Puritans, that today Baptists do not know their own spiritual family. They do not know that they are Puritans.



## PURITANISM

Part of the confusion about the Puritan roots of Baptists stems from confusion of what, exactly, Puritanism was. Use of the term “Puritan” is a matter of opinion. Some scholars,

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of such historiography see J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1869.) Cramp defines any Christians who practiced believer’s baptism as Baptists. For example, he claims that the Cathari “were manifestly Baptists” (139).

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like Alister McGrath, define Puritans as only those who remained in the Church of England, seeking to reform it.<sup>2</sup> Douglas Weaver claims that John Smyth, by seeking a “pure church,” left Puritanism (the movement committed to a Biblically pure church.)<sup>3</sup> A blind reviewer for a Baptist journal commented, “Modern Baptists arose from Congregational Separatists (not Puritans). Puritans persecuted Baptists.”<sup>4</sup> These historians are defining “Puritan” to exclude separatists.

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Puritan specialists, however, tend to define it more broadly. Patrick Collinson defined Puritans as “the hotter sort of Protestants.”<sup>5</sup> That definition includes separatists or “semi-separatists.”<sup>6</sup> Peter Lake’s description of Puritanism is likewise transferable to separatists: “A style of piety, an emotional and ideological style, producing distinctive structures of meaning whereby both the world and the self could be construed, interpreted, and acted upon.”<sup>7</sup> Recently Michael Winship has elaborated on Lake’s definition and explicitly extends it to Baptists by including John Bunyan as a model Puritan.<sup>8</sup> John Coffey and Paul Lim note, in their definition of Puritanism, that this “intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism” originated in the Church of England “but spilled out beyond it.”<sup>9</sup> David Hall’s definition of Puritanism includes separatists, Congregationalists and Trans-Atlantic Particular Baptists: they are “the British version of international Calvinism” or “the Reformed tradition, English or colonial accent.”<sup>10</sup> James Coggins explicitly states that Separatism was “an extreme branch of English Puritanism” although

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<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 112.

<sup>3</sup> C. Douglas Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Blind reviewer for *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, August 20, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 467.

<sup>6</sup> The term “semi-separatist” refers to those who were “independent but not against the Church of England,” who retained a “brotherly communion” with the established church. Mark R. Bell, *Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements During the English Revolution* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 55-56.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Lake, “Defining Puritanism—again?” in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Seventeenth Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 4.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-2. Keith Sprunger likewise defined it more broadly, as any English Reformed movement, including “English merchant chapels” overseas, such as in Holland. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1-2.

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just five pages later describes a church moving “from Puritanism to Separatism.”<sup>11</sup> Since it is reasonable to suppose that nearly all postreformation English nonconformists sought to reform the church along the lines of their preferences, including a minority that thought a “reformation without tarrying for any” was the best strategy, the broad definition of Puritanism is best.<sup>12</sup> Thus separatists were not people who “came out of the Puritan movement,” but a subspecies of Puritan.<sup>13</sup> Hence, one could be a Puritan who hopes his church’s separation from the established church results in that church following their example. This broad definition is what I am using here.

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“Puritan,” then, is an umbrella term that encompasses all types of attempts to reform the church of England, including those who stayed within it, seeking reform from within, Presbyterians who opted for the Westminster Confession (1647) and Independents (that is, Congregationalists, both semi-separatists and strict separatists). What all these expressions of Puritanism have in common is a shared goal—reformation—and a similar spirituality, “an inner-worldly ascetic evangelical movement, with its roots in the post-Reformation Calvinistic Anglican reform, aimed at holistic social transformation according to the ideational pattern of scripture and beginning with the personally experienced regeneration of sinful human beings.”<sup>14</sup> The “ideational pattern of scripture” required the “principle that all worship rites which do not have the express command of God must be removed,” later known as the regulative principle of worship.<sup>15</sup> They stood for “the intense and evangelical advocacy of the Christian obligation to know and serve God.”<sup>16</sup>

This broad, amorphous but spiritually and theologically specific definition of Puritanism established, leads to seeing how Baptists were related to it.

## BAPTISTIC PURITANISM

The history of Baptist origins often commences with John Smyth (1554-1612) baptizing himself and others, including Thomas Helwys (c. 1575-c. 1616) and John Murton (1585-c.

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<sup>11</sup> James Robert Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 29, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarrying for Anie* (1582).

<sup>13</sup> Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 14.

<sup>14</sup> John B. Carpenter, “A New Definition of Puritanism, A Cross-Disciplinary Approach,” *The Evangelical Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 17, <https://covenantcaswell.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/A-New-Definition-of-Puritanism.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Grenz, Isaac Backus—*Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought, and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Darrett B. Rutman, *American Puritanism: Faith and Practice* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970) 13.

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1626). Having fled to Holland (c. 1608) to escape persecution, they embraced believer's baptism either as a result of independent Bible study or with the persuasion of Mennonites.<sup>17</sup> They also embraced Arminianism, at the time of that controversy in Holland, and so began, after returning to England, a General Baptist church in London (1611/12). Thus, some Baptists claim, begins the chain of events leading to the Baptist movement, including its flourishing in America.

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There are several problems with the Anabaptist origins theory. First, in order to demonstrate a prior practitioner of believer's baptism is legitimately in the Baptist ancestry, one must show a causal connection to the later Baptist movement. That is difficult to demonstrate with Smyth who did not successfully gather an Anabaptist church in England that persisted nor can he be conclusively shown to have led others to do so. Helwys and Murton, who did gather a church, remained unconvinced of other essential features of Anabaptism like forswearing oaths, war, and political vocations.<sup>18</sup> Helwys, in particular, separated from Smyth on four points, two of which are typical of Reformed rejection of Anabaptism: about the Christian Sabbath and the appropriateness of Christians to serve the government.<sup>19</sup> Helwys' confession of 1611 specifically stated, "Magistracy is a Holy ordinance of God," that magistrates "may be members of the church of Christ," and that they "bear the sword of God," thus implying endorsing of capital punishment, contrary to most Anabaptists.<sup>20</sup> Helwys and his followers were so opposed to Anabaptism, when Smyth converted to it in Holland, Helwys declared that Smyth had "denied the Lord's truth and is fallen from grace."

Further, there are the unsubtle statements on the covers of prominent Baptist confessions denying any connection to Anabaptism. The First London Baptist Confession (1644) declared that the confessing church, we now call "Baptists," were "commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists."<sup>21</sup> In 1660, the General Baptists likewise complained about

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Carol Crawford Holcomb tells the story of Baptist origins and polity without any reference to Congregationalism (the movement). Holcomb, "Doing Church Baptist Style: Congregationalism" (Macon: Baptist History and Heritage, 2001), <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/pamphlets/style/congregationalism.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> The Schleithem confession (1527) stated, "Christ . . . prohibits all swearing, whether true or false." Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: The MacMillan, 1968), 74.

<sup>19</sup> Willaim Estep, "A Believing People: Historical Background," *The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 196 Louisville Conference*, Edited by James Leo Garrett, Jr (Scottsdale, PN: Herald Press, 1969), 49.

<sup>20</sup> "Helwys' Declaration of Faith—The First Baptist Confession," Society of Evangelical Arminians, last modified January 6, 2019, para. 24, <http://evangelicalarminians.org/helwys-declaration-of-faith-the-first-baptist-confession/>.

<sup>21</sup> "London Baptist Confession of 1644," *The Reformed Reader: Committed to Historic Baptist and Reformed Beliefs*, 1999, <https://www.reformedreader.org/ccf/h.htm>.

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being falsely called Anabaptists.<sup>22</sup> One of the earliest Baptist historians, Thomas Crosby (c. 1685-1752), “Tried to firmly dissociate the English Baptists from the continental Anabaptists.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, Winthrop Hudson concludes, “If the early Baptists were clear on any one point, they were clear on their insistence that they were not to be confused with the Anabaptists.”<sup>24</sup>

Second, it is unclear whether the Helwys church really began the chain-of-events that touched off the Baptist movement. B. R. White and Mark Bell question whether the Smyth-Helwys church persisted through the 1630s.<sup>25</sup> That is, we lack conclusive evidence that Helwys’s church survived very long, much less was the first in a series of Baptist churches. Douglas Weaver notes that revisionist Baptist historians have concluded “no direct linkage between the General Baptists of the 1640s back to Smyth and Helwys has been documented.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, there is no conclusive evidence that the Helwys church began the chain of events leading to Baptist churches today, especially in America. Rather, even the General Baptists in England “clearly emerged from the womb of Puritanism and the Separatist movement.”<sup>27</sup> As we will see, the General Baptist movement in England was not successful in creating a large following in America, except for the small Free Will Baptist movement, starting with Paul Palmer in North Carolina beginning in 1727 and Benjamin Randall starting in New Hampshire in 1780, both groups together accounted for probably less than ten percent of Baptists in America by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

Third, even those most ardent in their support of the Anabaptist origins theory admit, at least implicitly, that they lack evidence. Frank H. Littell (1917-2009), who vigorously championed the cause of the Anabaptists as the source of the “free church” ideal “like a latter-day circuit rider,” admitted frankly that direct evidence of a relationship between “continental Anabaptism and radical sectaries of the English commonwealth . . . broke down.”<sup>29</sup> Baptists hold to the free church ideal and are among “the radical sectaries of the

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<sup>22</sup> F. Smith, “A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith” (London, 1660),

<https://www.reformedreader.org/ccf/tsc.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the 17th Century* (London: The Baptists Historical Society, 1983), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, “Baptists Were Not Anabaptists,” *The Chronicle* 16, no. 4 (October 1953), 171.

<sup>25</sup> Mark R. Bell, *Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements During the English Revolution* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 42. White, *English Baptists*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering Our English Baptist Heritage* (Peterborough, Canada: H&E, 2019), 17.

<sup>28</sup> “About Free Will Baptists,” Free Will Baptist History, Free Will Baptist Historical Commission, [https://fwbhistory.com/?page\\_id=42](https://fwbhistory.com/?page_id=42).

<sup>29</sup> On Littell’s promoting the importance of Anabaptism for the “free church” movement, Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: MacMillan,



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English commonwealth.” Thus, Littell confesses to a lack of evidence for Anabaptism’s influence on Baptists. Likewise, William Estep (1920-2000), perhaps the chief purveyor of the Anabaptist origins theory among Southern Baptists, claims that the rise of the Particular Baptists reflects the impact of Puritanism “under Anabaptist influence.” He claims, “This influence may have been mediated more by books and tracts than by personal contact.”<sup>30</sup> His “may have” reveals he does not have concrete evidence of this. His testimony to the absence of evidence for the claim he is advocating is, itself, weighty evidence against it. Winthrop S. Hudson (1911-2001) notes, “The single most confusing element in the attempt to understand the Baptist heritage . . . has been the identification of the Baptists with the Continental Anabaptists.”<sup>31</sup> B. R. White concludes that “careful” historians “seeking to estimate the influence of Anabaptism upon both General and Calvinistic Baptist origins found that no significant influence could be decisively proved.”<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, as Hudson argues, there is not a need to credit Anabaptists as the source of believer’s baptism among Puritans.

The insistence upon believers’ baptism was a logical corollary drawn from the Reformation emphasis upon the necessity for an explicit faith and from the Congregational concept of a gathered church, as well as from the common storehouse of Biblical precept and example, rather than being the result of any supposed Anabaptist influence.<sup>33</sup>

That is, the narrative of Baptist origins is confused because it seeks unique men or a movement outside the larger Reformed movement to ascribe its genesis. This is unnecessary because Reformed theology and Congregational polity, when combined in seventeenth century England equal Puritanism, sufficiently account for Baptist origins.<sup>34</sup>

The traditional story of Baptist origins often implies that the Helwys church begins a self-conscious Baptist movement that then bifurcated into “General” (that is, Arminian) and “Particular” (that is, Calvinist) camps. However, this narrative has been challenged. First, Murray Tolmie concluded that General Baptists held “general redemption” as “their fundamental tenet, and as a result General Baptists had no sense of common purpose

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1968), x, 18. Franklin H. Littell, “The Concept of the Believer’s Church,” in Garrett, Jr., ed., *The Concept of the Believers’ Church*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Estep, “Believing People,” 53.

<sup>31</sup> Hudson, “Baptists Were Not Anabaptists,” 171.

<sup>32</sup> White, *English Baptists*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Hudson, “Baptists Were Not Anabaptists,” 176.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the traditional Baptist narrative, see John B. Carpenter, “Why Baptists Don’t Know They Are Puritans,” *Founders’ Journal* (Forthcoming, 2025).

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with the Particular Baptists.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Matthew Bingham, examining the Particular Baptist, reported that they felt that “paedobaptism could be tolerated but the ‘Arminian poison’ could not.” Thus, there was “no shared religious identity” between the two kinds of Baptists. The traditional narrative has been obfuscating the fact that the Particular Baptists, who would dominate early American Baptists, share far more affinities with “the wider puritan culture” than with General Baptists. Bingham claims that even the term “Baptist” obscures the connection of the “Particular Baptists” with the Puritans by creating the impression of an overarching Baptist communion detached from Puritan congregationalism. So, he prefers to call them “baptistic congregationalists.”<sup>36</sup>

These baptistic congregationalists, thus Puritans, also began in London. There, Henry Jacob (1563-1624) sought immediate reform of the church but did not condemn the established church as illegitimate, thus “semi-separatist.”<sup>37</sup> Although Jacob left the Church of England, he still believed the nonseparating Puritans in the established church were brothers and sisters in Christ. He founded the church—usually called the Jacob church—which arguably grew to become the mother church for Particular Baptists, although it began as a paedobaptist congregational church. He cultivated an irenic spirit toward Puritans remaining within the Church of England. By 1635, the church called Henry Jessey, a typical Puritan, as their pastor. Believer’s baptism eventually “engulfed the Jacob circle of churches.”<sup>38</sup> The mother church would eventually spawn five Baptist churches from 1638 to 1644. Finally, by 1644, Pastor Jessey himself, after “diligent and impartial examination of scripture and antiquity” including consulting some of the leading Puritans, like Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) and Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646), became Baptist.<sup>39</sup> Bingham notes that Believer’s baptism “was understood as a natural and unavoidable consequence of the congregational principles.”<sup>40</sup> He and his followers continued to cultivate a “strong sense of shared religious identity among ‘godly’ Calvinist puritans” whom they considered “fellow Puritans.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4, 18, 23.

<sup>37</sup> *A Confession and Protestation of the Faith of Certain Christians in England* (Middelburg, 1616) article 4, 8. Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the Beginning of King George I*, vol. 1, *Their History to the Restoration of King Charles II*. (London: The Editor, 1738), 310-11. Also see Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 7-28.

<sup>40</sup> Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 22. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*, 33.

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In the meantime, the first Particular Baptist church in England had been founded in 1638 by John Spilsbury (1593-1668). In 1644, the baptistic congregationalists, led by Spilsbury and William Kiffin, among others, drafted the first London Baptist Confession, itself an adaptation of the 1596 Separatist Confession. These early Particular Baptists preserved the congregational polity of that “True Confession.”<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, Jessey “maintained the same Christian love and charity to all saints as before” his conversion to being Baptist and travelled around England visiting the churches “to excite them to love and union among themselves . . . seeking to maintain peace and unity among those Christians that differed not fundamentally.”<sup>43</sup> This “irenic soil,” nurtured cordial relationships with other Puritan, was the ground in which about 250-300 Particular Baptist churches would grow in Britain by 1688.<sup>44</sup>

## BAPTISTS IN THE CITY UPON A HILL

Spilsbury and the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey circle of churches baptized people who migrated to America and became members of Baptist churches there. Some New England Puritans became Baptists and returned to England. For example, Hanserd Knollys’s (1599-1691) course seems typical for many Puritan-Baptists. He began as a Cambridge educated Church of England minister but felt it necessary to resign after two or three years because of his Puritan principles. He notes that in his youth he “got acquaintance with gracious Christians, then called Puritans.”<sup>45</sup> He became a separatist and then fled to New England to escape the archbishop’s high commission. Apparently, sometime in New Hampshire he became what Cotton Mather (1663-1728) termed a “godly Anabaptist.”<sup>46</sup> He returned to London in 1641 where he encouraged Henry Jessey (1603-1660) to become Baptist.<sup>47</sup> Knollys joined the Particular Baptists in 1644, surviving to be a signatory to the 1689 London Baptist Confession. That confession was, essentially, a Baptist version of the Congregational Savoy Declaration (1658) that was, in turn, based on the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the classic Puritan confession.

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<sup>42</sup> White, *English Baptists*, 61.

<sup>43</sup> Crosby, *History*, 312.

<sup>44</sup> James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists 1675-1705* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008) 13; John Sweat, “The Rise, Decline, and Renewal of the English Particular Baptists,” G3 Ministries, March 3, 2022, <https://g3min.org/the-rise-decline-and-renewal-of-the-english-particular-baptists/>.

<sup>45</sup> Hanserd Knollys, *The Life and Death of That Old Disciple of Jesus Christ and Eminent Minister of the Gospel Mr. Hanserd Knollys* (London: John Harris, 1692), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or the Ecclesiastical History of New England*, III (Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1820), 221.

<sup>47</sup> Crosby, *History*, 311, 336.



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Also subscribing to the 1689 confession was Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) pastor at Horsleydown. Keach begat Elias Keach in 1666. In 1686, Elias sailed for Philadelphia where he was converted after fraudulently representing himself as a pastor. The younger Keach would plant Lower Dublin Baptist Church (also known as Pennepack Baptist Church) along the same principles of his father. Keach's Pennsylvania church would spawn several other churches from which the Philadelphia Baptist Association, the oldest in America, would emerge.<sup>48</sup> News of persecution of Baptists in New England deterred those in old England from following in the footsteps of their Puritan brethren and emigrating. Even when the Clarendon Code (1661-65) was passed—four acts of Parliament designed to discourage the Puritans and other dissenters, in England after the restoration—and Baptists were now persecuted in old England too, still the specter of persecution in New England prevented any “Great Migration” of Particular Baptists there. Only one leading Baptist pastor, the Welsh John Miles (c. 1621-1683), emigrated to New England, settling, wisely, in the Plymouth colony in 1663.<sup>49</sup>

Some suggest that floggings and fines meted out by Puritan “standing order” to Baptists are evidence of a radically different faith. This is not necessarily so. People with affinities tend to grow up beside one another and then one or both groups may enforce their distinctives and persecute the minority, which is in many ways similar. Baptists grew up amid Congregationalists because they were so similar.<sup>50</sup> The standing order tried to suppress the distinctives. To claim that persecution proves that the two groups were radically different is akin to claiming that the British campaign in America during the Revolutionary war proves that America did not arise from Britain.

Meanwhile, some the separatists in exile, mostly in the Netherlands, emigrated to the Plymouth Colony, the “Pilgrims” of Thanksgiving fame. The mainstream Puritans, led by John Winthrop (1587/88-1649) came to New England, beginning in 1630, to found a “city upon a hill.”<sup>51</sup> When they arrived, they slipped into congregationalism with ease. But it was a momentous decision because it came pregnant with assumptions of ecclesiology that would move Puritans toward becoming Baptists. For example, the New England Puritans strengthened congregationalism's commitment to regenerate church

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankin, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26. Pennepack Baptist Church, accessed March 6, 2022, <https://www.pennepackbaptist.org/history.html>.

<sup>49</sup> William McLaughlin, “The Rise of Antipedobaptists in New England, 1630-1655,” *Baptists in the Balance: The Tension Between Freedom and Responsibility*, edited by Everett C. Goodwin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 76.

<sup>50</sup> See John B. Carpenter, “Baptist Polity Inherited from Congregationalism,” *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2023), 153-72, <https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/jbtm20b.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630).

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membership.<sup>52</sup> Soon after John Cotton arrived, a revival ensued among the new colonists. The result was that for entry into church membership these Puritans added, to the “Pilgrims” membership requirements of doctrinal subscription and moral living, a public testimony of experienced conversion.<sup>53</sup> Richard Mather wrote defending the practice of “testified regenerate membership” in 1646 and, by 1700, his son, Increase Mather (1639-1723) was still defending the practice:

It has been proved that church members ought to be believers, saints, regenerate persons. And therefore the Church should put the persons who desire admission into their holy communion to declare and show whether it be thus with them, whether they have truly repented of their sins, and whether they truly believe on Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Among those “planters of New England” was John Clarke (1609-1676). Clarke, from Suffolk, England, had been educated to be a physician. He arrived in Boston as part of the “Great Migration” in 1637. Apparently, he associated with Anne Hutchison’s antinomians as he was disarmed by the Puritan authorities to prevent an insurrection. By the next year he led a settlement to Aquidneck Island, Rhode Island. There he planted an apparently separatist Puritan church. The next year, Clarke moved to Newport, Rhode Island where he gathered another church. By 1644, under the influence of elder Mark Lucar, associated with Spilsbury’s church in London, Clarke’s church embraced believer’s baptism.<sup>55</sup> The church exists today as United Baptist Church.<sup>56</sup> His church kept close ties to the Baptists in Massachusetts Bay and cultivated Baptist congregations in the other Puritan colonies. In 1649, after a group of church members in Seekonk (then in Plymouth Colony but later in Rehoboth, Massachusetts) came to Baptist convictions and withdrew from their established church, Clarke arrived to provide pastoral care.<sup>57</sup> Two years later, in 1651, Clarke and Obadiah Holmes, originally from the Seekonk church, arrived in Lynn, Massachusetts, to fellowship with Walter Witter, an elderly man of Baptist principles. Their meeting was interrupted by two constables who compelled Clarke and his associates to attend a Puritan Sabbath service. They protested by refusing to remove their hats. They were sent to trial in Boston where they were sentenced with a heavy fine or to be “well whipt.” Friends of Clarke paid the fine for him, but the defiant

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<sup>52</sup> See Carpenter, “Baptist Polity Inherited from Congregationalism,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 154-58.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed* (London: R. O. and G. D., 1643), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1700), 19.

<sup>55</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> United Baptist Church, history, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://unitedbaptistnewport.com/history/>.

<sup>57</sup> Sydney V. James with Theodore Dwight Bozeman (ed.), *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island, 1638–1750*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 43.

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Obadiah Holmes refused to pay and, so, on September 5, 1651 was given thirty lashes with a three-corded whip leaving him permanently scarred.<sup>58</sup> Some witnesses to the whipping were moved by it to embrace Baptist principles. One such witness was Henry Dunster (1609-1659).<sup>59</sup>

Dunster was the first president of Harvard College, an esteemed founder of the standing order. But sometime after Holmes's lashing, he reasoned, in good Reformed-style, "All instituted Gospel Worship hath some express word of Scripture. But paedobaptism hath none."<sup>60</sup> The fundamental issue, however, was, again, the identity of the church as the gathering of the regenerate. "*Soli visibiter fideles sunt baptizandi*" ("Only the visible believers are to be baptized.") Since he could not see that infants were believers, they were not eligible for baptism.<sup>61</sup> Unlike some Baptists of the first two generations, he was not unnecessarily inflammatory; he was irenic, and so was not excommunicated for his Baptist beliefs from his Puritan church.

In Boston itself, the First Baptist Church was gathered in 1663 and led by Thomas Gould, meeting in homes until they were able to build their first "meeting house" (the Puritan term) in 1678.<sup>62</sup> Gould had been inspired by Dunster but, unlike Dunster, was unwilling to withdraw from Massachusetts, choosing rather to go to prison.<sup>63</sup> He was summoned to court in September 1665 to account for his new church. He presented to the court the Baptist church's statement of faith which in major issues, like the Trinity, Lordship of Christ and authority of scripture, reflected Puritan orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup> The church grew from its original nine charter members, after the Restoration in England required the loosening of the Puritan yoke in New England, to eighty members fifteen years later. This suggests that quietly dissenting Baptists inhabited many of the Puritan churches.<sup>65</sup> Cotton Mather, the third generation "Lord's remembrancer," claimed that Baptists were "among the planters of New England from the beginning, and have been welcome to the communion

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Williams Bicknell, *The Story of Dr. John Clarke*, (Little Rock, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005), 48.

<sup>59</sup> Louis Franklin Asher, *John Clarke (1609–1676): Pioneer in American Medicine, Democratic Ideals, and Champion of Religious Liberty* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance, 1997). Samuel Eliot Morison, *Builders of the Bay Colony* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 183–216.

<sup>60</sup> Jeremiah Chaplin, *Life of Henry Dunster* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1872), 112.

<sup>61</sup> McLaughlin, "Rise of Antipedobaptists," 90.

<sup>62</sup> First Baptist Church of Boston, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.firstbaptistboston.org/history.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 46. Alternately the name is spelled Goold, in Thomas S. Kidd and Barry N. Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America* 16.

<sup>65</sup> McLaughlin, "Rise of Antipedobaptists," 79.

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of our churches, which they have enjoyed, reserving their particular opinion unto themselves.”<sup>66</sup>

## THE PURITAN CENTURY

In the first two generations of New England, when the Puritans held the political reins, Puritans sought to expunge any separate, organized expressions of the Baptist movement from the commonwealth. That is, Baptist churches were not tolerated, even if individual Baptists were. In the heat of that furnace, the differences between Baptists and the mainstream of Puritanism were refined. The first generation of Puritans in New England was convinced that those who did not agree with them, like the Baptists, had “free liberty to keep away from us.”<sup>67</sup> We might say today, “Puritan New England: Love it or Leave It!” New England, after all, was the Puritans’ project. They should be excused a certain amount of sense of ownership of the place. Their insistence on conformity was the Puritans application of the European policy of *cuius regio, eius religio*.<sup>68</sup> Besides, even when, in England, Baptists were tolerated under Cromwell, Puritans in New England reasoned that their “City Upon a Hill” was too small, unstable and new, unlike the ancient, large and well-established homeland, to allow Baptists to grow their own churches. The Baptists responded by insisting that persecuting otherwise peaceful citizens for matters of conscience was not conducive to peace and stability, thus beginning their long campaign for religious liberty. This was the environment in which early Baptists and other Puritans differentiated themselves from each other.<sup>69</sup>

The Restoration in England (1660) resulted in the expulsion of Puritan pastors from their churches, some of whom fled to New England, including Increase Mather. They came to find a crisis that was built into the original polity.<sup>70</sup> When regenerate church membership is combined with infant baptism, eventually one must face what to do with the children of nonmembers who were baptized but unconverted. Only church members were supposed to receive ordinances of communion and baptism. Puritan covenant theology taught that the covenant that God had made with the elect included their children (at least until they could “own the covenant” for themselves). Hence, the infant children of church members could be baptized. In the original polity, though, when such children

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<sup>66</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America*, 2 (Edinburg: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 2, 532-33.

<sup>67</sup> Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobbler of Agawam* (1647).

<sup>68</sup> “Whose realm, their religion,” meaning that the religion of the ruler determined the religion of those ruled.

<sup>69</sup> McLaughlin, “Rise of Antipedobaptists,” 74.

<sup>70</sup> Francis Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), 161.

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grew up without experiencing grace for themselves, they could not be admitted as church members. So, New England Puritan churches found themselves with many baptized non-members. When they had children, those children—grandchildren of the visible saints—were not eligible for baptism. Hence, by the end of the first generation, increasing numbers of New Englanders were unbaptized. The Halfway Synod of 1661 decided that baptized children of church members who were orthodox and were not living scandalously could have their children baptized.

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This, later called “the Halfway Covenant,” is one way to resolve the conflict between a theology of regenerate church membership and infant baptism. The strong party of dissent from the innovation, first from young Increase Mather and about a century later from the Separates, sprang from the Puritan commitment to a spotless “Bride of Christ.” The Halfway Covenant was a compromise between the original Puritan conviction of a regenerate church membership and the logical consequences of the covenant theology underlying infant baptism. The other way to resolve that is simply by forsaking infant baptism.

Meanwhile, congregationalism’s commitment to regenerate church membership had been inclining New England Puritans toward moving to the Baptist fold. As the English Civil War (1642-1651) “loosed a flood of dissent,” converts to believers’ baptism skyrocketed.<sup>71</sup> By 1644, John Winthrop reported, “Anabaptistry increased and spread in the country.”<sup>72</sup> Three years later, the Massachusetts Bay Colony officially declared, “divers of [“Ana-baptists”] have since our coming into New-England appeared amongst our selvs.”<sup>73</sup>

Before the wary eyes of their Puritan neighbors, the Baptists fought, rhetorically, for toleration. In so doing, they strove to prove that they were not unstable. John Winthrop, the founding governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, when complaining about the rise of Baptists, cited the example of a man in Hingham, Massachusetts whom he described as “troublesome” and “given much to lying and idleness.”<sup>74</sup> Puritan William Hubbard (1621-1704) wrote, “It is too often seen that these new sectaries that go about to unchurch all other Christian societies do at last unchurch themselves and from anabaptist

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<sup>71</sup> McLaughlin, “Rise of Antipedobaptists,” 84.

<sup>72</sup> John Winthrop, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 177. Winthrop was referring to Baptists.

<sup>73</sup> “Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts,” 1647, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/page/1647-laws-and-liberties-of-massachusetts>.

<sup>74</sup> John Winthrop, *Winthrop’s Journal: 1630-1649*, Original Narratives of Early American History, ed. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 2:177-78.



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become sebastists [self-baptizers] then seekers and at last ranters.”<sup>75</sup> Baptists in New England sought to rebut that charge with their life. As former members of Puritan churches and respected citizens of the “City Upon a Hill,” like Henry Dunster they had the advantage of being known, and generally respectable, quantities. They were known to be orthodox. Their debates with mainstream Puritans were within the same theological framework.<sup>76</sup> They even called on the same logic, employed by none other than John Cotton, to justify the Puritans separation from the Church of England. Cotton had denied that they had technically separated from Anglicanism because the issues they refused to conform to were *adiaphora*, non-essentials, and so the differences should be tolerated. The Baptists likewise claimed that their differences with the New England way were in nonessentials and, so, should be tolerated.<sup>77</sup> Thus, even some of the Baptist principles of religious freedom were borrowed from the mainstream Puritans.

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However, what respectable Baptists, like Dunster, gained, others squandered. Most prominently, the man often hailed, undeservingly, as the father of American Baptists, Roger Williams (1603-1683). Williams’s experiment in Providence Plantations became the stage where the first Baptist church in America was gathered. In 1639 the small band of exiles from Salem, Massachusetts who followed Williams to Rhode Island became the First Baptist Church in Providence. That is, the first Baptist church in America was a transplant of a Puritan church. Williams and Ezekiel Hollimon baptized each other and then ten founding members of the new church, each former members of the Puritan church in Salem.<sup>78</sup> However, Williams’s inability to stay settled in a theological commitment or even in a church affirmed the criticisms of people like Hubbard that Baptists were unstable. Williams was Baptist for only four months in 1639. He did not clearly express what he was for. The Puritans and the Baptists knew they were for a pure church and agreed, at least within congregationalism, that meant a regenerate membership. They only disagreed on how to achieve it. What makes for true saints and churches Williams never resolved but remained a “seeker,” one of those unstable people Hubbard complained about.<sup>79</sup>

William Wickenden (c. 1614-1671) also a Puritan participant in the “Great Migration” of the 1630s who had settled in Salem, followed Williams to Providence Plantations and apparently remained an active Baptist. In 1656, he ventured to Flushing, New

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<sup>75</sup> William Hubbard, *A General History of New England*, Second Edition (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1868), 626. “Sebastist” is from Latin, *se baptizare*, (‘to baptize oneself’), referring to followers of John Smyth (the ‘Se-Baptist’), who after baptizing himself baptized the other members.

<sup>76</sup> McLaughlin, “Rise of Antipedobaptists,” 77.

<sup>77</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 47.

<sup>78</sup> McLaughlin, “Rise of Antipedobaptists,” 80.

<sup>79</sup> Hubbard, *General History*, 338.

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Netherlands to baptize some new converts and preach. But being unlicensed to do so in New Netherlands, he was arrested and fined, his fine remitted because of his poverty but then banished from the colony.<sup>80</sup> He was one of the first to attempt to plant a Baptist church in what was to become New York.

In this century of Puritan hegemony in New England, many Puritans became Baptists. As they did so, they took with them, often down to the tiniest details, congregational polity, such as commitment to regenerate church membership with a testimony of regeneration required for entry, letters of dismission, church covenanting, priesthood of all believers, local church autonomy, associationalism (or “consociations”),<sup>81</sup> and philosophies and practices of ordination.<sup>82</sup> Even some of the unique terminology of Baptists is owed to the Puritans, like the original term for their buildings, “meeting houses,” showing that they understood the church to be the body of believers, not the building or organization.<sup>83</sup> Further, the Baptist custom of calling local church members sent to a council (or “convention”) “messengers,” not presbyters, elders, delegates, or representatives, was inherited from them.<sup>84</sup>

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## THE PERSECUTION OBSESSION

The traditional telling of Baptist origins here turns to persecution. Baptists were officially persecuted in the first two generations of the City Upon a Hill and even after some toleration was forced on the Puritan colonies, after 1682, Baptists were socially ostracized. The experience of persecution plays an outsized, and thus distorting, role in Baptist history. About one-third of William McLaughlin’s important essay “The Rise of Antipedobaptists in New England, 1630-1655” is dedicated to tales of persecution meted out to Baptists by the “Standing Order.”<sup>85</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin remark on how the persecution went on for “so long,” fifty-one years, and attribute it to a presuppositional

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan Taylor, 1886), <http://www.reformedreader.org/history/armitage/ch09.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 59.

<sup>82</sup> See Carpenter, “Baptist Polity,” 153-72.

<sup>83</sup> For example, the First Baptist Church of Providence, RI, still announces, “When entering the Meeting House...” accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.firstbaptistchurchinamerica.org/>.

<sup>84</sup> Lechford, *Plaine Dealing . . . in These Times* (London: W. E. and I. G., 1642), 3; John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England . . . Containing a Full Declaration of the Church-Way in All Particulars* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1645), 114.

<sup>85</sup> McLaughlin describes representative incidents of persecution of Baptists for eight pages in his twenty-four page essay “The Rise of Antipedobaptists in New England, 1630-1655,” *Baptists in the Balance: The Tension Between Freedom and Responsibility*, edited by Everett C. Goodwin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 84-92.

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difference that forced the Puritan order to regard Baptists as “heretical.”<sup>86</sup> Thomas Kidd’s and Barry Hankins’ 2015 *Baptists in America* contains virtually no description of Puritanism while launching the story of Baptist origins, both in the preface and the book proper, with accounts of persecution. They even imply that the Puritans’ gospel was essentially different than “the gospel of the Baptists.”<sup>87</sup> The unspoken but inescapable conclusion, especially in the mind of the layperson at whom their history seems aimed, is that Puritanism was a radically different movement, with essentially different, even hostile, goals and theology.

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The many incidents of persecution in America, from fines, to whippings, to censures and excommunications, were symptoms of how New England Puritanism tended to create Baptists. Force and threats were required to keep more Puritans from following the logic of their theology to its conclusion. As that force became unavailable and the threats less credible, converts to Baptist churches increased.

While persecution is an important chapter of Baptist origins, it is just a chapter, not the whole volume. Excessive focusing on persecution obscures how closely related, theologically and even ecclesiologically, Baptists were to other Puritans. Indeed, they were “baptistic congregationalists,” with close theological affinities and friendly relationships with other Puritans.<sup>88</sup> At the same time Baptists in New England were feeling the lash of Puritans, old England saw the phenomena of mixed churches consisting of both Baptists and paedobaptist Congregationalists united in one membership.<sup>89</sup> The original closed communion tenet of the second edition of the 1644 London Baptist Confession was not accepted by enough Baptists because of their close association with Congregationalism. Hence, it did not survive into the 1677 confession, the Second London Baptist Confession (otherwise known as “the 1689”), which remained mute on the subject. One “open membership” (that is, “mixed”) church, the Broadmead Church in Bristol, sent a messenger to the 1689 assembly.<sup>90</sup>

In England, Baptists were part of the Puritan milieu.<sup>91</sup> Thomas Edwards (1599-1647) said Baptists were “the highest form of Independency.”<sup>92</sup> About a century later, English Baptist hagiographer, Thomas Crosby, returned the compliment, describing Puritans as

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<sup>86</sup> Chute, Finn and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, ix, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Dennis C. Bustin, *Paradox and Perseverance: Hanserd Knollys, Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 164-65.

<sup>90</sup> Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*, 65.

<sup>91</sup> Haykin calls that milieu “the matrix of Puritanism.” Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*, 89.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), 97-98; according to James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, 13. “Independency” refers to Puritan Congregationalists.

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“the most sober and gracious Christians.”<sup>93</sup> He first offered his pastor’s, Benjamin Stinton (1677-1719), research on Baptist history to Daniel Neal (1648-1743) to be included in his *History of the Puritans* (1732), thus showing that Crosby saw Baptists origins as deserving to be a chapter of Puritan history.<sup>94</sup>

Even in the Puritan “City Upon a Hill,” established as a training ground “to muster up the first of [God’s] forces in,”<sup>95</sup> it was originally Baptists separating and forming new churches that was not tolerated, not Baptist doctrines per se. Although second generation leader Increase Mather, like his contemporary Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), had called for suppressing the Baptists, when they had the power, he also acknowledged, in practice, the Baptists as legitimate (by inquiring whether the local Baptist church had any objection to John Farnum returning to membership at the North Church).<sup>96</sup> By the third generation, with The Toleration Act of 1689 passed in England and a new charter imposed on Massachusetts (consolidating it with the Plymouth Colony), established Puritans made peace with their Baptist neighbors. In 1718, Increase Mather and his son Cotton assisted in the ordination of a Baptist pastor with Cotton preaching the sermon. Far from considering Baptists heretical, he insisted that New England was a place where “the names Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Antipaedobaptist, are swallowed up in that of Christian.”<sup>97</sup> He asked his church members who held to believer’s baptism to remain in his church. He insisted that the Baptists he knew were “most worthy Christians, and as holy, watchful, fruitful, and heavenly people as perhaps any in the world.”<sup>98</sup>

## PURITANISMUS REDIVIVUS

A further factor muddling the connection between the rise of Baptists in America and Puritans is a failure to understand the Great Awakening in America as a revival of Puritanism.<sup>99</sup> The Awakening was not different in kind from the experiences of early Puritan growth in England and local revivals that had occasionally broken out in New

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<sup>93</sup> Crosby, *History*, 334.

<sup>94</sup> White, *English Baptists*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> E. Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sion’s Saviour in New England* (1654) (Delmar, New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974), 1.

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1991), 199.

<sup>97</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (London: John Dunton, 1693), 5. By “Antipaedobaptist,” he means Baptists.

<sup>98</sup> Mather, *Great Works*, 532-33.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Michael Haykin described George Whitefield, the leading voice of the Awakening, a “revived Puritan.” Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundas, Ontario: 2000.)

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England earlier, particularly under the ministry of Solomon Stoddard. As Richard Bushman notes, the Great Awakening “was merely the continuation of the tradition Stoddard represented.”<sup>100</sup> No less a keen observer and participant than Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) insisted that the Awakening was the same in kind as the revivals Stoddard oversaw. Edwards asserted that the Awakening was carried out in a manner agreeable to Stoddard’s doctrine and it is “apparent to all to be the same work.”<sup>101</sup>

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When Nehemiah Walter (1663-1750), the successor to the original Puritan missionary John Eliot and Increase Mather’s son-in-law, heard the harbinger of the Great Awakening, George Whitefield, he declared, “*Puritanismus redivivus*” — Puritanism revived!<sup>102</sup> That being the case, then, the subsequent, widely recognized explosion of Baptist growth following the Awakening is a product of a Puritan revival. It was not, as Kidd and Hankins implied, “*de novo*.”<sup>103</sup> The Baptist explosion out of the Great Awakening was from a Puritan soil with a revival of the Puritan spirit.

One of the greatest long-term effects of the Awakening was the swelling of Baptist ranks in New England. Many Congregationalists, who are of “the standing order,” who embraced the Awakening became “Separates” — Congregationalists not part of the established system, eschewing the Halfway Covenant because of their revived conviction that only the regenerate should be church members. Many separates, then, reexamined baptism. They understood that if they continued to baptize their infants, in a generation they would face the same dilemma as the Halfway Covenant synod had nearly a century earlier.<sup>104</sup> Faced with the absence of direct Biblical command or example of the baptizing of infants, as many as half of the Puritan Separates eventually became Baptists.<sup>105</sup> Thomas Nettles notes, “The same logic that made Calvinistic Anglicans become Puritans, or Puritans become Separatists, also made Separatists become Baptists.”<sup>106</sup>

Revived (that is, “New Light”) Congregationalists often moved to the Baptists, bringing their Puritanism with them. C. C. Goen’s verifies how the Awakening fueled Baptist

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<sup>100</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 4.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1741), 125.

<sup>102</sup> *George Whitefield’s Journals* (1740) (Carlyle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 461.

<sup>103</sup> Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 29.

<sup>104</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 63.

<sup>105</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 424.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 369.



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growth in two stages: first by creating new Baptist churches in the wake of the Awakening and then gradually assimilating many of the Separate churches into the Baptist fold.<sup>107</sup>

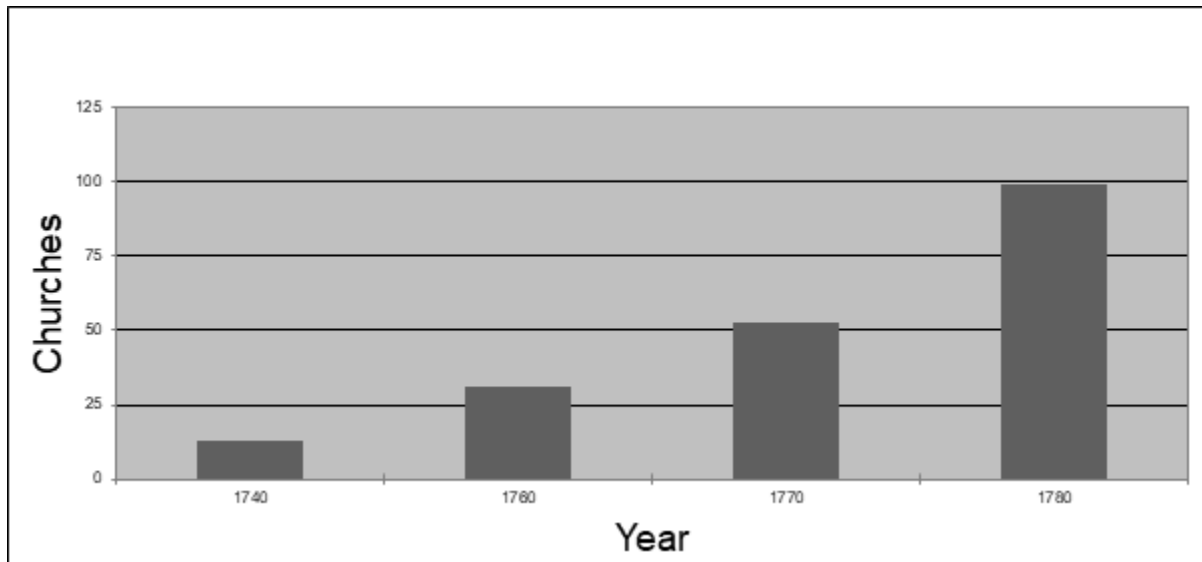


Figure 1. Baptist Growth in Massachusetts and Connecticut

These new Baptists are often called “Separate Baptist,” an unnecessary term, since all Baptists were separate from the established church, but one which serves to further prove the thesis of this article. These new Baptist churches were so much like the Separate ones, themselves *Puritanismus redivivus*, that the same modifier was used for both. Thus, New Light Puritans often became Separates and then Baptists. The result was a flood of new Baptist churches in the generation after the Awakening, over 90 percent of them sharing the Calvinism of the Puritans.<sup>108</sup>

The Awakening also spurred Baptists to spread to the other American colonies, especially the South which had been, up to that time, an Anglican stronghold.<sup>109</sup> The first Baptist missionaries came to Virginia from New England. Shubal Stearns (1706-1771) followed a typical pattern for new Baptists: first converted through the Awakening, becoming a

<sup>107</sup> C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalists and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.)

<sup>108</sup> Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 78. Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 120-21. The following chart is based on data from McLoughlin: “In Massachusetts the number of Baptist churches doubled from ten in 1740 to twenty-one in 1760, almost doubled again to thirty-six in 1770, and again to sixty-six in 1780. In Connecticut the number of Baptist churches tripled from three in 1740, to ten in 1760, to seventeen in 1770, to thirty-three in 1780.” McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 425.

<sup>109</sup> “Separate Baptists also fueled an unprecedented missionary campaign into the South.” Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 35.

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Separate, then a Baptist. He pastored a Baptist church in Tolland, Connecticut before migrating south with his family and five other families first to Winchester, Virginia and finally settling in Sandy Creek, North Carolina in 1755.<sup>110</sup> He grew a Baptist church of more than six hundred members, helping plant forty-two like-minded Baptist churches in North and South Carolina and Virginia and founding the Sandy Creek Baptist Association.<sup>111</sup> Baptists made up perhaps as much as 10% of the population of Virginia by 1772.<sup>112</sup> Isaac Backus (1724-1806) made a missionary trip to the South in 1789-90 taking his Puritan principles with him.<sup>113</sup> Overall, in fifty years after the Awakening, Baptists in America had increased by 375 percent.<sup>114</sup>

The Baptist missionaries arising from the Awakening had had their way prepared in the South by William Screven (c. 1629-1713). Screven had been ordained by the First Baptist Church of Boston. He gathered a Baptist church in Kittery, Maine, from which at least ten members transplanted to Charlestown, South Carolina, becoming the first Baptist church in the South. Their building, erected in 1701, was also called a “meetinghouse.” Upon his retirement as pastor in 1710, Screven admonished the congregation to obtain a new pastor who is “orthodox in faith, and of blameless life, and does own the confession of faith put forth by our brethren in London in 1689.” By 1750, Oliver Hart became pastor, a champion of the Awakening. He founded the Charlestown Baptist Association and demonstrated doctrinal continuity from New England Puritanism to the new Baptist churches in the South.<sup>115</sup> First Baptist Church of Charlestown, SC became “the mother church” of the Baptist movement in the South, producing Basil Manly, Jr. and James Boyce, two of the four founders of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>116</sup>

Although critical of the Puritan conception of church-state synergy and the meaning and mode of baptism, the New Light Baptists were essentially Puritans in every other respect. Isaac Backus, himself raised in a devout Puritan home, insisted that Baptists were good Puritans.<sup>117</sup> As a leading Baptist, Backus clung to “an undiluted Edwardsian theology”

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<sup>110</sup> Chute, Finn and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 78. Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 33.

<sup>111</sup> Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Rys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 173.

<sup>113</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 68.

<sup>114</sup> Chute, Finn and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 77.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Nettles, “The Rise and Demise of Calvinism Among Southern Baptists,” *Founders Journal*, no. 19/20 (Winter/Spring 1995), <http://founders.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/FoundersJournal19-20.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Chute, Finn and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 54; First Baptist Church of Charlestown, SC, [https://www.fbcharleston.org/files/ugd/d87e21\\_a1868b527ce72ff6782aa5e3ae75fc0a.pdf](https://www.fbcharleston.org/files/ugd/d87e21_a1868b527ce72ff6782aa5e3ae75fc0a.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 63-66.

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and the Puritan ideal of the church as the assembly of the regenerate, bolstered by careful church discipline.<sup>118</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Thus ends, at about the founding of the United States, the origins of Baptists in America. Baptists are not “another religious tradition” distinct from Puritanism.<sup>119</sup> They are “*Puritan Baptists*.”<sup>120</sup> As such, they inherited nearly all of their traditional polity from Congregationalists, the Puritans who dominated New England. Just as Increase Mather could boast that his Puritans were “the children of the good old *non-conformists*,” so can we Baptists say that we are “children of the Puritans.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 34.

<sup>119</sup> Contra Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 36.

<sup>120</sup> T. E. Watson, “Andrew Fuller’s Conflict With Hypercalvinism,” *Puritan Papers*, vol. 1, 1956–1959 (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000).

<sup>121</sup> Original emphasis, *An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New England* (Boston: John Foster, 1676), 21. James E. McGoldrick, *Baptist Successionism: A Crucial Question in Baptist History* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 124. Chute, Finn and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 14.