

The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

By Greg Wills

On October 16, 1814, William B. Johnson, one of the most respected antebellum Baptist leaders, separated from the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia. He declared himself no longer their pastor, nor even a member of the church, and marched out. The congregation expressed their respect and goodwill by inviting him to fill the pulpit temporarily, if he refrained from stirring the controversy between him and the church. Johnson agreed but could not resist the opportunity to rebuke the church the following Sunday—he declared them a “corrupt body.” For the next five years the regular Baptist churches rejected fellowship with him.

The controversy revolved around church polity. The main issue of contention was whether Christ commanded his churches to observe all their business, worship, discipline, and ordinances on Sunday, and on every Sunday. Johnson believed Christ had so commanded. Most of the congregation disagreed. In the six weeks prior to Johnson’s separation, the church had met twice per week to discuss scriptural polity.

This was not primarily a matter of personalities and power struggles. At bottom it was a question of obedience to Christ. Both Johnson and the church agreed that in all essential matters the New Testament had fixed the church’s polity. They had no liberty to arrange their polity in any manner suited to their own particular ideas of edification and good order. They believed that Christ established the laws of church government. He had legislative prerogative; they had executive and ministerial power only—they merely executed the directives of the king of the church.

Baptists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally agreed. Church polity, they conceded, was not the most essential area of doctrine. But just because it was not central to salvation did not mean that it was not important. The doctrine of the church was as much revealed truth as the doctrines of the incarnation, the atonement, and justification. It was an element of orthodox belief. For this reason Baptists sometimes disfellowshipped one another over disagreements in polity. For this reason also they published a great deal of literature on the subject. The texts reprinted in this volume reflect these commitments.

But polity was not merely a matter of obedience—the vitality and growth of the churches depended upon it. Baptists believed that scriptural church government formed an essential foundation for the prosperity of the church, for it advanced orthodoxy, evangelism, and discipleship. Correct polity fostered true spirituality.

Baptists believed in the first place that correct polity protected orthodox belief. Each congregation had responsibility to sustain scriptural truth against error. They judged what scripture taught, summarized scripture teaching in a written creed, pledged in their church covenant to uphold this faith, and enforced that pledge through church discipline against false teachers.

They held that correct polity also promoted discipleship. The polity in many ways merely embodied the evangelical message. They required the new birth by their policies of admission. They supported righteous behavior by church discipline. Their polity separated them from the world and worldliness. Discipleship indeed required upholding correct polity. They believed that Christ commanded his children to order their churches after the apostolic pattern. To fail was disobedience to Christ.

Baptists also believed that correct polity was foundational to evangelism. They believed that God would not ordinarily bless churches that tolerated impurity or heresy. God blessed the apostolic churches because they preached the evangelical gospel of the new birth through faith in Christ and because they established correct polity—they admitted believers only, they observed the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper correctly, they sustained true doctrine, and they expelled the immoral. Pure and orthodox churches could expect God's blessing. They trusted that God would pour down revival in greatest measure on those evangelical churches that ordered themselves after the pattern of the apostolic churches.

In 1819 William B. Johnson regained fellowship with regular Baptists when he repented of his condemnation of the Savannah church and promised to refrain from attempts to impose his views. This episode illustrates well the fact that Johnson and his fellow Baptists regarded matters of church government as important truths of revelation. Modern evangelicals generally view ecclesiology with indifference—it is a matter of prudence, taste, or tradition. Baptists of Johnson's day were closer to the mark. They held that church polity was an intrinsic part of Christianity. They debated ecclesiology intensely and sometimes divided over it. But their churches better reflected the gospel of the kingdom.

CONGREGATIONAL AUTHORITY AND SPIRITUAL EQUALITY

The scriptural church government, Baptists held, was congregationalism. They were democrats in the church—all ecclesiastical authority resided in the members jointly. They held authority immediately from Christ and

administered it according to the pattern revealed in scripture. This meant that the members together were responsible for the church's doctrine, discipline, and leadership. They had responsibility to establish what the Bible taught, to define the qualifications for admission to the church, to determine what behaviors violated the law of Christ, and to determine what errors required breaking fellowship and what errors did not. They had responsibility to examine and ordain ministers, to secure the proper administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to care for the poor of the church, and to promote evangelism and missions. Thus the congregation jointly adopted the church's creed and covenant, elected its officers, admitted believers to membership, and expelled the immoral.

They found this polity in the New Testament. Like such Puritan Congregationalists as Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, and John Cotton, Baptists understood the New Testament to teach that the apostolic churches were democracies. They appealed especially to Mt. 18:15–18, where Jesus instructed the church to expel an unrepentant offender. They appealed also to the matter of discipline in the Corinthian church in which Paul both instructed the church to judge its members (I Cor. 5:9–13) and described expulsion as a punishment inflicted “by the majority” (II Cor. 2:6).

Baptists believed, with most Protestants, that the practices of the apostolic churches were normative in all things essential to their worship, government, and discipline. Christ commissioned the apostles to establish his churches according to his pattern. He ruled the churches as their head and king. Since the apostolic churches exercised authority as democracies, Baptists argued, so ought all other churches. Christ required all churches to follow the divine pattern.

Baptists complied. In some churches, only white male members voted. In most, white male and female members voted. In many southern churches, perhaps most, slave members voted. Baptist churches practiced a more thorough democracy than did the American federal and state governments.

Most antebellum Americans were committed to a more or less patriarchal democracy, in which white men ruled in the state and in the family. Some, especially the southern planter class, added an aristocratic element. The less privileged whites who qualified to vote, they thought, should elect their social betters to run the affairs of state. The radical democratic government of the Baptist churches shocked such Americans, for it seemed to level all gender, class, and social distinctions. It put everyone—rich or poor, slave or free, male or female—on the same plane. Their votes counted alike. Such leveling threatened the social hierarchy, many Americans felt.

But Baptists, too, supported the patriarchal system. They believed that the social hierarchy sustained the general welfare.¹ But what was good for

¹This is not to say that Baptists were Federalists and Whigs; most probably were not. But whether Whigs or Democrats, Baptists endorsed the “natural” hierarchical relationships in society.

society at large was not permitted for the church. By the command of Christ the churches were spiritual democracies—all were equal in the kingdom of God. All stood equally condemned by their sin and equally indebted to the free grace of God in their redemption. All underwent the same baptism and shared in the same loaf and cup in the Lord's Supper. In the churches, they established a spiritual egalitarianism.

Baptists, especially in the South, believed that church democracies were compatible with slavery. Some southerners felt that when Baptists gave slaves spiritual equality, it implied that slaves should have social equality as well. Such egalitarianism in church, they felt, endangered the entire social system of which slavery was an essential part. But Baptists disagreed. They supported the southern social hierarchy and generally defended the institution of slavery. But they accorded slaves spiritual equality.

The church equality was unmistakable. The fact that all voted in most churches was only the most visible expression. All shared the same title—plantation mistress and her slave woman were each “sister” in the church; wealthy merchant and illiterate subsistence farmer were each “brother.” Black and white received baptism from the same minister in the same pool at the same ceremony and received the welcoming “right hand of fellowship” from every member alike. All were subject to the congregation's discipline.

The churches, however, made allowances for social standing, most visibly in the South. Most Baptists segregated the membership during worship to reflect three major social divisions. The blacks sat in the least desirable seats—either in the rear or in the gallery. The men sat on one side of the floor pews; the women and children sat on the other side. But for the most part, Baptists expressed their commitment to the social hierarchy not in the principles or practices of the church, but in how they administered these. The black members, for example, often had the right to vote, but generally took their cues from prominent white members. The vast social inequality between slaves and whites made the black members vulnerable in their person and property to any white in the entire community. They used their votes timidly and cautiously to avoid giving offense. The social hierarchy affected not so much the shape of Baptist polity as its texture. In the final analysis, Baptists pursued the apostolic model and established democratic congregations with a remarkable measure of ecclesiastical equality.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Baptists believed that Christ designed his churches for the redeemed. They held that the churches should admit the regenerate only. They therefore required persons seeking admission to the church to give evidence of their conversion. Members knew they could not peer directly into another's soul—they could not know certainly whether a person was truly born again.

But they were convinced that Christ required them to judge the evidence. They admitted persons who “in the judgment of charity” gave satisfactory evidence of conversion.

Converts usually joined the church at its monthly Saturday conference meeting. When the church “opened the door to receive experiences” applicants presented themselves for membership. They narrated their experience of conversion before the congregation. They answered questions which members posed. Their testimony and answers provided the evidence upon which the church judged. They then voted whether to receive the applicant into the church.

Baptists held that satisfactory evidence of conversion consisted of conviction, faith, and repentance. They expected converts to express their grief over their sin and admit their guilt. Converts had to state that they obtained joyful relief by trusting in Christ and in him alone. And they had to give evidence that they repented, that they abandoned sin and lived uprightly. Those who gave such evidence gained admission to the church upon their baptism.

When persons joined a Baptist church, they subscribed to its covenant, which summarized Christ’s commission to the churches. In it they declared that they intended together to be a church of Christ: “We do voluntarily and jointly separate ourselves from the world, and give ourselves unto the Lord, holding ourselves henceforth his, and no longer our own. We do also voluntarily and mutually give ourselves one to another; and receive one another in the Lord, meaning hereby to become one body, jointly to exist and act by the bonds and rules of the gospel, each esteeming himself henceforth a member of a spiritual body, accountable to it, subject to its control.”² To be a church they merely had to maintain the apostolic pattern—to frame the church’s government, officers, worship, and discipline after the model in the New Testament. Church membership meant pledging to be a church of Christ according to his rules. Samuel Jones’s *Treatise of Church Discipline* includes a typical church covenant.

Christ’s commission to the churches included also the command to make disciples of all nations. Although it was only one part of Christ’s commission, it was the greatest part. Baptists did not begin to organize and regularize their missionary efforts in a systematic way until the early 1800s, but their churches ever sought to make disciples. The churches and associations sent their pastors on missionary tours and contributed to expenses. Churches received such missionary evangelists warmly and provided them with what provisions they could spare. As Baptists organized and expanded

²Bethesda Baptist Church, Greene County, Georgia, Church Book, 16 Aug. 1817; similarly, Beavertown Baptist Church, Wilkes County, Georgia, Church Book, 18 Mar. 1836 (both on microfilm, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University).

their missionary efforts, most Baptists felt it their responsibility to contribute to the support of the preachers at home and abroad who proclaimed the good news to unbelievers.

BAPTISM

Baptists baptized converts by immersing them. Most converts preferred outdoor baptisms even when the church had an indoor baptistery. Hundreds and sometimes thousands gathered to watch the ceremony. Baptism held interest because it represented so much. It signified redemption in Christ; it was the gospel in picture. The minister explained this to the gathered crowd. But it also signified the separation of the church from the world. In baptism converts abandoned the world—its values, pastimes, and sins—and entered the kingdom of God on earth. It was a pledge to live according to the kingdom's moral code under the church's oversight.

Baptists believed that immersion of professing believers was alone baptism. They denied that sprinkling or immersing infants was baptism. They held that false churches could not baptize validly. They therefore did not recognize the validity of infant “baptisms” or the immersions of false churches.

But Baptists also rejected the immersions of other evangelical churches. Most Baptists held that the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were true churches because they held to the true gospel—they preached faith in Christ and the new birth. But these churches were in disorder because they practiced infant baptism, by which they allowed unregenerate persons to join the church. When Methodist or Presbyterian ministers immersed professing believers, as they sometimes did, Baptists denied that it was valid baptism.

Baptists held that because Methodists and Presbyterians baptized infants, they perverted scriptural baptism. Christ intended baptism to represent the redemption accomplished and applied to the person immersed. But Methodists and Presbyterians did not claim that baptized infants were redeemed and hence their baptism could not represent their redemption. Baptists concluded therefore that they perverted the meaning of baptism. Since they had a different baptism than that of the New Testament, Baptists concluded, then even when they immersed professing believers they did not truly baptize.

Baptists called such baptisms “alien immersions” and did not recognize their validity. When persons applied for membership to a Baptist church and claimed that they were immersed as professing believers by a Presbyterian or Methodist minister, Baptists required them to receive baptism before admission. This practice did not endear the Baptists to their fellow evangelicals. Baptists regretted this but felt bound by scripture.

In the late nineteenth century, many urban Baptist churches began to

make exceptions to this policy. They recognized an occasional alien immersion as a true baptism and did not require another immersion. By the mid-twentieth century, most Baptists belonged to churches that generally recognized alien immersions performed in other evangelical churches. Many churches still rejected them however. Landmark Baptists, who endorsed the views of Tennessee Baptist editor James R. Graves (1820–1893), continued to reject alien immersions. They did not recognize Methodist and Presbyterian churches as churches in any meaningful sense. Because such groups had no true churches, they had no true ministers and no true baptism.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Baptists believed that baptism was prerequisite to observing the Lord's Supper. Methodists and Presbyterians agreed with this. But Baptists held that immersion of professing believers was the only true baptism. Believers who were sprinkled as infants were not baptized. Since Baptists rejected alien immersions, even believers who received immersion at the hands of a pedobaptist minister were not baptized. Baptists therefore did not invite Methodists and Presbyterians to participate in the Lord's Supper with them. They usually called this practice "close communion."

Close communion separated Baptists from other evangelicals. Non-Baptist evangelicals sometimes accused the Baptists of bigotry, a sort of spiritual elitism. Baptists felt compelled to defend their practice and did so often. They responded that the pedobaptists also held the principle that baptism was prerequisite to participating in the Lord's Supper. They differed not on their views of the Lord's Supper then, but in their views of what constituted valid baptism. They also pleaded that they were not trying to exclude or embarrass other believers, but sought only to follow the New Testament. To follow the pattern of the apostles, Baptists argued, was not bigotry.

Baptists generally observed the Lord's Supper once per quarter. Many churches required a public reading of their covenant and creed at the church conferences held before these "quarterly meetings." They felt it appropriate that the Sunday Lord's Supper observance followed the Saturday church conferences in which they upheld their common faith and practice by reading aloud their covenanted duties under Christ. They upheld their duties also by exercising church discipline. In these ways they sought to secure that purity which was prerequisite to a proper observance of the Lord's Supper. To allow wickedness among them to go unrebuked and unrestrained would pervert the design of the Lord's Supper.

They made a distinction between the church and congregation—they invited members of the church to the table and they invited the congregation to stay and observe. Baptists visiting from other churches usually participated

(they called this “transient communion”). They usually took the bread and wine in their pews. They used fermented wine until the late nineteenth century, when some Baptists began to use grape juice, or as they called it, “unfermented wine.” They used a common cup. In the early twentieth century churches switched to the use of individual cups.

Some churches did not allow Baptists who belonged to other churches to take the Lord’s Supper with them. This was characteristic especially of Landmark churches. With all Baptists they agreed that only careful exercise of church discipline could preserve the integrity of the Lord’s Supper. But since the authority to exercise church discipline extended only to the members of the local church, they concluded that the Lord’s Supper ought to extend to the local members only. Since they furthermore had no responsibility for the discipline of members of other churches and could not ensure that transient Baptists were sound in their faith and morals, they could not protect the purity of the observance if they permitted transient communion.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Baptists also pledged themselves to separate from the world and submit to each other. Members of Atlanta’s First Baptist Church typically promised “to attend to our church conferences, and endeavor to keep up a godly discipline, that we may be blameless in the sight of God and man—That we may love as brethren and submit to one another in the Lord.”³ They sought to deal with each other in humility and kind regard. In matters on which members differed, they felt it their duty to declare their views and their reasons for them. But they sought consensus. The minority typically yielded to the will of the majority, usually without complaints or bitterness. The greatest test of mutual submission however was the exercise of church discipline.

Baptists practiced church discipline on a large scale. Between 1781 and 1860 Baptists excluded more than 40,000 members in Georgia alone. Across the nation in this period they excluded between 1 and 2 percent of their membership every year.⁴ But the number of church trials was yet greater. Only about half of the offenders received excommunication. Baptists on average disciplined between 3 and 4 percent of their members annually.

Baptists exercised discipline at their monthly Saturday conference

³Atlanta First Baptist Church, Church Book, 1 Jan. 1848, Georgia Department of History and Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴Estimate is derived from the statistical returns published in 1,600 association minutes from all southern states and 1,132 association minutes from twelve northern states. Member-years in the sample totaled 5,897,853; exclusions totaled 85,607. In this sample the churches excluded an average of 1.45 percent of members annually. For a more detailed discussion of Baptist church discipline, see Gregory Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

meetings. Churches required male members to attend. Female members attended also and often outnumbered the men. Some offenders accused themselves. In most cases one church member accused another. The accused usually confessed their guilt. When the accused was absent or denied guilt, the church appointed a committee to investigate. At a subsequent meeting the committee reported its findings and recommended a verdict and sentence. The members then voted. In some cases they found the accused not guilty and acquitted. In most cases they found the accused guilty.

Churches imposed one of two penalties or censures: admonition or excommunication. Those admonished retained their membership; those excommunicated did not. Some churches also practiced suspension. Suspended members could not participate in communion but remained in membership. After a specified period they lifted the suspension and the member again enjoyed full membership privileges. By the mid-nineteenth century few churches practiced suspension.

For members guilty of offenses, the outcome depended on the nature of the offense and on their response. For such serious offenses as violence, murder, and adultery, Baptists excommunicated with few exceptions, even when the transgressor repented. For less serious offenses, Baptists retained those who repented and excluded those who did not. Those who repented kept their membership but received a formal rebuke from the pastor in which he explained from scripture God's opposition to the offense, its terrible consequences, and exhorted the offender to walk according to holiness. Baptists expected the repentant to humble themselves utterly before God and before the church and to make no attempts at self-vindication.

Many excommunicated members maintained their piety. They lived virtuously, attended church services, and supported the work of the church. Such ones generally sought readmission. At a Saturday conference they presented their petition, confessed their sin, vindicated the church's action and authority, and pledged their repentance. The churches restored them to full fellowship.

Many offences never came before the church. For many minor offenses, individual church members admonished offenders privately. According to Mt. 18:15–18, an offended member should first rebuke the offender face to face, then in the presence of two or three others, and then before the church. When the offender repented, the process halted. Baptists believed that this triple-warning process applied to less serious sins only—in matters of grave offenses the case went directly to the church. (Some pastors urged that although grave offenses could go directly to the church, it would be wiser in most cases to pursue the triple-warning process.) Many offenders repented in such private conferences and escaped a formal church trial.

Baptists sought to restore offenders to holiness. They believed that church discipline helped believers overcome sin and temptation. God gave the church prayer, scripture, preaching, and praise as means to sanctify

them. He gave church discipline for the same reason. It was a divine medicine to heal the soul. It was for the good of believers who strayed from righteousness.

But Baptists sustained church discipline for another reason. They believed that Christ commanded it. They held that Christ required them to maintain the purity of the church through the exercise of discipline. They held that every member was accountable to Christ for sustaining purity through discipline. And they participated. They voted, accused, gave evidence, asked questions, investigated, and exhorted.

In large part the discipline worked. It promoted unity and purity. Baptists had their differences in the nineteenth century. But they defined the essential areas in which unity was necessary for maintaining fellowship. They did not tolerate departures from those standards of belief and behavior which they deemed essential. In essentials they were united and discipline protected this unity. Their churches generally achieved the purity they believed that Christ required of them, for they did not retain members who strayed from it.

God apparently blessed it—the churches experienced the greatest revivals in the period in which they practiced church discipline. Between 1790 and 1860 Baptists in America kept up strict discipline and grew at twice the rate of the population.⁵ In the twentieth century, Southern Baptist membership continued to grow faster than the population (though only marginally so since 1960) even though they abandoned discipline. The rate of growth, however, is considerably lower than it appears, for in the twentieth century it was much easier to become a Baptist and almost impossible to become an ex-Baptist.

Through church discipline Baptists maintained a clear distinction between the church and the world. Unbelievers knew that joining a Baptist church meant submitting to the church's authority to judge their belief and behavior. The gospel message had little power, Baptists believed, unless the churches were distinct from the world.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Most Baptists employed confessions of faith and supported their use. Most churches adopted them. So did most associations. Associations usually required churches applying for membership to present their creed, because they felt that the association should comprise churches of the same faith and practice only. They judged that they had no assurance of a church's orthodoxy unless its messengers presented the association a written statement endorsed by the church.

⁵See Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 36.

Many churches and associations adopted the lengthy Second London Confession, a Baptist revision of the Westminster Confession. Most southern churches and associations adopted a brief summary of that statement. The briefest summaries were a part of the covenant and reflect the commitments of the original: “we do hereby in his name and strength covenant and promise to keep up and defend all the articles of faith according to God’s word, such as the great doctrines of election, effectual calling, particular redemption, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, sanctification by the spirit of God, believers baptism by immersion, the saints’ absolute final perseverance in grace, the resurrection of the dead, future rewards, punishments.”⁶ The most common southern creeds repeated and enlarged these points to about one page’s worth.

Baptist churches adopted creeds because they believed that their polity required it. Christ required them to exclude unrepentant false teachers. But to recognize false teaching they had to agree on some understanding of what scriptural truth was. If they agreed on their understanding of what scripture taught, then there was no harm in writing that agreement down. Just as oral contracts gained security and stability when written, so agreement on scriptural teaching gained security and stability when written.

Baptists defended their use of creeds when anticreedalists attacked them. Beginning around 1820 Alexander Campbell, leader of the restorationist movement which produced the Disciples of Christ, sought to reform the Baptist churches. He opposed their creeds, the Calvinism expressed in the creeds, and the clergy who sustained both. Campbell convinced many Baptists to oppose their creeds. But the large majority of Baptists pleaded that creeds were merely the written expression of their views of scripture and as such were both lawful and needful. In the 1830s the Baptists disfellowshipped those members who subscribed to Campbell’s views.

Baptist associations excluded churches that rescinded their creeds. The Flint River Baptist Association in Georgia, for example, excluded the Bethlehem Church for this in 1852. Baptists believed that without a creed a church lacked theological stability and would drift into heresy. More commonly they concluded that a church that rescinded its creed probably had embraced heresy already.

Most Baptist churches and associations in the South favored adopting creeds. John Taylor, the famous Separate Baptist preacher of Virginia and Kentucky, held that members should agree upon some summary creed “in every church in its constitution.” He estimated that nine out of ten Baptist churches in these states had “what may properly be called a creed.” Thomas Meredith, editor of North Carolina’s *Biblical Recorder*, taught that “the

⁶Kiokee Baptist Church, Church Book, at front of second extant church book, 1820–1874, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University.

articles of faith form an indispensable element of the constitution” of a church. He knew of no church or association which “did not have its summary of faith as an essential part of its constitution.” Joseph S. Baker, who preached as a missionary in Virginia and edited several Baptist newspapers, wrote that the majority of Southern Baptists rejected anticonfessional arguments—“every association with which we are acquainted” had a confession of faith.⁷

But Baptists generally tolerated members who judged creeds unlawful as long as they did not agitate persistently against them. Occasionally a prominent Baptist opposed the use of creeds and raised public objections. Their arguments persuaded few.

Many of the works reprinted here do not discuss creeds. Their chief concerns were congregational government and proper administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This was natural. These were the central areas of disagreement with such evangelical churches as the Presbyterians and the Methodists. Baptists agreed with other evangelicals that creeds were proper and useful.

Other nineteenth-century Baptist books of church polity endorsed the use of creeds. James M. Pendleton, one of the leaders of the popular Landmark movement, taught in his *Church Manual* that creeds were necessary: “It is eminently proper for those who appeal to the Scriptures as the fountain of truth to declare what they believe the Scriptures to teach. To say that they believe the Scriptures is to say nothing to the purpose. All will say this, and yet all differ as to the teachings of the Bible. There must be some distinctive declaration.”⁸

William Crowell, editor of Boston’s *Watchman and Reflector* and of St. Louis’s *Western Watchman*, defended creeds in his *Church Member’s Manual*, first published in 1847. He argued that since God required the churches to maintain true doctrine, they must determine what the Bible taught and express it in writing. “It is likewise the duty of every church to decide for itself what doctrines the Scriptures reveal; and having done so, these doctrines form its creed. These the church agrees to maintain. If an individual adopts views of doctrine radically different, . . . he ought not to be admitted to the church; or if a member of the church has renounced its creed, he has deprived himself of the right to continue in its membership.”⁹

⁷John Taylor, *History of Clear Creek Church; and Campbellism Exposed* (Frankfort, Kentucky: A. G. Hodges, 1830), 27. Thomas Meredith, “Answers to Queries,” *Biblical Recorder*, 28 June 1845, 2; and “Creeds and Compilations,” *ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1849, 2. Joseph S. Baker, “Imputed Righteousness,” *Christian Index*, 2 Nov. 1848, 350.

⁸Pendleton, *Church Manual, Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, [1867]), 42. Williams Rutherford, professor at the University of Georgia, also argued for creeds in his *Church Members’ Guide for Baptist Churches* (Atlanta: James P. Harrison, 1885), 200–216. Some other polity manuals, most notably that of John L. Dagg (*Treatise on Church Order* [Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858]), omitted all discussion of creeds.

⁹William Crowell, *The Church Member’s Manual* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1852), 120.

J. Newton Brown, who influenced Baptists widely through his *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* and his *Baptist Church Manual*, helped to write and later revised the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. Southern Baptists revised and adopted this creed in 1925 and 1963. Brown printed the confession at the beginning of his church manual and in his encyclopedia. He held that the churches should require candidates for church membership to agree with the church's creed. They should receive those only who adopted "the views of faith and practice held by this church, as set forth in the foregoing Declaration" (the New Hampshire Confession).¹⁰

Edward Hiscox, in the many editions of his famous *Baptist Church Directory*, argued that churches ought to have creeds because persons who profess adherence to the Bible alone differ widely in their interpretations of scripture. He thought it desirable for every church to have a written creed, expressing "in concise and expressive language, what they understand the Scriptures to teach."¹¹ He included the text of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith.

James L. Reynolds, professor of theology at Mercer University and Furman University, argued in his polity manual reprinted below that creeds were vital to the life of the churches. Churches and associations, first, had a duty to adopt a creed at their organization, he said. Churches could not unite for efficient and harmonious activity unless they were agreed about the nature of Christianity. But such agreement must be written, otherwise the theological content on which they agreed would be uncertain and unstable. He urged, second, that if every Christian was bound to testify to the truth, the churches had the same obligation. He argued, third, that since Christ required churches to exercise church discipline over members who erred in their behavior or belief, they had to determine what scripture taught in order to know what was a departure from the truth. And if the churches had to determine the truth, there could be no objection to writing it down. Creeds were necessary, Reynolds argued, to protect churches from heresy and error, for they constituted ramparts protecting the correct interpretation of the scriptures from interlopers and traitors who handled the word deceitfully or corrupted its teaching.¹²

William B. Johnson, however, argued against the use of creeds. He agreed that in principle "there can be no objection to a church having a written declaration of the principles of the doctrine of Christ which she believes, and of the duties which she observes, that her true scriptural position may be

¹⁰J. Newton Brown, *The Baptist Church Manual: Containing the Declaration of Faith, Covenant, Rules of Order, and Brief Forms of Church Letters* (Philadelphia: B. R. Loxley, 1853), 25.

¹¹Edward Hiscox, *The Baptist Directory: A Guide to the Doctrines and Practices of Baptist Churches* (1859; reprint, New York: Sheldon and Company, 1867), 153.

¹²Reynolds, *Church Polity: Or, The Kingdom of Christ, in Its Internal and External Development* (Richmond: Harrold and Murray, 1849), 81–97, 237–240.

known.” But he thought the adoption of written creeds ill-advised for several reasons. First, there was no scriptural command or precedent. “It is deemed essential by some Divines, and churches, and associations,” Johnson observed, “that every newly formed church should have a written covenant, or abstract of principles, drawn out and subscribed by the members. I respectfully ask again—Are these things written in the Scriptures?”¹³

Second, Johnson believed that creeds tended to replace the authority of Christ with the authority of tradition. Johnson, like other evangelical Protestants, held that the scriptural form of church government is a Christocracy, by which he meant “that form of church government of which Christ is the head, and under which he requires his people to receive all their principles of actions from, and to frame all their doings according to, his laws and precepts contained in the Bible.” He held that creeds undermined Christ’s direct rule in the churches. Creeds collected independent authority. The human race has a “strong propensity,” Johnson felt, “to yield obedience to customs of merely human origin.” Even when churches and associations adopted creeds as mere declarations of their beliefs, Johnson judged, they tended to view the creed as an authority. The creed became Baptist tradition; tradition displaced scripture. But Christocracy without creeds “carries us back beyond our fathers, and places us at the feet of Christ.”¹⁴

Third, churches and associations already possessed a perfect standard. Johnson argued that it was absurd to adopt a creed since the creeds themselves admitted that the scriptures are the only standard of faith and practice. Other Baptists claimed that creeds were merely summaries of the Bible’s message. But, Johnson asked, why not adopt the Bible as your creed? “Can man present God’s system in a selection and compilation of some of its parts, better than God has himself done it, as a whole in his own book?” Since the Bible was a “perfect and full a standard,” Johnson urged, “why should an imperfect and limited one be adopted?” Since Christ had revealed “a complete and perfect code of laws and precepts,” Johnson maintained the “impropriety of having any human selection and compilation of these.”¹⁵

Johnson won some battles on this question. At the 1824 South Carolina State Convention he opposed an effort initiated by the Georgia Baptist Convention to persuade both conventions to adopt the Philadelphia Confession

¹³W. [William B. Johnson], “The Churches of Christ,” No. VII, *Southern Baptist*, 30 Jan. 1856, 2. In 1855–1856 Johnson wrote a series of articles for the *Southern Baptist* under the name “W.” James P. Boyce noted Johnson’s pseudonym: “I see Graves has been giving you a hard rub or two, on your article signed W.” (Boyce, letter to Johnson, 20 Jan. 1858, William B. Johnson Papers, Special Collections, James B. Duke Library, Furman University).

¹⁴Johnson, *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, Virginia: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 194, 201.

¹⁵Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 197. W. [William B. Johnson], “Associations-Conventions,” *Southern Baptist*, 10 June 1856, 1.

of Faith. Johnson and others convinced the delegates to adopt no creed. He drew up the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention at its formation in 1845 and undoubtedly was instrumental in assuring that the new organization adopted no creed. He argued that Furman University did not need one.¹⁶

He lost other battles. The Reedy River Baptist Association appealed to their creed in 1855 to disfellowship two member churches. Johnson and two others moved that the association repeal its creed, its “Abstract of Principles.” The association refused. At the 1849 South Carolina Baptist Convention, Johnson completed his successful defense of Furman theology professor James Mims from the charge of heresy. James L. Reynolds, Mims’s chief accuser, appealed to the Baptist creeds to substantiate the charge. Johnson argued that the accusation had no merit, since Furman University had no creed and needed none. The Convention upheld Mims but refused to reject creeds in principle. It asserted its right to adopt creeds as a basis of union and to guide its institutions. Overall Johnson converted few to his views.¹⁷

CHURCH OFFICERS—PASTORS, ELDERS, AND DEACONS

Baptists held that there were only two offices in the church, elder and deacon. This was the apostolic rule and remained in force. The New Testament had three names for the office of elder: elder, bishop, and pastor. The New Testament writers used the terms synonymously and so did the Baptists. They often called their pastors “elder” and sometimes called them “bishop.”

They were rather careful whom they appointed to this office. Samuel Jones’s *Treatise of Church Discipline* and the Charleston Association’s *Summary of Church Discipline* urged the churches to examine strictly the character and beliefs of ordination candidates. Baptist churches generally performed their duty well. They summoned area ministers who subjected the candidate to a typically rigorous examination of his conversion, call, theology, and ecclesiology.

Some churches had plural eldership. It was sometimes a formal recognition of the ordained ministers, the elders, in their membership. These

¹⁶Johnson, “No. 1: To the Baptists of South Carolina . . .,” *Southern Baptist*, 18 Oct. 1848, 510; and “No. 2: To the Baptists of South Carolina . . .,” *ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1848, 514. Johnson was chairman of the committee that drafted the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. He prepared a draft of the constitution in advance and brought it to the meeting (Robert Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People* [Nashville: Broadman, 1974], 164–172).

¹⁷James Harrison, no title, *Southern Baptist*, 10 Oct. 1855, 2–3. M., “The S.C. Baptist Convention,” *Southern Baptist*, 19 Dec. 1849, 752.

elders assisted the pastor as necessary in preaching and administering baptism and the Lord's Supper. They were leaders of the congregation by their wisdom, piety, knowledge, and experience. Such churches recognized the gifts and calling of all elders among them.

Other churches believed that Christ required them to have a plurality of elders. They held that all elders were equal in office but differed in duties; they were equal in rank but differed in service. The teaching elders had pastoral duties and alone administered baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ruling or lay elders participated primarily in governing the church. They led the congregation in its officer elections, its admission of members, and its discipline. But since all ecclesiastical authority resided in the congregation jointly, the elders had no formal authority to act on any matter as a body of elders. Their role was rather to initiate, advise, and exhort.

The churches that practiced plural eldership on this principle had difficulty sustaining it. In part the men elected ruling elders did not understand their office and duties. In Presbyterian churches the ruling elders had ecclesiastical authority—they governed equally with ministers all matters of membership and discipline. But Baptist ruling elders had no such authority. More important, they doubted the scriptural precedent for the office. Its justification rested on I Tim. 5:17: "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." This verse seemed to make a distinction between elders who rule and those who teach and preach. Most Baptists felt that this was slender support. By 1820 most churches had dropped the practice. But from time to time churches resurrected it.

Most churches agreed with Georgia's Powelton Baptist Church, whose members concluded in 1811 that lay elders were "unnecessary and not sufficiently warranted in scripture." Many of these held that the pastor and deacons jointly constituted the eldership. South Carolina's Tyger River Baptist Association, for example, judged in 1835 that "the eldership of the church" consisted of "the ministers and deacons."¹⁸

The texts reprinted here taught that the apostolic churches practiced plural eldership. Reynolds and Williams argued that a plurality was then necessary because persecution forced congregations to meet separately in small groups in houses and each meeting needed the services of an elder. But since modern congregations can meet together, they no longer needed plural elders. Jones on the other hand argued that although plural eldership was not mandatory, the practice secured important benefits and ought to be continued. Johnson taught that Christ strictly required each church to have plural eldership.

¹⁸Powelton Baptist Church, Church Book, 6 July 1811, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University. Tyger River Baptist Association, Minutes, 1835, 2. Joseph Baker taught the same (Baker, "Dr. Baker's Articles," *Christian Index*, 5 June 1861, 1.

The other scriptural office was deacon. Deacons were to oversee the temporal affairs of the congregation. They had responsibility to care for the needs of the pastor, to sustain the poor and destitute members among them, to make preparation for the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to look after the church's meeting house. Johnson and Reynolds argued that the early churches had deaconesses. Reynolds thought that the gender-segregating social customs of the early church era required the appointment of deaconesses, but there was no longer a need for them. Johnson argued that they were still needed. In this he agreed with R. B. C. Howell, second president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and B. H. Carroll, founding president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁹

The authors of the ten texts reprinted here agreed on most points of church polity. They agreed that the apostolic model was normative in all essential points of church government, worship, and discipline. They agreed that churches should admit regenerate persons only; that baptism was the immersion of professing believers; that all ecclesiastical authority resided in the congregation jointly; that there were only two church officers; that baptism was prerequisite to communion. I have noted their disagreement on some points. I mention a few additional disagreements in the following descriptions of their texts.

Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church and Its Discipline Displayed*, 1697

Keach (1640–1704) was one the most influential teachers in the history of English-speaking Baptists. He was pastor of the famous Horsleydown Baptist Church in Southwark, London for most of his adult life. He published fifty-four books. He suffered violence, imprisonment, the pillory, and fines for teaching the doctrine of believer's baptism.

Keach influenced Baptist practice in several ways. He led the effort to adopt congregational singing in Baptist churches. His catechism and church confession became standard works. In the text reprinted here he described the basic elements and methods of church discipline according to the scriptures. His description of discipline was clear and cogent. For nearly two hundred years afterward Baptist churches in England and America arranged their discipline generally as Keach suggested.

¹⁹Johnson oddly omitted discussion of deaconesses in the text below, even though his table of contents promised it. For his view of deaconesses, see Johnson, "Deacons of a Church," *Western Recorder*, 9 Mar. 1867, 1. R. B. C. Howell, *The Deaconship* (1851; reprint, Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1946), 115–126. On B. H. Carroll's views, see Alan Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1994), 28–29.

Benjamin Griffith, A Short Treatise of Church Discipline, 1743

Benjamin Griffith (1688–1768) wrote the *Short Treatise* at the request of the 1742 meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Griffith emigrated from Wales in 1710 and became a Baptist the following year. He served as pastor of the Montgomery Baptist Church in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, from 1725 until his death. In 1743 the association approved Griffith's treatise and ordered it published with the association's confession of faith, executed by Benjamin Franklin the same year. In Griffith's preface, he indicated that he had consulted works on church government by Benjamin Keach, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Abel Morgan. More than any of the other works published in this volume, the *Short Treatise* emphasized the importance of plural eldership. The Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted Samuel Jones's *Treatise of Church Discipline* in 1797 to replace Griffith's *Short Treatise*.

Charleston Baptist Association, Summary of Church Discipline, 1774

The Charleston Baptist Association, the oldest Baptist association in the South, published its *Summary of Church Discipline* in 1774. In 1767 they appointed Oliver Hart, pastor of Charleston First Baptist Church, and Francis Pelot, pastor of the Euhaw Baptist Church, to "draw up a system of Discipline agreeable to Scripture, to be used by the Churches." With the help of Morgan Edwards and David Williams they revised it. The association adopted the revised document in 1773.²⁰ Other associations and many churches adopted it.

The Charleston Summary was a directory of church government and discipline. It defined the church and gave rules for constituting one. It taught that all church authority was in the congregation, which had the "power and privilege of choosing its own officers (Acts 6:3; 13:2), exercising its own discipline (Matt. 18:17), and of administering the Word and its ordinances, for the edification and comfort of its members (Acts 2:46)." It outlined the qualifications and duties of the two apostolic offices of the church, ministers and deacons, and told how to ordain them. It told how to receive new members and enumerated the members' duties. It explained the benefits of associations and defined the nature of their powers.

The Charleston Summary explained scriptural church discipline and gave directions for administering it. On most points its views represented those

²⁰Wood Furman, *A History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South Carolina* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1811), 12–13; James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Church Discipline* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 16–17.

of Baptist churches in the South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On three matters, however, it differed from the common practices of the churches. First, it taught that churches had three kinds of penalty or censure at their disposal: admonition, suspension, and excommunication. Most churches did not practice suspension. Second, it taught that women should not vote: "They are excluded from all share of rule or government in the church." (The Summary implied perhaps that women could vote in admitting and disciplining members, for it advises that applicants become members of the church "by its common suffrage." In some churches, in fact, the women voted in "matters of fellowship" but not in "matters of government.") In most Baptist churches the women voted. Third, it argued that churches should not exclude repentant offenders. Most churches held that certain offenses required excommunication whether offenders repented or not.

This was not the first such document adopted by Baptists. In 1743 the Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted a similar directory, Griffith's *A Short Treatise of Church Discipline*. They differed in some ways. The Charleston Summary alone explicitly prohibited women from voting in the churches. It alone explicitly called for new members to subscribe to a written covenant. The Philadelphia Treatise made no mention of women voting or of subscription to a written covenant. But the Treatise alone called for plural eldership, in the form of ruling elders. It alone called on the elders to lay their hands on converts after baptism. The Charleston Summary did not mention these matters.

Samuel Jones, *A Treatise of Church Discipline*, 1798

Samuel Jones (1735–1814) pastored the Pennepek, New Jersey, Baptist Church for fifty-one years and played a leading role in the Philadelphia Baptist Association. The association elected him moderator of its annual meeting on nine occasions and often selected him to write its annual circular letter, to compose letters of correspondence with other bodies, or to preach the meeting's annual sermon.²¹

Jones was born in Glamorganshire, Wales, and emigrated to America with his parents. He received bachelor and master degrees from the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania). He taught school for many years and gained a reputation for extensive knowledge of Latin classics, mathematics, and science. He relished reading the New Testament in Greek.²²

²¹See Francis W. Sacks, *The Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority, 1707–1814: An Ecumenical Analysis and Theological Interpretation* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 200–202.

²²See William Staughton, *The Servant of God Concluding His Labors: A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Samuel Jones, D.D.* (Philadelphia: R. P. and W. Anderson, [1814]), 26–30.

In 1795 the Philadelphia Association selected him to prepare a new manual of church polity to replace the old one. Since 1743 they had endorsed Benjamin Griffith's "Short Treatise of Church Discipline." By the 1790s however they considered it defective. They adopted Jones's manual in 1797. First published in Philadelphia in 1798, the text in this volume is from an 1805 printing in Lexington, Kentucky.

Jones's treatise had clarity and scope. It discussed most of the topics of church polity and discipline in a thorough and clear fashion. It was also representative. Perhaps more than any other polity manual of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jones's most nearly represents the common sentiments and practices of the Baptist churches in America.

William B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 1846

William B. Johnson (1792–1863) was the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention and effectively promoted Baptist educational and missionary efforts. He helped to form the national missionary Triennial Convention in 1814 and the South Carolina Baptist Convention in 1821 and served as president of both bodies. He established several schools of high quality and taught large numbers of students throughout his career. He founded Columbia, South Carolina, First Baptist Church and pastored other churches, but his chief labor was in education.

While he was pastor of Savannah, Georgia, First Baptist Church, Johnson began a study of New Testament church polity and became critical of some Baptist practices. He objected to the traditional Baptist practice of excluding members who joined the Methodists or Presbyterians. He urged that members should not be received by letter of dismission from another Baptist church, but should be received only upon testimony of a work of grace. He opposed the Baptist practice of adopting written creeds in the churches and associations. He taught that pastors and evangelists did not need the permission of the church to baptize converts, for baptism was an ordinance of the kingdom of God and not of the church.²³ He held that churches ought to perform church duties—worship, preaching, the Lord's Supper, admitting and dismissing members, church discipline, and offerings—on every Sunday and on Sunday only. In these areas he disagreed with most Baptists.

Although he gained few followers, he advocated these ideas throughout his career. He wrote his *Gospel Developed* to promote them. He published them also in the South Carolina Baptist paper in a long series of articles signed "W." James L. Reynolds published his Church Polity in part as a

²³On this point, see also W. [William B. Johnson], "The Validity of Baptism Administered by an Unbaptized Evangelist," *Southern Baptist*, 27 May 1856, 1; and Johnson, "Reminiscences," 67, South Carolinian Library, University of South Carolina.

response to Johnson's "novel" ideas. But on most points of polity Johnson agreed with Reynolds and the majority of Baptists. On these common points Johnson expressed the Baptist position with clarity and precision.

Joseph S. Baker, *Queries Considered*, 1847

Joseph S. Baker (1798–1877) pastored churches in Georgia and Florida and edited the *Christian Index*, Georgia's Baptist newspaper, from February 1843 to December 1848. Circulation grew by 33 percent in this time. He edited other papers for shorter periods.

He studied at Yale University and graduated from Hampden-Sydney College. He graduated from Columbian College's medical department and worked in Virginia as a physician. He began to prepare for the ministry in the Presbyterian denomination, in which his parents had raised him. The presbytery assigned him an essay on baptism that led him to reconsider his views. He joined a Baptist church in Petersburg, Virginia, and they ordained him.

Baker wrote often on the subject of church discipline and urged the Baptists to faithfulness in this area. He published his *Queries Considered* as a number of his quarterly journal, the *Periodical Library*. He had published parts of it in various Baptist papers but added new material and revised the whole to provide a more complete directory for Baptist discipline. Baker's views were clear and represented well Baptist practice. Baptists received his views favorably.

James L. Reynolds, *Church Polity*, 1849

James L. Reynolds (1812–1877) had a distinguished career as a Southern Baptist leader. He graduated first in his class at the College of Charleston and was a full graduate of the Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. He taught variously in the fields of theology, moral philosophy, and Latin language and literature at Furman University in South Carolina, Mercer University in Georgia, and the University of South Carolina. He was president of Georgetown College. Nine times his fellow Baptists elected him president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.²⁴

Reynolds pastored regularly throughout his career, including Columbia, South Carolina, First Baptist Church; Georgetown, Kentucky, First Baptist

²⁴J. C. Furman, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. J. L. Reynolds, D.D.," *Baptist Courier*, 3 Jan. 1878, 2; Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina*, Volume 1: South Carolina College (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 202; William J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Beginnings in Education: A History of Furman University* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1926), 138; Furman University Board of Trustees, "Board of Trustees of Furman," *Working Christian*, 11 Dec. 1873, 2; "Professor J. L. Reynolds," *South Carolinian*, 10 March 1847, 2.

Church; and Richmond, Virginia, Second Baptist Church. He refused election as president of the University of Missouri because the board did not permit the president to accept any ministerial duties.²⁵

Reynolds wrote his *Church Polity* in part as a response to William B. Johnson's *Gospel Developed*. Reynolds and Johnson agreed on most items of polity. But Johnson sought to alter "Baptist usage" in the ways noted above. Reynolds did not attack Johnson's reformist views directly, but sought to vindicate the customary practices. In contrast to Johnson, for example, Reynolds defended the adoption of creeds and the use of letters of dismission. Reynolds wrote in the academic style of the colleges at the time but presented a cogent defense and clear description of Baptist practices.

Patrick Hues Mell, *Corrective Church Discipline*, 1860

P. H. Mell (1814–1888) was one of the most respected Baptist leaders of his era. He served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1863 to 1871 and from 1880 to 1887. He served as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention from 1857 to 1871 and from 1877 to 1886. He taught theology at Mercer University from 1842 to 1855 and became professor at the University of Georgia in 1856 and chancellor in 1878. He was born in Georgia and converted in 1832. He studied two years at Amherst College in Massachusetts. For most of his career he concurrently pastored two churches.

Mell wrote *Corrective Church Discipline* in the aftermath of the most explosive case of church discipline in Southern Baptist history. In 1859 Nashville's First Baptist Church excommunicated James R. Graves for slandering their pastor, R. B. C. Howell, and for refusing to submit to the church's authority. Graves claimed that the church violated scriptural due process in the trial because church members had not followed Jesus' command in Mt. 18 to go privately to an offender before bringing it before the church. He and many sympathizers walked out of the church conference and formed a rival church.

Graves fanned the controversy. He asked the Nashville-area Concord Baptist Association to investigate the case and to render counsel in the case. They concluded that Graves acted properly and that First Baptist Church erred. The Baptist General Association of Middle Tennessee and North Alabama (now the Tennessee Baptist Convention) similarly sustained Graves against the church. First Baptist Church ignored the advice of the association and state convention. They defended their course. It was scriptural, they claimed, and it accorded with traditional Baptist practice.

²⁵"President Reynolds," *Baptist Banner*, 4 Dec. 1850, 3; J. C. Furman, "Biographical Sketch," *ibid.*, 2; J. M. C. Breaker, "The Late Dr. J. L. Reynolds," *Baptist Courier*, 18 April 1878, 1.

Mell judged that Graves, the Concord Association, and the General Association held some erroneous principles in the realm of church discipline. He wrote *Corrective Church Discipline* in order to correct such errors and to establish a more scriptural understanding of the principles of church discipline. Mell made no mention of Graves, Howell, or Nashville First Baptist Church. But since Mell's principles were an implicit vindication of First Baptist's action, Graves and his supporters accused Mell of writing the book out of partisanship. A. S. Worrell, who assisted Graves in some of his publishing efforts, published a refutation of Mell's position in 1860.

Mell acknowledged that churches sometimes excluded innocent members. But, he argued, the innocent should endure the wrong in meekness and patience, not by forming parties and factions and seeking to vindicate themselves. Graves's supporters believed that this was a direct attack on Graves's character, although other Baptist leaders earlier taught the same. Mell's work was well received among non-Landmarkers. It in fact represented the common Baptist position on these issues.

Eleazer Savage, *Corrective Church Discipline*, 1863

Savage was born in Middletown, Connecticut on July 28, 1800. He graduated from the Hamilton Literary and Theological Seminary (now Colgate) in Hamilton, New York. From 1823 to 1826 he was pastor of Rochester, New York, First Baptist Church, during which time the church's membership more than doubled. He served also as pastor of the Baptist churches at Medina, Oswego, Albion, Holley, York, and Bath. The text reprinted here was one that Savage published in 1845 as a *Manual of Church Discipline* and in 1863 as the second half of *Church Discipline in Two Parts, Formative and Corrective* (the first half instructed pastors in the method of growing believers in holiness through such agencies as preaching, prayer, and Bible study). The text here is from the 1863 publication.

His treatment of church discipline has value today in large part because he took a rather systematic approach in which he presented details that other writers found too tedious to include. Other writers took it for granted that Baptists understood the procedural details of church discipline. But Savage included them. He described carefully the process by which churches treated offenders and delineated methodically the rule by which churches should evaluate offenses. His discussion of the manner in which believers should carry out the private aspects of discipline delineated in Matt. 18: 15–17 is especially helpful.

William Williams, *Apostolical Church Polity*, 1874

Williams (1821–1877) was one of the four founding professors of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina (now

in Louisville, Kentucky). He was born in Georgia and converted in 1837. He graduated from the University of Georgia in 1840 and from Harvard Law School in 1847. He received ordination in 1851 and was a full-time pastor until he became Professor of Theology at Mercer University in 1856. He taught church history, church government, pastoral duties, and systematic theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1859 until his death in 1877.

Williams's explanation of Baptist polity was clear and persuasive. He held the unusual position, however, that there were no formally organized churches until the Gentiles converted in significant numbers. He did not address some important issues of polity—church discipline, for example. But his views accorded well with the practice of the churches.

Williams initially presented this essay as an address to the Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1873. The text here is the expanded version of that address which the American Baptist Publication Society printed in 1874.

The editor of the *Religious Herald* wrote that Williams's essay "deserves the widest circulation" and that "every pastor" should put it in the hand of "every one of his flock."²⁶ He was right. Indeed, the need is far greater now to circulate not only Williams's insights, but also those expressed in the other nine works republished here.

²⁶Review of five tracts, *Religious Herald*, 29 Jan. 1874, 2.