CHANGED, SET APART, AND EQUAL:
A STUDY OF ORDINATION IN THE BAPTIST CONTEXT

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CHANGED, SET APART, AND EQUAL: A STUDY OF ORDINATION IN THE BAPTIST CONTEXT
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ABSTRACT

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The American Baptist denomination is often characterized as an ecclesiological grass-roots organization. The theology of such a denomination is practiced organically by the people and is seldom articulated by the academy. Thus one cannot find a well articulated theological understanding of what ordination means for the individual and the community in the Baptist context. A synthesis of Geertz’s thick description, Lindbeck’s approach to doctrine, and McClendon’s understandings of speech-acts and conviction will offer a methodology through which one can articulate a theology of ordination. In doing so, we will find that the “call” and a relationship with a congregation are essential for ordination to occur. Such a theology will suggest that one is changed through ordination, and this change is relational in nature. The Catholic concept of Sacramental Consciousness offers a way to articulate the community’s awareness of the pastor’s relational change while at the same time maintaining the egalitarian nature of a Baptist community.
Dedicated to my children who could not understand why their father was in school for so long and to my wife who was such a strong support throughout this journey.
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In a recent study, a variety of members of different Baptist congregations were asked if there were tasks or duties that the pastor could do that no one else could do, and the answer was consistently, “no.” Such a response may have suggested that while the presence of a pastor was helpful it was not essential in these Baptist churches. In this study the same groups of people were asked what would happen to their particular church if there were no permanent, ordained pastor serving at the time, and the answer was consistently, “we would close.”¹ From the beginnings of Baptist life, specifically among Northern Baptists (now known as American Baptist Churches, U.S.A) but to a degree with many other Baptist groups, tension has existed between the egalitarian notion of the priesthood of all believers and the ordination of clergy.² There has been a perceived need for a pastor to “lead the flock,” and yet the pastor is described as a part of the flock equal to all others in the congregation. For example, in Henry C. Vedder’s historic 1907 work, A Short History of the Baptists, the author describes what he considers to be a New Testament model of the church. In this model the pastor/leader (described as a bishop or elder, but, according to Vedder, meaning pastor) is chosen by the flock/congregation and

² While many of the conclusions made in this work can be applied to many different Baptist groups, the main focus will be with the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A. (ABC/USA) a denomination of Baptists in North America. For the remainder of this work these groups will be referred to as American Baptists, or ABC.
is regarded as one of the flock/congregation. Vedder claims that there is no division between the laity and the clergy.³ Compare this with the Roman Catholic practice where a hierarchal “ordering” or separation between priest and parishioner is considered normative. In American Baptist circles the idea of a hierarchal “ordering” of individuals within the local church goes against the non-hierarchal egalitarian ecclesial polity especially with the role of the clergy. Yet as suggested in the above study, the pastor’s presence is seen as necessary even if the way in which the role of the pastor and his or her relationship with the congregation is understood as ambiguous.

In Catholicism, ordination is understood as a sacrament; the individual is called to the ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care.⁴ Priests are called to “present to all people a living witness to God.”⁵ In order to represent Christ and “present a living witness to God” on behalf of and for the parish, the priest must be set apart practically, liturgically, and relationally so that Eucharist and other sacraments can be appropriately administrated. The priest is stepping into a specific and clearly defined role in relation to the community.⁶

Among many Baptists, the understanding of ordination, especially the relation of

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³ Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), 30. Further on in this chapter we will consider in greater detail different Baptist works dealing specifically with ordination and the role of the pastor.


⁵ *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (November 21, 1964), ch. 5, 41.

⁶ Ibid. There has been more recently a move away from the language of “ontological change” toward speaking of the order of the clergy in comparison with the order of the laity. In *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, ed. by Susan Wood, many of the authors draw upon an “ontology of relationality” and contend that although there is a hierarchy in the order of ministry from the bishop to the priest to the lay person in the parish, through baptism all are brought into a relation that reflects the ordering of the liturgical community. Susan K. Wood, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).
the ordained person to the community, is not as clear as it is in Catholic tradition. A variety of Baptist leaders, authors, and scholars have made a number of suggestions as to the nature or purpose of ordination, but we lack uniformity and theological clarity concerning the specific purpose or status the ordained pastor has within the church. We would have an easier time discerning what ordination is not, rather than what ordination is.

Aside from preaching (which is not always done by the pastor), the pastor is not normally set apart liturgically on a weekly basis from other members of the congregation. Lacking any formal sacraments, the American Baptist denomination traditionally does not recognize any liturgical acts which a pastor normally performs that a lay person cannot perform. Granted, one can find a shared and practiced desire to have an ordained pastor performing some of the liturgical tasks that are considered important in Baptist worship (Lord’s Supper, baptism, preaching), there is not, however, an articulated theological or ecclesiological imperative to have an ordained individual presiding during specific liturgical moments in the weekly worship services. The acts of worship

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7 While I am focusing on the American Baptist denomination, much of what I am offering can be applied to other Baptist groups and denominations. Because Baptists do not have a hierarchy and lack a historical centrality, it is difficult to point to one “tradition” from which the Baptists emerge. Instead, the Baptists are a conglomeration of “traditions” which share commonalities. McClendon refers to the Baptists with a lower case “b” in making this same point that there is not a single institution gathering known as Baptists, but a shared vision. In order to hold the institutional elements in tension with the movement itself, and because I am staying within the American Baptist denomination and not looking out to the Free Church movement as McClendon does, I will use an upper case “B,” with the understanding that much of what I am offering could be applied to the Free Church movement as McClendon understands it. Further in this work, I will discuss the shared characteristics of the American Baptist denomination. For McClendon’s argument see, James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Ethics*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 26-34.

8 As we will note, the lack of uniformity is largely due to the diversity of Baptists. As soon as one “Baptist” claim is made on behalf of the entire denomination, five counter claims can be made with the cry of “soul freedom” as the reason for the reaction. The lack of a hierarchy leads to the diversity. Yet, as I will claim, one can find core ideals and practices within the denomination and within the diversity.

9 Because the Lord’s Supper is generally viewed as a memorial act, and baptism emphasizes the belief of the individual, neither is seen as sacramental acts and thus does not claim a theological necessity for an individual set apart to preside and confirm a presence of God and/or grace. Bill Leonard discusses
themselves do not necessitate a pastoral presence in the same way one would find in Catholicism.  

As stated, the pastor is not set apart from the community. Among American Baptists, it is widely asserted that there is no ontological change which occurs when the candidate is ordained. One can make the claim that ordination is intended to make a professional or vocational recognition, but not to set one apart from the community in the same nature or practice as a priest is in Catholicism. Nor is the act of ordination considered a sacramental act in the same way it is understood in Catholicism. The question stands: “what does it mean to be ordained in the Baptist community?” The answers are scattered and vague; American Baptists lack a theology of ordination.

This lack of theological unity and clarity emerges out of the distinctives of the American Baptist denomination. One of these distinctives is the idea of soul freedom,
which claims that each individual has the responsibility and the freedom to work out his or her salvation. Another distinctive is the priesthood of the believers, which claims that each individual has the freedom and responsibility to discern his or her relationship with God, and that each person is free “to be a priest before God as well as responsible to be priests for God.” These distinctives are strong in the American Baptist denomination, and along with the individualistic thrust that was emphasized in the enlightenment period, one will find among American Baptists a heightened sense of individualism. Along with these two distinctives we also find church autonomy which stresses that each local church is on its own as a free standing, full realization of the body of Christ and that each church is interdependently but not hierarchically or episcopally connected. In this mix we find a powerful and pervasive individualism influencing each local church and the individual believer. This sense of individualism mixed with an egalitarian congregational context complicates the role and the understanding of ordination among American Baptists.

Most churches will claim to need a pastor, yet without a clearly articulated theology of ordination, the clergy and the laity find themselves in murky waters as they

distinctives are the boundaries by which the denomination is shaped. A number of different authors offer different lists of distinctives, and some Baptist have left other Baptist churches over the number and nature of the Baptist distinctives (for example, the 6 Principle Baptists in England and America). Thus it is difficult to claim a definitive list of Baptist distinctives. The majority of the lists include: Biblical authority, soul freedom or freedom of conscious, church autonomy, and religious freedom from the state. For other lists, see McClendon, Ethics, 26-34; and Shurden, The Baptist Identity.


15 This interdependent connection is also known as the “Association Principle.” It is the principle upon which formal denominational institutions of the American Baptists are founded. Theologically, the idea of interdependence and autonomy is very well articulated in Miroslav Volf’s work, specifically considering the notion of the Church as an image of the Trinity and existing as “polycentric communities,” a phrase which Volf attributes to Avery Dulles. Miroslav Volf, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity, Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age, ed. Alan G. Padgett (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 223-8. Historically, the idea and tension of the “Association Principle” has been a strong part of the Baptist story. For a brief introduction into the history and idea of the “Association Principle,” see: Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, “The Associational Principle of Baptists,” In A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1991), 173-194.
try to articulate and practice the roles and responsibilities of the pastor. Among American Baptists we cannot find a clear, sustained theological articulation of what it means to be ordained.

A Survey of Literature

A brief survey of some of the literature giving attention to the idea of ordination indicates the notable lack of work on the topic. The widely accepted general works on Baptist history (Torbet, McBeth, and Leonard) offer little insight into the theological significance of ordination. These works offer a historical view of the role the pastor had, and even that focus itself is brief. For example, in considering the history of the General Baptists in England, Leonard offers some insight into the process and purpose of ordination; however his insights are strictly limited to a particular historical context, and he does not compare the process with other decades or aspects of the global Baptist traditions. Along with Torbet and McBeth, Leonard does not offer any insight into the theological understandings of ordination, focusing only on the process and practical purpose of ordination within a specific historical context.16

Two manuals written in recent years and used by primarily by American Baptists offer a more substantial focus on the nature and practice of ordination yet lack a well articulated theology of ordination. When discussing the role of the minister in the church, Goodwin’s work considers the tension between the role of the pastor and soul freedom. Goodwin suggests that the pastor is expected and perhaps required to fulfill specific roles

and tasks within the church, such as preaching and pastoral care, and yet the pastor does not have ruling authority over the individuals of the congregation. Hudson and Maring consider the role of the pastor and the authority a pastor may hold in a congregation, specifically in leading worship, preaching, teaching, counseling, and administration. Both Hudson and Maring as well as Goodwin consider and suggest what a pastor is expected to do, but not what it means theologically for the pastor to be ordained. Flirting with theological implications, both works look at the idea of being called into the ministry. The call has been described by Maring and Hudson as having an external and internal nature. The internal nature is the feeling or experience that the individual has of God “calling” him or her to the pastoral ministry. The external call occurs when the members of a congregation recognize an individual as one who has the gifts and abilities to be a pastor as well as having an internal call. Such a view of the internal and external call is a start toward a theological understanding of the role of the pastor, yet does not give the kind of attention to the theological and ecclesial implications of ordination for the worshipping community that one needs to clearly articulate a nuanced understanding of ordination.17

The notion of a “calling” is found elsewhere. In his 1861 manual, *The Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, Francis Wayland claims that a minister is called by the Holy Spirit, “in his own heart… and in the hearts of his brothers.” According to Wayland, an individual must go before a community to be affirmed in his call which occurs through hearing the individual preach, discerning his teaching ability and his knowledge of scripture. The role of the Holy Spirit is an important factor for Wayland,

stressing the divine nature of the call. William Sweet describes a process Baptist pastors went through in the growing American West of the late 1700s and early 1800s. Sweet explains how an individual would tell about his “religious experience” with a congregation which would then affirm or deny the individual’s call to the ministry. In a more current work, Paul Fiddes describes ordination as the act in which the church, through the movement of the Holy Spirit, recognizes a person’s call to ministry. I have only offered a handful of examples stressing the importance of an internal call and the importance of a congregational affirmation of that call in many Baptist practices of ordination; the pages of this work could be filled with examples supporting and expanding upon this idea. Suffice it to say, the understanding of a call holds prominence in American Baptist’s concept of ordination yet has not received attention to the theological importance it has concerning ordination.

Within recent Baptist scholarship, much of which has been done by scholars connected with other Baptist denominations, is a movement in which has been labeled “catholic Baptists.” Some of the emphases of this movement include considering the influence of the notion of tradition upon Baptist theology, the importance of liturgy, and a sacramental approach to the commonly practiced ordinances of Baptists (baptism and Lord’s Supper). This movement considers in part how Catholicism can positively influence Baptists in areas such as tradition, ecclesiology, and liturgy. These “catholic

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Baptists” are not simply borrowing ideas from Catholicism, but considering ways in which the practices of Catholicism can inform and develop many Baptist practices.21

In the work Baptist Sacramentalism, we find two well thought out and forward thinking essays written on ordination that comes from this movement. John E. Colwell’s article, “The Sacramental Nature of Ordination: An Attempt to Re-engage a Catholic Understanding and Practice” offers a good look at the difference between a “sacrament” and a “sacramental act.” Ordination, Colwell claims, is a “sacramental act,” through the laying on of hands and the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is a moment when one is set apart from the community for the purpose of preaching and leading worship. Colwell’s understandings of the nature of ordination holds merit as he claims that it more than just an act of the community or a claim of the individual. He is attempting to name that “greater thing” which is happening at the moment of ordination. Yet Colwell does not consider how the “sacramental act” is named and experienced by the community. His essay does not go far enough in clearly articulating the theological implications implicit in the “sacramental act” of ordination for the individual and the community. It is a well written essay that calls for further investigation and development of his ideas.

In his book Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology, Colwell gives more attention to the idea of ministry as a sacramental act. In this work, Colwell continues his line of thinking suggesting that the mediation of the sacramentality of the pastor, of which Christ is the instrument, is effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Stressing that all are called to ministry or a royal priesthood through the Holy

21 Steve Harmon, “‘Catholic Baptists’ and the New Horizon of Tradition in Baptist Theology,” in New Horizons in Theology, ed. Terrence W. Tilley, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 2004, vol. 50 (Maryknoll and New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 117-134. This article, which is also reprinted in his book Towards Baptist Catholicity, is a good introduction into the thoughts and ideas found within this movement. Other scholars who have contributed to this movement include Paul Fiddes, Philip Thompson, Anthony Cross, John Colwell, and Mark Medly.
Spirit, Colwell suggests that the pastor participates in a unique priesthood. This priesthood is unique in the sense that the pastor represents God to the people in Word and sacrament. For Colwell, the pastor is separate from the rest of the congregation. The essence of ministry, representing God via Word and sacrament, is not an acquired competency but something to which one is called and placed apart from the community by God to do so; Colwell suggests it is an ontological separation of essence rather than one of function. Thus even if one no longer performs the function of the pastor one still holds one’s status and nature of ordination. According to Colwell, in the act of ordination, a calling and a promise of God’s presence are mediated in an indelible way.22

Stephen Holmes also postulates that a change occurs through ordination in his essay, “Toward a Baptist Theology of Ordained Ministry.” He makes it clear that one performs ministry on behalf of the whole church. For Holmes, the whole church is ordained, not only a handful of individuals, thus making the work of the pastor a corporate responsibility; the congregation is called to ministry, and individuals are called to serve on behalf of the church. As with Colwell, Holmes suggests that one is “ontologically changed” in ordination; one is called to a “way of being” rather than a “way of doing.” He suggests that the individual is indelibly changed through ordination and can never lose that distinction. He further suggests that through ordination one is called to a position of authority within the church, guided and directed by the congregation and by God, but still in a place of authority in relation with the congregation. As with Colwell’s essay, Holmes offers some valuable insights that deserve further consideration. Yet his particular emphasis upon an “ontological change”

22 John E. Colwell, Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2005), 213-223.
presents problems for many Baptists, problems not fully resolved in Holmes’ essay. Some of these problems might be lessened by a comparative study of what some contemporary Catholic theologians have themselves been suggesting concerning the concept of “ontological change” in light of the relationship of the priest with the laity.23 In an effort to avoid a hierarchal positioning of the pastor with the rest of the congregation, Holmes claims that the church is over the pastor even as the pastor has authority within the congregation. Even with this claim, which is not fully unpacked in his essay, he nevertheless runs the risk of going against the egalitarian, perichoretic nature of the church as expressed by the very Trinitarian authors Holmes references such as Miroslav Volf and John Zizioulas.24 If a change does occur through ordination, Holmes’ particular way of emphasizing the change as ontological, without further qualification, leans too far away from key tenets of Baptist ecclesiology held by a majority of American Baptists: the autonomy of the congregation, the priesthood of the believers, and soul freedom.25

Both authors offer valuable insights and a welcome start into this topic that deserves much more attention than it has previously received. Yet because of the brevity of their work, one is left with more questions than answers. For example one wonders how ordination is experienced and understood theologically, by both the pastor and the congregation, after the initial act of the laying on of hands. Neither Holmes nor Colwell

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23 For example, as mentioned above, Susan Wood’s work Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood addresses the nature and practice of ordination as an “ordering” of ministries for both lay and ordained. I will address this in greater detail in chapter 3.


25 Both Holmes and Colwell reference the idea of the priesthood of the believers as a misunderstood aspect of Baptists. They both make valid arguments against individualism; yet perhaps err too far on the other side in compensation. Due to lack of space, I will not be engaging these other tenets of Baptist life in this work.
address at length the relational theological implications of ordination for a community. Instead, they focus on the function of the pastor in the proclamation of scripture and administration of sacrament (ordinances). Further, their works are offered from an academically hierarchical point of view. Those who write within the academy are often guilty of offering “top-down” theories absent of the practices of the people. When doing Baptist theology in an American Baptist context, one must be persistent to consider the actions and ideas of the people in the pews. One must strive to look not only to the history of Christian tradition writ large, but also to the actions and implicit theology of local, American Baptist Churches (ABC) congregations. Finally, I must add that both Holmes and Colwell are writing from a British Baptist context and are emerging from and looking at slightly different issues than I am in my Baptist context in America.26

All of the above mentioned authors have attempted to express, implicitly or explicitly, what ordination may mean for Baptists. Yet, as was already mentioned, with every theologically orientated claim made by Baptists, coming from an academic, top-down context dealing with ordination or other aspects of Baptist life, we can find one if not more counter-claims, all using similar or different foundational sources to substantiate these counter-claims. Because the American Baptist denomination is a denomination of the people rather than one began and led by an individual, we need to look at the actions of the people to discern the theology of the people. By engaging in a “thick description” of the pastor, the church, the laypeople, and the relationships within, we can find trends and threads of commonality which can lead to a well-articulated and

nuanced theological understanding of ordination. Only by naming those trends and threads can we claim a theological understanding of ordination among American Baptists. Only by looking at the way the ordained person acts and is treated within a specific community can we begin to understand what ordination may be understood to mean within a Baptist context.  

**Focus and Purpose of the Work**

In this work, I will offer a theological approach to ordination as it occurs within the American Baptist context in a way that bridges theory and practice. Such an exploration will address the tension inherent in the American Baptist ideals/distinctives of soul freedom, priesthood of the believers, and church autonomy, as well as Baptist liturgy, American Baptist history, and the practices of the people within that denomination.

James McClendon suggests that to offer a Baptist theology, one needs to tell the story of the Baptists from a narrative perspective. I am going to tell a story of one part of the Baptists, that which emerged in the northern part of America. I will be focusing on one specific aspect of this story: the pastor in the local ecclesial community and how that

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28 Within the American Baptist denomination, more recently than historically, one can be ordained to a variety of roles from teaching at a college or university to serving as a hospital or military chaplain. For this study, I will be focusing on the role of the pastor in the local church community, a role that widely considered as the norm of ordination in the American Baptist denomination.
role has been and continues to be received and understood by Baptists in the pews.29 This study will be both exploratory and analytical. In order to articulate a theology of American Baptists in regards to the pastor, I will be investigating tendencies and practices and the acts of the people within churches, focusing on the way people treat the pastor, what people expect from the pastor, the way the pastor acts, and what he or she assumes about his or her vocation in the specific local church. Through an analysis of that data we will move toward a theology of ordination.

The Catholic/Baptist Comparison

While one must hold to one’s identity as it has emerged, the influence of another movement can prove helpful and illuminating. In order to find the language to articulate theologically the nature and meaning of ordination, I will look to the rich history of Catholicism to provide different angles and perspectives, staying aware of the very real ecclesiological and theological differences between Baptists and Catholics, but looking for ways in which Catholic sacramental theology can offer categories that may lead towards a more nuanced understanding of Baptist ordination. Such an approach will put me in agreement in a number of ways with many of the “catholic-Baptists” that we have already encountered (Harmon, Cowell, etc.).

Thesis

My thesis is that when one is ordained as a Baptist, from the perspective of the congregation and the individual ordained, one’s relationship with the congregation and the American Baptist denomination changes based on a “call.” In ordination a community

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29 McClendon makes the argument for “narrative ethics,” which he basis on a “realistic narrative” reading of the scripture. Taking his cue from literary critics, McClendon suggests that the narrative consists of three elements: character, social setting, and circumstance. Throughout this work, I will be looking at the character of the minister in various social settings and circumstances of Baptist life in historical context. McClendon, Ethics, 328-9.
names, celebrates, and claims the “call” and the relational change.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Summary of the theoretical, conceptual approach that will be used in the research}

As stated above, this work will employ both methods of analysis and interpretation. The analytical tools used in this work will principally come from the writings of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon. The methodology formulated from these three authors will allow us to gather data staying within the community at a thick level, engaging and discerning from within the community a theology of ordination.

Without an agreed upon doctrine of ordination in the American Baptist denomination, we will need to consider the practices of the community specifically around the office of the pastor. In chapter 2 we will work towards what Geertz articulates as a “thick description” of American Baptists as it has occurred and is occurring within the north-east American context, focusing specifically on ordination.\textsuperscript{31} This “thick description” will offer to us some of the salient practices of the community focused around the pastor and the pastor’s relation to the local congregation, what Geertz refers to as symbolic practices. From the practices of the community we will be able to shape a cultural and linguistic framework which will offer for us a grammar from which we will

\textsuperscript{30} The idea of a sacramental awareness will be a major part of this work. While all members have a relationship with the church, there is a relational difference with the clergy, which carries a sacramental nature. Richard Gaillardetz considers ordering relationships in a community from the Catholic point of view. He argues that all have been called into a new order with the Church through baptism, and yet there remains a hierarchy of order within the Church most directly related to its liturgical practices. I would contend that Baptists also understand themselves as entering into a new order through baptism, and that there are aspects of ordering based upon function, yet without the hierarchy. Further on in this chapter, and more so in chapter 3, I will discuss the concept of “sacramental consciousness” to which this thesis is referring. Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundation of Ministry within an Ordered Communion,” in \textit{Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry}, ed. Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 26-51.

\textsuperscript{31} Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, 3-32.
be able to articulate a theology of ordination.\textsuperscript{32} Thus the language and grammar derived from this Baptist narrative, whether it is particular to an individual church, or a part of a grammatical trend found in the American Baptist denomination, will offer the context for the analysis of a theology of ordination as it is practiced by the people in the pews and the clergy in the pulpit.

Lindbeck and McClendon offer a method of analysis of the data found in the social-ecclesiological context.\textsuperscript{33} Lindbeck’s approach to the role of grammar and doctrine in faith communities, as expressed in his work \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, offers a way to discern and decipher the doctrinal implications of ordination through examination of the internal speech patterns of particular communities and denominational doctrines. McClendon demonstrates a way to understand American Baptists from a narrative perspective as it is lived out by individual churches. We will be looking for those statements which hold a broad meaningfulness and importance within the American Baptist denomination and those which hold a secondary level of importance.\textsuperscript{34}

The interpretative aspect of this work will add theological depth to the results of my analysis of the American Baptist denomination which will support my thesis. I will examine the relation of the pastor with the local church, including the representation of the pastor on behalf of the church and within the church. The interpretation of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation will be influenced by the Catholic idea of “sacramental consciousness,” which is the awareness one has when one realizes


\textsuperscript{33} As with Geertz, Lindbeck and McClendon will be considered in further detail in chapter 2.

that something represents something more than that which appears on the surface.\textsuperscript{35} Although, in a Catholic context, the concept primarily refers to the traditional seven sacraments, it can also apply to an awareness Catholics have of the sacredness and divine presence in various symbols and practices both within an explicit ecclesial context and outside of an ecclesial context. For example, while the church building is on one level stones and mortar, on another level, the building can also be seen as representing the presence of the divine.\textsuperscript{36} The presence of the divine can be experienced through nature, through events, and through human relationships. Sacramental consciousness requires an analogical approach to thought and perception wherein the individual can experience the both/and of reality and the divine.\textsuperscript{37} Dennis Doyle describes sacramental consciousness as “awareness of the presence and activity of God in and through the things of this world.”\textsuperscript{38} Understanding sacramental consciousness requires attention to the relationship between the apophatic and the cataphatic approaches to the presence of the divine. I contend that an ecclesiology which includes this attention offers a way to articulate the awareness of a change which occurs through ordination in a Baptist context. Although I do not expect that most Baptists would recognize an “ontological change” as understood

\textsuperscript{35} The idea “Sacramental Consciousness” is referred to in different terms with different scholars. For example, Andrew Greeley refers to this idea as the “Catholic Imagination,” and David Tracy refers to an “Analogical Imagination.” One can trace the concept back as far as the writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite when he writes of apophatic and cataphatic theology. It is a concept that merits and has received a great deal of attention that cannot be given in this work but will be covered to a greater degree in Chapter 3. Andrew Greeley, \textit{The Catholic Imagination} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1-21. David Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism} (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 405-438. Dennis Doyle, “Sacramental Consciousness and a Roman Catholic Understanding of the Relationship between the Local Church and the Global Church,” (paper prepared for the Methodist-Catholic Dialogue, Los Angeles, California, May, 2002). Dionysius the Areopagite, “Mystical Theology,” in C.E. Rolt, \textit{Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and Mystical Theology}, Translations of Christian Literature, series 1, W.J. Sparrow-Simpson and W.K. Lowther Clarke, gen. eds. (London and New York: The Macmillan Company, 2004), 192-3.

\textsuperscript{36} Greeley, \textit{Catholic Imagination}, 34-39.

\textsuperscript{37} Tracy, \textit{Analogical Imagination}, 429-430.

\textsuperscript{38} Doyle, “Sacramental Consciousness,” 1.
in an individualistic and metaphysical way, they may be open to recognizing a real change understood against the background of an “ontology of relationality.” The language and expectations of the pastor used around the “sacraments” or “ordinances” (Lord’s Supper, Baptism, etc.) by Baptists signifies a change in the recipient’s relationship to the community before God; the language used around, by, and for the pastor signify a change in the community’s relationship with that pastor.

In addition to sacramental consciousness, a Free Church ecclesiology as articulated by Volf also informs and helps to further focus my understanding of ordination in a Baptist context.\(^\text{39}\) In his work, \textit{After Our Likeness}, Volf offers a way to consider a Free Church ecclesiology (within which the American Baptists can be included) based upon a Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity that allows for the mutual activity of specific charismas within a congregation. Holding to an egalitarian idea of the church, Volf provides ecclesiological insights that will help to articulate the functional relationship the pastor has with the church.

In articulating the specific relation with and representation of the pastor with members of the church, I will also look to the already mentioned idea of “ordering” within the community when discussing the role of the priest. In the collection of essays edited by Susan Wood one can find the idea that all members of the Church are brought into a new order, through baptism all are called to minister on behalf of Christ, and all are called to represent that order of ministry to the world. Thus through baptism, all are called to be ministers on behalf of Christ.\(^\text{40}\) Yet within each community/congregation

\(^{39}\) Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}.

\(^{40}\) Many argue that this is what is meant with the term “Priesthood of the Believers,” not necessarily a fully egalitarian understanding of ecclesiology, but an understanding that all are engaged to one degree or another in the ministry of Jesus Christ. See Colwell, “Sacramental Nature of Ordination,”
there exists a diversity of gifts and callings, which leads to a diversity of ordering. From a Catholic perspective, an understanding of an ordered ministry opens doors for the ways in which the laity are all a part of the liturgical ordering of the church, yet at the same time it retains a hierarchal understanding of the orders of ministry; we are baptized into a new “order” of existence with Christ as the head. One of the findings Wood offers in her work is that there is “…historically the principle of sacramental order.” From bishop to priest to deacon, there is a variety of sacramental orders for a variety of ministries, beginning with the sacrament of baptism. 41 As long as one remains attentive to differences between Catholics and Baptists concerning the hierarchal understanding of ordination, the notion that all are called to ministry and the sacramental nature of that order of ministry (a Holy Communion) can provide a way to understand the difference between the laity and the clergy in the American Baptist denomination.

*The Research Design*

In order to gather the data needed to offer a theology of ordination we will take a social/historical approach to the American Baptist denomination, with an eye toward the theological. In doing this I will discern the *practices of the people* and the *teachings of the tradition* as they relate to ordination.

The *practices of the people* are the practices and grammar within the context of an individual church. Using a local church I will look at the way pastors were chosen, the way they were ordained, treated, and, if possible, I will try to discern the level of

41 Wood, “Conclusion: Convergence Points toward a Theology of Ordered Ministries,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 263. T.F. Torrance also articulates a notion of ordering within the church. He considers Baptism to be the entrance into the church and Eucharist the moment when the diversity of spiritual gifts or “ordering” occurs. It is at the table when one is aware that some are called to serve the sacraments and others are called to be served. T.F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (New York, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993), 99-102.
importance the presence of the ordained minister had in the local community. As we look at the local practices, I will take into consideration popular movements, events, and schools of thought within specific times that may influence the congregation or the pastor. For this work, I will consider the First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts, a church that is over 300 years old; it is the second oldest Baptist church in Massachusetts. The historical and contemporary practices of that congregation will offer a thick sampling of the practices of the people, which we can consider throughout this study.

I will also consider what I will be calling the teachings of the tradition. These are the ideas of ordination within the American Baptist denomination which have been put forth by Baptist institutions and authors of one kind or another (denominational statements, publishing companies, etc). The teachings of the traditions have been taught in classrooms and offered through a published, authoritative medium representing an institutional, denominational consciousness. For example, published church manuals, guides for pastors, contemporary encyclopedia entries, minutes to association meetings, and written histories all reflect a broad understanding of the American Baptist denomination which will be considered. The teachings of the tradition will not necessarily reveal the ideas and practices of the participants of the individual church, but common thoughts as articulated on the institutional or national level.

The practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition will be discerned, compared, and analyzed with an eye towards four different time periods reflecting moments of significant change or tension in American religious history. For example,

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42 Each period of time was chosen from significant moments of American religious history as surveyed by authors such as Noll and Gaustad and Schmidt. Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the*
1835-1870 reflects a time of solidification with many Baptists in America, as well as a time of schism. It was during this time that the Civil War occurred, which left an indelible mark on American history. It will be in these times of heightened ecclesiological tensions that we will look closely at the teachings of the tradition and the practices of the people. Any points of tension, disagreement, or confusion between the tradition and the local practice, as well as points of agreement, will be of great interest. The time periods are offered as guidelines for consideration within the American Baptist denomination but are not intended to be used in a restrictive manner. The approximate time periods are as follows:

- **1720-1760** – Great Awakenings, National Development
- **1800s** – Great Awakenings, Growth of the Movement,
  Denominational Development, Civil War, Split with the Southern Baptist Convention
- **1910-1940** – Fundamentalist / Modernist Controversy
- **Late 1900s – Present** – Civil Rights Movement, Vatican II, Social Unrest of the 60s, Current Trends


43 In that time period, a number of Baptist formed the Triennial convention, which many consider to be the pinnacle of the Baptist denomination when considering denominational evolution. In 1845, the Baptists of the South formally split with the Baptists of the North, forming the Southern Baptist Convention.
application of the concepts of “sacramental ordering,” “sacramental consciousness,” and “ontology of relationality”; Volf’s egalitarian ecclesiology will also assist in an articulation of a theology of ordination. Through this research I will find and demonstrate an implicit understanding of and desire for an “ordering” of ministry through baptism, as mentioned in Wood’s work, yet one that still emphasizes the egalitarian ecclesiology that is part of the American Baptist denomination.  

Just as the priest is called to a specific relationship through ministry, the Baptist pastor is called to a specific order of ministry reflected in the relational change between the minister and the church.

**Conclusion**

There is a tension between a Catholic understanding of ordination and the egalitarian ecclesiology of American Baptists. I believe that the tension can be articulated in a way that maintains both the ideal of the priesthood of the believers as well as ordination as a setting apart of an individual to be a pastor as practiced among many American Baptists through a sacramental understanding of ordination.

The pastor does not change outwardly, but the ways in which the laity views the pastor and the pastor views the laity change; it is a relational change.

When one is ordained, one’s relationship within American Baptists changes in a sacramental way as may be detected in the role of the sermon and in daily tasks such as visitation. Even when an ordained pastor from another church visits, he or she is still seen as clearly distinct if not different or separate from the lay people, upholding a

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44 The idea of “ordering” occurs throughout Wood’s work. David Power’s article is one example of many in that work. David N. Power, “Priesthood Revisited: Mission and Ministries in the Royal Priesthood,” in Wood, *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 112-115.

45 In a previous paper I have considered ways to understand Sacramental Consciousness in the Baptist context. Malone, “Sacred Consciousness: A Communal Approach to Baptist Ordinances,” presented at the regional meeting of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, Washington, D.C., June, 2004. This will be considered further in Chapter 3.
sacramental understanding of this relational change.\textsuperscript{46} At the same time, there continues to be a desire to maintain basic tenets of American Baptist ecclesiology, specifically the priesthood of the individual believer, the autonomy of the local congregation, and the role the congregation has in articulating the external call of the pastor and in ordaining the pastor.

As I stated, this relationship between the church and the pastor can best be understood sacramentally; an understanding which offers a rich, symbolic, and metaphorical view of that which the pastor is assumed to represent as a part of something greater than the individual pastor. In the following chapter I will discuss in greater detail Geertz’s notion of ‘thick description’ as a way to gather the specific data needed to articulate a Baptist theology. We will consider the way in which Lindbeck understands grammar and doctrine, placing ordination in the proper tension with church autonomy and soul freedom. Finally, we will explore McClendon’s narrative approach to Baptist theology. This chapter will lay the theoretical groundwork necessary for gathering and analyzing the data. Chapter three will draw upon Catholic concepts to move toward a sacramental approach to ordination within the Baptist context. In this chapter I will more fully develop the concept of sacramental or sacred consciousness, as I have already briefly explained, considering the apophatic and cataphatic awareness that a congregation may have towards the minister. Following an understanding of sacramental consciousness, I will offer an application of this idea toward Baptist ordination. The writings of Wood as well as Volf and others will be used here. By the end of this chapter, we will have a well articulated a theology of ordination that will prove relevant for

\textsuperscript{46} Richard Gaillardetz suggests that a “relational ontology” be considered in the Catholic context, which is similar to what I am suggesting. Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Ecclesiological Foundations,” 40.
American Baptists.

In chapters four and five we will examine the *teachings of the tradition* as well as the *practices of the people* of what became the Northern Baptist Convention and eventually the American Baptist denomination, with one church in particular (First Baptist, Swansea MA), looking for trends to support or contradict my suggested theology of ordination, using as a guide the four significant moments in the religious history of America.

Finally, chapter six will pull the data from the specific church as well as from American Baptists and, after applying the methodology drawn from Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon, I will then examine the data and the findings of my historical study in an attempt to uncover an implicit understanding of sacramental consciousness as I have previously articulated. My conclusion will offer an articulation of a theology of ordination as it is practiced among American Baptists.
CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter we considered the inherent difficulties in attempting to offer and articulate a Baptist theology due in part to the social, grassroots nature of the denomination, the low ecclesiology, the lack of a formal liturgy or hierarchy, and the emphasis on personal freedom and institutional freedom. It is my argument that even in the face of such challenges one can discern a theology through the speech and actions of the people within the American Baptist denomination. Such an approach towards theology calls for a technique that utilizes social sciences in articulating theological beliefs and practices as they have occurred and continue to occur through speech and practices in the American Baptist denomination. Such an approach requires a methodology wherein the speech and practices of the people pertaining to ordination is discerned and analyzed. In this chapter I will offer a methodological groundwork through which one can deduce from the data some initial tools needed to articulate the theology of the community. This methodology will take a “thick” view of the speech and practices of the American Baptist denomination, discern doctrines or convictions, and articulate a hierarchy in which those doctrines should be approached. Such an approach is influenced by the writings of Clifford Geertz, George Lindbeck, and James Wm. McClendon, Jr. We will begin by reviewing the inherent difficulties and challenges found in doing Baptist theology. We will then summarize the influences of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon and the ways these scholars’ work contributes to the methodology I am proposing. With
the ideas of Geertz, we will be looking specifically at his approach to ethnography known as a “thick description.” After Geertz we will consider they ways in which Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine* can influence a possible taxonomy of grammar and speech acts, looking specifically at those pertain to a theology of ordination. With McClendon we will consider his understanding of “happy requests” and theological convictions which will positively influence my conclusions of a theology of ordination. At the end of this chapter we will have a methodology through which one can gather data and develop tools that will help to ascertain the theological speech, actions, and utterances of Baptists concerning ordination.

*The Difficulties of Doing a Baptist Theology*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a difficult thing to offer a Baptist theology. One difficulty many self-proclaimed Baptist theologians face when attempting to articulate a Baptist theology is the tension between honoring the individual freedoms practiced in the denomination (influenced in part by soul freedom) as well as the local institutional freedoms (influenced in part by autonomy of the local church) while at the same time attempting to speak theologically on behalf of an entire group of people.47 Unlike Luther and Lutherans, Calvin and those in the Reformed tradition, Aquinas (among others) and Catholicism, Baptists do not have a central theological figure they can rally around to glean doctrinal focus. Nor can one find a pan-endorsed Baptist Catechism to offer focus as one investigates theological trends and curiosities within the denomination. There is not an American Baptist version of Catholicism’s Congregation

47 The tension between personal freedoms and the rule of community has been a constant in Baptist life. Some such as Thompson, argue that a strong sense of individualism has enjoyed an undue reign at the expense of communal identity. See Philip E. Thompson, “Sacraments and Religious Liberty: From Critical Practice to Rejected Infringement,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, 36-54.
for the Doctrine of the Faith to offer a corrective when one makes theological claims on behalf of the Baptist denomination that go outside what many would consider normative bounds. Thus when trying to investigate particularities of an American Baptist theology, one cannot look to a specific theologian or a specific set of documents for guidance that would speak for the entire denomination. A singular articulated Baptist theology does not exist.

The American Baptist denomination is non-hierarchal. It is a social movement of a people that emerged out of a populist movement. The theology of the denomination has emerged from the speech and actions of the people within the denomination, i.e. “from below,” rather than through the writings and teachings of theologians; Baptists have been and continue to be shaped by the actions and trends of people through time. In his work considering religious movements on the Western frontier, William Sweet aptly describes how Baptist preachers in the midst of the Western expansion in America came from the ranks of the people. The leaders of the frontier churches tended not to be seminary trained, institutionally molded, and indoctrinated as theologian-preachers, but were farmer-preachers who were working the soil, struggling to survive just as the people in the pews were struggling with many of the same life experiences. These preachers were not as concerned with maintaining a denominational identity as they were concerned with serving the people in their immediate area. The lack of institutional conformity meant that the beliefs and practices of the Baptists were prone to be more organic and loosely connected than one would find from a strongly dictated central office.

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49 This is one of the historical differences between the American Baptist experience, specifically between the American frontier experience and the more urban English Baptist experience. This historical difference as well as other cultural differences has affected the ecclesiological narrative that has been
Perhaps it was and is due to the lack of central authority that leads to a proclivity for conflict within churches and among churches, regionally and nationally. One only needs a platform from which to offer one’s ideas and a group of people to endorse them in order to start a sub-movement among Baptists. James Wm. McClendon Jr. notes the number of controversies that have been a part of Baptist history (Calvinist vs. Armenian, missionary vs. anti-missionary, modernist vs. fundamentalist, etc.) and suggests that one of the reasons Baptist have not produced much theology is because constant controversies have monopolized and polarized the intellectual energy of the day.50

Finally, as has been already mentioned, the emphasis upon individual and ecclesial independence and freedom makes it difficult to offer a Baptist theology on behalf of the entire denomination. The American Baptist distinctives of soul freedom and church autonomy as well as the historical embrace of sola scriptura when doing theology make it difficult for anyone to offer a theology beyond the horizon of the individual and on behalf of the American Baptist denomination. From the Lord’s Supper to baptism, to ordination, each church and each individual could very easily have his or her own informed and nuanced understanding of these particular aspects of Baptist life, possibly contradicting other Baptists’ understanding and practices. The very nature of this denomination can easily lead one to assume that Baptist theology will be by nature contextual, multivalent, and may vary from person to person. Yet one of the premises of this work is that a Baptist theology does exist and can be found within the American Baptist denomination. The actions and words of the people in the pews create the rich soil for a Baptist theologian’s work in articulating a Baptist theology. Thus, for one to offer a carried through particular Baptist denominations today.

Baptist theology, one must start with the people. One must look at the actions, the speech, the rituals, and the shared belief statements of the people to find a theology true to the Baptist we are studying. From that rich and diverse resource one can articulate a theology that has the potential to speak to the larger American Baptist denomination. Hence we will need to develop a methodology that starts from the bottom, from the people in the pews rather than from the top, the ivory towers and pulpits, in order to articulate a Baptist theology.  

An Analysis of Grammar

In “listening” to the speech of Baptists we must have an approach and method that gives a sense of focus. The purpose is not to just take everything that is said, but to look closely for those actions and words which point toward a theology of ordination. The following three scholars all consider the grammar of a community in one way or another. In this section we will consider each scholar’s work which is germane and the ways in which there work will influence and inform the methodology that I am proposing.

Clifford Geertz – “Thick Description”

As it has been suggested, one must start from the ground, with the actions of the people, in order to offer a Baptist theology. The social nature of such an approach requires an ethnographic analysis of the words, actions, utterances, and symbols found within the denomination. When considering the fields of ethnography, anthropology and sociology, Clifford Geertz’s influence is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid. His approach toward analysis and interpretation of symbols in cultures has been

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51 I am not suggesting that we ignore the works of the “ivory tower” and pulpit. Works such as Hodge’s or Strong’s theology are very much a part of the American Baptist denomination. I am interested in how such thoughts and writings were accepted and appropriated by the people in the pews, and how thoughts and writings influenced the focus and articulation of the faith experience of the people in the pews.
groundbreaking, affecting not only the aforementioned fields but also history and theology. Thus as we consider the American Baptist denomination, we will look to the writings and influence of Geertz for direction of this work.

Born in San Francisco in 1926, Clifford Geertz received a B.A. in Philosophy in 1950 from Antioch College and then earned his Ph.D. in 1956 at Harvard University where he studied with Clyde Kluckhohn and Talcott Parsons. He taught at a number of institutions of higher learning including the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. At the time of his death in 2006, Geertz was hailed as an eminent cultural anthropologist, focusing on interpreting cultural symbols and offering meaning and order found in people’s lives based on those cultural symbols.

In what many consider to be his most influential works, The Interpretation of Culture, Clifford Geertz discusses his notion of culture, the symbols found within culture, possible meanings of those symbols, and methods of the interpretation of culture (as the title suggests). As an anthropologist, Geertz takes a “semiotic” approach; viewing humanity as suspended in “webs of significance,” culture being the substance of those webs. Geertz is following Weber’s lead with such an approach towards culture. Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture, 5.
it is human behavior. In taking a semiotic approach, Geertz claims that actions of individuals can be viewed as symbolic, suggesting that a meaning deeper than the action itself can be found. Sherry Ortner describes culture from this Geertzian perspective as a system of meanings embodied in symbols, an interpretation of which can be achieved through an observation of the public use of these symbols. As William Sewell suggests, Geertz considers symbols of culture as the “models of” or principles of reality, and the “models for” or templates for reality. The symbols found within culture offer the boundaries of understanding as well as the content for understanding within that culture. Thus when interpreting culture one needs to look at the public actions of individuals and then consider the symbolic references and finally the public meaning of those actions. In particular cultures, one will find historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols as well as inherited concepts expressed in symbols which influence the attitudes and concepts of life.

In order to name, discern, and articulate the patterns of meanings, symbols, and inherited concepts, one must utilize a “thick description” of the culture in question. A “thick description” of culture can lead one towards an in-depth analysis of the public meaning of the symbols found within culture. Geertz’s understanding of “thick

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56 Sherry B. Ortner, “Introduction” in *The Fate of “Culture”*, 6-10.
57 Sewell is referring to Geertz’s comments on culture in his essay “Religion as a Cultural System.” We should note that Sewell is describing Geertz’s understanding of symbols and culture as the beginning of a criticism of Geertz’s ahistorical approach. Sewell, “Geertz, Cultural Systems, and History,” 46.
58 Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, 5, 10-12. Geertz claims that public actions carry public meanings. An action that is specifically meant for only one other individual to understand, a secret handshake for example, is not a culturally mediated action symbolically pointing towards a cultural meaning but a private action that may or may not have cultural relevance.
59 Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, 85.
description” comes from Gilbert Ryle’s writings and thoughts in his *Collected Papers.*60 In explaining this anthropological and ethnographic approach toward cultural analysis, Geertz describes Ryle’s application of a “thick description” via a wink. When one winks, the symbolic action suggests layers of meaning depending on the context of the wink, the person winking, the person who is receiving the wink, and so on. A “thin description” of a wink would only describe the muscular movement of one eyelid and not indulge in a description of the context. A “thick description” considers the purpose, the underlying meaning, and symbolic reference of the wink within its particular cultural context; it considers the subtext of the symbol/action in question. Through a “thick description” one looks at, “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not exist.”61 To understand the meaning of the wink, one must understand the particularities of the specific culture within which the wink occurs, i.e. the language games and grammar of the culture. A cautionary note: as Stephen Greenblatt points out, Geertz does not completely agree with Ryle’s understanding of “thick description.” For Ryle, the “thick description” is an account of intentions, expectations, and circumstances that give actions their meaning. It is the analysis of the action that is important for Ryle. For Geertz, the thickness resides more in the description than in the analysis. Thus the wink, the context, code, method, etc. is more the focus of the description than the reasons behind the wink.62

For example, say a group of friends are standing outside of a coffee shop, talking,
and joking. The wife of one of the friends approaches the group and admonishes her spouse for staying out so late, questioning his intentions. One of his friends turns to the wife and says that her husband has been with them the whole time, drinking coffee and chatting on the sidewalk. Immediately after offering the alibi his friend turns, looks at the accused man and winks. Ryle would be interested in the intent and meaning of the wink. In an analysis of the action, Ryle would want to know if the friend is saying through his wink, “don’t worry, I will cover your story,” or, “let’s see if she believes us,” or, “it is a good thing we have been here the entire time.” Ryle would be interested in knowing if the wink is suggesting that the husband has been doing just what his friend suggested or has been doing something else. This is the analysis of the action.

Geertz, on the other hand, would not leap to analysis, but would want to know as much of the detail as possible. What time of day were the friends standing outside the coffee shop? How long were they gone? Has this been a constant pattern of the husband, or is this the first time that the wife has admonished him? Is the couple older or younger? What is the relationship of the friend to the wife and the husband? What kind of role do women have in marriage in that particular society? Was the wink hidden from the view of others, or obvious for all to see? The “thick description” that Geertz advocates would ask questions that would focus more on the description of the action, the context, and the characters involved rather than asking questions of analysis.

Geertz is clearly influenced by a later Wittgensteinian approach to language and culture when analyzing human groups. Wittgenstein’s view that all language is public influenced Geertz’s claim that culture and the symbols within culture are only public and not private. Basic to Geertz’s work is the idea that the language and speech of a culture
point toward the reality of a culture, and a “thick description” reveals for the sociologist or the anthropologist the language and speech embedded within symbols particular to the culture in question.\textsuperscript{63} This thick, linguistic, symbolic analysis, according to Geertz, is the purpose and object of ethnography. It is an approach that focuses on the meaning behind the behavior through an in-depth study of the context of the behavior rather than studying simply the behavior itself. One is not concerned about the muscular action that causes a wink to occur, but the context in which the wink occurred, the situation which may have caused the wink, the person giving the wink, the purpose and the meaning behind the wink, and the message conveyed by the wink within a particular context and culture.\textsuperscript{64}

A good example of this “thick description” is found in the oft-referenced Balinese Cockfight. In this example, Geertz and his wife were in a Balinese village trying to study and understand Bali culture but were making little progress as they were ignored by everyone in the village. For some time he and his wife tried to break into the culture to understand the “symbols” and practices of the culture, but could not get a response or reaction from anyone as to the practices of the people. Only able to share what he could see, all Geertz could offer was a “thin description” of the culture. It was not until he and his wife attended a cockfight which was broken up by the authorities, from whom he and his wife ran were they viewed differently by the people. After fleeing from a possible arrest with the rest of the people of the village, Geertz and his wife were given an entrée into the culture that he could not achieve through mere observation. Because of his

\textsuperscript{63} Kevin Schilbrack, “Religion, Models of, and Reality: Are We Through with Geertz?,” \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} 73 no. 2 (June 2005) 439. Schilbrack comments on Gertz’s dependence upon Wittgenstein with his emphasis on the public nature of language (i.e. culture).

\textsuperscript{64} Paul Shankman, “The Thick and the Thin,” 261. We should be clear that as to the particular action Geertz is not attempting to offer an overarching description of all similar actions in all cultures broadly construed, but instead is offering via “thick description” a description of a particular action in a particular culture. Thus Geertz’s analysis of the Balinese cock fight offers a view of the cockfight within the Balinese culture, but not of all cockfights in all cultures.
actions at the cockfight and the community’s reception of him and his wife afterwards, Geertz could ask about the “why” of the practices and symbols of the culture and received responses to his questions. He could engage the culture further as being more or less, a part of the culture. Through his interaction with the people of Bali, Geertz could achieve a “thick description” of the culture.65

There are some words of caution that one need be aware of when considering a Geertzian approach to ethnography via “thick description” and employing the findings of a “thick description” towards a theological analysis. Sewell neatly describes three different critiques from three different camps. The positivists claim that Geertz has abandoned the scientific values of “predictability, verifiability, and law-generating capacity.” The post-modernists claim that Geertz has not pushed his interpretative method far enough. The materialists argue that Geertz has neglected history, power, and social conflict.66 All of these critiques hold weight, but for this work we will consider the positivists’ critique of the subjective nature implicit in Geertz’s analytical technique. While one may aspire for an unbiased description of the culture in question so that one could speak to universal laws and theories, as soon as one begins to interpret the data, the ethnographer (or in our case the theologian) will be bringing to bear his or her own assumptions and cultural projections. No matter how one tries, an absolutely unbiased, objective analysis is beyond the realm of possibility, for as the horizon of the scholar interacts with the horizon of the text or data collected the observation and the interpretation will be affected.67 Whereas one aspires to obtain a deep rapport with the

67 Lincoln and Guba would argue that this is a reality of research that need not be eschewed but embraced. The more one knows the system or culture, the better one can adapt, adjust, and study the system.
culture in question, one can and should always be somewhat skeptical and honest about what will be a subjective interpretation even to the slightest degree knowing that subjectivity is bound to influence interpretation. We always walk with the humility that every analysis will be, if only slightly, subjective, and an outsider could very easily get an interpretation wrong.  

A different critique, not just towards a Geertzian analysis of culture as a source of theology but towards the use of social sciences in general as a source of theology, can be found in the writings of John Milbank among others. Milbank critiques the use of social sciences in general as a source of theology, claiming that such an approach to theology inherently undermines the sacred conclusions that one may reach due to the secular roots of the social sciences. When one is arriving at theological conclusions based upon data gathered through an ethnographic method, one is using social sciences as a source of theological analysis and, as Milbank argues, the foundation of one’s theological conclusions will be flawed. A basic premise of my work is that theology is done by the people; theology is contextual and should be articulated from the actions of the people. The purpose of my work is not to argue against Milbank and others, yet I recognize the value in remaining aware of Milbank’s critique. Milbank is arguing for a theology based on

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69 I’m speaking specifically of the “radical orthodoxy” movement, a term which Milbank has coined, which includes Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward among others.

70 Milbank’s work, Theology and Social Theory capsulate his argument against the use of social theory in theology. While the entire book should be read for the depth of Milbank’s argument, he sums up his approach and conclusion in the Introduction. John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (Boston: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), 1-6. A similar argument can be found in the Vatican document from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Instructions on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,” specifically section 8 which directly criticizes the Marxist analysis used in Liberation Theology.
upon scripture and tradition through which all other aspects and understandings of theology can emerge. I am not arguing that scripture and tradition should be somehow subordinate, but rather that they are understood within the context of a community. I am interested in the way scripture has been interpreted in a specific time and in a specific community, the conventions of worship and faith that have been passed on, and the rituals and customs of a particular community. I, along with others, am arguing for a contextual theology which emerges out of the particular cultures of each community.\textsuperscript{71} A “thick description” can appropriately and adequately offer symbols out of which one can discern theological conclusions.

Although we are primarily using Geertz’s anthropological and ethnographic methodology (the “thick description”) for this work, we should briefly review his definition of religion. Geertz’s definition will have a secondary level of influence, but it is something of which it is prudent to be aware of and consider; one can take Geertz’s definition of religion and use it to further illuminate his ethnographic method. Geertz describes religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”\textsuperscript{72} Morgan suggests that Geertz’s description of religion addresses the “problem of meaning;” meaning is the interpretative key for understanding and analyzing religion within a specific culture.\textsuperscript{73} Geertz is suggesting that religion connects people with ideas of meaning within their specific

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item As we will see further on in this chapter, both Lindbeck and McClendon hold to a contextual understanding of theology.
\item Geertz, \textit{Interpretation of Culture}, 90.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
cultures. Religious symbols point to linguistically mediated aspects of reality and languages found within the particular context of the community in question.\textsuperscript{74}

Thinking in Geertzian terms, we are interested in a “Baptist culture” which I contend exists. It is a culture that contains rituals, customs, patterns, and symbols. This is a culture that is pan-denominational on one level and yet exhibits differences depending on denominational connections, regional context, and the variety of members of local congregations. This culture is what I am attempting to analyze concerning ordination. As we consider the role of ordination in the American Baptist context, we will be considering the activities, speech, and patterns of behaviors by the community around and towards the pastor. We will be working with the assumption that the “Baptist culture” is a shared and public culture among American Baptists, that the symbols of the culture are public, and that they point toward meanings and understandings of ordination. In order to properly name those symbols which pertain to ordination, we will need a “thick description” of the American Baptist community historically and currently concerning the role of the pastor. Geertz’s ethnographic approach offers us the methodology for naming and articulating the symbols within the American Baptist denomination that point toward the theological understanding of ordination.

**Lindbeck – Speech and Doctrine**

George Lindbeck (b. 1923) is the son of American Lutheran missionaries. As a doctoral student he focused on medieval studies, and was later known for his ecumenical work. Lindbeck is often credited with the formation and founding of postliberal

\[\textsuperscript{74} \text{Kevin Schilbrack, “Religion, Models of, and Reality: Are We Through with Geertz?,” in} \]

\[\textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} \text{ vol. 73 no. 2 (2005), 445.}\]
theology. His short and succinct study, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, has been a highly influential theological work in the past two decades specifically in areas of ecclesiological and ecumenical advancements.

Lindbeck’s contributions to theological discourse concerning ecumenism, pluralism, and the role of doctrines in the life of the church are without argument substantial.

In writing this work, Lindbeck is addressing a major concern in ecumenical relations; how to reconcile doctrines of different traditions within Christianity which seem to directly contradict each other. Such contradictions make the prospect of Christian unity seem unachievable. Lindbeck is suggesting that a “cultural-linguistic” view of doctrine offers a way to work past these contradictions by considering the specific application (historical, contextual, etc.) of doctrines historically and currently. Such an approach views doctrines through a “regulative” or “rule” theory. The cultural-linguistic model allows one to look past the contradictions, considers the context (historical, social, etc.) in which the doctrines apply, and the greater regulative principle from which both doctrines emerge. For example, Lindbeck discusses the principles of divine presence in the ritual of Eucharist. One the one hand we have transubstantiation and on the other hand a symbolic or memorial sense of presence which may seem to directly contradict transubstantiation. Through a regulative approach, Lindbeck suggests that each doctrine embodies a rule of “sacramental thought and practice” that were important and perhaps necessary in a certain time and place and that may be able to be reconciled to a degree according to their use and function, and priority. “In short, to the degree that doctrines function as rules, … there is no logical problem in understanding how historically

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opposed positions can in some, even if not all, cases be reconciled while remaining in
themselves unchanged.”

Another example would be the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification
by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church a document in which the
influence of Lindbeck is evident. This work recognized the continuing seriousness of the
historical condemnations made by the Lutheran tradition against the Catholic Church and
vice versa concerning the doctrine of justification. Still, the document offers new insights
concerning justification that allow for the two traditions to find common ground. They
are able to articulate new expressions of the distinctive views of their traditions that no
longer fall under the condemnation of the other. For example, concerning the issue of
human “cooperation” with the free gift of grace, the document states:

20. When Catholics say that persons “cooperate” in preparing for and
accepting justification by consenting to God’s justifying action, they see
such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising
from innate human abilities.

21. According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of
cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose
God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can
reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can
only receive (mere passive) justification, they mean thereby to exclude
any possibility of contributing to one’s own justification, but do not
deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is

76 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 18.
effected by God’s Word [cf. Sources for 4.1].

In other words, both traditions recognized the historical necessity of their particular doctrines, maintain those doctrines, and recognize that both traditions were working out of a regulative principle of justification. They are no able to express their distinctive emphases in ways that account for the legitimate concerns of the other. Such an approach offers a sense of similarity between different traditions when considering the rule and allows for distinctions between traditions when considering the doctrine or practice that different communities have embraced in response to the rule (i.e. rule of sacramental presence can lead toward different doctrines).

Although I am not attempting to offer primarily an ecumenical work, Lindbeck’s regulative theory of doctrine is instrumental towards informing and influencing a methodology for doing Baptist theology. As stated, a major problem in offering a Baptist theology is the diversity found among Baptists either as different denominations, or even within denominations. In considering the rules that structure Baptist life, we will leave room for the different ways of responding to those rules as they may have occurred in regions, or even within individual churches. In this section work we will be focusing on Lindbeck’s approach to grammar and language, their correlation rules that the community would all embrace, and how doctrines may emerge in response to such rules.

Lindbeck begins his work by describing what he considers to be three different models of theology in western Christianity: cognitive, experiential-expressive, and

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The cognitive model focuses on propositions (doctrines) which are presumed to hold an ontological and universal truth. It “stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.” This approach utilizes an analytic and systematic approach to theology. For example, someone from the cognitive model would read the passage from John 14:6 where Jesus is represented as saying, “I am the way the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, New Revised Standard Version), and arrive at an exclusivist view of salvation claiming that everyone in the world will not be “saved” but through Jesus Christ. Because of the universal and ontological approach to truth in such a doctrine of salvation, there would be no other way for one to be “saved.”

The experiential-expressive model lifts up the experience of the believer prior to the doctrines of the community; doctrines symbolize and articulate the inner experience of the believer. The experiential-expressive model “interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.” We can find this model exemplified in multiple approaches to the Lord’s Supper. In such a model the experience of the individual will shape his or her understanding of the Lord’s Supper (i.e. real presence, memorial, etc.). It is not necessarily the variety of theological understandings that constitute an experiential-expressive model, but the acceptance that

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78 Lindbeck uses the terms, “types,” or “approaches” to describe the three different theologies rather than models, Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 16-18. The term “model” comes from Brad Kallenberg’s summation of Lindbeck’s work. Brad J. Kallenberg, “Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (1997), 192. I agree with Kallenberg that the term “model” captures better what Lindbeck’s project moves towards: a creation of different theological spheres based on different theological approaches. One may wonder if such models can co-exist, and while they can overlap, I would argue that one cannot participate in more than one model at a time without a dissonance in theological character. Each model demands consistency and approaches can vary from theological issue to theological issue (say, for example, taking a cognitive approach towards the existence of God but an experiential-expressive approach towards grace and forgiveness).

some will understand the liturgical act differently depending on the experience of the believer. The believer’s experience of the religious dimension of the meal will be most fully expressed in the ritual performance and doctrinal understandings of the Lord’s Supper. Lindbeck describes this model of theology as the “liberal” model emerging from and influenced by Schleiermacher.  

The third model that Lindbeck articulates and offers is the cultural-linguistic model. This approach to doctrine and theology places more emphasis on the language of a community and the rules or doctrines that emerge from language. Religion resembles “language together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures. The function of church doctrines is… communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action.”  

In other words, the language and rules of church doctrine are in essence the grammatical rules of discourse for the religious community or culture culminating in a particular church community. According to Lindbeck doctrines are, “Communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity and welfare of the group.”  

Doctrines are the rules that regulate the practices of the group which can lead to meaning and group identity.  

Whereas in the experiential-expressive model doctrines follow the experience, in the cultural-linguistic model doctrines precedes the experience.

Lindbeck is clear that the doctrines or the language of a community does not offer specific knowledge about a religion but instead focuses on “how” to be religious.  

One thinks of the second half of Pascal’s “Wager” as an example of such a theological model.

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 18.
82 Ibid., 74.
Most beginning students of philosophy and theology learn the first half of Pascal’s wager ending with the rational choice of believing in God. In the second half of his wager Pascal urges the gambler to make the bet that God exists and then to act as if God does:

They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally…  

Pascal is convinced that the very act of worship, participation in the liturgy, and participation in the values and norms of Christianity will lead to an authentic belief in the existence of God. In the same way, doctrines do not tell one what to believe but how to believe. The actions, the language, and the doctrines precede and shape one’s faith. For this work, we will be focusing on the third model Lindbeck offers, the cultural-linguistic approach.

If religion shapes and articulates the reality of the participant and the community, and language (broadly construed) is a way in which this articulation and shaping occurs, then one must focus on the place and use of language in a community in order to discern the theological stances, values, and identity of particular community. The way in which doctrine, liturgy, and other speech acts are used is the way in which we can discern the theological stances, values, and identity of a community. We must place an emphasis upon language.

Of course language consists of more than just individual words. We do not speak to each other through a staccato of individual words but with words strung together in comprehensive sentences. When we consider religious language, we are considering not

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86 Ibid., 121-127.
87 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18. Not all speech-acts are verbal hence our consideration of language must be “broadly construed.”
just singular or particular words in the community but “utterances.” Words, sentences, phrases, liturgical acts, etc. are all utterances through which a community embraces and voices a belief. As McClendon and Smith state, “Saying something, talking, speech in the full sense that saying something is a way of acting meaningfully, is to be understood in terms of the crucial significance of the speech-act.”

An “utterance” cannot exist in a linguistic vacuum but must occur in an appropriate context for it to have meaning. For example, when sitting at the dinner table for a traditional Thanksgiving meal, if without warning someone were to take a piece of bread, break it and say, “this is my body broken for you,” the action would not have any public ritual meaning because it would be outside of the context in which such an act would normally make sense. The words may be recognized as a religious utterance, but the setting and context of the words do not correspond with the context of a Thanksgiving dinner. A religious utterance “acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence.”

Lindbeck argues that there must be a correspondence between the speech and the act for the speech to hold meaning. Thus when approaching theology from a cultural-linguistic perspective, one will consider the language, the speech, and the speech-acts as they occur within a specific community to discern the doctrines of that community.

In order to gain a deeper understanding this approach, we must consider

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88 James Wm. McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 54. Speech acts, grammar, and language acts are all considered similar to “utterances” and are best articulated by Austin in How to Do Things with Words, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975). We will consider Austin’s description of language in the following section on McClendon.

89 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 65.

90 Lindbeck offers the example of the crusader’s battle cry, “Christus est Dominus,” while cleaving the skull of the infidel as an example of speech and action not corresponding. Ibid., 64.
Lindbeck’s overall view of religion. Similar to Geertz, Lindbeck describes religion as a comprehensive, interpretive scheme within a specific culture. It is a “cultural-linguistic” framework that shapes the entirety of life and thought.91 Within different religions one finds different idioms shaping and construing reality, the experience of reality, and the ordering of life.92 For example, a funeral service can articulate the theological significance of death as it is held by the community. A wedding ritual can articulate the theological significance of covenant and commitment between two people as understood and cherished by the community. The language of scripture and the liturgical context of scripture in either religious event offer meaning and understanding to suffering and blessings in one’s life. Religion articulates and shapes reality as it is experienced, language being the primary way in which such an articulation occurs.93

As one delves into the language and rules of the community one must be aware of a taxonomy or differences among doctrines. Lindbeck describes some doctrines as “operative” and others as “official.” Doctrines, official or operative, can be viewed as unconditionally necessary, conditionally essential, permanent, or temporary. Those which are unconditionally necessary are, “part of the indispensable grammar or logic of faith.”94 Those which are conditionally essential have emerged out of a historical context that demanded a doctrinal response. Lindbeck gives the example of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul stating that such a belief is necessary only when believers think in

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91 Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 32-33.
92 Ibid., 47-48.
93 This means that reality for someone in a religious context may be different than it would be for someone in a non-religious, or secular context (or may even vary from religious context to religious context). With the example of marriage, among other things, a wedding in a religious context may name the activity of God in the covenant and relationship of the two. In a non-religious, secular wedding, the two are entering into a covenant with a legal contract. Some of the current controversy around the definition of marriage stems from the different contexts of understanding and thus very different realities.
94 Ibid., 85.
terms of a “classical mind-body dualism.” On the other hand, the Trinitarian and Christological confession of faith of Chalcedon has historically been treated by mainstream Christianity as an unconditional necessary doctrine.95

Official doctrines can be considered as first-order rules whereas operative doctrines can be seen as second and even third order rules for the community.96 Lindbeck states that within global Christianity one can historically find three regulative principles: the monotheistic principle, the principle of historical specificity, and the principle of Christological maximalism.97 While official and operative doctrines may vary among different Christian denominations, all will return to and find themselves under the umbrella of these three regulative principles. For example, in some Christian communities (Methodists, Lutheran, and Catholic, for example) one will find doctrines concerning the method of baptism (infant vs. believer), different understandings of the Lord’s Supper and different ecclesiological structuring. These doctrines are important for the identity of the particular Christian communities, and despite their diversity they all connect in some way to the three regulative principles. The communal identity is shaped by operative doctrines as well as the official doctrines.

When discussing doctrine and grammar, Lindbeck claims that truth can be intrasystematic (have a truth of coherence) and/or ontological (have a truth of correspondence to reality).98 Intrasystematic truth need not always be ontological, but if a truth is ontological than it will also be intrasystematic. For example all Christians hold to the Christological maxim (the importance of Christ) which prevails through the thought

95 Lindbeck does note that some in modern times have held that the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines of Chalcedon are conditional and perhaps even reversible. Ibid., 86-87.
96 Ibid., 80.
97 Ibid., 94
98 Ibid., 64.
and action of Christian communities. This is an ontological truth because the truth of the community is corresponding with the reality of the person of Jesus and the event of Christ. Yet some Christian communities in attempting to understand the particularities of the Christological maxim adhere to a sense of pacifism as a Christian responsibility. Such a stance does not necessarily correspond to the reality of the person of Jesus and the event of Christ even as it is embraced by various communities. This is an example of an intrasystematic truth found within Christianity; it is a truth of a specific community but not necessarily a truth for all of Christianity. What some hold as a truth found within Christianity is not accepted as a truth for all Christians, creating tension and at the same time room for ecumenical dialogue.

There are a number of concerns and voices of caution found in the academic community since Lindbeck wrote his work. While we cannot consider every one here there are some concerns that we should be aware of as we work with Lindbeck’s theories and ideas. Specifically I will be considering those criticisms which emerge from what many would describe as a realist stance and a pragmatist stance.

Briefly, realism holds to the idea that, “the kinds of things which exist, and what they are like, are independent of us and the way in which we find out about them.” There are truths in the world that exist independent of language. From the realist camp

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99 I recognize that many of those who embrace a pacifist stance would hold to the idea that there is no other way to follow Christ, yet because there are many other Christians who disagree, and because it is an argument that cannot be made with complete certainty it is not an ontological truth.

100 Some may argue that Lindbeck is also dabbling with a logical positivist approach, specifically with his experiential-expressive model of theology. Thus the realist stance correlates with the cognitive model and the pragmatist stance with the cultural-linguistic model. While that argument can be made and certainly has merit for investigation in this work I am focusing on the tension between the cognitive and the cultural-linguistic models, hence the focus on the realist and the pragmatist approaches. This tension between realism and pragmatism is discussed in Timothy Jackson’s article “Against Grammar,” Religious Studies Review 11, no. 3 (July 1985), 240-245.

we find a desire to claim fundamental truths that can plainly and predictability be stated and which correspond to reality.\textsuperscript{102} Lindbeck’s official doctrines would be an example of these “truths.” If we were to return to Lindbeck’s different models of theology, the realists would be very comfortable with the cognitive model of theology. Because of the cultural-linguistic reliance on the language of a specific community as a means of discerning truth for that community, realists claim that there is a tendency in this approach to lean towards fideism.\textsuperscript{103} In particular, realists criticize the idea that the main doctrinal statements of a religious community are tied to the forms of life of that particular community, suggesting doctrinal relativity.\textsuperscript{104} If the grammar of a religious community does not particularly describe what one believes or what one does not believe to be true but rather how one should believe, finding reasons to connect with other communities under the banner of Christianity can be problematic. Realists have claimed that Lindbeck desires a fixed, catechetic standard of doctrines, rather than an ontological standard.\textsuperscript{105} For example, when discussing the Trinity, Lindbeck may be more concerned about how the community speaks about the Trinity than about what the Trinity actually is; the reality is made secondary to the grammar.

On the other hand, pragmatists in this context are concerned with individual actions, i.e. what the individual sees and believes as a way of doing theology. Richard

\textsuperscript{102} For example, O’Neill claims that there are some basic truths that are central to Christianity, and such truths are constant and independent of the particularities of various communities. Colman O’Neill, “The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth,” \textit{The Thomist} 49, no. 3 (July 1985), 442.

\textsuperscript{103} When discussing Lindbeck and this particular concern, Terrence Reynolds turns to a “strong” sense of fideism, that being “a position that depicts religious faith as counter to reason.” A weak understanding of fideism would hold that theological claims cannot be universally proven or defended, but rather are associated with the form of life the religious claims have helped to shape. A “weak” fideism is often associated with Wittgenstein. Terrence Reynolds, “Walking Apart, Together: Lindbeck and McFague on Theological Method,” \textit{The Journal of Religion} 77, no. 1 (January, 1997), 45 n. 3.

\textsuperscript{104} Reynolds, “Walking Apart,” 45.48.

\textsuperscript{105} Timothy P. Jackson, “Against Grammar,” 244.
Rorty suggests that in trying to understand pragmatism one starts with Alexander Bain’s definition: “belief as a rule or habit of action.”\textsuperscript{106} If we were again to use Lindbeck’s model, pragmatists could be most comfortable in the cultural-linguistic model of theology. We recall that in this model of theology language articulates the doctrine(s) of the community. Remember that Lindbeck claims that language precedes religious emotion or feeling. One cannot have a revelatory experience without the grammar to express such an experience. Yet some pragmatists would claim that such an approach conflates the explanatory nature of doctrines with the belief and experience of the confessor.\textsuperscript{107} In such a case, language does not stand alone but is deeply connected with the experience of the individual in a way that could be interpreted as leaning towards a realist stance.

Perhaps the greatest point of tension with the pragmatists is in Lindbeck’s attempt to describe some doctrines as “official,” or what he claims are “regulative principles:” the monotheistic principle, the principle of historical specificity, and the principle of Christological maximalism.\textsuperscript{108} Timothy Jackson claims that Lindbeck construes epistemological differences as alethiological (doctrines about truth) in placing such doctrines beyond the grammar of the community existing independently of the grammar of the community. If the focus is more on truth than on knowing and if doctrines can each have their own understanding and basis of truth independent of the grammar of the community, than one must wonder if Lindbeck is trying to establish truth claims about God in a way that is similar to truth claims found in a realist camp. It is this point,


\textsuperscript{108} Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 94.
Jackson argues, that the pragmatic objection is voiced most loudly: “The pragmatist sees no reason why a particular grammar or story or culture or creed should be any more immune to the vicissitudes of time and place than first-order claims.”\(^{109}\) Offering hope to the pragmatists, Thomas Hastings claims that Lindbeck is reducing the *signum et res* of a religious experience to a particular language game of a particular community which perhaps is fidieistic and which may not be acceptable to realists but in line with pragmatist thinking. Yet Lindbeck still wrestles with the urge to name overarching, “official” doctrines for Christianity, causing tension with the pragmatist camp.\(^{110}\)

In sum, tension emerges out of the disagreement between a realist and pragmatist approach to language, doctrine, and theology. Such an argument is enmeshed in Lindbeck’s intrasystematic and ontological approaches to truth within a community. The realists would do away with the intrasystematic approach claiming it is relativistic and the pragmatists would do away with the ontological claiming it is overarching and constricting of the truths of the local communities.\(^{111}\) Lindbeck is trying to hold onto both.

A slightly different critique comes from Miroslov Volf, who considers what influence culture may have on cultural-linguistic systems found within particular Christian communities. Different cultures have different influences and can very easily influence a religious community in one way or another. Such an observation causes one


to wonder if the grammar of a community is unique to that particular community or even to a particular tradition. We must always remember that the grammar of a community is to one degree or another a product of the larger culture in which it is embedded; i.e. how much is the theology influenced by the culture? Volf is suggesting that the experience and the context of the community is important to keep in mind along with the language of the community when doing a theology that is focused on the grammar of a specific community.112

With this overview of Lindbeck in mind, let us consider a possible application to the American Baptist denomination, particularly Baptist ordination. As has already been mentioned, American Baptists do not have prescribed doctrines and dogmas as a part of their community. Although Baptists are closely tied to the greater Christian tradition, many of the theological particularities of the denomination have emerged from the language and experience of the people (lay and clergy). When considering ordination within the American Baptist community, we will not focus specifically on what the texts of the community (or the teachings of the tradition, as referenced earlier) claim it means to be ordained. Such a top-down approach would favor a cognitive model of theology (although such a consideration will be part of the analysis of this work). Nor will we consider solely the experience of individuals and arrive at a plurality of meanings of ordination among Baptists which would favor an experiential-expressive model. We will focus on how one functions when one is ordained, but we will also look further for a consistency of functionality within the American Baptist denomination. Functionality

will be discerned through the speech around ordination on behalf of the ordained and the community. Such a theological awareness, as it is understood by a religious community, is intratextual: it is found in the use of language within the community itself (rather than extratextual: language between religious communities concerning ordination). Because such a study is intratextual, it will require a “thick description” of the community with a sensitivity towards the speech acts and utterances as they occur within community.  

From this “thick description,” one can articulate the grammar of a particular religious community, and how that grammar pertains to doctrines or rules for living within that particular religious community. As Geertz suggests, within such a community one can find symbols pointing to meaning. The language, utterances, and speech-acts of the people among American Baptists are among those symbols which point to the theology of the people. We will be interested in the grammar and rules which American Baptists have adopted to shape their lives and faith as we consider our ecclesiological question of ordination. Lindbeck’s grammatical approach to doctrines within the community gives us the framework needed to articulate and discern such a theology from the speech of the community.

As we build upon the work of these scholars, it is important to remember that we are focusing on a Baptist denomination within Christianity. The realist and pragmatist critiques are coming from and considering theology done within the larger context of the Christian community. The tensions between ontological truth and intrasystematic truth

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113 Ibid., 114-115. It is through “listening” to the way individuals in the community speak of the pastor, how the pastor speaks of him or her self, and how the pastor exists in the community that we may discern how the idea and practice of ordination occurs with the Baptist community. Hence we will need to have a “thick description” (as understood by Geertz) of the community.

114 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 80. As one employs what is widely accepted as a Geertzian term it is important to keep in mind that Geertz was concerned with meaning found within the shared symbols of the community while Lindbeck is concerned with functionality of language in articulating the shared meaning of the community.
exist when considering the larger Christian context, yet are not as pronounced within a sub-group such as the Baptists. Within the American Baptist denomination, when considering the theology of ordination, we need not focus on universal, ontological truths (although Baptists generally do agree on the basic ones that Lindbeck suggests, i.e. the Christological maximalism, the historical specificity, and the monotheistic emphasis), but on the intrasystematic truths particular to the community. What we are concerned with is how ordination is treated and talked about in the Baptist community, the consistency of the grammar, and the implications such speech patterns have on the theology of the community. We are not concerned with the greater pan-Christian meaning of ordination as understood by realists or pragmatists, but only ordination within this specific community.\textsuperscript{115}

The pragmatist/realist tension and criticism will not be resolved in this study. The concern is not central to our particular use of Lindbeck because we will primarily look to Lindbeck’s taxonomy of doctrines (the notion that some doctrines, those which are official, are unconditionally necessary and others are conditionally necessary, while others are operative) as a tool for analysis when considering Baptist distinctives. A great amount of strife has erupted in Baptist life over the tension among ideas such as soul freedom, church autonomy, and associational life. This tension has emerged for various reasons, social, political, and theological, and exists in large part because of a lack of clarity concerning a possible taxonomy of the distinctives which could be utilized in Baptist life. For example, a taxonomy of Baptist distinctives could clarify whether soul

\textsuperscript{115} I recognize that such an approach does place me more in a pragmatist camp. By looking only at the theology of ordination within one particular denomination I am tacitly admitting that other particular movements of Christianity may have their own theology of ordination, and that there very well may not be one overall theology of ordination from which all others derive, but instead a plurality of theologies.
freedom takes precedence over church autonomy and associational life.116 Because Baptists tend to turn to different distinctives for authority depending on the argument he or she is trying to make, a lack of clarity concerning the hierarchal priority of the distinctives can further muddle the investigation and conclusions.117 Lindbeck brings forth the question of conditional and unconditional doctrines when faced with such tension in the larger Christian context considering the difference between the doctrine of original sin, the Immaculate Conception, and the infallibility of the Pope.118 A similar taxonomy can be considered and applied to Baptist distinctives as they are found within the American Baptist denomination. Some distinctives were historically necessary (conditional) at the time they emerged while others are seen and continually necessary (unconditional).119 In addition, I would argue that some of the discerned doctrines of American Baptist life (as derived from the grammar and speech acts) are official while others are operative. Those which are official are essential and those which are operative are important. As Lindbeck suggests, official doctrines are conditionally or unconditionally essential depending on the context in which they emerged. For example, as we will see in Chapter 4, in the 1700s it was essential that one ordained would receive


117 I would argue that such a hierarchy is necessary for articulating a practical ecclesiology but one in which the hierarchy varies depending on context rather than one that is always set in stone. Because this work is focused on ordination I do not have the space to fully treat such a possible view of Baptist life but recognize that it is something which merits further study.

118 This is specifically found in chapter 5, “Testing the Theory: Christology, Mariology, and Infallibility,” of Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine*, 91-111.

119 For example, some in the Catholic-Baptist group would argue that the idea of Soul Freedom emerged from an Enlightenment context, and therefore a conditional necessary distinctive.
the title “Elder.” Yet as time continued, the individual ordained would receive the title “Reverend.” The title is a conditionally necessary doctrine based on the rule (as I am arguing) that a change occurs in ordination. On the other hand, the “call” is something that occurs throughout the history considered in this work and can be considered an unconditionally essential doctrine. In this view the identity of the community rests on official doctrines and is shaped by operative doctrines; the integrity of the community’s identity does not hinge on the presence of an operative doctrine.

While Lindbeck wrote his book with the ecumenical movement in mind, I will stay within the American Baptist denomination. Thus I will not be considering the way in which official doctrines (or convictions as we will see in the next section) are related to regulative principles of the greater Christian movement – that is a project for another time. Instead, I will be focusing on the American Baptist community itself and the ways in which official and operative doctrines function in shaping and informing the identity of the community.

For example, a believer’s or adult baptism is a necessary doctrine for Baptist identity and the method of baptism is important, but not essential. While most Baptists will argue that one must be immersed, those in a dry climate or individuals with a serious fear of water will be baptized through sprinkling or some other method. Immersion is an operative doctrine, it is important to the identity of the community, but it is not essential or necessary.

Since we are specifically focusing on the understanding of ordination, some distinctives will have prominence in our discussion and may be considered necessary while others may not enter into our conversation and may be considered important. As
we examine the role of the pastor in the church, among individuals, among Baptist
churches, and conflicting Baptist distinctives, it will be helpful to refer to such a
taxonomy that Lindbeck offers. As we articulate specific theological claims concerning
ordination, we will undoubtedly need to consider a hierarchy of some sort of these claims
so as to be more precise in our understanding.¹²⁰

Finally, we should take some heed of Volf’s cautionary comment that the context
can influence the grammar (and thus the theology) of a community. Each Baptist
congregation is different from the next due to geographic location, the specific members
of the congregation, and various cultural influences. It is very possible that the cultural
influences arising from a specific location can influence a particular Baptist community,
leading to a diversity of grammar within the American Baptist denomination. Yet I am
claiming that even within this diversity we can find common speech patterns, ideas, and
practices within Baptist churches, and based on this claim we can arrive at some broad
conclusions about ordination which apply to the larger American Baptist denomination
rather than just to one particular community.¹²¹ It is here that the realist/pragmatist
tension can be found. Some could accuse me of taking a realist stance when I attempt to
speak for the denomination. In my attempt to offer an ecclesiology of the American
Baptist denomination I am offering “truths” that would stand independent of the
particular language of specific Baptist churches. Others may be wary that such an
approach may lean towards pragmatism which looks only at the grammar of particular

¹²⁰ For example, in chapters 4, 5, and 6 we will see tension around the authority of the pastor and
the freedom of the individual as well as between the autonomy of the local church and the authority of the
association when choosing a pastor. Lindbeck’s taxonomy will help us steer through such tensions.
¹²¹ McClendon makes this claim, not just about Baptists, but about the “free church” movement,
 i.e. the Church of the Brethren, the Mennonites, the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), etc. Thus
McClendon uses a lowercase “b” when describing the “baptists” claiming to speak for a larger movement.
James Wm McClendon, Ethics, 19-20, 26-27.
church in a particular time and place. I argue that the American Baptist denomination is a community and even as it is made up of particular churches, there is a grammar that is a part of the denomination writ large. If the denomination can be broken down into the individual churches, then it can also be broken down to individual people in specific moments and places. Such a break-down of language and grammar can lead to such a private approach to speech that in the end it would lead towards no language at all.\footnote{Wittgenstein’s argument against the notion of a private language is a propos. Briefly, in such an argument Wittgenstein claims that private language does not have any meaning because it is not shared with other people or groups. Thus the speech of a Baptist church does not have any meaning if it is not connected with Baptist history and contemporary Baptist parlance. Ray Monk gives an excellent summary of Wittgenstein’s refutation of the idea of private language, referencing Wittgenstein’s \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §243-307. Ray Monk, \textit{How to Read Wittgenstein} (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 87-93.} The diversity of Baptist communities is a reality, and while I will attempt to speak of ordination across the Baptist experience, we must always keep in mind the possibility and reality of diversity due to contextual influence; i.e. there will always be exceptions to the rules.

\textbf{McClendon – Happy Requests and Convictions}

James William McClendon, Jr. is the only one of the three scholars discussed in this chapter who comes from a Baptist tradition and has offered a specifically “baptist” theology (albeit with a small “b” but for particular reasons).\footnote{In offering “baptist” theology, McClendon is grouping Baptists with other Free Church traditions as part of a movement within Christianity. According to McClendon, some examples of other groups which share the convictions and characteristics of the “baptist” movement are the Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, the Mennonites, and the Church of the Brethren. Thus the upper case “B” for McClendon signifies Baptist denominations as they have emerged in the United States and England, while the lower case “b” signifies a movement that began with the Anabaptists and continues today beyond the confines of denominations. For this work, I will be considering specifically the American Baptists as a denominational partially to focus the work and partially because even as the groups share many commonalities, there are enough differences to merit separate studies of theological and ecclesiological matters. Thus I will use the upper case “B” for Baptists. James Wm McClendon, \textit{Ethics}, 19-20, 26-27.} He grew up in Louisiana, and taught at various colleges and universities around the country. McClendon is known for his work \textit{Biography as Theology} as well as his three volume systematic theology,
McClendon was a distinguished scholar in residence at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. In this section we will look at McClendon’s understanding of convictions of a community as they occur in the narrative context of the community and how such an understanding of convictions can inform our work in naming a theology of ordination within the American Baptist denomination.

Well aware of the difficulties and pitfalls one faces when trying to offer a Baptist theology, McClendon embraced a non-foundational approach to theology. Foundationalism focuses on epistemological questions of truth claims, i.e. how truth claims can be justified. It is an approach that rests upon the idea that claims of truth must begin somewhere; there must be a source of any truth claim. A Non-foundational approach argues that claims need not be justified by a greater source of truth, or a larger truth-claim. Rather, truth can exist simply within the context of the community from which the claim is made. With a non-foundational approach, one does not consider a source of truth independent of the community, but instead recognizes the formative texts of the community, focusing on language as clues towards understanding the social context of the claims of truth as they exist within the community. In adopting such an approach to theology, McClendon employed a Wittgensteinian and Austinian focus on the actual use of the language leading one to consider the context within which the speech act occurs. Thus McClendon is not focused on the meaning of the words themselves, but on the way words are used as well as the context in which they are used.

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126 Ibid., 14.
The words themselves do not carry individual meanings, but when used along with other words in an order that makes sense they will then have meaning, showing or pointing to an idea or concept. Such an approach to language and meaning is influenced by Wittgenstein’s statement that “there is no more basic foundation for language than the conventions of the community that uses it.” Similar to Lindbeck’s focus on how doctrines functions more than on what doctrines mean, such an approach emphasizes the speech patterns, grammar and utterances of the community as well as how such speech patterns actually work within the community.

As already stated, the text of the community consists of the language, speech acts, and grammar of that community. In this view of language we find similarities between McClendon, Geertz and Lindbeck. From an awareness and understanding of the speech acts, rules of speaking and language games particular to the community, one can glean some of that community’s values and convictions. As we consider this view of language it is important to avoid the universal, or realist, position towards language and meaning. Language shows, or points towards an understanding within the community, but only within the local community. In the Festschrift for McClendon, Theology without Foundations, Nancey Murphy describes this linguistic approach to theology which McClendon utilizes, noting J.L. Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s influence. Murphy describes the social dimension and context in which speech occurs and meaning is found, listing the linguistic, the social, the reference (that which the conversation was about), the expressivity of the statement, and the uptake (the way in which the speech is understood). All of these contexts are interwoven and overlapping each other in discourse and have

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127 Ibid., 15.
bearing on the speech-act’s outcome. An awareness and understanding of these various aspects of the context of language can help one to articulate a thick understanding of the speech act.

James McClendon and James Smith claim that utterances or speech-acts, being more than a random collection of words, occur and have meaning if the speaker is informed on the subject. The speech-act is a “happy request” if the speaker and the receiver/hearer share a common language, if the common convention of speaking is understood, and if certain “representative” conditions and “affective” conditions are met. Thus an utterance or speech act occurs as it functions within a context including the content of the utterance. The utterance always occurs within the shared context of the speaker and the hearer involving and utilizing a psychological, representative, and a performative influence of speech.

Such an approach to language and meaning cannot occur in a “private” or through an individual’s interpretation of the text; meaning in a text cannot be found in isolation but within the context of a community. The actual meaning of the text itself exists in the transmission from one person or party to another person or party; it is in speaking and in hearing (i.e. the transmission) that the meaning of a text occurs. Thus for understanding and fluency to occur within a religious community (or for that matter any community), all parties involved (the author/speaker and the reader/hearer) must participate in a communal context. One cannot observe from outside, from a supposed

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129 McClendon and Smith’s “happy request” is very similar to Austin’s “felicitous statement.” James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions*, 56-69.
“objective” view, and know and fully understand the meaning of what is being said and done. For example, when a Baptist (or another Christian) holds up the piece of bread during the ritual of the Lord’s Supper and says, “In remembrance of Christ’s broken body, let us eat,” all those who are a part of the community understand what it is that the pastor is suggesting: eating the bread is a memorial act of the Last Supper as well as the person of Jesus Christ. An outsider may be confused about the connection (or lack of connection) between a piece of bread and a broken body as well as the necessity to remember something that happened thousands of years ago. The utterance makes sense within the context of the community.

Because worship is a communal act, the event of worship holds promise and potential for the articulation and analysis of speech-acts shared by the community. In his article “Sacraments and Speech Acts,” A.P. Martinich employs the writings and ideas of Austin to offer an in-depth analysis of the sacraments as speech-acts. Martinich claims that all sacramental acts (as understood from a Catholic perspective) are themselves speech-acts which, as McClendon would agree, and are understood and experienced within the context of the community. In applying Searl’s analysis and use of Austin, Martinich shows how each sacrament is a combination of a variety of conditions which affect the outcome of the reception of the sacrament. For example there are “hearer-relative conditions” which focus on the participants in the act, accounting for ignorance, deafness, etc. In addition, Martinich offers “content conditions” and “preparatory conditions” as well as “sincerity” and “essential conditions” as affecting the reception of

133 Ibid., 264.
134 This is one possible view of what a community may understand to be happening. Recognizing that there are a number of different ways to understand the Lord’s Supper, for the sake of argument I am offering only one as an example.
the speech-act of a sacrament. According to Martinich, each sacramental act in worship consists of a combination of conditions which when all satisfied make what McClendon would describe as a “happy request” or as Martinich writes, “a successful performance of a sacrament.”

When McClendon considers language and speech acts, he considers them within the context of a narrative. The narrative is the story of the community beyond the present context, taking into consideration the language and speech patterns of the past and the way in which speech patterns and language have either stayed the same or changed. This understanding of the community suggests that a community is a group that is historically founded and at the same time moving into the future. Thus in discerning meaning in a community one does not only consider the present language but the language and speech acts of the past and the potential speech acts of the future. Speech acts are not isolated incidents, but occurrences connected to past speech acts and informing future speech acts. With such a long view of the community in mind, one can begin to articulate the theology of the community as it emerges out of the context of that community.

McClendon defines theology as “the discovery, understanding, and transformation of the conviction of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.” The convictions of the community are the centrally held statements out of which the theology of the community emerges. Convictions are not doctrines, but those things which individuals

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136 Sewell makes this critique of Geertz, that his methodology considers a culture in only a present focused context and not a past into present context. A narrative view of theology considers the historical view of a community. Sewell, “Geertz, Cultural Systems, and History.”

hold dear to their lives. Convictions are communal beliefs expressed through speech.\textsuperscript{138} By keeping the narrative and the context central to one’s research, one can discern and articulate the convictions of the community and develop a theology of the community.\textsuperscript{139}

For example, McClendon describes the Baptist story or vision as “none other than the shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community.” This shared awareness comes out of the convictional statement, “this is that,” as central to Baptist ecclesiology, claiming that many Baptists have taken that phrase and the context within which it occurs and have understood it as descriptive of the church today. McClendon derives such a statement from Peter’s speech in Acts (Acts 2:16), when Peter claimed that the early church was the gathering at the moment that Joel and other prophets were speaking of, i.e. a “spirit-filled” time of prophesy and visions: “this is that.” Many Baptists embrace and incarnate such a vision and understanding of the community.\textsuperscript{140} According to McClendon, “this is that” is a phrase of conviction in Baptist ecclesiology which claims and embraces Peter’s vision as well as the vision of Joel and other prophets as a vision and description of the community. The convictions of the community look to that which happened to the early church and that which is promised to happen through Christ.\textsuperscript{141}

McClendon is offering a narrative view of a community with a methodological focus on language (broadly construed) as a source from which a theological analysis can

\textsuperscript{138} McClendon, “Narrative Ethics,” 385. See also, McClendon and Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions, 85-95.

\textsuperscript{139} For example, the Baptist distinctives may be seen as some of the convictions of the Baptist community. Jeffrey D. Vickery, review of Ethics: Systematic Theology, vol. 1, by James Wm. McClendon Jr., Review and Expositor 102 (Summer 2005), 534.

\textsuperscript{140} McClendon, Ethics, 32.

\textsuperscript{141} We should note that McClendon is not the only Baptist theologian to offer such an encompassing approach to ecclesiology, nor is McClendon’s take definitive. Volf, for example, offers Matthew 18:20, “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (NRSV) as the “convictional” text for a Free Church (of which Baptists are a part) ecclesiology.
emerge. In this work I will be considering the narrative of a particular Baptist church (First Baptist, Swansea Massachusetts) along with a more general though still selective narrative of the American Baptists denomination. I will be interested in the language concerning the role and the relationship of pastor with the congregation in the broader, national narrative as well as the specific, particular narrative, past and present. The language/speech used by the community and the convictions of ordination which emerge out of the language of the community will inform us of a theology of ordination which exists within the Baptist narrative.

A Synthesis

My intention is to offer a Baptist theology derived from the actions, grammar, and speech acts found in the American Baptist denomination. I contend that a theology of ordination exists within the American Baptists, but the speech acts pertaining to ordination need to be deduced before they are analyzed hence the emphasis on language and speech acts. Through an analysis of the speech acts, convictions pertaining to ordination can be discerned pointing to a theology of ordination that is true to the nuances and particularities of American Baptists. The writings, influences, and ideas of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon offer the tools necessary to craft an approach which will lead us towards such a goal. We have selectively reviewed particular areas of each scholar’s work that are germane to this project. Here I will suggest a synthesis of these areas that will provide a methodological foundation for this work.

The work of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon combined make evident that in an effort to find meaning, it is essential to have an awareness of the speech patterns, grammar, and the narrative context of the American Baptist denomination if one hopes to
ascertain anything clearly articulating a theology of ordination. Geertz suggests a “thick
description” of the community in order to obtain a full depth of the symbols (i.e. speech
acts) as they are used in the community. We will employ a Geertzian ethnographic
approach attempting to obtain a “thick description” of particular speech acts in the
Baptist community, specifically those around the community’s treatment and practices
concerning the pastor. Thus, the speech and grammar of the community around the
pastor, that is, around the way a pastor is chosen, ordained, and expected to act in the
community, will be of specific interest for this work. A thick description of a particular
church as well as the national denomination will offer a contextual location of the speech
acts of the community pertaining to ordination.

After obtaining a “thick” awareness of the context, the linguistic symbols,
utterances, and speech acts, specifically those that occur around issues of ordination as
well as the role and presence of the pastor, we will then consider what Lindbeck would
call “doctrines” or what McClendon would call “convictions” uncovered by our
examination of those specific speech-acts named. The convictions of the community
will be based upon those speech acts which can be considered official and supported by
those speech acts considered operative. Using Lindbeck’s taxonomy of doctrines, we will
consider which statements in Baptist life reflect or express Baptist primary convictions
about ordination, where tension may be found around such statements, and how this
tension is normally dealt with. We will also be considering those convictions which are
secondary in the life of a Baptist community. By comparing the speech of the local
community with the speech of the denomination (see *teachings of the tradition* and

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142 Granted, Baptist do not speak of doctrines and will seldom admit to their existence, but rules,
doctrines, or convictions exist within the Baptist community as this work intends to show.
practices of the people from the previous chapter) and prioritizing the speech acts as they are found, such convictions can be articulated.

As we shift between the primary and secondary convictions we have articulated from the utterances and speech acts we find from the Baptist community, we will need to keep the broader Baptist denominational narrative in mind. As already stated, a historical view of the American Baptists is essential for understanding our findings in the larger Baptist context. Following McClendon’s lead, we will be sure that the convictions of the community are placed in the narrative context. Thus that which directs the narrative and that which individuals find to be important to the life of the community will be the central focus for the community’s story. We will be asking what changes over time and what has stayed the same. This approach ensures that the convictions of ordination are not considered as an isolated moment in the story of the community but instead are seen as an integral part of the community past, present, and future. We will look closely at the speech used as well as the speech acts which have been and are employed, and we will at the same time consider a greater narrative within the American Baptist denomination.

From the writings and ideas of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon we will discern the story of the role and understanding (theology/convictions) of pastors within the greater Baptist story. A deductive approach will employ a cultural analysis, an organization of the findings, and place the findings in a larger narrative context. In other words, we will engage the Baptist community on a “thick” level, we will look for statements or acts which point towards convictions concerning ordination, and we will be sure to keep these convictions in the larger narrative context.
Conclusion

Offering a Baptist theology is difficult work due in part to the grassroots nature of the American Baptist denomination, the emphasis on the local church identity over a denomination identity, and the lack a major leader or theologian to offer concrete markers of identity and doctrine. Thus in doing a Baptist theology we must consider the language and speech-acts of the people in the pews as a source of doctrine. In order to do so, we must develop a methodological approach that discerns those speech-acts pertinent to ordination and from those speech acts can aid in articulating theological statements.

This chapter has developed the concepts which underlay the deductive methodology for this work. It has laid out the tools not only necessarily for a thick analysis, but also for a description and organization of the data that will give us what will be necessary to offer a solid theological analysis of ordination in the Baptist tradition. In the next chapter we will consider an analytical approach toward the findings and consider in depth the offered hypothesis of a Baptist theology of ordination.
CHAPTER 3 – SACRAMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction

In the previous chapter we considered the role language plays in discerning and articulating a Baptist theology. In this chapter I will offer an analysis of ordination in the American Baptist denomination that will be applied to data found using the methodology suggested in the previous chapter. This analysis will give depth to the statements, utterances, and speech patterns ascertained from the American Baptist denomination and will offer an articulation of a theology of ordination.

The analysis that I am offering will consider a sacramental view of ordination as it occurs within the Baptist context. It is my claim that when one is ordained, the essence of the relationship between the individual and the community changes. Such a change can be described and articulated using sacramental consciousness as it is understood in Catholic contexts. Because of a presumed dissonance between Baptist life and sacramental thought (a dissonance I will discuss later in this chapter), arriving at a sacramental understanding of ordination will take several steps. First we will consider the potential for sacramental language and a sacramental awareness among Baptists historically and currently. Second we will examine the theological concept of “sacramental consciousness,” its roots, and a number of current understandings of sacramental consciousness held by Catholic scholars. It is important that we have a firm understanding of sacramental consciousness as it will be the point of entry into our
analysis of the Baptist experience and understanding of ordination. Finally we will consider a conceptual application of sacramental consciousness with a focus on ordination and the role of the ordained pastor within the Baptist context. As we examine the history of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA in the following two chapters an understanding and application of sacramental consciousness will help in pointing to moments of what may seem to be an ineffable experience. Such an application will aid in claiming such experiences as part of a theology of ordination.

Baptists and Sacraments: A Brief History

Baptists have a history of skepticism towards anything considered Catholic or connected to Catholicism. It is because of this skepticism that many Baptist react negatively towards the word “sacrament,” sacramental concepts, or to anything else that could be seen as connected to or influenced by Catholicism.\(^{143}\) Although such a negative reaction is a very real part of Baptist identity and does inform many Baptist liturgical practices and theological assumptions about sacraments, it unfairly paints a monolithic view of Baptist relationships with Catholicism, including sentiments concerning sacramentality, and discourages an embrace of sacramental theology as it is practiced within the community. Some Baptist scholars argue that within Baptist history one could find trends which have a more sympathetic view of the theological and liturgical notion of sacraments and/or a sacramental awareness within the community while others would argue that the presence of a sacramental awareness is foreign to a Baptist community. Because a major focus of this work is to consider the application and articulation of sacramental consciousness within the Baptist context, it is important to be aware of the

\(^{143}\) Such a history of skepticism is not unique to Baptists, but is endemic of an anti-Catholic sentiment shared by the majority of Protestant churches in the 18th and 19th centuries in America. For a brief survey of the Protestant–Catholic tension, see: Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 208-210.
historic and current tensions that surround notions of sacramentality. We will first briefly examine some of the roots and trends of the anti-sacramental sentiment in different aspects of Baptist history and life and then consider some of the places within other aspects of Baptist history and life where one can find an appreciation for a sacramental awareness.

The Anti-Sacramental Trends

Historically and currently one can find among Baptists a negative view of Catholicism and of anything connected with Catholicism. This view has shaped many Baptists’ reluctant attitude toward the possibility of identifying a sacramental awareness within specific aspects of worship. Rather than speaking of specific sacraments — moments when God is recognized as present within the community via liturgical symbols — Baptists tend to speak of ordinances — moments when one responds to the call and command of Christ. These different understandings may very likely emerge from a prevailing assumption among many Baptists that ordinances do not have the same nature and purpose as sacraments. The liturgical actions of baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper are seen as symbolic of a response to the call and command of Christ. Yet many Baptists do not see these liturgical moments as acts infused with grace; they are not seen as an outward sign of an inward grace. Thus many Baptists do not view an ordinance as precipitating and participating in the presence and actions of God in a

144 Stanly Grenz suggests the Reformers’ reaction to medieval sacramentarianism as a major reason for their move toward understanding baptism and Lord’s Supper as ordinances. His cites Strong’s Systematic Theology as an explanation of ordinances as a response to the call and command of God. Stanley J. Grenz, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances,” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 80.

145 Grenz refers to the W.T. Conner’s writings, Christian Doctrine, in which Grenz claims that the preference for “ordinance” over “sacrament” is closely connected to the tension with Catholicism and the efficacy of the rites of the church. Reformers (Baptists) questioned the efficacy of church rites and sacraments thus favoring ordinances. Ibid., 77.
specific and real-time way, but instead as a response to the actions, presence, and commands of God in history and in one’s life.\textsuperscript{146} For example, as a sacrament, the Lord’s Supper emphasizes the real presence of Christ in the elements. Through participating in the sacrament, i.e. taking the elements, one receives grace from God. A non-sacramental point of view emphasizes the believer’s response to Christ’s command to eat and drink in remembrance of his life. The act of taking the elements symbolizes a response and a remembrance of Christ’s command to “take and eat” rather than a response to the real presence of Christ and the real grace received through the sacrament promised by God. Similar things can be said of baptism; a non-sacramental view sees baptism as a response to the actions of Christ in history (his baptism) and his call that all be baptized. Baptism is a public response to the call of Christ rather than a moment in which the participant receives grace. Stanley Fowler suggests that this view of baptism and the Lord’s Supper emerges out of a Zwinglian interpretation of the two rituals. Many Baptists today assume that such an interpretation is a part of the DNA of Baptist identity, an assumption that Fowler strives to prove as false.\textsuperscript{147}

Historically we can trace some of these anti-sacramental tendencies to the very beginnings of Baptist history. Many of the early Baptists of England in the 1600s rejected liturgical sacramalism because it was seen as a particular moment in which grace was


\textsuperscript{147} For example, if one were to read Hudson and Maring’s description of baptism and Lord’s Supper in Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, a book that (through its place on many seminary reading lists) is seen by many American Baptists as an authoritative guide and introduction to Baptist life, one would find a stance, albeit nuanced, toward a confessional view of baptism and a memorial view of the Lord’s Supper, rather than a sacramental or grace-infused understanding of the two liturgical events. Maring and Hudson, A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, 152-166. Fowler, on the other hand, claims that such a view of the Lord’s Supper and baptism is a “modern innovation.” Cross, “The Myth of English Baptist Anti-Sacramentalism,” 132.
bestowed through the ritual in question (baptism or Lord’s Supper). These English Baptists rejected the idea that a ritual itself could lead to one’s salvation, but they did not reject the idea that a ritual could play a part in understanding one’s salvation. 148

Writing about 17th century Baptists, Philip E. Thompson considers the anti-sacramental bias of leaders such as John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, and Thomas Helwys, and their questions about the efficacy of baptism toward ensuring salvation. The prevailing sentiment among these thinkers was that the ritual represented an occurrence that had already happened (acceptance of the grace of Jesus Christ), but did not by itself insure the bestowal of grace or the guarantee of salvation for the individual.149

In the same essay, Thompson considers the difference between the words “Sacrament” and “Ordinance” for the early Baptists. Grenz traces the differences in terminology back to the reactive anti-Catholic sentiment of the Reformations. Changes in the number of sacraments that would be accepted (in most cases moving from seven to two), the understanding of the nature of the sacraments, and the shift in terminology from sacrament to ordinance were all influenced by the extremely anti-Catholic milieu among Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries.150 Baptists and others were reacting in part to the shared assumption that a Catholic understanding of sacraments risked an unhealthy focus upon the clergy, elevated their status and position in the community, and increased the risk of sacerdotal practices within the church. For many of the reformers, the word “sacrament” itself had become tied to the perceived medieval malpractices that many

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148 According to Cross, this difference is a key point that Grenz is trying to make in his writings. Baptists’ reaction against sacraments was influenced by Mennonites from Holland. Yet Grenze suggests that Baptists did not deny the notion that baptism had “instrumental function in the application of redemption.” Ibid., 134.

149 Baptists would have argued that it was the acceptance of Christ on the part of the individual that would lead toward salvation which preceded baptism. Philip E. Thompson, “Sacraments and Religious Liberty: From Critical Practice to Rejected Infringement,” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 39.

Protestants were (and still are) reacting against.\textsuperscript{151}

Behind the anti-Catholic reactions to the word “sacrament” was a question over the role, place, and understanding of grace in these liturgical acts. As suggested earlier, Baptists have tended to reject the notion that a ritual is infused with grace and that the ritual itself is a moment when one can receive grace particular to that ritual (i.e. a sacrament). In such an approach, the priest is seen as essential for the mediation of grace and the guarantor that the ritual will be done correctly and that grace will be received. If, according to these Baptists, the priest is essential for the ritual, and grace is received through the ritual, then the priest is also essential for one’s salvation. Many Baptists and other Reformers felt that the claim that one is saved by “faith alone” is denied through such an approach to the sacraments that is focused on the clergy.\textsuperscript{152} The emphasis upon the ritual made many Baptists suspicious of what others claimed, that there is a very real sacramentalism within the long history of Christianity and even within the New Testament.\textsuperscript{153}

Much of the anti-sacramental sentiment found within those early Baptists has continued to color Baptist understandings of sacraments and sacramentality. Some scholars look beyond the influence of the Reformation and argue that the Enlightenment further influenced a Baptist view of sacraments in a negative way.\textsuperscript{154} In the introduction

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{152} This specific example comes from the criticism many scholars had of the book Christian Baptism: A Fresh Attempt to Understand the Rite in terms of Scripture, History, and Theology published in 1959 by a group of Baptist scholars who considered, among other things, the possibility that God may be present and active in the liturgical act of baptism. Such a suggestion drew the anti-sacramental criticism mentioned above. Stanley K. Fowler, “Is ‘Baptist Sacramentalism’ and Oxymoron?: Reactions in Britain to Christian Baptism (1959),” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 141.

\textsuperscript{153} In referring to Wheeler Robinson’s push of an “Oxford Movement” amongst Baptists, Cross shows how Robinson makes such a claim about the Baptists as a critique more than just as an observation. Anthony Cross, “The Pneumatological Key to H. Wheeler Robinson’s Baptismal Sacramentalism,” in Baptist Sacramentalism, 156.

\textsuperscript{154} Such scholars come from the group previously referred to as “Catholic Baptists,” (see chapter
to *Baptist Sacramentalism* Cross and Thompson describe the Enlightenment as a time when there was an “elevation of the spiritual over the material in what has effectively become a modern form of Gnosticism.” A “wedge” between things spiritual and physical has heightened the suspicion that anything physical would take on a spiritual role or influence in liturgical settings. In the same book Clark Pinnock states, “Modernity leaves little room for the presence and/or authority of God.” He goes on to claim that in Modernity the real is scientifically established, leaving no expectation for the presence of God in the world. In such a world view the Spirit is intangible and impalpable, strengthening the dualism between the physical and the spiritual mentioned above.\(^{155}\) For example the modernist Zwinglian approach to the Lord’s Supper (a memorial approach) is focused on a spiritual response to Christ by the individual and avoids any focus on any material changes of the elements on the table.\(^{156}\) Cross and Thompson claim that the enlightenment skepticism concerning the action of God in the natural world has closed the possibility that anyone would claim physical changes which might occur during worship and leads to an emphasis on the spiritual and experiential aspects of the Lord’s Supper. The bread will stay bread, the wine will stay wine, and only those who are present will experience the presence of the Spirit, but not through any physical elements.

With all this said, there is indeed a strong thread of anti-sacramentalism among Baptists. It is an aspect of Baptist life that we need to constantly keep in mind as we consider how to introduce notions of sacramental theology into a Baptist context.

\(^{1}\); they include Philip Thompson, Michael Broadway, Stanley Grenz, Anthony Cross among others.  
The Presence of Sacramentality in Baptist Life

Despite the strong anti-sacramental sentiment in many Baptists, there are those who argue that historically and currently, a sympathetic space for a sacramental awareness can be found within Baptist history. There are Baptists who do not harbor resentment towards things Catholic or the notion of suggesting a sacramental awareness. Cross and Thompson argue that “many Baptists from the seventeenth century to the present day have held to sacramental views of baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” as well as an appreciation for sacramental depth in scripture, prayer, preaching, and other aspects of church life.\(^\text{157}\) For example, the General Baptists of seventeenth-century England interchange the word “sacrament” with “ordinance” when describing baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Using the Orthodox Creed of 1678 as an example, Stanley Grenz demonstrates a continued use of both terms. However, Grenz states that although there was an overlap in terminology, there remained a different understanding of sacrament within the Baptist community. The critical issue was in the character and nature of the liturgical rites as discussed above.\(^\text{158}\) Yet there are examples of early Baptists regarding the sacraments as a means of grace received from God for the purpose of leading and strengthening an individual for salvation. This is a more nuanced view of the liturgical rite of baptism and Lord’s Supper leaning toward a “grace-filled” awareness within the ritual instead of an understanding that the Lord’s Supper was strictly as a memorial and baptism was only a response to the call of Christ.\(^\text{159}\)

Beyond the particulars of the specific rites, one can find aspects of a sacramental

\(^{157}\) Ibid.
awareness the ecclesiology of the Baptist movement. The Second London Confession of 1677 and the Philadelphia Confession offer a similar picture of the church that suggests a degree of sacramentalism:

The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.  

As we see here, the church is described as the body of Christ extending through time and space; it is not something concrete, not a building or a gathering of people, but something beyond what one can see. Although this is not an exhaustive survey of sacramental practices and leanings in the Baptist community, we can clearly see that there is an historical precedence for a sacramental understanding of the church, of the ministry, and of Christian life among Baptists.

Currently, one can find within among Baptists both subtle and overt leanings toward a sacramental awareness. In his work *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition*, Christopher Ellis describes what could be seen as a sacramental element in Baptist worship. Ellis notes that when a congregation gathers to worship, the people gathered are corporately attempting to discern the mind of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Such a corporate action suggests that the community is connected with something greater than itself and beyond itself and is aware of this

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This observation comes from Timothy George’s consideration of the Second London Confession, which George points out, echoes the Westminster Confession. He notes the strong similarity in language found in the Philadelphia Confession with the Second London Confession. Timothy George, “The Sacramentality of the Church: An Evangelical Baptist Perspective,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, 24.
connection. Bill Leonard describes the moment when a person walks down an aisle in church, whether it is toward the preacher during the altar call or at the end of the service when the majority of the congregation lines up to shake the pastor’s hand, as a sacramental moment. He suggests that the experience of shaking hands with the pastor or walking up the aisle during the altar call is the beginning of a conversion experience and of an awareness that something greater than the individual is happening. Ian Randall argues that in the 1900s the role of preaching and singing had a sacramental effect on the communal and individual experience of the congregation. Preaching carried an evangelistic appeal for people to come to Christ and emphasized a concept of holiness in different contexts. Singing has been and still is seen as a moment when the congregation joins together in one voice to proclaim a common theology in a visceral and spiritual way.

In a number of his works, Paul Fiddes suggests a sacramental awareness of the role of the covenant in the Baptist community. Fiddes claims that the covenant historically and currently is an ecclesiological foundation of the Baptist community. In a covenant, members of the congregation articulate their relationship with God and with each other through a church. The church covenant is not viewed as existing only in the present, but as something that transcends the here and now to the past and the future. The historical nature of the church covenant within each congregation connects each person with the values, hopes and faith of those who have been in the church before and those

163 Leonard is discussing the experience of conversion during the middle to late 1800s, specifically during Finney’s revivals. He suggests that the emotional/sacramental experience of the conversion is carried in the current day. Bill J. Leonard, “Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Pluralistic Culture,” *Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal* 82 no.1 (Winter 1985): 121.
who will come after. Those who draft and affirm the covenant are looking for a connection with members who will be a part of the church community in the future as well as in the present. Through the church covenant there is a sacramental understanding of relationship in Baptist churches.\textsuperscript{165}

There may be other examples of a sacramental awareness among Baptists, subtle or overt but space will not allow for an exhaustive survey of sacramental experiences and practices among Baptists. It is my hope that these examples have shown that despite the aversions many Baptists have toward sacramental language and theology, one can find examples of what can arguably be labeled sacramental practice, language, and theology among Baptists. With an awareness of historical precedence as well as a continued acceptance of a sacramental understanding, we will consider the sacramental awareness evoked through ordination in the American Baptist denomination.

\textit{Sacraments}\textsuperscript{166}

Before considering sacramental consciousness, we will consider the basic idea of sacraments in a Catholic context. Because sacramental consciousness be based on a theological understanding of sacrament, it is important that a basic knowledge of sacraments is understood.

A sacrament is commonly understood as being simultaneously a sign and a reality (\textit{sacramentum et res}); it is a mystery that points toward a divine reality (grace) but at the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{165} Fiddes goes beyond what I have suggested by speaking of the connection with the history of Christianity, a connection the “eternal” covenant with God as well as other aspects of the covenant and its role in the church. Fiddes,\textit{ Tracks and Traces}, 24-33. In considering the relationality of the community see Paul Fiddes,\textit{ Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity} (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{166} The content from this and the following sections is taken from a paper I presented at a NARBP meeting: “Sacred Consciousness: A Communal Approach to Baptist Ordinances,” presented at the 2004 region-at-large National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Annual Meeting; June, 2004,Washington D.C.
\end{footnotesize}
same time it contains and is the reality of that toward which it points. As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a sacrament is an efficacious sign of God’s grace that is instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church. A sacrament is a visible sign of the hidden reality of the grace of God. According to Thomas Aquinas, a sacrament involves a cause, a nature, and a good. Thus the grace that is received through sacraments offers forgiveness for past sins and failings (the cause), and gives strength for the individual to worship and live a holy life (the nature toward which we grow) and leads toward eternal life (the good).

Each sacrament contains a narrative and historical component connecting participants to the life of Christ. It signifies moments and aspects of the passion of Christ as well as moments or events in Christian history that are particular to the saving actions of Christ. A sacrament then liturgically incorporates the story of the life of Christ, a divine awareness of the promised presence of the Holy Spirit, and a sign that the liturgical event is a grace-filled moment that is communally shared. If the liturgy is seen as a range of words and actions in a specific context, then a sacramental rite is a moment of highly focused actions and words within a liturgical context; the liturgy, the words, and the ritual are all part of the sacramental act. Regis Duffy describes a

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167 One could also use the term “symbol” instead of “sign” in the Catholic context. The danger in the use of such a term lies in a common Protestant misunderstanding due in part to the influence of Paul Tillich among others. A “symbol” as understood by Tillich is not the same as a “symbol” in the sacramental context. For more information on the comparison, see Dennis Doyle, “The Symbolic Element in Belief: An Alternative to Tillich,” *The Thomist*, 45, 3, (July 1981) 449-471. This basic information on sacraments is taken from Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 3-4.

168 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §774, 1131.


170 Ibid., 553.

171 Timothy McDermott, introductory comment to “Living in Christ,” ibid., 542-3.

sacrament as a presence-filled event. It is a moment when God enables us to welcome the message of salvation and thereby receive its transforming and healing power as a community. In a sacramental act the community is aware of the self-communicating presence of God, connecting Christ with the church.\footnote{Duffy, “Sacraments in General,” 185-188.}

Let us consider the Eucharist as an example. As a sacrament, the Eucharist is understood as both a sign and a reality. Among other things, the Eucharistic event itself is a sign that connects the community with the events of the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ. The bread and the wine are symbols of the body and blood of Christ. At the same time, the Eucharist is in reality the body and blood of Christ. The bread becomes and is the body of Christ and the wine becomes and is the blood of Christ. The grace of God that is offered through the Eucharist with its symbols of the bread and the wine is a reality for those who participate in the sacrament. Just as one claims the reality of the symbols, one must also embrace the “mystery of God” within the sign of the Eucharist and the grace that is received through the liturgical act. Duffy reminds us that we need a profound respect for God’s mystery and a sense of wonder as we participate in that mystery. As is the case with all sacraments, the Eucharist cannot be fully explained and always holds to a sense of mystery.\footnote{Duffy, “Sacraments in General,” 189-191. My intention here has been to give the reader a basic appreciation of Catholic sacramental theology as needed for my purposes in this dissertation rather than to engage in an in-depth analysis of complexities of the debates that take place among Catholic scholars.}

With this basic understanding of sacraments, let us now consider the idea of “sacramental consciousness” as it has been discussed in Catholic circles.

\textit{Sacramental Consciousness}

If we are to consider the way in which the pastor is changed, we must consider
how people will perceive this change. In this section we will consider the way individuals can recognize the change through ordination and at the same time recognize that the pastor is not changed but represents something more.

Through the sacraments participants experience the presence of God via the symbol, the liturgy, the ritual, and the experiences of the other participants. Although we have been focusing on sacraments as understood in a Catholic liturgical context, we must remember that the experience of the presence of God is not limited to the sacraments. The presence of God can also be experienced through other signs and symbols in sacred and sometimes secular contexts. Sacramental consciousness offers a way of articulating this awareness of the presence of God in the world.

Sacramental consciousness is informed by and intertwined with Catholic understandings of the sacraments. It is a way in which one can name and claim the sign and the reality of the divine in various aspects of life. Before fully engaging the idea of sacramental consciousness as it is discussed by contemporary Catholic theologians, we will consider a theological foundation for sacramental consciousness: apophatic and cataphatic theology.

**Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology**

Apophatic theology takes its starting point in the denial that any concept of or statement about God can be fully affirmed. Such a denial of speech about God lies in the assertion that humans cannot adequately and fully understand the divine.\(^{175}\) The apophatic approach is often contrasted with the approach of cataphatic theology, a theology that allows for the experience of the divine through affirmative statements, images, and rituals. In the cataphatic approach a positive view of knowledge of the divine

is upheld and thus one can speak of positive attributes concerning God. We find an early and influential description of these two approaches to theology in the writings of the Christian mystic Dionysius the Areopagite. Although little is known about the author, his influence is seen in the theology of Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and others. 

Dionysius suggested that words and names which positively describe God point toward God in a very real way. Words of affirmation reflect the good of the world and the virtuous aspects of such words point toward the reality of God. This use of such words or concepts to describe aspects of God is the cataphatic, or positive approach toward knowledge of God. That which can be seen, known, and understood by humanity point toward God. For example, statements such as “God is just” or “God is mercy” are positive ways of knowing, approaching, and articulating the experiences of God. Those who make positive statements such as these start with broad, universal claims about God and then move toward the particular until they can arrive at a title or a name for God.

While Dionysus claimed to find truth in such statements, he also suggested that they can be narrow and limiting. In summarizing Dionysus’ understanding of positive or cataphatic theology, Vladimir Lossky states that such an approach to God can lead to knowledge of God but in an imperfect way. In order to move beyond these imperfections, Dionysus pushes the believer beyond the names for God and descriptions of God claiming that God is all that can be affirmed by humanity and at the same time

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176 Much about Dionysius the Areopagite is unknown. Some suggest that the Dionysius who is mentioned in scripture (Acts 17) is the author in question. Others state that the writings emerged in the fifth or sixth centuries which are often attributed to the author known as Pseudo-Dionysius were written by the person in question. Due to the historical ambiguity, I will hold to the name “Dionysius” throughout this work. Allan Armstrong, forward to On the Divine Names, x-xi.


God is beyond all that can said: “That while it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the universal Cause), yet in a stricter sense It does not possess them, since It transcends them all,…” 179 Thus, although one can affirm all that is said of God, one must at the same time deny all that is said of God, because God is more than anything that can be said. This move of negation is the apophatic correction of the cataphatic affirmation toward knowing and experiencing God. The apophatic approach embraces the realization that the unknowable nature of God is within every statement of God that is offered. One must remove all the things, names, titles, and descriptions of God that are impediments of who God is in order to know and experience the divine. 180

For example, the statement, “God is compassionate” is cataphatic in that it offers an affirmation of the nature of God. The statement holds a truth about the divine in that it speaks of the good of the divine. An apophatic response would remind the believer that God is more than simply compassionate, and is beyond compassion itself. God transcends the positive statement previously made. In this approach, one realizes that God is beyond all that exists, and that only through a process of negations will one gain an awareness of the divine which cannot be articulated. As Lossky summarizes, the apophatic leads towards a useful type of ignorance, for “it is in unknowing that one may know him.” 181

In Thomas Aquinas we find a synthesis of the cataphatic and the apophatic approaches to theology. Aquinas suggested the use of cataphatic (positive) theology as a way of making some affirmations concerning God. Such affirmations can claim unity of a statement (unity in the subject and the predicate) affirming God. At the same time through recognizing the apophatic, one recognizes that God is not necessarily limited to

181 Lossky, Mystical Theology, 25.
the content of the statement and in fact transcends the statement. If a statement is read in a limited way, without attention to the cataphatic and apophatic nuances, the statement might be misleading. As Aquinas expressed it; “The different ways of thinking of him are represented in the difference of subject and predicate; his unity we represent by bringing them together in an affirmative statement.”\textsuperscript{182} Aquinas agreed with Dionysius that the apophatic approach is necessary because “no word of God is appropriate to him in its way of signifying….\textsuperscript{183}” In considering the apophatic and the cataphatic synthesis, Aquinas moved toward a theological position in which the tension of maintaining the positive and the negative was possible and offered a statement of unity. Aquinas was offering a synthesis of the two approaches. Although one cannot know or speak of God in a complete way, one must name God and give God attributes so that one can know aspects of God as only a human can, and those names are not necessarily false. Aquinas held that we can predicate positive attributes of God in a true though analogical way. If we say that God is good, we are making a true statement, but the meaning of the word “good” as it applies to God is beyond our comprehension. Still, the meaning is not utterly different from what we do understand. In this way, our understanding, while not “univocal” or exactly corresponding, is neither to be thought of as “equivocal,” that is, as completely unrelated in meaning. Our understanding is, rather, “analogical.”

Lossky’s approach is similar to that of Aquinas, though the former gives somewhat less weight to the cataphatic. It is in the \textit{modus significandi} that the negation is known and in the \textit{res significata} that the affirmation occurs. In this process, the modes by which the nature of God is understood are denied, and it is in this denial that the nature of

\textsuperscript{182} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Ia, Q.13, article 12.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
God can be known.\textsuperscript{184} Although one must hold that the nature of God will always point beyond the statements and thus negate them, there is still an affirming truth within them.

When using symbols and signs as a way of experiencing and knowing God, there is a danger of idolization of the symbol or sign. For example, a gold cross in a sanctuary may be seen as a powerful symbol drawing many to realize the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Yet there is the danger that a congregation may idolize the cross and place upon the gold cross the aspects of the divine that they experienced. The cross itself may be seen as the source of grace, forgiveness, and salvation. The gold cross hanging on the wall can become their god. The apophatic and the cataphatic are useful in avoiding this complication. For example, in the Baptist tradition, the Bible is seen as an authoritative source of inspiration of and knowing about God.\textsuperscript{185} From scripture, Baptists can make a number of positive assertions about the nature of God, thus making scripture a primary way to know about God, Christ, and the human condition.\textsuperscript{186} The cataphatic approach would affirm that the Bible can indeed be used to learn about God through the narratives, writings, and affirmations one can find while engaging the scriptures. The apophatic approach would not deny the role of scripture in gaining knowledge about God, but would stress that through the Bible one cannot completely and fully understand and know about God and that God transcends the limited quality of the written word; God is found both within the scriptures and beyond the scriptures. Thus the apophatic approach would stress that the Bible is not the complete and only sign or symbol that offers

\textsuperscript{184} Lossky, \textit{Mystical Theology}, 26.


\textsuperscript{186} The role of scripture in the Baptist tradition has always been one of prominence as well as one of division. For more on the primacy of the Bible with Baptists, see, Shurden, \textit{Baptist Identity}, Walter B. Shurden, ed., \textit{The Bible}, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision, v.2 (Macon, Georgia : Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.).
knowledge about God; it points toward that which is greater. To experience God, one must engage the Holy Scriptures, but then go beyond scripture.

Held in tension, apophatic and cataphatic theologies offer a way in which one can move from the sign to the reality toward which the sign points while realizing that the reality transcends the sign in question. As we will see, the idea of sacramental consciousness draws much from apophatic and cataphatic theologies.

Sacramental Consciousness

Sacramental consciousness is a term used in Catholic circles that as one scholar states, “entails awareness of the presence and activity of God in and through the things of this world.” While other scholars use different terms (“catholic imagination,” “analogical imagination,” or “sacramental imagination”), all suggest that the basic aim of sacramental consciousness, however it is labeled, is to follow the example of Aquinas and others in holding the cataphatic and the apophatic in balance when speaking about the experience of God in a variety of contexts that go beyond the strictly liturgical.

Bernard Cooke considers the experience of humanity and the role of symbols within an experience as a moment when sacramental consciousness is actualized. Cooke suggests that a basic aspect of being human is awareness of one’s surroundings. Our freedom is limited and shaped by our surroundings and experiences, both extraordinary and ordinary. Within life experiences one can find meanings. Some of these experiences are clear, some are not, and not all are equal. Yet the fundamental thread of experience is

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188 While we will be reviewing the writings and ideas of Bernard Cooke and Dennis Doyle, there are others who have written on the topic of Sacramental Consciousness. Among those is David Tracy who describes and “analogical imagination,” which very basically understands that a “classic” is something that points toward knowledge about God and at the same time discloses a reality (Tracy, 108, 116, 118). Dennis Doyle acknowledges the way in which Tracy has influenced his work. For more on Tracy see: David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).
that meaning can be found depending upon one’s “philosophy of life,” and/or the way in which the community influences the individual. Cooke claims that this reality of meaning is the presence and activity of God in everyday life. Yet there is still a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and it is primarily in an awareness of the extraordinary permeating the ordinary that the divine is experienced.

Cooke claims that sacramental consciousness provides a hermeneutic through which our experiences with the divine can be understood as an experience with the “Word of God.” Symbols signify a presence. They give shape to thought, imagination and consciousness, and in order to have an impact of divine presence, the symbol must be seen as a “living symbol.” In the liturgical context, Cooke suggests that the symbols of the sacraments can point toward a presence of shared consciousness between God and the people. The sacraments are pointing toward something greater than human experience, connecting the individual with the divine and pointing the believer toward the reality of meaning that can be found in the ordinary and extraordinary. Yet the community is not fully in communion with the divine consciousness, and thus we find the not-yet of human experience. It is primarily through the symbols of the sacraments that the shared consciousness of God is communicated with the gathered worshipping people.

Dennis Doyle offers the definition of sacramental consciousness that was stated in the beginning of this section. In further elaborating on sacramental consciousness, Doyle

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190 Ibid., 40.
191 Ibid., 47-9. Unlike others Cooke does not make a direct connection with tradition, suggesting that sacramentality is directed connected to human experience. While I will not directly address sacramentality in the mundane, and while I would argue that one is always influenced to a degree by the values and tradition of one’s community eliminating the idea of a “universal human experience” void of any religious influence. I argue that when the pastor interacts with lay people in what may be considered “secular” encounters, there is still a sacramental awareness of that which the pastor represents.
considers the concepts of presence, narrative, and ritual, thus bringing sacramental consciousness into a liturgical context. Doyle’s understanding of presence is similar to Cooke’s understanding of sacramental awareness. According to Doyle, one is aware of one’s surroundings, of the time and space that one is occupying, and of the potential of God (or others) to also occupy that time and space. In experiencing the divine presence, Doyle suggests that there is a subjective pole that is the perspective of the believer, the community, or the one who is searching for truth in the divine. Humanity is the subjective pole. From that perspective, or pole, presence is something that is felt, or something that one can be aware of. The presence of God is what the sacramental consciousness is attuned to. Doyle states that “presence’ is relative to the imaginative frame of reference used to construct one’s idea of the space and time that one is occupying.” In worship (and in other contexts), narrative and ritual can construct and influence one’s idea of space and time, thus mediating the experience of presence. Doyle offers the example of the Jewish Seder. Through the particular aspects of this ritual, the narrative of the Exodus experience is remembered and experienced. The sense of presence that those who are involved in the ritual experience is sensitized toward the narrative of the Exodus event – through the ritual the participants are a part of that event. The time and space of the Exodus event is constructed through the ritual. The narrative of the Exodus event is retold and relived through the rituals that are performed by the community that night. In large part because of the ritual and the underlying narrative, the divine presence, for the participants, is truly experienced in a special and sacred way.

In the ritual of the Eucharist, the community is connected with the narrative of the

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193 Ibid., 3.
194 Ibid., 6-7.
passion of Christ. Again, the ritual and the narrative construct time and space in such a way that the presence of God is mediated differently than it would be in other circumstances such as weddings or baptisms. Those who are engaged in the ritual are aware of the sacredness of the time, space, and actions they are involved in; they are aware of a divine presence. They are in the presence of God, but still in the world; it is a both/and. The analogical balance is a driving aspect of the mystical experience, and it is mediated through a sacramental consciousness.

Sacramental Consciousness in the Baptist Context

Sacramental consciousness offers a way to articulate the experience of the presence of God while leaving room for the unknowable mystery of God. In this tension, we find a synthesis of the mystical apophatic and cataphatic views of the divine that both Dionysus and Aquinas engaged. A powerful, “spiritual” experience can point toward the divine, and yet the whole of the divine is always infinitely more than the particular experience can capture. As we have seen, the symbols of a tradition (rituals and objects) mediate and construct the space in which the divine presence is experienced, focusing and driving the cataphatic experience. The symbols point beyond that which they are toward that which they represent.

Although I have only offered a brief survey and summary of sacramental consciousness, we have the foundation we need to consider its application in a Baptist context. Through an articulation of sacramental consciousness in the Baptist context we can be aware of the ways in which the individual and the community are pulled into a reality toward which symbols of the community (broadly construed) points. Such an application will enable us to articulate the “spiritual” moments of the Baptist experience
as real moments when God’s presence is encountered without confining God to a specific idea, symbol, or ritual. At the beginning of this chapter we considered some ways in which a sacramental experience can be found in Baptist life as well as arguments some scholars make for incorporating such awareness into Baptist thought and life. For example, we saw the sacramental emphasis found in Ellis’ work on worship, specifically in his suggestion that there is a deep spirituality and sacramental awareness when the congregation discerns the movement of the Holy Spirit in the act of worship. Or, in Leonard’s idea of the sacramental power of the “call” in worship and the role of the pastor in worship, we observed that there is a sacramental awareness that something greater than what can be seen is happening. We can also find fertile ground for an appreciation of sacramental consciousness in Fiddes’ treatment of the role of covenant in the Baptist community. In stressing the sacramental awareness of the covenant between God and the church as well as among churches and between the individual and the congregation, Fiddes is pointing to something that is greater happening than simply having membership in a group.

In addition to the examples stated above and at the beginning of this chapter, one can find a sacramental awareness in the ordinances (baptism and Lord’s Supper) as they are typically practiced in the American the Baptist denomination. For example, when worshippers observe the Lord’s Supper and remember the night before Christ’s crucifixion, they are, among other things, experiencing the event itself through their active remembrance. Christ is present through such an active awareness and remembrance (anamnesis) of the Last Supper; as the individual is aware of the Last Supper in a way that he or she is present, that individual is aware of the presence of
Christ. This is a sacramental awareness. In baptism, the claim that one is dying and rising with Christ is a claim that something greater than a simple immersion is occurring. This is also a sacramental awareness.\textsuperscript{195}

There is room in the American Baptist denomination for an application of the idea of sacramental consciousness as it is articulated within the Catholic tradition and as it is considered within this chapter. Such a concept can deepen and enrich the experience of Baptists within worship and other aspects of the community.\textsuperscript{196} In the next section I will suggest a way in which sacramental consciousness can influence and inform an understanding of ordination in the Baptist context.

\textit{A “Sacramental Consciousness” of Ordination}

Before considering the application of the concept of sacramental consciousness to the experience of Baptist ordination, it will be helpful to address the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Part of my argument is that it is in this relationship that we find a theology of ordination. Such a consideration will be informed by the Catholic apostolic exhortation \textit{Christifideles Laici}, some of the essays from the work \textit{Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood}, edited by Susan Wood, and Mirslov Volf’s work \textit{After Our Likeness}. One may question why a Baptist would use a papal document as well as other Catholic authors to inform a consideration of Baptist ecclesiology. Along with a deep and well developed ecclesiology one can find in Catholic circles, a developed, nuanced understanding of the role of the priest and the nature of the

\textsuperscript{195} I have addressed the application of sacramental consciousness in the ordinances in greater detail in the paper, “Sacred Consciousness.”

\textsuperscript{196} In a previous paper I have suggested changing the terminology from “sacramental” consciousness to “sacred” consciousness. This is primarily because the anti-sacramental stance still held by many Baptists today is so strong that many congregations and individuals may not be willing to even consider such an idea simply because of its name. While many Baptists would be more open to the term “sacred” than “sacramental” I will maintain the term “sacramental” aware that a change in the terminology will very likely lead to a change in understanding. Malone, “Sacred Consciousness,” 19.
priest’s relationship with the congregation that can inform the Baptist conversation concerning ordination and the role of the pastor. We will avoid the hierarchal emphasis on the clergy that exists in the Catholic understanding of ministry, but we will look for an appreciation of the understanding of relationality that is held up in these Catholic writings as well as openness towards an egalitarian awareness that will be applicable to a Baptist context. Both *Christifideles Laici* and *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood* speak to the relationality of the church community, including the role of the priest. The thoughts and ideas in these works will greatly aid and inform our investigation.

In *After Our Likeness*, Mirslav Volf offers a Free Church ecclesiology that is influenced by an Eastern (specifically Cappadocian) understanding of the Trinity. We will not be using Volf’s work as a corrective to the two Catholic works, but as a supplement to the conversation and consideration of relationality in the church specifically as it pertains to the role of the pastor.¹⁹⁷

**Relationality in the Church**

When one speaks of relationality in an ecclesiological context, one is considering the ways in which members of a congregation relate to each other as well as to the persons of the Trinity. Along with Eastern Orthodoxy, contemporary Roman Catholicism stands out as a tradition that has been particularly emphasizing the concept that the primary, fundamental ordering of all relationships within the church, the basic event that ties together all relationships, is baptism. Baptism is a liturgical and sacramental event in

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which all ministries are rooted; it is a point of unity for all Christians.198 Through baptism
one enters a new life and becomes a part of a new community that is formed and shaped
by Christ. Through baptism all are called to holiness and in essence all start at the same
place of grace and redemption, making baptism the basic unity of ministry in
Christianity.199 Consider further that the basic unity that all find in baptism is that we are
brought into Christ’s unity with the disciples and the unity of the communion of the
Trinity. In addition, just as the disciples were in relationships with each other through
their own particular relationships with Jesus, we are in relationships with other Christians
through our own relationship with Jesus. Baptism brings us into those relationships. The
relationships that are founded through baptism correspond with the relational nature of
the Trinity, leading us to the relational unity within the Trinity as well as its particularity
(perichorisis).200 The Catholic idea of “communion ecclesiology” captures this
relationality, suggesting a union with God and others via Christ and the Spirit.201 Volf
offers his free church version of communion ecclesiology by describing the church as a
unity of believers, a unity that exists “as communion within the communion of the triune
God.”202

Through the relationality of God via the church, one can claim a new identity in
Christ. Through the relationality with others in the church one can share a Christian
identity with other Christians. The image of the church as the Body of Christ captures the

198 Many quote the passage from Ephesians 4:5 which states that there is, “one Lord, one faith, one
baptism.” Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered
Communion,” in Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood, 35. Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., “Ministry and
Understandings of Ministry,” in Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood, 73.
199 Christifideles Laici, ch.1.16.
201 Christifideles Laici, ch. 2.19. For more on communion ecclesiology see Dennis Doyle,
202 Volf,128.
idea of this individual and relational identity. The relationships of church community are founded and rooted in baptism and, although equality exists among those relationships, there is still a level of differentiation. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, individuals receive specific gifts or charisms that are in some ways initially independent of each other. For example, some receive the gift of service whereas others have the gift of teaching. Yet through the relationality of the church as the Body of Christ, we are drawn into an interdependence that we have with each other as we each use our gifts accordingly. Each person in the community will lift up others through his or her gifts and at the same time we are all responsible for our own gifts. In a community of different people with different gifts who are all united through their relationship with Christ, one must consider whether this differentiation of gifts is hierarchal or egalitarian. In the next section we will consider the specific charism of ordained ministry and the different ways in which that charism may affect the relationships in the church, keeping in mind the hierarchal and egalitarian tensions within the relationality of the church.

The Place of the Pastor in the Church: An Ontology of Relationality

As we have already stated, all are baptized into the ministry of Jesus Christ; thus all are called to some form of ministry. *Christifideles Laici* builds upon Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* in suggesting that through baptism, the grace of God calls the individual

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203 Michael Downey is specifically arguing that it is, “in the sacramental life of the Church that we express and receive our identity as the Body of Christ in this time and place.” While I agree with the emphasis on liturgical action in order to find applicability within the Baptist context I need to consider an emphasis beyond sacramental action. I would broaden Downey’s criteria and suggest that through participation in the Christian community, starting with baptism, one lives into one’s identity as the Body of Christ. Michael Downey, “Ministerial Identity: A Question of Common Foundations,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 17-18.

204 Ibid., 219.

205 Ibid., 231. One cannot help but note the eloquent way Paul made this point with his very real imagery of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12.
into participation with the threefold ministry of Christ (priest, prophet, king).\textsuperscript{206} Volf and Downey both argue that through particular ministries we can find a way of being Christian that is based upon a new understanding of ourselves and a new relational understanding with others; we are all called to a ministry through Jesus Christ and in doing that ministry we can know others who have also been called. This relational identification through a shared calling to ministry leads to an awareness of equality within the church through baptism. We are all involved in the ministry of Jesus Christ through our baptism.\textsuperscript{207}

Although we are all called to ministry through the Holy Spirit, there are specific ministries, orderings, or offices within the church. For example, as suggested by \textit{Christifideles Laici}, the laity is called to witness to the secular world on behalf of the church.\textsuperscript{208} The very method and approach by which a member of the laity witnesses to the world can vary depending upon his or her specific charism (teaching, ministry for the sick, prison visitation, etc.).\textsuperscript{209} It is when discussing the hierarchical or egalitarian difference in gifts, ordering, and offices within the church that we find a divergence between Free Church tradition and Catholic traditions. In \textit{Christifideles Laici} we find the claim, again building upon \textit{Lumen Gentium}, that ordained ministries are in a “primary position” in relation to other ministries of the church, that participation in the priesthood is different from participation in other ministries in degree and essence. The ministry of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Christifideles Laici} introduction, 2,5, ch. 1.14. The purpose of this work is not to argue the presence or action of grace in Baptism, for the sake of this work, suffice it to say grace is present in the event of Baptism.}
\footnote{Volf, 246. Downey, “Ministerial Identity,” 20.}
\footnote{\textit{Christifideles Laici}, ch. 1.15.}
\footnote{We are reminded of Ephesians 4:11-12, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ…” (NRSV).}
\end{footnotes}
the priesthood is a hierarchal position prior to or above lay ministries. In *Ordering*, Gaillardetz offers a softer take on the question of hierarchy in which the emphasis is not placed upon the “position” of the priest, but on the relationship of the priest with the people. Gaillardetz claims that in ordination one is ecclesiologically repositioned in the community, leading toward a new relationship with the church community. Thus in ordination, the ontology of the individual is not necessarily changed, but the ontology of the relationship between the pastor or priest and the laity is changed (relational ontology). Although the essay does not emphasize the hierarchal nature of the relationship change, it does speak to an ordering or repositioning within the community. In a Catholic context (specifically with *Christifideles Laici* in the background), such an ordering still points toward a hierarchal repositioning in the relational ontology. The ministry of the priest is, at least in some important ways, prior to the ministry of the lay people. Gaillardetz’s insistence that this repositioning within a liturgical community is to be distinguished from former understandings in which one individual was understood as being ontologically above another goes a long way in re-shaping Catholic thought and may in ways be close to the vision I am trying to articulate. As I struggle to appropriate the language and concepts associated with sacramentality in a Baptist context, however, I find any assertion of hierarchy, no matter how redefined and softened, to be out of Baptist reach.

What we desire for the Baptist community is a way to articulate the repositioning of the pastor in relation with the rest of the community that avoids any hierarchical ordering of the pastor over the laity whatsoever. In speaking of gifts or charisms, Volf

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210 *Christifideles Laici*, ch. 2.22.
suggests that ordination can be considered the public reception of a gift that is given by 
God for the sake of the local church. At ordination, the members of the church 
acknowledge that an individual has specific gifts that are suitable for ordained ministry 
and that this sets that individual apart, while at the same time they realize that the overall 
relational nature of the church is striving to reflect the perichoresis of the Trinity. 
Through this approach one can observe a relational change among the members of the 
church community and the individual whom the community sets apart as one with a gift 
or calling for ordained ministry. Volf emphasizes perichoresis as a way to maintain the 
egalitarian nature of the relationships of the church while holding onto the individuality 
of specific ministry; it is a change that does not necessarily have a hierarchal ordering.212 

In sum, all are brought into new a relationship with Christ and with others in the 
church through baptism; these new relationships reflect the perichoresis that is found in 
the Trinity. Thus there is ideally a mutual indwelling of the members of the church. 
Through baptism all are ordered to ministry and because there are different ministries 
dependent on one’s gifts, the diversity of the relationships within the church merits a 
sense of interdependence among the members of the church. No one individual is above 
another, and all have specific gifts within the community, including the ministry of 
ordination. Specific gifts must be present in a candidate for ordination, and people are 
called depending upon their recognition of these gifts in themselves as well as the 
congregation’s recognition that they possess these gifts (there must be an inward and 
outward call). While some are called to ordained ministry, the relationality of 
perichoresis within the church community maintains an egalitarian nature within the 
community between the ordained and the laity. The pastor is not placed above the

212 Volf, After Our Likeness, 249-255.
congregation, but his or her relationship with the congregation changes because of the call to ordained ministry; the ontology of one’s relationality to the congregation changes. Thus there is a separation of ministries but not a hierarchal positioning of ministries.

Sacramental Awareness of Ordination

When an individual is ordained, he or she is named as someone who has the particular gifts that are required as well as a call from God to perform in the office of pastor. As ordination is practiced in the Baptist or Free Church tradition, and as I have stated in this chapter, the pastor is not positioned above the rest of the congregation in any way that would suggest that there is a hierarchal difference between an ordained pastor and a lay person. Yet, as I have argued, a change does occur through ordination. As an ordained pastor, the individual now represents the ministry of Christ through preaching, through pastoral prayers, through teaching, and through other aspects of the ministerial office as we will see in the following chapter. As we continue in the next two chapters we will find the evidence of the relational change between the clergy and the laity. The relationship between the pastor and the people, after ordination, is one that points to the laity’s relationship with Christ, God, and the church among other things. The change is an ontological change of the relationality between the minister and the congregation.

Through the use of sacramental consciousness, we can articulate a way in which the members of the congregation can be aware of something as ineffable as the grace-filled relationship between two people in a community. Sacramental consciousness can awaken in an individual awareness that the pastor represents the greater ministry of Christ and at the same time does not encompass the entirety of the ministry of Christ nor
is above any other member of the congregation, thus maintaining the egalitarian nature of the relationships of the community. In other words, cataphatically, the individual may be aware that the pastor is someone who delivers sermons, who visits the sick, who offers leadership for the community. The individual is aware of what the pastor does, of how the pastor performs in his or her role, and of the way in which the functionality of the pastor connects with the divine. Understood cataphatically, the pastor is set apart from the rest of the community practically and liturgically, representing the presence of Christ in the community. Understood apophatically, the presence of the divine and the ministry of Christ is greater and beyond the function and office of the pastor. For example, when the pastor visits the sick at home or in the hospital the pastor is invoking the presence of the congregation and the presence of Christ for the sick. The purpose of the visit is more than just to visit, but, understood cataphatically, to bring the individual into contact with the body of Christ. Yet it is not solely through the presence of the pastor that the divine is present. Understood apophatically, the actions and presence of Christ is greater than the actions and presence of the pastor. The act of visiting points toward something greater than just a visit of a friend; the pastor represents something more, and yet at the same time, in as deep a sense is no more than a member of the church community. Through ordination the community is claiming that the ordained will represent Christ via his or her roles and functions liturgically and practically, yet at the same time the community recognizes that Christ is immeasurably greater than the ordained.

In the following chapters we will examine one particular church, the pastors who served in that church and the way in which the members of that congregation related to the pastors. As we consider this relationship it is important to keep the understanding and
application of sacramental consciousness offered in this chapter in mind. Such an understanding will aid in naming those relational changes and claiming those as important indicators offering a theology of ordination. It will be in such a social-historical survey we will find evidence of the sacramental awareness of ordination that I have illustrated above. In doing such a survey we will not only discern whether such a sacramental awareness exists, but we will pull out the multiple layers, aspects, and details of the relationships that emerge out of ordination.
CHAPTER 4 – FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, SWANSEA: 1700s-1800s

The theological convictions of a community can be found within the life of the community. The theological convictions of ordination in the American Baptist denomination are tied to a sacred or sacramental awareness of ordination reflected in the language and actions of the community. Such convictions are found in the broad, historical narrative of the American Baptist denomination. In this and the following chapter we will look at one particular community, the First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts (FBCS), founded in 1663. Rather than surveying the entire 300 plus years of the church, we will consider specific segments of time focusing on the ways in which the people and the pastor acted and interacted. The actions of the people in the community will be referred to as the practices of the people. We will compare the practices of the people with manuals, essays, and other writings from each particular time representing thoughts and ideas accepted by the American Baptist denomination as it emerged and existed at the time, specifically in the north-east. As with the local church, we will be focusing on that which pertains to ordination and the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. We will refer to this data as the teachings of the tradition. In looking at both the practices and the teachings, in comparing and contrasting, we will find a story of ordination as lived by one particular community and potentially practiced and lived by the Baptists in north-east America.

FBCS was begun in 1633 by a group of Baptists led by John Myles, who fled
from Wales seeking religious freedom and ended up in Rehoboth, a town in the Plymouth Colony. In the first hundred years of the church’s existence its building was burned down during King Phillip’s war, and then rebuilt in what became known as the town of Swansea, Massachusetts. As time continued, FBCS experienced growth and development as a Baptist community.\(^{213}\)

In the 1700s the church continued to grow in influence and membership. The third meeting house for FBCS was built in 1717 to accommodate the growing congregation. The Oak Swamp Baptist Church, the Baptist church in Bellingham, the Baptist church in Hornbine, the Baptist church in Oswego, and the Baptist church in Warren (which founded what was to become Brown University), were all formed and initially supported by members of FBCS. In the 1780s membership at FBCS reached about 200 due to the influence and energy of the Second Great Awakening.

In the 1800s FBCS joined the Taunton Association, started a Sunday school class and built the fourth and current meeting house. After celebrating its 200\(^{th}\) anniversary in 1863, membership began to dwindle. In 1869, for example, months passed without any church meetings due to a lack of interest and attendance. In the 1880s, membership began to grow again; average attendance was 50 and climbed as high as the 80s in 1889.

Low membership continued to plague FBCS into the early 1900s. In 1938 only 35 resident members were involved in FBCS. Yet in the 1950s the growth and energy experienced in the Second Great Awakening seemed to return (although in a very different cultural context); membership grew and the building was updated and remolded. In 1963 about 88 members were actively involved in the life of the congregation. In 1967

the building was expanded to provide a fellowship hall and classrooms. Linda Spoolstra, the first female pastor, was called in 1979. Currently, FBCS continues to be involved in the denomination locally and nationally. While membership has not exceeded 100 in recent years, the congregation continues to strive to support their pastor and maintain a presence in the community.214

Through this chapter and the next we will find the role of “the call” playing a prominent part in ordination. While we will find a nuanced understanding of the call in each time period it will be helpful to have a basic understanding of the call before considering the history of FBCS. The call to ordination consists of two parts, the internal and the external. The internal call is a religious experience an individual has instilling a desire and drive to pursue ordination. The external call is the action of a congregation (of which the individual is a part) affirming the individual’s internal call and affirming that the individual has the skills and abilities necessary to be an ordained pastor. When the call is mentioned, both the internal and the external call are assumed to be a part of the overall call unless otherwise stated. As we will see, the call, the interaction between the internal and the external, and the emphasis on the internal and external will consistently be a part of ordination the story of FBCS and the American Baptist denomination.

Part I – 1720-1800

The Call

In 1754, Isaac Backus wrote the treatise, “The Nature and Necessity of the Call,” challenging a law that required a minister to receive a specific amount of education in order to be considered in “good standing” by the governing authorities. Backus argued

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214 The summation of this history was provided by Rev. Dr. Charles Hartman, current pastor of First Baptist Church, Swansea.
that his position as the pastor of an open-communion, Separatist church in Massachusetts should be legally recognized by the local government regardless of what level of education he might have. Backus claimed that the “extraordinary call” a pastor received, which is similar if not identical to the idea of the “internal call” embraced by the American Baptist denomination, was essential for one to achieve ordination. Backus wrote, “Hence let every soul that profess themselves to be Christ’s ministers, examine whether they were called into that great work by the influence of the Holy Spirit or not.” This call, Backus argued, should take priority in determining the credentials of the minister over external measures such as education. If the pastor did not experience a sense of call from God then he had no place preaching or teaching as one ordained.

Backus was not against education stating, “let me exhort all Christians in general to improve faithfully what talents God has given them,” but was clear that the call was to take priority over education.

The emphasis on the sense of call that Backus articulated was reflected in the life of FBCS. After serving FBCS for two years as their third pastor, Ephraim Wheaton felt he needed some help with his duties. In 1718 Wheaton nominated two “brothers” of the church to help with the preaching and teaching of the pastoral office. The congregation accepted both nominations, and then encouraged John Devotion, one of the two nominated, to strive for ordination in order to be on a more collegial level with

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217 For a full list of the pastors of FBCS see Appendix A, 228-229.

218 The title “Brother” or “Sister” is given to the majority of members of the congregation. In addition, the title “Deacon” is given to one who has been chosen by the church for service and leadership. An “Elder” refers to the pastor. If one is neither the pastor nor a deacon, then he or she is known as a “brother” or “sister.” Records of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, 1649-1844, the John Myles Manuscript, John Hay Library, Brown University, (Nov. 26, 1718), 211.
Wheaton. Both the members of FBCS and Wheaton saw in Devotion gifts and skills necessary for a pastor; they embraced what became known as an “external call.” The external call is a community’s affirmation of one’s skills, abilities, and calling for ordination. Despite the encouragement of Wheaton and the congregation Devotion did not accept the offer and did not pursue ordination. While we do not know exactly why Devotion declined the external urge to pursue ordination, we can speculate that Devotion did not have a strong sense of an “internal call;” a personal religious experience leading one to desire ordination. Regardless why, it seems that Devotion did not have a strong sense that he was called to be a pastor.219

In 1725 John Comer was invited by Wheaton to serve with him at FBCS with the hope that Comer would pursue ordination. Comer declined due to what he described as an “opposition” from the community, feeling that the negativity towards him would be detrimental towards his work with and for the church.220 As he saw in Devotion, Wheaton saw in Comer a potential for ordination and wanted to confirm that external call. Yet Comer’s reluctance to express and embrace an internal call, as well possible friction from the community, occluded Comer’s ordination. In this case we find a positive relationship with the congregation lacking as well as a lack of an internal call.

Samuel Maxwell, the 4th pastor of FBCS, struggled in a very real way to embrace and articulate his own sense of internal call. Maxwell was ordained in 1721 by William Peckham, who was at the time the pastor of First Baptist Newport, RI. Wheaton also took part in Maxwell’s ordination, expressing his and the congregation’s endorsement of

Maxwell’s call. As a pastor, Maxwell served Baptist churches in Boston, Newport, and Swansea, but not without challenge and doubts.\(^{221}\) In 1729, while he was in Newport, Maxwell stated that he did not intend to preach any more and walked away from the pulpit, and presumably his ordination. Despite Maxwell’s reluctance to preach, he continued to read scripture, pray, teach, and lead worship with an unofficial assembly of Christians.\(^{222}\) Then in June, 1730, Maxwell read a paper to the Newport congregation signifying his intent to leave preaching, citing his “scruples,” concerning infant baptism as a reason for his departure.\(^{223}\) According to Maxwell, too much importance was placed on the particularity of baptism when people should be spending more time praying.\(^{224}\)

One would assume Maxwell’s qualms about baptism would cause a considerable stir among other Baptists, yet those who write about him in later years have labeled Maxwell a “Sabbatharian,” or a Seventh-Day Baptist and make no mention of his a peadobaptist leanings. It is likely that Maxwell’s urge for people to “pray” in a proper way is a call for people to pray and worship on Saturday rather than Sunday, which may have been seen as a greater scandal than an acceptance of infant baptism.\(^{225}\) In his reluctance over his position as a pastor as well as in his theological shifts we see ambiguity in Maxwell’s sense of call and faith. His theological turns and his moments of vocational ambivalence offer a good example of the importance the internal call has in ordination. Even when he was embraced and ordained by a congregation, Maxwell’s own ambiguity concerning his ordination affected his relationship with the church, his

\(^{221}\) C. Edwin Barrows, \textit{The Diary of John Comer}, n, 39.
\(^{222}\) Comer, \textit{Diary}, 77-78, 81.
\(^{223}\) Maxwell’s “scruples,” very likely leaned towards an acceptance of infant baptism, a difficult position to hold in a church that affirms and practices a “believer’s” or adult baptism. Ibid., 108.
\(^{224}\) Samuel Maxwell, \textit{The Case and Complaint of Mr. Samuel Maxwell} (Newport, 1750), 19.
understanding of his role as pastor, and his sense of duty. When Maxwell concluded that he no longer had an internal call, i.e. when he no longer felt he could preach, he resigned from the pastoral position in Newport, declining to perform the duties that the congregation expected of him. When Maxwell began to articulate his doctrinal shift through liturgy and worship, he was not directly renouncing his internal call, but the way he felt his call should be articulated as a pastor diverging from the understanding of the congregation’s sense of call, particularly along the lines of identity and practice. As a result of these theological shifts, Maxwell was dismissed from FBCS and from the Baptist church in Rehoboth. In reflecting on his dismissal from the Rehoboth church, Maxwell wrote, “The relationship between a Minister and his people is not a light trivial thing…” expressing lament over his break with the church.\footnote{Maxwell, Case and Complaint, 22.} Maxwell did not take his dismissal lightly and perhaps believed at one time that he was called to ordained ministry. Yet his understanding of call had diverged from the expectations and understandings of the Baptist congregations he had served in such a way that the community could no longer recognize Maxwell’s ordination. They could no longer affirm an external call and thus could no longer maintain a relationship with Maxwell as the pastor.

Through the external call the community would affirm an individual as having the necessary gifts, skills, and abilities needed to be a pastor. It was a public affirmation of an individual’s potential to become a pastor. For example, Wheaton was described as “a man who exerted a great and good influence on the Church and on others also.”\footnote{Thatcher, Historical Sketch, 6.} Such a description celebrates Wheaton’s positive influence among members of the community as well as the community’s acceptance of Wheaton. Before gaining his ordination,
Wheaton was chosen to assist Samuel Luther, the second pastor of FBCS. While working with Luther, the community continued to recognize Wheaton’s gifts for pastoral ministry. After Luther’s death the congregation ordained Wheaton and made him the pastor of FBCS.

As already stated, Wheaton recognized in John Comer gifts for ministry. Comer wrote about Wheaton’s invitation describing Wheaton’s assessment of him as “having been earnest with the Lord for ye bestowment of suitable gifts and graces for so sacred a service.” Wheaton was affirming Comer as someone who could be ordained, articulating an external call.\textsuperscript{228} Comer did work and assist Wheaton for a time, yet, as noted above, because of what Comer perceived as feelings of unrest he did not pursue ordination through FBCS, but moved to be ordained and to serve as the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Newport, Rhode Island.

In 1731, Wheaton saw in Samuel Maxwell some of the same gifts and potential that he saw in Comer and asked Maxwell to help him with his ministry. Maxwell accepted, showed promise, and in 1733, with Wheaton’s endorsement, Maxwell was ordained at FBCS in a service of prayer with laying on of hands.\textsuperscript{229} The example of Comer and Maxwell show that the internal call did not always precede the external call. Wheaton’s affirmation may have been what these two individuals needed to embrace their own sense of an internal call. Before an internal call was articulated, Wheaton and the community recognized the gifts and abilities, as well as a sense of a divine presence in Devotion, Comer, and Maxwell, encouraging a call for ordination.

While there were times when the congregation embraced and endorsed one’s

\textsuperscript{228} Comer, \textit{Diary}, 34.
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Records}, (April 18, 1733) 232.
external call, there were also examples of the community displaying a less enthusiastic articulation of a person’s call. In these examples the community expressed resistance toward offering full support of an individual’s ordination, voicing a sense of ambiguity around the individual’s gifts and ability for ministry, or his call to be a pastor. Jabez Wood was already a member of the congregation and provided supply preaching and teaching while the church was looking for a full-time pastor. In December, 1748, Wood was called to be the sixth the pastor of the church, and performed all the duties for which the pastor was normally responsible. While he was functionally the pastor of FBCS and Wood was not ordained until September, 1751, almost three years after he became the pastor.\footnote{Records, (March 3, 1747; Oct. 6, 1748, Dec. 1, 1748), 247; Thatcher, \textit{Historical Sketch}, 9.}

The glowing and positive description we found of Wheaton was not repeated for Wood. In one source Wood was described as a “man of moderate talent, whose views of the Gospel were not very clearly defined.” Such a description suggests that Wood’s performance and presence as a preacher, teacher, and pastor was lackluster at best.\footnote{Thatcher, ibid.} At the time of his ordination, the congregation did not rally behind Wood as a pastor; he was approved with a less than unanimous vote. Such lack of enthusiasm may have been why he was not ordained until three years after he started serving the church as their pastor. Members of the community did not fully and completely embrace Wood as someone who had the necessary gifts or the call for ordained ministry. Perhaps Wood’s three year trial as a pastor was to prove to the congregation that he was indeed capable, and even then a number of the members were not convinced.

The practice of having a time of trial for an individual before ordination was not
unique to FBCS. In 1746, when a Pennsylvanian church was without a pastor, the Philadelphia Baptist Association suggested that the church choose someone from within the congregation to lead worship and to perform other pastoral duties even though he was not ordained. If that person proved he could “exercise the office of ruling elder” without ordination, then he could continue to fulfill pastoral duties and begin to work towards ordination.\textsuperscript{232}

The role of the external call shows the influence the community had when discerning the status of the pastor. Ordination occurred through a specific community, the local church, as a way of celebrating an individual’s gifts for ministry and internal calling as a pastor. When a pastor would move to a new church even if he had been previously ordained, it was common for the church to ordain him again, expressing their affirmation of the pastor’s gifts and relationship to the community. In doing so, the local church would scrutinize the worthiness of the candidate for ministry even if he had been ordained elsewhere; the external call was affirmed with each new position.\textsuperscript{233} Thus the local church community would affirm an individual’s internal call to ordained ministry, and would affirm their support of the pastor through their decision to call him to serve their church. One can claim to be ordained, but if there was not a community affirming that claim, if there was not an external call, the ordination would have no validity.

If a congregation affirmed the external call of an individual, and the individual expressed an internal call, the affirmation of the congregation, expressed through ordination, is not indelible. If the relationship between the pastor and the congregation

were to change in a negative way, then the congregations’ affirmation of the external call may diminish. Benjamin Harrington began his ministry at FBCS with a great deal of positive affirmation and affection from the congregation; the congregation affirmed Harrington’s external call, his gifts, abilities, and charisma with enthusiasm. Yet this affirmation of Harrington’s call and presence turned sour near the end of his time at FBCS affecting his role and function as the pastor. Harrington began his pastorate at FBCS in 1742, and was described as someone with “more than ordinary abilities,” who was loved and respected by the congregation. This relationship changed in 1748, when Harrison abruptly abandoned the congregation leaving only reports of “unchaste conduct, which much sunk his influence.” In his history of FBCS Thatcher wrote how, “unfavorable reports, implicating his moral character, began to be circulated, and his influence was destroyed here.” Before Harrington’s tragic falling, he was respected, loved, and seen as the pastor of the church. Yet after negative reports on Harrington’s actions spread, his relationship with the congregation weakened, eroded, and his influence as a pastor diminished. While the specifics of Harrington’s actions are not clear, the community’s perception of the immoral nature of his actions negatively influenced their view of Harrington as a pastor and the external call they previously affirmed was no longer embraced. Even if Harrington desired to return to FBCS, without an external call, he could not function as the pastor in the community.

The external call was not only affirmed by the local congregation, but by other churches and pastors representing the larger American Baptist denomination. When an individual articulated his internal call towards ordination, not only would the local church

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235 Fisher, “History,” 266.
confirm the candidate’s call articulating an external call, but pastors from neighboring Baptist churches would be involved in affirming the external call in one way or another. Nearby pastors would become involved in the initial ordination service or in an installation service when a pastor was starting in a new location. For example, when John Comer was installed at the Baptist church in Rehoboth, Wheaton, who was still the pastor at FBCS, preached at Comer’s installation service and offered Comer the right hand of fellowship. Through his actions, Wheaton was not only offering his own personal support but was also representing the approval of other Baptist pastors in the area.237 When Samuel Maxwell was ordained in 1721 he received the “imposition of hands” by Wheaton and by William Peckham, who was at the time the pastor of the Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island.238 As with Comer, both Peckham and Wheaton were offering Maxwell their individual support and as well representing the support and approval of like-minded Baptist churches and pastors in the area. In 1742, when FBCS wanted to call Benjamin Harrington (who had previously been ordained) as the next pastor, the congregation addressed a council of Baptist pastors in order to seek approval of Harrington’s post. The council answered in the affirmative and in response to the council’s positive response, FBCS wrote to the Baptist church in Newport requesting Elder John Callender as well as other members of the congregation to assist with the installation of Harrington as “pastor and teacher” of FBCS.239 When FBCS finally decided to ordain Jabez Wood in 1751, the congregation called upon Elders Mash and Epham to offer their approval and assist in the ordination. Mash and Epham decided to withhold their support until the church had the opportunity to “settle some uneasiness

237 Comer, Diary, 121.
238 Barrows, Diary of John Comer, n, 39.
amongst them.” After a brief time when the “uneasiness” was settled to Mash and Epham’s satisfaction, they affirmed and endorsed Wood’s ordination on September 5th, 1751. In all of these examples we see local pastors having an influential role in the ordination and installation of a pastor in the local church.

The practice of seeking the affirmation and support of other pastors for installation or ordination was seen as important in part because of a growing theological and liturgical diversity among the Baptists in America due to the religious revivals of the 1730s. These revivals, often referred to as the First Great Awakening, occurred through the efforts of itinerant preachers following the example of George Whitefield. A doctrine of “conscious conversion,” emphasized by Whitefield and others placed one’s religious experience over one’s verbal profession of faith. These revivals celebrated emotional extravagance in the preaching and by the people gathered to hear the sermon.

In the 1720s, before the revivals of the First Great Awakening swept across the East Coast, there were a small number of Baptists living in the colonies. Yet in the 1730s the size and presence of the Baptists within the colonies grew, achieving a certain level of “respectability” among other Christian groups and the colonial populous. A large part of this growth occurred because of the emergence of the Separatist movement in the First Great Awakening. Conversion, according to many of the Separatists, was demonstrated

240 Records, (Jan. 10, 1751), 248b.
241 Ordination councils were not an innovation of the 1700s, but played a part in Baptist life since early Baptist life. In addition to assuring an acceptable doctrinal stance of a pastor and church, councils of pastors and associations of church would offer support to churches and draft confessions of faith for the sake of identity.
243 McBeth, Baptist Heritage, 200.
by the individual in an emotional, experiential way and led toward the creation of a “pure” church, a society of visible saints. Due to the emphasis on a lived and demonstrative conversion, disciplinary measures were often taken if a member strayed in one way or another from the perceived path of Christianity.\(^{244}\) As the revivals continued, Separatists, ascribing to many of the theological tenets and liturgical ethos of the revivals, began to claim to be Baptist in the 1740s. This transition occurred partly because Baptists and Separatists shared beliefs in regenerate believers, Biblical orientation in preaching and worship, and disciplinary practices. This transition also occurred because Baptists were protected by the Act of Toleration while the Separatists were not. This influx of neophyte Baptists caused tension with the traditional, long-standing Baptists over issues of liturgy, theology, and identity, and thus a council was needed to express approval on behalf of an aspect of Baptists for a candidate.\(^{245}\)

We see a desire for a council of like-minded Baptists in 1751 with Shubal Stearns, who originally came out of the Separatist movement. Stearns claimed to embrace the tenets and ideals of many Baptists, and in 1754 was invited to serve a Baptist church as their pastor. Yet Stearns was not recognized by the “regular” or long-standing Baptists, only by those Baptists who also came out of the Separatist movement and did not receive ordination from the “regular” Baptists. Daniel Marshall, who also moved from the Separatists to the Baptists desired ordination as a Baptist but could not find any support outside of Stern’s church. Feeling that he needed other pastors present to validate his ordination, Marshall requested other Separatist Baptists from farther away to convene a

\(^{244}\) Goen, Revivalism, 159-164.
\(^{245}\) Goen, Revivalism, 258.
council in order to affirm his internal and external call for ordination.246 With many the “regular” Baptists the same desire for the presence of other pastors for ordination occurred. In 1746 the pastor of the Baptist Church in Middleboro MA, a long-standing Baptist church, was looking to regain ordination for various reasons. In order to do so he needed three or four other long-standing Baptist ministers present to affirm and support his desires; their participation was seen as important to verify his ordination status.247

The influence of the growing diversity of Baptist churches moved beyond ordination and shaped associational life. Like-minded Baptist churches strived to support each other, insure doctrinal unity, guidance in disciplinary matters, and set standards and expectations for ordination through associations. The first formal association of Baptists in America was the Philadelphia Baptist Association (1708) followed by the Warren Association (1767).248 This emergence of associations of Baptist churches would be the precursor of the institutional denomination which would begin formation in the next 100 years. Through Ordination Councils, associations and eventually a denomination would remain involved in the ordination process.

Relationality and Authority

Because of the non-hierarchal nature of Baptist churches, the relationships between the pastor and the members of the congregation are an important ingredient in a theology of ordination. Within individual churches, the role of the covenant was instrumental in shaping and forming the life of the community and the relationships of that community. The covenant, a document composed by the members of the church, set

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a standard of doctrine, behavior, and expectations for members of the church. The church covenant was seen as an agreement between the members of the congregation, as well as a covenant with God, and recognizes that God is active and present in the community.249 Often the church covenant would emphasize an egalitarian ordering of the congregation, including the pastor, yet at the same time the pastor was often seen as an authoritative figure in matters concerning scripture and spirituality. Such a sense of authority and respect came out of the shared belief that one did not simply become a pastor on a whim or personal desire, but was called by God to the vocation.250 Because of the authority and respect of the pastor, the church was often seen as “under the care of” the pastor as demonstrated in a number of correspondences between FBCS and Baptist congregations in Newport and Boston. Salutations in these correspondences began with an acknowledgement of this position of the pastor addressing the church as “under the care of”251 This linguistic phrase symbolizes a perceived significance of the relationship of the pastor to the congregation. Even as the pastor is a member of the congregation, he is called to take care of the people and is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the community.

Another area where the pastor is notably set apart from the rest of the congregation is in the practice of baptism. When a baptism was recorded in FBCS the pastor was consistently named as official of the liturgical act, as if to give credit to the pastor for performing the act.252 The pastor was seen as responsible for administering the “sacraments,” i.e. the Lord’s Supper. While both Comer and Wheaton fulfilled this duty

249 Brackney, Baptist Life and Thought, 126.; for more on the role of the covenant in Baptist life see Paul Fiddes, ‘‘Walking Together’: The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,” in Tracks and Traces, 21-47.
250 McBeth, Baptist Heritage, 247-8.
251 Records, (circa 1719), 57.
252 Records, (Dec. 5, 1720; Jan. 5, 1721; July 6, 1721), 218, 220.
with regularity, Maxwell neglected to offer the Lord’s Supper to the people.\textsuperscript{253} When confronted over his lack of pastoral responsibility, Maxwell claimed that he did not feel moved to offer the Lord’s Supper. Because there were no other ordained clergy within the congregation, without Maxwell the congregation was not able to receive the ordinance. The practice was that only an ordained minister could officiate over the Lord’s Supper. When John Comer heard about Maxwell’s doctrinal ambiguity, his questionable preaching, and his teaching about infant baptism (as discussed earlier in this section), he wrote, “Lord keep those whom I baptize sound in your faith.” In Comer’s eyes he had a responsibility to the members of his church as the pastor.\textsuperscript{254}

If the pastor was to be responsible for the care of the congregation in spiritual and theological matters, as well as the one who would administer the Lord’s Supper and baptism, we must wonder what a church would do if it were without a pastor. In 1723, when a church in Brandywine, Pennsylvania did not have a pastor, the Philadelphia Baptist Association suggested that the members of the church could read scripture, pray and exercise spiritual gifts, but prohibited preaching by anyone who was not ordained.\textsuperscript{255} Such a directive suggests that the pastor’s primary role within a congregation was to preach. As mentioned earlier, the PBA also suggested that a congregation could choose someone from within the congregation to lead worship and perform other pastoral duties, using that time as a trial to see if he had the necessary gifts to serve as a pastor.\textsuperscript{256}

Yet there are a number of examples of lay people performing the duties of the pastor in FBCS. In 1729 John Callender, who was not ordained at the time, was hired to

\textsuperscript{254} Comer, \textit{Diary}, 108.
\textsuperscript{256} Gillette, “Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,” 1746, in McBeth, \textit{Sourcebook}, 152.
help Wheaton with the duties of FBCS and did so for two years before he was ordained as the pastor of the Baptist church in Newport.\textsuperscript{257} As mentioned earlier, Jabez Wood preached as a supply pastor (temporary substitute) for three and a half years before he was ordained.\textsuperscript{258} In Wood’s case, we need to remember that Harrington left his position suddenly, which placed the church in a moment of crisis looking for someone to lead the church without any notice. Time without a pastor was not something that the congregation was comfortable with.\textsuperscript{259} As stated earlier, Wood was called to fill in as the pastor in 1748, yet he was not officially installed until 1751.\textsuperscript{260}

**Discipline**

In the early 1700s if a member of the church was delinquent for one reason or another (lack of attendance, unruly conduct, etc.) he or she would be visited by some Deacons and/or “brothers” from the church who would implore the individual to change his or her ways. Wheaton, Maxwell, and Harrington were not involved in these confrontations; members were visited by other members. For example, in 1718 Brother Millard was called before the church over a questionable bill of sale to another church member and reprimanded for his actions.\textsuperscript{261} The names of those who visited Millard to call him to accountability were members of the congregation but did not include the pastor. Even the church president was active and involved in the ordeal, but nowhere was the pastor mentioned as having a part in these proceedings. The lack of the pastor’s name in issues of discipline was a constant with pastors Wheaton through Harrington. Yet when Jabez Wood was pastor there was a shift in this practice as Wood began to take part

\textsuperscript{257} Fisher, “History,” 264.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 267.
\textsuperscript{259} *Records*, (March 3, 1747; Oct. 6, 1748; Dec. 1, 1748), 247.
\textsuperscript{260} We will recall that Woods did not receive an enthusiastic reception from the congregation possibility further complicating his position as pastor. *Records*, 247, (Jan. 10, 1751), 248b.
\textsuperscript{261} *Records*, (Summer, 1718) 209.
in disciplinary visitations. In June 1774, the congregation asked Wood and one other member of the congregation to visit “Sister” Cole and confront her over her lack of attendance.\textsuperscript{262} This is the first example of the pastor actively involved in church discipline, suggesting a possible shift in the pastor’s influence and relationship with the congregation. This shift perhaps reflected a change in the amount of responsibility, care, and involvement the pastor was expected to have over individuals in the congregation.

If an entire congregation or a pastor was seen as delinquent by other pastors or churches pastors from nearby churches would take action. After the reputation of FBCS was damaged and diminished due to the troubling pastorates of Maxwell and Harrington, Jabez Wood went with a delegation to Stoughton, Massachusetts in 1776 to take part in receiving Elder Jeremiah Banitow into the Stoughton church. Through his actions and his presence Wood “renewed [the] fellowship” with the other Baptist pastors and churches demonstrating the way in which the pastor was most commonly the spokesperson for the church.\textsuperscript{263}

When Samuel Maxwell was airing his theological ambiguity over worship and baptism in a public manner, John Comer, who was then the pastor of the Newport church, felt that he had a responsibility to try to guide Maxwell to the “right and proper path” and thus confronted Maxwell taking on the mantle of discipline and correction. Seeing that Maxwell would not change his views, Comer then made the point to publicly preach against Maxwell’s views in order to warn members of his congregation and members of Maxwell’s congregation against Maxwell’s doctrinal errors.\textsuperscript{264} Comer saw it as his responsibility to confront Maxwell and then to be sure to protect people in his church, as

\textsuperscript{262} Records, (May, 1757), 250.
\textsuperscript{263} Records, (Aug. 1, 1776), 67.
\textsuperscript{264} Comer, Diary, 108.
well as others, from what he perceived to be doctrinal errors. John Callander, who was at this time ordained, wrote to Maxwell warning him that those who do not, “comply with the order of the Gospel themselves,” offend not only the people but God, and called for Maxwell to avoid “offence to the Brethren,” for to sin against the brethren and to wound them would be to sin against Christ. Callander urged Maxwell to change his mind for the sake of unity and threatened that Maxwell’s church would be dismissed from fellowship with the other Baptist churches in the area if Maxwell did not change his mind and his preaching.\footnote{Maxwell, \textit{Case and Complaint}, 7, 11.} While it was common practice for lay people to approach other lay people on behalf of the church in order to address issues of doctrine or practice, we do not have examples of lay people approaching a pastor when his teachings and practices are questionable. If a pastor were to err in one way or another it was other pastors who would address the issue.

Perhaps the greatest example of a pastor from one church becoming involved with another church is in the case of Daniel White. In 1719 members of the First Baptist Church of Newport requested assistance from Wheaton and the congregation of FBCS with an ongoing conflict caused by Daniel White. Before attending the Newport church, Daniel White was active with the Baptist churches in both Boston and Swansea. As a newcomer to FBCS, White was noted for his gifts for ministry, and in a short amount of time he gained the favor of the congregation. As his status increased, White was asked to assist Wheaton with ministerial duties, perhaps with the hope that White would eventually seek ordination. Yet in a short amount of time, the relationship soured as White began to accuse Wheaton of preaching false doctrine, an accusation he also made of the pastor at the Boston church. It was not long before White removed his membership.
from FBCS and moved to Newport, RI. In Newport, the story repeated itself as White was initially praised for his gifts and was given positions of responsibility and leadership within the congregation. One can only wonder if the things would have ended in the same way as it did in Boston and Swansea if the John Clarke family did not offer the Newport church a donation in Clarke’s name.\textsuperscript{266} The Newport church received a trust from the Clarke estate and had to consider what to do with the donation. In an attempt to wrestle control of the funds, Daniel White attempted to make himself the pastor of the church, threatening to split First Baptist, Newport.

It was at this point when William Peckham, who at the time was the pastor of the Newport church, wrote to Swansea and asked for Wheaton’s assistance. A few months later Wheaton and a contingent of representatives from the FBCS congregation met with White, Peckham, and the congregation of the Newport church to discuss and consider the matter. In the meeting we can only imagine the conversation that transpired between the current pastor Peckham, White who desired to be the pastor, Wheaton who had previously been slandered by White, and members of both the Newport and Swansea churches. According to the messengers from FBCS, one member of the Swansea church confronted a group from the Newport church who were supporting White. He pointed at Peckham and said, “God has ordained him the Elder and pastor of the church and you ought to trust him with reverence and respect, and not with contempt.”\textsuperscript{267} The meeting did not go well, and the Newport church decided to endorse Daniel White as Elder and pastor. The congregation of FBCS responded with a letter claiming that they would only

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{266} John Clarke was the co-founder of the Rhode Island Colony and was the first pastor of the Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island. William R. Estep, “Clarke, John (1609-1676),” in Dictionary of Baptists in America, 84-85.
\item \textsuperscript{267} Records, (date unclear), 92.
\end{itemize}
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recognize Peckham as the Elder, and they would neither address White as a member of
the church nor as the Elder. In this interchange, we note that Peckham insisted that
Wheaton give his assistance along with other members of FBCS, suggesting that the
presence of Wheaton, another Baptist pastor, was significant. FBCS’s refusal to
acknowledge White as Elder of the Newport church suggests that the individual’s
relationship with other pastors and churches is important when considering a status of
ordination. White did not participate in an ordination council, did not receive the
confirmation of the other pastors, and was not seen as one ordained by the other pastors.
If he was considered ordained in any way, it was only within the Newport church.268

Part II – 1800s

The early 1800s was a time of institutional growth and denominational
development due in large part to the energy and enthusiasm of the 2nd Great
Awakening.269 Preachers who were not a part of the accepted and institutionalized
religious movements of the day were closely connected to this energy as they held
revivals and camp meetings across the country. They advocated a passion for the
expansion of Christianity as well as hostility towards orthodox teachings and traditional
styles of worship. These were preachers who were claiming a new spirit of religious
fervor in America that pushed towards a “reconstruction” of religion, returning to what
they viewed as a “pure” form of Christianity. Such a movement offered the poor and
common people, those in the agrarian class, a sense of self-respect and worth in the
religious community. The magnetic religious leaders made the claim that established

268 Records, (date unclear), 61, 63.
269 Some historians claim that the 2nd Great Awakening took place around 1795 to 1810. Others
suggest that the Awakening went into the 1830s and 40s. Mark A. Noll, A History of Christianity, 166.
4-6. See also Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (University of
churches and educated clergy strived to be separate from and above the common people. Such a distinction of social and economic classes was eschewed in these populous religious movements. Learned theologians and preachers were not to be trusted, claimed these preachers. For the poor farmer, the various movements in the 2nd Great Awakening offered an egalitarian religious community which they could join. These preachers offered a vision of self-respect and self-confidence to those of the more agrarian class taking the religious experience of the people at face value, empowering and affirming the individuals. What was important was not the status and learning of the pastor or priest, but the individual’s response to the call for conversion and commitment to Christianity. The responsibility of faith and salvation was placed in the hands of the individual.\footnote{Nathan Hatch, \textit{Democratization}, 4-11.}

In addition to the democratic and individualistic spirit that was sweeping the religious landscape of America, a number of church manuals, histories, and texts on Baptist doctrines were published. While an individualistic spirit was strong in these revivals, a movement toward a solidification of the character of Baptist identity was also present as is evidenced in these publications.\footnote{Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 216.} Even as some were working towards a sense of unity amongst Baptists, there still existed a great deal of diversity. One example of this diversity amongst Baptist was what Henry Vedder negatively described as the rise of Unitarian Baptists.\footnote{Vedder, \textit{A Short History}, 335. As we will see Benjamin Taylor, a Unitarian Baptist, served as pastor of FBCS.}

Before we consider the practices of FBCS for this time period, a brief word about some of the sources used at the \textit{teachings of the tradition}. Many of the materials we are considering were published in the late 1800s. The works from the early 1800s focused
around the debate of clergy education. We find this in the “Fourth Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions of the United States,” written in 1818, John Taylor’s “Thoughts on Missions,” written in 1819, and “Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric” from a student’s notebook from 1830. On the one hand, these earlier works do not speak to broader issues of ordination processes, or the idea of the call, on the other hand they give an important insight into a particular debate which affected the understanding and view of the clergy in the American Baptist denomination. The later works, Wayland’s *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (1857), Jenkins’ *Baptist Doctrines* (1880), and Cathcart’s *Baptist Encyclopedia* (1881) reflect not only the thoughts of the particular times those works were written, but also movements and trends leading up to the date of publication as well as a solidification of a large part of the denomination alluded to in this introduction. Thus, while they were written later in the century the contents of these writings speak to the broader experience and feelings of previous decades.

**The Theology of the Pastor**

The importance of the internal and external call of the pastor continued to be recognized in the 1800s, yet we also begin to see an increased interest in the educational background and the theological leanings of the pastor. Abial Fisher, pastor of FBCS from 1836-1846, wrote a brief history of the pastors during the early 1800s that offers a good amount of information, albeit biased. In his entries, Fisher frequently comments on the education of the pastors and the possible influence one’s education or lack of may have had on the pastor’s relationship with the congregation. For example, Fisher was sure to note that William Northrup was a man who lacked formal education and thus verged

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273 Fisher “History of the First Baptist Church.”
towards Arminianism in teaching and practice (something which Fisher found objectionable). It is important to remember that FBCS was originally founded as a Calvinist Baptist church and maintained such an identity for more than the first one hundred years. Northrup’s Arminian tendencies and preaching rejected the idea of divine election which had been articulated in traditional Calvinist Baptist theology. Instead Northrup suggested God had universal perseverance, or grace for all people.\textsuperscript{274}

According to Fisher, Northrup had an “easy method of communication,” which may have proven beneficial in his initial relationship with the congregation, yet Northrup’s ministry did not end well.\textsuperscript{275} Fisher speculates that Northrup was an exceedingly good farmer, and due to his success with the church farm Northrup was able to live more comfortably than many of the members of FBCS thought was appropriate for a pastor.\textsuperscript{276} It was commonly held that the pastor should not be wealthy, and Northrup’s agricultural skills placed him in a position of relative wealth leading to a certain amount of ire among the members of FBCS. For his part, Northrup claimed that he was “abused” by many in the church and, according to Fisher, Northrup was certain to inform his friends of his mistreatment, creating factions within the congregation and causing a division.\textsuperscript{277} In 1807 Northrup informed FBCS that he would no longer serve as the pastor, and a year later asked to be dismissed to join the Baptist church in Rehoboth.\textsuperscript{278} While it may not seem that a lack of education or particular theological leanings were the causes of the poor relationship

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\textsuperscript{274} Fisher “History of the First Baptist Church,” 276. Arminianism comes out of the doctrines and teachings of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), stresses the idea that humanity has to respond to divine grace, and refutes the idea of divine election. Van A. Harvey, “Arminianism,” \textit{A Handbook of Theological Terms: Their meaning and Background exposed in over 300 Articles} (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 29-30.

\textsuperscript{275} Fisher, “History of First Baptist Church,” 277.

\textsuperscript{276} At this time it was common to let the pastor use land owned by the church as a farm to supplement his yearly salary.

\textsuperscript{277} Fisher, “History of First Baptist Church,” 276-7.

\textsuperscript{278} Records, (October 1, 1807), 301; (June 2, 1808), 303.
\end{footnotes}
between Northrup and the congregation, Fisher suggested that money spent on an educated pastor would have gained a better pastor and avoided any conflict.279

While in-between pastors, the church asked Benjamin Taylor to help on a temporary basis by preaching in the morning service.280 Taylor had already planned on going to Swansea to help a Six Principle Baptist church which had more Arminian leanings.281 When he received an invitation from FBCS to preach in the morning service, Taylor, who was described as a “Unitarian Baptist,” worried that his involvement with the “Christian Connexion” movement as well as his Unitarian theology would cause difficulty in what had historically been a Calvinist congregation.282

One of the major characteristics of the Second Great Awakening was an emphasis on individual freedom and authority; the religious experience of the individual was celebrated as divinely inspired. The lifting up of the individual’s conscience led to four major complaints with Calvinism: an endorsement of the status quo (which did not hold the individual’s experience in such a positive light), a sense of clergy control over the personal religious experience of the people, a preoccupation with complex and complicated doctrines, and a sense of clerical superiority.283 One of the results of this popular reaction to Calvinism was the forming of the “Christian Connection” by Elias Smith and Abner Jones in the beginning of the 19th century.284 Smith and Jones felt that it was important to have a “serious investigation” of scripture by the people rather than

280 Records, (June 16, 1819), 380.
283 Hatch, Democratization, 171.
284 We have seen two spellings of “Connection,” that which was used in the 1800s, and that which is more common today. They are both referring to the same thing. Hatch, Democratization, 42.
allow it to be interpreted by clergy.\textsuperscript{285} The Christian Connection embraced an emphasis on scripture, universal salvation, and freedom of the individual consciousness.

With this in mind we can see why Taylor would have been reluctant to lead a church that was historically known as a Calvinist congregation. In response to his doctrinal worries, one member stated, “that they had had the doctrine of election preached to them until the meeting house was empty, and that now they should like to try some other preaching, and see if it [the meeting house] could not be filled.”\textsuperscript{286} As Taylor preached at FBCS, the relationship between the pastor and the congregation warmed. In November, 1820, Taylor baptized a number of members of FBCS, suggesting that the doctrinal differences between Taylor and the congregation was less of an issue than Taylor was originally concerned.\textsuperscript{287} In December, 1820, FBCS voted to give Taylor permission to administer the “sacrament” (Lord’s Supper) to the church, “providing he complys with the church covenant.”\textsuperscript{288} In January, 1821, Taylor opened the annual church meeting with prayer, the first time that a pastor was mentioned as opening a church meeting with prayer in the early 1800s.\textsuperscript{289} What we see is a gradual acceptance of Taylor as the pastor of the church in various aspects of FBCS despite the doctrinal differences.

While he was preaching and fulfilling other pastoral duties at FBCS, Taylor was also preaching and serving as the pastor of the Six Principle Baptist church in Swansea. The growing responsibilities that Taylor had at FBCS along with the needs at the Six Principle church became overwhelming for Taylor and in March 1821, he requested a

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{286} Edumds, \textit{Memoir}, 45. Many of the popular revivalists of the time were aligned with a universal theology including Lorenzo Dow, John Leland, and Charles Finney. Hatch, \textit{Democratization}, 171-179, 197.
\textsuperscript{287} Records, (Nov. 5, 1820), 359.
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., (Dec. 7, 1820), 360.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., (January 4, 1821).
dismissal from FBCS claiming that it was difficult to preach in both churches. His request was described as “friendly and Christian,” lacking any sense of antagonism. In his history Fisher writes that Taylor was well liked, but describes Taylor’s preaching as “indefinite,” telling people how good they were but not expounding a great deal on Christ, sin or hell. Again, we need to be aware of Fisher’s doctrinal bias in such comments. Overall we can say that Taylor’s time at FBCS was one that was cherished by the congregation despite doctrinal differences. The congregation seemed to look past and even embrace the doctrinal differences that Taylor brought with him, welcoming him into their community as their pastor. Such a relationship is significant in the issue of ordination and the pastoral relationship with the congregation, for it may suggest that personality and charisma carry greater importance than theology. As we will see, FBCS will continue to move away from its reformed roots, and yet in the 1800s will never completely leave them.

The doctrinal diversity expressed by the pastors continued after Taylor, yet not with similar positive responses. In his history, Thatcher suggests that Jessie Briggs was aligned with the Freewill Baptists, a group loosely connected with the Christian Connexion, placing him in similar doctrinal circles as Taylor and the Unitarian Baptists. While such a theological stance did not seem to be an issue when Taylor was the pastor, Abail Fisher describes the climate after Briggs as one where the congregation desired more Calvinistic preaching. In December 1835 the congregation directly addressed Briggs’ theological leanings when he sent a letter requesting a transfer of

290 Ibid., (March 1, 1821).
292 Thatcher, Historical Sketch, 13. After experiencing a revelation similar to Elias Smith’s, Abner Jones sought ordination with the Freewill Baptists under the condition that he retain his independence as a preacher. Hatch, Democratization, 42.
membership from FBCS to a Baptist church in upstate New York. 294 John Martin, who brought the request from Briggs to the congregation, questioned whether or not the church in question was a “Freewill” church. The discussion that followed this request considered Briggs’ involvement and preaching in the Warren association while he was serving FBCS. The Warren Association was known as a Calvinist Baptist association, and if Briggs was associated with the Warren Association, then either Briggs was a Calvinist or he was not honest about his true theology. After some discussion, the members of FBCS decided to give Briggs the benefit of the doubt and to send a letter to the New York church expressing their thoughts and concern over Briggs becoming a part of a church that might not match his theological leanings. 295 We must wonder if Fisher and Thatcher were wrong in their assessment of Briggs as someone from a Freewill church, or if Briggs deceived the congregation as to his theological leanings in order to secure the position of pastor. If the latter is the case, then we see an example of a pastor changing to fit the desires of the congregation, something that we have not witnessed with previous pastors. Despite the congregation’s ambiguity around Briggs’ doctrinal beliefs, the awareness of theological differences evidenced in their conversation concerning the church Briggs wanted to join in New York along with the urge for “Calvinist” preaching after Briggs’ departure suggests that the members of FBCS were well aware of their own theological leanings. Despite their friendly relationship with Taylor, the congregation was not ready to abandon their Calvinist roots and accept whatever theological leanings a pastor in question might have. As if an answer to their

294 It was the practice of the Baptist churches in that time (and continues today) for someone to change membership via a letter from the previous congregation confirming the person’s good standing and assuring that his or her beliefs would conform with the Baptist church in question.

295 Records, (Dec 3, 1835), 389.
prayers, the following preacher, Fisk, had the “correct” theological credentials; Fisk was a Calvinist.

Previous to Fisk, FBCS practiced an “open” communion, meaning all who had been baptized were welcome to partake of the ordinance regardless if the baptism was in a different Baptist church, or through a different tradition, or even as an infant baptism. This openness is informed by an Arminian theology of grace. Under Fisk, the “church went back to its ancient order,” returned to Calvinism in the preaching, and to the practice of a “closed” communion.

We find other pastors embracing a Calvinist theology in this time. Accord to Fisher, William Barton followed Northrup’s soft Arminianism with a “cold orthodoxy” which did “little to warm the soul,” yet this orthodoxy returned to the tenets of Calvinism that the congregation had embraced in the past. Bartlett Pease who was pastor from 1821-1823 was described as a “Regular Baptist,” a term which at that time suggested he was theologically Calvinist. Despite his Calvinist roots, Pease did not have an easy or happy relationship with the congregation, nor did Northrup or Barton. Tension between Pease and FBCS escalated to a point where some of the parishioners cut up his “chaise” and others caused him personal harm more than once.

As mentioned above, Fisk reintroduced Calvinism and the practice of a “closed”

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296 A practice of open communion assumes that all baptized Christians are welcome to participate in the ritual, regardless if the individual was baptized as an adult or as an infant. A practice of a closed communion restricts participation to individuals who were baptized as adults, or members of the congregation depending on the severity of the views held by the congregation. There is evidence that FBCS practiced an open communion from its inception, and that under the leadership of William Northrup and Benjamin Taylor, FBCS embraced a practice of open communion. Such a practice is a very likely reason why FBCS never joined the Warren Association, a Calvinist association that endorsed a closed communion. W.L. Allen, “Lord’s Supper, Baptist Views,” in Dictionary of Baptists in America, 174.


300 Fisher, “History of First Baptist,” 278.
communion. In December 1837, just two months after FBCS joined the newly formed Taunton Association under the leadership of Abial Fisher, the church received a letter from the 1st Baptist Church in Warren officially breaking fellowship with FBCS because of their seemingly Arminian leanings. The Warren church did not completely close the door to fellowship stating that FBCS could join the Warren Association any time provided the church embraced a more reformed doctrine, and called a pastor of the Warren Association’s approval.301 The Warren Association’s attitude toward FBCS is ironic considering Abial Fisher, a proponent of Calvinism, was the pastor at the time.

In these trends we see a passive ambiguity towards theological leaning in the beginning of the 1800s with what seems to be an acceptance of Arminianism. Yet by the middle of the 1800s, these doctrinal trends of universal grace were rejected more and more as the congregation reclaimed the Calvinist theology upon which it was founded. This shift in doctrinal tendencies shows us that FBCS was not immune to the currents of the times, i.e. the theological movements of the 2nd Great Awakening in the early and mid 1800s. When considering ordination, such changes may suggest that the theology of the pastor can be important in informing the nature of the relationship with the congregation, but not definitively. It seems more that the character and charisma of the pastor took precedence over theology, a trend that we saw in the previous century.302

Education and Training

As previously stated, Fisher’s history notes the education of some of the pastors of FBCS, criticizing Northrup’s lack of education. According to Fisher, William Barton was a man who did not have and did not want a formal education, possibly expressing the

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301 Records, (Dec 3, 1837), 399-400.
302 I am speaking of the positive reception of Wheaton and Harrison (initially) as well as the negative responses to Wood and Maxwell.
populous sentiment of the revivals of the day.\(^{303}\) Barton preached for two years at FBCS (1808-1810), “but without success,” and was dismissed on his own request.\(^{304}\) According to Fisher, Barton stopped preaching altogether and eventually joined the Methodists, who were explicitly Arminian.\(^{305}\) Again, Fisher suggested that a formal education would have helped Barton in his ministry and would have kept him from veering off the path of Calvinism towards the Methodists.

As the Baptist presence on the American landscape grew, so grew the desire by many Baptists to be seen as a legitimate denomination by the general population. One area where this move towards legitimization was seen was in education. In 1825 the Newton Theological Institution was founded as a place where pastors could receive a certain level of formal education. The founding of this institution was greeted with mixed reviews. Some denominational leaders felt that the vision of the pastor would guide a local church, and a better educated pastor could offer a broader and more sophisticated vision.\(^{306}\) In 1818 Richard Furman argued that the pastor should have a basic understanding of the scriptures in their original languages and be fluent in areas of science, philosophy, and other “classics” in order to most effectively communicate the Gospel in the world today. Education, in Furman’s view, held a high importance and impact in creating better pastors.\(^{307}\) Furman also felt it was important to have a body of churches (a council) examine those applicants for ministry who sought to receive payment from the church. If a pastor was to receive a salary (and not all did), Furman felt that it was in the best interest of the churches to set a certain standards of expectation for

\(^{303}\) Fisher, “History of First Baptist Church,” 277.
\(^{304}\) Thatcher, *Historical Sketch*, 12.
\(^{305}\) Fisher, “History of First Baptist Church,” 277.
those pastors.\footnote{Ibid., 227.} As to the content of the education one would receive at the school of theology, lecture notes from the Newton Institution in 1830 focus on rhetoric, preaching and sermon delivery, reflecting the desire to hone the craft of preaching and elevate the standing of Baptist ministers in the American context.\footnote{“Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric,” from Unidentified Student Notebook, from Brackney, \textit{Baptist Life and Thought}, 195.}

Others, like John Leland, feared that imposing educational standards on clergy would lead towards a professionalization of the clergy, separating and placing them above the people in the pews. John Taylor argued that only Christ could call and prepare pastors, not institutions or councils. Agreeing with Leland’s concerns, Taylor feared that the emphasis on and requirement of education would create a “new race of pastors” which would be separate from the people in the pews.\footnote{John Taylor, “Thoughts on Missions,” from McBeth, \textit{Sourcebook}, 231-2.} In response to this fear and critique, Furman asked, “Is it not the interest of the churches that their spiritual guides possess every possible qualification for advancing their knowledge of divine subjects?”\footnote{“Fourth Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions of the United States,” 1818, from McBeth, \textit{Sourcebook}, 228-9.}

The critiques of Leland and Taylor were not unfounded, for as the American Baptist denomination grew, the very characteristics that made growth possible - agility, lack of educational standards of the pastor, lack of hierarchy and organizational connections - were lost as churches became more institutionally connected and as the clergy were expected to obtain a specific level of education. Efforts for education continued through the 1830s and 1840s leading to the emergence of a number of Baptist seminaries and colleges in the 1850s.\footnote{Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 182-3; Vedder, \textit{Short History}, 368.}
The rising expectations around preparation and training continued into the late 1800s. For example, while Francis Wayland was clear that education was not necessary for ordination, he does suggest that it is important for a pastor to “cultivate himself” for the sake of ministry. Wayland encouraged pastors to study different forms of address that would be useful to all and would be understood in a common language, thus maintaining the populist aspect of the American Baptist denomination that has been prevalent since the early revivals. Wayland did not say education was necessary, but he did feel that education would only assist the pastor in the populist endeavor of preaching to the people.  

Relationality

The tension between educational standards leading to professionalization of the clergy, and at the same time remaining connected with the people in the congregation was very real in the 1800s. If we look at the day to day actions of the pastors of FBCS, we can see ways in which the pastor was set apart from the congregation. When Abial Fisher was called to serve at FBCS, he was described as the “Pastor and Teacher” of the church, suggesting his role and relationship to the congregation was one of a leader with specific responsibilities and duties. While he was the pastor of FBCS, Fisher gave his approval for beginning a “Sabbath” school as well as a Young Men’s Temperance Society. It seemed that Fisher’s input was necessary for the genesis of these two programs. In worship, Fisher’s presence was seen as essential. In October 1839 on a Sunday when Fisher was absent from worship, the church records noted that the

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313 Wayland, Notes, 77, 37, 51. The populist aspect of the revivals in the early 1800s was addressed in the previous section. For more information, see: Nathan O. Hatch, Democratization, 17-22.
314 Records, (Oct 6, 1836), 392.
315 Records, (Aug 6, 1837), 397; (May 2, 1838), 401; (Feb 6, 1840) 409.
attendance was low due to the absence of the pastor.\textsuperscript{316}

This is not to suggest that there was a lack of tension between Fisher and some of the members of FBCS. In February 1846, Joseph Watson was charged with using profane language and abusive conduct toward Fisher and was excluded from the congregation one month after the altercation.\textsuperscript{317} Such language and attitude towards the pastor would not be tolerated by the congregation. After Fisher left as the pastor of FBCS, the relationship between the congregation and the pastor did not completely dissolve. A year after he stepped down as pastor, he was invited back to preach at the dedication of a new house of worship in 1847.\textsuperscript{318} All of these examples show how Fisher’s relationship with the congregation was one of leadership, influence, and respect, and in all of these examples we see how Fisher was set apart. The congregation would not accept poor treatment of their pastor, they felt more compelled to attend worship when the pastor was present, and followed the pastor’s guidance in issues of education and social programs. Even after he left, his relationship with the congregation was one of an ordained clergy, not as a lay person. If we recall from the previous century such a view of the pastor’s role within the congregation was also embraced. The congregation’s outrage over Joseph Watson’s abusive actions is similar to the congregation’s outrage in the previous century to the Newport Baptist church’s treatment of William Peckham by Daniel White and others. The pastor was someone who garnered the respect as well as spiritual authority of the congregation.

Respect and authority were integral to the relationship between the pastor and the congregation as was evidenced in the ordination service. In an ordination service, the

\textsuperscript{316} Records, (Oct 3, 1839), 407.
\textsuperscript{317} Records II, (Feb 5, 1846), 8; (Jan 14, 1847), 12-13.
\textsuperscript{318} Records II, (Nov 9, 1847), 13.
moment when the hands of local clergy and other officials were placed on the candidate, the “laying on of hands,” was important. At this moment, the candidate would be surrounded by other ordained pastors who would place their hands on the candidate, one person would offer a prayer, and immediately afterwards the candidate would be considered ordained. As with the previous century, all of the teaching of the tradition from this time are in agreement that only ordained pastors would be the ones who would lay hands on the candidate; the laity would not be involved in this aspect of the ordination service.  

If there were any changes to the candidate through ordination, this moment of laying on of hand would be considered the moment when such a change would occur. Jenkens, Wayland, and Cathcart all stated that at this point in the service the candidate was “set apart” from the rest of the congregation. Yet although the pastor was set apart from the congregation, both Jenkens and Cathcart attempt to describe a way in which the pastor is apart but not above anyone else in the congregation. Jenkens described the authority of the pastor as equal with all others in the congregation, stating that the pastor was a bishop without a hierarchy. Cathcart wrote that, “[pastors] are all bishops and each bishop is but an elder.” Their use of the title, “bishop” most likely was derived from scripture, reflecting a Baptist effort to reclaim a “primitive” church modeled after the New Testament. Since the terms “pastor” and “minister” are not specifically

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322 Primitive Baptists emerged in the 19th century from Calvinistic Baptist. Most claimed to be connected to the early, New Testament church and objected to any ecclesiological “auxiliaries” not found in scripture. While there were Primitive Baptist groups, the reference was used in a more generic sense, i.e.
mentioned in the Bible, having a bishop in the congregation may more authentically represent the New Testament model of the church.\(^{323}\) Recognizing that such a term would be controversial in Baptist circles, Jenkens emphasized the biblical understanding of bishop which he suggested is not the same as the title and office of bishop as practiced by Catholics, Episcopalians, or other denominations at the time. Jenkens stressed that despite the pastor being set apart there was no hierarchy within a Baptist church.\(^{324}\) While the teachings of the tradition offered a vision of the pastor as someone set apart from the congregation while maintaining an emphasis on equality within the congregation, it was not clear if that sense of equality was fully embraced by the laity of the congregation. We must remember that the pastor was ordained by other pastors laying hands on the candidate, setting the candidate apart from the laity. It is difficult to imagine this liturgical act in a way that maintains the egalitarian ecclesiology that many Baptists brag about while at the same time holding to the ordered theology of ministry suggested in the liturgy. In addition to this liturgical act, when Jenkens and Cathcart described the pastor as a bishop, despite the pains to avoid any Catholic or hierarchical connotation that may be found with such a term, the word still pointed to a difference between the pastor and the rest of the congregation.

This tension reflects the complexities found in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. One way this relationship was observed in the practices of FBCS was through the pastor’s title. In the FBCS records, the pastor was consistently referred to as “Elder.” Yet when Bartlett Pease was pastor this consistency was interrupted, notably

\(^{323}\) Jenkens’ ambiguity around the title, “bishop” comes from scriptural precedent. The word, “epikepos” is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and in Titus 1:7. We find in Jenkens’ writings as well as other Baptists a hesitancy to avoid the title and yet at the same time an aversion to the hierarchy suggested.

\(^{324}\) Jenkens, Baptist Doctrines, 260.
when Pease approached members over various issues. For example, in May 1822 Pease confronted members of the church twice about their lack of attendance. Both times this incident was recorded in the records he was referred to as “Brother Pease” rather than “Elder Pease.” Elsewhere during more routine meetings and events in the church, Pease was referred to as “Elder Pease.” The lack of consistency with Pease’s title may reflect the stressful relationship Pease had with the congregation. We do not find this inconstancy anywhere else in the church records with any other pastor, suggesting that the discrepancy comes out of a negative relationship between Pease and the congregation. This is an example of a way in which the relationship between the congregation and the pastor can affect the way the congregation views the pastor. On the other hand, the ministry of Benjamin Taylor evidenced a way in which a positive relationship could affect a congregation’s view of the pastor. Although Taylor was not from the same Baptist denomination as FBCS, he was greatly liked and treated as a pastor in every way. As already stated, Taylor was allowed to perform baptisms and officiate over the Lord’s Supper. Thus we have Bartlett Pease, who was described as a “Regular Baptist,” more in line with the historical theological roots of FBCS, and who was not treated well and not always referred to as “Elder,” and Taylor, who was described as a “Unitarian Baptist,” was referred to as “Elder,” and was given all of the rights and responsibilities that a pastor would have.

Previously, one of the functions of the Ordination Council was to affirm the internal and the external calls of the individual. It was the moment when the candidate would express his own sense of call and the community (the congregation and pastors

325 Records, (May 2, 1822), 363.
326 Thatcher describes Pease’s ministry as being, “commenced under unfavorable circumstances,” which eventually lead to his being unhappy and his leaving. Thatcher, Historical Sketch, 12.
from the area) would affirm his call thus expressing an external call. In the 1800s a sense of call is still considered important yet the internal call endorsed and affirmed in the ordination council does not seem to hold the same place of importance outside of the ordination process. In the above examples, the relationship between the congregation and the pastor via the active life of the church had a direct effect on the congregation’s affirmation or lack of affirmation of an external call regardless of a pastor’s expressed internal call. If the relationship between the pastor and the congregation was negative (as we saw with Harrison’s in the 1700s), then the pastor was not afforded the same authority as with a pastor who had a positive relationship regardless of his claim of a call. The pastor was set apart, but the degree of authority that pastor was given varied due to his relationship with the congregation.

Perhaps contributing to the way in which the pastor was set apart from the congregation were tasks and responsibilities that the pastor was expected to do, for example preaching and visitation for the sake of spiritual discipline. As we will recall, in the previous century, Jabez Wood visited members who had missed worship for a prolonged amount of time, or who had behaved in a way that was deemed unworthy. The major purpose of his visits was to call the delinquent individuals to accountability. When Barton and Northrup were pastors this practice seemed to have fallen by the wayside; perhaps due to the fact that both of their pastorates occurred under an air of conflict and unrest. The lack of visits may have been because neither Northrup nor Barton had the trust of the congregation. Abner Lewis, who had a more positive relationship with the congregation, revitalized the practice as he and a deacon would visit members who had
been absent or had been acting in an immoral way.327

This practice continued through the 1800s as pastors continued to visit delinquent members. For example in February 1840, Abial Fisher suggested that a committee be formed to assist the pastor in visiting members who had not attended worship for some time.328 In May 1853, while James Thatcher was pastor, the church specifically appointed him to visit two members who were upset with their exclusion in order that Thatcher could offer options for regaining membership.329

When Andrew Ashley was the pastor, there was a noticeable shift in the congregation’s expectations. Previously a small committee at most or a deacon at least would accompany the pastor on such visits. Yet in 1864 members of FBCS felt that “delinquents be left in the hands of the pastor” creating a more private, confessional feeling in the visit. The congregation hoped that such a tone of visitation would lead towards a more sincere repentance rather than the bitter and hostile feeling which had emerged through public reprimanding.330 Such a practice lasted less than three years, and in 1867 a committee was once again formed to accompany the pastor when visiting delinquent members.331 Overall the people of FBCS felt it was one of the duties of the pastor to visit delinquent members with or without others. This practice is part of an ongoing trend we saw in the previous century, when at first a committee would visit members without the pastor, and then the pastor was expected to take part in such meetings.

327 Records, (Sept 5, 1811), 319; (March 5, 1812), 323; (May 7, 1818), 379.
328 Records, (Feb 6, 1840) 409.
331 Records II, (May 2, 1867), 36.
Wayland observed a shift in the ethos and nature of visitation and felt that the basic practice of discipline was in danger of being lost. He claimed that too many pastors were using their visits for chatting and catching up. Such a visit, Wayland felt, lacked any spiritual depth. Instead, Wayland reminded the reader that the purpose of the visit was for the sake of religious conversation, and that the “pastor should make it his business to enter into the religious condition of every individual” whether or not it was for the purpose of discipline.\footnote{Wayland, \textit{Notes}, 333-4.} We do not have an account of every visit that the pastors of FBCS made, but we do know that pastors did make visits focusing on the fallen “religious condition” of members of the congregation. This task was a part of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation – never was an outside pastor with no connection to the church brought in to visit delinquent members.

In addition to visitation, preaching was a responsibility of the pastor. This task was addressed by a number of texts from this century. Both Jenkens and Wayland, when discussing the gifts that one needs for the “labor” of ministry, pointed out that preaching was an indispensable gift which a pastor must have to be successful in ministry.\footnote{Jenkens, \textit{Baptist Doctrines}, 251. Wayland, \textit{Notes}, 110.} According to Cathcart, the pastor’s primarily responsibilities were to preach and to see that the church was kept clear of heresy and sin. Cathcart did feel that the pastor was also responsible for the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but preaching was primary.\footnote{Cathcart, \textit{Baptist Encyclopedia}, 798-9. In describing worship practices, Benedict stated that only the pastor would serve communion. David Benedict, \textit{Fifty Years Among the Baptists}, (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1860; Paris: Arkansas, The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), 64.} Noting the importance of style as well as the task itself, David Benedict wrote that most of the preaching in the early 1800s was done without notes, in an extemporaneous style. If a pastor were to preach with notes, he would have been seen as
“reading” rather than preaching. Normally such a technique called for an apology from the preacher and was generally frowned upon. On the other hand, later in the century Wayland criticized extemporaneous preaching, claiming that it was unprepared and peppered with too many anecdotes and very little reason. Thus when it came to practice we see a variety of approaches to preaching as advocated by Benedict and Wayland. Regardless of the how, both authors affirm that preaching was a key responsibility for the pastor.

As with the previous century, the task of preaching seemed to be primarily for the pastor. If there were no ordained pastor present at the time of worship, as often happened often with smaller, struggling churches, Wayland suggested that the churches meet for the sake of praying, singing, reading scripture, and exhortation. In these cases anyone may be called to “read” a prewritten sermon, but Wayland stressed that those who were not ordained should not preach.

All of these tasks and responsibilities rested on the existence of a relationship between the pastor and the congregation. In ending or continuing the relationship in the 19th century it was normal for the congregation to decide each year if they wanted to continue with the pastor for another year, or if it was time for that relationship to end. In essence, the pastors were working with a year to year contract. For example, in October 1843, seven years after Fisher started working at FBCS, and after six annual affirmations to continue with Fisher, a member of the church suggested that it might be time to dismiss Fisher. Because there was not a quorum at the meeting a decision could not be reached. Despite the postponed decision and action, the suggestion was made and filtered

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336 Wayland, *Notes*, 236.
through the halls of FBCS, no doubt creating a sense of anxiety among the congregation and with Fisher. One month later, at the postponed congregational meeting, Fisher did not give the congregation the opportunity to discuss the motion; he resigned as pastor. The church voted to accept Fisher’s resignation the following week. Yet the relationship between Fisher and FBCS was not over, for although Fisher’s last day was slated to be April 1, 1844, on April 4 the congregation voted to continue with Fisher as the pastor for another year. The relationship between Fisher and the congregation would continue in this way for two more years. From one point of view, we can claim that no one is clearly in complete control of starting or terminating the relationship between the pastor and the church. Because of the mutuality between the pastor and the congregation either one could end the relationship. As we have already mentioned, Northrup claimed that he was “abused” by many in the church, was believed to be dividing the church, and many felt that he was earning more than was appropriate for a pastor. While both sides were upset with the relationship, in 1807 Northrup informed FBCS that he would no longer serve them as the pastor initiating the end of the relationship.

Barton preached for two years at FBCS (1808-1810), “but without success,” and was dismissed on his own request. Benjamin Taylor, who we recall was well liked by the congregation, requested in March 1821, that he be dismissed as their preacher, claiming that it was difficult to preach for FBCS and the other Baptist church in town. His request for dismissal was described as “friendly and Christian,” lacking any sense of

337 Records, (Oct 5, 1843), 426; (Nov 2, 8, 1843), 427.
338 Records II, (Apr 4, 1844), 7; (Oct 2, 1845), 8.
340 Records, (October 1, 1807), 301; (June 2, 1808), 303.
341 Thatcher, Historical Sketch, 12.
Andrew Ashley offered his resignation to FBCS in August 1865, which the church accepted; he was to end his labors on the last Sunday in October. Yet on November 2, of that year, Ashley rescinded his resignation, asking to stay, to which the church agreed and continued to employ him for two more years.\textsuperscript{343}

In all of these examples there is fluidity in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. The pastor and/or the members of the church could decide to end or continue the relationship. Just as both parties needed to be in agreement when starting the relationship, both needed to be in agreement when ending the relationship between the pastor and the church. Yet the yearly review of the pastor skewed the mutuality of the relationship. Every year the congregation had the institutionalized opportunity to express dissatisfaction and thus initiate ending the relationship. The pastor did not have an institutionalized opportunity to do the same. Ideally, if one party was not happy, that party could initiate a change in the relationship. If the relationship between the pastor and the congregation soured, such a change could affect the relationship itself, leading towards a termination which could be initiated by either the church or the pastor.

\textbf{Institutional Growth}

The religious energy which came out of the revivals led to growth of churches and denominations. A great majority of this growth was experienced by the Methodists and the Baptists, most notably on the western frontier.\textsuperscript{344} Among the Baptists, this growth was due in large part to a lack of institutional structure and hierarchy making it easy to form new churches with a great degree of agility. In the early 1800s, Farmer-preachers

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid., (March 1, 1821).
\textsuperscript{343} Records II, (Aug 3, 1865), 32; (Nov 2, 1865), 33.
\textsuperscript{344} Leonard, Baptist Ways, 158-9.
rather than seminary trained pastors on the frontier made it possible for churches to find leaders from within their community for their nascent gatherings. Because of the lack of institutional and ecclesiological structures, the Baptist denomination was able to expand as the nation expanded.

As this growth continued, Baptist societies formed to meet many of the growing needs of churches. Largely through the work of John Mason Peck, societies such as the Tract Society and the Home Mission Society were formed to meet the ministerial needs, educational needs, and to encourage connections among Baptist churches.\textsuperscript{345} The formation of these societies mirrored the movements of Protestant America in this time as seen in the organization of the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society and the American Education Society. Such societies offered the populous Bibles, pamphlets and religious news, and education in their faith.\textsuperscript{346}

As the 1800s progressed, Baptists continued to experience growth and institutional development specifically through the continued emergence of urban missionary societies. For example in 1861 the Woman’s Union Missionary Society was formed, and in 1877 the Woman’s Baptist Home Mission Society was formed both for the sake of doing good works, spreading the message of Christianity, and supporting missionaries throughout the nation and the world.\textsuperscript{347}

As a result of the development of Baptist societies and continued growth, many leaders in the Baptist denomination felt that organization would be helpful to ensure that


\textsuperscript{346} Goen discusses the way in which these societies, specifically the Home Mission Society, mobilized the evangelical movement in America helping to create a political and moral sense of unity. He notes the ways in which Baptists exemplified this sense of cooperation with the consolidation of societies as occurred in the 1814 Triennial Convention. C.C. Goen, \textit{Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War} (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 26, 60.

\textsuperscript{347} Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 166-7.
the missionary work of the Baptists would be done efficiently and effectively. From this articulated need emerged the Triennial Convention in 1814 in Philadelphia. In this meeting we find for the first time Baptists referring to themselves as a denomination.\textsuperscript{348} This move was not without its critics. While the societies would continue to be independent and structurally unconnected with local churches, they worked to collaborate among one another and among the churches. Such a loosely organized formation was favored with Baptist churches in the North, yet Baptist churches in the South desired the formation of a convention that would have centralized governance and connection with churches to coordinate the work of the societies through a central organization.\textsuperscript{349} Others, such as John Leland, were against any organizational move towards a denomination, claiming that such a move would precipitate a class of pastors through the emergence of clerical professionalism, diminish religious liberty among the local churches, and introduce creedal systems to the Baptist denomination.\textsuperscript{350}

FBCS was connected to the growth and development of the Baptist denomination through the financial support of Baptist societies and missionaries. When James Thatcher was pastor, the church gave money to more than fourteen national and international missionaries, as well as support for “feeble churches.”\textsuperscript{351} In 1853 FBCS added the Bible Society to their annual giving.

As the relationship between the denomination and FBCS solidified the denomination became a more pronounced third party player in ordination process. As we will see, the nature of this relationship was ambiguous; at times the denomination

\textsuperscript{348} Loenard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 165.  
\textsuperscript{349} McBeth, \textit{Baptist Heritage}, 347.  
\textsuperscript{350} Hatch, \textit{Democratization}, 95-99.  
\textsuperscript{351} Subscriptions for Foreign Missions, in the Andover Newton Theological School Archives, 1846. \textit{Records II}, (Oct, 1853), 15; (1850), 14; (Sept 3, 1847), 13; (Nov 5, 1846), 12; (Sept 17, 1846), 11.
attempted to control who would be ordained and who would serve churches, at and other times the denomination was an avenue through which churches could find fellowship and assistance though the actions and intervention of the pastor.

During the late 1800s FBCS continued and increased its involvement with the Baptist denomination primarily within the state of Massachusetts. When FBCS was searching for a pastor, Jessie Briggs, a former pastor and member of the Board of Domestic Missions in Rhode Island, recommended Oliver Fisk, a student at Brown University at the time. In October 1837, at a meeting in Fall River, Massachusetts, Abial Fisher led FBCS to join the Taunton Baptist Association, thus aligning First Baptist officially with a denominational institution. After joining the Taunton Association the church appointed Fisher and one other member to attend annual association meetings.

We will recall that after FBCS joined the Taunton Association the Warren Association severed all ties with the congregation. Only if FBCS called a pastor who would satisfy the standards of the Warren Association could connections be mended. In this example and in the example of Briggs’ recommendation of Oliver Fisk, we see denominational institutions involved at different levels in the process of calling of the pastor. In the previous century, as well as in the early 1800s, an ordination council of local pastors would approve the church’s choice for a pastor, yet the church would have the final decision in calling a pastor. In the above examples, we see the denomination having a hand in the church’s search for a new pastor, influencing the amount of freedom and control a congregation has in claiming a pastor and affirming the pastor’s external

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355 *Records*, (Dec 3, 1837), 399-400.
call.

As the influence and formality of the Ordination Council grew it became officially connected with a denominational Association. For example, in 1846, when FBCS decided to call Thatcher as their next pastor, a council of pastors and delegates from the Taunton Association were convened to vote upon the wishes of the church and offer their blessings. Thatcher was unanimously approved and the church continued with the process having gained the approval of the Association.356

The denominational connection through association did not preclude FBCS’ connection with other nearby churches regardless of their Associational allegiance through the actions and presence of the pastor. The pastor was expected to act as an ambassador of the congregation with other churches. When a church would ask for help, as the Baptist church in Dighton did in 1841, the pastor as well as a member of FBCS would go to assist in any way possible.357 Silas Hall went on two occasions to help other churches, one for ordination and one to assist with fellowship, presumably because of a church conflict.358 When the Warren church was 100 years old in 1864, Andrew Ashley, then the pastor of FBCS, was called upon by the congregation to write a letter of congratulations on behalf of the congregation. Ashley had the responsibility to represent the church, and such a representation suggests that the relationship between the Warren church and FBCS had warmed since the 1830s.359 The pastor was the main spokesperson for the local church.

There was not an agreement concerning the role and purpose of the Ordination

356 Records II, (Oct, 1853), 15; (1850), 14; (Sept 3, 1847), 13; (Nov 5, 1846), 12; (Sept 17, 1846), 11.
357 Records, (May 16, 1841), 416.
358 Records II, (Nov 29, 1855), 17; (Jan 1, 1857), 19.
359 Records II, (Nov. 3, 1864) 30.
Council with many of the *teachings of the tradition* from this time. As in the previous century the basic approach to ordination continued to be advocated; if a candidate had an internal call, and that call was confirmed, and gifts for ministry were evident, then the individual could be ordained by the local church. Both Jenkens and Cathcart suggested that the local church should first license the candidate as a way to let other churches know that the call of the candidate was appropriately tried and discerned by the congregation. After a time of licensure, during which the candidate would be trained and prepared for the pastoral ministry, the candidate could then be ordained. Normally the candidate’s ordination would be confirmed by a council of other ordained pastors in the same geographic area who would be summoned by the sponsoring church. As in the past, this council would give either its recommendation of the candidate’s worthiness for ministry or its disproval. The role of the Council was to approve ordination, but in the end both Jenkens and Cathcart claimed that the final say of ordination was with the local church.360

On the other hand, Wayland suggested that a local church could license someone to preach but could not ordain a candidate placing the final authority with the Council.361 Cathcart wrote that the moderator of the Ordination Council would preside at the ordination service rather than a representative of the sponsoring church.362 By shifting focus from the local church to the ordination council, Wayland and Cathcart place real and symbolic power in the role and presence of the Ordination Council albeit in different ways.

Thus we find some discrepancy as to the locus of the authority of ordination; it

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361 Wayland, *Notes*, 100, 114.
was either with an Ordination Council or with the local church. As the denomination grew, the understanding of the relationship between the local church and the denomination, in this case through the ordination council, moved into a time of flux. The Ordination Council began to represent more than other local pastors, but the presence of the Baptist denomination. Despite the ambiguity in the *teachings of the tradition*, when it came to ordination, the congregation of FBCS continued to stay connected with a Council representing a Baptist association (the Taunton Association). Based on the *practices of the people* that we have considered, we can surmise that FBCS saw the involvement of an Ordination Council as necessary, but we cannot say conclusively who had the final say with ordination.

At times the denomination was involved with FBCS in finding a new pastor. When searching for a pastor, normally a committee of three or four members would find a possible candidate, hear that candidate preach, and then invite the candidate to act as the next pastor of FBCS. One exception to this process as already mentioned was Oliver Fisk who was recommended by Jessie Briggs. Despite what may have seemed to be a growing effort by the denomination to control the appointment of pastors to churches, in every case the congregation ultimately voted on the candidate to be the next pastor. Abial Fisher was called and affirmed through a vote of the church in 1836.363 The same was true with James Thatcher, Silas Hall, Andrew Ashley, and J.A. Baskwell.364 Such a practice continues from the 1700s through the 1800s. The final decision as to calling a pastor was in the hands of the congregation.

Unlike in the previous century, each pastor called to serve FBCS who was

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363 *Records*, (Oct. 6, 1836), 392.
364 *Records II*, (April 30, 1868), 39; (Spet 1, 1864), 30; (March, 1857), 20; (March, 1854), 16; (August, Sept, 1846), 10.
previously ordained elsewhere did not have to discuss or share their internal call, nor did FBCS expressly affirm the external call. The instillation service no longer looked like an ordination service. Perhaps because of a growing rigor in denominational Ordination Councils, the congregation assumed that the internal and external calls were sufficiently considered in the pastor’s Ordination Council and ordination service. In 1815 George Hough was commissioned to be a pastor by the General Convention (a part of the Triennial Convention) for the sake of missionary work. In reflecting on his vows, Hough wrote to the Board of the General Missionary Convention expressing his own sense of call stating, “I obeyed, as well the call of duty as that of the church.” In this example, the “call of duty” can be understood as Hough’s internal call, and the “that of the church” is the expressed external call.

Cathcart claimed that God called every pastor and that the “office of the Christian minister was created by God himself, and its existence is to be defended by all the power of the churches.” Francis Wayland wrote that the call was heard by a pastor in two ways, “in his own heart,” and “in the hearts of his brethren.” These two works demonstrate a commonly held assumption continued from the previous century that a call was essential for one to be a pastor. One must have an internal call, from God, and that call needs to be confirmed externally in order to be recognized.

We find that from the 1700s to the 1800s the relationship between the pastor and

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365 Normally when one was commissioned to be a pastor it was through a local congregation, in this case, Hough was commissioned to be a “missionary” on behalf of the General Convention, lacking the local congregational connection.  
368 Wayland, *Notes*, 103.  
the congregation continues to be important in informing the role, expectations, and authority of the pastor. In addition to the relationship, the call (internal and external) is still seen as central for ordination. Many of the tasks expected of the pastor continue through the 1700s and the 1800s, including preaching and visitation. What has changed is the theological ambiguity of the congregation when considering calling a pastor. In the previous century theology was not questioned, yet in the early 1800s the theology of the pastor influenced the relationship between the congregation and the pastor one way or another. We also find more pastors pursuing an education for the vocation, but do not find this the level of education to be a priority for FBCS.

As said, the call continues to be important. What seems to change is the emphasis on the external call. The individual must express an internal call, but that call is tested through tasks and duties in the church, for some a seminary education, and the scrutiny of a denominational ordination council. In the 18th century the internal call played a prominent role guiding one’s decision to pursue ordination often guiding one away from ordination. In the 19th century we see a greater emphasis on the external call.

In the 18th and 19th century the foci and expectations of ordination occurred primarily at the local level. It was the local church that affirmed the call, and the Ordination Council confirmed the external call. Standards and expectations for confirmation of that external call were confined primarily within the local Ordination Council. As the 19th century progressed, the national denomination, as it was, began to suggest set standards for a pastor as we saw with the debate over education. Yet these standards, including education, were suggestions and not compulsory. Thus there would
remain a degree of diversity in the standards and expectations of the external call from region to region. As was mentioned earlier, even within the same geographic area, differed associations would expect different theological standards, for example the Warren Association was explicitly Calvinist. Due to the lack of national or denominational uniformity as well as educational standards, one’s abilities, theology, and charisma played a part in the congregation and the Ordination Council’s affirmation of the external call.

In the next chapter we will see a rising level of expectation of the education and training of an individual before ordination. This increased level will lead toward a great emphasis on education, a decreased emphasis on the internal call and a greater sense of a professionalization of the clergy.
CHAPTER 5 – FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, SWANSEA: 1900s

In the 20th century we witness a growth and solidification of the denomination as an institution. This growth directly affected the expectations of the external call through the Ordination Council and the local church. The internal call will remain a personal religious experience of the individual, but the denominational influence on the Ordination Council will lead to standards and expectations that were not previously a part of the path to ordination and are not optional. We will see that as well as expecting a certain amount of education, in some cases the Massachusetts Baptist Convention will demand to approve pastors called by FBCS, and in the late 1900s an increased amount of specific educational requirements will be required for ordination. Thus the story of Baptist ordination in the 20th century, especially among northern Baptists, tells of a growing denominational influence, an increased emphasis on the external call, a diminishing sense of importance on the internal call, and a professionalization of the clergy that places authority more on training and education than on one’s sense of a call.

Part I – 1910-1940

The Ordination Council

In the early 1900s the practice of local pastors making up an Ordination Council continued to be supported by the teachings of the tradition. Yet just as with the previous century we do not find a consensus among many of the scholars from this time concerning the locus of authority concerning ordination. William Henry Allison’s work,
Baptist Councils in America (1906), describes three leading theories concerning authority of ordination: 1) ordination through the actual ministry itself, 2) ordination in the local church, or 3) ordination through a council. In the first theory, the pastor is recognized through his actions within a church or community. While there may not be a formal Ordination Council and ordination service, through a consistent participation in and accomplishment of tasks of ministry (preaching and visiting for example), one becomes recognized as the pastor of a community. The second theory suggests that a council of ministers would not need to give the approval for an individual’s ordination, but instead the congregation would be the only body recognizing and affirming the call of a candidate. The third theory places weight on the approval and affirmation of other ministers through an Ordination Council. While he lists and describes all three approaches, Allison suggests that the presence of the council has become the norm for Baptists, serving as a “gate keeper” for pastors.370 Allison argued that because the Ordination Council was removed from the emotional ties and bias of the local congregation which may unduly influence one’s judgment of the candidate, it would assure that only those who were suitable for ministry would be ordained.

In his work, Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches (1935), William McNutt leans towards the second theory that Allison postulates, embracing a sensitivity towards the Baptist distinctive of the autonomy of the local church, claiming that it is in the local church where ordination occurs, and that the congregation has the final say in approving or rejecting one of their own for ordination. However, McNutt does not altogether abandon the Council. He suggests that an Ordination Council should have a hand in the

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process of approving someone for ordination since it is very likely that a pastor will work in more than one church in his professional life; the role of the council was to assure a certain level of competence and acceptable theological standards.\footnote{371 William Roy McNutt, Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1935), 79-80.} Both Allison and McNutt acknowledge the local church as having a central role in ordination while at the same time articulating the need for an Ordination Council in order to maintain a basic level of standard for candidates wishing to be ordained. Although neither scholar states it explicitly, the desire to embrace the role of the local church over the role of the Ordination Council may have been fueled by the theological conflict of the time (Fundamentalists/Modernists).\footnote{372 As we will briefly review further on in the chapter, some of the tension in the Fundamentalist/Modernists controversy led to an institutional distrust on the part of many churches. Keeping the central locus of ordination at the local church would ensure that the denomination could not “unduly” influence the theological position of candidates for ordination.}

The standards set by the Ordination Council reflect a movement advocating a seminary level of training for pastors that many of the scholars from the early 1900s embraced. As if echoing an argument from the previous century, McNutt argued in favor of requiring a basic level of education, claiming that it was important for a pastor to have a deep and broad knowledge in order to lead a church. The Second Survey of Fields and Work (1929), a sociological study of the Northern Baptist clergy, claimed that there was a dearth of trained pastors in the denomination and suggested that “well educated, thoroughly trained, highly qualified men” were needed.\footnote{373 McNutt, Polity and Practice, 73. “Second Survey of Fields and Work of the Northern Baptist Convention,” presented by the Committee on Survey to the Northern Baptist Convention (Denver, Colorado: June 17, 1929), 117.} In this move to support and embrace education the external call is emphasized and the internal call almost becomes secondary, a trend we began to see in the 1800s. Unlike the 19th century, we do not
encounter the same cry against educational standards in the early 20th century; education was becoming an assumed part of training for the ministry. Such a trend suggests that the external call grew in its institutionalization and the internal call continued to diminish in emphasis and importance.

FBCS continued to participate in the ordination process whether it was for someone from their own congregation, or for someone from a different church. Normally the pastor of FBCS would sit on the Council in order to assist with ordination process at the request of another church. For example, in December, 1912, Frederick Dark was asked by the Baptist Church of Taunton, Massachusetts to sit on an Ordination Council to consider the “setting apart to the Gospel Ministry Mr. Herbert B. Francis.” In January, 1914 Dark received a similar request to assist with another Ordination Council. In these examples we see FBCS’ continued connection and involvement through the actions and representation of the pastor in the ordination of individuals to serve in the “Gospel Ministry.” It is not clear if the Ordination Councils that Dark, or any other pastor from FBCS were involved with, concerned themselves with the educational standards of the candidate.

In August 1921, Frederick Dark presented to the congregation Arthur H. Wilde for ordination. Wilde had joined the church earlier that month and shared his desire to become a pastor with Dark and the congregation. After the members of FBCS heard Dark’s words of confidence in Wilde’s character and Wilde’s testimony concerning his desire to become a pastor, the church voted to recommend him to the “permanent” council for ordination to the Christian Ministry. The Ordination Council met with

374 Records II, (Dec. 8, 1912), 183; (Jan. 12, 1914), 215.
375 We will note that there are a number of different terms for the Ordination Council, including
Wilde and voted to ordain him on October 23, 1921, giving the final approval for Wilde’s call to ministry. Again, we do not see any emphasis on Wilde’s education, but instead on his desire and call. When FBCS called Ralph L. Phillips to serve the congregation he was not yet ordained. In April 1932 the church asked the “permanent” council to approval Phillips’ ordination. The Ordination Council approved Phillips’ call and he was ordained on June 10, 1932. In both of these examples we see the congregation acting as the initial gatekeeper and the acting agent in the ordination process, and yet in both the Council held the final say in approving the individual to become a pastor.

The Ordination Service

As in the previous century, there was a discernable liturgical moment in the ordination service when the pastor was set apart from the laity and considered ordained. In the two ordination services held at FBCS in the early 1900s it was a moment when the candidates were liturgically set apart through the act of laying on of hands and were welcomed into a “fraternity” of clergy. When Arthur Wilde was ordained in 1921, a “prayer of consecration” was offered at this liturgical moment. At this point all of the ordained pastors present, representing the “permanent” council as well as representatives of the denomination, gathered around Wilde, placed their hands upon him, and prayed. This was the moment in the service when Wilde was considered “consecrated” and officially ordained. Wilde’s change was reflected in his title in the beginning and the end of the service. In the beginning of the service he was referred to as “Mr. Wilde,” and at the end of the service, after the prayer of consecration he was referred to as “Rev.

376 Records II, (Oct. 23, 1921), 252.
377 Records II, (April 24, 1932), 282; (June 10, 1932), 285.
Wilde.” It was at the end of the service when Wilde performed his first liturgical act as an ordained pastor; he offered the Benediction. If there was a change in Wilde’s status during the service, the prayer of consecration seems to be the most likely point of change.378

When Ralph Phillips was ordained in 1932, we again witness the involvement of the clergy in the moment of Phillips’ change. The moment when Phillips received the “rewards of the Ecclesiastical Council” (the Ordination Council) was when his ordination was recognized by the corporate body in the context of worship. Again, it was a moment when all of the clergy present placed their hands upon Philips. As with Wilde, the nature of Philips’ change was reflected in his title. After the prayer he was no longer known as “Mr. Philips” but instead as “Rev. Philips.”379 In both of these examples the service was held at the FBCS showing the congregation’s support, but members of the congregation of FBCS were not directly involved in this liturgical apex of ordination. All of those who placed their hands on Wilde or on Phillips were clergy from other Baptist churches; aside from Dark’s participate in Wilde’s service not one member of FBCS was involved in that particular liturgical moment. Such an action suggests that the actual location of power of ordination lay with the clergy of the larger Baptist denomination. In both examples we see the denomination highly involved in the ordination of the candidate through the Council and through denominational representation in the worship service. The denomination, on the state level, played a central part in the process leading up to and the moment of ordination.

The liturgical practice of “laying on of hands” was not new to this century. We

378 Records II, (Nov. 2, 1921), 253.
379 Records II, (June 10, 1932), 285.
will recall that it was practiced in the 1700s and emphasized in the *teachings of the tradition* from the 1800s, specifically those works of the late 1800s (Wayland, Cathcart, and Jenkins). While other particularities of the service may have changed (names, participants, etc.), the practice of laying on of hands was the central part of the ordination service that carried through three centuries in the Baptist denomination.

**Pastoral Authority**

That there continues to be a clear moment in the ordination service when the candidate is set apart from the congregation may lead to the assumption that the pastor has a certain amount of authority within the context of the congregation similar to the relationship and authority we found in the 19th century. When we consult the *teachings of the tradition* we find conflicting views concerning the nature and locus of the pastor’s authority. In *Baptist Fundamentals* the authors held up the principles of equality and democracy within the congregation especially within the relationship of the pastor with the congregation. In their view, there was no distinction between the clergy and the laity concerning equality and authority.380 Such a stance embraces a radical idea of the “priesthood of the believers,” a characteristic of the Protestant movement and one of the Baptist distinctives. Leaning more towards a sense of ambiguity concerning the authority of the pastor, Philip Jones suggests in his work, *A Restatement of Baptist Principles* (1909), that all the officers of the church are “*prima inter pares*, elevated because of service,” suggesting that there is an ordering within the congregation although nuanced. He softens any possibility of a hierarchy by claiming that, “there is no supremacy that does not embrace the equality of all, and there is no authority that does not scrupulously

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conserve the rights of each.”  

On the one hand, Jones wants the office of the pastor (and other officers in the church) to be viewed with a certain level of respect and deference by the congregation. On the other hand he is deeply aware of the previously mentioned Baptist emphasis on the egalitarian ethos expressed through the idea of the priesthood of the believers.

McNutt, however, suggests that through ordination we witness a public “setting apart” of the candidate; the minister is no longer just one of the laity but is set apart. McNutt is aware that such a claim can lead to a hierarchal view of the pastor’s authority, and states that there is “nothing magical or sacramental to the minister.” Yet that the pastor is set apart to administer the ordinances, suggests something “sacramental.” In relation to the congregation, McNutt claims that the pastor is the head of the congregation and an ex officio member of all the boards. 

Despite his efforts to maintain a sense of equality, McNutt’s views of the pastor and his relationship with the congregation are ones that suggest an ordering and a hierarchy of sorts. While it may not be similar to those of other traditions (Episcopalians or Catholics for example), it is one that runs the risk of denying the egalitarian nature of a Baptist congregation that the authors of Baptist Fundamentals or Jones stressed. In all three works we find a tension between the drive for equality among the clergy and the congregation and the desire to view the role and office of the pastor as separate and set apart from the rest of the congregation.

In the practices of the people we see signs of this tension between the equality of the congregation and the authority of the pastor. This tension is perhaps best seen in the

382 McNutt, Polity and Practice, 80.
383 Ibid., 81.
384 Ibid., 72.
few instances when a non-ordained individual was fulfilling the role and responsibilities of the pastor. In some of these cases, ordination and training were expectations of the congregation if that individual was going to be considered their permanent pastor. For example in 1909 the church voted to call Mr. Morris L. Brown, a resident of West Chester, Pennsylvania to serve the church with the provision that he would first achieve his ordination.\textsuperscript{385} When John James was invited to serve the church, he had already received a Bachelors of Divinity and thus seminary training, but was not ordained.\textsuperscript{386} Despite his lack of ordination, the church voted to give James full rights to perform all the ceremonies and ordinances that an ordained minister would perform perhaps suggesting that education could take the place of the affirmation of an Ordination Council when it came to the congregation’s relationship with the pastor.\textsuperscript{387} It was not until the Massachusetts Baptist Convention intervened requesting that the pastor of FBCS be ordained that the congregation encouraged James to achieve his ordination.\textsuperscript{388} Ralph Phillips, as we mentioned earlier, was called to serve the church before he was ordained and was pastor of the church for two years before he achieved his ordination.\textsuperscript{389} In these examples we see the congregation willing to call individuals who were not ordained and willing to give those individuals full responsibilities of the pastor as long as they were either willing to gain ordination, or, in James’ case, have acquired a level of education considered proficient for a pastor.

There has been a trend in the \textit{teachings of the tradition} through the last three centuries concerning the role and authority of the pastor. In the 1700s the \textit{teachings

\textsuperscript{386} Records II, (Nov. 10, 1927), 272.
\textsuperscript{387} Such actions strengthen the claim that education and training are beginning to take a more prominent place in the nature of a pastor’s authority rather than the pastor’s internal call.
\textsuperscript{388} Records II, (May 14, 1928; July 22, 1928), 274-5.
\textsuperscript{389} Records II, (Oct. 15, 1930), 279; (June 10, 1932), 285.
reflected that the pastor had specific roles (primarily preaching), but was not considered above other members of the congregation. In the 1800s Cathcart and Jenkins both considered the way in which the pastor was set apart from the congregation, but tried to maintain a level of equality within the congregation. Cathcart suggested the term, “bishop” as a way to understand the nature of the pastor’s relationship with the congregation, suggesting a hierarchy. In the early 1900s, the teachings continued to reflect this desire to maintain an egalitarian nature of the Baptist denomination, but walked the fine line of placing the pastor apart from the congregation and not above.

We have seen the same consistency with the practices of the people. From the 1700s to the time in question the ordination of the pastor was considered important if not essential if he was to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the pastor. There have been times when a non-ordained individual has led worship and fulfilled other duties of the pastor, but only with the expectation that either the individual’s presence would only be temporary, or that the individual would achieve ordination. The status of ordination was important for the pastor of FBCS to delineate his role and relationship within the church.390

Twice FBCS had “acting pastors” serving and leading the church and in both instances they were treated differently confirming the role of ordination with the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. An “acting pastor” was someone who fulfilled many if not all pastoral duties when the church was in-between permanent pastors. The acting pastor preached, led Bible study, and performed other pastoral functions, and yet was not formally installed or treated as a permanent pastor. From 1904

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390 One could argue that Jabez Wood is an exception to the rule as he served for three years before obtaining ordination. This exception was due in large fact to the unexpected way Benjamin Harrison left the church as the pastor and Wood did eventually receive his ordination.
to 1907, Edwin G. Morse was the acting pastor for FBCS. During the 1906 annual meeting an argument erupted between the members of the congregation concerning communion; some were in favor of an open communion while others were in favor of a closed communion. It is surprising that Morse did not offer any insight or leadership over an issue that had such theological importance. In the past the pastor would lead theological and liturgical decisions of the church, including the approach and practice of communion. One would think that the opinion and leadership of a pastor or a pastoral figure would be seen as essential in such a debate, yet Morse was not a part of this conversation and did not offer any input. Instead of engaging the discussion, Morse handed in his resignation which initially was not accepted by FBCS. A few months later (April), Morse conducted himself in such a way as to forfeit the support of the church, further wounding his relationship with the congregation and was eventually asked to leave. In the process he lost his license to preach and officiate in the role of pastor.

FBCS called T.H. Buffum to serve as “acting pastor” from 1909-1912 in a way similar to Morse’s. Throughout his time in Swansea, Buffum was only referred to as the “acting pastor” of the church and was not ascribed the title “Reverend” or “Pastor;” he was “Mr. Buffum.” His relationship with the congregation began in 1909 with simply filling in on Sundays with preaching. In January 1910 the church voted to appoint Buffum the responsibility of administering the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. The congregation did not assume that Buffum could officiate over the Lord’s Supper nor did they know if they would be comfortable with Buffum administering the Lord’s Supper when he first started as the acting pastor. Yet after a couple of months they felt

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391 Marshall, Life in the First Church, 46-48. The particularities of Morse’s actions are unclear.  
392 Records II, (June 10, 1910), 165.
comfortable enough to allow Buffum to administer the Lord’s Supper and despite his lack of ordination the congregation gave permission for Buffum to perform an act that was primarily reserved for those who were ordained. We should note that neither an ordination council nor any other denominational body was involved in this congregational action; the power to give Buffum the permission to officiate the Lord’s Supper lay specifically with the congregation. In addition to administrating the Lord’s Supper, Buffum was sent to represent FBCS at Taunton Association meetings, a role normally reserved for the pastor. As with previous pastors, Buffum and his family joined the church shortly after beginning his service and removed his membership from the church when his time at FBCS ended. Thus far, aside from a lack of title, there seems to be little functional difference between Buffum, an “acting pastor,” and previous permanent pastors.

As was the practice of previous pastors, Buffum called the church school to order at the beginning of each year with prayer. It is interesting that in these instances Buffum was referred to as “Pastor H. Buffum;” there is no mention of his status as “acting pastor.” Yet, when FBCS celebrated its 250th anniversary, while Buffum was still serving the church, all the pastors who had previously served the church were mentioned in a ceremony excluding “acting pastor” T.H. Buffum. We also note that Buffum did not have the same role in disciplinary matters as previous pastors. In February 1912, Buffum called a church meeting to point out a “considerable disturbance

393 Records II, (Sept 11, 1910), 167.
394 Records II, (June 10, 1910), 165; (Nov. 17, 1912), 182.
395 Records of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA: Church School, 1889-1938 (Records, Vol. III), Collection of the First Baptist Church, John Hay Library, Brown University, (Jan. 14, 1912), 49. The Church School records and the church records were both recorded by F.E. Bixby, a former pastor of FBCS.
396 Records II, (c. Oct, 1913), 206.
in the evening meeting outside the church.” In response to Buffum’s concerns a committee of three was chosen to confer with the offenders or with their parents. Buffum was not on that committee.397

In the three years that Buffum served the church as the “acting pastor” we find considerable ambiguity concerning Buffum’s relationship with the congregation, his responsibility, authority, and the limits of such. In some instances he was treated the same was as an ordained, permanent pastor; he was expected to preach, allowed to administer the Lord’s Supper, joined the church, and gave the opening invocation for the Sunday school. In other instances he did not enjoy the same relationship as that of an ordained pastor, as we saw with discipline and his official relationship with the church; Buffum was never referred to as a “pastor” of the church.

When a pastor is ordained, the authority to ordain that individual lay with the Council. Yet when an “acting pastor” was called to serve the church, the authority to permit that individual to perform functions lay with the local church. The congregation would call someone to serve as a pastor even if he did not have his ordination, and would encourage the individual to eventually obtaining such a status, again suggesting that the authority to call someone to serve as pastor and to ordain someone lay with the congregation. In the end, we see that the relationship between the congregation and the church has the greatest affect upon the functionality of the pastor’s authority and that ordination holds sway in that relationship. If an individual is not ordained, or is an “acting pastor,” the congregation has to grant the individual the authority to perform specific duties in the church. Yet if the pastor was ordained, or moving towards ordination, the congregation exercised a greater amount of deference towards the pastor.

397 Records II, (Feb. 21, 1912), 178.
Denominational Involvement

The northern Baptist denomination continued to grow and change on the national and state level. Through this growth and change the relationship between FBCS and the Massachusetts Baptist Convention also changed and grew. In 1907, in Washington D.C., three separate Baptist societies were formed, coalescing the myriad societies that tended to duplicate ministries and services: the Home Mission Society, the Foreign Mission Society and the Publication Society. The formation of these societies led to a stronger sense of unification around the missionary works and endeavors of the northern Baptists.\(^{398}\) This unification emerged in an effort to assuage a growing financial anxiety expressed by many individual churches; church resources were spread thin as many tried to address the various needs of ministry represented by the multiple societies that existed. Out of this unification emerged the denomination that was officially known as the Northern Baptist Convention. Through this organizational change a greater sense of interdependence between churches and an organizational movement towards a centrality of power within the denomination was formed.\(^{399}\) With this new denominational organization came the potential for the denomination on the national and state level to exercise a greater amount of control over the standards and expectations of ordination. We have already seen a hint of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention’s increased its influence over FBCS’ in choosing pastors and in ordination.

When Ruben Davis was called to be the pastor of FBCS, the church held a “recognition” service (what is presently referred to as an installation service) for Davis in 1907. Along with local pastors, the Massachusetts Baptist State Evangelist, W.E.  

\(^{398}\) With each society that was formed a woman’s version was also created, for example the Women’s Home Mission Society. Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 391.  
\(^{399}\) Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 391.
Waterbury, attended, representing and speaking on behalf of the state convention.\textsuperscript{400}

Waterbury was with the people of FBCS two days later, holding meetings, presumably of an evangelical nature, and collecting a special offering for the Massachusetts Baptist Convention.\textsuperscript{401} When the church was without a pastor (from December 1908 to September, 1909), the Massachusetts Baptist Convention offered to send someone to help with evangelism and leadership. In response to this offer seven of the younger members of FBCS were in favor of accepting the help, two of the older members were against receiving help, and the rest “were silent.”\textsuperscript{402} This was a relatively new way the state convention was involved with a local church and those who had been a part of FBCS for some time were weary of such denominational involvement. The denomination was a growing presence in the life of the church and in the relationship between the church and the pastor.

In April 1923 the Massachusetts Baptist Convention stipulated that all churches receiving aid for the pastor’s salary (of which FBCS was one) must consult with the General Secretary of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention before calling a pastor or the aid may be lost.\textsuperscript{403} As we have observed, the traditional practice in the American Baptist denomination was that the local church would have the final say in calling and hiring a pastor. Thus the demand of the Massachusetts Convention went against the freedom of the congregation due to financial control. The denomination now had a certain amount of power and influence that could be exercised over FBCS’ choice of a pastor. For example, as mentioned earlier, when the church called John James, who was not ordained, to serve

\textsuperscript{400} Records II, (Oct. 18, 1907), 149.
\textsuperscript{401} Records II, (Oct. 20, 1907), 150.
\textsuperscript{402} Records II, (Sept. 20, 1908), 155; (April 4, 1909), 160.
\textsuperscript{403} Records II, (April 22, 1928), 258.
as the pastor the denominational intervened. While the church voted to give James full rights to perform all ordinances and ceremonies in May 1928, in July of the same year the State Convention pressured the congregation to encourage James to apply for a license to preach through the Taunton Association. The members of FBCS feared that they may lose their salary aid for the pastor if James was not eventually ordained and complied with the request. By applying for a license to preach through the denomination, the church was acknowledging that the approval of the denomination was important and had a role in the relationship between the congregation and the pastor.

When FBCS was searching for a pastor in 1930, the Massachusetts Baptist Convention recommended Frederick Garner, a student at Newton Theological School. When Ralph Phillips was ordained in 1932, Rev. Dolan, representing the Massachusetts Baptist Convention, took part in the service, welcoming him into the ministry. Within the American Baptist denomination is a stance that each congregation chooses its leadership (autonomy of the local church), yet from these examples we see the denomination, at least on the state level, involved and engaged with process of ordaining and calling a pastor. This is an indication of the growth and change of the denomination’s relationship with the individual church concerning the pastor and ordination.

The Pastor’s Relationship with the Congregation

During this time we find a significant shift in the way in which the relationship

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404 *Records II*, (May 14, 1928), 274; (July 22, 1928), 275; (Nov. 10, 1927), 272.
405 *Records II*, (June 5, 1930), 278.
406 *Records II*, (June 10, 1932), 285.
407 If one were to read the documents in Lumpkins’ Baptist Confessions one would find a consistent trend amongst the confessions: the individual church or community will call its own leaders, including the pastor. William L. Lumpkin, ed. *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969).
between the pastor and the congregation would end. In the previous century, it was the practice of the congregation to reaffirm their relationship with the pastor at each annual meeting for the next year; in essence the pastor was working with a year to year renewable contract. This continued until 1925 when Frederick Dark was the pastor. For the first twelve years of his time at FBCS, the congregation would vote in the affirmative every year to continue with Dark as the pastor for another year. This trend was interrupted when in 1925 the congregation voted to end Dark’s relationship with FBCS, giving him three months notice. Yet all was not said and done as one month later a handful of members drafted a letter to the congregation calling for a special meeting in order to rescind the vote concerning Dark’s termination. In July 1925, the congregation voted to rescind their decision and to continue with Dark as the pastor as long as there was “mutual satisfaction of either party.” In this incident, the annual renewal of the pastor’s position had come to an end, pointing to a shift in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. In the past, if a pastor wanted to leave he would offer his letter of resignation which the congregation could decide to accept or not accept. Yet every year the pastor could lose his position at FBCS regardless of his feelings on the matter. With this shift, the yearly whim of the congregation ended, and the pastor gained more equality in the relationship with the congregation. As in previous centuries, the dissatisfaction of the pastor or of the congregation could be a factor in ending the relationship, just as the dissatisfaction of the congregation could be a factor. While some may argue that there is not a substantial difference in the practice from yearly renewal to “mutual satisfaction,” the change in the practice itself points to a recognized change in

408 Records II, (May 11, 1925), 266.
409 Records II, (June 22, 1925), 266.
the nature of the relationship on the part of the congregation. The language of the practice had changed and even if the functionality is not all that different the speech-act is and this is significant.\textsuperscript{410}

\textbf{Theological Conflict}

The theological differences between Calvinism and Universalism in the 1800s influenced the congregation’s choice of pastors and the pastor’s theology influence the congregation. In the early 1900s those theological differences of the 1800s continued to affect FBCS and Baptist churches across America. While the theological camps have changed in ways, current positions could be traced back to the Reformed camp finding its roots in Calvinism and the Universalist camp finding its roots in Arminianism. In the early 1900s the tension and conflict between these two camps emerged in the majority of Mainline Protestant churches around the schools of thought known as Modernism and Fundamentalism, shifting its role and presence in America.\textsuperscript{411}

The religious tension between Modernists and Fundamentalists that affected the nation was also felt in the Baptist denomination. In 1920 a committee was formed among the Northern Baptist Convention to investigate “liberalism” in Baptist schools and colleges. For example, Shailer Matthews’ writings at the University of Chicago were seen as examples of upholding and embracing Modernist teachings.\textsuperscript{412} In 1920, at a pre-

\textsuperscript{410} In the next chapter we will look into the role and nature of speech-acts in a community as pointing to a shared theological understanding.

\textsuperscript{411} One could argue that Modernism emerged from the Universalism of the 1800s and Fundamentalism finds its theological roots in Calvinism. For a good, in-depth look at this significant theological tension in the early 1900s, see George Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925} (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

\textsuperscript{412} Leonard, \textit{Baptist Ways}, 401. While the two are closely connected, there are differences between modernism and liberalism. Marsden describes some of the tendencies of liberalism as including identifying the progress of the Kingdom of God with the progress of civilization, seeing morality as the essence of religion and no longer separating the supernatural with the natural. Modernism holds to the idea that religious ideas ought to adapt to modern culture. Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism}, 24, 146.
convention rally in Buffalo, NY, Baptist Fundamentalists, in reaction to what they perceived within the denomination as a Modernist move toward pluralism and inclusiveness, gathered to solidify their voice and speak out against such perceived movements. Out of this rally came the political will that influenced the Northern Baptist withdrawal from the ecumenical, inter-church movement of the day.  

In 1922, at the Baptist Indianapolis Convention, the Fundamentalist faction of the Northern Baptists urged the adoption of the New Hampshire Confession as a statement of belief for the denomination. In response to such a move, the majority of the delegates at the convention endorsed the following statement: “The Northern Baptist Convention affirms that the New Testament is the all-sufficient ground of our faith and practice, and we need no other statement.” The response of the delegates at the Indianapolis Convention denied the creedal moves of the Fundamentalists. Two years later (1924) the political and doctrinal pendulum swung to the other side when the Foreign Mission Society adopted a statement of orthodoxy leading to the dismissal of four missionaries presumably because they could not adhere to or adopt the statement. In the 1930s, as the denomination continued to grow, there was a proposal for educational standards to be required of the clergy, suggesting that clergy should have at least seminary level of education before receiving ordination. While most of those in the Modernist camp were in favor of such a move, Fundamentalists, led by William Bell Riley, were against such standards and expectations. As has been argued in the past, Riley feared a creation of an elite clerical

413 McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 570.
414 The New Hampshire Confession was written in 1830 in an attempt to restate a moderate Calvinism with the Baptists in New Hampshire after an influence of the Free Will Baptists led by Benjamin Randall in the 1780s. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 380.
416 Ibid.
class as well as an infusion of Modernist ideals in the church. In response to what many Fundamentalists saw as a negative and regretful move towards modernism as well as a reluctance to adopt a creedal statement of faith, the General Association of Regular Baptists was formed in 1932, offering a haven for Baptist Fundamentalists.

The theological and doctrinal tension that was so prominent in the nation and denomination during this time did not have the same impact on the relationship between the congregation of FBCS and the pastors as it did in the previous century; there is no direct evidence that the pastors preached about this conflict or that the congregation was aware of the conflict. Yet FBCS was not completely free from the national conflict and denominational tension. At the 1920 pre-convention rally in Buffalo the pamphlet *Baptist Fundamentals: Being Addresses Delivered at the Pre-Convention Conference at Buffalo*, was written. Rev. Frederick Dark, pastor of FBCS at the time, was one of the signatories of the pamphlet. In signing the pamphlet, Dark placed himself in the Fundamentalist camp. While we do not find any example of Dark pushing, preaching, or promoting any specific theological ideas or agendas from the Fundamentalist camp, his participation in the pre-convention rally places him in this theological movement. While it was very possible that FBCS was still holding onto its Calvinist roots in calling a pastor who would align himself with the Fundamentalists we must remember that within the Fundamentalist movement we do not find a strict adherence to Calvinism, but a mixture of an experiential revivalism attributed to Keswick as well as ideals of Calvinism. In addition, with the cultural decline of Fundamentalism, many churches that held strongly

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419 *Baptist Fundamentals*. 

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to any semblance of Calvinism would have left the Northern Baptist for the General Association of Regular Baptists. FBCS did not leave the Northern Baptist Convention, suggesting that the congregation, and perhaps the pastor, were willing to sacrifice a zealous observation of strong theological stances for the sake of unity.420 Aside from Dark, we do not have any specific evidence of the theological leanings of the pastors of the early 1900s.

Part II – Late 1900s

Denominational Involvement

In 1968 a theological conference was held by the American Baptist Churches at Green Lake, WI in order to address issues of ordination.421 Through this process a new statement suggesting procedures for ordination was approved by the American Baptist National Ministers Council and the Commission on Ministry (a Commission of the Board of National Ministries). In this statement uniform steps toward ordination were encouraged, including the “Act of Licensing” by a local congregation, four years of college, and three years of seminary education including a course on Baptist polity and history. The document suggested that all of these steps were to be accomplished before the candidate went before an ordination council.422 While it was formalized and approved by an official part of the denomination, aside from the educational requirements, the process towards ordination remained similar to that which we have seen in the past; licensure and affirmation of the congregation followed by education and training. This

420 Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 98, 118, 120, 190-1.
421 The American Baptist Churches is what used to be the Northern Baptist Convention, but changed its name to the American Baptist Churches in 1950, and then to the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. in 1972. Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 409-10.
422 Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 416. While this statement was approved by the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches it was not considered mandatory, but instead to offer guidelines for associations to follow.
conference and the document that emerged from the conference in part legitimized and institutionalized what was already local practice on a national level.\textsuperscript{423}

FBCS continued to maintain its connection with the denomination and remained involved with issues of pastoral leadership and ordination. As in the past, if one wanted to be ordained, one would go before an Ordination Council made up of local pastors and lay people. If the candidate went through all of the recommend steps and was approved by the Ordination Council, his or her ordination would be recognized within the national denomination.\textsuperscript{424} As in the past, the pastor of the church would attend Ordination Councils as a representative of their church. For example, Charles Haines participated in a number of Ordination Councils representing FBCS.\textsuperscript{425} With the increased institutionalization of ordination, as FBCS continued to stay connected to and engaged with the Ordination Council, FBCS continued to stay connected with the denomination.

When FBCS called a new pastor, the denomination continued to be connected and involved. The Massachusetts Convention did not require an approval of the pastor, but would send a representative to participate in the installation service. Denominational representative was present for instillation services of both Charles Haines and Linda Spoolstra.\textsuperscript{426}

In these examples we see a continued trend towards denominational uniformity and involvement with the external call and educational requirements towards ordination. The presence of a denomination representative may have been seen as supportive of the

\textsuperscript{423} Brackney, *Historical Dictionary*, 313.

\textsuperscript{424} By this time women were being ordained as well as men.


church, but may also have been seen as offering credibility to the church’s call of that pastor. The standards and expectations of the candidate were set by the denomination, and while the internal call continued to be regarded as vital, it did not receive as much attention and no institutionalization as a requirement for ordination.

Declining Membership and the Status of the Pastor

In the last 30 years of the 1900s, FBCS had four pastors, experienced institutional growth, financial anxiety, and maintained a rich sense of continuity in the relationships between the congregation and the pastor.\footnote{The data for this section will be from church records, interviews, and a focus group survey of a cross-section of the congregation. The methodology of the focus group was based upon a previous study I did of Baptist churches in Southern Ohio, see: Malone, \textit{Wants, Needs, Desires}. The list of the questions as well as some of the data from this study can be found in Appendix B.} Perhaps one of the greatest sources of anxiety in this time was the declining membership and the financial anxiety connected with the decline of the congregation. In July 1988, when FBCS was between pastors, the search committee held a congregational meeting asking if the congregation would prefer a full-time pastor or a part-time pastor. It was a time when finances were scarce, and the search committee feared that they would not be able to afford a full-time pastor. Despite this anxiety, the congregation was overwhelmingly in favor of calling a full time pastor if at all possible.\footnote{Records of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA: Church Membership Record, 500 Names, October 13, 1970-April 1977, Records Vol. IV (Collection of the First Baptist Church, John Hay Library, Brown University), July 10, 1988, 63.} In the mind of many members of FBCS, a full-time pastor is the same as an ordained pastor, and such a status was important. When asked to consider the possibility of having no ordained leadership for a certain amount of time, some members felt that a prolonged time without an ordained pastor would only increase the anxiety of the church. It was a possibility that they could not imagine. If the congregation were to call someone who was not ordained, such a relationship would be viewed as temporary.
with the understanding that the church would call someone ordained as soon as possible. Such an attitude is familiar to the one we saw with the “acting pastors” of the early 1900s. For some members it was a matter of credential and training and for others it was a sense of call affirmed though the ordination process perhaps returning to the 1700s emphasis on the internal call.\textsuperscript{429} Because of the congregation’s connection between ordination and full-time ministry, the two are closely related if not synonymous, we can observe the way in which the search committee’s question in 1988 drew out the congregation’s desire not only for a full-time pastor but for a pastor who was ordained.

The financial difficulty to afford a full-time pastor reflects struggles that were shared by many mainline churches in the late 1900s. From the 1980s to the present change was perhaps the only constant in a large part of the context and culture of religious America, especially within mainline Protestantism. Part of the changes included an emergence of individualism which mixed with an evolving sense of religious de-traditionalization and cultural pluralization within the broader society which led to the decline of the many mainline churches. Such a trend challenged the institutional strength of traditional denominations as a growing number of people in the United States would think of themselves as religious but would not claim fidelity toward a particular religious organization.\textsuperscript{430}

Denominational decline was one of the largest changes that mainline

\textsuperscript{429} Focus Group. See Appendix B.
Protestantism had to contend with in the last 30 years. David Roozen states in *Church, Identity, and Change* that it was a time when denominations had to consider how to “bear their particular legacies faithfully and effectively into a changing future.”⁴³¹ The rising sense of individualism as well as the pluralization of society challenged mainline Protestantism to wrestle with a sense of identity as people began to attend more non-denominational churches. The decline in numbers negatively influenced institutional growth of all Protestant mainline denominations.⁴³²

In New England, Protestant churches experienced the same struggles as those throughout the country. Yet in addition to those struggles, Protestants had to contend with a Catholic majority.⁴³³ In the past Protestant churches were centering cultural forces in New England in the areas of leadership and civic traditions. While Protestant churches continue to be the custodians of the local civic culture, of shaping the town and community life, focusing on community involvement, this presence and role has been diminishing in what has become a Catholic enclave.⁴³⁴ The change of statues of Protestant mainline churches, diminishing numbers and diminishing influence, affected the role and place of the church in the community, and thus the status of the pastor in the community. These changes were felt by First Baptist Church in Swansea as well as by many other Protestant churches across the nation.

**Ordination**

As in the past, if an individual felt that he or she was called to pastoral ministry, this internal call would be affirmed by the congregation of FBCS, and the congregation

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⁴³¹ Roozen, “Introduction,” 1, 3.
would also articulate and name an external call. As has been the case in the past, the
congregation played a necessary if not essential role in approving one’s sense of call, and
the Ordination Council played a necessary part in credentialing the candidate.⁴³⁵

Such a practice is affirmed in a number of the teachings of the tradition. Hudson,
Hays, and others articulate the call in a similar way. If one felt called to obtain ordination,
he or she would express such a calling as one that came from God; showing a continued
emphasis on the idea of the internal call. The congregation, seeing potential in the
individual, would embrace and encourage his or her desires for ordination, thus
articulating an external call.⁴³⁶ As with previous centuries, the process of confirming the
internal and external call was a trial period where one would demonstrate his or her gifts
and abilities for ministry through assisting the pastor and performing pastoral duties such
as preaching or visitation. After the congregation felt secure in the candidate’s internal
call as well as the candidate’s skills and ability for ministry, the congregation would grant
the candidate a license to preach. This license was a temporary affirmation of the
candidate’s desire to gain ordination as well as an expression of the congregation’s
confidence in the candidate’s skills and call. The license was renewable and normally
recognized by other Baptist churches. During the time of licensure the candidate would
attend seminary, preach, and assist with other pastoral duties in preparation for
ordination. The license gave the church the ability to give their recommendation and
approval for the candidate to continue performing pastoral functions, with the
understanding that if the candidate did not show the gifts necessary for leading a church

⁴³⁵ Focus Group, see Appendix B. Charles Hartman phone conversation with author, 13
November, 2009.
or did not prove competent to be a pastor the congregation would not renew his or her license to preach.\textsuperscript{437}

With each pastor that FBCS called in the late 1900s, the congregation held an installation service during which a charge would be given to the pastor. The charge was a moment when someone would ask the pastor if he or she was ready to accept the responsibilities that are expected of a pastor for FBCS, and then would call the pastor to commit to those responsibilities. When David Movsovich was installed the moderator of the church, a lay person, gave the charge. When Charles Hartman was installed the co-chair of the search committee, again a lay person, gave the charge. Yet when Elizabeth Wilkinson was installed as the pastor, the area minister at the time, an ordained clergy representing the denomination, gave the charge.\textsuperscript{438} While these are not ordination services, they are similar to the ordination/installation services of the 1700s, they were times when the congregation and the community would affirm the individual as the pastor of their community. The role of the internal and external call continued to play a large part in this action as the pastor affirmed his or her internal call in the commitment to the responsibilities of being the pastor, and the congregation supported the external call in accepting of the pastor’s commitment. This service is a moment when the congregation could directly embrace the external call of the pastor, even if he or she was ordained elsewhere, and for the pastor to rearticulate his or her internal call and embrace an external call specifically to that local community.

After an individual receives a positive affirmation from the Ordination Council, the sponsoring congregation would hold an ordination service in order to publicly and

\textsuperscript{437} Hudson, “Ministry,” 240. We will recall that similar advice was given by the PBA to a church seeking a pastor in the 1700s.

liturgically affirm the individual’s call. Maring and Hudson stress that the recognition of the call to ordination is never a private matter but something to be celebrated and embraced by the community hence the public nature of the ordination service.439 During this service a charge for ministry similar to the charge given in the installation service is normally given to the candidate. As with the installation charge, this charge includes the responsibilities and opportunities for ministry yet focusing on a more general level. In addition to the candidate’s charge, a charge is given to the ordaining church concerning its responsibility to support the candidate in his or her ministry.440 As in the past the pinnacle act of ordination was the moment in the service when attendants would lay hands on the candidate, a blessing would be offered as well as a prayer in which the Holy Spirit would be asked to guide the candidate in ministry.441 Diverging from all of the previous periods considered, some of the teachings suggested that laity as well as ordained clergy might be involved in this act of ordination; the laying on of hands was no longer restricted to the ordained. Normally, after the prayers the candidate would be given a stole, symbolizing his or her newly claimed ordained status. The denominational document “Policy Statement of Ministry” states, “persons to be ordained were formally set apart by a service of ordination with the laying on of hands.”442 As in the past, the moment of placing hands on the individual again seems to be the liturgical and sacramental apex of the ordination service.

The denomination continued to be involved in calling a pastor but to a lesser degree than we saw in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In Haines’, Spoolstra’s, and

442 “Policy Statement on Ministry,” 3.
Wilkinson’s installation services a representative from the Massachusetts Baptist Convention was present and participated in one way or another, but the financial control we saw in the beginning of the 20th century was no longer in practice. The teachings of the tradition from the late 1900s affirm the continued relationship between the congregation, the pastor, and the denomination specifically through the Ordination Council as a group representative of the association, region, or national body. Through this process, the Council, in part representing the denomination, would consider the Christian experience, the call to ministry, and the views of Christian doctrine.

Theological Conflict – Going Outside the Family

The late 1900s was not without cultural and theological conflict. In 1970 Kenneth Damstrom was called to serve as pastor of FBCS. Damstrom was educated at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts and was described as someone from the “Oral Roberts” school of ministry and theology. Gordon-Conwell was (and is still) known as a theologically and socially conservative institution similar to many other religious leaders and institutions connected with the Religious Right, which, at the time, was growing in popularity as well as gaining cultural and political power. In calling Damstrom, it seemed that FBCS was trying to keep up with these cultural trends. As one individual described it, the church was looking for someone who modeled the characteristics of the then still new television evangelists; thus the attraction to what was described as the “Oral Roberts” school. Another member of FBCS felt that in calling

445 Charles Haines, telephone conversation with author, 6 November, 2009. While Haines attributed Damstrom with the “Oral Roberts School,” there is no record of Damstrom attending Oral Roberts University. Haines was referring to a certain approach and view of evangelism that many attributed to Oral Roberts.
446 Haines, phone conversation.
Damstrom, the congregation was trying to capture and embrace the ideals of the evangelical movement closely associated with the Religious Right.\textsuperscript{447} For the first time the congregation reached outside of the Baptist family; Damstrom was ordained through the Assemblies of God, a historically Pentecostal denomination.

Calling Damstrom could be seen as the last vestige of FBCS’ Calvinist heritage. We need to be clear that the “Oral Roberts” school is not necessarily Calvinist, nor are pastors from the Pentecostal movement. However, as Marsden argues, the vestiges of 1920s Fundamentalism (which was in part influenced by Calvinism) helped shape the Holiness and Pentecostal movements by example and influence.\textsuperscript{448} Before Damstrom, Robert S. Carlson, was the pastor from 1958 to 1969. Carlson was also a graduate of Gordon-Conwell, but did not emphasize fundamentalist theology as much as a conservative theology; one that ascribed to “orthodox” tenets of Christianity but did not eschew society, suggesting that the congregation was at least influenced by a more conservative leaning theology. When calling Damstrom, members did not stress a Calvinist theology, but instead a media-savvy approach to evangelism. As we will discuss below, Damstrom’s time with FBCS did not end well, and after Damstrom we see a notable shift in the theology of the pastors as the church called Charles Haines, a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, and a pastor who embraced a much more progressive theology. Since Haines, all of the pastors came from a more progressive theological position, either directly from Andover Newton, or in some way influenced by Andover Newton and/or progressive theology. I would not label this as an end of Calvinism in FBCS, but as a marked turn from Calvinism, perhaps deliberate. One cannot

\textsuperscript{447} Howard Levine, telephone conversation with author, 13 November, 2009.
\textsuperscript{448} Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism}, 195.
pinpoint a specific moment in time when FBCS completely left its Calvinist roots, or give the credit (or blame) to a specific pastor. As mentioned in the previous section, Frederick Dark did not lead the congregation to leave the denomination and join the General Baptists, a move which may have sown the seeds leading to the end of Calvinism in the congregation. As FBCS continued to call pastors from the Northern Baptists (and the American Baptists) where Modernism and progressive theology was tolerated, the chances of calling a strict Calvinist pastor decreased as time continued. This is not to suggest that FBCS could never return to its Calvinist roots. As in the past, the theology of the pastor has affected and influenced the theology of the congregation, thus while the current pastor embraces a progressive theology, we can presume that if the church were to call a pastor who embraced a conservative, or Calvinist theology, such theology would be reflected in the congregation.

During his time at FBCS (which was only a year), Damstrom witnessed the resignation of the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, and Sunday School Superintendent in the months of June and July. In response to these resignations, the congregation held a meeting at which point Damstrom offered his own resignation, which was not immediately accepted. At this meeting Rev. Shieby, the area minister representing the Massachusetts Baptist Convention, attended to offer assistance in any way that he could, demonstrating a continued connection with the denomination. The following month, FBCS held a second congregational meeting and voted to accept Damstrom’s resignation.\footnote{\textit{Records}, vol. V, July 20, 21, August 24, 1971.} As one member described the relationship, “he was not a good match for the church.”\footnote{Levine, telephone conversation, 13 November, 2009.}
The Pastor and Worship

Along with theological differences, there was a certain amount of ambiguity around the role and the expectation of the pastor and worship. On the one hand, the pastor was given a great amount of authority and control over the shape and content of worship. Along with this amount of control and authority, members of the congregation expressed a sense that it was important to have the pastor (or another ordained pastor) administer the Lord’s Supper. In addition members of the congregation also expressed the expectation that the pastor would make sermon preparation and preaching a priority among the many weekly tasks calling for his or her attention.

On the other hand, there were a number of opportunities for lay people to preach and lead worship. Special Sundays such as, Men’s, Women’s, and Youth Sundays were set aside to offer different members of the congregation the opportunity to preach and participate in leading worship. Thus we find a desire for an ordained person to be in charge of and to lead worship, and yet we also find the practice of lay preaching, leadership, and participation in worship. It may be that the congregation recognizes the importance and significance of the presence of an ordained individual, specifically with worship, but at the same time embraces the Baptist notion of the priesthood of the believers.

The egalitarian emphasis in the Baptist community and the ambiguity around the pastor’s role in worship can lead us to consider if the pastor has any authority in the congregation and what that authority might look like. When asked about pastoral

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453 Focus Group, see Appendix B.
authority, some members commented that authority was given to the pastor in certain areas where the pastor has an assumed level of knowledge and expertise through training. These areas included theology, scripture, and spirituality. If any had a question about scripture or theology they would follow the leading and the guiding of the pastor. While the pastor has a level of authority through training and expertise, this same group of people was clear that the pastor does not have authority over one’s individual interpretation of scripture or over one’s understandings of salvation and their relationship with Jesus Christ (one’s personal theology). The authority given to the pastor was primarily based on training and knowledge.\textsuperscript{454} We will recall in the 1700s when members of FBCS defended Peckham as the pastor in light of Daniel White’s attempt to take over as pastor of First Baptist, Newport, they invoked Peckham’s call as a reason to respect him as pastor. The authority of the pastor was derived from the internal call. Yet in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, authority was based more on training and expertise rather than internal call. This shift may point to the very professionalization of the ministry that Leland and others feared with the creation and emphasis of educational expectations. It does seem, when considering pastoral authority in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the internal call has fallen to the background.

This ambiguity about the authority of the pastor is what one would expect from a Baptist congregation. When asked about allowing one to be baptized and to join the church the pastor of FBCS was granted a good amount of authority. As one pastor stated, he felt that he could recommend whether or not someone could join the congregation or receive baptism and his recommendation would be honored. Officially he did not have the final say, but, as this pastor claimed, his recommendation carried a great deal of

\textsuperscript{454} Focus Group, see Appendix B.
weight. Members of the congregation affirmed this observation, agreeing that the pastor had influence over decisions concerning membership and baptism and that they would follow the pastor’s suggestions. Thus, while the individual is encouraged to make the initial decision concerning his or her salvation, the pastor holds a great deal of influence over the next necessary steps in claiming and articulating one’s salvation: baptism and church membership. On the one hand, members of the congregation would claim that the pastor does not have authority over the spirituality of individual members of the congregation, but on the other hand the pastor functions as the gatekeeper of some of the major aspects of one’s spiritual life: baptism and church membership.

This tension concerning the role and authority of the pastor, as well as the question around the special status of the pastor was articulated in the teachings of the tradition. In Winthrop Hudson’s article, “The Pastoral Ministry,” ordination is described as a specific calling of some Christians to work in the area of pastoral ministry. Such a ministry includes leading the congregation in public worship, instructing the congregation in Christian “truth,” as well as guiding and if necessary admonishing the congregation in their faith and spiritual development. As in previous decades, if one felt called to gain ordination, he or she would articulate such a calling as one that came from God, thus continuing to emphasize the internal call. In addition to the internal call,

456 Focus Group. See Appendix B.
457 I am not arguing that church membership is a necessary part of salvation, but is an important part of being a Christian.
within the literature we see a continued commitment to the external call, or the moment when the congregation embraces and encourages the desires of the individual to pursue ordination. As in the past, the process of confirming the internal call was through a trial period where one would demonstrate his or her gifts and abilities for ministry. After the congregation felt secure in the candidate’s ability and internal call, the congregation would grant the candidate a license to preach so the candidate could train and prepare for ministry.

The ambiguous nature of the authoritative status of the pastor hinted at in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been abandoned by the end of the 20th century. Both Hudson and Hays stress that ordination does not give one special status before God or a special status within the congregation; one did not acquire a unique or indelible change making one different from the laity through ordination. Instead, the position of leadership and the status of the pastor exist through the nature and function of the office of the pastor within the local church. An individual was not qualified to be a pastor because of his or her standing in the community, or because of a specific personality, but because he or she has been recognized as someone in the community who was called to function in the role of the pastor. Ordination was a process through which one was installed into an order of pastors, or vocation of ministry and given the opportunity to participate and function in the life of a church through a specific office, as the leader of the congregation. Ordination did not confer a special status before God or the laity but instead among the

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462 For example, in the late 1800s, Cathcart suggests that all pastors are “bishops,” and Philip Jones suggests that all officers (including pastors) are first among equals.
As stated above, the pastor was primarily expected to be the leader of the congregation in worship, an instructor of the congregation in the history and theology of Christianity, and one who would spiritually guide the people collectively and individually. In order to adequately fulfill such duties, Hudson suggests that the pastor be free from other responsibilities in order to devote time to study and to focus on preaching “above all else.” Hudson further states that the essential feature of the pastor is the relationship he or she has with the congregation and that the pastor should cultivate that relationship in the ways listed above.

While we have an emphasis on the ministry of all the people, we still find an articulated understanding that pastors are called to a particular ministry: serving and leading a church. William Brackney defines ordination in the Baptist context as being set apart for a special ministry. When a congregation is considering a candidate for ordination, they may consider specific characteristics of that individual. Some of the characteristics that Goodwin suggests are growth in spirit, growth in character, peaceful, not arrogant, knowledgeable, and proficient in certain skills that are seen as necessary for being a pastor.

The distinction of the office and role of the pastor as suggested in the *teachings of the tradition* is based on functionality. According to Maring and Hudson, what sets a pastor apart from the congregation are the responsibilities rather than rights; responsibilities including leading worship, leading through preaching, pastoral care,

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466 Hudson, “Ministry,” 240.
administration of the ordinances, instruction, and empowerment in faith.\textsuperscript{469} Maring and Hudson stress that the responsibility to administrate the ordinances (Lord’s Supper and Baptism) come primarily from an expressed consent of the congregation through the service of ordination, rather than from the internal call.\textsuperscript{470}

Both Brackney and Goodwin suggest ordination should be viewed as a lifelong statute. Yet Goodwin also claims that there are times when one would want to renew one’s ordination. While he states that there is no real reason for renewal, Goodwin does suggest that it is permissible if one is moving to a different form of ministry (for example, teaching at a college or a seminary rather than leading a church), if one has not been professionally active as a pastor for a long period of time, or if an individual is moving from one denomination to another.\textsuperscript{471} Maring and Hudson suggest that it is possible to remove a regionally or nationally recognized ordination if there has been a scandal with the individual or a prolonged period of inactivity.\textsuperscript{472} Thus while some suggest that ordination is life-long, others leave room for renewal of ordination, or to have the possibility to remove one’s status of ordination. Regardless, a major role for the pastor is to lead worship and to administer the ordinances.

The Authority of the Pastor

In the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century we find the continued emphasis that the pastor is a part of a congregation, not elevated above anyone else in the congregation, and at the same time is considered the leader of the church as we have seen in the past. The pastor is ordained by the local church, and is called by the local church to serve as the pastor. Thus the local

\textsuperscript{470} Maring and Hudson, \textit{Baptist Manual}, 106. Despite this statement, Maring and Hudson claim that the local congregation may authorize a layperson to preside at a service of the Lord’s Supper.
\textsuperscript{472} Maring and Hudson, \textit{Baptist Manual}, 119.
church remains the primary setting for ordination and the primary setting through which the pastor can express his or her functionality via ordination.\(^{473}\) Within the local church the pastor has authority, setting standards of morals and beliefs based on his or her readings and interpretations of the Gospel.\(^{474}\) This authority is not hierarchal but relational, and it is gained through time and trust with the congregation. The pastor is never considered as an authority over the members of the church, but an authority within the church through teaching, knowledge, and expertise.\(^{475}\) As stated in the “Policy Statement on Ministry,” “Ordained persons do bear the responsibility of their designated ministries, but are not a separate class within the church or a group with special access to God.”\(^{476}\) As well as having a direct relationship with the local church, the pastor also represents the congregation to the community and in a lesser case to the world. The majority of the time a lay member of the congregation would not have the same level of representation as the pastor of the church would.\(^{477}\) Such a representation does not give the pastor any specific authority but instead a responsibility that is a part of ordination.

With preaching, the *teachings of the tradition* suggest that the pastor should enjoy a certain amount of freedom around the topic, tenor, and tone of the pulpit. This is often referred to as a freedom of the pulpit, and it is the responsibility of the congregation to assure that the pastor will have such freedom.\(^{478}\) The *teachings of the tradition* does not


\(^{474}\) Goodwin, *New Hiscox Guide*, 50, 73. While the pastor has a certain amount of spiritual authority, the congregation has the opportunity to vet the pastor during the candidacy period to confirm if Biblical interpretations and beliefs of the pastor will conform with Biblical interpretations and beliefs of the congregation. Because of this vetting, ideally there will be a certain level of agreement between the pastor and the congregation as to the moral and spiritual standards they will embrace.


\(^{476}\) “Policy Statement on Ministry,” 1.


\(^{478}\) “Resolution on Freedom of the Pulpit and Pew,” Reference #8099-9/82, adopted by the
offer consideration into technique for preaching as we saw in previous centuries nor do they speak to the importance of education to inform the preacher. This may be because by this time it was assumed that the pastor would have a seminary level of education. The issue was not pastoral authority in the sermon, but freedom on the pastor’s part.

When considering the practices of the people, authority was displayed through the tasks and functionality of many of the pastors in the late 1900s. Linda Spoolstra oversaw and led a renovation campaign, programmatic changes, and general institutional growth in FBCS. Spoolstra also called the congregation to focus on four areas of concern: youth, purchasing a projector, family ministry, and adult ministry with the feeling that such a focus would help the church develop programatically. From the meeting notes, one gets the impression that Spoolstra was exercising a degree of leadership and authority in suggesting the four areas of concern.

Spoolstra was not the only pastor to lead in programmatic areas. Wilkinson proposed that the church meet with a consultant to offer direction for fundraising so that the congregation could increase its finances. Hartman offered a stewardship plan for the church and led a “Rekindle Program” for the Massachusetts Baptists, with which FBCS was involved. In these examples the pastor perceived an overall need for the congregation that members of the congregation might not necessarily have seen and directed the congregation accordingly. With all three pastors the congregation followed the suggestions and leadership offered. This role and expectation of the pastor as

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For example, Spoolstra advocated a “Mission Outreach” focus for the church to become involved a specific ministry and called the church to set aside four Sundays to dedicate the church to specific ministries. Records of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA: Church Register and Record, April 13, 1977 – December, 1983. Volume IV (Collection of the First Baptist Church, John Hay Library, Brown University), April 17, 1979, 186; October 16, 1979, 194.

someone who would offer a vision for the congregation was articulated and affirmed by
some of the current members of the FBCS.  

Not all the pastors were able to enjoy such a broad sense of freedom and authority
in programmatic leadership. After the difficult experience with Damstrom the
congregation was slow to offer authority to the pastor who followed, Charles Haines, in
areas of finance, administration, and concerns with the physical building. Yet, Haines
claims that he had a certain amount of authority and freedom in areas of spirituality and
worship. He described his time at FBCS as one of healing and spiritual deepening as well
as one with a great deal of latitude in worship and with the Lord’s Supper. The
freedom that Haines experienced in worship displays a degree to which the pastor’s role
in worship was central to the pastor’s relationship with the congregation. Even if the
congregation was hesitant to allow the pastor a leadership position in more administrative
areas, worship was the major focus of a pastor’s function. When asked to list some of the
myriad tasks many expected the pastor to perform and fulfill, members of the
congregation considered sermon preparation as the most important weekly duty followed
closely by worship preparation.

Not only was preaching an important task, but as intimated through Haines’
experience, the pastor’s presence and role in leading the Lord’s Supper was also seen as
important for the life of the church. In 1982 the deacons discussed whether the pastor
should always be present for the Lord’s Supper or if one should be retained in the event

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481 Focus Group, see Appendix B.
482 It is worth noting that during this time the pastor never had complete control over the finances
of FBCS, but, as Haines stated, his role was not central in such areas. With other pastors (for example,
Linda Spoolstra) we see a greater level of involvement in areas of finance. Haines, telephone conversation,
6 November, 2009.
483 Haines, telephone conversation, 6 November, 2009.
484 Focus Group, see Appendix B.
that the current pastor was away. The deacons agreed that while they were comfortable
with lay people leading worship and preaching, it was important to have a pastor present
for these worship services. For example, when Spoolstra told the deacons that she would
be away on January 1, 1984 for vacation, the deacons decided to postpone communion
for the following week when Spoolstra would be present.\footnote{Records, vol. IV, May 23, 1982, 232-3.}

During this time as in the past, when a pastor left a congregation he or she still
maintained his or her ordination and was still viewed and treated as a pastor even if he or
she was not the current pastor of the church. In August 1985 the Luther family,
descendants of the second pastor of FBCS, Samuel Luther, held a reunion on the church
grounds. Among those attending the reunion was the Rev. Gordon Luther who was
licensed to preach at FBCS, ordained elsewhere, as was currently serving as the pastor of
the Baptist Church in Hoosick Falls, New York. Although he was serving a different
church and was ordained at a different church Luther’s ordination status was recognized
and he was asked to preach and lead worship.\footnote{Records, vol. VI, Aug 23-24, 1986, 36.} In October 1998, Homecoming Sunday,
pastors who had previously served at FBCS were invited to take part in the worship, and
were recognized as clergy indicating a continued relationship with the congregation as
well as a continued recognition of their ordination.\footnote{Records, vol. VI, Oct 19, 1988, 233-4.}

Despite the central role of the pastor in worship, there were moments when those
who were not ordained preached and led a Sunday service. While Haines was pastor the
congregation had a “Laity Sunday” in October 1973 in which a lay member of the
congregation preached and other members led worship. In August 1976 while Haines was
on vacation the church services were led by members, and not by a “supply” pastor.  

While the central role of the pastor was focused on worship, and seen as essential for the Lord’s Supper, there seemed to be a relaxed acceptance when a lay person would preach and lead worship. As previously mentioned, there were annually scheduled days when a lay person was expected to preach, i.e. “Men’s Sunday,” “Women’s Sunday,” and “Youth Sunday.” More than once in this time when the pastor was away on vacation for the month of August (the customary month for the pastor to go on vacation), a lay person would normally preach and lead the services. Presently some of the members of FBCS continue to view occasions when a member of the congregation could preach as valuable moments for the congregation and an overall good experience for FBCS, yet they would not want lay preaching to become a regular occurrence. 

In the literature from this time we find a consensus that all people are called to ministry in one form or another. For example, the denominational statement, “Resolution on the Call to Ministry” states that “every person who confesses faith in Jesus Christ is called to discipleship and ministry.” Maring and Hudson write that ministry belongs to the whole church and that all members are ministers. The role of the pastor, Maring and Hudson claim, is a distinction of function only; all are called to serve Christ in one way 

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491 Focus group, see Appendix B.
492 “Resolution on Call to the Ministry of all Believers,” American Baptist Resolution statement Reference # 8203:11/93. Adopted by the General Board of American Baptist Churches, June 1994. Revised, 1995. Modified by Executive Committee of the General Board, September, 1999. Resolutions are statements that representing a position of ABC/USA on a specific issue based on a policy statement and calling for some type of action. A policy statement represents a position(s) of the ABC/USA on a broad issue. None of these statements have binding authority over individual churches, but offer guidance to the churches as well as guiding the decisions and actions of the different program boards.
or another.493 This is similar to the idea of “ordering” that we considered in an earlier chapter; through baptism all are called to ministry. Just as suggested in the previous chapter, the hierarchal emphasis many assume to be a part of the Catholic context is eschewed in Baptist writing.494 The teachings of this time suggest that all people have a responsibility to be engaged in a ministry in one way or another as is reflected in the practices.

Summary

In comparing the practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition from 1720 to the present we can begin to draw a number of conclusions.495 As we saw, for the most part the practices of the people and the teachings of tradition were in agreement. While there are moments of ambiguity within the teachings and within the practices, in the majority of these moments, the ambiguity found in the teachings matched the ambiguity found in the practices. The agreements between the teachings and the practices suggest that the practices of FBCS were very likely reflected in the practices of other northern Baptist churches connected to the American Baptist denomination in the United States, and the similarities of ambiguity between the practices and the teachings further bolster this claim. Thus based on these similarities we can draw some broader conclusions concerning the role of ordination in the American Baptist denomination in

494 The Resolution statement cited above is similar to the emphasis that all are baptized into ministry is found in Christifideles Laici as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, Gaillardetz discusses a view of ordering based on relationality; see Chapter 3. The Second Vatican Council offered considerable progress away from a hierarchal emphasis. For example, the second chapter of Lumen Gentium stress that the church is the people of God, all baptized into a participation with the priesthood of Christ. There continues to be a hierarchy, yet the common connection through Christ brings a sense of equality in the church, Chapter 3.
495 This section will offer a preliminary summary of comparison and some conclusion. In the following chapter we will analyze the data in a much more detailed fashion, looking to the speech-acts and the grammar of the congregation and the American Baptist denomination.
As we review the experiences of FBCS we will notice some changes in the practices and expectations of the pastor, changes that were also reflected in the teachings of the tradition. In the 1700s, education was not considered essential for ordination. By the mid to late 1800s the idea of a pastor without seminary education was frowned upon by some and acceptable to others; there was a diversity of approaches towards the training of the pastors in FBCS and the denomination. The 1900s marked a change in the diversity of this expectation; all pastors afterwards were expected and assumed to have a certain amount of professional training. This expectation influenced the pastor’s authority within the congregation and by the late 1900s a pastor’s authority was based in large part on his or her training and education.

What we find is a changing trend concerning the call. In the 18th century, the internal call was strongly emphasized in determining if one was to be ordained. The external call was a congregational affirmation not only of the individual’s skills and abilities, but of the individual’s sense that he had an experience with the divine setting him apart for ordination. Yet as time continued more energy and focus was placed on the external qualifications and less on the internal sense that God had called and set apart the individual to be a pastor. By the 20th century, a pastor was expected to have seminary training as well as completed a number of steps prescribed by the denomination (primarily through geographic regions or local associations) in order to be ordained. By the late 20th century the internal call was considered in the ordination process, but did not

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496 As always, we need to remember that any broad comparison is made with the very real awareness and understanding that there will always be individual exceptions to any generalization made. We also need to be aware that this study has been primarily focused on a European-American Baptist experience and does not reflect the experiences of other ethnicities.
receive the same scrutiny as it did in the 18th century.

When it came to discipline, the role and involvement of the pastor also changed. In the early 1700s the deacons of the church, without the presence of the pastor, would confront members of the congregation who were negligent in attending worship or involved in a scandalous practice. Yet as we saw with Comer’s reaction to Maxwell’s doctrinal ambivalence and Comer’s concern for people within his own congregation, the pastor was seen as someone who had a responsibility over the spiritual well-being of the members of the congregation.\footnote{Chapter 4.} In the 1800s the pastor became highly involved in such confrontations, joining the committees which addressed individuals’ wayward lives and practices. The 1900s marked a change for the congregation and the pastor as the practices of the church moved away from disciplinary meetings and confrontations. Yet despite the absence of disciplinary committees there was still an expectation that the pastor would guide and influence the congregation’s spirituality and individuals’ sense of well being. We saw this most markedly in the recent practices of baptism and church membership. For both, the pastor acted as an unofficial gatekeeper offering his or her approval or denial for baptism and membership. While such influence and expectations are not specifically connected to disciplinary action as they were in the past, they point to the congregation’s recognition that the pastor has authority not only in areas of Biblical studies and theology, but in discerning the degree and nature of one’s faith, and one’s spiritual life. At the same time, members of the congregation felt that the pastor did not have a final authority in issues of Biblical interpretation and salvation, thus creating a sense of ambiguity. In the examples of the pastor’s involvement in disciplinary action, as well as authority concerning the spiritual well-being of the members of the congregation,
the authority of the pastor in the church, and the pastor’s relationship with the church were and continue to be at issue. While there was a change in the practice and the role of the pastor, the central focus that the pastor holds some degree of influence if not authority with an individual’s spirituality holds some consistency. 498

One other change we find is around the egalitarian emphasis embraced by the American Baptist denomination, and the relationship of congregation with the pastor. Historically, Baptists practiced the priesthood of all the believers, calling all who are baptized to the ministry of Christ as equal, and holding the ideal that the ordained pastor is not above the congregation in any way. Yet as the tenets of egalitarianism were and are embraced, the pastor is set apart from the rest of the community testing the egalitarian ecclesiological emphasis. In the relationship between the pastor and the congregation we see a certain amount of ambiguity between authority and equality, most notably in worship. In the 1700s, if a church was without a pastor it was acceptable for the people to gather, sing, read scripture, but preaching was seen as a responsibility of the pastor. Even though preaching continued to be set aside for the pastor to fulfill, in the late 1900s FBCS held specific Sundays when a layperson would preach. If the pastor was away the leadership of the congregation would call for members of the congregation to preach and lead service. The teachings of the tradition in the early 1700s and 1800s did not stress the view that all are called to be ministers through their baptism, but do stress that one of the primary tasks of the pastor is to preach. Yet the teachings in the late 1900s stress that through baptism all are ministers of Christ. The example of lay preaching is a practice of

498 For more on discipline in the church see Gregory A. Wills, Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900, Religion in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). While Wills’ book focuses on the experience in the South, the picture that Wills paints, specifically in the late 1700s and early 1800s can hold with many churches in the North. See also Susan Juster, Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
Along with the changes, we can notice some things that were constant in the past two hundred years. Despite the changing emphasis from internal to external, the call continued to be prominent in ordination. When one desired the status of ordination, after receiving affirmation from a congregation, the individual would go before a council made up of clergy and representatives from local churches and share his or her internal call and a church’s expressed external call. While the local church would be the community ordaining the individual, we consistently saw that the presence and affirmation of an Ordination Council was seen as a necessary part of the process. Even as the emphasis on the internal and external shifted through the centuries, the overall call and the role of the Ordination Council was seen as a consistent part of the process toward ordination.

Finally, throughout the history of FBCS that we have considered, the relationship between the pastor and the congregation has a direct effect on the effectiveness of the pastor. Examples of a negative effectiveness due to a negative relationship can be found in the pastorates of Samuel Maxwell, William Northrup, William Barton, and Kenneth Damstrom, to name a few. In each of these examples, the individual was qualified, trained, and ordained by a Council, yet did not have the trust or respect of the congregation, and because his relationship with the congregation was so negative he did not have a fruitful or pleasant ministry. On the other side, if we were to consider the pastorates of Benjamin Taylor and Linda Spoolstra as well as others we see a positive relationship between the pastor and the congregation and what was considered a positive ministry. The relationship between the pastor and the congregation greatly affects the leadership and effectiveness of the pastor.
We have surveyed a number of the pastors of the First Baptist Church of Swansea MA from the mid 1700s to the present day. In this survey, we have compared the actions of the pastor and the congregation with the *teachings* of ordination and ministry found in the writings from the northern Baptist denomination and what was to become the American Baptists. In doing so we have “listened” to a grammar of ordination shared and spoken by the congregation and the American Baptist denomination. In the next chapter we will consider the important and essential aspects of ordination embraced by FBCS and possibly the American Baptist denomination and the theological implications suggested in such aspects.
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

Introduction

Trying to discern a theology of ordination in a Baptist context (let alone any theology in a Baptist context) is fraught with difficulties and potential pitfalls. As discussed in the first chapter, such a task necessitates use of the social sciences to inform any theological claims that may be made. In the second chapter we considered a methodology influenced by the writings of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon that would discern a lived theology from the practitioners of the American Baptist denomination itself. This methodology took seriously the actions and speech-acts of the people within the Baptist community as indicators of this lived theology. Such considerations did not yet conclusively point to a well articulated theology of ordination; further analysis called for a next step. In the third chapter I offered a potential understanding of a practiced theology of ordination in the Baptist context based on the idea of sacramental consciousness as it is primarily articulated in Catholic contexts. It is my contention that an analysis of the data leads one to consider an ontology of the relationality between the pastor and the congregation and the way that relationality may change through ordination. My hypothesis in connection with this part of my study was that many American Baptists, especially but not exclusively those in the American Baptist denomination, participate in a “sacramental consciousness” when it comes to a theology of ordination. They are aware that the pastor’s relationship with the congregation is
changed through ordination, symbolically representing the presence and activity of God within the congregation, and yet at the same time American Baptists are aware that God is greater than and beyond any understanding and awareness derived through the presence and relationship with the pastor. This awareness comes out of the call (internal and external) as it is experienced in the community and the relationality between the pastor and the congregation. Employing the ideas of sacramental consciousness takes the findings derived from the methodology developed in the second chapter and provides a more comprehensive analysis.

The fourth and fifth chapters told a story of the pastors and the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA, comparing their actions with the actions and writings of the Northern Baptist denomination, what would become the American Baptist denomination. It was from these chapters that we assembled the materials needed for our final step of constructive theology. We looked for historical consistencies as well as for consistencies between the practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition. From those consistencies we have detected symbolic acts and speech acts pointing towards a shared theology of ordination. In this chapter we will offer convictions of theology based on symbols and speech acts of the community that speak of a theology of ordination. The convictions that I will offer will support my argument that a comprehensive analytical view of the symbolic acts, speech acts, and convictions revealed in American Baptist practices, particularly northern ones, uncover a type of sacramental consciousness that can move us constructively toward an American Baptist theology of ordination.

In order to arrive at these conclusions we will first review the “thick description” of FBCS combined with the teachings of the tradition and name some of the speech acts
that occurred with regularity. Following this description we will consider what a felicitous speech act will look like in the Baptist context. Then we will offer a taxonomy to the speech acts, discerning those where are official and those which are operative. From such speech acts organized in a manner of official and operative I will offer convictions, also official and operative. Finally, from such a descriptive effort of gleaning and naming speech acts and convictions I will offer a theology of ordination utilizing sacramental consciousness.

The Thick Description

The social-historical study of the American Baptist denomination, locally (via the First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts) and nationally (via manuals and other texts) offers a “thick description” of the pastor in the Baptist context. In this study we considered the purpose of ordination, the underlying meanings and the symbolic references pertaining to the pastor, the pastor’s role, and the pastor’s relationship with members of the congregation as well as individuals and institutions outside of the congregation. A “thin description” of the pastor would claim that a pastor is to “teach and preach.” Such a description does not consider the nuances of preaching, the content of teaching, and perhaps most importantly, the relationships between the pastor and the congregation. A “thin description” is inadequate in providing a theology of ordination. We pursued a “thick description” with the understanding that systems of meaning are embodied in the symbols of a community and that reality as it is understood by the community is defined by the symbols shared by the community. Thus the boundaries of the shared reality of the community as well as the content of this reality are found within the symbols of the community. This being the case, the parameters of the role of the
pastor as well as the community’s understandings of a theology of ordination are found within symbols shared and embraced by the American Baptist denomination.499

From our study of FBCS, we can name some of the symbols, or symbolic acts that pertain to a theology of ordination.500 Symbolic acts in this case are those actions which point to a deeper understanding or belief shared by the community concerning the theology of ordination. We must remember that such a list of symbolic acts will neither be exhaustive nor completely immune from the author’s biases in selectivity. However, the symbolic acts offered here have emerged from a serious study of the confluence of the practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition which are documented as having occurred again and again in the American Baptist denomination, and which have been reasonably demonstrated to take a central place in Baptist beliefs and actions relevant to ordination.

The Call

Within the local church and the national denomination the call played a prominent role in ordination. Both the internal and the external call were major symbolic acts that were consistently a part of an individual’s process towards ordination. The internal call was understood as a moment when an individual experienced a desire or spiritual longing to be a pastor that was attributed to God. The external call was the action of the congregation affirming the individual as someone who has gifts and abilities to serve as a pastor. Both the internal call and the external call were expressed publicly and could happen in any order; one does not necessarily happen before the other.

499 This is a very brief, thumbnail summary of Geertz’s influence on my methodology. See chapter 2, for a more in-depth view of my application of Geertz’s work.

500 Let us remember that a symbol, in Geertzian understanding, is more than a specific thing, but can be an action, a set of actions, or speech.
For example, we will recall the example of Arthur Wilde who joined FBCS, and expressed to the pastor, Fredrick Dark, his desire to be ordained, thus proclaiming his internal call. Wilde received Dark’s support, the congregation’s affirmation, and thus the external call. The affirmation of a congregation as well as the expressed desire of an individual was a consistent part of ordination.

The Ordination Council

Along with the call, the role of the Ordination Council constituted another symbolic act that was prominent throughout the Baptist story. In the Ordination Council the external call expressed by the congregation was affirmed by other Baptist pastors from nearby churches, representing the local Baptist denomination, and was seen as a necessary step towards gaining a status of ordination. Again, we will recall how Arthur Wilde was expected to go before the Council after receiving the support of the congregation. The Ordination Council also demonstrated and encouraged the relationship between the church, the pastor, and the local American Baptist denomination.

The pastor’s involvement with the denomination was capsulated in the Ordination Council. As we saw, the pastor was expected to be engaged on the congregation’s behalf with the denomination via meetings, ordination councils, and with other churches. The pastor’s involvement was a primary way which the church maintained a connection with the denomination, this connection beginning with the Ordination Council.

Laying on of Hands

In the ordination service the act of laying hands on the candidate was a central

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501 See Chapter 5.
502 Ibid.
moment in recognizing a change in the relationship between the candidate and the rest of
the community. In the ordination services we examined, the individual was not
considered ordained until the moment when other clergy or lay people (in the late 20th
century) placed their hands on the individual and said a prayer for the individual. We saw
this specifically with Arthur Wilde’s and Ralph Phillip’s ordination services. If we
were to pinpoint one moment when a change occurred it would be this liturgical moment.
In every case, the change was relational; the individual was now seen as set apart from
the congregation. In addition to the liturgical act of laying hands on the candidate, the
presence of a representative from the denomination as well as from other churches
suggests that more than an individual church was participating in the act of ordination,
and that other Baptist churches denominationally connected were involved in affirming
the change and the role of the individual through ordination.

Title

After the ordination service, the candidate was referred to as “Elder” or
“Reverend” signifying a change in the pastor’s relationship with the congregation. Once
someone acquired this title, it was maintained within the congregation and among other
churches. We will recall that the two times when a non-ordained person served the
church as the pastor (Buffum and Morse) neither were referred to as “Elder” or
“Reverend.” Instead, they were both given the title: “acting pastor.” In addition to the
lack of title, in both cases the congregation had to approve of Buffum and Morse
presiding over the Lord’s Supper. In essence, their relationship with the congregation as
“acting pastors” was different from those pastors who were ordained either before they

503 Ibid.
began working with the church or while working with the church.\textsuperscript{504} The lack of a title seems to be an indication of that difference; Buffum and Morse either had not expressed an internal call or did not receive an external call and were not treated in the same way as those who were ordained.

\textbf{Relationality}

Finally, the pastor’s functionality and relationality were important as they influenced and informed the authority of the pastor within the congregation. Functionally, some of the expectations of the pastor included leading worship, preaching weekly, presiding over the Lord’s Supper, and performing baptisms. We will recall that one of the reasons why FBCS expressed displeasure with Samuel Maxwell was because he did not lead a Lord’s Supper service for several months.\textsuperscript{505} In some cases, as in the late 1900s, when Linda Spoolstra was scheduling vacations, the congregation decided that the presence of an ordained pastor was essential to observe the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{506} Both Charles Hartman and Charles Haines expressed a sense of control and authority they felt they had over worship and spirituality given by the congregation. This authority and control that the pastor had in worship was a way in which he or she could share his or her theological leanings through sermons and prayers as we saw with Benjamin Taylor or with Oliver Fisk, for example.\textsuperscript{507} Functionally, the pastor has been liturgically necessary for such tasks as preaching and the Lord’s Supper, as well as offering guidance in spiritual matters suggesting a certain level of authority within the community.

Yet as we have seen, the congregation has the power to decide who to hire to be

\textsuperscript{504} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{505} Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{506} Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{507} Chapter 4.
their pastor and when to end their relationship with the pastor. The pastorates of Abner Lewis, Abial Fisher, Fredrick Dark, and Kenneth Damstrom are all examples of the congregation’s involvement and role in ending the relationship between the pastor and the church. As we will recall, there was a time when the pastor’s contract was renewed on a yearly basis, giving the congregation a tremendous amount of power over the pastor’s tenure at the church. While this power diminished to a degree with the end of this yearly practice, we continued to see examples of the congregation having influence over the relationship with the pastor. On the other hand, the pastor had the freedom to end his or her relationship with the congregation if he or she felt it was necessary to do so. While the pastor has spiritual and liturgical authority, the degree of authority is limited to the satisfaction of the congregation. Finally, the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation influenced the functionality of the pastor. If the relationship was positive then the pastor had greater latitude in assuming spiritual authority as we saw with Taylor. Yet if the relationship was negative as we saw with Maxwell, the pastor had less ability to claim spirituality authority. The relationship between the pastor and the congregation is influenced by the functionality of the pastor and the functionality of the pastor is influenced by the relationship with the congregation.

The functionality and relationality of the pastor, the title, the liturgical significance of the ordination service (laying of hands), and the call are all symbolic acts pointing towards a theology of ordination. They are symbolic acts that have occurred not only on the local level but are also referred to on the national level through the teachings of the tradition. From these symbolic acts we can discern speech-acts pointing towards a theology of ordination.
Felicitous Speech-Acts

Now that we have listed a number of the symbolic actions that have been and continue to be prominent in the Baptist community concerning ordination, we will discern if these symbolic actions can be considered “happy requests” or felicitous acts within the community and the context within which that could occur.\(^{508}\) We will recall that a “felicitous” speech act is one where the speaker and the hearer share a common language, a common convention of the action is understood, and “representative” and “affective” conditions are met.\(^{509}\) The above symbolic actions are considered symbolic actions, or speech acts because they convey a certain understanding of ordination within the community; they are actions and deeds which correspond to a propositional truth of the American Baptist denomination.\(^{510}\) We must be clear that not all speech acts are felicitous, and thus not all speech acts correspond to a truth of ordination that the community embraces and lives. For example, some Baptist pastors wear a Geneva gown for Sunday worship. One may consider the act of wearing such garments in a liturgical setting a speech-act; it is saying something about the role and nature of the pastor in the liturgical context. Yet if it is a speech act which points towards a conviction of ordination that is shared by the American Baptist denomination in question, then it must have a felicitous nature within the denomination rather than within one particular church. In

\(^{508}\) The majority of this section is influenced McClendon’s work that I reviewed in Chapter 2.  
\(^{509}\) Chapter 2.  
\(^{510}\) As suggested by McClendon and Smith, Chapter. We are shifting terminology from “symbolic actions” to “speech acts.” The idea of the symbol or symbolic action comes out of a Geertzian context, while the term “speech act” is found more in the works of McClendon and Lindbeck. Recognizing that all share a Wittgensteinian influence to one degree or another I am suggesting that there are more similarities than differences between “symbolic actions” and “speech acts.” With this in mind, we will be using the term “speech acts” in this section because the analysis offered is influenced by the work of McClendon and Lindbeck. Both scholars refer more to “speech acts” than to “symbolic actions.” We will also recall that I am favoring a pragmatist approach to Lindbeck. Thus the “truths” that I speak of pertain to the Baptist community and may not correspond to the broader Christian community. See Chapter 2.
order to be felicitous, such an act must have a shared linguistic base, a shared social experience, a sense of reference when discussing the role and the nature of the pastor, an expressivity of a statement concerning ordination, and an uptake by the listener/receiver of the speech act. The act of wearing a robe is something that is understood in some churches as a sign of one’s ordination, but in other congregations can be seen as a sign which expresses a certain sacerdotal undertone as well as a hierarchal sense of the pastor in the congregation. In some congregations the robe is embraced and in others it is eschewed. While this speech act may have value in individual congregations, it is not one that we could use on behalf of the American Baptist denomination.

The speech acts listed above emerge from a comparison and combination of local and national narratives. For each of these speech acts to make sense, to be considered felicitous, they need to meet all of the above criteria within the context in question. They need to share language, social context, have an agreed upon topic, be expressed in a way that makes sense to the listener, and be understood by the listener. For example, consider the speech act of the call (internal and external). The expression of the call and the affirmation of the call is something that must be understood by both the candidate and the community. Such an expression and reception needs to occur in an ecclesial context or else they would not have the same weight or import. A group of friends who are not connected to a church cannot affirm the internal call of an individual in the same way a

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511 See specifically Nancey Murphy’s description of the social dimension and context in which speech and meaning is found, Chapter 2.
512 We will recall the tension over what are often seen as overt “sacramental” actions in the Baptist church, a tension that is very much alive today. Thus some Baptist congregations would affirm the robe while others would eschew the notion. Chapter 3. The nature and function of the robe in the Baptist context is something that has not been written on to a great deal, yet it is not a topic that can be covered in this work due to lack of space.
513 Austin describes a felicitous utterances as being prelocutionary, locutionary, and illocutionary. Murphy’s description of McClendon reflects Austin’s influence. Smith and McClendon use the term “happy request” relaying on Austin’s influence.
congregation would. Nor would the call have the same import if the individual expressed his or her internal call at a cocktail party. The reference of the speech act must be understood by all as an expression of an understanding of God’s intervention in one’s life leading one to ordained ministry and thus as an affirmation of that individual’s interpretation by the congregation. The expressivity and the uptake of the speech act will determine if the internal call is shared and understood by the congregation and if it is affirmed via the external call. If a congregation were not to affirm the expression of the internal call, than there would not be an uptake of the speech act. In the same way, if the individual does not agree with a congregation’s feeling that he or she is called to ministry, then there is not an uptake of the external call.

Another example of what could be a felicitous speech act occurs during the ordination service: the laying on of hands. At the moment of the laying on of hands we find a speech act that is occurring in a specific social-liturgical context. The participants and observers have all agreed on the language and the nature of the language within the service as focused on ordination. All of those involved in this specific action are participants of the American Baptist denomination. All understand that the focus of attention is on the candidate and concerns the candidate’s ordination. The solemnity of the moment when the participants place their hands on the candidate expresses that this is an extra-ordinary moment, and, after the action is over, all consider the candidate ordained, understanding the act to be one of significance and value. The expression and reception of the call and the liturgical act of the laying on of hands are two examples of potentially felicitous speech acts.

For all of the speech acts to have symbolic depth corresponding to a propositional
truth and pointing towards the community’s convictions of ordination, they must meet all of the criteria we have considered. After determining the nature of the speech acts, we must then attempt an ordering or taxonomy of the speech acts.

A Taxonomy of Speech Acts

As we recall from Chapter 2, Lindbeck describes some doctrines as operative and some as official. Again, as we are considering these terms, those which are operative are important for community identity, and those that are official are essential for the identity of the religious community. Some of the speech acts that we have named earlier in this chapter can be considered official; others can be considered operative. Those speech acts which can be considered official are the call (internal and external) as well as the relationality between the pastor and the congregation. Both are essential for ordination to occur in the Baptist community. If an individual does not articulate a call (internal) and a congregation does not affirm a call (external), then ordination cannot happen. If a pastor does not have a relationship with a congregation of one sort or another, then the pastor’s ordination will not be recognized and cannot exist; the relationship with the congregation affects the efficacy of the pastor’s functionality. In addition, the external call cannot occur without a relationship between the individual and a congregation nor can the internal call be expressed if there is no one to hear it. Both the

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514 While Lindbeck is referring to doctrines, his approach, focusing on the cultural-linguistic aspects of a religious community, can be applied to the notion of speech acts that I have offered earlier. Thus what Lindbeck considers of doctrines we can consider of speech acts.

515 Recall Chapter 2, for a summary of Lindbeck’s writings on this subject. We will recall that a “necessary” speech act is one that shapes the identity of a particular community and an “essential” speech act is central to identity of the community. While in Chapter 2 I considered the difference in a broader, Christian context, in this context we are considering which speech acts shape the identity of a particular church and which are essential to the community being identified as Baptist.

516 Such a taxonomy of speech acts are similar to Lindbeck’s description of intrasystematic and ontological truths. Just as Lindbeck speaks of doctrines pointing towards, or corresponding with truth, in similar fashion, I argue that the speech acts we are considering point towards truths yet they are truths embraced by a specific community and not necessarily ontological truths.
call and a relationship with a congregation are unconditionally essential for ordination to be recognized and to occur.

Of the operative doctrines, the Ordination Council shapes and offers a sense of identity and continuity of ordination within the American Baptist denomination. The Council is a mechanism by which the external call is embraced by the larger Baptist community; it is an important part of ordination but not absolutely essential. A local church could ordain an individual, at which point the call and the relationality would be present even without the Ordination Council. The affirmation and participation of the American Baptist denominational community would be lacking, but that would not keep the individual from claiming ordination within the context of the local church. In addition to the Ordination Council, the titles given to the pastor, or lack of titles, are also operative speech acts, naming the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Again, as with the Ordination Council, the title is important but not absolutely essential for ordination.

Both the Ordination Council and the title point most directly to the call. Both are an extension of the external call; the Ordination Council is the way in which the denomination can affirm the internal call and the external call. The title is the community’s symbolic embrace of the individual’s internal call as well as the external call. It is a speech act that professes and attests to a previous speech act, that a call has been confirmed. In an ordination service involving representatives from the denomination, the liturgical act of laying on hands can also be seen as an operative speech act connected to the Ordination Council. The service itself is one that is important,

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517 I recognize that relationality is also necessary for a title or an Ordination Council, but if we were to suggest a connection from the official doctrines, we can find a greater sense of connection between the title and the Ordination Council with the call.
but not essential for ordination. The local church can hold an ordination service without involvement from the American Baptist denomination and have a moment of laying on of hands. As we will see below, the act of laying of hands itself is important as it encapsulates both the call and the relational dimension of that call.

We have labeled the relationality of the pastor with the congregation as an official speech act. The functionality of the pastor and his or her level of authority are operative speech acts which point towards relationality, a key dimension of any official speech act. The nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation will shape and form the way in which the pastor will function and the way in which the pastor can practice authority in the American Baptist denomination. Yet while both are important, neither is essential. It is possible for an individual to have a poor relationship, little to no functionality within the church community, and little to no authority and still be recognized as ordained. We saw this with Maxwell, Wood, and Northrup among others. All were given a title and were recognized as ordained throughout their relationship with FBCS. Denominational involvement can also be seen as connected with functionality, depending on the relationality of the pastor with the congregation. These speech acts are important to the identity of the community, but are not essential for the identity of the community.

Thus, while we have a number of speech acts pertaining to ordination, only two rise to the level of official speech acts: the call and the relationality of the pastor with the congregation.

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518 Again, I recognize that the call is necessary for a pastor to function and have a level of authority, but these two operative speech acts derive more closely from relationality.
Convictions

As we will recall from chapter two, convictions are “centrally held statements out of which the theology of the community emerges.”\textsuperscript{519} The official speech acts that we have named correspond to the convictions of the community, which correspond to a propositional truth (a theology) in which the community participates. When those speech acts occur in a felicitous manner, then they are corresponding to a conviction and thus to a theology of ordination. From the speech acts discussed above we can articulate at least four convictional statements regarding ordination emerging from the call, relationality, authority, functionality, and extra-church relationship. Because these statements are based on official and operative speech acts, they are not equal. Instead, the first two convictions can be considered primary and the later two secondary. Those which are primary are what Lindbeck would describe as doctrines pointing toward an ontological truth, a truth that corresponds to a reality. Those which are secondary point to what Lindbeck would describe as an intrasystematic truth, a truth of coherence. In this context, I am approaching ontological truth from a pragmatic approach, favoring the actions and speech acts of the community as corresponding to a truth of that community rather than trying to define an ontological truth from a realist perspective.\textsuperscript{520} The convictions come from and correspond to the American Baptist denomination. Some truths articulate the core identity of this Baptist denomination; other truths presuppose that identity and function intrasystemically. We will start with the primary convictions.

Call

\textit{The call is an essential part of ordination. It is comprised of the individual’s}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{519} Chapter 2.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{520} We will recall the summary of debate between the realists and the pragmatists evoked by Lindbeck’s writings in Chapter 2.
internal call expressing a sense of God’s desire for the individual to enter into the vocation of pastoral ministry, as well as an external call expressing an affirmation of an individual’s skills, abilities, and God’s desire for the individual to enter into the vocation of pastoral ministry by a church community.\textsuperscript{521}

The call is an essential part of a theology of ordination. If one desires to be ordained and has a sense of God’s presence in that desire, then he or she expresses that desire as a “call” to a community. As stated earlier, the very act of sharing, articulating and expressing one’s internal call must be a felicitous act within the community in order for an affirmation of that call (the external call) to be embraced. If the language is not shared, or the expressivity not understood, or the reference not understood, or the social context is not shared, then the uptake, the understanding of the act, will likely be confused. Thus the individual must be able to speak in a way that the community will understand. The individual must express a compelling belief that God is involved in the call, and the community must understand what the individual means when he or she speaks about God and a call to pastoral ministry. Such an expression occurs within the context of a Baptist community and is understood as an expression that will lead to further action: ordination.

The same holds for the community’s expression, embrace, and affirmation of the individual’s potential for ordination: the external call. All of the criteria making the speech act felicitous which applied to the internal call also applies to the external call, except that in this case, the individual is the recipient of the act. The individual must

\textsuperscript{521} I recognize that I have not addressed a myriad of theological issues concerning the nature of God including eminence, transcendence, divine will, or many other theological complexities. The point of this work is not to debate if and how God is active in the lives of humanity, but to consider how the Baptist community understands the role of God in ordination.
understand the community’s sense and expression of his or her external call. The congregation may initiate the process with an expression of an external call or the individual may with an expression of an internal call; one need not precede the other. In all cases, both the internal call and the external call must be felicitous for the call to occur as an official speech act.

The speech act of the call, internal and external, expresses the belief that there is a divine or spiritual presence involved in the call. Thus one does not simply desire to obtain ordination; there is an essential belief that God is an active part of the call. We saw an expression of God’s activity in an individual’s call in a number of manuals and texts, for example, in Isaac Backus’ “The Nature and Necessity of the Call.” As we saw in the history of FBCS, those moments when an individual embraced the call, he or she named the presence and activity of God in that call. On the other hand when we encountered ambiguity and uncertainty around the call (internal and external), such doubt expressed a degree of uncertainty concerning the desire and presence of God in the call.522 The challenge to the community is to discern the claim of divine inspiration in one’s vocational desires and for an individual to clearly express a sense of a divine presence in such a call. Showing and affirming that God is involved in one’s decision to pursue ordination is essential for conviction of the call. As we will see further on in this chapter, this awareness of God’s presence and participation in the call by the individual and the congregation is an awareness that something greater than that which can be seen is occurring. Using the terms and concepts developed in the study, one can call this awareness “sacramental.”

A part of discerning and affirming God’s presence and desire for the individual to

522 We primarily saw this in the 1700s with Jabez Wood, Samuel Maxwell, and John Devotion.
enter into ordained ministry is to test the gifts and abilities that an individual would need to function as a pastor. For example, in order to be a pastor one needed to be able to preach and have knowledge of scripture and an understanding of theology. These areas of focus do not directly pertain to a sense of a divine presence but by affirming such gifts affirms at the very least an unspoken assumption that God would only call someone who would have the necessary gifts and aptitudes to be a pastor. As we saw in the 1700s, although understanding of scripture was seen as important and to a degree necessary, formal training was not required. The greater emphasis was placed on the activity of God in calling the individual to pastoral ministry. As time went on, the internal call continued to be important, but the emphasis of the external shifted from affirming the sense of presence and activity of the divine to the training and knowledge received in preparation for ministry so that the individual could be seen as an “expert.” It was still important for the individual to express a call from God, but in order to display an ability to be a pastor one had to gain formal education. Regardless of the shift in emphases of the external call, the underlying truth that this conviction points towards remains: the core Baptist belief that God is active in the person’s call and that the community is affirming the divine participation. In other words, one cannot just decide to be a pastor on his or her own whim; God must be involved in such a decision and a community must affirm God’s involvement.

As stated previously, the speech acts of the title (Rev. or Elder), the liturgical moment of laying on of hands, and the Ordination Council can all be seen as pointing towards an external recognition of the call. Again, for such acts to be considered

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523 For example, the time Jabez Wood was pastor before gaining ordination, and the time Benjamin Taylor led the congregation before receiving permission to officiate over the Lord’s Supper.
operative, they must be felicitous. The Ordination Council is a place where one’s call is confirmed by Baptists outside the local church. The Council is to be a time when other pastors and lay people from other churches can examine the candidate and judge whether or not he or she is indeed called; in other words, if God is active in the call. The candidate has needed the congregation’s support before attending an Ordination Council, but the Council has been the place where the external call of the congregation was affirmed or rejected on behalf of the denomination. The title of pastor is the continuing expression of the congregation’s external call as well as the affirmation within the American Baptist denomination of the pastor’s call. Because ordination services involved pastors from other churches, the laying on of hands is a liturgical moment expressing the affirmation of the American Baptist denomination as well as the affirmation of the local church. The individual’s participation in such events/actions is a continuing expression of his or her internal call and embrace of the external call. Again, these actions and affirmations all point to a truth, as it is embraced by the community, that there is a divine involvement in the individual’s call.

**Relationality**

*Ordination cannot occur or exist outside of a relationship between the individual and a community.*

The pastor is in a number of relationships, with the congregation, with the denomination, and with other pastors to name a few. While the nature of these relationships shape and form the functionality and the identity of the pastor in different ways, the primary visible relationship upon which ordination is based is the one between

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524 Granted most Baptists recognize that individual churches can ordain a candidate without the intervention of a Council, but in practice this “local” ordination is not normally recognized by other Baptist churches and is not the norm of practice as we have seen in the national and local contexts.
the pastor and the local congregation which is affirming the call of the pastor, a call that speaks to the congregation and the pastor as being in relation also with God. As with the call, the relationality experienced between the pastor and the congregation must be felicitous. Language between the pastor and the congregation must be shared, and the speech must be understood within a Christian and a Baptist context. There must be an understood expressivity. For example, when a pastor leads a congregation in prayer, the way in which the pastor is expected to lead prayer as well as the way in which the congregation’s actions show that they are praying with the pastor point to an understood expressivity of the relationship. This expressivity can also be seen in relationship when a pastor preaches, visits, or leads Bible studies.

All the parties must agree on the reference of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. As we saw in the call, the congregation understands that the pastor has been called by God to have a specific relationship with the congregation. The social context is within an ecclesial community, and the uptake is an understanding that the pastor has certain responsibilities within the community.

The function of preaching demonstrates a felicitous act affirming the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. When the pastor preaches, there is an understood language, a shared language around the topic, an understanding of the role preaching has in the church, and an understanding that the pastor is the one who preaches. The expressivity of relationality is that through ordination the pastor recognizes his or her responsibility to preach and the congregation affirms that responsibility. The pastor and the congregation must understand that the responsibility to preach is due to a role or presence of God in the individual’s calling. The social context is the local church,
and the uptake is that the congregation recognizes the pastor’s sermon has importance in the worship service as well as for the lives of the members. As we will discuss further on in this chapter, the relationality of the congregation and the pastor is recognition that there is a change in the being or ontology of the relationship due to the activity of God. That change corresponds with the pastor having a specific presence and function within the congregation.

Ordination could not occur without a relationship between an individual expressing a call and a congregation affirming the call, pointing towards a truth that the relationship between the congregation and the pastor is an essential part of ordination. Such a truth suggests not only that one must have an initial relationship with a congregation to be ordained but that one must have a continuing relationship with a congregation in order for one’s ordination to continue to be recognized. We can observe other speech acts as intrasystemically connected to this conviction. For example, the nature of the authority the pastor has in spiritual areas such as worship, teaching, biblical study, etc., is connected with the corresponding relationality between the pastor and the community.

As mentioned previously, the functionality of the pastor is shaped by his or her relationship with the congregation. The degree to which a pastor would take part in church discipline or be involved in administrative or programmatic areas varies based on his or her relationship with the congregation. The more positive the relationship, the more involved was the pastor. The yearly renewal of the pastor’s contract, which either the congregation or the pastor could terminate at any time, as well as the primary role the

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525 Again, this work is focusing on the parish based pastor within the American Baptist denomination. I recognize that there are a variety of ministries for which one is ordained, and thus a variety of “congregations.”
congregation played in hiring a pastor point towards the equal nature of the relationality between the pastor and the congregation; it is a relationship that is not considered to be hierarchal. If there is no relation between a congregation and a pastor, then ordination cannot effectively or really occur.

While convictions addressing the call and the relationality share an equal level of primacy concerning ordination and can be considered official convictions reflecting the identity and beliefs constitutive of the American Baptist denomination, convictions about authority and the ordination council, operative conditions, can be considered on the secondary level. This level is regulative rather than ontological.

Authority

A pastor’s authority is informed by the nature of his or her relationality with the congregation. Such authority is not over the church, but is an authority within the church.

We briefly discussed the way in which functionality is connected to relationality and we can say the same about authority. Yet the conviction of authority is different enough from functionality and relationality to merit its own discussion. Whereas both functionality and authority are operative convictions linked with the official conviction of relationality and to a slightly lesser extent the call, authority precedes functionality. We have seen a number of ways that pastoral authority was displayed. In some cases, the role of the pastor was to preach and to preside over the ordinances as we saw with supply or temporary pastors. 526 In other cases, as with Charles Haines for example, the pastor had freedom and authority in spiritual matters such as worship, but very little input and authority concerning financial and programmatic matters. We will recall that Haines was

526 For example, Morse, and Buffum, Chapter 5.
the pastor right after Damstrom who did not have a harmonious pastorate, a situation that affected the relationship between Haines and the congregation. We will also recall that Linda Spoolstra, who immediately followed Haines and had a very positive relationship with the congregation. Spoolstra was very involved in the financial and programmatic aspects of FBCS.

The inconsistencies in practice regarding authority demonstrate the manner in which the relationship the pastor has with the congregation affects the pastor’s authority within the church. The way in which relationality affects authority is a didactic process; it is a relationally informed process between the pastor and the congregation. As stated above, this authority is practiced in such a way that is within the congregation and not above the congregation. Whereas the pastor can make theological and doctrinal claims which may guide and shape the ethos of the congregation, the members of the congregation can decide to affirm the pastor by continuing to have a relationship with him or her or by ending their relationship with the pastor. This egalitarian nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation is essential for the above stated conviction of authority to hold.

As explained earlier, the speech acts which point toward the above stated conviction of authority can be considered operative and intrasystematic. They are operative because the way in which the pastor operates and acts within and among the congregation informs the identity of that community but are not necessary for the identity of that community. These speech acts correspond with the truth of the relational nature
of the office of the pastor with the congregation. We can say that all pastors have a relationship with a community/congregation, and because authority is based on that relationship, we cannot say that all pastors at all times have a specific kind or type of authority. The authority of the pastor varies based on the actual relationship between the pastor and the congregation.

Ordination Council

_The Ordination Council is a way in which the call (internal and external) is affirmed and embraced by the American Baptist denomination._

For the pastors of FBCS, a Council was consistently a part of an individual’s ordination (or installation in the first two centuries). This was a consistency that we also saw in the _teachings of the tradition_. The Council consisted of pastors and lay people from local Baptist churches with similar theological persuasions.\(^{529}\) While we found a number of examples in the _teachings of the tradition_ emphasizing the primacy of the local church as the locus of ordination, the activity of the Council was described as an important step in ordination.\(^{530}\) The Council plays an important part in the process towards ordination.

While the council is important for ordination, it is not essential. The presence and activity of the council is predicated on the previously articulated internal call as well as an external call. If an individual does not articulate a sense of a divine calling to pastoral ministry and if a congregation does not affirm the divine presence of the individual’s call,\(^{529}\) While this is no longer seen as a necessity, in the 1700s if one was a Regular Baptist or a Separatist Baptist made a difference. Likewise, in the 1800s, the theological leanings of the church affected the company of the Ordination Council. Hence FBCS’ lack of invitation to join the Warren Association when the Association was formed. At the time FBCS was served by a pastor with Arminian leanings and the Warren Association was strictly Calvinist.\(^{530}\) We will recall that William Henry Allison described three types of ordination: via the ministry, via the church, and via a council. William Roy McNutt claimed that ordination occurred primarily through the local church but still saw a value in the Ordination Council. Chapter 5.
then the Ordination Council cannot occur. The individual and the local community must be in agreement concerning the call previous to a Council. On the other hand the internal and external call can be expressed and affirmed and the individual can be ordained in the local church without an Ordination Council occurring. The Ordination Council is the way in which other Baptist churches take part in affirming the call of the individual and the endorsement of the congregation. Out of such a conviction comes the denominational connection with the pastor and the church. This denominational connection was seen in a number of ways. On a regular basis the pastor would attend meetings with other Baptists from nearby churches. We have seen a number of times when the pastor attended Ordination Councils, and we have seen examples when the pastor would go to another church to help in a difficult time. The denominational connection found in the Ordination Council continues through the action of the pastor on behalf of the church.  

The Ordination Council insures that the pastor has been approved by a Council which shares the theological and ecclesiological convictions of those other churches in the same association. The Council acts as a stamp of approval for the denomination giving the pastor the permission to interact with other churches as one ordained. Thus, through the affirmation of the Ordination Council, the call of the individual and the affirmation of the call by the congregation are recognized and endorsed by other Baptist churches.

The conviction of the Ordination Council cannot occur without a call; it is a conviction that is derived from the conviction of the call.  

As with authority, the Ordination Council is operative and intrasystematic. As with authority, the Ordination Council is the source of denominational connections, but instead is a part of it. The ways in which Baptist churches are connected to each other merits its own attention. Time and space is not available in this study.

Just as authority was related to both relationality and the call, so is the Ordination Council related to both. Yet, as authority was more closely related to relationality, the Ordination Council is more closely related to the call as that is what the council is determined to ascertain.
Council is important in shaping and informing the identity of the community, but not essential. Because other pastors from nearby Baptist churches are involved, the ordination service, specifically the laying of hands, is a completion of the act of the Ordination Council. It is a liturgical moment showing the affirmation of the Baptist community beyond a single congregation of the individual’s call.

Yet if a church was isolated doctrinally, geographically, or in any other way and someone expressed an internal call, the congregation itself could very well articulate the external call and move on towards ordination without the input of other Baptist churches. The Council is important, but the call is essential.

Thus far we have named a number of the speech acts practiced by the community (local and national) pertaining to ordination. From those speech acts we have discerned primary convictions (convictions which are official and correspond to a truth) and secondary convictions (convictions which operative and intrasystematic). We have concluded that the convictions of *the call* and *relationality* represent primary convictions and *the role and nature of authority* as well as the *Ordination Council* represents secondary convictions. Within and connected to these convictions are other speech acts corresponding to a truth of the community. While the list of speech acts or the list of convictions is not exhausted, we can say that the speech acts and the convictions offered, specifically the primary convictions are conclusive. In the next section we will note how the awareness of the action of God in the call as well as the change in the relationality between the pastor and the congregation point to an understanding that something greater that what can be seen is happening with ordination. Yet at the same time, there is an
understanding that God remains beyond the call and the relationality of ordination. The primary convictions point to a sacred awareness in the American Baptist denomination.

*The Sacramental Consciousness of Ordination*

We will recall the earlier offered hypothesis which states that through ordination the relationship primarily between the congregation and the pastor and secondarily between the pastor and the community changes. This is a change of the very being of the relationship; hence it is what we have called a change of relational ontology. The convictions of the call and of relationality as addressed above point to the nature of this change via ordination. As we have seen in chapters 4 and 5, the pastor and the congregation are aware of this change implicitly and explicitly.533

The call and the relationality of the pastor with the congregation points to the cataphatic awareness of the pastor’s unique presence in the community. This awareness is sensitive to the idea that the pastor is someone who functions in a very specific way within the community; the pastor is someone who preaches, teaches, and leads in specific areas, who is set apart but who is not placed above the members of the congregation. Not only does the pastor have specific functions, but the pastor represents to a degree the presence and activity of God within the community. We saw this in the affirmation of the call (internal and external). Through the pastor’s functionality and relationality the presence of God is experienced by the congregation.

This is the cataphatic awareness that the congregation and pastor share; that ordination represents something greater than the individual and that the relational change which occurs through ordination points to that greater awareness. The relationships between the pastor and the congregation are different from those between lay members of

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533 Chapter 3.
the congregation. In the call the pastor has expressed that God has been active in calling him or her to pastoral ministry. In the call the congregation has affirmed the presence and activity of the divine. Thus for members of the congregation, the presence of the pastor draws people to be aware of the presence of God. Secondly, in the American Baptist denomination the pastor represents the church he or she serves. The pastor is participating in a relationship that is greater than a secular relationship between institutions, and is a part of something that is not seen; the relationships of believers as churches. This relationship is most poignantly articulated during the moment in the ordination service when there is the laying on of hands.534

On the other hand, an apophatic awareness stresses that the pastor is a member of the congregation, no different from any other members of the congregation, and that God is beyond the presence and actions of an individual. An apophatic awareness reminds the people that the pastor is only human, limited and finite, and the presence of God is beyond and greater than any one human. The relationality and functionality of the pastor alone cannot point to the presence of God, or be the only way in which one can be aware of God’s presence. The pastor’s call must be affirmed by the congregation. The pastor must have a relationship with the congregation. These convictions point to the way in which the relational change rests just as much in the hands of the congregation as it does in the hands of the pastor. The apophatic response to the cataphatic would be that the functionality and authority of the pastor is created and shaped by the congregation; God remains beyond what can really be known through a relationship with a pastor.

534 Earlier in this chapter I suggested that the ordination service could be considered an operative doctrine when it involves representatives from the American Baptist denomination. In this instance, I am referring to a liturgical moment that could happen within the context of the local church, or within the context of the denomination. While the majority of examples of ordination services we encountered involved the American Baptist denomination, as I suggested earlier, a local church ceremony is not inconceivable.
The move between the cataphatic awareness of the presence of the divine in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, including function, tasks, and responsibilities, and the apophatic awareness that God is greater than that which can be seen and experienced in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, is the foundation of a sacred consciousness of ordination within the American Baptist denomination.

As stated previously, sacramental consciousness is derived from thoughts and writings found in Catholic circles of thought. To summarize what we reviewed in chapter three, we will recall Bernard Cooke’s suggestion that symbols in the human experience mediate our awareness of the extraordinary and offer meaning to the human experience. Dennis Doyle writes about narrative, ritual, and presence as the context within which an awareness of the divine occurs. A participant’s perspective within this context leads to an awareness of the possibility and the reality (as it is construed) of a divine presence. Sacramental consciousness, in essence, is a cataphatic awareness of the divine through symbol and context in tension with the apophatic corrective reminding us that God’s presence cannot be mediated through symbol or ritual. What I am offering as sacramental consciousness for a Baptist context is a synthesis of sacramental consciousness as offered by these Catholic scholars as it can be understood in a Baptist context.

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535 Chapter 3.
536 Ibid.
537 Sacramental consciousness does not have one universal, agreed upon meaning, hence the variety of scholars offering slightly different understandings. It is my hope that the synthesis of these three scholar’s works can be offered in a way that can be applied in the Baptist context.
538 I am very much aware that the term “sacramental consciousness” may have a low level of receptivity in Baptist churches. Yet for this work I will maintain the term because so much understanding of sacramental consciousness applied to a Baptist context comes from Catholic circles. Changing the term will change the meaning of the term. Yet if one wanted to concretely offer the findings of this work to a
As I have already suggested, in the primary convictions of relationality and the call we can find that it is a sacramental consciousness of the congregation and the pastor which allows all involved to recognize that something changes in ordination and yet at the same time, the pastor is not placed above the congregation. We will recall from chapter three that through baptism all are brought into a new relationship with Christ and with those in the church community. In this new relationship with Christ all are called in one form or another to the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is a basic, grounding idea of relationality within the church, that through baptism all are brought into a new relationship with each other through their commitment to Jesus Christ. Relationality is a key component of the church, one that is grounded in baptism and reaffirmed through the regular practice of the Lord’s Supper. It is a part of the church that is shared and experienced by all.

Through ordination this relationship changes. The call articulates a way in which this relationship changes between the pastor and the congregation. The individual’s relationship with Christ compels one to function in a specific way within the community based on that individual’s call. The relationship with the people changes as the one who has been called to serve as a pastor is affirmed by the congregation. It is through the call, the expression of the internal call and the affirmation of the external call that the individual pastor’s relationship with the congregation changes. Ordination is more than

Baptist community one would have to consider a change in terminology and potentially a nuanced change in one’s understanding of sacramental consciousness. In such a work one does need to be aware that Baptists on the whole lack a concrete sacramental theology and thus we cannot assume that the Baptist community would embrace all of the nuanced understandings that come along with such a term as “sacramental consciousness.” For example, the word “sacrament” comes from the Latin suggesting not only a mystery (which is more from the Greek) but also an oath. We cannot assume that such a nuanced sacramental awareness exists in the American Baptist denomination. From the data collected, we can say that there is an awareness of the presence of the divine within the community, and particularly how that presence is understood in the context of ordination.
acknowledging gifts and abilities, but acknowledging that the essence of the relationship between the individual and the congregation has changed; an ontological change of relationality. The moment in the ordination service when participants place their hands on the candidate and pray for the candidate is a moment when the internal call, the external call, and the relational change are most strongly articulated. This moment occurs in the context of worship, in a ritual nature, and is connected to a greater narrative of past ordinations in the Baptist tradition, as well as a Biblical narrative of anointing and calling. In the moment when there is a laying on of hands, the community is expressing awareness of the relational change, and the divine presence in the candidate’s vocational decisions. In the moment when there is a laying on of hands, a classic practice in the Christian tradition is once again embraced; the community is connected with a presence greater than the candidate and is still reminded of the humanity of the candidate. In one sense the congregation is aware that they are placing their hands on someone who will be expected to function as a pastor. In another sense the congregation is aware that God is a part of this moment in calling the individual, and because of that call, the individual will represent in one way the presence of the ever-transcendent God in the community.

A sacramental consciousness of the pastor is an awareness of a relational change that occurs through ordination due to a perceived presence of the divine (the call) that at the same time maintains that the one being ordained is not changed as an individual. Even as the pastor is set apart from congregational relationships, representing in one way the activity of God, a sacramental consciousness is also aware that God still utterly transcends the presence and relational capacity of the individual. The operative or secondary convictions and speech acts, such as the title of the pastor and the functionality
of the pastor within the congregation point to this awareness. When an individual is ordained he or she does experience an ontological change of relationality with the community; it is a change that is perceived and expressed through a sacramental awareness within the community.

Conclusion

Many American Baptists, especially though not exclusively those in the American Baptist denomination, have a theology of ordinance. It is not a theology that has been written by past scholars, but one that has been and continues to be practiced within the churches; it is a theology that is done rather than told. Attempting to articulate such a theology calls for a thick study of the community, considering the symbolic actions, grammar, and speech acts of the community. Through studying the actions and practices of a local Baptist community and comparing those practices with the trends and teachings of the American Baptist denomination on a national level, we can see this theology as it has been practiced. The practices of the community and the denomination point towards the necessary symbolic role that the call of the individual and the affirmation of that call by the community plays in ordination. We also see the necessary symbolic role that the relationship between the community and the pastor plays in a theology of ordination. Ordination is not understood without the presence of these two convictions. From these two convictions emerges an awareness of an ontological relational change that occurs through ordination. This is a relationality within the congregation, setting the pastor apart from the congregation, but not above. The sacramental consciousness of the congregation is the awareness of the change that takes place based on these two primary convictions of the community. The sacramental consciousness is aware of what the pastor’s relationship
with the congregation represents, the presence of God, and at the same time aware that the pastor is not above anyone in the congregation.

It is not an easy thing to offer a Baptist theology. The grassroots nature of the denomination along with its diversity as well as the lack of creeds or a hierarchy of any kind makes it difficult to recommend a theology that might speak to the denomination. It is my hope that this study can offer a theology that does indeed speak to a significant segment of the American Baptist denomination. My hope is that Baptists can acknowledge in an ecumenically fruitful way the sacramentality of some of their practices, in this case especially ordination, in a manner that preserves the critical independence of the denomination as well as the traditional focus on the transcendence of God relative to all earthly matters.
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APPENDIX A – PASTORS OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF SWANSEA, MASSACHUSETTS

Note: Those in bold are pastors who have been the focus of this work. Those in bold and italics were “acting pastors” and are not on the official FBCS list of pastors.

- John Myles – 1649-1661 (in Wales); 1663-1683 (in Massachusetts)
- Samuel Luther – 1685-1716
- Epharim Wheaton – 1716-1743
- Samuel Maxwell – 1743-1739
- Benjamin Harrington – 1742-1750
- Jabez Wood – 1751-1779
- Charles Thompson – 1779-1802
- William Northrup – 1804-1808
- William Barton – 1808-1810
- Abner Lewis – 1811-1819
- Benjamin Taylor – 1819-1821
- Bartlett Pease – 1821-1823
- Luther Baker – 1824-1832
- Jesse Briggs – 1835-1835
- Oliver Fisk – 1835-1836
- Abial Fisher – 1836 – 1846
- James Thatcher – 1846 – 1854
- Silas Hall – 1854-1857
- Josephus Horton – 1857-1864
- Andrew Ashley – 1864 – 1867
- J.A. Baskwell – 1868-1870
- Cummings Bray – 1871-1874
- Josephus Horton – 1876-1882
- George Bixby – 1882-1891
- Fred Bixby – 1892-1898
- Lucian Dury – 1898-1904
- Edwin G. Morse – 1904-1907
- Reuben Davis – 1907-1908
- T. H. Buffum – 1909-1912
- Frederick Dark – 1913-1927
- John James – 1927-1929
- Frederick Garner – 1930-1930
- Ralph L. Phillips – 1930-1938
- Robie M. Brown – 1938-1940
- Ernest D. Miller – 1941-1943
- George F. Currier – 1944-1948
- Lloyd I. Elliot – 1949-1949
- Ray M. Mashall – 1950-1954
- Arthur E. Darby – 1955-1957
- Kenneth Damstrom – 1970-1971
- Charles Haines – 1973-1978
- David Movsovich – 1985-1988
- Charles K. Hartman – 2001-
APPENDIX B – SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

On September 19, 2009 I conducted a focus group with a small selection of the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts (participants were recommended by the pastor). The purpose of the study was to discern a current congregational ethos and approach to the pastor and ordination. These questions were based on a study I previously presented (Malone, 2005). Below is a list of the questions as well as a summary of the answers given.

1. **What should pastors do to take care of themselves physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually? What responsibility does the congregation have in this? How can the congregation help the pastor?**

   The participants stated that a desire for solitude, meditation and time for reflection is important. They felt that the congregation should give the pastor opportunities to schedule such time. One person stated that the pastor needs to reflect and then teach the gleanings of his or her reflection to the congregation.

2. **According to Ephesians 4:11-12 “[Christ’s] gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.”**

   a. **How do you hear this passage in terms of the pastor’s role?**

   The consensus of the group was that the pastor is a teacher of the congregation, and yet as one participant stated, “the leadership of this church rests on not just his shoulders but on all our shoulders.” Others stated that everyone has gifts and should use those gifts; a responsibility of the pastor is to help people realize their own gifts.

3. **What is the response of your congregation when a lay person is filling a pulpit?**

   In general the participants felt that it is a good experience and valuable for the congregation when a member of the congregation preaches.

4. **What would change in the life of your church if there were no ordained person serving there?**
There was a negative reaction to such a possibility stating that there must be an understanding that the congregation would find someone full time to be the pastor in the near future. As far as credentials go, ordination is important. As one person said, “I’d rather have a credentialed doctor than not a credentialed doctor; yes it’s important to me.” For this group, ordination means the person received training, and that the pastor would have affiliation with the denomination and with other churches because of his or her ordination. Thus such a situation would have to be temporary.

5. **Describe any difference you see between lay Christians and those who have been ordained.**

One participant stated that an ordained minister has been accepted in the “brotherhood” of ordained ministers. This participant went on stating that he or she has passed set requirements, have expressed a call, fit a certain type of personality, and have received a specific training. Others stated that with an ordained pastor, you know what you are getting, that there is a certain level of training and preparation which one can expect.

6. **Some believe that a pastor has a unique vantage point from which he or she views a congregation. What does this mean in terms of the pastor’s role?**

In this case the consensus was that the pastor might see gifts in members of the congregation that others were not aware of; he or she sees the needs of the congregation. The pastor knows what will build up the congregation and can encourage or discourage the congregation to head in certain directions.

7. **Some Christians believe that God has entrusted certain authority to pastors. How do you see that? Which decisions can be made without the pastor’s input?**

As one participant said, “I’m willing to give authority to my pastor in certain areas…. Theology for example.” Another stated, “We’re not willing to give up authority to interpret scripture in my own way or my understanding of my relationship with God and Jesus. Most people embrace their own authority in these areas.” Thus for the group the pastor is a spiritual leader, has some authority of influence with church decisions, but in the end decisions are made by the congregation. Yet with membership and baptism, the pastor can make recommendations that would allow or disallow a candidate to go forward; in the majority of cases the congregation would follow the pastor’s suggestions. With spiritual life, the pastor has an obligation to monitor how the congregation is doing. The pastor does have some authority when interpreting scripture and teaching about God, yet the congregation still has a responsibility for their own spiritual development.

8. **What is your expectation of the pastor when serious conflict erupts among members of the congregation?**

The participants expect the pastor to be a mediator.
9. Is there any way that expectations of the pastor are measured? Is there any way to provide feedback to the pastors regarding these expectations?

(Answers were not germane to the study)

10. What influences your personal thinking or ideas regarding your expectations of the pastor?

Past history, experiences, and actions of previous pastors were very influential in influencing expectations of the pastor.

11. Please mention four to six tasks you believe to be part of a pastor’s work responsibilities. Note: This will be done through voting and ranking to find the consensus of the top five in the group

(17 tasks were listed. Of these tasks, 6 received votes as listed below)
Sermon Preparation: 13 votes – 36%
Prayer: 7 votes – 19%
Organizing Worship: 6 votes – 17%
Visitation (of members and visitors): 5 votes – 14%
Youth: 4 votes – 11%
Meetings: 1 vote – 3%