

d. The Baptist Bodies

Here we have our hands full due to diversity of organization, theology, and development. Our treatment therefore is a bit superficial (again!) and probably does not touch on all the bodies at all. As a rule autonomy is a key word in the Baptist bodies and this allows for associations that are not really associations at all. But we do the best we can. There were 28 separate organized bodies in 1965...the number has grown since then. There are nearly 30,000,000 reported Baptists in the religious census (from 100,000 in 1800) and in total growth expansion over the American history, the Baptist bodies are second only to the Roman Catholic Church. In 1910, 40% of the baptist numbers were black...but this figure by 1960 had declined to 25% although the total number of black communicants had grown. So much for general statistics. Some notes on particular history follow:

(1) Essential characteristics: (This is a more demanding subject with the baptist bodies due to the lack of confessional uniformity)

- avowed conversion
- individual responsibility of the believer to God
- separation of church/state
- autonomy
- baptism by immersion: qualification for membership

(2) Practical qualities

- Authority: Bible
- Two ordinances: Baptism / Communion
- doctrinal simplicity
- freedom of conscience and practice

(3) General history

- The Baptist who came to the colonies were of two basic groups:
  - general baptists more ordered to Arminian theology and having somewhat survived a brush with unitarianism.
  - particular baptists more ordered to Calvinism.

As with almost all religious groups of the time they practices a "closed" communion and found that the character of life in the colonies tended to make their polity/theology differences less meaningful.

- Colonial associations developed, mostly for fellowship. The London confession of 1689 was a doctrinal norm (but not a required credal standard) and the Philadelphia Association was formed in 1707. The Philadelphia Confession was widely adopted in 1742 and the New Hampshire Confession given in 1832. The latter was less