

d. Baptist Foundations

The Baptist bodies are very diverse and numerous and there was some truth to this in colonial days as well. The major division was between those called "General Baptists" who followed a more-or-less Arminian theology and "Regular Baptists" who were usually Calvinists. These bodies were only in ideal related to the old Anabaptist movements although some family ties, etc., will be found. In England the general Baptists had tended towards universalism and the particular members towards an exclusivistic orthodoxy that does not produce growth. In the colonies both positions modified somewhat.

(1) Essential characteristics that would mark most Baptist bodies are these:

- avowed conversion
- individual spiritual responsibility
- separation of church and state
- individual church autonomy
- required immersionist profession baptism
- freedom of conscience and practice
- doctrinal simplicity
- two ordinances: baptism and communion

For bodies such as the Anglicans and Presbyterians we have not listed essential characteristics since they are defined by creed. Both the congregational and baptist moves need the characteristic discussion since creedal forms are not championed universally by either body.

(2) While not welcome in New England or Virginia, baptist groups began to show up from the earliest settlement times. They did not have much growth or stature in the earlier part of the 17th century however. Most of those in the colonies accepted the London Confession of 1689 and a fellowshiping association was formed in 1707. Subsequently a Triennial meeting was arranged and while the association had no legal influence or hold on its members it did offer a point of common strengthening and conference. (For the earlier work of Roger Williams and John Clarke, see our notes on Rhode Island on pages 14-15.) It is true that the Association represented Baptists mostly from the Middle colonies but that was the heart of their strength. The association adopted the Philadelphia confession in 1742...similar to the London Confession and both modeled after the Westminster and Savor confessions with added material on baptism. In 1764 the Association (with others) sponsored the founding of the College of Rhode Island (Brown University) for the training of persons for the Baptist ministry.

(3) Prominent leaders in the Baptist movement through these years would include Isaac Backus (1724-1806) and