

## 5. The Baptist Community (as a unit)

(the foundation notes are on pages 27-28)

The Baptist community is extremely diverse and having no committed creed, polity, etc., is very hard to characterize in anything but a very general sense. We can treat it as a group and mention individual sections for particular notation but it is impossible to think we will cover all the ground that needs to be made up in this association. The characteristic notes on page 27 will serve pretty well for all baptist bodies but beyond that great diversity is the rule.

a. The best term for describing most of the post war baptists is that of "regular baptists". They were largely calvinistic at the beginning but this distinctiveness was muted by concourse with other bodies after the war and the diverse development of individual conventions on the frontier after the war.

b. General baptists began, about 1830, the almost unheard of practice of "open communion"...allowing any who profess to be believers to take part in the Lord's Supper in an individual church.

The slavery and states rights issues forced a schism in the Baptist bodies in 1845. The Triennial convention (previously discussed) had been their format for fellowship and enterprise but in the time between the triennial conventions of 1841 and 1844 great stress developed over the slavery question. Some controversialists founded the American and Foreign Free Baptist Missionary Society in 1843...you can see the seeds of discord. The slavery issue was hotly argued in 1844 at the Philadelphia gathering of the Triennial convention and in 1845, at Augusta, Georgia, 377 delegates from 8 states formed the Southern Baptist convention. The schism is with us today.

c. On particular developments in the National period, we follow the growth of the conventions:

(1) the "northern convention"...an assumed title more or less official in 1907 and becoming the American Baptist Convention in 1950. Present headquarters are at Valley Forge, PA., and the chief officer is the National Secretary. The powers of this office are advisory and administrative, not legislative. Cooperating agencies include: the American Baptist Home Mission Society, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, the American Baptist Publication Society, etc. The convention sponsors a host of colleges and seminaries and its distinguished leader for many years was William Bell Riley. There is a strong, vocal element of an evangelical persuasion in the fellowship.