

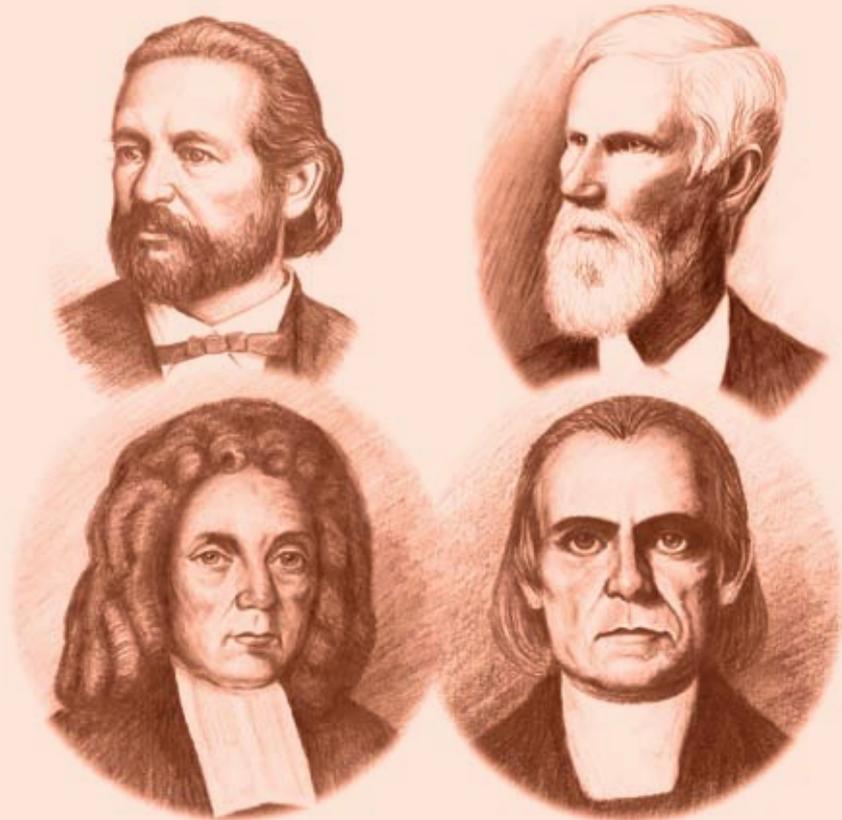
The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

Issue 76

Spring 2009



**ONCE UPON A TIME,
400 YEARS AGO . . .**

CONTRIBUTORS:

Dr Tom Ascol is Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, FL and author of the Founders Ministries Blog: wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/

Tom Hicks is Pastor of Discipleship for Morningview Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL.

Dr Ben Mitchell is newly appointed Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy, Union University, Jackson, TN and Editor of *Ethics and Medicine: An International Journal of Bioethics*.

Dr Tom J. Nettles is Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

Cover: Portraits by Robert Nettles of James P. Boyce, P. H. Mell, Benjamin Keach and J. L. Dagg. More portraits by Robert Nettles are included in *By His Grace and For His Glory* by Tom Nettles (Founders Press, 2006).

The Founders Journal



Editor: Thomas K. Ascol

Associate Editor: Tom J. Nettles

Design Editor: Kenneth A. Puls

Contributing Editors: Bill Ascol, Timothy George, Fred Malone, Joe Nesom, Phil Newton, Roger Nicole, Don Whitney, Hal Wynn

The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith which Southern Baptists produced, *The Abstract of Principles*.

Subscription Price (one year): \$20.00 (\$25.00 outside the USA)

Please send notice of any change in address. Send all inquiries and correspondence to:

Founders Journal • P.O. Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL 33915

For those who have access to the InterNet or many commercial online computer services, you may send your correspondence to editor@FOUNDERS.org via electronic mail. Or you may contact us by phone at (239) 772-1400 or fax at (239) 772-1140.

Also visit our web site at <http://www.FOUNDERS.org> for an online version of *The Founders Journal*.

Four Hundred Years of Baptists

Tom Ascol

The popular, twentieth-century evangelist, Vance Havner used to say, “We Southern Baptists may be many, but we’re not much.” He had a point. Four hundred years ago things were just the opposite. Baptists were not very numerous, but they were substantive.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the origins of modern Baptists. The questions of how and when Baptists got started have provided enough fodder to sustain family feuds across all of our history no matter when you mark our beginnings. This issue of the *Founders Journal* not only acknowledges but celebrates the beginnings of modern Baptists in England in 1609.

John Smyth was the pastor of that first Baptist Church. His conviction about the proper subjects of baptism led him to reject paedobaptism as an error and to separate from the Puritan movement that maintained that practice. John Clarke pastored the second Baptist Church in America. His life epitomizes the Baptist convictions of liberty of conscience and proper separation of church and state. The testimonies of these two Baptist leaders are reviewed in the article by Tom Nettles.

Tom Hicks writes about Benjamin Keach, who lived and served as a Particular Baptist pastor in the latter part of the 17th century. Though Baptists have been a separate people, as Keach demonstrates, they have been far from cultic. Embedded into the Baptist DNA is a solid commitment to evangelical essentials. Those who renounce such essentials in the name of being Baptist are in reality denying the very heritage to which they unjustly lay claim.

The issue concludes with an article by Ben Mitchell that provides an overview of the life of Patrick Hues Mell. Mell was a 19th-century Southern Baptist leader who was so highly esteemed by his fellow Southern Baptists that he was elected to serve as president of the convention for 17 years. He typifies the kind of leaders to which the SBC looked in her formative years.

In North America, especially in the South, the people known as Baptist are experiencing something of a theological and spiritual renewal. In His grace God is rekindling biblical convictions and concerns that once clearly defined the Baptists. As we move into the 5th millennium of our existence may luminaries from the past help point the way forward into healthy streams of apostolic Christianity.

Once Upon a Time, Four Hundred Years ago...

Tom J. Nettles

... John Smyth baptized himself and John Clarke was born. The first of these phenomena gave a strange birth to the present day Baptist denomination. The second introduced into the world one of the most important figures in the founding and sculpting of identity for Baptists in America.

John Smyth, A Sojourner for Truth

For twenty-three years before 1609, John Smyth had been intimately involved in the tense seventeenth-century discussion of ecclesiology. At his entrance in Cambridge in 1586, a plan had been afoot for three years by the infant Puritan movement to reform the English church by means of *The Book of Discipline*. Archbishop Whitgift had been systematically repressing this movement since its inception in 1583. Elizabeth had been under a cloud and hesitant to confront it until after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Then as W. T. Whitley wrote, “She struck hard and shattered the Puritan hopes.”¹ While Smyth enjoyed an auspicious university career from 1586–1598, he also witnessed the earliest frustrations of Puritanism, the rise of Separatism, a challenge at the University to the prevailing Calvinism of the English church with the consequent production of the Lambeth Articles by Whitaker of Cambridge and endorsed by Archbishop Whitgift,² and the conversion to Separatism of his former tutor Francis Johnson. The Separatist church over which Johnson served as pastor immigrated to Amsterdam in 1593.

Meanwhile, Smyth expanded his reputation for both piety and scholarly achievements, lecturing in philosophy and theology, preaching in chapel, and holding prayer meetings in his room. He left the University in 1598, but virtually nothing is known for sure of his movements until his election as Lecturer at Lincoln in 1600.

From the vantage point of this influential, and coveted, position of Lecturer to a corporation, Smyth surveyed the variety and power of religious influences immediately around him. His knowledge of a strong Roman Catholic contingent in Lincoln, combined with the Protestant fear of the bloody oppressiveness of Rome, influenced Smyth to advocate governmental intervention in religious affairs and support a policy of intolerance. Since the devil in his subtlety takes advantage of man’s natural inclination and leads many to follow false religions, so he reasoned, “the Magistrates should cause all men to worship the true God, or else punish them with imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or death as the qualitie of the cause requireth.”³ Fight blood with blood, so the standard wisdom of the day taught.

Smyth also showed his spirited disapproval of ignorant, incompetent, heretical, worldly, lazy, and fearful ministers. He affirmed the doctrines of election, Christ’s substitutionary death for his elect, justification of them through forgive-

ness and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and the certain perseverance of these to eternal glory. He held that the baptism of infants in the Anglican Church was a valid baptism while at the same time he worked with the Puritan goal of establishing a more thoroughly reformed approach to parish life.

Several factors of personal study and historical circumstance drove Smyth to a Separatist position by 1607. He gave a succinct outline of his understanding of the marks of a true church in a short work entitled *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church*. Several notable features of this include his description of the true church as containing "1. True matter. 2. true forme. 3. true properties." The true matter of a true visible church is saints, "men separated from all knowne syn, practicing the whol will of God knowne unto them." The inward form of a church consists of the Spirit, faith and love while the outward form is a two-fold covenant between God and the faithful and between the faithful mutually. The true properties of a true church consist of communion in the holy things of God and exercising all the powers granted by Christ to the church. These powers include communion, the exercise of gifts, the election and proper functioning of officers, and excommunication. Smyth still maintained, in spite of his perception that true saints compose the matter of the church, that "Princes must erect them in their dominions & command all their subjects to enter into them, being first prepared and fitted therto."⁴ This separatist construction had tensions within it that could not long be maintained—that is, a procedure for creating a believers' church while still practicing infant baptism and magisterial power in its establishment.

Smyth expressed his earnest intent plainly in stating, "I will every day as my errors shall be discovered confess them and renounce them."⁵ Accordingly, he discovered differences in three distinct areas between his kind of separatism and the separatism of Francis Johnson. These differences illustrated for Smyth how deeply the "mystery of iniquitie" had sunk in to the worship and offices of the church. He sought a more purely biblical church by reformation of three areas: an increasing purity in the corporate worship of the church as "spiritual worship," in the officers of the church by rejecting a tri-fold presbytery for a uniform eldership, and a treasury sanctified by refusing contributions from non-members.

After this publication in 1608, Smyth intensified his study as to what constituted the real spirituality of a true visible church. Trueness included the right practice of baptism on the basis of a true faith and true calling. In his lengthy answer to Richard Bernard, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, Smyth wrote "True calling, profession & baptisme: & inward calling, profession, & baptisme, are the infallible tokens of Sanctification and Saynts," He goes on to clarify this further when he reiterates, "He that is baptized into that true faith, after that true manner Christ hath prescribed, I must needs say that he is truly called, truly professeth, is truly baptized, and so he by reason of his outward true calling, true professions of the true faith, and true baptisme is discerned & judged to be inwardly called, inwardly to have faith, to be inwardly baptized, & that truly."⁶ These statements seem so consonant with believers' baptism that some, including W. T. Whitley, have concluded that Smyth had already initiated the baptism of believers by the time he wrote this work. That is not the case, however. When he asserts that "a baptized person, must baptize into the true Faith of Christ, a person capable of baptisme,"⁷ he is indicating the falsity of the Anglican faith, the Puritan faith, and

thus the falsity of their baptisms, and the purity of the Separatist faith. “Christ & wee of the Separation have a third Faith,” he contended, “for we wil Subscribe neither to the [Bishops] Faith, nor the Puritanes Faith, but the faith of Christ indefinitely comprehended in the Holy Scriptures.”⁸ These three groups represented three faiths and thus three baptisms. The Separatist baptism introduced the person, new believer or infant, into the pure faith of the Separatist congregation, and therefore into a true covenant, true repentance (demonstrated by the practice of discipline), true ministry, and true worship. He still maintained that the things revealed “aperteine to us & our Children.”⁹ In addition, his understanding of the new covenant was not matured, so that he still defended the place of the magistrate as “keeper of both the tables of the commandments: both to abolish Idolatry & al false wayes, also to forbid & punish all unrighteousness as also to command & cause al men within these Dominions to walk in the wayes of God.”¹⁰ Smyth continued his identity with the Separatist history in reminding Bernard, “Remember that our cause is the same in a manner with the Puritane cause, onely they dare not practise as wee doe: remember that the Lord hath had those that have spilt ther blood in this testimonie, & ther blood & testimony hath stirred us up to this our witnesse.”¹¹ The truth that he defended had been opposed by a number of “Oxford Doctors,” and though “it was opposed in the Queenes dayes,” it has still prevailed. He certainly has in mind the cause of separatism.¹²

The pressure, however, exerted by his increasingly spiritual understanding of the church drove him quickly to reject infant baptism and the entire hermeneutic that had supported it, and to adopt the baptism of believers only. Very soon after the publishing of *Paralleles*, early in 1609, Smyth disclaimed the legitimacy of his church, dissolved it, and reconstituted on the basis of believers’ baptism. Since none of the members of the church considered themselves truly baptized, Smyth baptized himself, then baptized Thomas Helwys and “so the rest, making their particular confessions.”¹³ In this diminutive congregation increasingly isolated from the larger movements of Protestantism, in the difficult pilgrimage of a single individual as he guided the spiritual life of a devoted and loyal congregation, we locate the beginning of the present-day Baptist movement.

Smyth then argued for this new-found way of constituting a true, spiritual, and faithful church in a book entitled *The Character of the Beast*. The book had two major points and three arguments in demonstration of each respective point. The major propositions were “1. That infants are not to bee baptized” and “2. That Antichristians converted are to bee admitted into the true Church by baptism.”

The three aspects of his argument under point one were, first, that neither precept nor example in the New Testament from Christ or the apostles supported infant baptism. Second, Christ commanded that disciples were to be made by teaching and then baptism, but infants cannot be brought to Christ by teaching. Third, baptism of infants introduces the carnal seed into the covenant when the covenant does not belong to them.

Under the second proposition concerning the baptism of converted antichristians, one must see first that Antichristian was the nomenclature Smyth used for members of churches that practiced infant baptism. His publication of the book conformed to his personal quest “for the glory of God, the manifesting of the truth to our own nation, & the destruction of the man of sinne.”¹⁴ All three

supporting points for the second proposition emphasized that a true church depended on true baptism; false baptism, therefore, perpetuated a false church. One cannot leave a false and antichristian church without at the same time leaving its baptism. The baptism of infants Smyth contended “to have been a cheef point of AntiChristianisme, & the very essence & constitution of the false Church.” Members of those churches that baptized infants, were unbaptized and also members of visible antichrist. The Separatist no more than the Puritan could effect a true church while maintaining the baptism of the false. Rather, he candidly asserted that “the Seperation the yongest & the fairest daughter of Rome, is an harlot.”¹⁵

To come out of antichrist meant to reject its baptism and receive the true baptism. Churches reforming from antichristianism, must be constituted in the same way as the primitive churches, that is, by baptism of believers, to as many as the Lord our God shall call. Infant baptism means the continuation of the Old Covenant which was manifest in the implementation of carnal, elemental, principles as types of the truly spiritual that was to come. The introduction of carnal seed into the covenant has been surpassed by the spiritual principle of regeneration that replaces physical birth as the means of qualifying for the sign.¹⁶ If one baptizes infants he may as well continue the levitical priesthood and temple worship, and cannot consistently separate himself from Anglicanism or the church of Rome.¹⁷ Smyth portrayed the argument that infant baptism is a necessary consequence of circumcision as “mere hallucinations & sophisms” and the position to which he had arrived on believers’ baptism as the “most undoubted & most evident truth that ever was revealed to me.”¹⁸

When Smyth baptized himself, he was not unaware that the Anabaptist Mennonites practiced believers’ baptism. He did not seek the institution from them because he still believed that they were heretics in several important doctrines. In his preface he contradicted a position on several doctrines allegedly characteristic of anabaptism. He affirmed the full inspiration and usefulness of the Old Testament, but maintained that its types and shadows had been fulfilled. Second, he affirmed the Puritan view of the Sabbath. Third, he acknowledged the divine ordination of magistrates for the well-being of nations, but now admitted that he was in a transition state concerning his viewpoint of their relation to the church. “The Lord we doubt not,” Smyth assured his readers, “will direct us into the truth concerning that mater.” He also rejected the Mennonite teaching of the celestial flesh of Christ, affirming instead that “he is the Sonne of Mary his Mother, made of her substance” and that Chr[ist] is one person in two distinct natures, the Godhead & manhood, & we detest the contrary errors.”¹⁹ In addition, Smyth still was firmly entrenched in his Calvinistic beliefs, convinced of total depravity, the necessity of regeneration, election of mere mercy, and particular redemption. Each of these played a part in his rejection of infant baptism as argued in *The Character of the Beast*.²⁰ I concur with the judgment of Jason K. Lee that Smyth “rejected his Reformed views between the publishing of *The Character of the Beast* in 1609 and his submission of *Corde Credimus* to the Mennonites in 1610.”²¹

This confession of Smyth, *Corde Credimus*, is twenty articles long.²² It demonstrates that in a short time, Smyth concluded that the Mennonites were not a false church, that their distinctive theological ideas were either correct or harmless to traditional orthodoxy. It also shows that he had displaced a part of his ground

for rejecting infant baptism to an aggressive non-reformed theological basis, particularly his radical shift on original sin and general atonement. His subsequent attempt to dissolve the church and unite with the Mennonites was rejected by Thomas Helwys and a dozen other members of the church. This small group returned to England with a witness for church purity based on the baptism of regenerate persons only.

Ironically, this late-term soteriological shift of Smyth, not more than two years before his death, created enduring difficulties for the theological integrity of the group of Baptists that owed their origin to him, the General Baptists. Though Helwys did not go so far as Smyth in rejecting Calvinism, the trajectory meant a recurring cycle of difficulties with Christology and universalism. A second group of Baptists that emerged three decades after the publication of *Character of the Beast*, the Particular Baptists, soon found among their number an American pioneer named John Clarke.

John Clarke

Clarke was born in 1609, the year of Smyth's baptismal revolution. Trained in law, medicine, and theology, Clarke reached Massachusetts in November 1637. He had reached convictions on assurance that differed from those of the Puritans, more closely aligned with the troublesome Ann Hutchinson, a view he modified later. He soon left Massachusetts, and with the help of Roger Williams purchased land from the Indians that became Newport. Clarke also aided in establishing a charter for the colony that became known as Rhode Island.

Although Clarke participated in religious services in the colony from its inception, it was not until 1644 or just prior to that, that the church became Baptist. Under the influence of Mark Lucar, who came from the Particular Baptists of London, Clarke initiated baptism by immersion of believers only as the manner of entrance into the church. This was the second Baptist church founded in America. Brief remnants from Clarke's confession of faith show him to be a decided Calvinist.²³

In 1651, Clarke, along with his fellow church members Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, were imprisoned in Massachusetts and sentenced to be well-whipped, though their crime of being "Anabaptist" was deemed worthy of capital punishment. Crandall and Clarke were released and escorted back to Newport, but Holmes was indeed whipped severely. Clarke struck a blow for religious liberty through the details of these events in a book entitled *Illl Newes from New England* published in London in 1652. He closed the book with eight arguments for religious liberty, demonstrating his proposition that "no servant of Christ Jesus hath any liberty, much less authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow-servant, nor yet with outward force, or arm of flesh to constrain or restrain another's conscience, not yet his outward man for conscience sake, or worship of his God." Such constraint of conscience had no biblical warrant, nothing in the New Testament could justify the use of such oppressive measures in service of the gospel. In addition, the Massachusetts Bay policy opposed the character of meekness in Christ's disciples, substituted human force for God's intent to manage His own kingdom, created hypocrisy and not true worship, violated Christ's words of instruction and

His example concerning the handling of doctrinal error and preaching to unbelievers, and contradicted the civil peace, liberty, prosperity, and safety of a commonwealth.²⁴

Summation

These events of four-hundred years ago have cast long shadows into our time. The influence on religious history lies in the removal of an inconsistency within Puritanism between the desire for a disciplined church of visible saints and the retention of infant baptism. The political implications of believers' baptism brought about the new order of a democratic society committed to equal opportunity for all citizens through separation of church and state. Other Christians have reason to join Baptists in thanking God for this heritage and humbly to petition the throne of grace for a more perfect zeal for His glory in the proclamation of the gospel to all nations, and not resting content that we have done our Lord's will until we have taught those converted to observe all things that He has commanded us. ☺

Notes:

¹ W. T. Whitley. *The Works of John Smyth*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), 1:xxv.

² The Lambeth article provided a strongly Calvinistic interpretation of article XVII of the XXXIX Articles. This was prompted when a student, Barrett, that eventually converted to Roman Catholicism, criticized the Calvinistic exposition of the Apostles Creed by Perkins and, when called on to defend his criticism, was pressed to read a recantation. Smyth would have found no reason to dissent from the prevailing Calvinism of Cambridge at that time.

³ Smyth, *A Paterne of True Prayer*, Whitley, *Works*, 1:166.

⁴ Smyth, *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church* (1607) Whitley, *Works*, 1:267

⁵ Smyth, *The Differences of the Churches of the Seperation* [sic] (1608) Whitley, *Works*, 1:271.

⁶ Smyth, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, Whitley, *Works*, 2:383.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 515.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 518.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 519.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 527.

¹² *Ibid.*, 527-28. In the next 16 pages, Smyth answers point by point several syllogisms that Bernard foisted against the separatists, asserting in the end that he had demonstrated separatism to be "the undoubted truth of God." [544]

¹³ Champlin Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), 1:237.

¹⁴ Smyth, *The Character of the Beast*, Whitley, *Works*, 2:565. Burrage is quoting a work by John Robinson entitled "Of Religious Communion Private and Publique."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 571.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 579-80.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 663-70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 624, 679.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 571-72.

²⁰ Ibid., 640–42, 667–68.

²¹ Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 174.

²² For the text see, William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 100f.

²³ See Isaac Backus, *History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists* (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871) 1:206. See also Louis Franklin Asher, *John Clarke (1609–1676): Pioneer in American Medicine, Democratic Ideals, and Champion of Religious Liberty* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co, 1997), 117.

²⁴ John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New England* (London: Henry Hills, 1652), 63–74.

News

Church Planting Network

Founders Ministries is prayerfully pursuing the development of a church planting network that is confessional, baptistic, and missional. We are in the process of developing a database comprised of individuals and churches who: (1) Have planted a church in the last 10 years, (2) Are currently in the process of planting a church, and (3) Are looking to plant within the next five years.

Learn more at: <http://www.founders.org/churchplanting/index>

Founders Podcast

In our most recent podcast, Dr. Wyman Richardson interviews Dr. James Leo Garrett, Distinguished Professor of Theology Emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Dr. Garrett's most recent book, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009) provides an overview of Baptist theology by examining books, confessions and leaders across the last four centuries.

You can find Founders Ministries Podcasts on iTunes or at:

www.recoveringthegospel.net

Click on "Go to Podcasts" on the Welcome page.

Founders Fellowship Breakfast

The Founders Fellowship Breakfast will be held on June 23, 2009 at the Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. Plan to join us in the Coronet Ballroom A/B on Level 1 at 6:30 AM. Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, will be speaking on "Creeds, Deeds and the Great Commission." Tickets are \$15 and include breakfast. Those who register by June 1 will receive a discount of \$5 off the ticket price. Registration closes June 7, 2009.

Register online at: www.founders.org/conferences/ffb/

The Evangelical Convictions of Benjamin Keach

Tom Hicks

Benjamin Keach was an evangelical. As a Baptist pastor, his aim was to believe, teach, and defend everything in Scripture, including Baptist ecclesiology, but he was first and foremost an evangelical who benefitted from and held certain core doctrines in common with other evangelicals. Those core convictions related to the authority of Scripture, the gospel-structure of Scripture, and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Biographical Background

Benjamin Keach was born on February 29, 1640 at Stoke Hammond, Buckinghamshire, England, and died on July 18, 1704. He lived during one of the most tumultuous periods of English history. Keach was converted when he was fifteen years old under the preaching of Matthew Mead, a warm evangelical Anglican Calvinist. Being convinced of believers' baptism and liberty of conscience, Keach sought baptism by immersion under the ministry of John Russell, who was a General Baptist pastor. By the time Keach was eighteen years old, he had demonstrated that he was a gifted teacher and preacher; so, his church set him apart for the ministry.

When Keach was twenty years old, he married a young woman named Jane Grove. They had five children, but Jane died in 1670 when she was only thirty-one years old. Keach remained single for two years after Jane's death, and then he married Susanna Partridge, who had been widowed. Keach and Susanna had five daughters, and they were married for thirty-two years until Keach died in 1704.

Keach's ministry was fraught with difficulties and persecutions. He was jailed in 1664 for preaching to a group of dissenters. He was arrested again that same year when the authorities found out that he had written a book for children entitled, *A New and Easie Primer*, because they claimed it taught various heresies, including believers' baptism. The jury found Keach guilty because the judge intimidated them into handing down a guilty verdict. The judge sentenced Keach to jail for two weeks, during which time he was required to appear twice in the pillory where his books were burned right in front of his face.

When Keach was twenty-eight years old, persecution was so severe that he and his family moved to London where he was ordained the pastor of a church in Southwark. In his early years as a believer, Keach held to an Arminian doctrine of salvation. But, soon after becoming the pastor of the Southwark church, he adopted Calvinist theology, which he vigorously preached and defended for the rest of his life. When Keach first became the pastor of the Southwark church, the small congregation met in a little house on Tooley Street in London. However, as the church grew, it soon had to move to Horse-lie-down where it eventually grew to have nearly one thousand members.¹ Keach's church would later be pastored by other notable figures such as John Gill and Charles Spurgeon.

Keach was arguably the most influential second generation Baptist. He wrote more than forty books in defense of the gospel and his whole system of theology. The fact that he signed the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith helped to give that confession wide acceptance among Particular Baptists. Keach was committed to all biblical truth, but his core beliefs were those shared not just by fellow Baptists, but by other evangelicals as well.²

The Bible

Benjamin Keach believed that the Bible is God's perfect revelation to men. In 1682, Keach wrote a book on the metaphors of Scripture, entitled *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors*. In a section preceding the main body of the work, Keach included a detailed defense of the divine origin and authority of the Bible, called "Arguments to Prove the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures."³ In that section, Keach marshaled numerous arguments in defense of a single thesis: "The Scripture, or Book called the Bible, is of divine Original, inspired by the Spirit of God, and therefore of infallible Truth and Authority."⁴

Keach said that his thesis should be evident for a number of reasons. Chief among those reasons is that the Bible itself claims to be God's Word. The Bible's human authors believed that the words they wrote were the very words of God. Keach wrote, "that God Himself inspired them to write it, and that it was no product of their own, but every part of it the genuine Dictate of the Holy Ghost."⁵

The character of the human authors also gives credibility to their claims. The biblical authors did not present themselves as perfect men, but humbly revealed their own faults. Since they were so honest about themselves in their writings, their motivations should not be looked upon with suspicion. In addition, the Bible is a book that was written by numerous human authors over a period of thousands of years. With so many different authors from different times, one would expect a wide variety of conflicting opinions. However, the Bible's teaching is harmonious. The Bible is a single story from cover to cover with a single unifying theme. The Scripture's unity is a testimony to its divine origin.

Keach also made a practical argument for the Bible's authority. No other book exercises such power over the hearts of men. Only the Bible has the power to convert sinners and edify saints, to expose sin by God's holy law and to bring men to salvation by God's great grace. Such power is proof of the Bible's divine origin. The doctrines revealed in Scripture are so contrary to natural human impulses that it would be impossible for men to have written it. Doctrines such as divine sovereignty, human sin, the cross, grace, repentance and faith are repugnant to depraved human beings. Thus, the Bible must be of divine origin.

Regarding the relationship between the inerrant originals and translations of the Bible, Keach wrote:

The Word of God is the Doctrine and Revelation of God's Will, the Sense and Meaning, not barely or strictly the Words, Letters, and Syllables. This is contained exactly and most purely in the Originals, and in all Translations, so far as they agree therewith. Now though some translations may exceed others in Propriety, and significant rendering of the Originals; yet they generally, (even the most imperfect that we know of,) express and hold

forth so much of the Mind, Will, and Counsel of God, as is sufficient, by the Blessing of God upon a conscientious Reading thereof, to acquaint a Man with the Mysteries of Salvation, to work in him a true Faith, and bring him to live godly, righteously, and soberly in the World, and to Salvation in the next.⁶

In other words, the very letters, syllables, and words of the originals were “exactly” and “most purely” found in the originals. God inspired every detail of the autographs. But, in His powerful providence, God also has ensured that any corruption of transmission or translation has not so changed the message of the Bible such that its meaning is distorted.

In spite of all his arguments for Scripture’s truthfulness, Keach believed that only the Holy Spirit can soften a man’s heart to make him able and willing to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. There is no logical argument that will convince a man of the Bible’s truthfulness unless the Spirit brings him to repentance. In the fifth question, Keach’s Catechism asks, “How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God?” It answers, “The Bible evidences itself to be God’s Word by the heavenliness of its doctrine, the unity of its parts, its power to convert sinners and edify saints; but the Spirit of God only, bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in our hearts, is able fully to persuade us that the Bible is the Word of God.”

The confessions of faith that Keach embraced also taught the doctrine of biblical authority and divine origin. Keach held to the *Second London Baptist Confession*, which has a clear statement on the authority of Scripture: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (2LBCF 1:1). It also says that Scripture “is to be received because it is the Word of God” (2LBCF 1:4), and that it is “infallible truth and divine authority” (2LBCF 1:5). The Baptist Catechism, which bears Keach’s own name, asks, “What is the Word of God?” It answers, “The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, being given by divine inspiration, are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” Keach drew up a confession of faith for the Southwark church. Section 6 of that confession, “Of the Holy Scriptures,” reads, “We believe the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, and are the only Rule of Faith, and Practice; all things being contained therein that are necessary for us to know concerning God, and our Duty unto him, and also unto all men.”⁷

Keach’s commitment to the Bible’s authority was a commitment that he held in common with other evangelicals. It set him apart from groups that denied biblical authority and formed the basis of unity with other evangelicals.

Covenant Theology

Like other evangelicals, Keach embraced covenant theology, which he believed was the Bible’s own hermeneutical grid and therefore the lens through which Scripture should be read. For Keach, covenant theology was the framework of the gospel itself. According to Austin Walker, “The covenant of grace assumed a central place in Keach’s thinking, so much so that it is not possible to appreciate either Keach’s Calvinism or the man himself without a right appreciation of his understanding of it.”⁸ In 1693, Keach preached two sermons that were later edited

and printed in a forty-four page booklet entitled *The Everlasting Covenant*. These two sermons outline Keach's covenant theology.

The heart of Keach's covenant theology has to do with the contrast between the covenant of works (law) and the covenant of grace (gospel). Keach believed that God made a covenant of works with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that God made a covenant of grace among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity.⁹ Where Adam failed to keep God's law, Christ succeeded. Romans five explains the contrast between these two covenant heads (Romans 5:12–21). Just as there is one covenant with Adam and all who are in him, so also is there one covenant with Christ and all who are in Him.

Keach taught that the Bible reveals two administrations of the covenant of works. The first administration appeared in the garden before Adam's fall. That garden covenant promised eternal life to Adam on the condition of his perfect obedience to God's law and threatened eternal death for sin. In addition to the first edition of the covenant of works, Keach wrote that "there was another Edition or Administration of it given to *Israel*, which tho' it was a Covenant of Works, *i. e. Do this and live*, yet it was not given by the Lord to the same End and Design... It was not given to justify them." Referencing John Owen, Keach argued that the Mosaic covenant given to the Israelite nation serves to reveal God's perfect holiness. It also serves to prove that sinners, who are without such perfect holiness, can never be justified in God's sight. Therefore, one function of the Mosaic covenant is to drive men outside of themselves, away from their own righteousness, and to the alien righteousness of Christ for justification (Romans 3:19–20; Galatians 3:21–22). Keach's covenant theology was significantly influenced by John Owen, who was not a Baptist, but a Congregationalist.¹⁰

Keach taught that the covenant of grace manifested itself throughout biblical history. Genesis 3:15, the *protoevangelium*, reveals the first gospel promise to Adam. It is a revelation of the covenant of grace because the promise of grace "primarily runs to Christ, *as the Woman's seed*, and so to us in him." The Abrahamic promise does the same when God declares to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18, "In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." According to the New Testament, Christ himself is the promised offspring (Galatians 3:16), and this promise guarantees blessings for men from every nation who are in Him (Galatians 3:28–29). Similarly, Keach argued, the Davidic covenant "runs to Christ, and also in him to us" (Psalm 89:20, 28, 29). The covenant with David and his offspring pointed to Christ and was a type of the covenant with Christ and those in Him. So, all of the Old Testament covenants are promises flowing from a single covenant of grace with Christ and those in Him.¹¹

Keach argued that the covenant of grace is a covenant of grace to the elect, but to Christ, it is a covenant of works and merit. Christ had to keep God's law in order to merit the blessing Adam forfeited. The elect benefit from the merits of Christ in the covenant of grace when the Spirit applies Christ's work to them.

He then discussed various ways in which the eternal covenant of grace is a well-ordered covenant (2 Samuel 22:5).¹² It is well-ordered with respect to God's attributes. It puts many of God's attributes on display, including God's sovereignty, showing that God has the right to choose those upon whom He would bestow His saving benefits. The covenant also displays God's infinite wisdom in

designing such a covenant, His love for His people, His justice in upholding His holy law, His power in effectually calling the elect, and His faithfulness in keeping them to the end.¹³

Keach said the covenant of grace is well-ordered in that it magnifies the glory of the whole Trinity. The Father's glory is magnified because He is the efficient cause of redeeming grace. The Father sends the Son, and everything the Son does in the covenant ultimately redounds to the glory of God the Father. The covenant of grace also magnifies the glory of Jesus Christ as the covenant head. Christ's glory is manifest by His loving willingness to suffer and intercede for God's enemies and to be their high priest forever, purchasing justification and securing sanctification for the elect. The covenant also magnifies the glory of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating His divinity and distinct personality. He has His own terms to fulfill, convicting of sin, quickening the elect on the basis of Christ's work, clothing them in Christ's righteousness by faith alone, sanctifying them to the uttermost, and preserving them safely unto their glorification. Thus, Keach said that the covenant of grace is well-ordered to glorify the whole Trinity.¹⁴

Furthermore, the covenant of grace is well-ordered because it honors God's holy and righteous law. Keach insisted that Scripture shows God upholding and honoring the law by means of the covenant of grace. He taught that God cannot justly discard His law, nor can God justly accept imperfect obedience as any part of justification because justification requires perfect obedience to God's law.

Keach then showed that the covenant of grace is well-ordered for the good of the elect. It is the ground and cause of their reconciliation, quickening, justification, adoption, sanctification and salvation from hell. It is a dependable covenant, sure, and certain in every respect. Christ fulfills all of its terms. The covenant was formed in the eternal and immutable decree of God and is therefore sure. It is a sworn oath and promise for the elect. It was confirmed by Christ's blood and executed by the Holy Spirit. This covenant was witnessed by mighty miracles and attested by the Apostles. Therefore, the elect may trust that this is a sure covenant for their good.¹⁵

Finally, Keach turned to apply his two sermons. His application included both "reprehension" and "exhortation." Keach began by reproving licentious living. It took the death of Christ to redeem men from their sin, which shows sin's seriousness. Far from promoting lawlessness, the covenant of grace, rightly understood, leads men to understand the great wickedness of sin and causes them to hate it and turn from it. Keach also reproved those who mixed their own holiness with Christ's righteousness, since nothing short of Christ's perfect righteousness can merit any justification for sinful men. Keach admonished everyone who tries to reform his life through moral efforts and legal strivings, since such legalistic effort can never bring salvation. Only those who look to and rest in Christ and His righteousness may have peace with God and properly grounded relief for their troubled consciences. Keach exhorted the ungodly to tremble in light of their sins and the infinite offense they are to God. He told broken sinners to look to Christ for comfort and urged them to embrace God's free grace in the gospel, and to find consolation in Jesus Christ.¹⁶

For Keach, the covenant of grace is no lofty or high minded speculation. It is the very marrow of the gospel with rich and far reaching practical implications for

all men everywhere, but especially for those the Father has chosen for salvation. It is also one of the gospel convictions that he shared with fellow evangelicals who were not Baptists.

Justification by Faith Alone

Keach's doctrine of justification was another core doctrine that he shared with other orthodox evangelicals. There were two extreme unorthodox understandings of justification: (1) eternal justification before faith and (2) justification by faithful works on the last day. In response to both of these errors, Keach wrote *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes*, in which he argued that justification is by faith alone, though the book primarily responds to eternal justification. God declares believing sinners righteous on the ground of Christ's righteousness after it is received by faith alone. Keach insisted that while everyone in Adam is actually condemned, everyone in Christ is actually justified. The text of his sermon was Romans 8:1, which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Keach began the sermon by dealing with the context of the passage in the book of Romans, showing that it comes after Paul charges that all are under sin and condemnation (Romans 1–3) and that justification comes by grace through faith (3–5), even though a war rages in the heart of every believer between the law of sin and the law of God (6–7). Keach then explained Romans 8:1, arguing that "now," after conversion, there is no condemnation for those who are "in Christ." On the basis of his exegesis, Keach drew two doctrinal conclusions. First, *"All those that are in Christ Jesus, or have obtained actual Union with him, are justified Persons, and for ever delivered from Condemnation."* Second, *"All Mankind, even the Elect as well as others, are under Condemnation, before their actual Union with Jesus Christ."*¹⁷

Keach then set out to show how absurd it is to say that the elect are actually united to Christ and justified from eternity. If eternal justification is true, then none of the elect were ever condemned. That is because on their scheme, Adam, who was among the elect, was eternally justified. If that is true, then Adam could not have been condemned when he fell in the garden.¹⁸ It then necessarily follows that none of those who were in Adam could have been condemned either, and there was no fall or need for Christ's redemption, which is absurd. Not only is justification before faith contrary to reason, but it is also contrary to Scripture. Romans 10:4 teaches that Christ is only the end of the law for those who believe, not to anyone else. Galatians 3:13 and 4:4–5 say that Christ came to redeem those who were under the law and thus condemnation. Those texts do not say that Christ came to redeem those who were justified but did not know it. It is also illogical to say that Christ redeems and justifies those who are under the law if they were never actually under the law's condemnation.

Keach went on to explain in what sense Christ historically purchased reconciliation and justification for the elect and in what sense the elect are not actually justified and reconciled until they believe.¹⁹ He argued that Christ's historical work actually paid the price to deliver the elect, but that the elect are not actually delivered, but are condemned, until the Holy Spirit applies His work in time. Keach wrote, "So the Atonement made for us by Jesus Christ, which is the Price and meritorious Cause of our Redemption and Justification, is one thing,

and our receiving the Atonement or the application of his Blood to our personal and actual discharge from Sin, Guilt and Condemnation, is another thing.”²⁰ So, Christ’s work purchased the robe of righteousness, but the Holy Spirit graciously places that robe over the shoulders of the elect in His time. Keach explained that the difficulty we have in grasping this distinction comes from the fact that God is an eternal and timeless Being who appropriates the benefits of Christ’s work at various points in time. Nevertheless, before the elect believe in time, they are condemned, and after they believe, they are justified. Justification changes God’s relationship with the elect from “condemned” to “justified.”²¹

Keach further explained that even though this controversy relates to the work of Christ and His federal headship, the same perplexity regarding accomplishment and application applies to Adam’s federal headship. When Adam sinned in the garden, his posterity was condemned in him. At that moment in history, Adam’s sin demerited condemnation for those who descend from him by natural generation. They were “fundamentally and representatively condemned in him.” However, none in Adam “are actually condemned until they actually exist and partake of his corrupt Nature.” The same is true of those in Christ. Christ’s work merited justification for those in Him. All of the elect were “fundamentally and representatively justified in him.” However, none in Christ “are actually and personally justified until they are united to him, *and partake of his Divine Nature.*”²²

Keach argued that when men become partakers of the divine nature, they believe unto actual justification. According to Scripture, faith precedes actual justification (Romans 5:1; 3:28; Galatians 2:16, 24; Acts 13:38; John 3:36), and those who wish to honor the text of Scripture must affirm that we are actually justified after faith, not before it. While Keach affirmed that justification is by faith, he denied that faith is a “cause,” “condition,” “instrumental cause,” “procuring cause,” or “qualifying condition” of justification. By denying those terms, Keach meant to reject any notion that faith somehow renders Christ’s work more satisfying to God. He preferred instead to say simply that “without Faith God declares no Man a justified Person.” Keach wrote, “The Holy Spirit in our Union with Christ, puts upon us the Robe of Righteousness, which was not upon us before we obtained that Spiritual Union,” and, faith is “the Hand that receives, or that apprehends Jesus Christ.”²³ This is a critical difference between Keach and the high Calvinists. Keach denied that Christ’s righteousness is actually imputed until the Holy Spirit imputes it in time.

Keach recognized that there were some who taught that the elect merely come to realize that they are justified by faith (passive justification by faith). They said that though the elect were always justified, they did not always know it. So, when the elect come to faith, they simply come to understand the righteous status they have always possessed. Keach rejected this view as being inconsistent with the testimony of Scripture.²⁴

He closed the sermon with an application that begins by warning people “to take heed how they seek to render the state of the Elect to be good before Grace and actual Union with Jesus Christ.”²⁵ Keach declared that there is no benefit that can come from telling unregenerate men that some of them might already be justified, since such teaching might simply serve to harden them in their sins. He also pointed out that justification before faith diminishes God’s grace and gives

repentant sinners less to be thankful for after their conversion, since they were never children of wrath, but merely failed to realize their righteous status.

Keach's doctrine of justification was the orthodox evangelical view. The doctrine of justification was central for Keach because it is the pivotal place at which Christology meets soteriology. On this point, like the doctrine of Scripture, and covenant theology, Keach was at one with his evangelical brothers in Christ. 🐣

Notes:

¹ David A. Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 59.

² For more biographical information on Keach, see William Cathcart, ed., *Baptist Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: L.H. Everts, 1881), s.v. "Keach, Rev. Benjamin," 637–638; Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London: n.p., 1739), vol ii, 185–209; vol iii, 143–147; vol. iv, 268–314; Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 1. (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 163–193.

³ For a more detailed analysis and description of Keach's arguments contained in this section, see L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, revised and expanded (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 75–81.

⁴ Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London: n.p., 1682), viii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁷ Benjamin Keach, *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ or Congregation meeting at Horsley-down* (London: n.p., 1697), 5.

⁸ Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON, Canada: Joshua Press, 2004), 107.

⁹ Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, A Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul or, The Excellent Nature of the Covenant of Grace Opened in a Sermon Preached January the 29th at the Funeral of Mr. Henry Forty* (London: n.p., 1693), from the preface.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20–21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22–24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24–27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31–34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38–43.

¹⁷ Benjamin Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes. Wherein it is proved that the whole First Adam was condemned, and the whole Second Adam justified* (London: n.p., 1698), 11, 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ Keach said it is logical nonsense to say that "God saw us in the first *Adam* condemned, and in the second *Adam* justified, at one and the same time." *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

The Life and Labors of Patrick Hues Mell

C. Ben Mitchell

Like the men and women of Hebrews eleven, there have been Southern Baptists, little known to our generation, “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. 11:38). Such a man was Patrick Hues Mell.

Birth and Early Years

Born July 19, 1814, Patrick was the son of Major Benjamin Mell of Laurel Hill, Georgia, and Cynthia Sumner Mell of South Carolina. We know little of Patrick’s earliest years except that he was the second of eight children. Young Patrick’s father was a very wealthy man, “sympathetic by nature, and generous to a fault.”¹ So generous was he that he gave away most of his fortune, leaving his family very little after his death in 1828. Three years later Mrs. Mell died, leaving seventeen-year-old Pat responsible for the entire family.

A mere youth without experience, he was forced to rely solely upon his native genius to provide a means of support for himself and dependent brothers and sisters. He gave up the small remnant of his share of the property ... to the support of his brothers and sisters, and started out with the determination to obtain an education, and as far as possible recover the social position and property that had been lost by his father’s misfortune.²

At this point Mell began his lifelong career of teaching. At age seventeen he taught primary school in a log hut with a dirt floor in his birthplace of Walthourville, Georgia, (approximately 50 miles southwest of Savannah).

Though Patrick’s father never professed Christianity, Mell’s early years were not without spiritual impressions. Dr. John Jones, a classmate and later a Presbyterian minister, said of Mell’s upbringing,

His mother was a woman of marked individuality of character, intellectual, and truly a Godly woman, brought up in the strictest mode of old Congregationalism, and, no doubt, perfectly familiar with the Westminster Shorter Catechism.³

An excerpt from a letter from Mrs. Mell to her son demonstrates her great concern for her son’s soul (one should note that by this time Mell evidently had aspirations toward the Gospel ministry):

My Dear Boy:

It is high time that you and I should communicate frequently and intimately and confidentially. If this is not to be expected by the time you have

arrived at fifteen when is it to be looked for? On one account I have more anxiety, even dread on your behalf than for any of my children. Earnestly as I wish a son of mine to be a minister yet I tremble at the idea of educating and devoting a son to the sacred profession without previously satisfactory evidence that his own soul was right with God... My heart burns *to see you* in every sense of the word a true Christian... You should exercise a jealousy over yourself lest the trifles of this world should deaden your feelings about the grand questions: what are the chances of my salvation—what have I done—what must I do to be saved? ... remember they that are Christ's have crucified their affections and lusts—*crucify yours*.⁴

Mrs. Mell's heart so yearned for her son's salvation that she also wrote him the very next day:

I say this with anxiety, and write with fear, but I say it with earnest prayers for the real conversion of your soul to God, and with some hope that he will hear the petition that I have endeavoured to offer up for you for many years back. I will repeat. I can never consent for you to study for the ministry until I have some satisfactory proof of your heart being turned to God in holy consistency and permanency of character.⁵

Mrs. Mell never lived to see her son converted for in 1831, the Lord took her; however, the seed of her prayers was not sown in vain. In the summer of 1832, Mell was baptized at North Newport Baptist Church, Liberty County, Georgia, by the pastor, Josiah Samuel Law. The following year, due to the beneficence of a wealthy gentleman, George W. Walthour, Mell was able to enter the freshman class of Amherst College in Massachusetts. Several events at Amherst testify that, though baptized, Mell was not converted.

At Amherst things didn't go well between the Southern boy and his Northern mentors. One of them especially distasteful to Pat Mell was a Professor Fiske. Pat's Southern Blood boiled hot one Sunday when Professor Fiske was preaching. He made some derogatory remarks about Southerners. Pat walked out of the sanctuary and was condemned for disorderly conduct. Trouble arose again when Pat refused to divulge to the faculty the names of some of his fellow students accused of violating rules of the college. Threatened with expulsion, he was determined not to be intimidated and stood his ground to the last. Although he would not yield, the faculty decided not to expel him.⁶

But unknown to Mell, Dr. Fiske wrote to Pat's benefactor accusing the young Mell of wasting money, causing Mr. Walthour to withdraw his support from the young scholar. Hence, Mell could no longer afford to stay at Amherst. With little more than five dollars in his pocket, in 1835, Mell walked twenty-five miles to Springfield where he was able to secure a teaching position.

The next four years were filled with unrest for Pat Mell. Even so, his buoyant spirit and sense of humor kept him from utter despair. From Springfield he moved

to Hartford, Connecticut, where he became associate principal at the East Hartford High School. A year later, in 1837, Mell returned to his Southern home and in a short time secured a principalship at Perry's Mill School in Tatnall County, Georgia. The following year he moved to Montgomery County where he taught at Ryal's school until, in February of 1839, he was offered the position of principal of the Oxford Classical and English School (which was a preparatory school for Emory College).

Conversion and Call to the Ministry

Though troubled, unsettled, and under the strain of several years of toil and struggle, a wise Providence was watching over the young man. A merciful God held him in the hollow of His sovereign hand. A letter written on the twenty-fifth of February, 1839, to Josiah Samuel Law, who had baptized him eight years earlier, reveals that while at Oxford the prayers of his mother bore fruit in the life of her son.

Rev. and Dear Sir:

You have no doubt been aware from your own observations, and from the testimony of others, notwithstanding you have received no confession from me of the fact, that I have been for some years past careless in regard to the interests of eternity, and a backslider from the faith I professed. When I gave up my hope I was absent from the state and did not inform you of it, as I thought (erroneously I have since been informed), there were but two ways, according to the rules of the church, by which my connection with it could be dissolved—one, by a dismissal in regular standing, should I wish to connect myself with another body—and another by ex-communication. And I suppose the latter to be administered only when the member violated any of the obvious rules of *morality*—or at least as the church has instituted to regulate his *outward conduct*. My object in writing you at present is to ascertain whether my name is still on the church books so that I may be able to discover what my duty may be under the circumstances....

The Lord has dealt mercifully with me and has been pleased to bring me from the most awful lengths of unbelief and to humiliate me at the foot of the Cross. And I think I can say that I have the firmest belief relying humbly upon his promises that he has for Christ's sake pardoned all my sins. It is almost more than I can realize, and when I consider who I am and what I have been and how I have trifled with this subject I am filled with astonishment that I can by possibility arrive at such a state of mind as to believe that I have passed from death unto life ...

When I connected myself with the church I was entirely ignorant of the religion I was professing. This I say not to clear myself from the imputation of instability nor in any measure as an apology, but as an awful fact that I professed to believe in a God of whom I knew nothing....

Living by faith in Christ, laying hold of his promises and trusting him for their fulfillment, though read often and heard oftener—astonishing as it may seem to you—and it cannot surprise you more than it does me now, I

never attached any idea to as a part of the gospel plan and instead of seeking the witness of the Spirit of God which might bear witness with my spirit that I was born again, I looked to my own animal feelings for the proof of my acceptability with God—feelings which a pathetic story, theatrical representations, and harmony of sound have often since produced. And I was assured that all was right if I could succeed in exciting those feelings on rising from my bed in the morning and on retiring at night, especially if I could have them accompanied by a few tears. This, Sir, was my religion. This was the sandy foundation on which I built, and it was not to be wondered at that the waves of the world, beating on my house should overthrow it. The comforts of religion were to me but a name. I sought God's face, not because I loved him but because I feared him. I looked upon him not as one who could smile upon me and bless me too, but as an angry God who would punish me for my sins. I renounced the world not because I saw its vanity compared with the things of eternity, but because I felt myself compelled to from motives of safety; and I am bound to believe—though it was what I could not consent to confess to myself at the time—that if I had only been assured that I had nothing to fear from God's righteous indignation I should never have renounced them and connected myself with his people. Such was my religious state when I left home for college. And now I was placed in the midst of new scenes and new associates—my attention and interest became absorbed by other subjects. God and the things of eternity became less and less interesting to me—my efforts to create a good state of feeling became less and less strenuous with frequent intermissions. From indifference for my soul's salvation, I glided by an imperceptible current to a distaste for the subject—to a downright dislike for it and finally openly and joyfully threw off the restraints that my religion has imposed upon me and buried myself in the world. The failure to obtain that change of heart which the Bible spoke of induced me to question its reality and to believe at first that it had its existence only in the heated imagination of enthusiasts, and then that it was a cunningly devised fable invented by priest-craft to gull the simple and perpetuate its power. And thus the Bible came to be viewed as an imposture and God's people as deluders and deluded, and it only remained for me to consummate my unbelief by doubting the existence of a God—Yes, with my eyes upturned to the heavens, which declare his glory, and open upon the beautiful material world around me, which showeth his handywork, I said in my heart, and rejoiced that I could say it: There is no God. But my merciful Heavenly Father has forgiven me that sin.

When I think of the awful depths of unbelief to which I had struggled, I am filled with amazement at the long suffering and mercy of God in that he did not suddenly cut me off or give me over to hardness of heart and blindness of mind to believe a lie. And now my whole heart became absorbed in the things of this world. God and religion were not thought of except to be blasphemed and sneered at—not openly; for motives of prudence induced me to conceal my state that I might not shock the minds of men and thus throw a barrier in the way of my temporal prospects. Ambi-

tion now took entire possession of my soul, a desire to rise above my fellows in mental state—not so much that I might be able to do more good, as that I might be a mark for all to gaze at. This, a desire to become great in the world, had been a *principle* with me from my earliest recollection, though I had the good sense to conceal it from my acquaintances generally, and often when I was a poor boy destitute of even the necessaries of life would I delight myself picturing in my imagination scenes of future grandeur and triumph in which I would be the actor. These were but dreams it is true, but dreams that expelled from my thoughts every thing that did not administer to them. And at the time I am speaking of my mind had become so spiritually darkened that could I have accomplished fame by it I verily believe I would have been willing to renounce without the slightest sinking of the heart thenceforth and forever all interest in the atonement of Christ whose very existence I doubted. Such was my state when a little more than a year ago I returned home.

But I have extended this already to an unbecoming length. It only remains for me to relate as briefly as possible the means by which my thoughts were again diverted to the things of eternity. — And here I have no signal interposition to relate, no *occurrence* to point out as having been instrumental in rousing me to a sense of my awful condition. But it pleased God that I should be placed in a situation where I could be frequently alone; where, by influences of his Holy Spirit he might turn my thoughts inward and the still small voice of conscience might be heard. The world, too, previous to this, had begun to assume rather a different aspect in my eye. Circumstances had happened which affected me, alone it is true, and which had made a deep impression on me. Experience had shown me that the affections of friends even who wished me well, could easily be alienated, and that from the world I was just as likely to receive censure for that which deserved commendation as the contrary. During my absence from Georgia, all the time not devoted to the discharge of my duties had been spent in amusements or in company of which I possessed an unlimited command, and thus thoughts on religion had no opportunity of intruding themselves upon me. But after my return I engaged in business very much at the time against my own consent, in a part of the country that is very thinly settled, where there was not a single young person of my own age with whom I could associate; added to this was the fact that I was not in a situation to occupy my vacation time with books. So that certain hours every day I was left alone with myself. During these periods God was pleased to be near me and to induce such a train of thought as to show me the vanity of earthly things, and the weighty importance of things of eternity. The objections I had cherished against the existence of a God and the authenticity of the Scriptures, now that I had an opportunity of thinking calmly and without interruption, lost their weight. The more particularly so as I had no opportunity of noting the inconsistencies of professing Christians, and seldom heard the gospel preached. In this part of my experience there is nothing standing out distinct to which I can refer as the cause of any result which

followed. I commenced teaching school in that place confessedly with the belief that the Bible was all a fable and even if true that it was never more to receive attention from me. And my steps that were imperceptible to me at the time and cannot be traced now I was brought to relinquish all my doubts and to feel that even from me the subject has an interest. But notwithstanding, for more than a year did I trifle with this subject. There was this doubt I had to solve, this mystery I had to look into, and I tried to satisfy myself with saying that Religion was a subject I could not understand. Then perhaps yielding to the influence of the moment I would retire to a private place and try to pray, an because I did not receive a miraculous manifestation of God's presence in my heart I would give up in despair and perhaps the next moment with a zest which would astonish myself, would join with the thoughtless in throwing ridicule on the Bible and Religion.

But not to multiply words. In this awful state did I continue until about three weeks ago when God was pleased to bring me like a little child to the foot of the cross, and I was led to pray him to save me in his own way. I know I am weak and unable to persevere if I depend upon myself; but Christ is strong and he has told me in his word, his grace will be sufficient for me. Let me beg an interest in your prayers, as I have no doubt I have already had. Pray for me that I may not again deceive myself but that I may build on the rock Christ Jesus.⁷

And thus we learn from his own pen how redeeming grace laid hold on Pat Mell. Evidence that this change of heart was real came in Pat's desire to give his entire energies to the service of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Surely his dear mother's words echoed in his mind: "I can never consent for you to study for the ministry until I have some satisfactory proof of your heart being turned to God in holy consistency and permanency of character." The remainder of Mell's life was a living illustration of the constancy and diligence that attends a genuine call to the ministry. In writing to Pastor Law of his aspirations to the ministry of the Word Mell acknowledged, "I know I am not fit for the office; but the preparation of the heart is with God and he can qualify me for it."⁸ This belief that only God can qualify and equip a man for the Gospel ministry was etched deeply into Mell's heart. In his first address to a graduating class (1843) at Mercer University, Mell said,

Your hearts must be deeply imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. You must not only understand but feel those truths; not only recommend them to others but love them yourselves, and what is more, you must preach and strive in humble dependence upon Almighty aid.⁹

Mell also believed that for some men, himself in particular, formal theological training was part of God's means used to prepare His ministers. Though more education was Mell's aim, God was already guiding him toward a ministry and providing him with the requisite spiritual and intellectual materials that make for a godly man and a preacher of great power.

In the late spring of 1840, less than a year after his call, Mell began preaching in the Oxford community under the license of the North Newport Church of

Liberty County. During the week days Mell would teach at the prep school and on the Sabbaths he would preach in the destitute places in and around Oxford.

Pastorates and Career at Mercer

In 1840, Mell married Lurene Howard Cooper—one of his former students at Ryal's Academy in Montgomery County, Georgia. Their union of twenty years was blessed with eight children and a love that saw them through both adversity and success.

On February 17, 1841, having been strongly endorsed by former Georgia Governor George M. Troup, P. H. Mell was elected to fill the chair of Ancient Languages at Mercer University, then located at Penfield, some thirty-five miles from Athens. In October of the same year, Mell was ordained to the Gospel ministry by the North Newport Church, under imposition of the hands of B. M. Sanders, W. H. Stokes, and Otis Smith (then president of Mercer University). His ordination was called for by the Greensboro Baptist Church which Mell pastored for ten years following. W. H. Stokes preached the ordination sermon from the text of 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word." And preach the Word Mell did. One contemporary said of Mell,

As a preacher Dr. Mell is strong, able, argumentative, and sound doctrinally, holding his audiences spell-bound by the clearness of his statements and the strength of his reasoning. His arguments, founded on sound premises, reach inevitable conclusions. On the grand doctrines of Christianity and especially the (so called) "five points" in theology, he is especially able. On the distinguishing doctrines of his denomination he is particularly strong and conclusive, always refuting those who put them selves in opposition to him.¹⁰

When a year later, he addressed the graduating class at Mercer, Mell expressed his personal evaluation of much of the preaching of his day:

The demand for preaching that will excite, at once, all the faculties of mind and heart, is but limited, and I grieve to confess that the supply falls even short of the demand. The people are easily satisfied, and are patient, when, week after week, they hear the same first principles of the doctrine of Christ vociferated in their ears; and the preacher taking license from this to indulge his indolence, continues to substitute sound for substance, and to ring the same round of changes in their hearing.¹¹

But to these young preachers he went on to say,

Penetrate, for yourselves into the inexhaustible mind of Gospel truth. It is necessary to your extensive and permanent usefulness, and, as educated ministers, you are bound to do so.¹²

Professor Mell's years at Mercer were spent, by and large, in usefulness and happiness. Under the eminent President John Leadley Dagg, Mell's "youth, health, and vigorous body enabled him to fill the position of disciplinarian with marked

success.”¹³ It was while serving as Mercer University’s disciplinarian that Mell received the nickname “Old Pat” from the students. One might think that the office of disciplinarian at a school for Baptist ministers would be a task of relative ease and complete safety. This was not the case. One evening Professor Mell was called out by the noise of drunken university students on the street of Penfield. These students, armed with weighted sticks, threatened to beat Professor Mell for exposing some previous crime to the college authorities. As soon as Mell was able to see their faces, he announced himself, called them by name, and ordered them to go to their rooms and to report on the following morning to the President’s office. When he turned to walk away, one of the students laid his loaded stick to Mell’s head. Glancing off the side of his head, the stick landed soundly on his shoulder, temporarily paralyzing Mell’s arm. The next day the young boy, sober and realizing what he had done, left the school without waiting to be expelled.

On another occasion, Mell’s life was saved by rain-dampened gun powder when a drunken student put a pistol to “Old Pat’s” chest and pulled the trigger three times. The task of disciplinarian was not without its dangers. Still, Mell served well in this capacity.

From 1848 until sometime in 1880, Mell, along with his teaching responsibilities, pastored two, sometimes three churches. When in 1857 Mell took the office of Professor of Ancient Languages at the University of Georgia, his contract was made “with the stipulation that his professorial duties were not to interfere with his relationship to the churches of which he pastored.”¹⁴ In 1848, while still pastoring the Greensboro Church, Mell also accepted the Bairdstown Church in Green County. In 1852 he was called to take charge of the Antioch Church in Oglethorpe County as well. Realizing that these last two churches would occupy all of his time, he was compelled to dissolve his ten-year pastorate at Greensboro.

Mell was a faithful and able pastor as well as a powerful preacher. One of the members of the Antioch Church writes, after Mell’s twenty-six-year pastorate there,

I was impressed at once that he was a peace maker in the fullest and best meaning of that term. He did not seek to harmonize discords by leaving some points of the case unnoticed, others merely smoothed over or covered to ferment and burst forth in all their fury; his plan was the best; every point in dispute met on its own merits and upon principle, by which an adjustment could be made, and peace and harmony secured upon a solid basis.¹⁵

Another said of his pastoral abilities,

As to his ministerial ability and usefulness, the success with which his efforts were crowned are sufficient answers even to the most fastidious criticisms to which his ministry might be subjected. As a pastor, in my judgment, I have yet to meet his equal. My kind regard and respect for him in the past were occasions for the remark that I worshipped him, and that I thought I would go to him when I died. In our memorial services I referred to this statement, and remarked that my attachment for him remained unabated and I was willing for my friends to consider that my desire was to

go to him when I died, because I imagined he was very near to the Saviour, nearer in position, perhaps, than I hoped would be accorded me.¹⁶

Mell was not only a pastor, disciplinarian, and college professor, but also an author. He held in his hand a ready pen whose ink flowed from 1851 until near his death. Mell's first written work was his treatise on *Predestination and the Saints' Perseverance*. As seen earlier, Mell was an able exponent and a fearless defender of "the five-points of theology." Mrs. D. B. Fitzgerlad, a member of the Antioch Church recalls,

When first called to take charge of the church Dr. Mell found it in a sad state of confusion. He said a number of members were drifting off into Arminianism. He loved the truth too well to blow hot and cold with the same breath. If it was a *Baptist* church it must have doctrines peculiar to that denomination preached to it. And with that boldness, clearness, and vigor of speech that marked him, he preached to them the doctrines of predestination, election, free-grace, etc. He said it was always *his* business to preach the truth as he found it in God's word, and leave the matter there, feeling that God would take care of the results.¹⁷

His stated reason for writing *Predestination and the Saints' Perseverance* (which first appeared as a series of articles in *The Christian Index*) was to answer two printed sermons by Reverend Russel Reneau, which had been "extensively distributed through parts of Georgia and Tennessee, and [had] been lauded as a complete refutation of Calvinism."¹⁸ Mell engaged in this written debate because he believed that the heart of the gospel was at stake. He did not believe that he was entering an esoteric discussion about some ancient controversy. This was very much a "live" issue.

I have been pained to notice, for some years past, on the part of some of our ministers, in some localities in the South, a disposition to waive the doctrines of Grace, in their public ministrations. While some have been entirely silent about them, and have even preached, though not ostensibly, doctrines not consistent with them, others have given them only a cold and half-hearted assent, and some few have openly derided and denounced them. This, in many cases, has resulted, doubtless, from a lack of information, and from an apprehension, therefore, that the doctrines of Grace are synonymous with Antinomianism.¹⁹

That Mell was no cold formalist and that his doctrines did not lead him to any kind of fatalism is seen in that the Lord was pleased to send revival to the Antioch Church in 1852-53. From this revival Mell's second treatise flowed, *Baptism In Its Mode and Subjects*.

This publication owes its existence to the following circumstances: — During the month of August last, the Lord blessed the church at Antioch, of which I am the pastor, with a season of refreshing from his presence. During its progress, we had, for nearly two weeks, daily occasion to ad-

minister the ordinance of baptism. As is my custom, I availed myself of the opportunity afforded, to address the people at the water's side on the subject....

Within a mile of Antioch is situated a Methodist Meeting House called "Centre." The next "Quarterly Conference" appointed the very estimable gentleman, Rev. Wm. J. Parks, the Presiding Elder, to preach a sermon on Baptism.... It was never publicly avowed, I believe, but it was generally understood, that it was to be a reply to my remarks at the water's side.²⁰

In addition to preaching on the subject of baptism, Rev. Parks also distributed, in "Mell's Kingdom" (as the community came to be known), a number of works on infant baptism. As a result the Antioch and Bairdstown churches requested, at a regular business conference, that Mell publish his "very instructive discourses... on the subject of baptism." Thus, again we see Mell thrown into controversy. We are told that the book had a wide circulation and that it was instrumental in changing several Pedobaptists to the faith and belief of the Baptist denomination.²¹

While Mell never swerved an inch from the defense of the truth, he was nevertheless very courteous to those who differed with him. The Scripture says,

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth ... (2 Timothy 2:24, 25 NAS).

That this was the case with Pastor Mell is seen from the following description by his son,

Among those who sat under his ministry for ten, twenty and twenty-five years were people of other denominations who were as warm and friendly as any he had. Some Methodist brethren attended every conference meeting as regularly as did those of his own flock, and it was a source of great pleasure to him. They might shake their heads at what they called his "hard doctrine," but they would shake his hand just as cordially at the close of the sermon and they claimed a share of his visits as much as did the members of his own flock.²²

Paul and Barnabas at Mercer?

The next several years following 1854 were tumultuous for Mell, Mercer University, and Georgia Baptists. In February of 1854, John Leadly Dagg let it be known that he thought the time had come for him to be released from the presidency of Mercer. Opposition to this course arose principally due to the apprehension of difficulty that might arise in the choice of a successor.²³ Almost prophetically the turmoil arose. A statement was reportedly given out that the reason for Dagg's resignation was due to his "failing strength." Dagg immediately registered his protest to this inaccurate statement.²⁴ Mell, believing that the stated reason for Dagg's resignation would do "great injustice to a capable and faithful officer," drew up a petition signed by all the professors (with the exception of Dr.

N. M. Crawford, Professor of Theology) asking that Dagg not be retired on account of "failing strength." Nevertheless, the Board of Trustees received Dr. Dagg's resignation and very soon thereafter elected Professor Crawford to the position of President.

There soon sprang up between Professor Mell and President Crawford a difference of opinion in regard to the duties belonging to each, which resulted in estrangement, and their resignations were offered to the Board.²⁵

The ultimate end of this sad contention was similar to that in which Paul and Barnabas found themselves, and resulted in their departure from one another. Dr. Crawford was reinstated by the Board; Professors Mell, Dagg, and Hillyer resigned; and not until 1856 did things begin to settle. There is much that can be said about this controversy and much that must be left to conjecture.²⁶ Suffice it to say that no one's character was maligned during the tempest, especially not that of Mell. In the heat of the battle, Professor Mell was elected Moderator of the Georgia Baptist Association and offered the presidency of Mississippi College, the principalship of the Alabama Female Institute, and called as pastor to the First Baptist Church of Savannah, only the first of which he accepted.

Following his resignation as Professor of Ancient Languages at Mercer, the students of the University offered the following tribute to their beloved professor.

At a meeting of twenty-nine students of Mercer University, in the Ciceronian Hall, on Thursday evening, the 29th of November, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

WHEREAS the pleasant relationship which Rev. P. H. Mell has heretofore sustained towards the Students of Mercer University, as Professor of Ancient Languages, not long exists,

Resolved, That in his retirement he will carry with him our best wishes for his future happiness and the earnest desire that in whatever sphere his lot may be cast, his labors may be rewarded with the same eminent success that has attended them during his connexion with Mercer University.

Resolved, That as a testimonial of the high esteem and admiration which we entertain towards him, both as a man and as a laborious and competent Professor, we tender him a Gold-headed Cane, bearing the inscription: Prof. P. H. Mell, from Students of Mercer University.

Resolved, That the above proceedings be published in the Temperance Banner, Christian Index, and Tennessee Baptist.

A motion was made, and prevailed unanimously, that the meeting, on Saturday night thereafter, resolve itself into a Committee as the whole, and *en massa*, make the presentation in due form at the private residence of P. H. Mell.²⁷

At the University of Georgia

By the time the tumultuous waters had been quieted, a year had passed. Somewhat battle-scarred and most certainly weary, Mell was elected by the Board of Trustees to the chair of Ancient Languages at the University of Georgia on De-

ember 11, 1856. He occupied this post until, in 1860, he was elected to the chair of Ethics and Metaphysics and made Vice-Chancellor of the University. In the interim, Mell was elected President of the Georgia Baptist Convention, a position which he held for a total of twenty-four years. Also, Furman University conferred upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1858. All seemed quiet for this space of three years, but in 1860 Mell was thrust again into the battle.

The publication of his third major treatise, *Corrective Church Discipline*, raised the ire of the growing number of Landmarkers in the Southern Baptist Convention. According to his son, Mell was asked by a number of Baptist leaders to “prepare a work on the subject [of church discipline] that would give a clear conception of the relationship existing between churches, and the status of the members of the church.”²⁸ First published as a series of articles in the major Baptist papers of that day, *Corrective Church Discipline* was published later in book form by the Southern Baptist Publication Society in 1860. Though there is nothing in the superb treatise itself that would lead one to think it was a polemic against Landmarkism and especially against the treatment received by R. B. C. Howell of the First Baptist Church of Nashville, still, being published so soon after the Nashville trouble, everyone knew the target at which Mell had aimed. The publication of Mell’s articles set off a journalistic debate in nearly all of the South’s denominational papers. Professor A. H. Worrell of Talladega, Alabama, published a series of articles entitled “Review of Corrective Church Discipline” which sought to answer Mell’s arguments from a Landmark position and only fanned the flames of controversy. Though some writers, as fallen men are often wont to do, engaged in character assassination, Mell remained courteous and tried always to address the issue, not the personality of the author.

When one writer tried to defend the Landmark position by taking verse after verse out of its Scriptural context, Mell’s only reply was,

I see that my brother ... has attacked my last position and quoted certain Scripture to sustain his point. Now by my dear brother’s course of reasoning I can prove anything from the Bible. I can prove that the brother ought to hang himself. Does not the Bible say “Judas Iscariot went out and hanged himself”? (Matthew 27:5) and does in not also say: “Go, and do thou likewise”? (Luke 10:37); “That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27).²⁹

Thus, Mell was a staunch defender of Baptist principles and never let the opportunity pass to speak the truth in love against error. He had a keen sense of the ludicrous and he maintained a powerful ability to wield the weapon of sarcasm to make his point. The sharpening of the weapons of sarcasm and quick retort began even in his early years. As a young boy, he met the neighborhood bully on a narrow path on which the lad would not allow Mell to travel. Straddling the path the bully said, “I never give ground to a fool.” Mell simply stepped aside and replied, “I do.”³⁰

The year following the publication of *Corrective Church Discipline*, the Civil War broke out. Being a strong sympathizer with the South, Mell was one of the first to offer his services to the defense of his homeland. At the opening of the war a company of fighting men was organized called “Mell’s Volunteers” (later “Mell’s Riflemen”). While preparations were being made to send the riflemen to the battle

front in Virginia, Mell's wife died, forcing him to resign his commission. Not only did Mell lose his wife, but also in 1862 at Antietam, the bloodiest battle of the war, Mell lost his eldest son, Benjamin. The correspondence between Mell and the family who attended his son before his death is very touching.

Mell was married December 24, 1861, to Eliza E. Cooper of Scriven County, Georgia, and fathered six children. In 1862 *Keep the Sabbath* was published as a tract to be distributed among the soldiers.

In 1863 two very important positions were bestowed upon Mell. First, he was elected colonel of a militia by the citizens of Athens, Georgia, for the purpose of defending the northern part of the state from invasion. One party on the committee for the citizens of Athens, upon learning that Mell was being considered for the position said, "Why he knows nothing about military affairs." To which another member replied, "I don't care for that, I am for Mell anyhow. For a man who can manage four hundred Baptists can do anything."³¹ The second momentous event Mell's life was his election in 1863 to the presidency of a denomination he helped build, the Southern Baptist Convention. Mell, who met with the others in Augusta in 1845, was to occupy the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention for seventeen years. From 1863 to 1886, except for eight years of absence because of sickness, Mell presided over the convention.³²

In January of 1866, with the scars of war etched upon his heart, Mell resumed his duties at the University of Georgia. While there is not room here to recall his achievements, to be sure, Mell was convinced that there could be no separation of sacred and secular for the Christian. His labors at the University were performed as diligently unto the Lord as the work he undertook as pastor and Southern Baptist leader.

Prince of Parliamentarians

At the Southern Baptist Convention of 1867, meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, Mell was requested (by a resolution made by J. P. Boyce) to draw up a manual of parliamentary practice for the use of the denomination. A year later *A Manual of Parliamentary Practice* was published and adopted by the SBC. So wide-spread was the acceptance of this work that many legislative bodies adopted Mell's Manual, including the Georgia legislature. As parliamentarian and presiding officer Mell excelled, so much so that he wore the title "Prince of Parliamentarians." In *Parliamentary Law*, a text designed for the author's classes at Southern Seminary, F. H. Kerfoot acknowledges,

During the first ten years that the author taught this subject he used as his textbook the manual on Parliamentary Practice, by President P. H. Mell. This is in many respects an excellent book. And it may well be supposed that the use of it for so many years must have left its impress upon the teacher, and hence upon the following pages also.³³

One visitor at the Southern Baptist Convention of 1866 commented upon Mell's abilities as a parliamentarian:

We think Dr. Mell the best presiding officer we have ever seen; and we heard many present at the Convention express the same opinion. He un-

derstands perfectly the duties of the position, and acts with that deliberation, promptness and firmness, yet with kindness, he held in check any who might be unruly, and enabled the humblest and most modest member of the Convention to gain the ear of the body. No press of business, or excitement incident to such meetings, when unexpected questions were sprung, could for a moment disconcert him. He impressed all with his peculiar fitness for the position which he so gracefully filled.³⁴

Mell's personal charisma as president and presiding officer was seen when,

At a certain meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Dr. Mell called a brother to preside over the body over his temporary absence. Business moved along all right until some one made a motion that called many to their feet, all clamoring for recognition from the chair. The President hopelessly pounded on the desk for order, order, but there was no order. Dr. Mell was sent for by some one who recognized the importance of a cool headed man in the chair. He came back and quietly assumed charge of the chair. The gavel tapped lightly on the table, and instantly, as if by magic, disorder ceased, groups of members that had formed all of the house and were talking excitedly and loudly, dispersed and sat down, and the great body moved smoothly and orderly on with its business as if it had been some vast piece of machinery under the control of its master.³⁵

Perhaps it was this great popularity as a parliamentarian that so overshadowed his gifts and abilities as a pastor and theologian, that has prevented more being known about Mell in our own day.

Mell's Nervous Attack

The years between 1871 and 1873 were very troublesome for Mell. The weight of the churches upon him, the duties of the University work, the denominational responsibilities, his prolific pen, all contributed to what became known as Mell's "nervous attack." In August 1871, while preaching at Bairdstown, Mell was seized by an attack that left him prostrate and nearly ended his life. For over a year he was unable to do any active work. Perhaps this was an instance of what we today call ministerial burnout. Often Mell was heard to say, "Let me wear out, not rust out."

Along with all of his responsibilities and duties, was it not also his great burden for the souls of men that led to his attack? Several days before his debilitating seizure, Mell stood in the pulpit of the Antioch Church and pleaded,

"Must I . . . leave you, as I found you, out of Christ? Must all my arguments, my entreaties, my prayers, be only so many millstones hanged about your necks to drag you down into perdition? My skirts are clear. I have warned you of God's righteous indignation. I have wooed you by the sweetness of Christ's love." Lifting his eyes, he said solemnly, "God is my witness, I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God, but O how can I leave you. For many of you, I feel it will be only a little

while till we shall hold sweet converse in a better world, but for you who have resisted the power of the Gospel so long, must I stand in judgment against you?"³⁶

Though impressed that the time of his own death was at hand, Mell was spared for future usefulness. After suffering for nearly a year, Mell's doctor prescribed a cruise. Upon his return, and with another year of rest, in 1874 Mell again took up his labors at the University of Georgia and both churches, with even more vigor than before.

Perhaps this experience on the "backside of the desert" provided Mell with more time for prayer and meditation, for in 1876 his *Doctrine of Prayer* was published. Two years later, Mell was elected Chancellor of the University, a position he occupied until his death in 1888. Under his leadership, the trustees established branch colleges in several Georgia towns, the founding of a school of technology (now Georgia Tech) was approved, and an agricultural experiment station was established. A contemporary said of Mell's work at the University:

Chancellor Mell's administration was a decade of prosperity to the University. He brought to the office long experience as a college professor, strong convictions of duty, and well digested policy, and the confidence of the powerful denomination to which he belonged ...³⁷

In all, Dr. Mell served the University of Georgia for twenty-two years, the Southern Baptist Convention presidency for seventeen years, and the Georgia Baptist Convention for twenty-four years. His ministry included too many churches and agencies to mention, and his written works were circulated extensively in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Last Illness and Death

On December 12, 1887, Mell preached his last sermon. He spoke on the doctrine of election from 2 Thessalonians 2:13. On the fifteenth of the month he was forced to lay aside all his duties and seek rest in the southern part of Georgia. On this day he wrote to his son:

My health is bad. I have broken myself down by my overwork. My doctor orders me off for the recess. Many of the Trustees urge me to take a month's rest; but I cannot do so, my colleagues are already overworked, and my classes would suffer. There is no rest for me but in the grave.³⁸

On the twenty-sixth of January, 1888, Patrick Hues Mell found his eternal rest in the arms of his loving Heavenly Father. Three days before his death he was heard to say, "I have been a wonderful child of Providence, if not of grace."³⁹ His son recalled Dr. Mell's last hours:

At intervals ... he said, "I commit my soul to God in Christ Jesus—Glory be to God." "Once I was dead, but now am alive. In the other world I am thoroughly understood and thoroughly appreciated—thoroughly understood and thoroughly appreciated." He uttered these words just as

written—repeating the last part of the sentence. It seemed to those who watched that he was permitted to penetrate the veil which hangs between this and the other world, and that he actually beheld the understanding and approving smile on his beloved Master’s face.

Just before breathing his last he said: “Nearly home?” and made an effort to say something more, but failed. He then tried to fold his hands across his breast and died without a struggle—fell asleep in the arms of Jesus, for whom he had fought a valiant fight, and at the end of many long years of useful life was taken to his reward.⁴⁰☺

Notes:

¹ P. H. Mell, Jr., *Life of Patrick Hues Mell* (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1895), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ Spencer B. King, Jr., “Patrick Hues Mell: Preacher, Pedagogue, and Parliamentarian,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 5 (October 1970): 187.

⁷ P. H. Mell, Jr., *Life of Mell*, 33–39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹ P. H. Mell, “Professor Mell’s Address, Delivered to the Graduating Class of the late Commencement,” *The Christian Index*, August 18, 1843, 515.

¹⁰ Samuel Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* (Atlanta: The Christian Index, 1881), 382.

¹¹ “Address to Graduating Class,” 516.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Life of Mell*, 48.

¹⁴ Robert Preston Brooks, *The University of Georgia* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1956), 69.

¹⁵ *Life of Mell*, 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

¹⁸ P. H. Mell, *Predestination and the Saints’ Perseverance* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1851; reprint ed. Forth Worth, TX: *The Wicket Gate*, 1983), iii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, iv.

²⁰ P. H. Mell, *Baptism In Its Mode and Subjects* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1853), v.

²¹ *Life of Mell*, 56.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

²³ John L. Dagg, “Autobiography” in *Manual of Theology and Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982, reprint ed.), 49.

²⁴ B. O. Ragsdale, *Story of Georgia Baptists*, Volume 1 (Atlanta, GA: The Executive Committee of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, 1932), 1:102.

²⁵ *Life of Mell*, 77.

²⁶ For the complete scenario see Ragsdale, *Story of Georgia Baptists*, 1:101–117 and Mell, *Life of Mell*, 76–102.

²⁷ *The Christian Index*, Vol. 34, Dec. 13, 1855.

²⁸ *Life of Mell*, 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁰ King, “Preacher, Pedagogue, and Parliamentarian,” 191.

³¹ *Life of Mell*, 144.

³² It is interesting to note that in the years of Mell’s absence as president, J. P. Boyce presided over the denomination, and also, in the year of Mell’s death, 1888, Boyce served as president of the SBC.

³³ F. H. Kerfoot, *Parliamentary Law* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1899), vi.

³⁴ *Life of Mell*, 153–54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

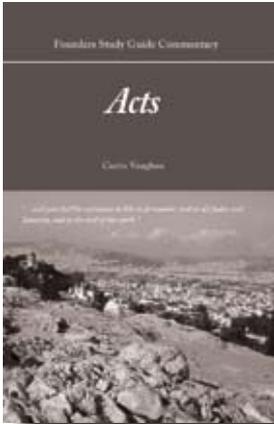
³⁷ Robert Preston Brooks, *The University of Georgia*, 79.

³⁸ *Life of Mell*, 249.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 251.

New from Founders Press



Acts

Founders Study Guide Commentary

By Curtis Vaughan

159 pages (soft cover)

\$9.99 Retail

\$6.99 Special Introductory Price

from Founders Press

Now through June 30, 2009.

“Curtis Vaughan’s Study Guide is characterized by clear and informative exegesis, solid theological exposition, warm devotional applications, and trustworthy pastoral insights. Students, Bible teachers and preachers will find this well-written volume to be exceedingly helpful for grasping the message and meaning of the Book of Acts.”

—Dr. David S. Dockery, President, Union University, Jackson, Tennessee

Visit our website for more Founders Study Guide Commentaries and other titles by Founders Press:

<http://www.founderspress.com/>

Contents

Four Hundred Years of Baptists	1
<i>Tom Ascol</i>	
One Upon a Time, Four Hundred Years Ago ...	2
<i>Tom J. Nettles</i>	
The Evangelical Convictions of Benjamin Keach	9
<i>Tom Hicks</i>	
The Life and Labors of Patrick Hues Mell	17
<i>C. Ben Mitchell</i>	
News	8