

**Themes and Tensions from
400 Years of Baptist History**
By Blake Killingsworth¹

It is an honor to be able to present to you some thoughts on where the Baptist tradition has been and where it is going. For the sake of introductions, let me say a couple of things. First, my area of research centers in the United States South in the early 1800s, and while I will do my best to make my observations broad, I am necessarily limited to that which I have studied. Second, there are far more knowledgeable individuals who can stand before you today, but from my understanding, they were all busy. So you have me. When the BWA asked me to present at this forum a few months back, they said that I was representing not only a historians perspective (which is questionable), but also the perspective of younger Baptists (which is even more questionable). With this in mind, I pray that you will extend grace for any overlap of my comments with their comments or, which is far more likely, any naïve or less-than-informed statements I may make.

The question before us today is where are Baptists going in the twenty-first Century? Since our distinguished colleague Dr. Daniel Carro began his talk with the philosopher Yogi Berra, let me begin mine with an equally nebulous philosopher—my father. Dad loved to tell the story of three older sisters who all lived together in the same house. One was upstairs, filling her bath tub with water when she took a step in the tub. Pausing a moment to adjust to the temperature, she became a bit confused and called out to her sister who was down stairs. “Ethel! Do you know if I was getting into the tub or coming out of the tub?” Frustrated, Ethel began to make her way up the stairs to help her helpless sister. About halfway through the stairs she paused to catch her breath, and then became confused. Calling to the third sister, who was at the

¹ This paper was originally presented at the “Baptists at 400” Forum at the 2010 Baptist World Alliance World Congress, held in Honolulu, Hawaii, on Friday, July 30, 2010.

breakfast table, Ethel said, “Mildred, was I going up the stairs or down the stairs?” Disgusted with the status of her two sisters, Mildred rose from the table, began to make her way to the stairs when she said to herself, “I will never turn out to be like those two,” and then proceeded to knock on wood to ensure her saying would come true. But then she paused, became confused, and then said out loud, “Now, I was going to answer the front door or the back door?”

I guess the moral to the story is to never state in public a joke your father told you. Or it could be that if you can’t remember where you have been, it is hard to know where you are going. With this in mind, I thought that it might be useful to look back at our 400 history and try to extrapolate some of the themes that have shaped our lives, tensions that have come from these themes, and future direction connected to these themes and tensions.

Before I begin, though, let me give one more word of warning. In my heart, I am a generalist. I like to see the larger picture of history and try to track movements. However, the problem of the generalist, as has been demonstrated very clearly since the formation of women’s history, African-American history, and other new fields, is that there is always an exception to the rule. For years, as one of my professors always said, American history was about dead white men from Boston, and as a generalist, I run the tendency of talking only about that which I know and which reflect who I am—even if I am not from Boston and not yet dead. This is also a good time to promote to you the need in the field of history for more and more trained voices. Unfortunately, as Dr. Carro also pointed out yesterday, the field of Baptist history is filled with Anglos, mostly male. This is changing some as over the past several years more and more women have entered the industry, but we need more and more voices from the east and the south in order to expand our understanding of our past. Yet for the next several hours, you are stuck

with a live white man from Dallas—so let me begin with three themes that have formed us, and then I will go on to three areas of tension and then three areas of future direction.

Themes in Our Past

To begin, we need to place the Baptist expression within its historical context. First, the Baptist church was formed during the latter stages of the Renaissance and the early stages of the Enlightenment. While the full thrust of the Enlightenment would not manifest itself for another hundred years or so, by the beginning of the 1600s, a dramatic shift had occurred in the thinking of Europe, a shift that propelled reason to the forefront and attempted to eliminate superstition. Education became supreme, and literacy was essential. Thanks to Johannes Gutenberg and his printing press, ideas spread like wildfire. Neither the Catholic Church nor the King's Court held the monopoly on ideas anymore. Individuals began to read and think for themselves, sometimes disagreeing with the prevailing philosophy of the day. Although it would not fully take hold of Europe until the mid-1700s, this concept of the individual as being free from authority—both the state and the church—was born.²

Second, the first Baptist church arose within the chaotic context of the English Reformation. In the English world of the Reformation, a variety of expressions arose. The English had no Luther or Calvin, and while Wycliffe carries the title of the first English reformer, he did not witness the eventual Reformation, nor did his work establish the full theological parameters of the English Reformation. Instead, the Reformation in England in many ways became an expression of the merchant class, producing a wider array of theological

² An excellent overview of this time period can be found in Bard Thompson's *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996). Also, I would highly recommend Andrew Wall's work, especially his well known book *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997) in order to think about Christian history from a larger perspective, seeing the ways in which cultural movements impact various understandings of Christian theology and especially Christian practice.

opinions than elsewhere. And when this underground Reformation finally became official, it did so more for biological reasons than theological reasons, for as we all remember, Henry needed a son, and it was “obviously” all Catherine’s fault. Of course, more factors were at play in the Reformation, but for the sake of time, it is useful to see the English Reformation as carrying no true unified theological expression because it was not initiated by a theological debate nor did it have had an established theological spokesman. In this context, a variety of expressions arose, among which stood a group of Baptists.³

A third factor arose some 100 years after the birth of the Baptist movement—English evangelicalism. Of course, it is necessary to say that not every Baptist in the early years became a part of the evangelical movement, but I think it is safe to say the Baptist movement has been dramatically impacted by the Evangelical movement. Born out of the hymnody of Isaac Watts and the teachings of the Moravian Brethren and John Welsey, English Evangelicalism spread through the 1700s. David Bebbington has provided a useful and succinct description of evangelicalism, identifying four common traits that combine to form the evangelical expression of Christianity—biblicism, a strong reliance upon the Bible as the overarching authority in one’s life; crucicentrism, or being cross-centered, the tendency to see the central point of the Gospel narrative as being the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus; conversionism, the tendency to stress the concept that believers experience a change in their lives from being dead in sins to being alive in Christ; and activism, the desire to put feet to faith, a desire that is carried out in a variety of

³ A. G. Dickens’ *The English Reformation*, second edition (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989) remains a standard work on the English Reformation and does a good job of summarizing the early English reformation movement through the work of Wycliffe and also the Lollards. Also see Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of the Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

ways. For example, George Whitfield's activism was played out through his engagement of outdoor evangelistic sermons and also his work in founding an orphanage in Georgia.⁴

As the evangelical movement spread throughout England and the English colonies in America, it entered into the Baptist churches. In the colonies, Isaac Backus perhaps became the most famous of these New Light Baptists. A Congregationalist, in 1741 he experienced the same conversion that Wesley described, and subsequently became a preacher. About ten years later, he began to doubt the validity of his infant baptism and explored the doctrines of the Baptists. In 1756, he broke with the Congregationalists, formed his own Baptist church, and in the years that followed, travelled throughout New England, evangelizing and promoting Baptist associational work. Again, while not all Baptists became "evangelical," it is safe to say that the evangelical movement deeply influenced the direction of Baptist life in the centuries that have followed, especially evangelical activism.⁵

We now have three main themes surrounding the development of Baptists. First, Baptists were born in the early stages of the Enlightenment, which provided them with a decidedly individualistic and rationalistic orientation. Second, Baptists developed their theological understanding the midst of a wide-array of Protestant theological expressions, none of which stood as a central authority for the Baptists to follow or for Baptists to reject. Third, a large majority of Baptists adopted an evangelical expression of their faith, highlighted by immense activism in a variety of ways.

Tensions in Baptist Life

⁴ See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989).

⁵ See Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus: Vol. I-III*, edited by William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979).

These three factors have often combined to form a number of tensions within the Baptist family over the years.

First, there has been a continuing tension between the autonomous individual and the larger congregation, closely tied to the tension between the autonomous church and the larger family of Baptists. Baptists were born out of the Enlightenment, where there was a championing of individual reasoning. We don't just do something because the preacher told us; we do it because we understand it and we read it for ourselves in Scripture. This tendency compels us to champion concepts such as the priesthood of all believers.

At the same time, Baptists champion a connected community. We are a family. Perhaps one of the clearest indications of this view is our practice of communion. Many Baptists take communion as a united family, together, at the same time, instead of individually receiving the elements and consuming them on their own. One Baptist professor I know informed a couple that he would not administer the Lord's Supper at their wedding because for Baptists, communion is to take place as a community, not individually. When I heard this, it finally dawned on me what I had done all those years in church. We partake of our communion as one large family. Family and community are a vital part of what it means to be Baptist.

Baptists love the idea of the autonomous individual as well as the idea of the connected community, and naturally, these ideas cause tensions. The very first Baptist church experienced this tension as John Smyth, not long after forming the first Baptist congregation, left the community because of a theological disagreement with Thomas Helwys. Likewise, Roger Williams, founder of the First Baptist Church in America, left his congregation shortly after its formation because he was convinced that no organized church could ever be totally pure. Often, individual members will become so convinced of a point of view that they leave their

congregations to form brand new congregations, taking as many others along with them as they can. In the 1850s in Charleston, South Carolina, a small group within the First Baptist Church grew frustrated with the direction of the church, especially the decision to allow women to be voting members of the church.⁶ Instead of adhering to community or the leading of their pastor, the group decided to leave the church and form their own church, the second Baptist church in Charleston, known as Wentworth Street Baptist Church.

The tension between the autonomous individual and the community is perhaps more visible and troubling in regard to the relationships between autonomous, individual churches and the larger community of churches. How does the larger community of Baptist churches maintain fellowship when major disagreements take place and individual churches claim the right to practice as they see fit? This situation arose most notably in the 1840s in the United States. Beginning in the early 1800s, missionary-minded Baptist churches attempted to pool their funds together for the purposes of establishing mission work both abroad and in the United States, creating the Triennial Convention. However, by the 1830s, several churches in the North began to aggressively push for the abolition of slavery in the South. In response, Baptists in the South, in many ways trapped by the prevailing ideas in their own culture, aggressively defended slavery and accused the Northern Baptists of engaging in politics and ignoring the classic teachings of Scripture. Frustrations came to a boil in the 1840s as Northerners made one final push toward abolition, and the Southern Baptists bolted from the convention to form their own, new association of purely Southern churches. In this situation, the larger community failed to maintain unity in the face of this great controversy because the stance of the autonomous church or churches outweighed that of the larger community.

⁶ *Protest Against the Proceedings of the Corporation of the Baptist Church in Charleston, and Letter of Dismission, Granted to Those Who Went Out to Form the Second Baptist Church in Charleston* (Charleston: Hayden & Burke Printers, 1841).

Second, there is a tension that has developed between those of the Baptist faith expression and those of other Christian expressions, especially fellow Protestants. In the fall of 2000, I began my graduate work at Wheaton College in Illinois, a non-denominational school with a broad evangelical background whose most famous graduates include Jim Elliot and Nate Saint as well as a little known Baptist named Billy Graham. My first week there I met Mark Noll, a preeminent voice in the field of American church history. Noll introduced himself in his usual nonchalant manner, and he asked where I was from. I replied that I was from Texas and a graduate of Dallas Baptist University. Then Noll said something that has stuck with me to this day. “Baptist? Good. We need more of you. Baptists tend to only talk to themselves.” I chuckled when he said this, but it is very much true.

The Baptist faith formed out of the competing views of the English Reformation, one of several voices competing for room, busily justifying our views while many times desecrating the views of others. Because of this, we have an unfortunate tendency to isolate ourselves from other groups out of fear, I think, of losing our distinctiveness if we associate too closely with them. After all, if a Methodist is as good as a Baptist, why be a Baptist?

Also, an interesting thing has come about in our isolation. I think that because of the chaotic nature of our upbringing, we have a very difficult time with our identity. My wife and I recently adopted a beautiful baby girl named Chloe. Chloe’s birth mother is originally from Honduras, but grew up in Texas, and her birth father is from Nigeria. So Chloe is Hondurgenian, with a Texas flair. As is the case with adoption, in the years to come, we know that Chloe will want to know more about who she is. Like all children, she will have an identity crisis, and her’s may be a bit more pronounced because of the diversity of her background. We Baptists are the same. If we step back a minute from our discussion and just ask ourselves what are we doing,

we will be surprised. How many other Protestant groups have this type of identity crisis that we always seem to face? Methodists know who they are. Lutherans know who they are.

Presbyterians know who they are. They can all point back to one or two parents, or in the case of the Presbies, a common document. We cannot. And that is probably a very good thing because I do think it is far more useful to consider Baptists as more of a movement than a group. But calling Baptists a movement brings about serious tensions as we both try to interact with other Protestant groups and also try to understand who we are in the light of many fading denominations.

Third, Baptists face serious tension as we each express our own forms of evangelical activism—especially a tension between what might be called a radical activism and, for lack of a better term, respectable activism. Radicalism is in our Baptist blood. We rejected the prevailing thoughts of how government should interact with the church and took the radical stance that public funds should never be used to influence our private expressions of faith. We rejected the concept of priestly ordination and took the radical stance that the only true appointment that was needed to preach was the calling of God. Because of this stance, our Baptists forbearers, such as John Bunyan or Obadiah Holmes, suffered severe persecution. Unfortunately, as Baptists grew more respectable, so did a desire to not appear to be too radical. They wanted to be radical, but within reason. They pushed, but only so far—thus we developed a tendency toward respectable activism. Sometimes, this respectableness has been a very good feature of the Baptist movement. It has kept us grounded and helped us to avoid the temptation to always be in conflict with society or each other...please note I said society, i.e. people, not culture, i.e. the ways of this world. It has kept us connected with orthodox Christianity, even if we think at times that we are the only true orthodox group in existence. It has provided a chance for believers to

become pillars of the community and, at times incredibly important, the business world. After all, our churches, ministries, and associations could not exist if there were not members whose generosity made them possible. But this tendency toward “respectability” can have some very severe consequences.

Susan Juster in her book *Disorderly Women* describes the ways in which New England women experienced high levels of freedom within the Baptist church prior to the American Revolution, but following the war, as the Baptists became more and more respectable, women began to have less and less freedom. Likewise, Christine Heyrman in her work *Southern Cross* described how Baptists in the early 1800s, along with other Southern evangelical groups, changed from being voices on the outside of culture to be voices defended culture. This turn from radicalism to respectableness in large measure is what caused many Baptists in the South to refuse to listen to the arguments against slavery and rather defended a barbaric practice that had come to characterize the Southern culture.⁷

During the time of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, it was the Baptist churches the African-American community, a community denied full access to society, that expressed the classic Baptists radical element, condemning the culture of racism and pushing for full social justice and freedom. However, some, certainly not all, established Anglo Baptist churches felt the stance too radical and argued for gradual, private changes, or no changes at all. Following the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 that called for an end to racial segregation in the public school system, W. A. Criswell of First Baptist Dallas mocked the decision and claimed that it would never affect his church. Others throughout the South followed suit, including James Gardner, the editor of the Texas Baptist newspaper, *Baptist*

⁷ Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1997).

Standard. Gardner retired within months of the Brown decision but made his feelings on the matter very clear, expressing frustration with “pestiferous pettifoggers” who flooded the South to merely stir up trouble. Against these voices, Billy Graham, who at the time was a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas under Criswell, claimed that he and his pastor never saw eye to eye on the issue of race. In fact, Graham’s embrace of many of the leaders of the Civil Rights movements, and his insistence on integrated revivals helped to push many Southern churches along the road to integration.⁸

The radical activism versus respectable activism tension goes beyond just issues such as race. For example, we see this tension between those that tout evangelism and the Saving Gospel while others tout the Social Gospel and the need for the church to transform society. Both call for activism, both are expressions of Baptist life, and both have their place, but between the two camps, a continuing tension remains, one which often causes meaningful fellowship to disintegrate.

Future Trends

The topic of this forum isn’t just to rehash problems of the past, but rather to suggest future directions for the Baptist movement. Here are three areas which I think our background and historic tensions provide us insight as to how to proceed.

⁸ For a more complete picture of the reaction of the *Baptist Standard* and other Baptist outlets to the *Brown v. Board* decision, please see Blake Killingsworth, “‘Here I Am, Stuck in the Middle with You’: The *Baptist Standard*, Texas Baptist Leadership, and School Desegregation, 1954 to 1956,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 41/2 (Spring 2006): 78-103. After giving this presentation, Dr. Devon Dick, a fellow presenter, reminded me of Graham’s one-time allowance of segregated services. It should be noted that in the early years of his ministry, Graham allowed the practice of segregated services at his revivals. In 1952, he began to vocally challenge the practice of segregation, but only tentatively at first. By 1953, his convictions finally won out, and he refused to hold any segregated services, much to the chagrin of several Southern churches and church leaders in the U.S. By the time of the *Brown v. Board* decision, Graham had made his stronger position against segregation known. For a brief overview of his interaction with segregation, please see Rob Mull, “Billy Graham: The Unifier,” *Christian News and Research* (13 July 2004) (<http://www.ctlibrary.com/newsletter/newsletterarchives/2004-07-09.html>).

First, in the years to come, we will see a continuing tension between the individual and the community. This historic tension will probably become even more pronounced because of the rise of modern technology. Ideas move at the speed of light through the internet, and with the globalization of Christianity, Baptist expressions will become more and more diverse and widespread. As this happens, we will experience an explosion of theological ideas, some of which we will embrace and others we will question. However, we must never forget that we are a family. We need to honor the individual, adhering to our belief in the priesthood of all believers, allowing for one's reason and the Holy Spirit to be the guide, while at the same time, making sure not to close off theological boundaries so much so that that we forget that we are a family.

At the first meeting of the Emerging Leaders Network held in Accra, Ghana, one of the members from Africa asked about why the Southern Baptist Convention had left the BWA. While those of us from the US sought to explain the political and theological debates surrounding the issue, he said something that has remained with me over the years. "How can you leave a family?" he said. "You are still a family. You cannot disown your family." I think these words will be useful for us to remember in the years to come. Whether you agree or disagree with an individual, a church, or an entire convention, we must remember in the years ahead that we are a family, and family is always family. I am reminded often of the analogy that Paul provides for us concerning the various functions of each part of the Body of Christ. Sometimes I wonder if our larger theological and political debates arise because we refuse to see the value in another part of the body. For example, if the hand says it does not need the eye, should the eye tell the hand, "Well, I don't need you either!" No, the hand needs the eye, and the eye needs the hand, even if they do not want to admit it because of the anger and bitterness that

has developed over the years. Even if one side refuses to acknowledge the workings of Christ in the other, the other side needs to always to see value in the one who is rejecting him. The hand may continue to reject the eye, but the eye must insist—to himself and to others—that it needs the hand. Of course, this is a tricky road to travel, because there are real debates and real theological errors running rampant in the world. But there is hope, especially in light of the call by our General Secretary Neville Callam to use these next five years to find areas of common ground and clear disagreement. Likewise, outgoing President David Coffey's recent work on Christian reconciliation provides insight as to how to mend fences and pray for the day when the hand and the eye will communicate again. In the years ahead, we must be actively involved in this process of discussion and reconciliation, because just as important as it is for us to have good theology, it is important for us to have a good family.

Second, because of the changing reliance upon denominational identification, Baptists will find it increasingly difficult to identify their place within the larger Christian fellowship if they continue to refuse to engage with other Christian groups. In the West, the role of denominational identification is decreasing as we enter what has been called a post-denominational culture. This isn't to say that denominations as such will die, but they will most likely lose the level of influence they enjoyed throughout the twentieth century. Denominations are products of modernity. It is the desire of a group of people to produce a structure that will provide an ideal and unified expression of an idea. Republicanism, nationalism, and progressivism are political expressions of modernity. Likewise, denominationalism is an expression of modernity. It was born in the twentieth century and found its heyday when a populace still believed that organizations were the key to success and that unification could be

achieved through committees and programs. We have now entered the post-modern age in the West, an age where structure is always suspect.

Because of this, in the years to come, we must be willing to do two things. First, we need to avoid our tendency to only talk among ourselves. Our Baptist organizations will not save us. We need to be ready to work with like-minded believers, regardless of their denominational background, all for the glory of God, not for the glory of Baptists. With this in mind, partnerships are going to be vitally important. We need to befriend each other, understand the mission and the needs of other Christian organizations, and be prepared to share ideas, resources, and credit. Remember, the glory in the end goes to God and God alone, regardless of the label of the person sharing the Good News.

Next, those of us in the West need to be willing to let go of the role of defining exactly what a Baptist is. The question was asked in the forum yesterday what a Baptist would look like in 40 years. My answer is that she will speak Spanish, be a lay member of her church, and practice a vibrant form of worship, including the use of charismatic gifts. We have seen an incredible shift in the last fifty years as the center of Christianity has moved from Europe and North America to the Southern Hemisphere. With this shift in mind and in the midst of our post-modern age, we need to be less concerned about the place of Baptists as a denomination and see Baptists more in terms of an expression. This does not mean that we abandon our associational or our denominational structures, but rather we try not to promote our denominations by any means necessary.

Let me take a quick moment, however, to make an observation. While those of us in the West see this post-denominational world coming, I am not sure that the same is happening in other parts of the world that have not undergone the kind of dramatic splits among the Baptist

family. Someone yesterday asked the question as to what makes a Baptist want to be a Baptist. In my context, the answer will probably be convoluted and in the end be a matter of being comfortable with the tradition in which was raised. But if you ask an African from the Nigeria, they may tell you it is because Baptists preach the Bible. In another context, they may say it is because Baptists help the poor. And in these places, being Baptist is considered a very good and stabilizing identity. Therefore, we must be very careful in our generalizations. As Dr. Karen Bullock and Dr. Carro ably explained yesterday, what we see happening in one context may have little to no correlation to another context.

Third, we need to be aware of our tendency to abandon radical activism in exchange for being accepted. As Baptists expand globally, we will see many new groups arise who are on the outside looking in on their culture, and they will naturally appear far more “radical” to those who have already been accepted within their own culture. In other words, the activities of Baptists in Africa will naturally look far more radical than the activities of those in Western Europe. Both sides need to keep in mind the value of the other. Radicalism is in our Baptist blood. It keeps us from being too ingrained in the culture. It encourages us to no longer be conformed to the ways of the world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind. It is the prophetic voice that calls for all things to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. On the flipside, the respectable aspect of Baptist life encourages us to make it our ambition to lead a quiet life so that our daily activities will win the respect of outsiders. It reminds us to endure suffering with patience and a hope upon the Lord. It helps us to maintain a voice within the broader community. Now hear me out, I am not saying that it was right for the established Baptists of the slave South to stand by and let their brothers and sisters suffer. Far from it. I think in many ways they failed in their duties at the time. But what I am saying is that as the Baptist expression grows, we will see

various forms, both with the radical fringe and the respectable fringe, and we need to do our best to remember that both have their place in Baptist life, and both are a part of the Baptist family, and as has already been said, if we are family, we remain family.

Finally, since I am supposed to be a representative of the younger generation, let me give you a few pictures of the work that is going on around the world among younger Baptist leaders.

Brickson Sam of Sierra Leone serves as president of the All-Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship. This past year, the group has sponsored two major Peace Conferences with the goal of promoting peace and reconciliation throughout Africa, and a third is planned for this coming September. The hope is that conferences like these can impact the youth and produce a generation in Africa that embraces peace. If young people think of Christ as their Prince of Peace, then Christ's peace will truly reign in Africa.

In India, Anderson Tokbi serves as the mission secretary of the Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention. Over the past several years, Anderson has been active in organizing mission teams of 26 full-time church planters and volunteer workers that travel into non-Christian villages to share the Gospel. Over this past year, God has used these missionaries to visit over 2,000 families this past year, share the Gospel with over 5,200 persons, and witness the conversion and baptism of 107 adults.

Asha Sanchu is a kind and soft-spoken woman from Nagaland, yet she may very well be the strongest person you have ever met. Years ago, Asha felt the Lord calling her to join the ministry of NighLight in Bangkok. She obeyed and left her home to spend time in the bars and brothels of Bangkok, beginning friendships with the prostitutes in hopes of sharing the love of Christ with them and seeing them set free from their bondage. This experience helped her as two years ago she became the head of a similar organization in her home country of Nagaland,

known as the Miqlat Ministry, a safe haven for battered women, neglected children, and women who in their desperation to survive became prostitutes.

Finally, we have Koffi Kpomgbe of Togo. Koffi is a gregarious fellow that has never met a stranger. He is active among the youth in Togo, and he works as a translator, being fluent in his French, English, and German, among many other languages. Koffi is a member of the Emerging Leaders Network, who one day asked if I knew of a pastor named Trevor Carpenter, whom he believed was a Dallas Baptist University graduate. I knew Trevor but I had not seen him in some town. He has since become pastor of a Baptist church along the border between Texas and Mexico, in the town of McAllen. This church a few years back began making trips to Togo, and Koffi became their liaison. Two years ago, Trevor performed the wedding ceremony for Koffi and his lovely bride. This entire relationship sprang up not from denominational meetings or associational conferences. There was no directive from a general secretary to have this random church in Texas become involved with a random Baptist mission in Togo. This was the work of a Baptist church feeling the call to partner with another group of Baptists.

Of course, these are just snapshots of younger Baptist expressions around the world, and you can go all throughout this meeting and hear similar stories. The trick is that as Baptists, we need to be aware of our upbringing and watch out for our tensions. We need not be worried that activities are happening apart from the Baptist name. We need not think that we have to control it in some way. While, oversight is necessary to be a good steward of funds, we have to allow the Holy Spirit to work in ways that we have yet to imagine. And this is so much a part of the Baptist history. We are a people convinced that through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the reading of God's word, God can and will work among individual believers to see His Kingdom established.