

ABSTRACT

The Awakening of the Freewill Baptists: Benjamin Randall and the Founding of an American Religious Tradition

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The last decades of the eighteenth century brought numerous changes to the citizens of colonial New England. As the colonists were joining together in their fight for independence from England, a collection of like-minded believers in Southern New Hampshire forged an identity as a new religious tradition. Benjamin Randall (1749-1808), a principal founder of the Freewill Baptist movement in colonial New England, was one of the many eighteenth century colonists that enjoyed a conversion experience as a result of the revival ministry of George Whitefield. Randall's conversion included a direct revelation from God that communicated God's universal love and grace for all people. As a result of his conversion he began evaluating the spiritual condition of his fellow parishioners and he was disappointed that his peers did not share his newfound zeal for spiritual matters. His spiritual zeal prompted him to examine the scriptures on his own and he questioned the practice of infant baptism. Randall completed his separation from the Congregational church of his youth when he contacted a Baptist congregation and submitted himself for baptism. When Randall was introduced to the

universal love and universal grace, was at odds with Calvin's doctrine of election that was affirmed by the other Baptists.

Randall's spiritual journey continued as he began to preach revival services throughout the region. His ministry was well received and he established a new congregation in New Durham, New Hampshire, in 1780. The congregation in New Durham served as Randall's base of operation as he led revival services throughout New Hampshire and Southern Maine. Randall's travels introduced him to many colonists who accepted his message of universal love and universal grace and a movement was born as Randall formed many congregations throughout the region. Randall spent the remainder of his life organizing, guiding, and leading the Freewill Baptists as they developed into a religious tradition that included thousands of adherents spread throughout New England and into Canada.

The Awakening of the Freewill Baptists:
Benjamin Randall and the Founding of an American Religious Tradition

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2007

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The scholastic endeavor may appear to be the task of one individual but in reality it is a communal task. Many individuals and organizations have contributed in significant ways towards the completion of this research endeavor. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to William H. Brackney for his support, guidance, and vision for this project. Dr. Brackney's support for my abilities has not wavered since my entrance into the Baylor University doctoral program and his belief in me and my work served as a life preserver many times when I felt as if I was about to go under. I would also like to express appreciation to Dr. William L. Pitts who constantly demonstrates gracious hospitality whether he is in the classroom, his home, or in England.

Scholars cannot accomplish any project without the able assistance of librarians and I am indebted to the following institutions for their expert support: Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections at Ladd Library of Bates College; Franklin Trask Library of Andover Newton Theological School; Jesse H. Jones Library of Baylor University; Maine Historical Society; and Tuck Library of New Hampshire Historical Society. Specific thanks also to Marc Nicholas, Social Science and Humanities Reference Assistant at Jones Library, who discovered numerous sources that I had trouble locating on my own. Special thanks are also in order to the members of the First Free Will Baptist Church in New Durham, New Hampshire, who allowed me unlimited access to the church records that helped this project come alive.

Individuals have also contributed to my own personal sanity and well being throughout this academic process. Personal words of thanks to my colleagues in the

lounge who provided numerous laughs along the way and helped keep things in perspective. I would like to express a final word of thanks to Clova Gibson who provided expert assistance throughout the dissertation process.

To Natalie: "let's live"
Anna: "let's dance"
Luke: "let's tackle"
Reid: "let's play"

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the Great Awakening brought confusion and diversity to the religious life of the American colonies. Following the example of British Evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770), itinerant preachers used innovative methods to stir the hearts of colonists and this resulted in spiritual vigor and reform throughout the region. Individuals left the established churches in their home towns because of a perceived lack of spiritual vitality and they formed new congregations.

The nascent Baptist movement benefited greatly from the religious turmoil initiated by the revivals as it experienced significant numerical growth in the eighteenth century. While scholars have long debated whether the “Great Awakening” is the correct terminology for what occurred in eighteenth century colonial America, it is beyond dispute that the religious upheaval initiated by the revivals had a direct impact on the formation of Baptist congregations in the colonies.¹ In New England, one significant development in Baptist life was the birth of a new faction of Baptists that espoused belief not in God’s election, but in humanity’s free will to choose or deny God’s offer of salvation. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Freewill Baptist movement, as

¹See Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Decried and Described: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” *Journal of American History* 69 (September 1982): 305-325 and Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

it came to be known, originated and developed through a series of revivals in upcountry New England, including Southern New Hampshire, Southern Maine, and Vermont.

One of the principal founders of the Freewill Baptist movement was Benjamin Randall² (1749-1808). Randall himself had experienced conversion following his attendance at one of Whitefield's revivals in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1780. Following his conversion, Randall began to evaluate the spiritual vitality of his fellow parishioners in a local Congregational church and was unimpressed with the level of piety and holiness exhibited by the membership. He soon began to participate in and lead spiritual meetings outside of the authority of his congregation. In the same year that the colonies each declared independence from Great Britain, Randall helped form a separate congregation and declared his independence from what he perceived to be a spiritually dead Congregational church.

Randall's spiritual journey continued as he became the leader of a Baptist congregation at upcountry New Durham in New Hampshire. Randall was not content to preach only to his congregation and, like many of his separatist peers, he began to itinerate throughout northern New England. His emphasis upon free grace, freewill, and free communion soon attracted the attention of neighboring Calvinistic Baptist ministers who questioned his theology and eventually distanced themselves from Randall and his ministry. Seemingly unaware of his theological divergence from the Calvinistic Baptist majority, Randall was not deterred by the lack of support from the Baptist clergy. In response to his censure by the Calvinistic Baptist majority, Randall formally constituted

²There are inconsistencies in the spelling of Randall's name. Even Randall himself used a couple of variations including Randal and Randell. For the sake of uniformity I will use Randall unless the name is part of a quotation.

the New Durham Baptist church as a Freewill congregation in 1780. His itinerant preaching resulted in the founding of additional Freewill Baptist congregations and Randall established a system of quarterly and yearly meetings called the Freewill connexion in an effort to maintain accountability within the movement. Randall spent the remainder of his life (1780-1808) attempting to oversee the spiritual vitality of numerous congregations in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts.

The Freewill Baptist movement is a uniquely American story and the academic community has yet to explore fully the significance of the Freewill Baptist movement to the greater Baptist and evangelical traditions.³ One way to examine the importance of the Freewill movement is to evaluate one of its principal founders, Benjamin Randall. Randall's spiritual odyssey from an unconverted member of the established Congregational church to becoming one of the leading figures in the genesis of a new religious tradition merits investigation. Yet, Randall's designation as the founding father of the Freewill Baptist tradition does not go unchallenged. For example, the Maine Historical Society holds the papers of Ephraim Stinchfield, a contemporary of Randall, and refers to Stinchfield as the "founder of the Freewill Baptists."⁴ Among other

³The Freewill Baptist movement in New England is not to be confused with the General Baptist movement in England. During Randall's life, the Freewill Baptist movement in the colonies had no relationship with the General Baptists in England. Dan Taylor (1738-1816), is considered the great organizer of the General Baptists in England and helped form the New Connection of General Baptists in 1770. On Taylor and the New Connexion, see F. W. Rinaldi, "The Tribe of Dan: The New Connection of General Baptists 1770-1891" (Ph. D. diss., University of Glasgow, 1996). For a confessional statement of the New Connection see the Articles of Religion of the New Connection in William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1959) 342-344. Following the death of Randall, John Buzzell, the heir-apparent to Randall, began corresponding with the General Baptists in England.

⁴Ephraim Stinchfield Collection at the Research Library of the Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

objectives, this project will assess whether Randall initiated the movement or was an early advocate who came to be the leading figure.

Another area in need of investigation is Randall's leadership style. Randall was not content to supervise only the spiritual vitality of his own congregation and he organized a structured meeting schedule in an effort to oversee the spiritual vitality of the other Freewill Baptist congregations throughout New England. Historically Baptists have recognized the priority of local church independence and Randall's hierarchical system of supervision must be assessed in light of eighteenth century Baptist practice.

Another factor that must be addressed is the existence of freewill theology from the beginning of the Baptist story in England. Although the General Baptists did not become the numerically dominant expression of Baptist theology, like Randall, General Baptists believed in unlimited atonement as they emphasized the human response to the gospel. Randall's freewill theology was not an innovation in Baptist life even though it was considered unorthodox by Randall's New England Calvinistic Baptist peers that numerically dominated the colonies. Although historically it has been the minority position in Baptist life, freewill theology and Baptist doctrine are not mutually exclusive. By 1840 there was a virtual transatlantic community of "Arminian" Baptists. There is room in the Baptist narrative for both Calvinistic Baptists and those espousing a freewill theology.⁵

Unfortunately only a limited amount of primary source material pertaining to Randall survives. Randall kept a journal that details much of his life and ministry but

⁵In fact, Baptists in the eighteenth century cannot adequately be divided into two types based solely on their belief in the theology of the atonement; those who believed the resurrection to be beneficial for all people (general atonement) and those who believed the resurrection was only beneficial for the elect (particular atonement). The issue of atonement was but one distinguishing mark and it did not serve as the defining characteristic of eighteenth century colonial Baptists.

only portions of it can be found in the published work of Randall's successor as leader of the Freewill Baptists, John Buzzell (1766-1863). Buzzell's work, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall, principally taken from documents written by himself*,⁶ was printed in 1827, and offers a glimpse of Randall's journal. As the title indicates, Buzzell provided only limited narrative that introduced lengthy passages taken directly from Randall's journal.

At the turn of the twentieth century, another book focusing on the life and ministry of Randall was published. Like Buzzell before him, Frederick Wiley, a Freewill Baptist minister, relied heavily on Randall's journal to compose the narrative of his life story entitled *Life and Influence of Benjamin Randall, Founder of the Free Baptist Denomination*.⁷ Wiley's foreword reports that he had access to both Randall's journal and some of Randall's other works that "if published would make two or three respectable volumes."⁸

In 1804, the Freewill Baptists authorized a reprint of a work by Maritime evangelist, Henry Alline⁹ (1748-1784), *Two Mites, Cast into the Offering of God, for the Benefit of Mankind* (1781).¹⁰ The 1804 edition included amendments made by Randall

⁶John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall, principally taken from documents written by himself* (Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman, & Co., 1827).

⁷Frederick Wiley, *Life and Influence of Benjamin Randall, Founder of the Free Baptist Denomination* (Boston: American Baptist Publication Society, 1915).

⁸Ibid., n.p.

⁹Scholars are indebted to the work of former Queen's University historian George Rawlyk for his tireless efforts in exploring Alline's significance and contribution. See specifically George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).

¹⁰Henry Alline *Two Mites, Cast into the Offering of God, for the Benefit of Mankind* (Halifax, NS: A. Henry, 1781).

of Alline's original work and can be examined and compared with the original 1781 edition in an effort to understand Randall's own theological perspective.

Alline's influence was not only felt through his personal ministry and his theological writings but also through the hymns he wrote. Alline's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* published in 1797 served as the leading guide for Freewill Baptist worship for a number of years until the Freewill Baptists published their own hymn book in 1823. The 1823 hymnal included numerous hymns from Alline's original hymnal and a number composed by Benjamin Randall as well. An examination of Randall's hymns will be necessary in recovering Randall's theology.

Historiographical Considerations

Despite his contribution to the American religious landscape, the academic community has devoted very little attention to the life and ministry of Benjamin Randall. Besides the above mentioned works devoted to Randall's life, other works that focus on the organization and development of the Freewill Baptist denomination devote attention to Randall's life and ministry. Works such as Isaac Stewart's *The History of the Freewill Baptists, for Half a Century*,¹¹ published in 1862 and Damon C. Dodd's *The Freewill Baptist Story*,¹² published in 1956 provide no new insight into the specifics of Randall's life and appear to rely solely on Buzzell's work as the source of information on Randall's life and ministry. Both of these works are denominational histories published by the

¹¹Isaac Stewart, *The History of the Freewill Baptists, for Half a Century* (Dover, NH: Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1862).

¹²Damon C. Dodd, *The Free Will Baptist Story* (Nashville, TN: Executive Department of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, 1956).

Freewill denomination and offer little to no critical examination of Randall or the early days of the Freewill movement.

Eastern Baptist College historian Norman Baxter's *History of the Freewill Baptists*,¹³ published in 1957, advanced the frontier thesis as the primary explanation of the origins of the Freewill Baptists. However, the frontier thesis is inadequate to explain the difference between the Freewill Baptists and the other movements that began during that era, such as the Methodists, the Christian churches, and the Universalists.

Wellesley College historian Stephen A. Marini's dissertation, *New England Folk Religions, 1770-1815: The Sectarian Impulse in Revolutionary Society*, is one of the few academic works that gives Benjamin Randall and the Freewill Baptists serious consideration and evaluation. In Marini's estimation the Freewill Baptists were similar to other Separatist communities of the era as they focused on "fervid piety, ecstatic worship forms, Biblical literalism, the pure church ideal, and charismatic leadership"¹⁴ In his study, Marini focused primarily upon the common region shared by the Freewill Baptists, Shakers, and Universalists in upcountry New England. All three groups remained in many ways consistent with their orthodox contemporaries but were considered extremists for some of their radical departures, including the anti-Calvinistic position of the Freewill Baptists.

In an effort to evaluate the rise of the Freewill Baptist movement the student must first understand the social and religious culture in which Randall lived and worked. The eighteenth century in the American colonies was a tumultuous period as a new nation was

¹³Norman Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists: a study in New England Separatism* (Rochester, NY: American Baptist Historical Society, 1957).

¹⁴Stephen A. Marini, *New England Folk Religions, 1770-1815: The Sectarian Impulse in Revolutionary Society*. (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University Press, 1975), 2.

formed out of conflict with England. Religiously speaking, the eighteenth century was significant because the series of revivals that began in the 1740's continued to have an impact upon the religious consciousness of the people leading up to and following the Revolutionary war.

After establishing the diversity that existed amongst the seventeenth and early eighteenth century colonial Baptists in chapter one, it is necessary to discuss how the Calvinistic Baptists developed into the dominant expression of the movement. Chapter two will describe the changes and developments that occurred following the revivals that led to the dominance of the Calvinistic Baptists. It is also important that the details of Randall's life be redrawn and analyzed. Randall inherited a growing bias against Calvinism and its effects. With others, he established the Freewill denomination by forming congregations throughout New England. Chapter three will present the details of his conversion experience and chapter four will focus on his efforts in preaching revivals, forming congregations, and organizing the burgeoning movement.

The fifth chapter will examine Freewill Baptist theology and its unique polity. Attention will be given to Randall's theology, the cross currents of the Maritime evangelist, Henry Alline, and other New England thinkers. Randall's own innovative scheme for overseeing the spiritual health and well-being of other Freewill congregations also requires assessment.

The sixth chapter of the project will focus on factors that gave permanent shape to the Freewill movement in the first quarter century. The Freewill Baptist movement faced new trials and challenges after the death of one of their leading figures. Randall's influence did not end with his death and is evident for decades as he became a popular

icon of Freewillism. The work will conclude by marking the enduring legacy today of non-Calvinistic Baptists and their place in the Baptist story as well as on the American religious landscape.

The Great Awakening of the 1740's initiated by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and a host of others is often marked as the turning point of the Baptist story in America. Few historians would dispute Brown University historian William G. McLoughlin's assertion that the New Light Separates who eventually adopted the Baptist view of believer's baptism "brought about a revolution in the Baptist denomination."¹⁵ As a result of the formative role of the Great Awakening on the development of the Baptist tradition in colonial America little attention has been devoted to the vast differences in theology that existed within the Baptists community prior to 1740. Historians have focused instead on the dramatic numerical increase in the midst of the eighteenth century revivals that spurred the growth and development of the Baptist tradition.

Forty years after the Whitefield revivals swept the colonies the Freewill Baptist tradition encountered stiff resistance from Calvinistic Baptists who came to numerically dominate the Baptist scene in colonial America only after they enjoyed a dramatic increase in numbers in the midst of and following the Great Awakening. To ignore the theological variety of the Baptist churches that existed prior to the Awakening is to disregard a number of Baptist congregations that should not be forgotten when telling the Baptist story. From their beginnings in America, Baptists have not exhibited one

¹⁵William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833; the Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* 2 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) 1:319.

monolithic Baptist theology, but a variety of Baptist theologies that when examined in full produce a true picture of the Baptist tradition in colonial America.

CHAPTER TWO

The Colonial Baptist Milieu Prior to 1740

Benjamin Randall, the great organizer of the Freewill Baptists in colonial New England, was disowned by his Baptist peers for his failure to accept Calvin's doctrine of election. The doctrine of election was accepted by the established Congregational churches as well by the majority of the eighteenth century Baptists in New England. The eighteenth century Baptists that rejected Randall's theological diversity stand in stark contrast to the colonial Baptists of the seventeenth century that did not exhibit theological homogeneity. This chapter will demonstrate the theological diversity that existed among seventeenth and early eighteenth century Baptists in colonial New England.

In order to understand the development of the Baptist tradition in the colonies one must first recognize the dominant hold on religious matters enjoyed by the Puritans. While the Freewill Baptist movement did not begin in New England until the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the theological foundation that fostered the development of the movement began with the arrival of the first Puritan emigrants from England in 1620. The story of the development of Puritan theology in the colonies, including the covenantal theology that demanded strict moral obedience and the controversial Half-way covenant that redefined church membership, must be understood in order to appreciate the religious landscape in which the Freewill Baptist movement originated.

The Puritans

In many ways, the first Europeans to settle in New England set the tone for the religious ethos of the colonies. In 1620 the Puritan Pilgrims arrived in the New World and established Plymouth Plantation in an effort to complete the reformation that they believed the Church of England had abandoned. The Puritans immigrated to the colonies in an effort to enact and enforce the religious changes and innovations they believed to be in obedience with God's word. The Pilgrims envisioned a commonwealth of saints that lived together under one standard, the Bible. In the words of Harvard Divinity School professor David D. Hall, "all other forms of truth were incomplete or partial next to Scripture. It was the living speech of God."¹

The Puritans believed that they had received a unique calling from God to demonstrate to the world how a colony of believers could live in harmony both with one another and with God. In a sermon preached during the Pilgrims' voyage to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony, future Governor John Winthrop made it clear to his audience that they were now partners with God as he proclaimed, "We are entered into covenant with Him for this work."² The covenant between God and the Pilgrims was established before the first home was built or the first crops planted by the Pilgrims in the New World.³ The covenant between God and the Pilgrims was the same as the one established between God and the Israelites, a conditional covenant based upon the

¹David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 24.

²Ibid.

³The Puritans did not originate in the American colonies but came from England in part to organize a pure church. See Ch. 1 "Ecclesiology and Soteriology" in Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 21-76.

obedience of the community to God and his law. As Perry Miller at Harvard long ago stated, “the covenant between God and man is an agreement of unequals upon just and equal terms.”⁴ As long as the Pilgrims continued to obey God and his commands they would be blessed. If the Pilgrims rejected God and his commands then God’s blessing would be removed.

The conditional covenant coupled with the Puritan doctrine of election resulted in a community that worked to live up to a heavenly calling while at the same time remaining completely dependent upon God to determine the eternal destination of each individual. Miller pointed out the unique dynamic that existed for the colonists, “the federal God, who is exceedingly shrewd, perfected the adroit device of incorporating the Covenant of Works in the Covenant of Grace, not as the condition of salvation but as the rule of righteousness.”⁵

The Puritans had a calling that they had to live up to and yet their efforts did not guarantee blessing or salvation beyond the earthly existence. This dichotomy resulted in a society of hopeful doubters who yearned to live lives that pleased God and yet remained aware that despite their obedient actions their eternal destiny was firmly in the grip of God. It was a complex situation summed up nicely by Yale historian Edmund S. Morgan: “Though God’s decrees were immutable and no man whom He had predestined to salvation could fail to attain it, the surest earthly sign of a saint was his uncertainty; and the surest sign of a damned soul was security.”⁶

⁴Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 376.

⁵Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 384.

⁶Edmund Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1963), 70.

God's involvement was not limited to ecclesial matters and God's law was to be obeyed in all realms of life. In colonial New England church and state were not separate spheres that precluded involvement in the other but were entities that coexisted under the divine leadership and direction of God. Individuals that questioned the prevailing opinion concerning the role of civil government in spiritual matters soon discovered the consequences of expressing an opinion at odds with the established order.

Roger Williams

A classic example of how the Puritans treated an individual with differing views on theological matters is Roger Williams.⁷ On February 5, 1631, Williams (1604?-1683), accompanied by his wife, arrived in New England eager and excited about participating in the innovative spiritual experiment that was the colonies. Williams had hoped to find a community of saints able to live and worship free of the control and supervision of the Church of England. Williams' expectation of discovering a pure church was unrealized as he quickly assessed the church in the colonies to be just as corrupt as the Church of England which he sailed to the colonies to escape.

Williams lived for a time in Salem, Plymouth, and Boston and in each settlement was unimpressed with the piety of the local congregations. Williams was also outraged that some colonists would return to England and willingly worship in the Church of England that they had separated from. Williams believed complete separation from the Church of England was necessary for the congregations in the colonies but his was the minority opinion. The majority of the colonial Puritans believed the best way to reform

⁷For a recent excellent biography of Roger Williams see Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999).

the church was from within as they hoped the Church of England back home would be inspired to further reformation when they observed the spiritual purity of the new churches in the colonies. Williams enjoyed no such optimism regarding the reform of the Church of England and believed strongly that the best way to reform the church was to sever all ties with the national church that he considered to be corrupt.

Williams urged the congregation in Salem to separate themselves from the congregations in Boston and Plymouth and this proved to be the final straw for the civil leaders of the Massachusetts Bay colony. Williams was formally brought to trial for his subversive actions and teachings and was formally banned from the colony on October 9, 1635. Williams was given six weeks to remove himself from Massachusetts before the authorities would enforce the punishment and in the beginning of 1636 Williams found himself living among the Narragansett Indians southwest of Boston.

The treatment of Williams by the Massachusetts Bay leadership exhibited the abuse of power that Williams spoke out against as the civil courts imposed a verdict on a spiritual matter. Williams left England because of the corruption of the Church of England and discovered a different but in his opinion still corrupt church alive and well in New England. We will return to Williams' life and ministry when looking at the development of the Baptist tradition in the colonies.

While outspoken dissenters caused problems for the Puritans, these were at least easy problems to solve as the courts consistently punished and fined those who expressed divergent theological opinions. A more complicated problem developed as existing members of the Puritan community and their descendants chose not to express divergent

theological opinions but in essence refused to express any theological conviction whatsoever.

Some children of the colonists refused to accept the covenant from their physical and spiritual forefathers. These individuals did not exhibit a life of purity but remained full members of the church as a result of being baptized into the church as infants. This situation proved to be a complicated matter for the New England clergy who wanted to maintain the purity of their congregations. The ingenious solution that avoided the heretical extremes of antinomianism and believer's baptism was the "Half-way Covenant" that was ratified in September 1662.

This unique compromise allowed the children of those individuals who were baptized as infants to receive baptism. The baptized children would then be considered half-way members and could attain full membership after publicly accepting the covenant. This decision continued to provide the clergy with control over church membership as they refused to serve the Lord's Supper to half-way members and only offered it to those who had publicly accepted the covenant and as a result received full membership status. In the estimation of University of Iowa professor Mark A. Peterson, the adoption of the Half-way Covenant was "part of a larger, general approach to both the sacraments and preaching designed to encourage a greater commitment to godliness and to attract a wider audience within New England society."⁸

The continuing production of offspring was bound to create a problem for a culture that placed great spiritual expectations on each successive generation. Inevitably, some children who had been baptized would choose not to embrace the covenant

⁸Mark A. Peterson, "The Plymouth Church and the Evolution of Puritan Religious Culture," *New England Quarterly* 66:4 (Dec 1993): 581.

themselves and yet later in life would want their own children to be baptized in the church as they themselves had been. Edmund Morgan, in his thorough study of Puritan church identity in New England, disagreed with the notion that the Half-way covenant exemplified the decline of Puritan piety. “The halfway covenant, I would maintain then, was neither a sign of decline in piety nor a betrayal of the standards of the founding fathers, but an honest attempt to rescue the concept of a church of visible saints from the tangle of problems created in time by human reproduction.”⁹ The great emphasis placed upon personal spiritual experience that resulted in part from the Half-way measures served as the spiritual foundation for the revivals that occurred in the colonies throughout the eighteenth century.

The Half-way Covenant did not introduce the idea of emphasizing experiential conversion to Puritan New England. As early as 1648 the Cambridge Platform that was adopted by a synod of Puritan clergy emphasized the importance of individuals relating their personal spiritual experience to the congregation. The document states, “a personall & publick confession & declaring of Gods manner of working upon the soul, is both lawfull, expedient, & useful.”¹⁰ However, the belief in the doctrine of election excluded Puritans from making a move toward God and the Puritans remained steadfastly dependent upon God to extend grace to them. Ironically, as professor Morgan pointed out, “membership required an experience that was beyond the power of man to attain by his own efforts.”¹¹

⁹Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 137.

¹⁰Williston Walker, ed., *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 223.

¹¹Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 93.

The fact that the half-way measures failed to spur on the multitudes to aspire to full membership within the church resulted in a church at the turn of the eighteenth century that looked much like the church in the middle of the seventeenth century, a mixture of saints and sinners alike. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Edwin Gaustad has contended, “Congregationalism became more like the world in which it lived, less like a pure fellowship of saints called out from society.”¹²

Colonial Baptist Diversity

The story of Baptists prior to the revivals of the 1740's can be told by focusing on the Baptist story in four New England towns; Providence and Newport, Rhode Island, and Swansea and Boston, Massachusetts. The story of Baptists in colonial America begins with Roger Williams and Dr. John Clarke. Both Williams and Clarke immigrated to the colonies from England and adopted the Baptist position on believer's baptism sometime after arriving in New England. Williams was banned from Massachusetts as a result of his controversial beliefs and Clarke willingly moved to Rhode Island to avoid the intervention of government in religious matters.

Williams' banishment from Massachusetts begins the saga of the Baptists in colonial America. The founding of the first Baptist church in colonial America did not happen immediately following Williams' banishment from Massachusetts Bay but only after a handful of like-minded individuals moved to Providence to join Williams. This small collection of believers organized the first Baptist church in colonial America in 1639. The fact that Baptists were born in colonial America out of separation from

¹²Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 15.

another church is not surprising and proved to be the pattern for the origin of Baptist churches in the years following Williams' departure from Massachusetts. The first Baptist congregation in America was formed as a result of their rejection of the intrusion of civil governments on spiritual matters as well as the belief that baptism was reserved only for believers.

Williams himself did not remain a member of the Baptist congregation in Providence long as he questioned the legitimacy of his baptism in light of his belief in the importance of apostolic succession. Williams spent the rest of his life seeking an ideal community of faith that he would never find. The Baptists Williams left behind in Providence continued in the Baptist tradition without their founder. The Baptist congregation at Providence existed for a time as a "mixed" congregation composed of those who believed in general atonement for all (General Baptists) and those who believed atonement was made only for the elect (Particular Baptists). Their willingness to worship together despite their theological differences regarding atonement suggests that their differences paled in comparison to their resolve concerning the importance of believer's baptism.¹³

A theological dispute eventually arose in Providence that the Baptist congregation could not resolve, resulting in the organization of another Baptist congregation in Providence. The dispute centered on the practice of the laying on of hands. The question hinged on whether or not the practice of the laying on of hands was a requirement for church membership. The practice was based on Hebrews 6:1-2, which some Baptists

¹³Isaac Backus, *A History of New England. With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* 2nd Ed. David Weston 2 Vols (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871) II: 285-287.

understood to communicate the necessity of both baptism and the laying on of hands. Those that believed in the necessity of the laying of hands were known as “Six Principle” Baptists as they subscribed to all six principles of practice as described in Hebrews 6:1-2.¹⁴ One of the first Baptist historians in the colonies, Isaac Backus, preserved a letter written in 1730 to the Pastor of the Baptist church in Providence, James Brown. The letter includes a hint of information regarding the initial separation of the first Baptist church in America.

And as I have been informed, by one or more of the ancient members of our church at Providence, that such was the opinion of the Baptists, in the first constitution of their churches throughout the colony; and that such as were under laying on of hands continued their fellowship with those that were not, until one who was in great repute for wisdom amongst them did, in his teaching, declare, that the doctrine of laying on of hands was a doctrine of devils, upon which a separation was made.¹⁵

The teacher who refuted the practice of the laying on of hands was Thomas Olney. Olney was not persuasive enough to lead the church to reject the practice and his turned out to be the minority opinion within the congregation. The congregation maintained their current practice and Olney led a group of supporters to form a second Baptist congregation in Providence that rejected the practice of laying on of hands for church membership in 1652.

Theological diversity was present in Newport, Rhode Island, as well. Like the congregation at Providence, the Baptist congregation in Newport was formed largely as a result of the leadership efforts of one man, Dr. John Clarke, whom Baptist scholar William Brackney calls, “the pre-eminent pastor-theologian in early American Baptist

¹⁴The Six Principles that governed the theology and practice of the church include repentance, faith, baptism, the laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment.

¹⁵Letter from Joseph Jencks to James Brown, March 19, 1730 as cited in Backus, *A History of New England*, II: 22-23.

life.”¹⁶ Unlike Williams, Clarke remained with the congregation he formed at Newport in 1644 serving as pastor until his death in 1676. His service to the congregation was interrupted by his travel to England from 1652-1664 in which he successfully worked to secure the charter for the colony.

Prior to his journey to England to secure the charter for Rhode Island, Clarke, like Williams before him, experienced both persecution and public embarrassment at the hands of the Massachusetts civil government. In 1651 Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and John Crandall traveled to Lynn, Massachusetts in an attempt to minister to an aging Baptist. Upon their arrival in Lynn, the Newport Baptists were arrested and imprisoned for their religious beliefs. Obadiah Holmes refused to allow anyone to pay his fine on his behalf and as a result was subject to an extended prison sentence and physical punishment. The incident was included in Clarke’s *Ill Newes from New-England*¹⁷ in which Clarke protested the harassment religious dissidents received at the hand of the Massachusetts Puritans.¹⁸

As was the Baptist congregation at Providence, the Baptist congregation at Newport was originally a “mixed” congregation composed of both General and Particular Baptists. Their theological differences concerning the atonement did not keep them from worshipping together in the same congregation. Early in Baptist life in the colonies one

¹⁶William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 203.

¹⁷John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England, or, A Narrative of New-Englands Persecution wherin Is Declared That While Old England Is Becoming New, New-England is Become Old* (London: Henry Hills, 1652). 47-64.

¹⁸For a full account of the trial and persecution of Clarke, Holmes, and Crandall, see Edwin S. Gaustad, Ed. *Baptist Piety: The Last Will & Testimony of Obadiah Holmes*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

can conclude that the issue that united these diverse Baptists, believer's baptism, was more important than the difference of opinion in regard to the effects of the atonement.

The Baptist congregation at Newport also followed in the footsteps of its sister congregation in Providence as it endured a conflict within the church over the practice of the laying on of hands. Unlike at Providence however, at Newport the majority of the church members were Particular Baptists and as a result the General Baptists who advocated the practice of laying on of hands separated and formed a second Baptist congregation at Newport in 1656.¹⁹ William Vaughn led the dissenting faction and served the Six Principle congregation until his death in 1677.

The Baptists in Newport were not finished with controversy following the separation prompted by the debate of the Six Principles in 1656. Less than ten years later, Stephen Mumford, a Seventh-Day Baptist from Bell Lane Sabbatarian Church in London arrived in Newport in 1665.²⁰ Seventh-Day Baptist historian Don Sanford pointed out that Mumford maintained dual membership in Bell Lane Seventh Day Baptist Church in London and Tewkesbury Baptist Church in Gloucestershire. Sanford suggested that dual membership was not uncommon for Sabbatarians as he stated, "Many of the early Sabbathkeepers in England did maintain membership in other churches for a number of years."²¹ Mumford was able to convince a small handful of Newport Baptists

¹⁹In the early eighteenth century the pastor, John Comer, attempted to make the laying on of hands a requirement for church membership but the Newport church rejected Comer's suggestion and Comer subsequently left the church. See John Comer, *The Diary of John Comer* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1893)

²⁰See Raymond D. Irwin, "A Study in Schism: Sabbatarian Baptists in England and America, 1665-1672," *American Baptist Quarterly* 13 (Sept 1994): 237-248, in which Irwin suggests that Mumford was an early missionary of the Sabbatarian movement.

²¹Don A. Sanford, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992) 95.

of the necessity of observing the Sabbath on Saturday. As with the Six Principle controversy initially there was little discussion in the Newport church regarding whether Saturday or Sunday was the true Lord's Day as the two groups existed together in one body.²² The issue could no longer be ignored when a number of families who had become convinced of the necessity of Seventh Day worship changed their minds and returned to the Sunday worship gathering. The Seventh Day advocates were originally comfortable maintaining their relationship with those who were less enlightened and continued to meet on Sundays for worship. However, after the small band of converts to Saturday Sabbath defected back to the Sunday morning group, the Seventh Day minority corresponded with Mumford's previous church, Bell Lane in London, asking for advice. The elders at Bell Lane affirmed the frustration and rejection experienced by the Sabbatarians in Newport stating, "there are no wounds like those we receive in the house of our friends, nor anything like the strong opposition of brethren."²³

Another letter from London to the Newport Sabbatarians did not only offer sympathy but rather encouraged the Newport Sabbatarians to separate themselves from the established church. In a letter dated March 6, 1670, Edward Stennett instructed the Newport Sabbatarians, "you ought then to withdraw yourselves, and not be partakers of other men's sins, but keep yourselves pure, but with all humility, meakness and

²²Edwin S. Gaustad, Ed. *Baptist Piety: The Last Will & Testimony of Obadiah Holmes*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978,) 51-55.

²³Bell Lane Church to Newport Sabbatarians, March 26, 1668, "Extracts," ed. Ray G. Huling, *Magazine of New England History* 1 (1891): 197-198, as cited in Raymond D. Irwin, "A Study in Schism: Sabbatarian Baptists in England and America, 1665-1672," *American Baptist Quarterly* 13 (Sept 1994): 242.

brokenness of heart.”²⁴ The Newport Sabbatarians did not immediately heed Stennett’s advice and continued to hope and work for a resolution. However, the tension between the leadership of the Sabbatarians and the Baptists in Newport continued to grow and following a tense confrontation between Obadiah Holmes of the First-day Baptists and William Hiscox of the Newport Sabbatarians a separation was inevitable. On December 7, 1671, five Newport Sabbatarians separated themselves from the Baptist congregation in Newport and formed the first Seventh-Day Baptist church in the colonies.

While ultimately a separation did occur, the decision was not reached until six years after Mumford arrived in Newport with his Sabbatarian doctrine. For six years the two groups existed together as one congregation but in the end a separate and distinct Seventh-Day Baptist church was formed. The official separation did not forever end the civil relations between the two congregations. After Pastor Richard Dingley left the Baptist congregation at Newport for South Carolina in 1694 the church went without a pastor for several years. In 1711 church elder William Peckham was installed as the pastor. Prior to Peckham’s elevation into the ministry in order to meet the needs of the congregation the church membership voted to place themselves for a time “under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. William Hiscox of the 7th day Church.”²⁵ Originally those advocating Seventh-day worship were content to worship with First-day Baptists and then forty years later the roles were reversed as those advocating First-day worship were willing to join with a Seventh-day Baptist congregation.

²⁴Edward Stennett to Newport Sabbatarians, March 6, 1670, “Extracts,” ed. Huling, *Magazine of New England History* 2 (1891): 172-3, as cited in Raymond D. Irwin, “A Study in Schism: Sabbatarian Baptists in England and America, 1665-1672, *American Baptist Quarterly* 13 (Sept 1994): 244.

²⁵Newport Historical Society Vault A, Box 50, Folder 5 as cited in Edwin S. Gaustad, Ed. *Baptist Piety: The Last Will & Testimony of Obadiah Holmes*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 106.

Theological openness was also apparent in the Baptist congregation at Swansea, Massachusetts. The story of the Baptist congregation at Swansea is unique in that it began not in the colonies, but in Wales. The 1662 Act of Uniformity that enforced the use of the Book of Common Prayer placed a heavy burden on all theological dissenters in England. John Myles, pastor of a Baptist congregation in Swansea, Wales, led a group from his congregation to the colonies in hopes of finding the religious freedom that no longer existed in England.

The congregation officially came together under Myles' leadership in Swansea, Massachusetts in 1663. The Isaac Backus Papers at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, include Backus' copy of the original church covenant of the Baptist congregation at Swansea. It is clear from the covenant that the church from its beginnings practiced open communion with all people they considered to be Christians. The covenant stated,

a union in Christ is the sole ground of our communion each with other, so we are ready to accept and receive and hold church communion with all such as by a judgment of charity we conceive to be fellow members with us in our Head Christ Jesus, although differing from us in such controversial points as are not absolutely and essentially necessary to salvation.²⁶

It is clear from their beginning as a congregation that the Baptists at Swansea were open to worshipping with other Christians who differed with them on the necessity of believer's baptism. The covenant indicates that the theology of every outsider would be examined in an effort to determine if they were also of the Christian faith. The Baptist congregation at Swansea expressed a theological openness that few other colonial

²⁶*The holy covenant of the first founders of the church of Swanzezy, entered into at their first beginning, and all the members for diverse years.* The covenant can be found in the Isaac Backus Collection at the Franklin Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts (Hereinafter cited as Backus Collection, ANTS).

churches exhibited as they allowed non-members who could demonstrate their Christian faith to partake of the Lord's Supper.

This demonstration of theological openness at Swansea was similar to the theological diversity evident in the Baptist congregations at Providence and Newport. While it is true that separate congregations were eventually formed in both localities, the fact that the Baptist congregations were composed of those who advocated both general atonement and limited atonement as well as those who rejected the laying on of hands and those that advocated its necessity for church membership cannot be overlooked. The same diversity is evident from the origins of the Baptist congregation at Swansea. It must be pointed out however, that the idea of open communion did not extend beyond Baptists and Congregationalists. As William Brackney points out, "He [Myles] was hostile to the same groups of religious heretics as the Congregationalists."²⁷ For Myles and the Baptists he led at Swansea the manner of baptism did not determine whether or not an individual was a Christian. Though they practiced baptism differently both Baptists and Congregationalists were part of the Christian family. Myles served as pastor of the congregation at Swansea until his death in 1683. For nineteen years the theological openness to all Christians modeled by Myles proved to be the pattern adopted by the Baptists at Swansea.

Swansea was not immune from the theological diversity that had occurred in Providence and Newport and after the death of Myles a second Baptist church was formed in 1693. This congregation advocated the necessity of the laying on of hands for

²⁷William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 208.

membership into the church and did not sing in worship.²⁸ This second Baptist congregation at Swansea was similar to the variety of Baptist congregations that developed at both Providence and Newport and it supported the “Six-Principle” practice of the necessity of laying on of hands for church membership. The fact that they did not sing in worship may mark this incident as the first Baptist church split in the colonies based at least in part upon worship style and not solely on theological practice.

King Philip’s War between the colonists and the Native Americans disrupted life in Swansea and the church disbanded from November 1676 to February 1678. This disruption enabled John Myles to serve as the acting pastor of the Baptist congregation at Boston that had formed in 1665. The story of Baptist belief in Boston began in 1655 as Thomas Gould and his wife refused to bring their child for baptism. Gould publicly protested the practice of infant baptism and eventually began holding private meetings in his home that led to the formation of the Baptist congregation in 1665. The church began with nine individuals some of whom were members of Baptist congregations in England and had recently arrived in Massachusetts.²⁹

Baptists in Boston faced a more difficult climate compared to the Baptists in Swansea, Providence, and Newport. Boston was the heart of the Puritan dominated Massachusetts Bay colony and as a result the Baptist congregation at Boston faced the most intense persecution from the Puritan establishment. As a result of their religious conviction regarding believer’s baptism the Baptists at Boston were not afraid to speak their minds and tell the civil government their theological position. In a confession they

²⁸Backus, *History of New England*, 2:434.

²⁹Nathan E. Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston (1665-1899)* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 29.

presented to the Massachusetts courts the Baptists declared their ability and right as a congregation to act free from any intervention on behalf of the government. The 1665 confession includes the following:

And this Church hath power to receive into their fellowship vissible believers & if any prove scandelouse obstenate & wicked to put forth such from amoungst them when the Church is mett to gather they may all propesie one by one that all may learne & all may be Comforted.³⁰

The Baptists stated their God-given authority as a congregation to welcome members into the fold as well as discipline them if necessary. The excerpt is also telling for its emphasis on each individual participating in the service by prophesying in order to instruct and comfort one another. The participation of the entire body was probably a necessity as none of the original members were ordained ministers.

This spiritual individualism demonstrated by the Baptists at Boston was a major threat to the Puritan establishment that considered itself to be the theological clearinghouse for all congregations and all ministers. As McLoughlin stated, “At least to the Puritans it seemed individualistic, anarchic, antinomian. In reality it was merely a different form of communitarianism. What the Baptists argued for was spiritual community within each church and between churches rather than in terms of the spiritual community of a Bible Commonwealth, for the latter, they said, led inevitably to the establishment of a national church.”³¹

As a result of their dissident beliefs the Baptists at Boston were subject to severe scrutiny and persecution. To avoid garnering any unwanted attention Gould convened many meetings at his home on Noddle Island in Boston Harbor. Nathan Wood, former

³⁰Ibid., 66.

³¹William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833; the Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* 2 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) 1:60.

pastor and historian of the First Baptist Church of Boston, observed that Noddle Island served literally as a safe haven for Baptists to conduct their services. “Every Lord’s Day, members from Boston, Charlestown, and Woburn might be seen rowing across the harbor to the chosen meeting-place, where they might remain unmolested during a quiet hour of devotion and worship.”³² The Baptists could not avoid detection for long and Thomas Gould and others were fined and imprisoned on a number of occasions. Also, after the Baptists erected their first church building in 1679 the government immediately banned them from using the building for worship contrary to the established Puritan method.

The Baptist congregation at Boston was not composed only of those who lived in Boston but also included citizens from numerous other towns including Woburn and Charlestown. As the leading city of the colony, Boston served as an ideal meeting place for Baptists from throughout Massachusetts. Even if the distance prevented some members from participating in the weekly worship service, people from all over the colony still joined the congregation at Boston as a demonstration of their belief in the Baptist position and their solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the congregation. The first leader of the Baptist congregation at Boston, Thomas Gould, died in 1675 and by that time the congregation had already spread its influence well beyond the Boston city limits. As Nathan Wood concluded, “they had entrenched themselves in numerous towns, & the leaven had penetrated every part of the commonwealth.”³³ Evidence of the spreading influence of the Baptist congregation at Boston is the number of new churches throughout the region that it supported or founded. As a number of citizens from the

³²Wood, 96.

³³Ibid., 123.

same town became members of the Boston congregation they would eventually begin a new congregation. This process occurred in a number of towns including Springfield, Sutton, and most famously Kittery, Maine, which at the time was part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.³⁴

The Baptists at Boston continued to flourish after the death of Gould and eventually asked John Myles of Swansea to serve as acting pastor. Myles had led the Baptist congregation in Swansea since its inception in 1662 and the church at Swansea had consistently demonstrated a theological openness to Congregationalists. Myles' ministry to the congregation at Boston was significant as he influenced them in regard to open communion and provided mature ministerial leadership following the death of their founder and leader, Thomas Gould.

Evidence of the lasting influence of Myles' theological openness can be seen at the ordination of Elisha Callender to the pastoral office of the Baptist congregation at Boston in 1718. The ordination sermon was not preached by a Baptist pastor from another congregation but by one of the leading Puritan ministers of the day, Cotton Mather. This action was significant as it granted the Baptist congregation legitimacy in the eyes of the Puritan establishment. Whereas, for years the Baptists were subject to punishments, fines, and imprisonments, at the ordination of Elisha Callender one of the

³⁴The Baptist congregation at Kittery was led by William Screven who was baptized into the Baptist congregation at Boston in 1681. A year later the Boston congregation affirmed Screven's gift for the ministry and he constituted a new congregation at Kittery, Maine in 1682. After enduring severe persecution and harassment, Screven led the congregation to move to Charleston, South Carolina in 1684. At Charleston the church led by Screven proved to be instrumental in furthering the Baptist cause in the South. See Robert A. Baker, *The First Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1966).

leaders of the Puritan establishment not only recognized his ministry but preached an irenic ordination sermon entitled, “Brethren Dwelling Together in Unity.”³⁵

Before arriving at the portion of the sermon focused on the installation of the new minister, Mather opened the work by justifying his participation in the service. After focusing on the action of the Holy Spirit and the person of Christ, Mather summed up his willingness to participate by stating, “In short: They whom Christ Receives ought therefore to Receive one another.”³⁶ The Baptists had come a long way in terms of respectability in Boston as one of the leading Congregational ministers affirmed the existence and ministry of the Baptist congregation and urged their new pastor to follow the “Maxims of Piety.”

Following the death of pastor Elisha Callender in 1738 the Baptist congregation at Boston again invited the Congregational clergy to participate in the ordination of their next pastor, Jeremiah Condy from London. The ordination sermon for Condy was not preached by a Congregationalist but by John Callender, the nephew of Elisha Callender, and the pastor of the Five Principle Baptist congregation at Newport.³⁷ However, not all of the Baptist congregations in the colonies agreed with the decision to invite the Congregationalists to participate in the ordination service. The Baptist congregation at Swansea under the leadership of Elder Samuel Maxwell wrote to the Boston congregation in order to express their disapproval of including the Congregationalists. After listing

³⁵Cotton Mather, *Brethren Dwelling Together in Unity. The True Basis for an Union Among the People of God, Offered and Asserted; In a Sermon Preached at the Ordination of a Pastor, in the Church of the Baptists. At Boston in New England on 21 May, 1718*, (Boston, MA: S. Gerrish in Corn-Hill, 1718).

³⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷The Five Principle Baptist congregation was the First Baptist Church of Newport, Rhode Island, that was founded by John Clarke.

their reasons for condemning the decision they urged the Boston Baptists to reconsider allowing a Congregationalist to oversee the ordination. “Therefore we pray you to take it into serious consideration, before you proceed; for if you proceed in that way, it will be matter of grief to us, and we believe to the whole church, and particularly to our brothers and sisters at Providence.”³⁸ The letter includes no insight into the relationship between the Baptist congregations outside of the fraternal relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ. It is clear however, from the tone of the letter that the Swansea congregation wanted to make sure that the Boston congregation was aware that both the Swansea congregation and the Providence congregation did not approve of their decision to invite the Congregational ministers to participate in the installation of the new pastor of a Baptist congregation. Apparently John Myles’ theological openness continued in the Baptist congregation at Boston but effectively had ended in the Baptist congregation at Swansea.

This brief survey of the Baptist congregations in Providence and Newport Rhode Island, and Swansea and Boston, Massachusetts provides a good picture of the challenges that were present from the onset of the Baptist presence in the colonies. These were not the only Baptist congregations that existed prior to the revivals initiated by Edwards and Whitefield; Isaac Backus’ vast chronicle of the growth and development of the Baptist tradition in the colonies mentions the formation of Baptist congregations throughout New

³⁸Letter to the Baptist Church of Christ in Boston from the Baptist Church of Christ in Swanzeay dated February 8, 1738/9, cited in Backus 2:33.

England.³⁹ The Baptist developments in these four cities, however, are representative of the milieu in which the Baptist tradition originated and developed in the colonies.

Summary

That Baptists were a persecuted minority as a whole cannot be argued. Baptists in Rhode Island did enjoy considerably more religious freedom than did their Massachusetts brothers and sisters; however, their religious beliefs are what forced them to move to Rhode Island in the first place. In order to enjoy religious freedom they had to leave the established Massachusetts Bay colony and establish a colony of their own. Those Baptists who lived in Massachusetts endured years of persecution including physical beatings, financial penalties, and imprisonment as a result of their divergent beliefs. Individuals such as Roger Williams, Obadiah Holmes, and Thomas Gould were willing to take the punishment of the civil government as a result of staying true to their religious convictions.

Their willingness to endure the punishment meted out by the Puritan rulers demonstrated a passionate commitment to their Baptist beliefs. Baptists of both colonies were consistently faced with the opportunity to turn their back on their religious beliefs in order to avoid banishment, public humiliation, or imprisonment and while some may have succumbed to the pressure, the majority of the colonial Baptists stood up to the establishment in order to stay true to their convictions. The ever present threat of persecution did not stop the Baptists in Rhode Island or Massachusetts from practicing and defending their religious beliefs.

³⁹In his vast narrative Backus mentions the formation of Baptist congregations in New London, and Wallingford, CT; Smithfield, RI; Middleborough, Dartmouth, Sutton, Springfield, Chilmark, and Newbury, MA; all prior to 1740.

The final conclusion of this investigation of colonial Baptists prior to the Great Awakening is the clear demonstration of theological diversity evident in the Baptist community. The Baptist congregations in Rhode Island were composed of those with differing viewpoints on atonement and on the practice of the laying on of hands. The Newport congregation even included those who advocated the necessity of a Seventh-day Sabbath. These diverse theological opinions existed originally in the same congregations as the differences were considered secondary to what they held in common; believer's baptism and the exclusion of the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The congregations at Swansea and Boston exhibited an open communion policy with the Congregationalists that culminated in Cotton Mather's inclusion in the ordination service of Boston Baptist pastor Elisha Callender in 1718. The liberal spirit did not last in Swansea however, as the Baptist congregation expressed its displeasure the next time the Boston Baptists invited the Congregationalists to assist them in ordaining their new minister.

Prior to the revivals initiated by Edwards and Whitefield, colonial Baptists exhibited no theological unity outside of the acceptance of believer's baptism and the independent autonomy of each congregation. By the end of the eighteenth century however, a Calvinistic majority developed amongst Baptists in New England. Before proceeding to the discussion of Benjamin Randall and the Freewill Baptist movement that emerged in the late eighteenth century, we must first explore how the Calvinistic Baptists came to dominate the face of the Baptist tradition in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE

Towards a Community of Baptists 1740-1780

Baptists in Colonial New England may have been a diverse lot prior to the revivals of the 1740's; however, their divergent theological views were not welcomed as the Congregationalist Standing Order did not tolerate many theological deviations. Christianity was to be practiced in the orthodox way, namely in worship services in the parish church under the leadership of the parish minister.¹ The Puritans demonstrated their reliance on Calvin's doctrine of election as they believed an individual's eternal destiny was determined by God alone. The Puritans understood salvation to be God's decision but colonial men and women lived lives of purity as if their eternal destiny was based upon their behavior while hoping to discover themselves to be among God's elect at the end of their lives. The religious and cultural dominance enjoyed by the Congregational churches in the seventeenth century did not last long in the eighteenth century as it was disrupted largely by the efforts of two men, a parish minister from Northampton, Massachusetts and a visiting Anglican priest from England. The revival experience of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, and the vast popularity of the revivals led by the barnstorming George Whitefield forever altered the religious landscape in North America. Both of these individuals laid a foundation upon which Benjamin Randall's own life and ministry would be heavily dependent. Both individuals endorsed

¹For an assessment of Puritan spirituality see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe's, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). For a treatment on the practice of religion by the Puritans see David D. Hall, *World of Wonders, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1989).

the revival methods that Randall himself would use to establish the Freewill Baptist tradition. Edwards and Whitefield were also significant as their ministries had a large impact on the rise of the Separate-Baptists that took their Puritan heritage, including their belief in the doctrine of election, into the Baptist ranks.

Jonathan Edwards¹ (1703-1758), pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts, enjoyed a three-year period (1733-1735) in which many of his Northampton parishioners experienced a spiritual awakening. Under the leadership of Edwards the congregation enjoyed numerous conversions and it did not take long for the neighboring communities to hear about the heightened spirituality of the Northampton parishioners. Urged by ministerial co-laborers to communicate the truth of the revival experience in Northampton, Edwards eventually published a memoir of the event so that others would be informed about what really happened during the revival.²

Edwards remained set apart from his ministerial colleagues as a result of the spiritual stirrings that occurred under his leadership in Northampton. Edwards' influence throughout New England grew in part as a result of his published narrative regarding the awakenings that occurred in Northampton. Edwards became the leading voice for the spiritual revivals that began to occur throughout the region and his prestige as the presiding minister over a great spiritual renewal provided him with the credibility that

¹Jonathan Edwards' life and ministry has garnered significant scholarly attention. For years Puritan scholar Perry Miller's *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: NY: W. Sloane & Associates, 1949) has been viewed as the standard critical biography. For a more recent thorough examination see George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Yale University has republished all of Edwards' work see Jonathan Edwards *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* ed. Perry Miller, 23 vols, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957). Many scholars view Edwards as the progenitor of the evangelical tradition in the United States, see the collection of essays in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition* ed. D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2003).

²Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Word of God in the Conversion of many hundreds souls in Northampton, Massachusetts, A.D. 1735*, (Boston, MA: n.p., 1738).

was needed to question and challenge the established spiritual norms concerning baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church membership. The revivals that occurred under Edwards's leadership and the dissemination of his theological writings that explained and supported the events in Northampton placed Edwards in the leading role defending the legitimacy of revivals that focused not on the covenant between God and the community but on the relationship between God and individual persons.³

One of Edwards' greatest contributions was his defense of human emotions in matters of religion. Many opponents of the revivals dismissed the spiritual validity of the events because of the innovative style and emotional appeal that was common throughout the revivals. Edwards spent much of his career writing in defense of the legitimacy of the revivals and the innovative styles and techniques that accompanied them.⁴

Edwards remained influential primarily through his writings while another man provided visible leadership of the revival experience throughout the colonies of New England. George Whitefield (1717 -1774), an English cleric, began his ministry in England where he had introduced and achieved success with itinerant and open-air preaching. Whitefield was educated at Oxford where he became acquainted with Charles and John Wesley and adopted the "methods" they used for deepening their piety. Even as their careers took them in different directions, the relationship they established at Oxford continued throughout the rest of their lives. As his popularity and fame grew in England,

³In his article "Jonathan Edwards and the Origins of Experimental Calvinism," D.G. Hart suggests that Edwards' emphasis on personal conversion may have inadvertently undermined the Calvinism that he so vigorously defended. See D. G. Hart, "Jonathan Edwards and the Origins of Experimental Calvinism," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition* ed. D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2003), 161-180.

⁴See Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, (Boston: Kneeland and Green, 1746).

Whitefield set his eyes on the colonies across the Atlantic. Whitefield originally visited the colonies hoping to raise money to support an orphanage in Georgia but Whitefield became famous for his innovative revival meetings in which he challenged individuals to be born again.

Unlike Edwards who was concerned with explaining and defending the revival in light of the orthodox tradition, Whitefield did not concern himself with offending the religious establishment and focused solely on presenting the message of the gospel. Whitefield did not focus his attention solely on the members of the established church but “reached all levels of American society from slaves to governors, convicting all and persuading many to accept the New Birth.”⁵ Whitefield’s fame exploded throughout the colonies as much for his method as for his message. A Whitefield revival was more of an event than a worship service as Whitefield used presentation skills more often associated with the stage than the pulpit to communicate the gospel to the masses.⁶ His sermon delivery was filled with emotional appeals and extemporaneous outbursts urging the audience to consider their eternal destination. Whitefield did not emphasize the importance of orthodox theology or right doctrine but did use his innovative methods to appeal to the emotions of his audience. As Harry Stout at Yale commented, “In the end the revivals were simply not about theology but about experience.”⁷

⁵Harry S. Stout, “George Whitefield in Three Countries,” 58-72 in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, eds. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 61.

⁶For an excellent contribution to Whitefield studies focusing on his methods and his cultural significance see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

⁷*Ibid.*, 206.

Prior to his second preaching tour through the colonies Whitefield published his journal from his first expedition which included his observations concerning the spirituality of clergy and common-folk alike. One journal entry in particular caught the attention of all citizens, “Many, nay most that preach, I fear do not experimentally know Christ.”⁸ The publication of such a blatant attack on the spiritual vitality of the majority of the clergy Whitefield encountered on his first tour prompted a debate regarding the nature of salvation and acceptable spirituality. How did an individual demonstrate that he or she “experimentally” knew Christ? The clergy faced a growing challenge as they were prone to condemn Whitefield’s radical techniques while the majority of the citizens appeared to embrace his innovations with open-arms. Clergy that opposed his methods were accused of being spiritually dead and were labeled as ministers that did not “experimentally” know Christ. Whitefield’s dramatic message of conversion coupled with the publication of his concerns regarding the spirituality of the clergy throughout the colonies equaled a sudden increase in questions and controversies regarding the definition of salvation. These questions came to the fore as a result of Whitefield’s travels and the questions themselves continued to linger in New England even after Whitefield’s death. Questions regarding the nature of church membership and the definition of salvation provided many revival advocates, such as Benjamin Randall, the opportunity to challenge the spiritual status quo and begin new congregations.

Whitefield’s controversial techniques and his criticism of the New England Congregationalist clergy may have prompted the theological discussion that dominated

⁸George Whitefield, *George Whitefield, A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, From a few Days after his Return to Georgia To his arrival at Falmouth, on the 11th of March 1741. Containing An Account of the Work of God at Georgia, Rhode Island, New-England, New-York, Pennsylvania and South Carolina. The Seventh Journal*, (London, n.p., 1741), 54-55.

mid-eighteenth century New England but he was not solely responsible for the theological quagmire that impacted the entire region. As Stephen Foster, Professor Emeritus at Northern Illinois University, suggested, “Friend or foe of Whitefield, the New England clergy had done his advance work.”⁹ Questions about church membership and salvation existed in New England prior to Whitefield’s arrival in the region and as a result of the theological developments the people were prepared to receive Whitefield’s ministry. Alan Heimert at Harvard some years ago commented, “The American mind was profoundly prepared for the day of his coming, and he served only as the catalyst of a spiritual and social ferment that had been brewing for more than a decade.”¹⁰ Individuals like Jonathan Edwards who had serious questions regarding the standard practice of baptism and the established definition of church membership, found in Whitefield an individual who described the Christian life in unconventional terms and was willing to challenge the spiritual status quo that in the estimation of Edwards and others did not accurately communicate the truth of Christianity. The existing theological speculation served as kindling and Whitefield’s innovative ministry and scathing critique of the New England clergy provided the spark that became a wildfire of theological affirmations, allegations, and exhortations.

The Revivals Bring Controversy

Whitefield’s success and the response of the people to Whitefield’s innovative style prompted imitators that tried to duplicate his success. Whitefield’s first tour of the

⁹Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 296.

¹⁰Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 34.

colonies lasted only one month but the imitators that followed as well as Whitefield's periodic trips to the colonies allowed the impact of his visit to linger for decades.

Devotees of Whitefield that continued the work forced the New England clergy to choose sides in the growing debate centered on determining the legitimacy of the new preaching methods and the controversial tactic of challenging the salvation of other clergy.

The religious establishment of Puritan New England was forever altered as a dividing line concerning the revivals was established. It is no surprise that some of the harshest critics of Whitefield's innovative methods and those employed by his followers were the established clergy in New England. Some ministers admired Whitefield's success and appreciated the infusion of spiritual intensity his meetings brought to a community. Other ministers however, remained unimpressed with Whitefield's success and responded by questioning the legitimacy of his innovative methods. The pro-revivalist faction became known as "New Lights" and those that opposed the new preaching techniques and developments became known as "Old Lights."¹¹

One major point of contention was the idea suggested by Whitefield and one of his notable followers, Gilbert Tennent, that some of the New England clergy were actually unconverted and as a result incapable of leading a congregation towards spiritual development and maturity. Whitefield published his doubts regarding the salvation of some clergymen in his journal following his first revival tour and Tennent also published a pamphlet focused on the controversial subject.¹² Tennent (1703-1764), a Presbyterian minister who was urged by Whitefield to continue the revival work in New England,

¹¹See Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 61-79.

¹²Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry Considered in a Sermon on Mark VI: 34*, (Philadelphia, PA: Benjamin Franklin, 1740).

attacked the controversial subject head on in his pamphlet *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*. Tennent's pamphlet did not use allegory or metaphor concerning the possible dangers of an unconverted ministry but provided a clear course of action for a person who determined that they were sitting under the ministry of an "unconverted" minister. Tennent warned those who determined their parish minister to be unconverted that they were in danger of sin if they remained under the spiritual leadership of a spiritually dead minister. Tennent was aware that he was challenging the established parish church system but believed Christians should seek out effective ministers. He wrote,

it is both lawful and expedient to go from them (ungodly ministers) to hear Godly Persons; yea, it's so far from being sinful to do this, that one who lives under a pious Minister of lesser Gifts, after having honestly endeavour'd to get Benefit by his Ministry, and yet gets little or none, but doth find real Benefit and more Benefit elsewhere; I say, he may lawfully go,...¹³

For Tennent the established law restricting parishioners to their local parishes did not take into account the spirituality of the minister. If the minister did not exhibit spiritual vitality then the parishioners should be able to seek the spiritual tutelage of another. The established law compelled individuals to attend only their local parish church and did not grant them freedom to move about in order to assuage their personal opinions. To bind a person to a certain minister against his or her will was in Tennent eyes, "a cruel Oppression of tender Consciences, a compelling of Men to Sin."¹⁴

Questioning the salvation of a parish minister resulted in two developments that marked a shift in the religious practice of New England. Lay persons began leaving their parish congregations in an effort to establish a church of converted, pious individuals and

¹³Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁴Ibid., 21.

itinerant ministers took it upon themselves to make up for those parish ministers who continued to minister despite the fact that they remained “unconverted.” Both of these controversial developments were major threats to the established religious order of New England as choice and preference regarding the minister and his style entered the mind of the laity.

A notable opponent of the new revival methods and the spiritual finger-pointing that often accompanied it was Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), the influential pastor of First Church, Boston. As minister of one of the leading Congregational churches in New England from 1727 until his death in 1787 Chauncy played a leading role in the revival debate for more than fifty years. His opposition to the controversial techniques associated with the revivals is clearly elucidated in his pamphlet, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* in 1743.¹⁵

Chauncy did not rule out that God was at work in some of the revivals that occurred in the region but he did oppose ministers that used provocative actions and allegations in an effort to evoke an emotional response from the audience. Chauncy did not hesitate to show his contempt for Whitefield whom he held responsible for the religious upheaval that resulted following his first tour of the colonies. In an ordination sermon preached prior to Whitefield’s second visit to New England, Chauncy labeled Whitefield as the disruptive force that agitated the religious establishment.

Suffer me, Sir, to beseech you, and my Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry, here present, will not take it amiss, if I beseech them also, to mark this Man who has caused Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and to avoid him. Turn your view, my Brethren, into all Corners of the Land: Behold the Confusion in Towns; the Contention in Churches; the Alienations and Separations of

¹⁵Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the Nature of Religion in New England*, (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743).

People from one another, and from their Ministers: Behold the Heat of Men's Spirits; the Wildness of their Imaginations; the Errors of their Judgment; the Disorders of their Practice...¹⁶

Chauncy held Whitefield responsible for the influx of changes that occurred following Whitefield's first preaching tour and urged the ministers in attendance at the ordination service to not allow Whitefield entrance into their pulpits during his second tour of New England. Chauncy did not support the innovative methods introduced during the revivals and he opposed providing the disruptive Whitefield a second opportunity to stir up controversy in the churches of New England.

While Edwards, Chauncy, and other New England clergy debated the merits of emotions in matters of religion and the innovative techniques employed by Whitefield and others, the majority of common folk were not interested in the debate and simply responded to the message delivered by Whitefield and the other revivalists. As a result of the revivals some entered the church for the first time while others who were already part of a congregation began to question the spiritual validity of both their fellow parishioners and ministers alike.

The decades following the initial waves of revival initiated by Edwards and Whitefield would see a new development within the Congregational church as individuals decided to separate themselves from the established church in an effort to begin new churches that exhibited a spirituality that gave evidence to their converted state. These "separating" congregations completely altered the religious landscape in colonial New England. The spiritual vitality and authority of the established parish

¹⁶Charles Chauncy, *Ministers exhorted and encouraged to take heed to themselves, and to their Doctrine. A Sermon preached the 7th of November, At the Installment of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Frink to the Pastoral Care of the third Church in Plymouth*, (Boston, MA: Rogers & Fowle, 1744), 38.

minister came under intense scrutiny and the laity served as judge and jury in determining the authenticity of a clergyman's faith and the legitimacy of his ministry. Some individuals were not impressed with what they observed and decided they would be better served spiritually if they established new congregations. Not just a few new congregations were formed but many as "open schism was the order of the day."¹⁷

In the appendix to the second edition of *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800*, C.C. Goen, formerly at Wesley Theological Seminary, listed 201 churches in New England that formed as a result on separatist principles.¹⁸ Goen did not contend that his list was exhaustive but suggested that the list served to illustrate the massive number of new congregations that began in direct opposition to the perceived lack of piety and spiritual authority present in the established congregations. Fifty-two of the congregations maintained their identities as Separate Congregational churches while the remaining 149 eventually became Separate-Baptists as their continued search for spiritual purity led them to adopt the practice of believer's baptism.

The revivals of the 1740's effectively ended the dominant hold of the religious and cultural establishment enjoyed by the Congregational church in New England. Since arriving in the colonies the Puritans had persecuted and legislated against dissenters in an attempt to maintain a monopoly on the established religion of New England and the veritable frenzy of theological questions brought on by the revivals basically ended the Puritan's claim as the only true expression of Christianity. The revivals however, were not solely to blame for the end of Puritan dominance in New England. As Foster argues,

¹⁷Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 127.

¹⁸C.C. Goen, *Revivals and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) 300-326.

“the great religious revival of the 1740s, did what it is often represented as doing, fatally rupture the Puritan movement. It must be understood, however, that the victim was subsequently a long time dying.”¹⁹ Theological problems and questions with the Puritan ideal existed from the onset of the “Holy commonwealth.” Developments such as the Saybrook Platform, the Halfway Covenant, and the controversy surrounding the converting nature of the Lord’s Supper as advocated by Solomon Stoddard²⁰ all served as the preliminary attacks that paved the way for the leveling blast that was the eighteenth century revivals.

This wide-spread support for the revivals and the innovative techniques that accompanied them serves as a decisive moment in the religious history of the American colonies and the future United States. Allen Guelzo, professor at Gettysburg College, views the revival period of the eighteenth century as a foundation for the Evangelical movement in the United States. He wrote, “the Awakening remains the formative event of the American evangelical mentality—it gave methods, psychology, and role models and heroes.”²¹ The revival methods and the leaders who introduced and defended them had a lasting impact on America’s religious tradition because of the great success of the revivals in prompting individuals to evaluate their spiritual condition. If the methods of

¹⁹Foster, 290.

²⁰The grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, preceeded his grandson as pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts. Stoddard believed the Lord’s Supper to be a converting ordinance that should be offered to all pious individuals regardless of their church membership. For a look at Stoddard’s understanding of the conversion process see, Michael Schuldiner, “Solomon Stoddard and the Process of Conversion,” *Early American Literature* 17 (Winter 1982-83): 215-226. For a treatment of Stoddard’s lasting impact on religion in New England see, Paul R. Lucas, “‘The Death of the Prophet Lamented’: The Legacy of Solomon Stoddard,” pps. 69-84 in *Jonathan Edwards's Writings :Text, Context, Interpretation*, Ed. Stephen J. Stein, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996)

²¹Allen C. Guelzo, “God’s Designs: The Literature of the Colonial Revivals of Religion, 1735-1760,” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D.G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 160.

the revivals were only innovative and failed to offer tangible results no future generation would have been interested in reproducing the new styles. The fact that the charismatic preaching and emotional appeal of the revival preachers was so effective encouraged future religious leaders, including Benjamin Randall, to embrace and continue the innovative methods in the hope of experiencing similar success as they called individuals to examine and evaluate their spiritual condition.

Baptists in New England were unable to ignore the spiritual revitalization prompted by Whitefield's revival tours. For the most part, the theologically diverse Baptist congregations that existed prior to the revivals were not supportive of the revivals and the innovations that were associated with them. The revivals did eventually add significant numerical growth to the Baptist tradition but the majority of those conversions did not occur in Baptist churches that existed prior to the onset of the revivals. The dynamic growth enjoyed by the Baptists as a result of and following the revivals was largely through the development of new congregations, often as a result of the decision of a congregation to separate from the established order and adopt Baptist beliefs en masse. Therefore Baptist congregations represented both sides of the revival argument as the majority of the pre-existent Baptist congregations were "Old Lights" who did not condone the new methods and the Baptist congregations that formed as a result of the revivals were "New Lights," who supported, approved, and employed the new techniques.

The First Baptist Church of Boston serves as a clear example of one of the few Baptist congregations that experienced a schism as a result of the revivals. In 1738 the First Baptist Church of Boston called Jeremiah Condy (1709 -1768) to follow Elisha

Callendar (1692 – 1738) as pastor of the congregation. George Whitefield's journey through New England in 1740 included a memorable oration on Boston Common before an estimated crowd of 20,000, but Condy and other leaders of the First Baptist Church in Boston remained unimpressed. The spiritual arousing initiated by the Whitefield revivals had little impact on the Baptist leadership in Boston. Writing over a hundred and fifty years after the event, former Pastor and historian of the First Baptist Church of Boston, Nathan Wood, lamented the opposition to the revivals of the Boston and Newport Baptist congregations stating that their "opposition resulted in the failure of these churches to profit by the great revivals."²² The lack of enthusiasm for Whitefield and his revivals made Condy and the Baptist congregation an "Old Light" congregation. McLoughlin considered Condy to be a clergy ahead of his time as he was "well imbued with the spirit of benevolent do-goodism, pious philanthropy, and sentimental beneficence which more characterized the eighteenth century man of reason and sympathy than the seventeenth century man of faith."²³

In September of 1742 four members of the congregation separated themselves from the congregation citing concerns regarding Pastor Condy's theology. The most significant charge of those separating was that "he (Condy) holds general redemption, is a free-willer, holds to falling from grace, and denies original sin." These accusations were based upon the fact that "He publicly owned at a church meeting, that he never had preached election, and believed he never should; alleging as a reason for it, that if he should preach up election, he should offend the greater part of his church." The letter

²²Nathan E. Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston*, (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 238.

²³William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vol. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1:318.

justifying the separation also argues that the Baptist congregation had moved away from the articles of faith on which the church was originally established.²⁴ The separating group of Baptists accused their former pastor of theological laxity and charged him with deviating from the theological orthodoxy of the founding fathers of the church.

At a meeting on November 12, 1742, Condy notified the church that he had received a letter dated September 29, 1742, from church members James Bound, John Dabney, Thomas Boucher, and John Proctor that criticized Condy's theology. Following Condy's announcement, "the church voted unanimously that this letter should not be read and that no action should be taken."²⁵ The unanimous decision of the congregational meeting indicates that the accusations found in the letter signed by Bound, Dabney, Boucher, and Proctor clearly represented the minority opinion within the congregation. The church did not immediately take disciplinary action against the complaining foursome but the following year, as a result of their consistent critique of Condy and his theology, the congregation decided it was best that the divisive faction be "suspended from communion."²⁶

The group that attacked Condy's theology illustrates the mindset of the parishioners of the revival era as they believed they had the spiritual authority to question the orthodoxy of the established minister of the church. In the opinion of his opponents, Condy's theology was of the Arminian variety which literally scared the complaining

²⁴Letter from James Bound, John Dabney, Thomas Boucher, and John Proctor to First Baptist Church of Boston, September 29, 1742, printed in its entirety in Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 2:421.

²⁵Wood, 241.

²⁶Ibid.

group away from the established Baptist congregation in Boston. Following their banishment from communion the complaining faction formed their own Baptist congregation in 1743 and considered themselves to be the true Baptist congregation in Boston because they retained the Calvinistic theology of the founding members of the church while Condy and the remainder of the Baptist congregation were no longer theologically sound enough to merit the name First Baptist Church of Boston.²⁷ The new congregation needed a minister to provide spiritual leadership but the majority of Baptist churches in the vicinity were in agreement with the First Baptist Church of Boston and did not support the revivals as this separating group did and the new dissenting Baptist faction was forced to seek assistance from Baptist leaders from Groton, Connecticut and Leicester, Massachusetts.²⁸ As Miami University of Ohio professor Carla Pestana noted, the existing Baptist congregations failed to take full advantage of the upheaval caused by Whitefield and his revivals. “Far from benefiting from a crisis in colonial religious life – a crisis that might well have redounded to their benefit – the Baptists fought among themselves as did their congregational neighbors.”²⁹

George Whitefield and his revivals had a large impact on Baptists in eighteenth century colonial New England not through growth in the existing Baptist congregations but primarily as a result of the separations that occurred from the established

²⁷The separating congregation eventually took the name Second Baptist Church and then Warren Avenue Baptist Church. The separating congregation united with the Warren Baptist Association in 1772.

²⁸Pastors Valentine Wightman of Groton, Connecticut, and Thomas Greene of Leicester, Massachusetts, met a contingent from the separating First Baptist Church of Boston in Warwick, Rhode Island, and they ordained Ephraim Bound as the pastor for the separating group of Boston Baptists on July 27, 1843. Ephraim Bound was the son of James Bound who was one of individuals who signed the letter criticizing Condy and his theology, See Backus, *History of Baptists in New England*, 2:422.

²⁹Carla G. Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 172.

Congregational churches. Individuals that formed Separatist congregations questioned the spiritual vitality of the parish minister as well as the validity of the congregational system that resulted in what the Separatists judged to be a spiritually dead tradition. To the Separatist, the Halfway covenant was partly to blame for the existing spiritual lethargy in New England that prompted their defection because it designated individuals as halfway members as a result of their entrance into the church following their baptism as infants. Membership status, even of the halfway variety, was offered to individuals even though they failed to publicly profess a faith of their own. The policy endorsed a lukewarm approach to spiritual matters that involved eternal consequences. The Halfway covenant eliminated the difference between the church and the world as infants were baptized into the church regardless of their parent's ownership of the covenant. As a result of this theological challenge many Separatist individuals and churches began to consider the tenet espoused by the Baptists of believer's baptism which delayed entrance into the church until an individual took hold of the covenant for themselves.³⁰ As Goen pointed out, the Separates' desire for a pure church led them to the Baptist position as, "the only way to guard against the dilution of the churches which had led to such vapidness in the past was to admit by baptism only convinced believers. The logic of the pure church ideal was inescapably on the side of believer's baptism."³¹ The journey was often not instantaneous and usually involved a lengthy process of Bible study and reflection.

³⁰For a discussion on understanding Baptists as a movement, tradition, or denomination see the "Introduction" to William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of Baptists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), xxv-xxxii.

³¹Goen, 210.

The progression from member of the Congregational standing order to Separatist and then to Separatist-Baptist is clearly illustrated in the life of Isaac Backus.³²

The life of Isaac Backus (1742-1806) was forever altered following the initial waves of revival in colonial New England. His diary recounts his conversion experience on August 24, 1741, when “he [God] opened to my Soul the glorious way of Salvation by Christ and gave my Soul to Close therewith.”³³ Five years following his conversion Backus’s spiritual journey led him to join a Separatist congregation and in 1748, despite the fact that he had never been ordained, he was chosen to be the pastor of the Separatist congregation in Titicut, Massachusetts. Backus’s spiritual expedition was not yet complete as he began to investigate the Baptist practice of believer’s baptism. In 1751 Backus accepted the Baptist position on believer’s baptism and led his congregation as an open communion church in an attempt to please both those who supported infant baptism and those who rejected the practice and advocated believer’s baptism. The balancing act was difficult for Backus and eventually he threw his lot with the Baptists and received ordination in the Baptist tradition and became pastor of First Baptist Church in Middleborough, Massachusetts, in 1756.

One of the largest challenges facing eighteenth century Baptists in Massachusetts was the clergy tax.³⁴ All citizens in Massachusetts were taxed in order to support the established clergy within the colony. Baptists were not comfortable contributing to the

³²For a detailed account of Backus’ life and ministry scholars are indebted to William McLoughlin for making Backus’ diary available. See Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, 3 vols., ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979).

³³Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, 1:xvii.

³⁴Since their beginnings in the American colonies Baptists faced penalties and fines for their dissenting religious opinions. The story of the Baptist struggle for religious freedom in Massachusetts is told in detail in William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: 1630-1833: the Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

financial support of ministers they did not agree with theologically. After his acceptance of the Baptist position on believer's baptism, Backus became a leading spokesperson for the Baptist fight for religious liberty as he traveled many miles in an effort to organize the Baptist fight against the clergy tax in Massachusetts. The journey of Isaac Backus from member of the established Congregational church to Separatist and then on to Separate Baptist is but one of literally thousands that occurred throughout New England in the years following the years of revivals led by Edwards and Whitefield.³⁵

While Backus' journey to Separatist and then to Separate Baptist is representative of many individuals who followed a similar path in the wake of the Whitefield revivals, Backus' life and ministry following his ordination as a Baptist minister is far from typical as Backus quickly became a leading figure in Baptist life in New England. He was a prolific writer and worked diligently to end the religious oppression levied by the Massachusetts government on all religious dissenters.³⁶ Part of his work to end the religious oppression included visiting Baptist congregations throughout the colony in order to garner evidence and support for his efforts to end the religious monopoly

³⁵For the definitive work on the development of and organization of the Separate Baptists see C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalism and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962).

³⁶Backus' literary output is impressive. Included in his works are defenses of the Separate Baptist position on a variety of theological topics as well as works arguing for religious liberty and freedom of conscience. For a work representative of his defense of the Separate Baptist position see *A Fish Caught in his own Net. An Examination of Nine Sermons, from Matt. 16.18. Published last year, by Mr. Joseph Fish of Stonington: Wherein He labours to prove that those called Standing Churches in New-England, are built upon the Rock, and upon the same Principles with the first Fathers of this Country; And that Separates and Baptists are joining with the Gates of Hell against them. In Answer to which; Many of his Mistakes are corrected; The Constitution of those Churches opened; the Testimonies of Prophets and Apostles, and also of many of those Fathers are produced, which as plainly condemn his plan, as any Separate or Baptist can do.* (Boston, MA: Edes & Gil, 1768). For a work representative of his appeal for religious freedom see *A Seasonable Plea for Liberty of Conscience, Against some late Oppressive Proceedings; Particularly in the Town of Berwick, In the County of York.* (Boston, MA: Philip Freeman, 1770). These publications and others by Backus can be found in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism; Pamphlets, 1754-1789*, William G. McLoughlin ed., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

enjoyed by the Congregationalists in Massachusetts. The Congregational monopoly equaled unfair treatment including fines and imprisonment for Baptists and other dissenting groups. This was a personal issue for Backus as his own mother was imprisoned for her Separatist opinions in 1752 and Backus' decision to embrace Baptist principles made himself and his congregation targets of Congregational attacks. The task of presenting the Baptists in Massachusetts as a unified voice was difficult because the Baptists did not recognize any authority outside of that of the local church and often did not communicate on a regular basis with other congregations.

Even though they were similar theologically in regard to believer's baptism, a chasm still existed between the Baptist churches that existed prior to the revivals and did not endorse the revivals or the innovative methods that accompanied them and the Separatist-Baptist congregations that came into existence as a direct result of the revivals. The two groups maintained understandable distance from one another as each group rejected the method and style advocated by the other. McLoughlin also suggests that the long-standing Puritan antipathy of Baptists that existed since the founding of the colony had a lingering effect on the relationship between Separate-Baptists and the Pre-Whitefield Baptists that existed prior to the revivals. "Against all of the Baptists the Separates held the ingrained prejudices of the Puritan upbringing."³⁷ Likewise, the Baptists were skeptical of the Separates and the revivals in general as noted by Isaac Backus, who also served as the pioneer historian on Baptists in the colonies of New England, "as the work (the revivals) was begun and carried on almost wholly by Paedobaptists, from which denomination their fathers had suffered much, most of the

³⁷William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Company, 1967), 91.

Baptists were prejudiced against the work, and against the Calvinian doctrine by which it was promoted.”³⁸

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Baptist churches that existed prior to 1740 exhibited no theological harmony, representing diverse views on controversial issues such as general or particular atonement, the laying on of hands for church membership, the practices of open or closed communion, and whether Saturday or Sunday was the true Sabbath. Considering the variety of Baptist congregations that existed prior to 1740, to attempt to draw one monolithic sketch of the Baptist tradition in colonial America is misguided. Following the revivals of the 1740's the Baptist population in New England enjoyed an infusion of converts from the Separate tradition, thereby adding yet another ingredient into the mix of ideas and practices.

The Pre-Whitefield Baptist Churches

Before looking at the end result of the infusion of Separate Baptists into the Baptist fold following the revivals, it is important to first sketch a picture of the Baptist landscape that existed prior to the transition of numerous Separate churches and individuals to the Baptist position. In an effort to describe the Baptist landscape I will offer a typology for understanding the Baptist congregations that existed prior to the revivals, or what I am calling the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches. The Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches were far from homogenous and yet a number of characteristics can be highlighted to draw a sketch of the congregations. The typology offered is based solely on the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches as they existed in the middle of the eighteenth

³⁸Isaac Backus, *History of New England* 2:41.

century prior to the large number of converts from the Separate congregations into the Baptist fold .

The Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches were fiercely independent in terms of polity. In part because they experienced first-hand the dangers of the highly organized Congregational churches that dictated the theology of the region, the Pre-Whitefield Baptists were leery of any kind of organizational activity that could have called into question the authority of the local congregation. While the churches communicated regularly with one another there were no attempts to organize a governing entity to provide leadership and direction for the Baptist churches in New England.³⁹ The churches viewed the local church to be the highest authority and saw no scriptural support for any kind of authoritative entity that could potentially threaten the authority of the local congregation. When James Manning suggested the formation of a Baptist Association in 1767 none of the Pre-Whitefield Baptist congregations sent an official representative to the initial meeting.⁴⁰ Notable in their absence were representatives from the First Baptist congregation in Boston, the Baptist congregations at Swansea, Massachusetts, and the Baptist churches in Newport and Providence, Rhode Island. When the initial meeting for the Warren Association concluded only four churches

³⁹In an enlightening essay, William McLoughlin exhibits the evidence from Backus' journal of the existence of a Six-Principle Calvinistic association. See William G. McLoughlin, "First Calvinistic Baptist Association in New England 1754?-1767," *Church History* 36 (1967): 410-418. While the evidence McLoughlin provides is compelling it is difficult to discern any specific purpose outside of fellowship for the association.

⁴⁰Philip Freeman, a member of the First Baptist Church of Boston attended the meeting but not as an official representative of the church. The church record book indicates no action of the church authorizing Freeman to attend the meeting on behalf of the congregation. See Wood, 257.

agreed to participate in the new organization, each of which could trace their origins as congregation to the Whitefieldian revivals.⁴¹

Despite their fierce independence the Pre-Whitefield Baptist congregations were also interrelated. In late seventeenth and early eighteenth century New England Baptist churches were relatively scarce and did not exist in every town; as a result Baptist colonists joined the Baptist congregation closest to their home. For example, in the late seventeenth century a small number of members of the First Baptist Church of Boston were residents of Newberry,⁴² which is situated thirty five miles north of Boston. When a sufficient number of Newberry citizens had joined the Boston Baptist congregation it was decided at a church meeting “that we the Church at Boston have assented unto the settling of the church at Newberry.”⁴³ A similar incident occurred the following year at Kittery, Maine. When a sufficient number of colonists from Kittery, Maine, and the surrounding area joined the Baptist congregation at Boston they requested to be set apart and recognized as a separate and distinct congregation. After taking into consideration the spiritual maturity of the members requesting their dismissal, the Baptist Church at Boston responded: “having given themselves up to ye lord & too one Another in A Solemn Covenant to walk as said Covenant may Express and alsoe having Chosen there officers whome they with us have Appointed & ordained, we doe therefore in ye name of ye lord Jesus & by the Appointmt of his Church deliver them to be A Church of Christ in

⁴¹Only four Baptist churches joined the Warren Association at its inception in 1767; Warren, Bellingham, Haverhill, and Second Middleborough.

⁴²Present day Newbury, MA.

⁴³First Baptist Church of Boston Church Record as cited in Wood, 178.

ye faith and order of ye Gospel.”⁴⁴ In both Newberry and Kittery, the Boston congregation operated as a clearinghouse for the establishment of new Baptist congregations. This process continued into the eighteenth century with the Boston congregation recognizing the formation of new Baptist churches at Sutton, Brimfield, Springfield, and Haverhill.⁴⁵

A similar pattern can be found when looking at the history of the Baptist congregation at Swansea. Like the Boston congregation, the congregation at Swansea was composed of colonists from throughout the surrounding area. In 1753 a sufficient number of church members from Rehoboth had joined the church and desired to start a congregation in Rehoboth. Otis Wright, the historian of Swansea, Massachusetts, recorded the incident: “In 1753 thirty-three members residing in or near Rehoboth were dismissed at their own request to constitute a church to meet in that town.”⁴⁶ The Rehoboth colonists remained loyal to their membership in Swansea and requested that they be dismissed from their membership in Swansea in order to form the new congregation in Rehoboth. The Swansea congregation granted the request of the Rehoboth members and recognized their former members as a new congregation. The pattern continued as the newly formed Rehoboth congregation eventually recognized the establishment of the Warren Baptist Church in Warren, Rhode Island, composed of its former members in 1764.

⁴⁴Ibid., 179.

⁴⁵The Sutton Baptist congregation was officially recognized in 1735; Brimfield, 1736; Springfield, 1740; Haverhill, 1765.

⁴⁶Otis O. Wright, *History of Swansea Massachusetts 1667-1917* (Swansea, MA: Town of Swansea, 1917), 111.

The interrelated nature of the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches can also be seen as the churches regularly assisted one another in ordaining new ministers. Ordained Baptist clergy were relatively few and when a congregation needed to ordain a new minister, the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches called upon other Baptist congregations to assist them. When the Baptist Church in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, ordained Nathaniel Millard in 1736, they wrote the Baptist Church in Boston to ask if they would participate in the service. After notifying the church of the date they asked, “our desires to you our Brethren is that you would be pleased to assist us here in not only by your prayers to God for us but also by the Company of your Elder and such of the brethren as your may think fit at the time of ordination.”⁴⁷

The following year the Baptist congregation in Leicester extended a similar invitation to the Baptist church in Rehoboth. In a letter dated August 18, 1737, the Baptist church in Leicester asked the Rehoboth congregation for assistance and asked the Rehoboth congregation to spread the word to the Baptist congregation at Newport as well. The letter closed, “pray communicate this letter to Elder Callender & his church at Newport for they are desired to assist in ordination.”⁴⁸ With the assistance of the Rehoboth congregation the Leicester congregation ordained Thomas Green as pastor September 28, 1737.

Along with their fierce independence and their interrelated nature, the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches also exhibited a fraternal openness to Congregationalists. While the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches differed with Congregationalists on the

⁴⁷May 21, 1736 letter from John West for the Baptist Church in Rehoboth to the Baptist Church in Boston. Backus Collection, ANTS.

⁴⁸August 18, 1737 letter from Benjamin Marsh and the Baptist Church in Leicester to Elder & Brethren of the Baptist Church in Rehoboth. Backus Collection, ANTS.

practice of baptism, their theological differences did not preclude them from inviting Congregationalist ministers to fill the pulpit, worshipping with the Congregationalists, or allowing Congregationalists to partake of the Lord's Supper.

In 1764 the First Baptist Church of Boston decided to invite Boston area Congregational ministers to participate in the installation service of Samuel Stillman as pastor.⁴⁹ At the time, Stillman was serving as an assistant to Ephraim Bound at the Second Baptist Church. The decision by the Baptist congregation in Boston to invite the participation of area Congregational ministers was consistent with the installation services for previous pastors Elisha Callender and Jeremiah Condy that included ministers from area Congregational churches as active participants. The installation service of Stillman was notable for the fact that no other Baptist churches were represented at the service, including Rev. Bound from the Second Baptist Church. Stillman's installation service included only clergy from a number of Congregational churches in Boston.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, following the installation service of the Boston Baptist church's previous pastor, Jeremiah Condy in 1739, the Baptist church at Swansea wrote a letter to the Boston congregation stating its disapproval of the decision to invite ministers who had not been properly baptized to participate.⁵⁰ Despite the

⁴⁹The Deacons of First Baptist Boston extended invitations to the Church of Christ in Boston, the Church of Christ in Brattle Street, the Old North Church, and the New North Church to assist in the installation service. For a complete copy of the letter requesting the assistance of these churches see Wood, 248.

⁵⁰February 8, 1739 letter from the Baptist Church of Christ in Swanzeay to the Baptist Church of Christ in Boston. Backus Papers, ANTS. A copy of the letter is also included in Backus, *A History of New England*, II:33. The Swansea congregation's disappointment is clear from the opening of the letter, "But we shall be sorry to hear that you make use of or Improve other ministers of other persuasion in the ordination of him whome you have chosen for that worke; for we Believe it to Be Not agreeable to your own Principles."

rebuke from their sisters and brothers in Swansea, the Boston congregation did not waver in their decision to allow Congregational ministers to participate in the installation service of their new pastor and when the installation of a new pastor occurred twenty five years later the Boston Baptist church extended a similar invitation to the Boston area Congregational clergy to participate in the installation service.

Even before Congregational ministers participated in the installation service of Jeremiah Condy, a number of Boston area Congregational ministers helped fill the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of Boston. After the death of Elisha Callender and prior to the installation of Condy in 1749, the First Baptist Church of Boston sent a letter to area ministers requesting assistance as they looked to find a permanent replacement for Callender. Recipients of the letter included such notable Congregationalists as Benjamin Colman, Increase Mather, and Charles Chauncy.⁵¹

Another example of Boston Baptist church's fraternal relations with Congregationalists was their decision to worship with the New Brick Congregational church at the New Brick facility while the Baptist congregation worked to build a new facility for themselves. From May 1771 to December 1771 the members of the Baptist church in Boston worshipped with the members of the New Brick Congregational church. Dr. Ebenezer Pemberton of New Brick and Dr. Samuel Stillman of the Baptist congregation alternated the preaching responsibilities. In order to keep the money separate the New Brick congregation suggested "the one Congregation to Mark S on their Money: & ye other P, & and to make an equal Division of the loose Money."⁵² The

⁵¹Wood, 228.

⁵²First Baptist Church of Boston Church Record as quoted in Wood, 262.

Baptist congregation agreed to the proposal and for seven months the congregations worshipped together at the New Brick Congregational facility.

Lastly, the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches did not approve of the revivals led by or inspired by George Whitefield. The response of pastor Jeremiah Condy and the First Baptist Church of Boston to Whitefield's innovative method and style that has already been mentioned serves as the clearest example of the rejection of the revivals demonstrated by the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches. Condy rejected both Whitefield's enthusiastic approach to Christianity and the innovative techniques he employed.⁵³ Like their Boston brethren, the Baptist congregations in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Swansea and Rehoboth, Massachusetts, also rejected Whitefield and his enthusiastic presentation of the gospel.

Following the revival ministry of George Whitefield and his subsequent imitators, the Baptist landscape was forever altered in the New England colonies. Whether the Pre-Whitefield Baptists agreed theologically or in worship practice or style with the Separate Baptists was really a non-issue as the massive number of converts made the Separate Baptists the new face of the Baptist tradition in New England.

⁵³As noted above, not every member of the First Baptist Church of Boston agreed with Condy's complete rejection of Whitefield and his revivals. Along with the individuals who drafted a letter of complaint to Condy and the church, a handful of other individuals in Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches also supported Whitefield and his revivals. Elder Ebenezer Moulton, pastor of a Baptist congregation at South Brimfield, baptized Ephraim Bound who was the first pastor of the second Baptist Church in Boston (later called the Warren Avenue Baptist Church). Bound's ordination was officiated by Thomas Green, the pastor at Leicester. Invitations to assist in Green's ordination were extended to the Baptist churches in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island. When reporting on the Baptist response to Whitefield and his revivals, Backus reported that the small number of Baptist congregations embracing the revivals included the Baptist congregations at Boston, Leicester, and Brimfield. See Backus, *A History of New England*, 2:41. Moulton, who fled Massachusetts in debt, later became the pioneer Baptist in Canada where he established a congregation at Horton Landing (now Wolfville), Nova Scotia in 1763. See William H. Brackney, "The Planter Motif among Baptists from New England to Nova Scotia, 1760-1850" pps. 283-302 in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, eds., William H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

While the vast number of converts from the Separates who retained the Calvinism of their Congregational heritage certainly played a role in making Calvinism the dominant theology among eighteenth century colonial Baptists, mass conversions from the Separate movement were not the only reason Calvinism became the prevailing theological expression among the colonial Baptists in New England. The unifying work of Isaac Backus, the founding of the Warren Baptist Association, and the development of the Rhode Island College all played a role in determining Calvinism to be the widely accepted theological position among colonial Baptists in New England.

Isaac Backus

Through his efforts to gather information in regard to the religious oppression and abuse against Baptists propagated by the Massachusetts Congregationalists, Backus traveled widely and became a prominent figure among Baptists of all varieties in colonial Massachusetts. Backus hoped to present the Baptists as a unified voice that could protest their ill treatment more effectively as a collective body than on an individual case by case basis. As Walter Shurden at Mercer has pointed out however, “the theological diversity among Baptists also created an obstruction in the path of interchurch relationships.”⁵⁴ As a result of the theological diversity of the Baptist congregations Backus faced a difficult challenge as he hoped to urge the theologically diverse Baptist population to set aside their theological differences in an attempt to present a unified appeal on behalf of all the Baptists in Massachusetts to the Massachusetts courts.

⁵⁴Walter B. Shurden, “The Baptist Association in Colonial America, 1707-1814,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13 (Winter 1986): 118.

From their beginnings in the colonies Baptists separated from one another over issues such as the necessity of laying on of hands for church membership and regarding the legitimacy of the revival methods employed by Whitefield and his imitators.

Following his own conversion into the Baptist tradition Backus took on the unenviable task of trying to unify the diverse Baptist population against the oppression of the Massachusetts courts. Backus journeyed throughout New England visiting Baptist churches in an effort to gather evidence against the Massachusetts civil authorities and was well aware of the diversity that existed within the Baptist tradition in New England.

Along with the existing theological diversity prevalent in eighteenth century New England another challenge facing Backus' unification efforts was the Baptist principle of local church independence. Baptists of all varieties, including the Pre-Whitefield Baptists that existed prior to the revivals of the 1740's, and the new Baptists that came into the fold following their separation from the Congregational church, operated as individual congregations free from the influence or control of any other entity. As a result of their standing bias regarding any external ecclesiastical authority many Baptists were initially hesitant to participate in Backus' effort to present a unified picture of Baptists in Massachusetts. Backus was not easily dissuaded, however, and he continued to meet with a variety of Baptists in an attempt to convince them of the necessity and importance of presenting a unified Baptist story to the Massachusetts courts.

Backus' persistent effort with one group in particular illustrates his desire to bridge the chasm that existed between the theologically diverse eighteenth century Baptists in New England. Backus' journal reports five different meetings from October 1763 to February 1767 in which Backus met with representatives of members of a

number of Six-Principle Baptist churches in the hopes of convincing them that their belief in the necessity of the laying on of hands did not exclude them from joining with differing Baptists in presenting their stories of oppression to the authorities.⁵⁵

McLoughlin reports that “principally through Isaac Backus’ efforts, one after another of these churches gradually came to take the more common view of the Separate-Baptists that the laying on of hands was an optional rite, a nonessential.”⁵⁶ As a result of their decision to understand the laying on of hands as an optional rite that did not prohibit them joining with Five Principle Baptists, churches of the Six Principle association were freed to align themselves with five-principle Baptist congregations in an effort to lobby for religious liberty for the Baptists.

While Backus hoped to present the Baptists in Massachusetts as a unified voice he did not envision the development of any kind of administrative body that would serve as an authoritative entity above that of the local congregations. He wanted to speak on behalf of Baptists as a representative and not as a supervising authority. Backus himself was initially cool to the idea of an association of Baptist churches when it was first proposed by James Manning in 1767. At the time Manning was both pastor of Warren Baptist Church in Warren, Rhode Island, and President of Rhode Island College. The founding of the Warren Baptist congregation coincided with Manning’s arrival in Rhode Island. A large majority of the founding members of the Warren Baptist congregation had previously been members of the Baptist church at Swansea, Massachusetts, who decided to begin their own congregation in Warren.

⁵⁵See William G. McLoughlin, “First Calvinistic Baptist Association in New England 1754?-1767,” *Church History* 36 (1967): 410-418.

⁵⁶McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 1:503

The Origins of the Warren Baptist Association

The formation of the Warren Baptist Association and Rhode Island College was a result in large part to the influence and efforts of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. As a representative of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Manning first traveled to Newport, Rhode Island in 1763 to confer with local Baptist leaders and Rhode Island authorities in hopes of founding a college. Rhode Island officials granted the charter in 1764 and Manning opened the college in Warren, Rhode Island, as the first Professor and first President in 1766.⁵⁷

Also in 1766, Manning asked his church's permission to initiate the formation of an association of Baptist churches. The congregation agreed to Manning's proposal and Manning invited the Philadelphia Baptist Association to send representatives to the initial meeting so that they could share their first hand experience regarding the benefits of an Association of Baptist churches. At their annual meeting in 1766 the Philadelphia Association authorized John Gano, Samuel Jones, and Morgan Edwards to represent the Philadelphia Association at the inaugural meeting of the Warren Association in the Fall of 1767.⁵⁸ At the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Association in 1766, the Philadelphia Association also recognized the importance of maintaining communication with their Baptist brothers throughout the colonies as they moved to maintain "yearly

⁵⁷A more thorough treatment of the founding of Rhode Island College will be offered later in this chapter.

⁵⁸A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1707-1807*, (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851; reprint, Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2002) 97.

intercourse between the Associations to the east and west of us be, by letters and messengers.”⁵⁹

The initial interest meeting of Warren Baptist Association occurred September 8, 1767, in Warren, Rhode Island, and representatives from eleven Baptist churches participated. Manning envisioned the new association to be a model of the Philadelphia Baptist Association which formed in 1707. Theologically the Philadelphia Association was unapologetically Calvinistic, though of several varieties. The Philadelphia Baptist Association had adopted the London Confession of 1689 as their Confession of Faith and the Association wanted to make their beliefs known to the public; thereby they commissioned Benjamin Franklin to publish their adopted confession in 1742.⁶⁰ At the Warren Association’s annual meeting in 1769, the organization officially adopted a “Plan of the Association” that demonstrates the theological similarity between the Warren Baptist Association and the Philadelphia Baptist Association. The Warren Plan stated that “The faith and order of this Association are expressed in a confession put forth by upwards of a hundred congregations in Great Britain, in the year 1689, and adopted by the Association of Philadelphia in 1742.”⁶¹ The association also agreed to establish and sustain a relationship with the Philadelphia Baptist Association authorizing representatives to attend the meeting of the Philadelphia Association as well as inviting

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰For a copy of the Second London Confession that served as the basis for the Confession of the Philadelphia Association see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969) 241-295. A copy of the title page and the two additional chapters added by the Philadelphia Association can be found on pps, 350-351.

⁶¹The early documents of the Warren Baptists Association include “Sentiments Touching an Association,” and “Plan of the Association.” The above quote is from the “Plan of the Association,” and can be found in Reuben A. Guild, *Early History of Brown University, Including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning, 1756-1791* (Providence, RI: Snow and Farnham, 1897; reprint, New York, NY: Arno Press, 1980), 77.

representatives from Philadelphia to attend the meetings of the Warren Association. The initial interest meeting in Warren, Rhode Island, concluded with the formation of the Warren Association as an undoubtedly Calvinistic Baptist association.

The presence of the Baptist leaders at the meeting did not guarantee their support for the organization as only four of the eleven churches represented agreed to form an association of Baptist churches at the close of the meeting. Isaac Backus attended the gathering and was elected to serve as clerk of the meeting but failed to be convinced concerning the necessity of an Association of Baptist churches as he returned to his Baptist congregation in Middleborough without giving his consent to join the new organization. Backus' journal entry following the meeting illustrates his lack of support for the new association, "I did not see my way clear to join now, if ever I do."⁶² Following the initial meeting of the Warren Association Backus wrote a letter to James Manning inviting him to come to Middleborough in order to explain the concept of the Association to Backus' congregation.⁶³ Three years later however, any initial hesitation Backus had about the existence of the Warren Association intruding into the affairs of a local congregation had been alleviated and Backus' Middleborough Baptist Church joined the Warren Association in 1770.

In 1769 the Warren Association formed a Grievance Committee that was charged with the responsibility of petitioning the legislature for religious liberty and the alleviation of the church tax. In light of Backus' previous experience of gathering information on religious persecution, Backus quickly became a leading member of the

⁶²Tuesday, September 8, 1767 *The Diary of Isaac Backus* 3 vol., ed. William G. McLoughlin, (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979) 2:671

⁶³Letter from Isaac Backus to James Manning, Sept. 19, 1768. Backus Collection, ANTS.

committee after his church joined the association in 1770. The relationship between Backus and the Warren Association was mutually beneficial as Backus represented the Baptists in discussions with the government over religious oppression and the Warren Association provided Backus with an organization that added weight and substance to his petition. As McLoughlin stated, “he at last possessed the resources he needed to crusade for the downfall of this (religious persecution) system.”⁶⁴ In the assessment of Shurden, “the organization of the Warren Association was the most important step toward achieving religious freedom in New England.” The organization of the association in general and the Grievance Committee in particular gave Baptists a united voice that enabled Backus and others to lead a “frontal attack on the religious establishment.”⁶⁵

The Founding of Rhode Island College

While the formation and the activities of the Warren Association helped Calvinism become the dominant Baptist expression in eighteenth century colonial New England the founding of Rhode Island College also played a significant role in shaping the theological direction of eighteenth century colonial Baptists. The relationship between the Warren Association in Rhode Island and the Calvinistic Baptists of the Philadelphia Baptist Association again played a role in determining the theological character of the Baptist college designed for preparing ministers for careers of service in Baptist churches. The idea for the Baptist college that eventually began in Rhode Island was developed outside of New England and as with the formation of the Warren

⁶⁴McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition*, 111.

⁶⁵Walter B. Shurden, *Associationalism Among Baptists in America: 1707-1814* (New York: Arno Press, 1980) 210-211, originally presented as the author’s thesis (TH.D) at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967.

Association, the Philadelphia Baptist Association was instrumental in the founding of the Baptist college in Rhode Island. The first sentence of Brown University historian Reuben Guild's *Early History of Brown University, Including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning, 1756-1791*, affirmed the vital role the Philadelphia Baptist Association played in founding the Baptist college in Rhode Island. "Brown University owes its origin to a desire on the part of members of the Philadelphia Association, to secure for the Baptist churches an educated ministry, without the restrictions of denominational influence or sectarian tests."⁶⁶

The minutes of the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1764 indicate that the Association encouraged wide-spread support for a Baptist College in Rhode Island even prior to its actual existence. "Inasmuch as a charter is obtained in Rhode Island government, toward erecting a Baptist College, the churches should be liberal in contributing towards carrying the same into execution."⁶⁷ James Manning a former participant in the Philadelphia Baptist Association and at the time the pastor of the Baptist congregation at Warren, Rhode Island, was the leading figure in the early days of the college. It is impossible to mention the formation of Rhode Island College without referring to the activities of James Manning. As institutional historian Guild stated, "The story of his (Manning's) life is the history of the college."⁶⁸

Manning's educational training included stops at Reverend Isaac Eaton's Hopewell Academy and the College of New Jersey where he completed his studies in

⁶⁶Guild, 7.

⁶⁷*Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 91.

⁶⁸Guild, 22.

1758.⁶⁹ The Philadelphia Baptist Association asked Manning to travel extensively throughout the colonies in order to garner support for a Baptist college. His travels took him often to Rhode Island and he established a good relationship with a group of Baptists who lived in Warren, Rhode Island, but maintained their church membership with the Baptist congregation at Swansea. In 1764 the Baptists in Warren decided it was time to begin a congregation of their own and they asked James Manning to serve as their founding pastor. Manning accepted the invitation and in November 1764 the Baptist church at Warren was established.

The following year the trustees of Rhode Island College chose Manning to serve as the founding president of the institution. Manning welcomed his first student, William Rogers, in September and immediately began his duties as both Professor and President.⁷⁰ Manning was not alone in attempting to garner support for the new educational endeavor. Supporters of the college worked quickly to establish a relationship with English Baptist leaders whose influence and enthusiasm for the project helped in raising awareness and needed money for the school. For example, after being elected as a trustee of Brown in 1765, Isaac Backus began to correspond with English Calvinist Baptists such as John Gill, Benjamin Wallin, Samuel Stennett, and John Rippon.⁷¹ In a letter to English Baptist Benjamin Wallin, dated May 18, 1773, Manning thanks Wallin for the collection of books authored by Dr. John Gill that Wallin donated

⁶⁹For a succinct but informative sketch of Manning's life and ministry see Richard A. Seeley, "The Reverend James Manning: First Pastor, First President," *Foundations* 16 (July-Sept 1973): 255-260.

⁷⁰William Rogers was the first student to enroll and from 1765 -1769 twenty eight other students were admitted to Rhode Island College. See *Matriculation Roll of the numbers of students In Rhode Island College, with their time of admission*. James Manning Papers, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island (hereinafter cited as Manning Papers, BU).

⁷¹For a complete list of Manning's correspondents see the Manning Papers, BU.

to the school. Manning considers the works to be “a most valuable Donation.”⁷² Other trustees of the college, including Hezekiah Smith and Morgan Edwards, traveled extensively in an effort to solicit financial support for the college. Smith traveled primarily to the Southern Colonies and Edwards journeyed across the Atlantic to solicit support from influential British Baptists.

As the first Professor and the founding President of the first Baptist college in the colonies, James Manning helped shape the first generation of educated Baptist clergy in New England. Manning served the school as President for the first twenty six years of its existence until his death in 1791. Considering the length of his tenure and the nature of his responsibilities as Professor and President it is hard to argue with the conclusion of Baylor historian William Brackney, who considered Manning to be “the fountainhead of Baptist education in the United States.”⁷³

The relationship between the Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Baptists of New England did not end following the founding of Brown University or the establishment of the Warren Association and continued for many years as the Warren Baptist Association and the Philadelphia Baptist Association joined forces to appeal to the Continental Congress for religious freedom in 1774.⁷⁴

⁷²May 18, 1773 letter from James Manning to Benjamin Wallin. Manning Papers, BU.

⁷³William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 254.

⁷⁴See Robert G. Torbet, *A Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association: 1707-1940* (Philadelphia: PA, Westbrook Publishing Co., 1944) 40-48.

Summary

The forty year span from 1740 to 1780 proved to be significant in determining the theological shape and direction of the Baptists in New England. Prior to the era of revival sparked by Whitefield the Baptist congregations were theologically diverse on many issues including the necessity of the laying on of hands for church membership, the practice of open or closed communion, and whether Saturday or Sunday was the true Sabbath. The Baptist churches also maintained a high level of independence as they rejected any form of ecclesiastical authority outside that of the local congregation.

The eighteenth century revivals made the largest impact on the established Congregational churches as members separated from their parish congregations. The majority of the Baptist churches that existed prior to the revivals were not impressed by the innovations introduced by the revivals and as a result did not participate in or support the revivals. The Baptist tradition felt the impact of the revivals primarily through the spiritual journey of the Separatists as they moved from their established Congregational churches into the Baptist tradition when they adopted the practice of believer's baptism. The large number of converts into the Baptist tradition helped shape the theological picture of the tradition as the revival enthusiasts retained their Calvinistic beliefs.

The massive number of converts into the Baptist tradition may have remained for the most part isolated if not for the organizational efforts of Isaac Backus and the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Isaac Backus' tireless efforts to gather information and unify the variety of Baptist churches into a united voice to combat the religious persecution created a vast network of relationships and communication between Baptists congregations and leaders throughout New England. The Philadelphia Baptist

Association enjoyed the benefits of their organization and believed that the Baptists in New England would benefit as well and their intuition was correct as the Warren Association was formed in 1767. The benefits of the association soon became evident to other Baptists in New England as new associations formed following the leadership of the Philadelphia and Warren Associations.⁷⁵

These associations became in many ways the face of the tradition throughout New England as they represented many Baptist congregations in disputes with the civil government and met to help resolve disputes within Baptist congregations as well. The associations always maintained an advisory role but the recommendation of the associations often came with the approval of or endorsement of influential Baptist pastors in the area.

The final piece of the puzzle that explains the shift from theological diversity in the Baptist tradition towards the appearance of theological homogeneity and the acceptance of the Calvinistic position is the founding of Rhode Island College. The Calvinistic Philadelphia Baptist Association played a leading role in the founding and the early years of the college and they made sure that the school was theologically consistent with their own beliefs. Baptists traveled throughout the colonies and back to England to help raise support and awareness for the new Calvinistic ministerial training school in Rhode Island. If a congregation wanted an educated Baptist minister to serve as pastor there was only one place they could look for help, Rhode Island College. The work of Isaac Backus, the formation of the Warren Baptist Association, and founding of Rhode

⁷⁵The Connecticut Baptist Association was founded in 1772 and the New Hampshire Baptist Association was organized in 1776. The Woodstock Baptist Association composed of churches from Vermont and Eastern New York was established in 1781.

Island College all played a role in determining the face of the Baptist tradition in New England to be decidedly Calvinistic by 1780.

The years 1740-1780 were filled with religious controversy as the revivals experienced by Jonathan Edwards and led by George Whitefield disrupted the practice of Christianity in the colonies. Congregations throughout the colonies were divided as to the legitimacy of the revivals and individuals and congregations alike took sides in the debate. The revivals empowered the laity to examine and at times question the spiritual condition of the established clergy which resulted in the formation of numerous new “separate” congregations. The majority of the Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches rejected Whitefield and his innovative methods but the massive number of individuals who became Baptist following their separation from the established Congregational churches helped shape the theology of the Baptist movement in the colonies. The organizing efforts of Issac Backus, the beginnings of the Warren Baptist Association, and the founding of Rhode Island College all contributed to the fact that the majority of Baptists in New England near the end of the eighteenth century were indeed Calvinistic. The dominance of the Calvinistic Baptists in late eighteenth century New England is not the whole story, however, as the theologically diverse Pre-Whitefield Baptist churches continued to exist and a new Baptist movement was about to begin under the leadership of Benjamin Randall.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Awakening of Benjamin Randall

The Baptist movement in New England experienced a significant shift in the eighteenth century as the theologically diverse tradition took on a more theologically homogenous character as the formation of Baptist associations throughout New England and the founding of Rhode Island College helped give Baptists a decidedly Calvinistic profile. The newly formed associations and Rhode Island College were led by Baptist ministers of the Calvinistic persuasion and in many ways came to represent the Baptist movement in New England. The organizational efforts of the Calvinistic Baptists does not signify that non-Calvinistic Baptist congregations no longer existed in New England after these associations and the college came on the scene. As demonstrated above, Baptists were theologically diverse prior to the wave of revivals that occurred in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and despite the fact that the Calvinistic-minded Baptists organized associations and a college, the Baptist tradition continued to be theologically diverse after the waves of revival began to subside.

Theological diversity within the tradition was not a treasured attribute for eighteenth century New England Baptists who worked tirelessly to gain recognition as a legitimate religious tradition in the eyes of the civil magistrates. If Baptists could have convinced the civil authorities that they retained the core tenets of orthodox Christianity and differed only in the practice of baptism, they would have a far greater chance of gaining official recognition from the civil governments which would exempt from paying

the clergy tax that supported the standing order. The Baptists formed associations and a college that were similar in theological convictions to the established Congregational tradition. Essentially it was not in the best interest of Baptists wanting to be recognized as a legitimate and acceptable expression of Christianity to tout or trumpet the theological diversity that existed among the Baptist churches in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, especially as Arminianism could have been the culprit. In part to demonstrate the orthodoxy of their beliefs the Calvinistic Baptists formed associations and a college that were similar in theological convictions to the established Congregational tradition. The leaders behind the formation of the Warren Baptist Association and Rhode Island College realized that as a result of the theological diversity within the Baptist movement and the strong bias against ecclesiastical authority outside of the local congregation it would be difficult to convince all Baptists to participate in their organizing efforts. Instead of attempting to form any kind of official Baptist organization that represented all congregations within the Baptist tradition in New England, the organizers of the Warren Association and Rhode Island College invited individuals and congregations to join their endeavors with an open invitation extended to any and all Baptists who may have been interested.¹

The existence and success of these new Baptist entities, associations and Rhode Island College, was not dependent upon the support of and approval of all Baptists within the movement. These organizations needed support and approval from just enough Baptist leaders and congregations that would allow them to exist and operate. The

¹As mentioned in the previous chapter, the initial interest meeting of the Warren Baptist Association concluded with only four churches agreeing to be part of the new organization. Some individuals present were concerned that the association would impede or usurp the authority of the local church.

associations and college found more than enough support from the massive number of converts from the Separatists that eventually adopted the practices the Baptist position on believer's baptism. While the origins of the associations and the college were predicated upon support from Baptist congregations, as the association and college commenced and found a semblance of stability, the organizations were then capable of determining for themselves whose support or participation they would permit. It is at precisely this point that the life and ministry of Benjamin Randall intersects with the developing Calvinistic community within the eighteenth century Baptist tradition in New England.

Benjamin Randall conducted his ministry outside of the existing Baptist tradition because his theological opinions were not welcomed in the New England Baptist world that attempted to present itself as the theological half-brother of Congregationalism. Randall's rejection of the Calvinism of the established Congregational church and the Calvinistic Baptists made him an unwanted and unclaimed member of a tradition. Before going into detail on Randall's interaction with the Calvinistic Baptists in New England a detailed examination of Randall's life will be presented.

Details of Randall's early life and childhood are drawn primarily from his own writings. The writings themselves are no longer extant; however they survive in both John Buzzell's biography and the Freewill Baptist publication, *A Religious Magazine* (1811- 1812, 1820 -1822), both of which contained printed excerpts from Randall's own hand.² It is important to note that Randall's writings were published by Buzzell and in A

²John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall principally taken from documents written by himself* (Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman, & Co., 1827). John Buzzell, "A Short History of the Church of Christ, Gathered at New-Durham, N.H. 1780," *A Religious Magazine: Containing a Short History of the Church of Christ, Gathered at NewDurham, N.H. in the year 1780* (Kennebunk, ME) Jan 1811- Oct 1812, Aug 1820 – Sept 1822. In 1993 the Free Will Baptist denomination also reprinted a copy of Randall's journal but it is not a complete copy and primarily reproduced the same portions that are included in

Religious Magazine because of who he was as the leader of the movement. The republished writings are not private journal extracts that reveal intimate matters concerning Randall's private life. The material was published for public consumption and written by Randall to provide details of his early life and conversion for the followers of the movement he helped organize. Randall's status as the founder of Freewill movement resonates with Washington University professor Daniel Shea's statement concerning the communal nature of spiritual autobiography, "As the member of a family, a church, and a body politic, he (the Puritan autobiographer) could never speak simply to hear his echo, nor was he free to consider his autobiographical reflection of himself totally apart from the faces that surrounded it."³ While Shea refers specifically to the Puritan biographer, his assessment applies to Randall as the Puritan ethos was alive and well across eighteenth century New England. Considering his status as one of the founders of the Freewill Baptist movement, Randall's writings needed to reflect the proper humility regarding his conversion and would have been far from an critical assessment of his childhood and life that would have tarnished his reputation as the leader of a new religious movement.

Randall's Childhood and Early Spirituality

On February 7, 1749, Benjamin Randall (1749-1808) was born to Benjamin and Margaret Randall of New Castle, New Hampshire. The elder Benjamin Randall was a sea captain and encouraged his son to go to sea. But, a sailor's career was not as

Buzzell's work, see *The Journal of Benjamin Randall and the First Free Will Baptist Church, New Durham, New Hampshire*, ed., Roy Thomas, (Antioch, TN: Randall House Publications, 1993).

³Daniel B. Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography, ed. William L. Andrews (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988; reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 111.

agreeable to the son as it had been for the father. The son realized he could not live a life at sea but he decided to dedicate his life to helping those who could and he apprenticed with a sail-maker in Portsmouth. He applied the skills he learned as a sail-maker toward working with clothes for individuals and he supported himself and his family as both a sail-maker and a tailor.

Like the majority of eighteenth century colonists in New England, Randall and his parents were members of the Congregational church. In recalling his childhood, Randall recounted that he always took a serious approach to matters of religion, striving to be an upright child so that he might avoid the “deep pit, somewhere under where we live.”⁴ Randall described his own childhood spirituality as “pharisaical” as he tried to get to heaven through good works such as praying and fasting as he attempted to “establish a righteousness of my own.”⁵

From his perspective, Randall’s best effort to live a holy life was compromised by his participation in dances within the community. The established church did not bar participation from the dances but Randall’s own conscience convicted him of his participation in such activities. As a result of his “sin,” Randall was often too afraid to communicate with God through prayer for a few days after participating in one of the public dances. When he finally did muster up the courage to begin communicating with God again he would try to reestablish his relationship with God by praying more often

⁴John Buzzell, “A Short History of the Church of Christ, Gathered at New-Durham, N.H. 1780,” *A Religious Magazine: Containing a Short History of the Church of Christ, Gathered at NewDurham, N.H. in the year 1780*; (Kennebunk, ME) Vol. II, No. 6, Feb 1822: 207. Excerpts of Randall’s writings were reprinted by Buzzell in Vol. 2 of the Freewill publication, *A Religious Magazine*.

⁵Ibid., 208.

“to make up all I had lost.”⁶ This anxiety in regard to being separated from God because of one’s action was a result of the covenant theology of the Puritans. New Englanders were constantly reminded of their special calling they were to live up to. Any actions that were deemed inappropriate threatened one’s status as part of God’s children. Randall’s anxiety in regard to his status with God in his early years can be compared to that of the great Puritan Cotton Mather. In his evaluation of Mather’s spirituality, Charles Hambrick Stowe at Northern Baptist Seminary concluded that “he was capable of entering and persevering in the cycle of humiliation and thanksgiving over the period of a full week.”⁷

In his written reflection of his participation in the public dances, Randall excused his participation in part because no member or minister of his church ever condemned the practice. In fact quite the contrary occurred as “the minister of the place, and all the ministers that I knew, would not only allow of it, but would ever plead for it, under the name of civil recreation.”⁸ Randall’s entry clearly belies his frustration with the church authorities and members that did not forbid, but in contrast encouraged his participation in such trivial matters like a public dance. Randall believed himself to be a walking contradiction as he longed to live a life that honored God and yet continued to participate in public dances that he believed dishonored God. As a result of this duality Randall experienced great torment confessing, “I used to have dreadful apprehensions concerning

⁶Ibid., 209.

⁷Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 285.

⁸Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1822): 208.

the state of my soul.”⁹ The apprehension regarding the eternal state of Randall’s soul illustrates the puritan anxiety that scholars contend was rampant throughout eighteenth century New England as members of the established church tried to live up to the holy calling of their ancestors. In Randall’s own assessment, by participating in the public dances he was tarnishing the visibility of saving grace in his life and as a result was putting his own salvation at risk.

Despite the consistent anxiety Randall experienced throughout his childhood in regard to his spiritual condition, as a youth he did not question the spiritual validity of the established congregational church of which he was a member. His spiritual anxiety illustrated his concern over matters of religion and it should be of no surprise that the young Randall had a firm opinion regarding the spiritual innovations of the “Grand Itinerant,” George Whitefield.

Whitefield’s final revival tour through New England took him to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1770. Upon hearing the news of Whitefield’s arrival in New Hampshire, Randall recalled his frustration and antipathy toward Whitefield’s intrusive and enthusiastic ministry. Randall’s own writing regarding the event is necessary to convey his anger.

In the year 1770, the year that I was twenty-one; the God of heaven, sent, that flaming preacher, George Whitefield, through these states. But, O, how disgusting was the news of his arrival to me. I was much opposed to all traveling preachers, who in those days, by way of derision, were called new-lights,.... And where there was any power in the preaching, I thought it was all delusion, and enthusiasm. And that all such preachers, were turning the world upside down—breaking up churches—frightening the people—And that their earnest and loud preaching, was only designed to make the people cry out, and make a noise—And that they

⁹Ibid., 209.

preached only, because they would not work. And I felt enough of the spirit of persecution, to have had all such preachers whip'd out of town.¹⁰

In the same way that the spiritual anguish of his youth illustrates Randall's Puritan heritage, his initial rejection of Whitefield's innovative ministry marked him clearly as an "old light" who not only rejected the innovations introduced by Whitefield and imitated by others but viewed them as harmful practices that damaged the church. Outrage concerning the practice of itinerant preachers is also evident in Randall's complaint as he understood the itinerant preachers to be a source of divisiveness and conflict for the colonists. Randall's opposition to the idea of itinerancy proves him to be a clear example of an opponent of the revivals as he "drew an explicit link between itinerancy's challenge to the parochial system and its challenge to the entire colonial social order."¹¹ In his writing, Randall recalled that his anger was so great that if given the opportunity he would have been glad to assist in physically removing itinerants from his town.

Randall held the general public's interest in Whitefield responsible for his own attendance at the Whitefield revival stating, "as almost every body turned out to hear him, I went also." Randall was not interested in gaining spiritual benefit or theological insight from Whitefield as he recollected, "I felt resolved, that his preaching should have no effect on me."¹² Initially Randall's prediction remained true as he participated in Whitefield's services on September 24th, 25th, and 28th at Portsmouth and his spiritual condition emerged seemingly unaffected. Only a few days following his departure from

¹⁰Ibid., 210.

¹¹Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 43.

¹²Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (Feb 1822): 211.

Portsmouth, Whitefield fell ill and died in Newbury, Massachusetts, and Randall's prediction of remaining unaffected by Whitefield and his ministry proved to be mistaken.

Randall's Conversion

News of Whitefield's death prompted in Randall a spiritual conflict of epic proportions as he began to compare his own spirituality to that of the famous evangelist that he previously dismissed as fanatical. After the event Randall recorded his thoughts upon hearing the news of Whitefield's death. "The first thought, which passed through my mind, was, Whitefield is now in heaven; and I am on the road to hell. I shall never hear his voice any more. I have despised him—He was a man of God, and I have reviled, and spoke reproachfully of him. He has taught me the way to heaven; and I regarded it not."¹³ This passage from Randall indicates a complete about face concerning Randall's perception of and attitude toward Whitefield and his ministry. The news of Whitefield's death prompted a shift in Randall as he moved from an ardent opponent of Whitefield and his innovative methods to a great admirer of the Grand Itinerant's ministry and life of service to God.

Randall's seemingly dramatic response to Whitefield's death was not an isolated incident as many colonists mourned the loss of the controversial evangelist. Whitefield's most recent biographer, Harry Stout at Yale, contends that Whitefield's death prompted dramatic responses from individuals throughout the colonies. "His death provoked widespread displays of tears and sorrow without precedent in the American colonies. Not until the death of George Washington would there be a more universal display of sadness

¹³Ibid., 212

and loss.”¹⁴ Newspapers throughout the colonies reported the news of Whitefield’s death and major cities throughout the colonies held public memorial services to give citizens the opportunity to pay their respects to the famed evangelist. For example, an article in the *Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette & Historical Chronicle* suggested Whitefield was “perhaps as universally beloved, and as universally lamented, and more so than anyone ever was in America.” The article concluded with the following, “all the Bells in this Town toiled from Eleven o’Clock in the Forenoon, till near Sun down.”¹⁵ People were not only saddened by the news of Whitefield’s death but some individuals, including Randall, experienced a deep sense of personal loss even though they had never met the famous evangelist. In Stout’s estimation the personal sense of loss experienced by many citizens demonstrated Whitefield’s appeal to the masses. “Perhaps most remarkable in the accounts of Whitefield’s death, however, was the sense of personal loss expressed by many who never knew him personally.”¹⁶ News of Whitefield’s death had a tremendous impact on Randall prompting not only a sense of personal loss but also a sense of spiritual bankruptcy as Randall began to question his own identity as a Christian.

Comparing his own spiritual status to that of the esteemed evangelist proved too much for Randall to bear and he spent the next two weeks in deep introspection regarding his spiritual condition. His weeks of personal self-examination led him to conclude that his own sinfulness merited eternal damnation and separation from God. Randall’s intense examination of his spiritual condition led him to conclude that he was literally the worst of sinners. “For I thought no person ever felt such horror as I did. All my former

¹⁴Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 281.

¹⁵*Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette & Historical Chronicle*, October 5, 1770.

¹⁶Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 283.

religion appeared worthless, and fled from me as though it never had been. It seemed as if there never was any person so vile as I, having such a heart alienation, and such enmity to God, in all his nature, and the manifestations of his spirit and power. Such unreconciliation to God.”¹⁷

His self examination led him to the scriptures and specifically to the New Testament book of Hebrews. He reflected specifically on Hebrews 9:26¹⁸ and during his meditation on the verse experienced a change in his condition as he sensed the easing of his spiritual burden. The easing of the spiritual weight did not bring relief, however, but greater anxiety as he understood the lifting of the burden to be proof that he was spiritually bankrupt to the point that he was no longer capable of caring for his spiritual condition. He recounted in his journal: “I began to feel calm and peacable in my mind. This afrightened me; for I feared I was losing my concern, and should turn back into my old state and be as bad or worse than ever. I cried, O Lord, I had rather remain in this distressed state, till I am as old as Methuselah, could it be possible, than to turn back again to folly.”¹⁹

Fortunately for Randall, the feeling of his spiritual burden being lifted did not indicate he was now spiritually apathetic but it was truly a turning point in his life as he began to reflect on the love of God as found in the person of Jesus. After reflecting on the ultimate sacrifice offered for the world by Jesus, Randall turned his back on his former spirituality and considered himself to be “born again.”

¹⁷Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (Feb 1822): 212-213.

¹⁸Hebrews 9:26 reads: “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (KJV)

¹⁹John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 18-19.

The world and all its vanities are now loathsome to me. I hate sin and folly and have no relish for any earthly good. What do I love? I know I love God, and long after righteousness. What then is this, but a change, wrought by the power of God in my soul? This is conversion; this is what I read of in the scriptures, being born again.²⁰

Whitefield's impressive legacy as an agent of revival even continued after his death as the news of his death prompted an intense introspection in a revival opponent that resulted in yet another conversion.²¹

Randall's writings detailing his conversion experience serve as a good example of spiritual autobiography. In his important work on spiritual autobiography in early America, Shea concluded that spiritual autobiographies focus specifically on "the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine life."²² Randall's writings provide an intimate look at the point of grace in Randall's life as he reflected on the experience of finally feeling accepted by God's grace and love. His spiritual pilgrimage prior to his dramatic conversion Randall considered to be worthless and trivial because his previous spirituality did not lead him to a place of security in regard to his salvation. With his dramatic conversion following Whitefield's death, Randall never doubted his salvation again as he lived out his life confident that his eternal destiny was in heaven.

²⁰Ibid., 10.

²¹In the estimation of Puritan scholar Edmund Morgan, prior to the Whitefieldian revivals there was an established morphology of conversion for the Puritans that included, "knowledge, conviction, faith, combat, and true, imperfect assurance." See Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of the Puritan Idea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 72. The revivals condensed the established morphology as individuals quickly moved from sinner to saint. See Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See in particular chapter 5, "The American Morphology of Conversion," 163-186.

²²Shea, xxvii.

While in some ways Randall's conversion was similar to one that occurred at a Whitefield revival Randall's conversion also included a unique theological position that was unlike the majority of converts under Whitefield's ministry. Randall's conversion experience also marks his beginning point as a believer in the doctrine of universal atonement. In recounting his conversion experience he wrote, "I saw in Him a universal love, a universal atonement, a universal call to mankind, and was confident that none would ever perish, but those who refused to obey it."²³ Randall's theological departure from the Calvinistic norm of his era occurred at the point of his conversion. In his history of the Free Will Baptists, William Davidson at Columbia International University, inaccurately stated that Randall's theology included four phases one of which was "the period in the Calvinistic Baptist tradition" which Davidson cautioned "must not be underestimated."²⁴ In his writings Randall never recorded any acceptance of the Calvinistic Baptist position. In contrast, later in his life after he accepted the Baptist faith he was surprised to learn that other Baptists were not theologically in line with his belief in universal atonement. His own writings demonstrate that Randall's conversion was the moment he accepted universal atonement as his understood the message of the gospel to include universal love and grace for all. He may have been associated with Calvinistic Baptists after his baptism but he himself never adopted the Calvinistic position believing instead in the universal atonement from the moment of his conversion.

Many individuals that accepted the position of universal atonement came to their conclusions years after their initial conversion and after a thorough examination of

²³Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 11.

²⁴William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in America, 1727-1984* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1985), 171.

scripture. A notable example of a Baptist minister that gradually came to accept the position of universal atonement was Elhanan Winchester.²⁵ Winchester (1751-1797) served a number of Baptist congregations in Massachusetts and one in South Carolina prior to becoming pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia in 1780. While in Philadelphia Winchester's theology progressed to the position of universalism, believing that eventually all people would be saved.²⁶ As a result of his theological evolution, the Philadelphia congregation no longer felt comfortable with Winchester's liberal theology and Winchester was removed as pastor. No long theological journey was necessary for Randall however, as Randall's acceptance of the doctrine of universal atonement coincided with his conversion. As Norman Baxter noted, it was ironic that "the death of a Calvinistic evangelist had induced in Randall a conversion experience which was universalistic in its concepts."²⁷

Despite their differences in theology, Randall and Winchester shared very similar conversion experiences. Like Randall, Winchester also experienced a great deal of anxiety over his spiritual condition. He recounted his conversion in a pamphlet written just prior to the turn of the nineteenth century.

²⁵For an early examination of Winchester's life and ministry see Edwin M. Stone, *Biography of Reverend Elhanan Winchester* (Boston, MA: H. B. Brester, 1836). For a more recent critical examination of Winchester's spiritual evolution see Joseph R. Sweeny, "Elhanan Winchester and the Universal Baptists" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1969), 18-46.

²⁶After searching the scripture in an attempt to refute the idea of universal salvation Winchester became convinced of its truth. Winchester was convinced that God's desire to save all people triumphed over the punishment of sin which Winchester believed to be finite. Winchester did believe that punishment for sin occurred after death but believed the punishment was an aid to salvation as it purged the sins from the individual. After one's sins had been purged a person would then be restored to an eternal relationship with God. See Sweeny, 63-87.

²⁷Norman A. Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists* (Rochester, NY: American Baptist Historical Society, 1957) 5.

I laboured night and day, but could find no rest, till one morning—a time never to be forgotten!—as I was walking on a Journey, under great distress, and when deliverance seemed farther from me than ever, all at once I was brought to resign my soul into the hands of God, and thus I expressed myself—‘Lord, here I am, a poor helpless sinner; I resign myself into thine hands; take me, and deal with me just as thou pleasest: I know thou canst do me no injustice.’ Immediately these words came into my mind with great power and sweetness—‘In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee.’ Isaiah xlix. 8. And I had then such a view of Christ as made me to cry out, ‘Glory to God in the highest! This is salvation; I know this is salvation.’²⁸

Both Winchester and Randall endured months of spiritual anxiety as they were unable to find satisfaction for their souls. The spiritual anxiety of each led them both to conclude that they were the worst of sinners and without hope for reconciliation with God. At their lowest moments a verse of scripture came to mind for each and with the verse came a sense of calmness and their burdens were lifted. The feeling of relief was so real to each one that they immediately recognized that moment as the moment of their salvation.

While Randall’s conversion ultimately influenced the spirituality of Portsmouth and the surrounding region, Randall’s conversion did not prompt in Randall an immediate change in his career vocation or life plan as he continued in his vocation as a sail-maker. In 1771, the year following his conversion, Randall married Joanna Oram of Kittery, Maine, who like Randall, was the child of a sea captain. It was the birth of the couple’s first child that prompted the spiritual evaluation of the established church that eventually resulted in Randall’s decision to leave the established church in an effort to navigate the turbulent spiritual waters on his own.

Having experienced a profound spiritual awakening Randall shared his experience with the Congregational Church in New Castle and applied for membership. In

²⁸Elhanan Winchester, *The Universal Restoration Exhibited in a Series of Dialogues* (London: W. Burton, 1799), 105-106.

November 1772 the process was complete and Benjamin and Joanna Randall joined the church at New Castle under the direction of the Reverend Stephen Chase. Chase was a Harvard educated Massachusetts native who was installed at the Congregational Church in New Castle in 1756.²⁹ Unfortunately for Randall, membership in the church did not necessarily signify a heightened sense of spiritual awareness or spiritual maturity on behalf of the other members. Randall was not impressed by the spiritual vitality of the members and was disappointed to discover the evidence of sin in the lives of the church members, or as Buzzell put it delicately, “he began to discover that the church he had so lately joined was all in disorder.”³⁰

Like many eighteenth century colonists who were converted as a result of Whitefield’s life or in Randall’s case Whitefield’s death, the spiritual vitality of the local church became a source of frustration and confusion for Randall. Randall’s experience with and examination of the established Congregational church left him frustrated and disappointed in the lack of spiritual vitality he observed in the congregation and the established Congregational church in New Castle, New Hampshire, left him spiritually wanting. Randall took matters into his own hands and sought out other likeminded individuals who were unimpressed with the piety of the parishioners and they began to hold meetings apart from the church service in which they sang, prayed, and read a sermon. Believing that the pastor approved of their efforts to grow spiritually Randall invited him to participate in the meetings but Reverend Chase never chose to join them. The group continued to meet together and Randall took it upon himself to invite a

²⁹John Albee, *New Castle: Historic and Picturesque* (Boston, MA: Press of Rand Avery Supply Co., 1884; reprint, Hampton, N.H. Peter E. Randall, 1974), 108.

³⁰Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 28.

traveling preacher to New Castle in order to edify the group and he offered the guest preacher the pulpit of the New Castle church. Chase's dissatisfaction in these separate meetings became obvious as he refused to allow the traveling preacher entrance into the church. The town selectmen eventually settled the dispute in Randall's favor but the relationship between Randall and the established minister, Stephen Chase, was effectively ruptured.

Prior to his participation in Whitefield's revival services Randall expressed frustration regarding the tension and divisiveness brought into the local parishes by traveling preachers such as Whitefield. Five years after his conversion experience Randall, himself a product of Whitefield's ministry, embraced the idea of itinerant ministers and caused a disruption within the church that the local government officials had to settle. By definition of his actions, Randall had become a New Light, the kind of Christian that he previously rejected and despised on account of their fanatical religiosity.

In an effort to enhance his own spiritual vitality and to move towards spiritual maturity Randall embraced the practice of itinerant ministers and initiated the formation of devotional meetings apart from the traditional worship services. Randall secured his identity as a New Light when he separated from the established parish church in 1775. Randall can be clearly labeled a New Light as a result of his emphasis on conversion and his belief in the "reality of a personally experienced Christian faith."³¹ The bitter relationship with the parish minister, Stephen Chase, prompted by the dispute over Randall's invitation to the guest preacher functioned as the final evidence Randall needed

³¹Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 182.

to justify his separation from the established Congregational church he had known his entire life.

Like many eighteenth century colonists before and after him, Randall was convinced that the lack of spirituality vitality in his parish church necessitated a separation. Randall's quest for spiritual growth and maturity was not supported by the pastor of the parish church and Randall felt vindicated in his decision to become a Separatist. He left the established church on account of his desire to improve the spiritual condition of himself and other like-minded individuals. Randall's separation from the established Congregational church only marked the beginning of a new chapter in Randall's spiritual journey.

Like many of his New England peers, Randall's life was affected by the events and the circumstances surrounding the colonies fight for independence. When the British warship *Scarborough* arrived of the coast of New Castle, in May 1775, Randall volunteered his services to the army and he served for three months as an assistant commissary supplying food and supplies to members of the colonial army. Following his initial three months of service Randall moved his family to Maine away from the threat of war but returned alone to assist his colonial peers for another three months.

Randall continued to be plagued by anxiety concerning his spiritual condition and began to question the practice of infant baptism. Randall consulted the scriptures to answer his doubts about the practice but after his examination he was convinced that the Bible did not support the practice. This new revelation put Randall in a difficult position since rejecting the practice of infant baptism amounted to a questioning of his own salvation and that of his wife and children. For Randall however, the scriptural evidence

supporting believer's baptism outweighed any personal reluctance or social pressure and he decided to seek baptism to bring his life in accordance with his new understanding of scripture. The ordination of William Hooper,³² August 14, 1776, in Madbury, New Hampshire, provided Randall with the opportunity to participate in believer's baptism which marked his transition from Separatist to Separate-Baptist. At the conclusion of Hooper's ordination service, Hooper baptized Randall, John Trefethen, Nathaniel Lord, and Ephraim Foss in the river at Great Falls.³³ Along with adopting the practice of believer's baptism Randall became a member of the Baptist congregation at Berwick, Maine.³⁴ The Berwick Baptist church was formed as a result of the efforts of Hezekiah Smith.³⁵ Smith was the pastor of a Baptist church in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and often took journeys into New Hampshire and Maine, preaching when and where the opportunity allowed.³⁶ The Articles of Faith of the Berwick congregation leave no

³²Hooper himself was a member of the Berwick congregation prior to his installation as pastor, see Charles F. Hayes, *Historical Sketch of the Baptist Church at North Berwick, ME., 1768-1894*, (North Berwick, ME: Journal Print, 1894), 7.

³³Henry S. Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, ME: Marks Printing House, 1904), 47.

³⁴A bit of confusion exists in regard to the location of the church Randall joined. In "Benjamin Randall and the Baptists," *The Chronicle* XV (1952), Raymond Bean of Crozer Theological Seminary, stated that Randall became a member of the Berwick, Maine, church even though the service was in Madbury, New Hampshire. Following his ordination Hooper served as pastor of a Baptist congregation in Berwick, Maine. Some of the members of the Berwick congregation lived in Madbury, New Hampshire. The ordination service occurred in Madbury, New Hampshire, but was conducted under the authority of the Baptist congregation that usually met at Berwick, Maine. Apparently the location of Randall's baptism was also a source of dispute within the 19th century Freewill Baptist movement. A letter dated June 15, 1859 from Enoch Plone to Elder John Buzzell asked, "When, and where, was Elder Benjamin Randall baptized?" In the letter Plone remarked that "Some have supposed that Randall was baptized in Madbury, N.H.. Some at South Berwick, Quampeagan landing, Some at great Falls, in Berwick." The letter can be found at the Research Library of the Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

³⁵For a brief introduction to Smith's life and ministry see John David Broome, "Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill," *Baptist History and Heritage* 1 (Aug 1965): 8-14.

³⁶For a personal account of Smith's life and ministry in Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire see Hezekiah Smith, *The Life, Ministry, and Journals of Hezekiah Smith: Pastor of the First*

question as to the theological bent of the congregation as the first line states the intention of the individuals to unite as “a particular Baptist church.”³⁷ Randall’s enthusiasm for his decision to be baptized and to join with the Baptists of Berwick, Maine and Madbury, New Hampshire is evident in a letter he composed to William Hooper one week after his baptism. Randall’s belief in the importance of the Lord’s Supper is apparent as he wrote,

I Rejoyce that our Communion Day Is appointed and that It draweth so nigh I trust that thro the goodness of God I and our Dear Brother Trefethen shall have the happiness of joyneing with you in selebrating this Precious feast and shewing fourth the Lord’s death until he comes.³⁸

The letter also demonstrates the great appreciation Randall had for his church membership. His decision to be baptized by immersion and join the Baptists was not a flippant decision but rather the culmination of a long process of scriptural study and spiritual examination as he sought to be obedient to the commands of Christ.

In a span of six years Benjamin Randall experienced a number of significant changes in his spiritual life. After initially rejecting the innovations of New Light preachers such as George Whitefield, Randall responded to the news of Whitefield’s death with a conversion experience that he did not even know he needed. Then, like many other converts of the eighteenth century revivals, Randall began comparing and critiquing the spirituality of his fellow parishioners and the parish minister to that of his own new found spiritual zeal. Unimpressed by the spirituality he observed around him

Baptist church of Haverhill, Massachusetts 1765-1805 and chaplain in the American Revolution 1775-1780, ed. John David Broome (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004).

³⁷The Articles of Faith of the Berwick Baptist church are presented in Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine*, 32-34.

³⁸Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire to William Hooper, Berwick, Maine, August 21, 1776, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 3-4 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Ephraim Stinchfield collection, The Research Library of the Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine, hereinafter cited as “Stinchfield Collection, MHS.”

Randall took it upon himself to host meetings with other individuals who also were uninspired by the piety of the local congregation. Randall's own investigation of scripture ultimately led him to question the practice of infant baptism and acceptance of believer's baptism. His spiritual journey was not yet complete, however, as he struggled with making a move from the pew to the pulpit.

Randall's Call to Preach

Randall's writings report that he had sensed a call from God to preach the gospel initially in 1775 but he adamantly refused to accept the task. Since his conversion he led the weekly devotional meetings and it was his habit to read a published sermon to the group for their edification. Randall's writings recount that early in 1777 after Randall had completed reading a sermon to the group one of the participants admonished Randall to stop reading old sermons. "Brother, Randall, I am tired of hearing you read old sermons. If you will not preach to us, do leave off reading the old sermons and read the Bible."³⁹ The words of the critic rang in Randall's ears at the next meeting and he debated between reading a published sermon or reading straight from the Bible. He began to read a published sermon but was unable to finish as he was overwhelmed in his conviction that he should not be reading someone else's sermon but should be delivering a sermon of his own. Randall recounted later, "I threw down the book, and broke out into a confession and cried and told the people that the Lord had made it manifest to me, for two years past, that it was my duty to preach the gospel. Now I am resolved to be obedient and give myself up to his service as long as I live."⁴⁰

³⁹Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 51.

⁴⁰Ibid., 53.

While Randall may have debated his call to preach for two years, when the decision was finally made, Randall wasted no time in making himself available to preach. He preached wherever and whenever given the opportunity and Randall officially became that which he previously despised, an itinerant minister. The spiritual zeal Randall enjoyed since his conversion continued as he began to preach throughout Southeastern New Hampshire and Southern Maine. Randall's enthusiasm for his new calling was not shared by all the members of this community however, as many people did not support the practice of itinerant ministers or believe that an uneducated minister should take the pulpit. Randall was opposed by many people who were much like himself prior to his conversion, afraid of the disruption often brought on by wandering ministers. Randall's lack of education was also a stumbling block for many citizens as they believed the legitimacy of a minister's calling came from the confirmation of the ecclesiastical authority and not from divine revelation.

As Randall began to preach in various places he encountered many individuals that believed as Randall himself once did that itinerant preachers were divisive and seditious. Also like Randall, who prior to his conversion expressed a desire to physically remove itinerant ministers from his town, others attempted to inflict harm on Randall because of his new preaching activities. Randall faced not only verbal taunts but physical threats to his life on account of his new calling. Mobs attempted to break up services in which Randall was preaching and in one incident a man threw a brick at Randall and narrowly missed his head. Randall faced violent opposition on numerous occasions and in a variety of forms but, as he recounted in his writings, "the Lord preserved me."⁴¹

⁴¹Ibid., 71.

As an itinerant minister with no formal training Randall posed a dual threat to the established religious system that maintained strict parish boundaries and required a properly educated clergy. The same religious zeal that prompted his conversion led him to answer the call to preach even though he had received very little formal education and no theological training. When Randall separated from the established church he freed himself from the expectations of the establishment including that of respecting parish boundaries and requiring formal educational training for ministerial candidates. Following his conversion and separation from the Congregational movement, Randall was bound not to the demands and expectations of his fellow man but obligated to follow the direct calling from God upon his life. Randall was convinced that God called him to a life of preaching despite his lack of formal training and he was not constrained to defer to the man-made parish boundaries if he was given the opportunity to preach the gospel. Those individuals still loyal to the established church maintained a far different opinion of Randall and those like him who openly challenged the authority of the religious establishment.

Opponents expressed their frustration often verbally but also on occasion through violence. In the estimation of Central Michigan University professor Timothy Hall, opponents of uneducated itinerant ministers were trying to hold on to the religious monopoly the established church enjoyed and the relative peace that accompanied it. “This defense of learning represented more than a simple attempt to restore the New England churches to their pristine, seventeenth-century purity. Learning also constituted a bulwark of reason against the social chaos produced by superstition and enthusiasm.”⁴²

⁴²Hall, *Contested Boundaries*, 64.

Since Randall's spiritual authority as a minister did not come from the conventional source, namely the established ecclesiastical authorities, Randall did not have theological credibility and was a threat to society. Also, since his authority as a minister came from God and not from the established ecclesiastical authorities, Randall was viewed as a minister free from accountability to any ecclesiastical authority and therefore potentially dangerous in his theology and practice.

Despite the concerns and opposition expressed by some citizens Randall's itinerant preaching ministry was still well received by some colonists. Word of his preaching skill soon spread throughout the region and Randall received numerous invitations to preach. Towns in which Randall preached included Barrington, Madbury, Loudon, Canterbury, and New Durham, all of which are located in New Hampshire.⁴³

Randall's new found calling of preaching the gospel did not completely alleviate his anxiety in regard to his spiritual condition that he had experienced since his childhood. Even after his separation from Congregationalism and after his decision to begin preaching, Randall maintained a healthy fear of God while also maintaining a humble recognition of God's grace. In an April 19, 1777, letter addressed to his parents, Randall exhibited a desire to live a life that acknowledged the goodness and grace of God. He wrote:

(I) am this Day the Living witness of God's mercy and am this side the grave and not amongst the dead and this Side hell and not amongst the Dam'd O might the Lord make us sensible of the obligations we are all under to live to his glory for all his goodness to all of you and my worthless self.⁴⁴

⁴³Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall* 71-73.

⁴⁴Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire to Capt. Benjn Randall, Georgetown, Maine, April 19, 1777, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 6-8 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Stinchfield Collection, MHS.

This yearning to live a life that reflected the graciousness and goodness of God would be evident throughout Randall's life and ministry as he emphasized the importance of living for God as a response to God's grace.

Randall's commitment to the local church that he joined is also evident in another letter he composed to William Hooper and the Berwick Baptist church. Randall was unable to attend the church meetings as often as he would have liked and he wrote Hooper to inform him of the reasons why in recent weeks he had been unable to attend as often as he would have liked.⁴⁵ Hooper preached in both Berwick, Maine, and in Madbury, New Hampshire, and on occasion Randall preached in Madbury when Hooper was in Berwick. Randall's letter to Hooper also included another letter addressed to the congregation at Madbury that Randall wrote to explain why he was unable to preach for them as scheduled on September 14, 1777.⁴⁶

During his travels, citizens from the town of New Durham, New Hampshire, heard Randall preach and they extended an invitation for him to preach regularly in their town. The prospect of serving as a parish minister was not originally part of Randall's plan as a minister. He envisioned a ministry much like that of Whitefield, traveling whenever an invitation was extended to preach the gospel.⁴⁷ Buzzell recorded that

⁴⁵Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire to Willm Hooper, Berwick, Maine, Sept 4, 1777, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 9-10 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Stinchfield Collection, MHS.

⁴⁶Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire, to Madbury Baptist Church via William Hooper, Sept 4, 1777, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 9-10 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Stinchfield collection, MHS.

⁴⁷Whitefield was not an itinerant minister but a traveling evangelist. Whitefield did not model the practice of the itinerant ministry but was himself aware of Wesley's authorization of the itinerant ministry. In the estimation of Boston University historian David Hempton the itinerancy was crucial in establishing the Methodist movement in the colonies as he stated that it was "the itinerancy that more than anything else forged a national movement." See, David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT:

Randall struggled with the decision to serve as the settled minister in New Durham because Randall “never intended to be confined to any people but meant to be every person’s minister.”⁴⁸ Randall’s desire to serve a region and not solely a settled congregation can be traced to his own conversion experience that was prompted by the life, ministry, and death of George Whitefield. Whitefield did not pastor a congregation in the colonies and spent his time traveling and preaching wherever the opportunity arose. Randall hoped for a similar ministry in which he was free to itinerate throughout the region so that he could help as many people as possible.⁴⁹ Despite his initial hesitation to serve in a specific location, upon receiving promise from the New Durham group that they would provide a house for his family, Randall moved his family to New Durham in March of 1778.

When he settled his family in New Durham, Randall had no idea that his theological position was in any way unique compared to other Baptists in the area. At this point in his life, Randall wrongly assumed that he was theologically in line with his Baptist peers. He recounted, “As the doctrine of Calvin had not been in dispute among us, I had not considered whether I believed it or not.”⁵⁰ His conversion experience

Yale University Press, 2005), 121. Unlike the Methodist itinerants, the itinerant ministers of the Freewill Baptist connexion did not receive a salary from any institutional entity.

⁴⁸Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 72.

⁴⁹What developed in Randall’s ministry is similar to the Methodist model of circuit preachers that is largely credited with helping establish Methodism in frontier regions. While the Methodist movement was alive and well in the colonies by 1780 the Methodists did not have an official presence in New England until 1789. See Richard D. Shiels, “The Methodist Invasion of Congregational New England,” 257-280 in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* eds. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001). He states, “If there were any Methodist institutions in New England prior to 1789 there were a mere handful of isolated ‘classes’ spread across the region” (Shiels, 264). Any suggestion that Randall modeled his ministry on the practices of the Methodists is difficult to prove considering the Methodists did not officially arrive in New England until after Randall’s ministry practice was established.

⁵⁰Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 75.

served as the origin of his belief in the concept of universal atonement and his humble examination of scripture only affirmed his theological perspective he accepted at the point of his conversion. Randall was unaware that affirmation of Calvin's doctrine of election was held by a large majority of Baptists in colonial New England. The nuances of the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism were unknown to Randall and he acted as if he did not know a debate even existed. Randall's naiveté regarding the doctrines of Calvin did not last long after moving to New Durham as he was publicly questioned about his belief in the doctrines of Calvin. When asked why his preaching was not consistent with Calvin's doctrine of election he responded, "Because I do not believe it."⁵¹ For Randall, the doctrine of election was not up for debate as his revelation from God at his conversion served as the authoritative source for his belief. While Randall's answer demonstrated his conviction on the matter to the audience, privately Randall began to question the accuracy of his theological convictions.

Randall's preaching soon attracted the attention of area Baptists and in July 1779 the congregation at Gilmanton, New Hampshire, convened a meeting to examine Randall's theology and the Gilmanton congregation determined Randall and his theology to be insufficient. Randall had not been discouraged by a lack of public support in the past and this occasion was no different as he promptly responded, "It makes no odds with me, who disowns me, as long as I know that the Lord owns me."⁵² The following letter written from Randall to the congregation at Gilmanton offers insight into the theological differences that existed between Randall and the Baptist church in Gilmanton. It is not

⁵¹Ibid., 76.

⁵²Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 79.

known if the undated letter was written prior to his “trial” or as a follow-up to the disputation. What is clear from the letter, is Randall’s reliance on scripture to defend his rejection of Calvin’s doctrine of election and support his position of free grace that enables all who believe to be saved. The letter includes Randall’s understanding that Christ desires for all men to be saved which discounts Calvin’s doctrine of election which advocated that the atonement was only available for the elect. Randall anticipated their argument in favor of Calvinism and supplied his reason for rejecting the Calvinistic doctrine.

Another question I would ask you is whether Christ did mean that they would not come unto him that they might have life and did he mean they could not come again Did the apostle mean as he said when he in 1 Corinthians 7 verse, ‘but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with all’ and In Colossians 1 chapter 28 verse and again in 1 Timothy 2 chapter 3; 4 5 6 verses speaking of Christ our saviour who ‘will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth and further declares that he gave himself a ransom for all a gain’ Did the apostle understand him self in the second chapter of Titus 11 verse ‘for the Grace of God has appeared unto all men.’⁵³

He continued to use the scripture to support his rejection of Calvinism as he rhetorically asked why Jesus would weep over Jerusalem unless the people had the potential to repent, “why should Christ weep over Jerusalem Because they had time to be gathered.”⁵⁴ Neither the public trial nor the letter could convince the Gilmanton congregation of the legitimacy of Randall’s views and he was public disowned by the Gilmanton congregation. Outside of the public reproach from his debate opponent Randall incurred no ramifications for his apparent “defeat” at the Gilmanton disputation.

⁵³Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire, to The Saints and faithful Brethren and Sisters IN Christ Jesus which are at Gilmanton, undated, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 12-14, 16 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Stinchfield Collection, MHS.

⁵⁴Ibid.

After the incident at Gilmanton, Randall was asked to defend his beliefs again at the place of his baptism, Madbury, New Hampshire. Randall and another colonist, Daniel Lord,⁵⁵ were asked to defend their beliefs. Randall recorded very few details of the incident merely summarizing in his journal that they “let us go, without owning or disowning us.”⁵⁶ Randall himself appealed to the Berwick congregation to request a dismissal so that he would not be a problem for the congregation. The Berwick Baptist congregation did not view Randall’s theology to be worthy of expulsion and despite Randall’s request, the congregation took no action on the matter. “I applied to the church to which I belonged, for a dismissal, but they would never grant it. Neither was there ever a committee appointed by the church, to labor with me, that ever I knew of, and so they let me alone.”⁵⁷

As pioneering Maine Baptist historian Henry Burrage noted, “It is worthy of note that neither Mr. Randall nor those who were in agreement with him were disfellowshipped by the churches with which they were connected.”⁵⁸ The disputations were isolated events that were held to compare the theological viewpoints of opposing individuals. The deliberations held no authority over Randall or his ministry. No course of action was taken by the congregation that had baptized Randall or by the group of people in New Durham that asked him to settle in their town. The incidents in Gilmanton and Madbury

⁵⁵Like Randall, Daniel Lord was a member of the Berwick Baptist church and became convinced of Randall’s freewill theology. He was ordained by Randall and others in 1793 and served as a minister in the growing Freewill movement until his failing eyesight prompted him to retire with his son in New York. See “Rev. Daniel Lord,” *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, edited by G. A. Burgess and J.T. Ward, (Chicago, IL: The Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 344.

⁵⁶Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 80.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine*, 53.

demonstrate that there were Baptists in the area who disagreed with Randall's rejection of Calvinism but were not in positions of authority over Randall to dissuade him or stop him from continuing his ministry.

The only real impact of the disputations came as a result of Randall's desire to be ordained. Randall needed a minister of the gospel to lead the service in which he would be set apart for the gospel ministry. The disputations at Gilmanton and Madbury made Randall's theology public knowledge and, as a result, limited his options for ministers who were willing to participate in an ordination service to set Randall apart for public ministry. While Randall's options may have been limited they were not non-existent. A number of churches in surrounding towns, namely in places where he had preached previously, approved of Randall and his theology. A congregation in Loudon, New Hampshire, led by Edward Lock,⁵⁹ and familiar with Randall and his teachings, like Randall, publicly rejected Calvin's doctrine of election. Also the Berwick, Maine, congregation was composed of a number of individuals that agreed with Randall's view of universal atonement, and eventually separated from the Berwick congregation and formed a new congregation in Barrington, New Hampshire, under the leadership of Tosier Lord.⁶⁰ After the new congregation was formed in Barrington, Randall asked the

⁵⁹Edward Lock was a minister of the Gilmanton Baptist church that hosted Randall's disputation. Following the disputation Lock realized he agreed with Randall's free gospel theology and requested a dismissal from the church and it was granted in February, 1780. Tosier Lord agreed theologically with Randall and Lock and ordained Lock who became pastor of a Baptist congregation at Canterbury, New Hampshire. Lock would eventually join the Shakers before returning to minister under Randall's authority as part of the Freewill connexion. See "Rev. Edward Lock," *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, (Chicago, IL: The Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 341-342.

⁶⁰In 1776 Tosier Lord was pastor of a Baptist congregation at Lebanon, Maine, and was ordained by Dr. Samuel Shepherd, a Calvinistic Baptist. Shepherd had been converted under the ministry of Hezekiah Smith. Participants in Shepherd's ordination service included Samuel Stillman of Boston, Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill, and James Manning of Providence. See Backus, *History of New England*, II:169. At the time of Lord's ordination Shepherd was the pastor of a Baptist church in Brentwood, Massachusetts. In 1779 Lord became pastor of the Baptist congregation at Barrington, New Hampshire,

Berwick congregation for his dismissal from the church in order to become a member of the new church at Barrington, New Hampshire. In an undated letter from Randall to “Tosar,” Randall made it clear that he not only wanted to become a member of the new Barrington congregation but also expressed his desire to be ordained. He wrote,

Benjamin called to be a Preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ By the will of God according to the Promis of Life which is in Christ Jesus To Tosar my Dearly Beloved Brother In Christ...Inform thee that I have been down to Madbury and have seen Elder Wm Hooper and do see my way clear to joine with thy Church If the Church as a Body sees their way clear to Receive me and further I Don't Expect any Letter of Recommendation But only as one that is a Brother In Errors...If you See your way Clear I should be Glad of ordination as soon as will be convanant and I have fixt upon a Day In my mind which Is this Day fortnight which will be the first Wendsday in April and that is the 5 day.⁶¹

Randall's desires as expressed in the letter soon came true as he was welcomed as a member into the newly established Barrington congregation in March, 1780. The date Randall suggested for his ordination was agreed to as well as April 5, 1780, marked the ordination of Benjamin Randall as Edward Lock from Loudon and Tosier Lord from Barrington participated in the ordination service.

Edward Lock and Tosier Lord, the ministers who officiated at Randall's ordination were aware of Randall's rejection of Calvin's doctrine of election and were theologically in agreement with Randall. Their participation in the ordination service confirms that Randall was not the sole founder of the Freewill movement in New Hampshire as there were other ministers who also rejected the doctrine of election. Lock

and was present at Randall's disputation at Gilmanton. Following the disputation Lord acknowledged that he agreed with Randall's free gospel theology and the rejection of Calvinism. While Lord welcomed Randall as a member of his Barrington congregation and led in Randall's ordination service, Lord never became part of Randall's Freewill movement. See “Rev. Tosier Lord,” *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, (Chicago, IL: The Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 344-345.

⁶¹Benjamin Randall, New Durham, New Hampshire to Tosar, Barrington, New Hampshire, undated, written in the hand of Benjamin Randall, found on pages 19-20, 24 in the Benjamin Randall notebook found in the Stinchfield Collection, MHS.

and Lord did not play a large role in the development of the Freewill Baptist movement and as a result have often been overlooked because of Randall's quick emergence as the tireless organizer of the movement. Randall was not content with ministering only to those in New Durham and he traveled extensively throughout Southern New Hampshire and Maine in an effort to preach the gospel. Randall spent the remainder of his life organizing the burgeoning movement and his efforts merit his recognition as the movement's first great organizer and unquestioned leader.

Summary

The ten year span from 1770 to 1780 saw a radical change within Benjamin Randall. Prior to his conversion in 1770 he was fervently opposed to George Whitefield and his revivals as well as the innovative methods Whitefield employed during the revivals. He did not believe that the faith and spirituality advocated by Whitefield and other revivalists was genuine Christianity but rather an entertaining attempt to play on the emotions of the audience. He also originally rejected the practice of itinerant preaching, believing that itinerant ministers brought division and strife and not the truth of the gospel wherever they traveled and preached. Randall did not reject Whitefield's revivals because he was apathetic toward all things spiritual. In contrast, Randall rejected these innovations because he believed so earnestly in the traditions of the established Congregational churches. His conversion following Whitefield's death changed everything. His conversion experience led him to spiritual heights that his parish congregation was unable to match or help him sustain, so he took spiritual matters into his own hands. Randall's separation from his established parish church culminated when he invited an itinerant preacher to use the parish pulpit. When the parish minister refused

to allow the guest the pulpit, Randall knew his relationship with the parish church in New Castle was effectively over.

Like many other eighteenth century colonists who separated from the standing order churches, the separation was not the final stage on his spiritual journey but in reality the separation served as the launching pad for the next phase of spiritual development as he began to question the practice of infant baptism. The private study of the scriptures, coupled with his own introspection on the matter, led Randall to reject the practice of infant baptism and he decided to submit himself for believer's baptism; thereby becoming a Separate-Baptist. Lastly, Randall wrestled with his own calling to preach the gospel. After two years of struggle he relented and when he began to preach, people responded in significant numbers. Randall began to itinerate throughout Southeastern New Hampshire and as his popularity grew Baptists in the area began to question his theology. When Randall's preaching garnered attention from his Baptist peers, Randall was made aware that his free will theology was not consistent with Calvin's doctrine of election that was affirmed by the majority of Baptists in colonial New England. Undaunted by the challenges to his theology brought by other Baptist clergy, Randall did not stop preaching the gospel and continued to have success as people responded to his message of universal love, a universal atonement, and a universal call to mankind. Randall was not alone in his rejection of Calvin's doctrine of election as other ministers such as Edward Lock and Tosier Lord also preached a gospel of free grace emphasizing a universal atonement that was available to all people. Randall's spiritual journey from Old Light Congregationalist to a New Light Baptist culminated in his ordination in 1780. The ten year process only served as the necessary foundation for the

next phase of his life. Following his ordination, Randall first founded a new congregation and then served as the great organizer and the first dynamic leader of a new American religious tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Awakening of the Freewill Baptists

Benjamin Randall's transition from a revival opposing Congregational lay person to a revival leading Baptist minister took ten years. Following Randall's ordination as a Baptist minister he wasted no time in beginning his next phase of life as he helped found a church in New Durham, New Hampshire, two months after his ordination. Randall's work was not complete after he established the one congregation in New Durham and he continued to itinerate throughout the region preaching wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself. Randall's preaching ministry continued to be well received as evidenced by the fact that he consistently received invitations to preach. Churches were formed throughout New England as many colonists embraced Randall's message of Jesus representing "a universal love, a universal atonement, and a universal call to mankind."¹ Randall maintained a sense of responsibility to these new congregations and continued to supervise and guide these congregations for the remainder of his life. Randall's success as an itinerant evangelist prompted an administrative challenge as the ever growing number of congregations made it difficult for Randall to provide adequate supervision and pastoral leadership to the numerous churches he formed throughout the region. Randall developed an elaborate organizational structure that enabled him to maintain communication with and supervision over the congregations that started as a

¹The supernatural vision that occurred at his conversion is when Randall's theology of free will originated. John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randel, principally taken from documents written by himself* (Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman, and Co., 1827), 20.

result of his ministry. This chapter traces the development of the Freewill Baptist movement under Randall's leadership and explores the unique interconnectedness that enabled Randall to maintain supervision and authority over a number of different congregations spread across hundreds of square miles.

Randall's first order of business following his ordination was founding a church near his home in New Durham, New Hampshire. The people of New Durham asked Randall to settle there in 1778 but they did not formally constitute a church until June 30, 1780. Randall himself wrote the articles of faith and the church covenant.² Seven people participated in the founding of the New Durham congregation, all of whom demonstrated their acceptance of the covenant with their signature.³ Randall, the founding pastor, authored the covenant that served as the promise the new church members pledged to one another. The importance of the covenant merits its inclusion in full.

Therefore we do now declare that we have given ourselves to God and do now agree to give ourselves to each other in love and fellowship and do agree to take the scriptures of truth for our rule of our faith and practice. Respecting our duty toward God, our neighbors, and our selves. We promise to practice all the commands of and the ordinances of the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so far as they are or shall be made known unto us by the light of the Holy Spirit of truth, without which, we are sensible, we cannot attain to the true knowledge thereof.

and Do promise to bare one another burdens and so fulfill the Law of Love which is the Law of Christ. and we Do agree to give Liberty for the Improvement of the Gifts of the Brethren. and to keep up the publick worship of God amongst our selves and not to forsake the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is. and also agree not to Receive any person into fellowship, except they give a satisfactory account of a change of Life and heart.

²Ibid., 83-84.

³The church was established in the home of Joseph Boody and the building is still standing. The original members of the New Durham congregation were Benjamin Randall, Robert Boody, Nathaniel Buzzell, Joseph Boody, Judith Chartel, Margery Boody, and Mary Buzzell as recorded in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:2. The records are held at the First Free Will Baptist Church in New Durham, New Hampshire. Hereinafter cited as FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

and also they shall promise to Submit to the order and Discipline as above.
May God Enable us to keep covenant. Amen.⁴

The covenant recognized the authority of the scripture, specifically citing the importance of the New Testament, as the guide for conduct and worship within the newly established congregation. It is also important to notice the humility present in the covenant as Randall and the other founders recognized that they still had more to learn. The covenant includes the expectation on behalf of the congregation that the Holy Spirit would continue to lead them as they sought to more fully understand the commands of the New Testament.⁵

The covenant of the New Durham congregation also allowed for the improvement of gifts. The language indicated a willingness to allow all church members the opportunity to explore fully their spiritual gifts in order to use them for the betterment of the whole congregation. The covenant also indicated the regulations established for accepting new members into the congregation. Any individual interested in the becoming part of the church had to give “satisfactory evidence of change in life and heart” and had to be willing to commit their lives to the expectations and examination of the community. The process of examination within the church community was not limited to the New Durham congregation as Randall implemented the examination

⁴Entry dated June 30, 1780 in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:1-2. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁵Randall emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to teach and lead the congregation is in contrast to the expectations of Baptists who affirmed the Second London Confession as the Second London Confession does not allow for the possibility of the Holy Spirit leading outside of what is already established in scripture. A citation from the opening section *Of the Holy Scriptures* makes it clear the Holy Spirit cannot introduce something not already found in scripture. “The whole Council of God concerning all things necessary for his own Glory, Mans Salvation, Faith and Life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new Revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” “Second London Confession,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* ed. William L. Lumpkin, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 250.

method whenever he helped start a new church. The implementation of the examination process of accountability helped Randall monitor the activities of the fledgling congregations and helped Randall maintain supervision over the individual members of the new congregations as well.

The church covenant includes expectations regarding behavior within the community as well as the standards for accepting new members into fellowship with the congregation. The covenant did not include any stipulations regarding the government of the congregation. Three months following the covenant agreement of the Church of Christ of New Durham the new congregation recognized the need for additional leadership positions and elected deacons and church officers on September 2, 1780. The church record book reports that they “proceeded to Chuse Such officers as we Supposed Needfull for the Church. Firstly Chose Br Benjamin Randell Clerck of the Chh. Secondly Chose Robert Boody to Serve as a Deacon in this Chh.....Thirdly Chose Nathinel Buzzell and Joseph Boody to Serve as Ruling Elders In this Chh.”⁶

It is noteworthy that along with his duties as Pastor of the congregation Randall was elected to serve as the Clerk of the congregation. The presence of the clerk was necessary at all official church business and the election of Randall as clerk affirmed his desire and expectation to be present whenever official business of the Church of Christ of New Durham occurred. The job description for the Deacons and Ruling Elder are not stipulated in the church records but the tasks of each soon became clear within the Freewill movement. The Deacons were focused on meeting the physical needs of the members of the congregation while the Ruling Elder helped provide spiritual leadership

⁶Entry dated September 2, 1780, in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:3. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

in the absence of the Teaching Elder, in this case Benjamin Randall. The role of the Ruling Elder was significant because the Teaching Elders, Randall included, expected to be itinerant ministers not bound to a single congregation. Electing a Ruling Elder to lead in Randall's absence insured the meetings of the congregation would continue when Randall was unavailable because of his ministry activities in other locations. The election of a Ruling Elder suggests that Randall expected to miss worship on occasion and needed someone to provide leadership in his absence. His election as Clerk of the church however, indicates Randall expected that the official business of the church, including the examination of individual members, would not occur without his presence.

Despite Randall's conviction that his preaching and his theology were orthodox, the persistent questions from other Baptists regarding Randall's rejection of the doctrine of election caused Randall personal distress even after founding the New Durham congregation. Ever since he answered his initial call to preach, Randall had endured violent physical attacks and verbal harassment in an effort to remain obedient to his call from God.⁷ While the opponents who threatened physical violence could not deter Randall from entering the pulpit, the public disputation over his theology did prompt him to reassess whether or not he should continue in the ministerial office. The passages Randall's opponents cited to support the doctrine of election continued to haunt Randall after the disputations concluded.⁸ He struggled to make sense of these passages in light of his belief in the universal atonement of Christ and for the first time since he answered

⁷Buzzell reported Randall's memories of the persecution. "I really felt in danger of my life; but I gave myself to prayer, and the Lord very marvellously preserved me. As I was walking the street one day, some one threw a large piece of brick at me which brushed my hair, on the back part of my head, and was thrown with such violence that when it struck the board fence, it broke to pieces." Buzzell, *Life*, 60-61.

⁸Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4

the call to preach, Randall questioned whether or not his confusion on the doctrine of election should prevent him from preaching.

Randall himself maintained a high view of scripture as evidenced by the church covenant that expressed their decision “to take the scriptures of truth for our rule of our faith and practice.”⁹ Prior to the public disputations Randall was convinced that his theology was consistent with the whole of scripture and the verses used by his opponents caused Randall to consider halting his public ministry until he could better understand the complex passages that appeared to contradict his personal theology of universal atonement. Despite the recent highlights of his ordination and the founding of the New Durham congregation, Randall continued to struggle with doubts and confusion in regard to the doctrines of Calvin originating from the disputations with other Baptists. As evident in the church covenant Randall was convinced that God would help him understand the confusing passages that caused him such distress. Randall turned to God for help in his spiritual distress and refused to seek the counsel of or writings of other men in his search for spiritual truth. Buzzell recounted, “he felt no freedom to search any writings to get the opinions of men; he even felt forbidden to do it.”¹⁰ Randall continued to wait on God for an answer to the perplexing passages that caused him such anxiety. It took a spiritual revelation of divine origin to help Randall overcome his newly developed hesitancy in regard to his public ministry.

⁹Entry dated September 2, 1780 in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:3. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

¹⁰Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 86.

While in his cornfield in July 1780, Randall experienced just such a direct revelation from God. A lengthy selection from Randall's journal is necessary to relate the experience.

It appeared to me that I saw a white robe brought and put over me, which covered me all over. I looked down all over me, and I appeared as white as snow....I saw all the scriptures in perfect harmony; and those texts, about which my opposers were contending were all opened to my mind; and I saw that they ran in perfect connection with the universal love of God to men and the universal atonement in the work of redemption, by Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man—the universal appearance of grace to all men, and with the universal call of the gospel; and glory to God! my soul has never been in any trials about the meaning of those scriptures since. After passing through the above, the scene was withdrawn. I came to myself, and was sitting on the rock, and all flowing with sweat, and was so weak that I could hardly sit up. I observed the sun, and found I had been in this exercise as much as one and half hour. I never could tell whether I was in the body or not.¹¹

Prior to his mystical experience Randall had difficulty reconciling the passages of the opponents with his own theology. Randall then experienced a unique spiritual revelation that enlightened Randall to understand how the passages of the opponents could in fact be consistent with and not contradictory to his own personal theology.¹² The spiritual authority of the trance-like experience did not supersede that of the scriptures but the experience did enable Randall to reconcile his theology with the complex passages of scripture that he previously remained unresolved. Even after the direct spiritual revelation occurred it was still important that Randall's theology be consistent with scripture. Even a spiritual revelation directly from God in the form of his vision could not keep Randall from recognizing the authority of the scriptures as the rule for faith and practice of the Christian tradition.

¹¹Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 88-89.

¹²Unfortunately, Randall did not provide details of his mystical experience so that the debate over Calvinism and Arminianism could have been settled once for all.

New England had a long history involving reports of the direct revelations of God to various people in the form of visions and trances and the majority of it was negative. Spiritual visions and trances were often associated with antinomian ideas that the religious establishment considered to be a threat to society. Prior to the revivals prompted by Whitefield and his followers, spiritual visions and trances were often associated with heretical and seditious individuals or groups such as Anne Hutchinson¹³, the witches of Salem,¹⁴ or the Quakers.¹⁵ Direct revelations from God in the form of spiritual visions or trances had reemerged in New England during New Light revivals prompted by Whitefield's tours of the colonies beginning in 1740. The dramatic spiritual experiences accompanied by these visions and trances did not receive broad support from clergy as the direct revelation involved during the visions and trances threatened the authority of the clergy, including those who approved of the revivals. As University of Richmond professor, Douglas Winiarski pointed out, the ministers who approved of the revivals were often opposed to the fanaticism associated with the direct revelation from God that came via visions or trances. "For decades, ministers on both sides of the Atlantic had prayed for a marvelous effusion of the Holy Spirit; when the harvest came, many had reaped substantial rewards. Yet, with few exceptions, revival opposers and

¹³Anne Hutchinson was banned from Massachusetts in 1638 in part because of her enthusiastical spiritual experiences in which she claimed to communicate directly with God. For a good review of scholarship on Hutchinson see, Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order," *Church History* 59 (Dec 1990): 482-496. For a recent investigation of Hutchinson see Michael P. Winship, *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson: Puritans Divided*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

¹⁴Recent scholarship on the Salem Witch Trials includes Richard Godbeer, *Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and John P. Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁵See Carla G. Pestana, "The City Upon a Hill Under Siege: The Puritan Perception of the Quaker Threat to Massachusetts Bay, 1656-1661," *The New England Quarterly* 56 (Sep 1983): 323-353.

advocates alike drew the line at those spirit-possessed delusions collectively ridiculed as trances, dreams, and visions.”¹⁶

Randall was one of those few ministerial exceptions that welcomed his spiritual trance as the solution to his scriptural dilemma regarding the doctrines of Calvin that had plagued him for two years. Randall understood the incident to be a unique revelation from God but the fact that he was willing to publish the incident in his journal indicates that Randall recognized the significance of the event and believed a revelation similar to his was possible for others to receive as well. The church covenant emphasizing the leadership of the spirit as well as the publication of his personal trance-like revelation¹⁷ indicates that Randall was open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the life and faith of both individuals and congregations.

Wellesley College historian Stephen Marini some years ago recognized the emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to be wide spread throughout northern frontier in eighteenth century colonial America. He believed the emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that was existent in a number of theological traditions “opened Calvinism to the acceptance of a whole range of physical, sensory, emotional, and visionary experiences hitherto excluded as enthusiasm by the Puritan morphology of

¹⁶Douglas L. Winiarski, “Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England,” *The William & Mary Quarterly* 61 (January 2004): 4.

¹⁷Douglas Winiarski inaccurately contends that the Eleazer Wheelock manuscript, “remains the only surviving first person account of a new dimension of radical evangelicalism that had spread across New England like wildfire” (Winiarski, 17). Randall’s experience was recorded in his journal and published by Buzzell. See also the first person accounts of Ephraim Stinchfield, John Colby, Peleg Burroughs, and Job Seamans. See Ephraim Stinchfield, *Some Memoirs of the Life, Experience, and Travels of Elder Ephraim Stinchfield* (Portland, ME: F. Douglas, 1819). John Colby, *The Life, Experience, and Travels of John Colby, Preacher of the Gospel*, (Portland, ME: A. & J. Shirley, 1815). Peleg Burroughs, *Peleg Burrough’s Journal, 1778-1798*, ed Ruth Ann Wilder Sherman (Warwick, RI: Rhode Island Genealogical Society, 1981). William R. Millar, “The Diary of Job Seamans,” *Foundations* 25 (Jan-Mar 1982): 81-103.

conversion.”¹⁸ Randall’s trance-like spiritual revelation serves as a prime example of the power of a visionary experience as Randall placed greater authority in the direct revelation from God than in the logic and arguments of his opponents. The unique spiritual revelation he experienced provided Randall all the authority he needed to remove his doubts in regard to the doctrines of Calvin and to move on confident in the adequacy of his theology and in the Holy Spirit’s ability to lead him in his ministry to his congregation and beyond.

The spiritual authority that Randall placed on his trance-like experience that ended his doubts regarding the doctrines of Calvin is similar to the authority Randall placed on the revelation he experienced ten years earlier at the point of his conversion. Randall was in a similar state of despair in regard to his spiritual condition at the time of his conversion and he unexpectedly experienced a revelation in which he understood a verse from Hebrews in such a way that it dramatically ended his despair regarding his spirituality. Randall experienced another direct revelation from God following his ordination that included physical manifestations of exhaustion and sweat and the special revelatory experience served as the spiritual authority needed to convince Randall to move forward. On two separate occasions in Randall’s life, a divine revelation served to give Randall confidence and assurance to move ahead in his spiritual development.

Organizing Churches

With his confidence buoyed by his trance-like experience, Randall was more convinced than ever of the orthodoxy of his theology that was revealed to him at the time

¹⁸Stephen Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982): 11.

of his conversion. Randall continued to accept offers to preach outside of New Durham, but the New Durham congregation remained the base of his operation. With the establishment of the Church of Christ in New Durham, Randall founded the first of many churches.¹⁹ The New Durham congregation served as the mother church for the Freewill tradition and all subsequent Freewill Baptist churches founded by Randall maintained a relationship with the New Durham congregation. Norman Baxter noted the importance of the New Durham congregation as he concluded, “the history of the movement turns around that church as the hub of the movement with the various spokes radiating out from it.”²⁰

Following his trance-like spiritual experience Randall continued in his ministry with a newly found confidence and began to travel to new destinations to preach the gospel. In the Fall of 1780 Randall’s itinerant ministry took him as far east as Saco²¹ and Hollis, Maine. His preaching ministry in Hollis resulted in the formation of a church with over a hundred members.²² At the beginning of 1781, Randall received an invitation from a group of people who wanted to form their own Freewill congregation North of New Durham in the town of Tamworth.²³ Randall visited Tamworth in February and discovered it to be on the edge of the wilderness and noted that it was

¹⁹It is important to note that the New Durham congregation and the subsequent churches founded by Randall did not refer to themselves as Freewill Baptists. The founding church called itself the Church of Christ in New Durham. Randall’s opponents referred to Randall and his church members as Freewillers and eventually the movement adopted the term for itself but not until after Randall’s death.

²⁰Norman Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists: A Study in New England Separatism*, (Rochester, NY: American Baptist Publication Society, 1957), 24.

²¹Formerly Little Falls Plantation.

²²“Maine,” *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, (Chicago, IL: The Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1886), 353.

²³New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:5. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

“thinly inhabited.”²⁴ Randall traveled to Tamworth with Brother Samuel Weeks of Gilmanton who Randall recorded “by the Providence of God was traveling that way.” Randall met with the Tamworth residents that requested his assistance and later recorded in the record book of the Church of Christ of New Durham that he “helpt them to Imbody as a branch of This Church of N Durham and they are now Standing In Fellowship with us.”²⁵

Throughout 1781 Randall continued to preach whenever given the opportunity and as ministers on the New England frontier were relatively few, Randall was presented with many invitations to preach. A letter recorded in the *New Durham Church Record Book* from a congregation in Barrington, New Hampshire, gives evidence for how churches without resident ministers operated in eighteenth century New England. The Barrington congregation sent a letter to the congregations in Loudon, Gilmanton, and New Durham, New Hampshire, and the congregation in Shapleigh, Maine asking to allow their ministers to come to Barrington once a quarter to lead services. After requesting assistance the letter included the Barrington congregation’s suggested plan, “we have timed It as followeth that Loudon Send theirs the first first Day after the first fourth Day in September and that Shapleih town Send theirs In October and that New Durham Send theirs In November and that Gilmanton Send theirs in December each one In their turn.”²⁶ The letter asked that the congregations at Loudon, New Durham, Gilmanton, and Shapleigh allow their ministers to travel to Barrington in order to lead

²⁴Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 96.

²⁵New Durham Church Record Book I, I:5. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

²⁶August 1, 1781 letter from the congregation in Barrington, New Hampshire to the Church of Christ in New Durham in the New Durham Church Record Book I, I:6. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

services for the Barrington congregation. The Church of Christ of New Durham agreed to the suggested plan and voted to approve the request at their monthly meeting on September 19, 1781.²⁷ As a result of the decision Randall visited Barrington on the first Sunday after the first Wednesday in November. This incident illustrates the limited number of ministers available on the frontier as congregations would often rely upon itinerant ministers to lead worship services.²⁸

The result of Randall's itinerant ministry at times merited the formation of a new congregation. The formation of a congregation in Woolwich, Maine, was accompanied by the baptism of five individuals on October 2, 1781. Randall recounted that although there were over three hundred present at the baptism, "there were no more than three that ever before saw baptism administered by immersion."²⁹ Randall's preaching tours were successful as evidenced by the fact that by the end of 1781 there were fourteen Freewill Baptist churches in New Hampshire and Maine.³⁰

Along with helping the new converts organize into new churches, Randall also helped introduce an element of supervision and authority for the new congregations. Even though these new congregations were considered separate entities they maintained a relationship with Randall and the New Durham congregation. When a new church was

²⁷See the minutes of the monthly meeting dated September 19, 1781 in the New Durham Church Record Book I, I:6. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

²⁸Randall did not consider this event to be the origin of the connexion. When talking about the beginning of the connexion Randall referred to the establishment of the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1780 as the origins of the movement. See his 1807 letter to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting cited in Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (1812): 268.

²⁹Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 101.

³⁰In New Hampshire, Freewill congregations existed at New Durham, Barrington, and Tamworth. In Maine, Freewill congregations were established at Hollis, Woolwich, Milton Mills, Acton, Georgetown, Squam Island (now Westport), Bristol, Lisbon, Gorham, Scarborough, and Durham.

organized by Randall it was understood to be in “connexion” with Randall’s New Durham congregation and the term “connexion” signified the relationship between the new church and Randall’s New Durham congregation. As the religious movement continued to grow, the term “connexion” was used to describe all the churches within the Freewill movement as they were recognized to be in relationship with Randall’s Church of Christ in New Durham as well as all the other churches in the movement as well.

When Randall helped establish a new congregation he also implemented the same organizational structure that he had instituted in New Durham. The organizational system hinged on the implementation of a monthly meeting in each new church. The monthly meeting was designed to give the members of the churches the opportunity to keep one another accountable according to the church covenants they had established and willingly affirmed. Using the church covenant of the New Durham congregation as a guide it is clear that the church members were expected to exhibit high moral standards and the monthly meeting provided an opportunity for examination and evaluation of the behavior of all individuals. This method of examination and accountability was originally done prior to the worship service as indicated by this Sunday, May 17, 1781, entry from the church record book, “Read the Chh articles and Covenant and find none of the members present object against them.”³¹ In order to participate in a worship service, the gathered individuals had to reaffirm their commitments to the covenant that they originally agreed to upon entering the congregation.

The affirmation of the church covenant was not enough for Randall and the New Durham congregation as they eventually decided a fuller account of the spirituality and

³¹New Durham Church Record Book I, I:5. Entry dated May 17, 1781. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

religious experience of the members was necessary. Instead of affirming the covenant prior to worship, a full accounting from each individual was needed and a separate meeting for that purpose was organized. The church record book notes that on July 20, 1781, it was decided to “Establish our monthly meeting to be held the Second Fourth Day In Every month.”³² The monthly meeting was moved to a Wednesday and served as the period of examination and accountability for the members of the congregation. The move to Wednesday is significant because Randall was free from any itinerant ministerial responsibilities on Wednesdays and with the decision to schedule the monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of each month, Randall could organize his schedule in order to guarantee he would be present both for the examination of each member and for the matters of church business that were discussed.

The Puritan practice that demanded a personal testimony of all individuals desiring church membership was adopted for use in the burgeoning Freewill Baptist movement. An individual had to initially relate his or her personal conversion story to gain acceptance into the church but Randall added an element of continual commitment as he expected members to relate his or her spiritual experience and spiritual condition in order to remain in good standing as a member of the church. Buzzell summed up the activities of the monthly meeting by stating, “the members all met to relate their experience, and give and receive advice from one another.”³³ The monthly meetings were not devised solely for the congregation to provide advice and feedback for its

³²New Durham Church Record Book I, I:5. Entry dated July 20, 1781. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

³³Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 106.

members but were planned out in such a way that Randall himself could attend to provide his supervision and input for the new converts in the newly organized congregations.

In 1782 Randall limited his trips away from New Durham on account of his ill father-in-law who lived with the family in New Durham. His father-in-law, Captain Robert Oram, died after a lengthy illness July 21, 1782. Following the death of Captain Oram, Randall resumed his practice of traveling to visit the churches he founded throughout the region. His authority was such over the churches in Woolwich, Georgetown, and Edgecomb, Maine, that the congregations did not chose elders or deacons until Randall was able to visit in the Fall of 1782 so he could provide leadership in the selection of church leaders and in the ordination process of the ruling elders who would serve in leadership in Randall's absence.

Problems in New Durham

The year 1783 proved to be a difficult one for the Church of Christ of New Durham. The system of accountability established as well as the method of church decision making that had developed was put to the test as internal conflict arose between Randall and one of the Deacons, Robert Boody. The church record indicates that in February 1783, Deacon Boody brought numerous allegations³⁴ against Randall before the

³⁴The entire entry reads as follows: "Brother Robt Boody brought In many Eleagment against Br Benjn Randell which when the Church came to hear and consider upon they Conclude them all to be Groundless herouseys and that Br Randel In all those things stand clear In their minds. Then Br Boody charged Br Randel with saying some things In some conversation that they had a lone that no body heard but themselves and Bro Randel Denies that he said as Br Boody says that he Did and Br Boody Charges him to be in a lye and one tells his story this way and the other that So that It brings the Chh into Such a Dificulty that they cannot tell which Is Right and So put it off for further consideration and think It is expedant to suspend the administration of the Supper for the present untill the Dificulties Can be Removed." See the entry dated February 22, 1783, in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:20. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

church body and the church body decided “them all to be Groundless herouseys.”³⁵

Following the church’s decision Boody reported that Randall spoke privately with Boody and told him a lie, a charge which Randall denied. The church record book demonstrates the difficulty facing the congregation as it was recorded, “one tells his story this way and the other that So that It brings the Chh into Such a Dificulty that they cannot tell which Is Right.” The situation was so challenging and divisive that it was decided to postpone taking the Lord’s Supper together until a decision could be reached on the matter.³⁶

The congregation continued to struggle over the dispute and did not reach an immediate decision in regard to the controversy between Pastor Randall and Deacon Robert Boody. Three months after the initial charges against Randall were brought before the congregation by Boody it was agreed to conclude the matter and continue as if it had not occurred. The church record notes that on May 14, 1783, Randall and Boody agreed to put their disagreement behind them as “they Each one Declare they are willing to conclude It to be a mistake and to cast It all away and never to make It up again.”³⁷

The initial dispute between Randall and Boody may have been resolved but the conflict between Deacon Boody and the Church of Christ of New Durham continued. In June 1783, Boody’s theology came under congregational scrutiny as he held and proclaimed divergent views on baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the washing of the Saint’s feet.³⁸ A council was scheduled for June 18, 1783, so that the church could

³⁵Minutes of the Church of Christ of New Durham meeting held February 22, 1783 in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:20. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:21. Entry dated May 11, 1783. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

³⁸1 Timothy 5:10 refers to the practice of foot washing as the washing of the Saint’s feet.

examine Boody and his controversial beliefs. At the council, Deacon Robert Boody along with Nathinel Buzzell and Ebenezer Bickford reported that they believed the ordinances to be optional practices that were not mandatory for the church to follow. They contended that the disciples of Christ practiced the ordinances “thro weekness and Because they Did not understand their commission.” The church rejected their divergent opinion and affirmed the importance of practicing the “vizable things” in obedience to scripture and considered Boody, Buzzell, and Bickford to be “transgressors” because in the mind of the church they “refuse to walk according to their covenant Ingagements with us.”³⁹ As a result of their divergent theology and their disobedience to the covenant of the congregation, the Church of Christ of New Durham believed it was their covenantal responsibility to discipline the “transgressors” in hopes that they would reconsider and return to the orthodox faith in obedience to their previous commitments to the covenant. The covenant obligation of the congregation was clear as indicated by the church record which notes that the congregation considered it their responsibility “to admonish them to Return to their Duty and If they still refuse then we are to take the apostles Rule Note Such ones as walk not according to Treditions we have Received By word or Epistle and have no company with them yet not treat them as Enemies But admonish them as Brethren.”⁴⁰

After months of debate and discussions with the offending parties, the church was left with no choice but to dismiss the three members for their rejection of the ordinances of the Christian faith. In a letter from the church to Deacon Robert Boody the position of

³⁹New Durham Church Record Book I, I:22. Entry dated June 18, 1783. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁴⁰Ibid.

the church is made plain, “believing it is not right to make a prison of the church to confine persons contrary to their minds and not being desirous to lord it over thy conscience as thou Declareth that thou are consciensously Bound we would comply with thy request and this may inform thee that thou hast thy Liberty by our consent and that we shall not for the future from the date hereof, look upon thee as a member in visible standing with us and that thou art no more under our watch.”⁴¹ The congregation attempted everything within its means to bring the offending parties back into the fold of the congregation but was ultimately unsuccessful. For Randall and the New Durham congregation the scriptural evidence regarding the ordinances was too great to overlook and the individuals who wanted to eliminate the practices of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the washing of the saint’s feet were removed from membership of the New Durham church. The New Durham congregation lost one of its key members from an important family within the congregation.

Along with the internal threat to the New Durham congregation posed by the theological divergence expressed by Boody, Buzzell, and Bickford, in 1783, Randall also experienced an external threat to the entire connection. Like many new religious movements, the burgeoning Freewill tradition encountered some difficulties from competing religious movements in the early years of its development. Shakerism⁴² was introduced into Loudon, New Hampshire, in 1782 by a traveling peddler who shared

⁴¹December 2, 1783 letter from the Church of Christ in New Durham to Deacon Robert Boody in The New Durham Church Record Book I. FFWBC, New Durham, NH. The church record book confirms the letter of dismission to Boody was authorized at the November 29, 1783 meeting of the Church of Christ of New Durham. The Record Book indicates that the letter was written December 2, 1783, but authorization for Zachariah Boody to carry the letter to Robert Boody is not recorded until May 12, 1784.

⁴²For a treatment of the beginnings of the Shakers in Colonial America see, Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 10-38.

stories of his encounter with the Shakers in New York with the colonists in Loudon. The congregation in Loudon was not originally founded by Randall and therefore not part of the growing Freewill movement but the congregation did agree with Randall's rejection of Calvinism and the pastor, Edward Lock, had provided leadership in Randall's ordination service.

In January 1783, members of the congregation at Loudon wrote to Randall to ask for his assistance after their pastor, Edward Lock, and others from the congregation had officially left their congregation and joined the Shakers.⁴³ "With a sorrowful heart I sit down to write to you at this time to inform you of some of our difficulties we are under. If I mistake not all our Elders and Deacons have left us and joined the Shaking Quakers (so called) with great part of the church with them and with the rest most of them seems to be in a cold dull melancholy case."⁴⁴ It is notable that the remaining members of the Loudon congregation sought the assistance of Randall considering he was not the founder of the congregation. Prior to founding the church at New Durham, Randall was a member of the Loudon congregation and he maintained a relationship with members of the church after he started the church at New Durham. After receiving the letter in January, health problems initially prevented Randall from traveling to Loudon to assist

⁴³The Freewill Baptists were not the only Baptists affected by the development of the Shakers. Valentine Rathbun, a Baptist pastor in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, moved to Albany, New York to join the Shaker movement for three months before returning to Pittsfield. Upon his return he wrote a pamphlet rejecting their beliefs and practices. Valentine Rathbun, *Some Brief hints of a Religious Scheme, Taught and propagated by a Number of Europeans, living in a place called Nasquennia, in the State of New York*, (Norwich, CT: John Trumbull, 1781).

⁴⁴January 13, 1783 Letter from Loudon, New Hampshire group to Benjamin Randall and the rest of the church at New Durham in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:19-20. This was the fourth letter from the Loudon congregation that requested assistance of the New Durham congregation. The letters dated August 1, 1781, June 12, 1782, and November 19, 1782 are included in the New Durham Baptist Church Records, Book I. The June 12, 1782 letter was signed by the pastor, Edward Lock and the Jan 1783 letter reports the departure of Lock to Shakerism. The letters are included in the New Durham Church Record Book I. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

the remaining members of the congregation. In July however, he was healthy enough to travel and helped reconstitute the church. After it was reestablished the church was no longer an independent congregation but became a member of Randall's growing movement, or as Buzzell put it, "On the 5th of July he (Randall) re-embodied them, and received them into connexion."⁴⁵ The newly reformed congregation viewed themselves to be part of the Church of Christ of New Durham as evidenced by the fact that the covenant of the newly established congregation is included as part of the records of the Church of Christ in New Durham.⁴⁶

The reorganization of the congregation at Loudon is unique in light of the fact that they had already been an established congregation. The rest of the churches within the connexion were founded by Randall following a successful stint of preaching in that particular location but the Loudon congregation was already an independent congregation prior to Randall's arrival. The fact that Randall reconstituted the church implies that Randall believed that they lost their identity as a congregation when Pastor Lock abandoned them to join the Shakers. Randall's reconstitution of the church and reception of the new church into the connexion signifies Randall's adoption of the church into his movement. The new church was now part of the Freewill connexion and they willingly placed themselves under the spiritual authority of Randall and his connexion.

The threat of the Shakers to the Freewill movement was serious enough to merit a Connexion-wide fast in October 1784. A letter was sent to all the churches in relationship with Randall to, "keep Wensday the thirteenth day of October Next as a day

⁴⁵Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 114.

⁴⁶New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:22. Entry dated July 5, 1783. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

of fasting with prayer to almighty God for Jesus Saek to Scatter and Consume this smook with the Spirite of his mouth and the Brightness of appering and unwind the old Dragon In all his Serpentine windings and delusive charms to or In our souls and Shortly Bruise him under our feet for his own Name sake.”⁴⁷

After returning from his trip to Loudon, Randall visited the established churches in Maine that were part of the connection. His trip east coincided with the monthly meetings of the Maine churches and Randall “found the brethren steadfast in the faith, and increasing in numbers.”⁴⁸ The exodus of Edward Lock and others in the Loudon congregation to Shakerism only reinforced the practice of examining the faith and practice of churches and church leaders throughout the movement. Randall’s visits to the monthly meetings enabled him to evaluate the doctrine and faith of the various churches and allowed Randall to maintain theological supervision over the congregations even though he was not present for every meeting of each congregation. As Randall attended the monthly meetings of the various churches he was able to enjoy fellowship with all the congregations within the connexion but the churches themselves however, had very little interaction with one another. Randall was the sole connection between the churches as he functioned as a defacto bishop providing guidance and leadership for the different congregations.

While Randall’s home was in New Durham, New Hampshire, his services as a revival preacher were still in demand throughout New England. While continuing as the

⁴⁷September 4, 1784 Circular Letter from Edgecomb Quarterly Meeting in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 21. This record book is located at the Tuck Library at the New Hampshire Historical Society. This record book has no identifying title but as it contains the records of the Quarterly Meetings that were held in various places I will refer to it as The Quarterly Meeting Record Book.

⁴⁸Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 114.

leader of the congregation at New Durham, Randall spent the rest of his life responding to invitations to preach and to requests asking for his assistance in order settle disputes within a congregation. A few notable examples will be offered as representative of his ministerial exploits.

On April 11, 1785, Randall received a letter from Strafford, New Hampshire, asking for his assistance. Randall's authority as a spiritual leader was evident as the congregation pleaded, "Brother Benjn Randall Don't thee want to come and see thy poor Brethren that have a Little hope Distressed on Every Side.....and we want thee to Come Down and set in order the things that are out....Come down Brother Randall and help us for we stand in need of help."⁴⁹ Randall was not able to fulfill their request immediately but in August left New Durham for Strafford in order to provide spiritual assistance to the struggling congregation at Strafford, New Hampshire. Randall helped provide encouragement and direction to the congregation and on August 22, 1785, he ordained Joseph Boody, one of seven founding members of the New Durham congregation, as the Ruling Elder of the Stafford congregation. As a result of his five years of experience under Randall's spiritual authority and leadership in New Durham, in Randall's estimation, Boody was prepared and able to provide adequate spiritual leadership to the Strafford congregation.

A letter addressed to Randall from either a congregation or a group of people hoping to become a congregation did not necessarily mean Randall would soon arrive bringing with him only his encouragement and blessing. Randall took very seriously his responsibility as the spiritual leader and guide to the fledging congregations and

⁴⁹April 13, 1785 letter from Strafford Baptist Church to Benjamin Randall, in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:28. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

spiritually wandering individuals and refused to recognize a group of individuals as a new congregation unless he was confident that the group was ready to make the important step of covenanting together as a congregation.

Like the congregation at Loudon, the Barrington Church⁵⁰ also reorganized themselves to be part of the Church of Christ in New Durham. A copy of the covenant is found in the *New Durham Church Record Book* and the entry concluded with the acknowledgment of the relationship between the Barrington Church and Randall and the New Durham congregation as they affirmed that they “Look upon our Selves as Members of the Church at New Durham.”⁵¹

The importance of the church covenant to Randall is evident in how he handled a challenging situation within the Church of Christ in New Durham. Almost from the inception of the church in 1780 Randall encountered difficulty and challenges from some of the members. Randall often used church discipline⁵² when necessary in an effort to return backsliding members to the fold but in 1791, in Randall’s view, the corruption and immorality of the New Durham congregation was beyond the point of church discipline and Randall, the revival preacher known for establishing new congregations, took the drastic step of formally ending the existence of his own congregation.

Early in 1791 Randall agonized over the lack of spiritual vitality within the congregation and after asking God for direction in how to lead the congregation he determined it was best to start over. Randall believed that the members of the original

⁵⁰Present day Crown Point Church in Barrington, New Hampshire.

⁵¹New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:47. Entry dated March 26, 1788. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁵²The practice of church discipline will be given thorough treatment in the following chapter.

New Durham congregation lost their identity as a proper visible church because they were not living according to the church covenant that they had willingly affirmed.

Randall's solution to the problem was to declare the end of the original congregation and to start a new congregation with other individuals, who like Randall, were willing to live up to the high standards of the covenant.

The decision to disband the congregation did not affect only those members of the congregation but also had an impact on the entire community. Randall wanted the community to know that those individuals who did not live according to the covenant were no longer members of the church. In order to inform the citizens of the dissolution of the congregation and to distance himself publicly from the backsliding members Randall publicly read a letter on April 3 and April 10, to notify the citizens of New Durham of the formal end of the Church of Christ of New Durham. The letter opened,

But considering how Very infearious the Number of those who stand fast in the truth are to those who have turned 'like a Dog to his Vomite and as a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the Mire,' Conclude that our former covenant Engagements are broaken, by the ungodly conduct of professors who have Become backsliders, and that we are no more a Church in Visable Standing; and that we believe it Most for the Glory of God that We Desolve our former Visable Standing as a Church and make a publick Declaration that We are No More a Church in Visable Standing as formerly that people in general May not Look upon Disorderly Walkers as members of this church any longer.⁵³

The reading of the letter was necessary so that Randall could inform the citizens that he and the other like-minded members had done their part in fulfilling their covenant obligations but the "backsliders" were the ones who brought about the dissolution of the congregation. The public notification also freed Randall of any covenantal responsibilities to these individuals as the decision to free the "backsliders" from

⁵³New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:55-56. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

membership responsibilities was communicated to the entire town. The disobedient individuals were no longer members of the church because the church no longer existed as a result of the individual members that did not live up to their covenantal obligations.

The public announcement also made public the opportunity for members to join in a new congregation. The letter concluded, “Therefore every Member is Now from this time free from Each other as to any outward Engagement, and are at Libberty to joyne with any church that they have fellowship with.”⁵⁴ The inclusion of this statement was crucial in that it granted Randall and others the ability to form a new congregation because they were publicly freed from their covenantal obligations in the original congregation. On April 13, 1791, three days after the second public reading of the letter of dissolution, Randall and others joined together in covenant agreement to form a new congregation.

When Buzzell recounted the incident he made clear that Randall and those who followed him in forming a new congregation were left with no alternative, “After much conversation on the necessity of coming out from the spirit and practices of this wicked world, and of living up to the rule given by Christ, they unitedly arose and gave each other the right hand of fellowship, publicly declaring that they came out from all disorderly walkers, and that those professors who were disorderly were no more of them.”⁵⁵ Randall was not responsible for the break up of the church but rather the disorderly members of the congregation who no longer lived according to the established covenant were the ones who effectively dissolved the original Church of Christ in New

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 133.

Durham. The behavior of the backsliders forced Randall and others to start a new congregation composed of those who were willing to adhere to the demands of the church covenant.

As in the original congregation a covenant was drafted but this covenant offered more ethical clarity so that the congregation would have specific expectations of all members. The new covenant included such expectations as the rejection of the customs and fashions of the world, the banning of lawsuits between believers, and the rejection of bearing arms. The new covenant also encouraged the practice of the Golden Rule in business dealings and affirmed the practices of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the washing of one another's feet.⁵⁶ The original church covenant did not offer the specific restrictions and affirmations that are present in the second covenant.⁵⁷ Randall and the New Durham congregation were frustrated that some of the members did not live up to their covenant obligations and the second covenant made clear exactly what was expected of all members. Those members who failed to live up to the expectations were subject to discipline from the other members. The new covenant concluded with the expectation that "if any of us are Convicted of not walking according there to or of Violating thereof We shall be Deem'd Disorderly and be Delt with as Such as the afforsaid Rule shall Direct."⁵⁸ Randall and twenty others were willing to live according to the newly established covenant and on April 13, 1791, a new Church of Christ in New Durham was established.

⁵⁶Covenant of the Church of Christ in New Durham in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:57-60. Dated April 13, 1791. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁵⁷Both covenants are included in the appendix.

⁵⁸Ibid., 1:60.

The difficulties facing Randall in New Durham did not preclude him from his concern for the spirituality of others throughout New England as he continued to travel throughout the region in hopes of offering spiritual leadership and guidance. In 1791 Randall received a letter requesting assistance from a group of people in Strafford, Vermont. The group in Strafford heard of Randall's ministry from Robert Dickey, a member of the New Durham congregation that was working as a hired laborer in Strafford. The Strafford group admitted their anxiety over their spiritual condition and asked Randall for assistance. A portion of the letter dated September 10, 1791, reads, "We now think it expedien according to the Light and manifestation of God to come in to church order of government as the word of God directs and being informed by Brother Dickey of your standing and your order it being agreeable to our minds we request some of the elders of your church to come as soon as possible to our assistance as we are in a trying world and expos'd to many snares, and we are alone as to sentiments in this part of the world."⁵⁹ In July of the following year, Randall was able to fulfill the request of the Strafford group and interviewed and observed the fledgling congregation. Accompanying Randall on the trip to Strafford was John Buzzell⁶⁰ who eventually would follow in Randall's footsteps as a leading figure within the Freewill tradition. Randall and Buzzell carried with them a letter of endorsement from the Church of Christ in New Durham. The letter recommended Randall as "a Regular ordain'd Elder for the space of twelve years and in good standing whome we Esteam highly in the Lord for his work sake; together with our Dear Brethren John Buzzell whome we esteem a Mesenger of the

⁵⁹September 10, 1791 letter from a group in Strafford, VT, to Benjamin Randall and the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:66. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁶⁰Buzzell's conversion into the Freewill movement and his ordination as minister in the tradition will be covered later in this chapter.

Lord and a preacher of the gosple.”⁶¹ Randall and Buzzell attended several meetings in Strafford and Randall baptized a few individuals.⁶² Randall and Buzzell observed a lack of theological unity within the citizens of Strafford and as a result could not in good conscious recognize them as a church in relationship with the New Durham congregation. Buzzell recalled that as they left Strafford they were forced to extend “the parting hand” and were unable to welcome them with the hand of fellowship.⁶³ Randall and Buzzell returned to New Durham without establishing the Strafford group into a new congregation because Randall did not believe they could successfully covenant together as a congregation because

there is a Difference among them with regard to their Sentiments in Somethings which causeth a division ...according to the Best of our Judgment and cannot Remove them—therefore our Result is if they cannot be agreed to walk together; it is best to Divide and Every one take the Libberty to walk as they Understand.⁶⁴

Randall would not allow a congregation to become part of the connexion unless it was theologically consistent with the other churches already within the connection. The Strafford group exhibited a theological diversity that Randall was unwilling to accept within the connection.

The relationship between Randall and the Strafford group did not end with Randall’s return to New Durham in 1792. The next year Randall returned to Strafford and participated in a theological disputation with William Grow, a Calvinist, in order to

⁶¹July 24, 1792 letter from the Church of Christ of New Durham to Strafford, VT, in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:82. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁶²The New Durham Baptist Church Records indicate the Baptism of three individuals from Strafford from August to October of 1792. New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:82. FFWBC, New Durham, NH. See entries dated Aug 29, 31, and Oct 7, 1792.

⁶³Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (Oct 1811): 124.

⁶⁴New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:96. Entry dated Feb 21, 1793. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

help the Strafford group determine their theology. After Grow and Randall presented the specifics of their theology the Strafford group voted in order to demonstrate whether they agreed with the Calvinism of William Grow or the universal call presented by Randall. By a slim margin Randall won the majority of votes by the count of fifteen to ten. Despite the victory Randall was still not comfortable welcoming the Strafford group into the connexion and again he returned to New Durham without recognizing the legitimacy of the Strafford congregation. John Buzzell returned later that same year and preached several times in Strafford in an effort to form a new congregation. Before he returned to New Durham he observed nine members of the Strafford group covenant together as the first church in Vermont to be in connexion with the Church of Christ in New Durham.

Organizing a Movement

As a result of the revivals he led and the congregations that he established Randall's status as a spiritual authority continued to spread throughout Northern New England posing the challenge to Randall of maintaining a relationship with various churches spread throughout the region. As Randall continued to preach revivals and respond to calls for assistance, a large portion of his attention turned to organizing the rapidly increasing religious tradition. Many of the congregations that were recognized to be in connexion with the New Durham congregation did not have an ordained minister of their own and were largely dependent upon Randall for providing spiritual guidance and occasionally serving as a spiritual authority when conflict arose within a congregation. For example, Buzzell recounted that by 1790 there were eight ordained ministers among the 400 members within the connexion.⁶⁵ To provide adequate supervision and care for

⁶⁵Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 60.

the congregations, Randall was forced to travel when needs arose. An organizational structure was proposed so that representatives from the congregations could come together for a joint meeting once a quarter so that all the congregations could gather together in one place and Randall could assist all of them at once. This idea kept Randall from constantly having to travel away from New Durham and limited his supervisory meetings to the newly established quarterly meetings that were composed of the different congregations.

The close of 1783 brought a new development within the emerging Freewill tradition as December 6, marked the first connexion-wide meeting held at Little Falls, Maine.⁶⁶ The idea behind the connexion-wide meeting was to allow all the members of the connexion the opportunity to gather together for edification and fellowship. The idea for the connection-wide meeting did not originate with Randall but with Daniel Hibbert, the ruling elder at New Gloucester. The New Durham Church record book includes a letter dated October 11, 1782, from Hibbert to the “the Brethren at N Durham, Loudon and Gilmanton.” He wrote the congregations asking them to consider allowing all members in connexion with the New Durham congregation the opportunity to join together for a meeting. He wrote,

Believing we are members of one Body and have a Right In the Name of assistance of each other But knowing no weapon Like Love I feel willing to pray and Intreat In the fear and the Love of God Brethren Beseech to ask of God wether Duty Don't find you to take part with us and Come to our help....Brethren Don't Delay but Let your Love and fervency for the truth be known.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Record of the Proceedings of the Baptist Quarterly Meeting held at Little Falls on the Six Day December The First Last Day of the Weak In the Year of our Lord Christ One Thousand Seven Hundred and EightyThree in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book held at the Tuck Library at the New Hampshire Historical Society.

⁶⁷October 11, 1782 letter from Daniel Hibbert to the Church of Christ of New Durham, in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:18. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

Randall and the other members of the Church of Christ of New Durham agreed with Hibbert's proposal and organized a meeting for December, 1783.

The meeting gave the various congregations that composed the Church of Christ of New Durham the opportunity to meet together as one body. The meeting opened with "solemn prayer for Direction and Blessing" and immediately moved to conduct business as they elected Pelitiah Tingley as the clerk of the meeting.⁶⁸ Randall's congregation at New Durham set the example for the direction of the meeting as they sent a letter to inform the entire connexion of their recent activities and their current religious condition. The letter also included the full endorsement of the Church of Christ of New Durham for the proposed Quarterly Meeting system that recommended meetings be held in four different places four different times a year. The letter states, "We would hearby testify that we are Rejoiced at It and fully fall in with the proposal."⁶⁹ After the letter from the New Durham congregation was read the group joined together in the Lord's Supper and participated in the washing of the Saint's feet.⁷⁰ Buzzell recounted that the first time in which all the congregations that were part of the Church of Christ of New Durham joined together for the Lord's Supper and the washing of the Saint's feet was "a time of refreshing to their souls."⁷¹

This initial meeting of the entire connexion offers the first evidence of the practice of washing one another's feet as a connection-wide practice within the Freewill

⁶⁸Record of the Proceedings of the Baptist Quarterly Meeting held at Little Falls on the Six Day December The First Last Day of the Weak In the Year of our Lord Christ One Thousand Seven Hundred and EightyThree in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 1. Tuck Library, NHHS.

⁶⁹Undated Letter from Church of Christ of New Durham to Little Falls, in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 1. Tuck Library, NHHS.

⁷⁰The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 2. Tuck Library, NHHS.

⁷¹Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (Jan 1811): 10.

movement. The controversy with Deacon Boody at New Durham gives proof of the practice at New Durham and the practice of washing the Saint's feet was present at the first quarterly meeting as well. The emphasis on the scripture as the sole guide for church practice led the participants to adopt the practice of washing the Saint's feet as they followed the example of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper.

The activities present in the monthly meetings of the various congregations were also present as the quarterly meetings providing Randall the opportunity to supervise the member congregations and provide suggestions or rebukes if needed. Buzzell again offered a reflection of the developing quarterly meeting system stating that they gathered together, "for the purpose of conversing together, and conveying to each other the light which God had communicated to them, so that whatever was communicated to any one of them, was for the benefit of the whole. And if any one had a burden, all helped him to bear it. Those meetings were nurseries of union, knowledge, experience, and practical piety."⁷² The inclusive nature of the connexion is evident in Buzzell's comment. Even though the congregations existed in different towns throughout Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine, they all considered themselves to be part of a new movement under Randall's leadership. Any wisdom or insight granted to one individual was expected to be shared with others for the edification of the entire organization. The openness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit demonstrated by Randall and the New Durham congregation was evident in the initial connection-wide meeting as they expected the Holy Spirit to provide guidance and leadership to the entire gathered assembly. The churches were

⁷²Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (Jan 1811): 10.

separated physically from one another but considered themselves to be part of one spiritual body with their organizer, Benjamin Randall, as their leader.⁷³

At the conclusion of the initial meeting it was decided to meet regularly on a quarterly basis in various locations so that the members of the connexion would have four opportunities a year to be together for fellowship and edification. The location of the meetings varied so that members from all of the churches within the connexion would have equal opportunity to attend. The decision was made to “meet quarterly for the Advancement of Christ’s Glorious Cause Viz At New Gloucester the first Last Day in March at New Durham the first Last Day In June at Woolwich the first Last Day In September and at L. Falls again the First Last Day In Dec.”⁷⁴

Also at the close of the initial meeting the group agreed to draft a letter to be read by all the member congregations so those individuals not present could be informed of the discussions that took place during the meeting. The letter is filled with great expectation regarding the importance of their task as they labored on behalf of God. The letter opened with an encouragement for all individuals to be constantly at work on behalf of the Lord, “Every one building up against his own house now there are Such fearful wastes made In the walls and so many Enimies on Every Side watching to Break In and as the fields are white and already to harvest Pray Pray O Pray the Great Lord of the harvest to thurst forth Faithful Labourers Into his harvest.”

The teaching and ruling elders were singled out with a specific admonition to be diligent in their God appointed tasks, “O that every watchman and officer in Particular

⁷³By 1792 Buzzell recounted the existence of over 40 congregations that were part of the Freewill Baptist connexion. Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 115.

⁷⁴The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 2. Tuck Library, NHHS.

may Now exert yourselves to the utmost IN Stretching Every Vein and Nerve power and faculty of Body and Soul for the permotion of Christ's most Glourious and Elustrious Kingdom." The church leaders and officers unable to attend the Quarterly Meeting were urged to work strenuously on behalf of God and were reminded that the church leaders would one day be held accountable for their actions as ruling elders and deacons, "We Charge you who are trusted to watch over the Flock over which the holy Ghost hath made you overseers and watchmen watch o Watch as those that must give an account."

The letter also included a call to repentance for those in the connexion who were separated from the church as a result of sin. The letter reminded those backsliding members of the seriousness of being separated from God and urged them to reconsider their actions and be restored to their congregations. "O Who can bare the thoughts of one single soul sinking eternally with a most pitiful as well as powerful Emanuel at the Door of their hearts and mouth. O Eternity Eternity Eternity knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men as the God Did Beseech you by us we pray you In Christ Stead be ye reconciled to God."⁷⁵

The members of the connexion that drafted the letter wanted to communicate the importance of their spiritual endeavor and reminded the congregations of the significance of their meeting together both for worship and for monthly meetings in which the individual members of the congregations were held accountable for their actions. The contents of the letter give evidence to the high emphasis on right living and moral purity that existed from the beginning of the Freewill movement. The letter stressed discipline and accountability within the congregations and did not include any theological

⁷⁵December 10, 1783 Circular Letter from the New Durham Quarterly Meeting at Little Falls, Maine, in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 4. Tuck Library, NHHS.

instruction regarding the person of Christ or the doctrine of atonement. From the beginning days of the Freewill movement there was a strong emphasis on proper actions and obedience to the commands of scripture and ethical behavior received far more attention than did any kind of theological debate concerning the tenets of Calvinism.

The following year the Freewill movement instituted their new organizational structure as planned at the initial meeting in December 1783. In 1784 Quarterly Meetings were held at New Gloucester, Maine; New Durham, New Hampshire; Woolwich, Maine; and Little Falls, Maine. The establishment of the quarterly meeting system in the emerging Freewill Baptist tradition preceded any kind of organizational activity by the Calvinistic Baptists in New Hampshire and Maine.⁷⁶

The establishment of the quarterly meeting system enabled Randall to maintain a relationship with all of the churches that were in theological agreement with the Church of Christ of New Durham.⁷⁷ Randall's itinerating ministry enabled him to encounter other churches in the region, some of which Randall discovered to be similar to the Church of Christ of New Durham. As a result of the rapidly expanding Freewill movement Randall continued to devote his time both to the Church of Christ of New Durham, as well to recognizing new congregations to be in connexion with the Church of

⁷⁶The earliest evidence of the existence of the New Hampshire Baptist Association can be found in the 1784 *Minutes of the Warren Association* in which it is recorded that "A letter was received from the New Hampshire Association, consisting of six churches, containing nearly four hundred members, by the hand of Elder William Hooper, who gave a clear and satisfactory account of their faith and order." Cited by Burrage, 76. For the years 1790, 1793, 1794, 1796-1814 the *Minutes of the New Hampshire Baptist Association* can be found at the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York. In Maine the Bowdoinham Baptist Association organized in 1787 see Burrage, 87. A microfilm copy of the minutes of the Bowdoinham Baptist Association for 1792-1814 are located at the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York.

⁷⁷A full treatment of the polity of the Quarterly Meeting structure as well as an analysis of the theology behind the system established by the Freewill Baptist movement will be offered in the following chapter.

Christ of New Durham and maintaining fellowship with other like-minded congregations. The establishment of the Quarterly Meeting schedule helped Randall maintain regular contact with other ministers and congregations throughout the region. For the remainder of his life and ministry Randall devoted significant time and energy to providing leadership to the Church of Christ of New Durham as well as maintaining communication with other churches within the connection. He traveled extensively throughout New England in order to maintain a relationship with other churches so he could successfully monitor the behavior of those congregations that were in connexion with the Church of Christ of New Durham. The establishment of the quarterly meeting system allowed Randall to provide supervisory leadership over the congregations by monitoring the theology of the congregations, ordaining leaders for the various churches, and settling disputes from monthly meetings within the connection.

The second quarterly meeting occurred March 6, 1784, at New Gloucester, Maine, and serves as a representative example of the regular activities that composed the quarterly meetings. At the meeting, letters from the New Durham, Parsonsfield, and Woolwich congregations were read and officers were elected from the representatives present from the congregations at New Durham, Parsonsfield⁷⁸, Woolwich, Hollis, Scarborough, Gorham, and New Gloucester. The letter from Samuel Weeks of Parsonsfield affirmed the decision to meet together on a regular basis, “we thought it good to wright to inform you that we believe the meeting to be for the Glory of God and

⁷⁸Parsonsfield became the center of Freewill education as Parsonsfield Seminary was founded in 1832.

the Comfort of Zion.”⁷⁹ As in the monthly meetings, the first item of business was to affirm theological harmony within the group. Buzzell reported, “Their first business was, to know if the brethren and sisters present, were in fellowship with each other: and upon examination found a most blessed union.”⁸⁰ The same pattern from the monthly meetings of the individual churches continued at the quarterly meeting of the entire connexion as a period of examination and evaluation opened the meeting. If the participants were found to be in fellowship with one another then they “agreed to go forward In the ordinances of our blessed Lord Jesus.”⁸¹ Randall improved on his gift of preaching as he delivered a sermon on Psalm 133:1, focused on the blessings of unity within the connection.⁸² A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to the drafting of a circular letter that was addressed to all the churches of the connection.

The circular letter drafted by the representatives at the quarterly meeting is similar to the letter drafted at the December meeting in that it did not mention the condition of the churches in the connexion and offered no report about the activities of the various churches.⁸³ The letter addressed to the churches within the connexion primarily urged

⁷⁹Undated Letter from Samuel Weeks and the Parsonsfield Church to the March 6, 1784, New Durham Quarterly Meeting at New Gloucester in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 7. Tuck Library NHHS.

⁸⁰Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (Jan 1811): 12.

⁸¹Record of the March 6, 1784, Quarterly Meeting at New Gloucester in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 8. Tuck Library, NHHS.

⁸²“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

⁸³The circular letters from the December and March Quarterly Meetings can be compared with circular letters from the Warren Baptist Association, the first Calvinistic Baptist Association in New England. The letter from the 1780 meeting of the Warren Association proves to be quite a contrast as the Warren letter opened by reporting on the condition of the churches involved as well as related the events of the meeting. “Our souls were abundantly refreshed with the good news we received from almost every quarter. In a great part of our churches the glorious redeemer has been lifting up his standard in a very powerful and prosperous manner; his love and the riches of his grace has been wonderfully displayed; his

the recipients to maintain moral purity so they could be assured of salvation. The letter is filled with biblical references and allusions and included numerous references to remind the recipients of the necessity of rejecting the sins of the world. One section is addressed specifically to those in the connexion who have turned away from their faith in order to seek the pleasures of this world. “O backsliders, leave the field swine and husks and return to your Father’s house where there is bread enough and Lay no longer in a starving condition. O how can you leave so kind, loving, glorious, compassionate friend and husband for a few momentary, carnal delights?” In case there was any question about what those carnal delights were the authors made it clear as they listed “vain cursing and Swearing Drunkenness whoring adultery and carnal company, gaming frolicking and Dancing anger malice revenge worldly mindness worldly honours and robbing” as the things they needed to avoid. Those members of the connexion that continued to seek after the vanities of this world were headed for eternal disaster as they chose to “go to hell because those are the things that Lead there.”⁸⁴

The circular letter functioned as an appeal to the members of the connexion to maintain a high moral standard consistent with the call of the gospel and did not include any information regarding the events of the meeting or specific instruction for the churches within the connexion to follow. The letter’s emphasis on moral purity and righteous living indicates the high moral standards expected of individual members within the churches in the connection. The letter from the quarterly meeting emphasizing moral purity is consistent with the practice of examining the moral purity of members at

children have been quickened, comforted, edified, and strengthened.” See *Minutes of the Warren Association In their Meeting at Royalstone, September 12th and 13th, 1780*. (n.p., 1780), 7.

⁸⁴March 6, 1784 Circular Letter from the Quarterly Meeting at New Gloucester in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 10. Tuck Library, NHHS.

the monthly meetings of the churches within the connection. Benjamin Randall, and his burgeoning movement, focused not only on preaching the message of the gospel but also devoted energy to maintaining the evidence of the gospel in the lives of the members.⁸⁵ In Randall's mind, if a person lived a life of moral purity then he or she provided evidence that they had indeed heard and embraced the gospel message.

While Randall was involved in many of the activities associated with the quarterly meetings of the Church of Christ of New Durham, an incident from the June 1786 quarterly meeting stands out for Randall's disapproval of the action of the group. The New Hampshire Baptist Association composed of Calvinistic Baptist churches formed in 1784 and some of the Freewill Baptist leaders present at the quarterly meeting decided to write a letter to the Calvinistic Association as an example of Christian charity. Among all the participants at the quarterly meeting, Randall alone voted against drafting the letter to the Calvinistic Baptists in the area.⁸⁶

The letter recognized the theological differences between the two groups and expressed the Freewill Baptist's desire "that all stumbling-blocks found with us, or you, may be removed." The letter also expressed the hope of the Freewill quarterly meeting that all enmity between the groups would come to an end, "We wish that all shyness, evil-surmising, or evil-thinking, in any of your hearts, or our own, against our neighbor or brother, may be forever expelled." The Freewill group believed that the importance of the tasks of both groups outweighed any theological differences that separated them. They

⁸⁵The idea of embodied ethics became the starting point for the systematic theology of Baptist theologian James W. McClendon Jr. James W. McLendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986). See in particular Part II: The Sphere of the Communal, 158-239.

⁸⁶Record of the June 3, 1786 Quarterly Meeting at New Durham in The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, 74. Tuck Library, NHHS.

concluded the letter suggesting that both groups focus their attention on their mission, “Let us mutually lay aside every weight, and constantly set the Lord, the worth of his cause and immortal souls, before our eyes.”⁸⁷

Randall’s antipathy towards the existence of the Calvinistic Baptists is further evident in a journal entry recorded by Buzzell. Following a preaching tour of Southern Maine in August 1786 in which Randall’s ministry was well received, he gladly reported,

I found great freedom in preaching—the truth prevailed, and the people through all that country appeared to be awakened. The Calvinistic vail which had been so long over their hearts, seemed to be rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the people were able to look into the perfect law of liberty.⁸⁸

In Randall’s view, the theology of the Calvinistic Baptists was not the pure truth of the gospel and he was pleased to report that he was fortunate to have the opportunity to proclaim the true gospel to those individuals, who previous to Randall’s arrival, had only known the erroneous gospel as presented by the Calvinistic Baptists. This journal entry also sheds light on why Randall did not support the drafting of a letter from the New Durham quarterly meeting to the New Hampshire Baptist Association. Since Randall believed the gospel of the Calvinistic Baptists to be erroneous he was unwilling to extend a welcome to them or to express any willingness to cooperate with them in ministry. Randall did not recognize the gospel of the Calvinistic Baptists to be authentic and pure and was unwilling to express any form of support for the ministry of those who preached an adulterated gospel.

⁸⁷June 3, 1786 Letter from the New Durham Quarterly Meeting to the New Hampshire Baptists Association cited in Stewart, *History of the Freewill Baptists*, 88.

⁸⁸Buzzell, *Life*, 124.

Further Organization

The Freewill Baptist movement had grown significantly since its inception in 1780 as the ninety-five active members that were in connexion with the New Durham Church in 1792 were scattered across fifteen different towns.⁸⁹ The distance separating many of the members from New Durham prompted Randall to come up with an alteration to his original organizational pattern that was established in 1783. The change was necessary because the various monthly meetings associated with the Church of Christ of New Durham also experienced growth. In the same way that new congregations were formed and recognized to be part of the Church of Christ of New Durham, new congregations were settled near other towns that already had monthly meetings of their own. As a result, the need developed for a system that allowed for a number of different quarterly meetings in four different locations within the connexion so that the new congregations could be monitored and tended to as needed.

He presented his new organizational strategy at a meeting in Barnstead, New Hampshire, May 23, 1792 and Randall entitled his proposal, "A Method for the Better Regulating the Church of New Durham."⁹⁰ Randall proposed that each monthly meeting establish its own clerk and book of records in order to maintain the regular business of the church. The records from the monthly meeting were to be presented and examined at the quarterly meeting nearest to their location. Quarterly meetings were to continue

⁸⁹By 1792 the Freewill connexion included congregations in New Durham, North Strafford, and Strafford, New Hampshire and Hollis, Woolwich, Georgetown, Bristol, Gorham, Gray, Parsonsfield, Lincolnville, Paris, Edgcomb, Canaan, and Camden, Maine.

⁹⁰The title of his proposal is somewhat misleading because it refers specifically to the Church at New Durham. It must be remembered that Randall viewed all the churches that he helped to establish to be part of the New Durham church. While the name denotes a single church in reality it represents all the congregations that were in connexion with Randall's Church of New Durham.

meeting to accommodate the numerous monthly meetings that existed throughout New Hampshire and Maine. Randall proposed that the quarterly meetings of the Church of Christ of New Durham that rotated between Parsonsfield, Edgecomb, and Gorham Maine, and New Durham, New Hampshire, take the name of Yearly Meetings because they met only once a year in each location. The actions of quarterly meetings would then be reported to the yearly meeting as the representatives of the quarterly meetings communicated their spiritual condition by presenting their congregational record books and delivering matters of internal controversy to the yearly meeting. The proposal called for meetings to be held in Parsonsfield, Maine, in February; New Durham, New Hampshire, in June; Edgecomb, Maine, in September; and Gorham, Maine, in November. The proposed system enabled all members within the connexion the opportunity to attend at least one of the yearly meetings so they could hear of the status of all the various congregations that existed within the connection.

The quarterly meetings continued to occur on a regular basis in order to maintain supervision and communication with the various monthly meetings that existed within the connection. As the growth of the connexion continued, eventually additional quarterly meetings were necessary. These additional quarterly meetings conducted business in the same way as the New Durham quarterly meeting and reported to and relied heavily upon the guidance of the yearly meeting. The Edgecomb Quarterly Meeting and the Farmington Quarterly Meeting were both officially recognized by the yearly meeting in 1794. The system that was adopted in 1793 allowed a small amount of freedom for the congregations in the connexion as it was becoming difficult for Randall to monitor the activities of each congregation. The new system was established so that

Randall and others such as Pelatiah Tingley, and Samuel Weeks, could maintain supervision over the connexion by attending the four different yearly meetings that occurred each year.

Randall's "A Method for the Better Regulating the Church of New Durham," was presented to representatives of four different monthly meetings⁹¹ at the May 1792 meeting in Barnstead, and the representatives approved of the reorganization of the Freewill movement. While the reorganization of the administrative structure of the movement did enable the distant members of the connexion greater involvement in the growing Freewill movement, the restructuring also enabled Randall the opportunity to attend the four different yearly meetings so that he could continue to monitor the activities of the connexion and provide leadership as controversy and difficulties arose. He could also theoretically attend each of the quarterly meetings as well but the establishment of the yearly meetings alleviated Randall from needing to attend each of the quarterly meetings because any source of tension or controversy within a quarterly meeting would eventually be brought to the yearly meeting for mediation.

Randall's episcopal leadership over the connexion must not be overlooked as he continued to travel throughout the connexion providing spiritual leadership and guidance as long as his health and family matters would allow. The new organizational system was established so that conflicts and challenges faced by congregations at their monthly

⁹¹Along with the Randall-led Church of Christ of New Durham contingent, representatives were present from the Monthly Meetings at Middletown, Barrington, and Pittsfield. See the Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:2 which is located at the First Free Will Baptist Church of New Durham, New Hampshire. This record book is different from The Quarterly Meeting Record Book, located at the Tuck Library of the New Hampshire Historical Society, that included the records of the Quarterly Meetings that rotated to different locations from 1783 -1792. It is also different from the Yearly Meeting Record Book that is located at the First Free Will Baptist Church of New Durham, New Hampshire, that recorded the events of the Yearly Meetings after the new organizational structure was implemented in 1792.

meetings could be brought to the next quarterly meeting. If the dispute was not settled satisfactorily at the quarterly meeting it was then sent to the yearly meeting for final adjudication. The new organizational system resulted in the yearly meeting serving as the final authority on controversial matters within the movement. The implementation of the new system guaranteed that Randall and other Freewill Baptist leaders could provide leadership and help settle disputes that arose within the movement.

One of the controversies brought to the yearly meeting involved the controversial practice of excluding members from active membership of a congregation. Within the Freewill movement, valid membership in a congregation was understood to be critical for the salvation of each individual. If an individual was excommunicated from their congregation then their salvation was understood to be at stake because they had failed to live up to the covenant agreements they entered into upon coming into the congregation. The establishment of the new organizational structure took the matter of excommunication out of the hands of the local congregations or monthly meetings and put it under the authority of the yearly meeting. As Randall recorded in the church record book the new system was put in place in part “so that No Member may Be Rejected only at the yearly Meeting.”⁹²

With the new organizational structure put in place the various quarterly meetings continued to go about their business providing leadership to area monthly meetings and recognizing new congregations under their jurisdiction. For example, at the New Durham quarterly meeting held in October at Barnstead, the members present authorized a committee to go to Wolfeborough in order to investigate constituting a new church.

⁹²Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:4. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

Randall led the committee that was given a letter from the New Durham quarterly meeting authorizing them to “Imbody a Church in fellowship with Chh of New Durham and if they so Do we shall Look on Such a Number of Members as one with us.”⁹³ The meeting also authorized a committee to attend the ordination of John Buzzell. The authorized list of ministers representing the New Durham quarterly meeting at Buzzell’s ordination included Randall. The record book states that Randall and others, “be our mesengars from the Chh of New Durham to attend the ordination of Brother John Buzzell.”⁹⁴

The responsibilities of the quarterly meetings also included rendering judgment on controversial and divisive issues that developed at the monthly meetings that were in association with the quarterly meeting. The New Durham quarterly meeting was consulted by the monthly meeting in Barrington, in regard to a problem between two members, James Gray and William Roe.⁹⁵ Randall was again assigned to be part of the committee that represented the quarterly meeting and was asked to investigate the matter and report back the results. After their investigation the committee reported back at the following meeting that “Brother Gray was Very culpable and much to blame and that he should publicly Confess and Condemn it.”⁹⁶

The growth of the Freewill movement prompted Randall to reorganize the connexion in 1792. The activities of the monthly meetings did not change and the

⁹³October 17, 1792 Letter from New Durham Quarterly Meeting to Baptist Brethren at Woolfsborro in Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:9. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁴Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:10. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁵Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:19. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁶Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:25. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

responsibilities of the quarterly meetings did not change either as they continued to provide leadership and guidance to the monthly meetings in their area. The reorganization resulted in the development of the yearly meetings that rotated throughout the connection. This reorganization allowed Randall to maintain communication with all of the constituents of the movement and allowed all matters of controversy and division to be submitted to the authority of the yearly meeting that occurred four different times a year in four different locations. Randall's satisfaction with the reorganization effort is evident from his journal entry at the close of 1792 as Buzzell reported, "he attended all the quarterly meetings through the year: visited all parts of the Connexion, and to his unspeakable joy, found the brethren much engaged, and great additions to the churches."⁹⁷

Ordaining Leaders

One of the reasons the organizational structure of the Freewill connexion is such a crucial piece of the Freewill story is because the burgeoning religious movement existed with relatively few ordained ministers. The ordination of a minister was a very serious undertaking and Randall and the other leaders in the movement understood the scriptural mandate to require severe consideration including a thorough examination of the candidate's character and a sufficient demonstration of spiritual gifts by the candidate. Randall's elaborate organizational structure enabled Randall and the other ministers to provide leadership over a large number of congregations and it was not necessary to have an ordained minister at the head of each and every Monthly Meeting. The organizational structure also allowed the ministers the opportunity to maintain communication with and

⁹⁷Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 120.

supervision over all the monthly meetings within the connexion. The growth of the movement coupled with the spiritual development of certain individuals convinced Randall to set aside a handful of individuals for special service as ordained ministers within the connection.

Perhaps the most notable example is John Buzzell. Buzzell became a member of the Church of Christ of New Durham during the revival that followed the dissolution of the first congregation in 1791. Randall baptized Buzzell on June 8, 1791, but their relationship had commenced the year before when Buzzell came to New Durham and opened a school in the Fall of 1790. During that Fall season, Buzzell attended many meetings of the Church of Christ of New Durham and visited Randall in his home on a number of occasions. At the close of the school term, Buzzell became convinced of his need for Christ and publicly proclaimed his desire to be a Christian to the New Durham congregation prior to returning to his hometown of Middleton.

Buzzell's spiritual fervor continued after he left New Durham and soon after he returned home he helped establish a monthly meeting in Middleton. He began to preach in neighboring towns including Brookfield, Wolfeborough, Barnstead, and Pittsfield, and gained more members for the Middleton monthly meeting. As a result of the rapid growth, the Church of Christ of New Durham recognized the monthly meeting as a branch of the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1792. It was hard for Randall to ignore the efforts of Buzzell and the impressive results of his ministry as he helped establish a new congregation composed of members from five different towns. As a result of the demonstration of his spiritual gifts and because God was clearly blessing his efforts as evident by the number of people who responded to Buzzell's ministry, Randall

and the Church of Christ of New Durham moved to set Buzzell apart for the ministry. Buzzell was ordained on October 25, 1792, by Benjamin Randall.⁹⁸ Randall preached the ordination sermon from 2 Corinthians 5:20, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” When reflecting on the event, Buzzell himself reported, “Elder Benjamin Randel preached a well adapted sermon on the occasion.”⁹⁹ Samuel Weeks, the minister from Parsonsfield, also participated as he prayed while the ministers laid their hands on Buzzell as well as gave the ministerial charge.¹⁰⁰ In 1798 Buzzell moved to Parsonsfield to help provide spiritual leadership and guidance to the churches formerly under the authority of Samuel Weeks. Soon after arriving in Parsonsfield, Buzzell became the recognized spiritual leader of the Parsonsfield Quarterly Meeting that was recognized by the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1798.¹⁰¹ Buzzell’s greatest contribution to the Freewill movement occurred following Randall’s death as he worked vigorously to continue to the work Randall had begun.¹⁰² He was recognized as the heir-apparent to Randall and functioned largely in the same capacity as he provided guidance and leadership to the connexion.

The ordination of ministers in the Freewill movement was in fact a rare event as the itinerant aspect of the ministry ensured the existence of a far greater number of churches compared to the number of ordained ministers. As a result of the elaborate

⁹⁸Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:12. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁹Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (July 1811): 93.

¹⁰⁰Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book I, 1:12. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

¹⁰¹Stewart, 134.

¹⁰²Buzzell’s role as successor to Randall, as the leader of the Freewill movement, will be assessed in Chapter Six.

organizational structure the ordained clergy were able to provide spiritual leadership and guidance to a number of congregations. The various congregations met for worship whether they had a minister present or not but often did not conduct matters of business unless a member of the ordained clergy was present. The ordained clergy could not attend every worship service but could attend each of the Monthly Meetings of the various congregations that existed within their region. Randall's ability to supervise and lead the growing Freewill movement was threatened only by his own frailty. Near the end of his life, illness prevented him from attending a number of meetings and it is clear from letters Randall wrote to the members of the movement that he was concerned about the future direction of the movement if he could not be present to lead and guide the movement.

Death of Randall

When returning from a visit to the churches in the connexion in Maine in 1804 Randall came down with a cold that kept him bedridden for several weeks. His condition was such that he was unable to attend the New Durham Quarterly Meeting held July 31, 1804. Since he was unable to attend the elder statesman of the movement drafted a letter to the members of the Meeting expressing his theological conviction as well as his concern for the future of the movement. The letter opened with a familiar refrain from Randall as he offered an explanation of the origin of his theological position stating, "I am more, and more, established in the faith I have always Preach'd, and know that I received it not of men, neither was I taught, but the revelation of Jesus Christ."¹⁰³ After

¹⁰³July 31, 1804 Letter from Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting. in the Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book II, 2:130. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

stating the origin of his conviction he then affirmed his belief in universal atonement and the free will of all humanity. “I am strong in the belief of the universal love of God to all men in the atonement; of the universal appearance of the light, love and grace of God to all men; and that the salvation or damnation of man kind, turn upon their own receiving or rejecting the same.” After affirming his belief in the free will of humanity Randall also affirmed his rejection of the “shocking, inconsistent, Calvinistick doctrine of election and reprobation.”¹⁰⁴

The letter was not only an affirmation of Randall’s theology, however, as it also included his pastoral concern regarding the actions and behavior of the constituents. He exhibited some concern that the illicit behavior of some of the members would jeopardize God’s blessing on the entire community. He wrote, “O, beware of it, I pray you; for we are called out from the world, and from every people under heaven, and our only prosperity depends on our following that Lead, and if we don’t God will Raise up another people, and we will sink as others have Done before us.”¹⁰⁵ Randall’s concern over the ethical consistency of the members of the connexion existed throughout his ministry even to what he thought was his last days. He fervently believed that disobedience on behalf of the individuals of the connexion would jeopardize the offending party’s salvation as well as potentially take away God’s blessing from the entire connection. His concern regarding his own health is also evident as he divulged that he believed his time as leader of the connexion had come to an end and he was uncertain who would take his place. He did not name a successor but left it to the Lord to raise up a new leader. He confessed to

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 2:131

the connection, “Now, brethren, I am going to leave the Connexion with you, and I know not on whome my mantle will fall; I will it to whome the Lord wills;”¹⁰⁶ Randall expected that in the same way God supernaturally revealed the theology that guided Randall throughout his ministry, God was going to have to supernaturally chose a new leader to take Randall’s place.

The July 1804 New Durham quarterly meeting also entertained the motion to establish a new quarterly meeting within the state of New Hampshire because of the size of the New Durham quarterly meeting made for a large meeting. Stewart reported that in 1804 alone five churches had been added to the New Durham quarterly meeting which brought the total number of member churches up to thirty-six. The motion was presented to divide the New Durham quarterly meeting but the representatives from the thirty-six churches rejected the proposal. Randall’s distress regarding his health and departure from the connexion was short-lived as he recovered and was healthy enough to attend the next meeting of the New Durham quarterly meeting in Canterbury, New Hampshire, on October 16, 1804. His illness also caused him to miss the yearly meeting held in September but he recovered in time for the November meeting held in Parsonsfield, Maine. At the Yearly Meeting in Parsonsfield, in which Buzzell estimated attendance to be between 1000–1,200 people, Randall was elected to his familiar post as moderator of the meeting, preached two times during the gathering, and administered the Lord’s Supper to the members.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 273.

Randall's health continued to improve at the close of 1804 and into 1805 and he returned to his normal ministry activities as he traveled throughout the connexion in order to supervise the activities of monthly meetings as well as participated in the connection-wide yearly meetings that provided guidance to the various quarterly meetings. In the following year, 1806, the health problems that began in 1804 returned and after traveling to Fitchburg, Massachusetts, to participate in the ordination of Stephen Gibson, Randall told John Buzzell that he had "left blood in a number of places in every town between Ashby and New-Durham."¹⁰⁸ His ill health prevented Randall from attending the August 1807 session of the New Durham quarterly meeting and as before he wrote a letter to the members encouraging unity within the connection. He opened the letter cautioning against internal division as he wrote, "O be aware of sisams and rents, and be not of such as cause divisions, but mark such, and turn away from them. United we stand, but divided we fall."¹⁰⁹ While he urged for unity within the connexion he was concerned that there was a "scattering spirite abroad in the world" in the form of human inventions such as "platforms—creed—covenants—and forms for ordinances which are not found in the scriptures of truth." He urged that the "human inventions" be ignored in order to maintain purity and unity within the connection. As in the beginning of his ministry, he called for total reliance on scripture as the guide for the faith and practice of the connection. In the letter he pleaded with the members of the connection, "cleave to the

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 275.

¹⁰⁹August 15, 1807 Letter from Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in the Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book II, 2:223. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

scriptures of truth and make that the only rule of faith and practice, both in temporal life and for the government of the church.”¹¹⁰

His health improved enough that he was able to travel to visit the congregation in Woolwich, Maine, in September. Randall participated in the worship service on September 20, 1807, and he “delivered his last sermon to the church in that place, and closed the scene by administering the Lord’s supper, and washing of the saint’s feet.”¹¹¹ Randall’s illness returned in 1808 and he spent most of the year confined to his home which prevented him from participating in a session of the New Durham Quarterly Meeting held at Andover, New Hampshire, on May, 14, 1808. As before the fact that he was unable to be present physically did not prevent Randall from making an impact on the session as he wrote a letter that was read to the gathered participants.

As in previous correspondence with the participants of the quarterly meeting, Randall’s anxiety over the future of the movement is obvious as he expressed his concern regarding the next generation of ministers within the connection. Randall made clear that he was apprehensive about the theological impurity and the lack of humility that he observed in the next generation of ministers. He expressed his concern while also reminding the recipients of the theological purity that existed during the beginning stages of the movement. He wrote, “The time was, when but one doctrine—the doctrine of Jesus—was known. Our preachers were content to be humble, pious men. O when shall I see such a season again! O when shall I see ministers travelling in spirit, with agony of

¹¹⁰Ibid., 2:224.

¹¹¹Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 284.

soul, going softly and saluting no man by the way!”¹¹² The next generation of ministers in the connexion did not demonstrate the humility that Randall believed the ministerial task demanded. Randall observed a generation of ministers that were concerned more about the praise and adulation of their fellow man than the directives and mandates from God that should have guided their actions and behavior. Particularly in the early stages of his ministry Randall had very little public affirmation and relied heavily on the spiritual affirmation he received directly from God. He hoped the next generation of ministers within the connexion would demonstrate a similar devotion and reliance to God and not strive for the temporary satisfaction found in the praise of their peers.

Randall’s anxiety was not only for the ministerial leadership within the connexion but also for the backsliding members of the connexion that did not fully understand the fact that their inappropriate actions had jeopardized their relationship with God. He urged the backsliding individuals to repent so that they could be reunited with God and if they did not then Randall was prepared to testify against them at their day of judgment. In the letter he pleaded, “O sinner, rouse, rouse soon, or you will be eternally undone. This is my last call to you (perhaps), till I meet you at the judgment-seat, as a swift witness against you.” Randall closed the letter expressing equal concern over the fate of both the ministers who were tempted by the praise of men and the backsliding individuals who refused to repent. He urged both groups to be as fearful as he was about their spiritual condition. He begged, “O backslider, slothful preachers, I tremble for you. O tremble, tremble for yourselves; for if you die so, great will be your condemnation.”¹¹³

¹¹²May 14, 1808, Letter from Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting cited by Stewart, *History of the Freewill Baptists*, 248.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 249.

This proved to be Randall's last letter to the members of the connexion and his final correspondence is consistent with his public ministry as he urged the participants to make sure that their actions were consistent with their identity as followers of Christ. His concern about the eternal consequences of the actions of both "backsliders" and "slothful preachers" illustrates his belief that both members and ministers of the connexion could jeopardize their relationship with God and find themselves eternally separated from God as a result of their disobedience.

The illness that prevented Randall from attending the May session of the Quarterly Meeting eventually took his life on October 22, 1808. The recurring bouts of illness provided Randall plenty of time to prepare for his own death and he planned out the details of his own funeral service. Buzzell recounted that "every arrangement for the funeral had been made under his own direction, even the preparation of his graveclothes."¹¹⁴ One of the things Randall determined was who would officiate at his funeral service and he asked John Buzzell to preach the funeral sermon. The service was held October 26, 1808, to allow time for ministers and members from throughout the connexion to travel to New Durham for the funeral.¹¹⁵ In total, seventeen ordained ministers attended the service to pay their respects to the great organizer of the Freewill Baptist movement.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Ibid, 250-1.

¹¹⁵The best estimate of the number of members in the Freewill Baptist connexion at the time of Randall's death is offered by the *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, which estimated the number of churches to be roughly 100 and the members to be around 5,000. See G.A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, "Benjamin Randall," in *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, (Boston, MA: Arthur Stockin, 1889): 560.

¹¹⁶Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 300. Randall's prestige was such that a lock of his hair was preserved. A lock of Randall's hair along with his pewter cup and plate and his spectacles are held in the Archives Center of the American Baptist Historical Society at Valley Forge, PA.

Summary

From his ordination in 1780 until his death in 1808 Benjamin Randall worked tirelessly to fulfill his obligations as a minister of the gospel. His work began as a revival preacher traveling from town to town preaching the message of God's universal love to whoever would listen. The center of his ministry was New Durham, New Hampshire, where he lived and formed the first of many churches. The formation of the Church of Christ of New Durham in no way restricted his ministerial exploits as he continued to travel throughout New England extolling individuals to embrace the grace of God. His ministry activities led to the recognition of numerous churches throughout the region and Randall instituted an organizational system that included regular monthly meetings enabling him to maintain supervision over the newly formed congregations. As the movement continued to grow the established organizational system had to expand and Randall instituted the quarterly meetings as a way to monitor and assist the ever-growing number of monthly meetings within the connection. The pattern continued as the movement continued to expand and eventually the organizational system had to adapt again in 1792 as yearly meetings were introduced as the final authority on all matters of controversy and division within the connection.

While the connexion experienced impressive numerical growth under Randall's leadership and direction, the first church founded by Randall, the Church of Christ of New Durham, was not free from controversy and the original congregation was disbanded on account of the individuals who could not maintain their covenantal responsibilities. Proper behavior and adherence to the church covenant were important matters to Randall and he maintained high expectations of those who desired to join with

the Church of Christ of New Durham. These same high expectations were imposed upon all the members of the connexion and as a result church discipline was an important piece of the Freewill Baptist story. The strict discipline and the high expectations placed upon all members of the connexion fostered an attitude of accountability which at times led to division. The organizational system Randall implemented proved to be both a blessing and a curse as the high expectations placed upon the membership led to many controversies and divisions within the connection. Randall imposed the expectations on the connexion and then spent his life adjudicating matters of controversy and division that resulted from the high ethical expectations placed upon the members of the connection. Despite the high expectations placed upon the members and prospective members, Randall's Freewill movement enjoyed significant growth during his lifetime. Randall's ministry that started with the formation of one church in New Durham, New Hampshire, developed into a regional religious movement that needed Randall's supervision and guidance in order to live up to the expectations Randall believed God had for the Church of Christ of New Durham.

CHAPTER SIX

The Theology of the Freewill Baptists

As the American colonies adjusted to their new identity as the United States of America, a connection of congregations under the leadership of Benjamin Randall developed into a unique religious expression. The genesis of the movement was located at New Durham, New Hampshire, the home of Benjamin Randall, who provided the organizational stability that helped shape a collection of congregations into a unified movement. The previous chapter recounted the travels and activities of Randall's life and ministry. This chapter will analyze the theology of Randall and the connexion that separated them from the majority of the other religious groups in New England that affirmed Calvinism. The opening section will examine Randall's theology as found in his writings and as demonstrated in the activities of the connexion. This chapter develops Randall's efforts to control the fast-growing movement through his itinerant ministry, the unique polity of the connexion, the practice of church discipline, and the establishment of the Elder's Conference.

Before proceeding to examine the theology of Randall and that of the Freewill connexion, as found in Randall's writings and demonstrated by the actions of the connexion, we must first discuss the sources of Randall's theology. Randall's ministerial training did not include any kind of formal education. Randall was a self-taught minister who developed his theology based upon his own personal interpretation of the scripture along with the supernatural revelation he experienced at the time of his conversion. Randall's theology was not derived from another human but supernaturally given by God

himself and communicated to Randall through a vision. He did not appear to depend on the authority or opinion of any other individual or group and declared himself to be capable of reading and understanding the scripture for himself. Randall was in no way a prideful theologian as he did not take credit for crafting his theology but considered God to be the direct source of this theological understanding. In one of his letters to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting he wrote of his theology stating, “I know that I received it not from men, but by the revelation of Christ.”¹ The supposed supernatural origin of his theology and polity provided Randall with the confidence he needed to preach, to constitute new churches, and to organize a new religious tradition despite the fact that his theology was in stark contrast to the prevailing Calvinism affirmed by the majority of his peers. With God enabling him to study and understand the scripture, Randall was confident that he could explain the truth of the gospel to the citizens of New England. Following his conversion, Randall spent the remainder of his life relying on the spiritual guidance of God to enable him to teach and preach throughout New England. He relied on God’s leadership as he guided the new congregations he helped establish and recognize into a unified movement.

In order for individuals to become part of the Church of Christ of New Durham, it was first mandatory that they demonstrate to the congregation evidence of both their conversion as well as their on-going relationship with Jesus Christ. This expectation is clearly explained in the original church covenant as the founding members decided to “agree not to Receive any person into fellowship, except they give a satisfactory account

¹Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 250.

of a change of Life and heart.”² Membership was not granted to all inquiring individuals but was only extended to those individuals who could give evidence of their conversion in the past and could demonstrate the vitality of their faith. Individuals had to testify orally about their conversion experience as well as visually through their behavior. Buzzell recounted the cautious nature of Randall and the connexion as he wrote, “they were also pretty cautious about owning, or calling brother, or sister, until they gained a satisfactory evidence, that they were really born into, and belonged to the family.”³ Membership in the Church of Christ of New Durham was an important designation and it was not granted to all persons. Membership was extended only to those individuals who could convince the members of the vitality of their faith.

Randall’s belief in the importance of demonstrating one’s faith can be traced back to his own frustrating experience in the Congregational Church of New Castle, New Hampshire. Randall separated from the church because of the perceived lack of piety exhibited by the members of the congregation. Randall had enjoyed a dramatic spiritual conversion and was disappointed to find that other church members did not share his enthusiasm for the faith or his desire to live according to his understanding of scripture. When establishing his own congregation at New Durham and then when recognizing other congregations to be in relationship to it, Randall established the necessity of clear evidence of one’s piety as a prerequisite for membership.

Another characteristic of Randall’s theology as demonstrated by the church practices he advocated was his belief in the practice of open communion, that is, allowing

²New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:2.

³Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (July 1811): 82.

all professed followers of Christ access to the Lord's Supper. Randall and the Church of Christ of New Durham first considered the question September 12, 1781, and "after Long Labour" decided "to Refer It to further Consideration."⁴ Eventually the congregation decided that visible evidence of the Christian life was the only prerequisite for access to the Lord's Supper as they decided non-immersed believers could "participate at the table as long as their lives demonstrated a commitment to Christ."⁵ A similar decision was reached at the December 1785 New Durham Quarterly Meeting held at Gorham, Maine. In his early history Buzzell recounted, "At this meeting, they agreed to admit to their communion, all such persons as give a satisfactory evidence that they are united to Christ by a living union with him."⁶ The open communion policy of the Church of Christ of New Durham was adopted at the Quarterly Meeting so that the policy would be uniform throughout the connexion. As all churches were recognized to be in relationship with the original Church of Christ of New Durham it was imperative to Randall that the theology and practice be the same throughout the movement.

Randall's belief in the free will of humanity also led him to believe that it was possible for individuals to lose their salvation. In the same way that individuals could chose to accept God's grace they could also make the decision to reject the grace of God. Even individuals that previously accepted God's grace could change their mind and reject it. Randall's conviction that men and women could lose their salvation is demonstrated

⁴Entry dated September 12, 1781 in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:6.

⁵New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:82.

⁶Buzzell, *Religious Magazine* (Jan 1811): 18.

clearly in his lone extant published sermon.⁷ In the sermon he established the unblemished spiritual condition of children and God's unconditional acceptance of them. In Randall's opinion, all children were free from condemnation until they reached the age of accountability at which time they were subject to condemnation for their own sins. All people were eligible to accept the grace of God but their lives must demonstrate that decision. If individuals accepted the grace of God but then did not demonstrate their Christian identity in their life, then Randall believed they put their salvation at risk. He wrote, "but if he(a backslider) remains in his rebellion, and continues in his backslidings, and so lives, and so dies, 'All his righteousness that hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.' Ezek 18:24,26."⁸ Salvation was not secured once a person was baptized but was subject to the daily decisions of the individuals as they chose whether or not they wanted to demonstrate their decision to accept the grace of God by living in obedience to God's commands. Individuals that no longer lived according to scripture and according to the covenant agreements of the congregation were not assured of salvation and condemned themselves on account of their illicit behavior.

Henry Alline

The theology of Randall and the eighteenth century Freewill Baptists can also be revealed through the interaction with and response to two individuals, Henry Alline and

⁷Benjamin Randall, *A Discourse Delivered Extempore at Farmington, N.H., February 27, 1803 at the Interment of Murmoth Fortune Herrick, Son of Hallibut and Sally Herrick*, (Dover, N. H.: Samuel Bragg, 1803).

⁸Ibid., 13.

Elias Smith. Henry Alline⁹ (1748-1784), was a Maritime evangelist, hymn writer, and theologian who was born and died in New England but spent the majority of his public ministry in Nova Scotia.¹⁰ Alline was known to Randall and the connexion through his writings, primarily his anti-Calvinistic publication *Two Mites*.¹¹ At the Quarterly Meeting held at Edgecomb, Maine, on September 4, 1784, it was decided to republish Alline's work. Randall recorded the events in the record book that the participants "Voted to have Brother Henry Alens Book intituled Two mites republished."¹² Whether or not any action was taken at that time is unknown because there is no existent edition of Alline's *Two Mites* published by the Freewill Baptists prior to 1804. Twenty years after the decision was reached to reprint Alline's work, *Two Mites* was reprinted by the Freewill Baptists after it had been amended by Benjamin Randall.¹³

Alline was also a noted hymn writer and like his theological treatise, *Two Mites*, his hymns became widely accepted within the Freewill connexion.¹⁴ Also, a number of Alline's hymn were included in the first official hymnbook of the freewill movement

⁹Scholars are indebted to George Rawlyk for his thorough examination of Alline's ministry as well as Alline's participation in and contribution to the late eighteenth century colonial New England religious landscape. For an interesting article on Rawlyk's evolving opinion of Alline see Barry Moody, "George Rawlyk's Henry Alline," 53-76 in *Revivals, Baptists, & George Rawlyk*, ed., Daniel C. Goodwin (Wolfville, NS: Acadia Divinity College, 2000).

¹⁰See the "Introduction," 5-53 in Henry Alline, *Selected Writings*, ed., George Rawlyk (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987) and J. M. Bumsted, *Henry Alline 1748-1784*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1971). Alline's journal is also available see *The Life and Journal of the Rev. Mr. Henry Alline*, eds., James A. Beverley and Barry Moody (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1982).

¹¹Henry Alline, *Two mites on some of the most important and much disputed points of divinity cast into the treasury for the welfare of the poor and needy, and committed to the perusal of the unprejudiced and impartial reader* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: A. Henry, 1781).

¹²Sept 5, 1784 Edgecomb Quarterly Meeting entry in The Yearly Meeting Book, 20.

¹³Henry Alline, *Two Mites Cast into the Offering of God, for the Benefit of Mankind*, Amended by Benjamin Randall, (Dover, NH: Samuel Bragg, 1804).

¹⁴A collection of Alline's hymns was published by Samuel Bragg at Dover, New Hampshire in 1795 see Henry Alline, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Dover, NH: Samuel Bragg, 1795).

when it was compiled and published in 1823 under the leadership of John Buzzell.¹⁵ In the introduction to the hymnbook, Buzzell refers to the “pious Allen” as well as other hymn writers including Watts, Dodderidge, and Newton, “whose names alone seem to be sufficient recommendation of their works.”¹⁶ Such high praise indicates Buzzell knew the Freewill community needed no introduction to Alline as they were already familiar with his work.

In *Radical Sects in Revolutionary New England*, Stephen Marini inaccurately reported that Alline attended the 1784 Quarterly Meeting and “deeply impressed Benjamin Randel by his spirituality and by the power of his theology.”¹⁷ The first historian of the movement, I. D. Stewart also related Alline’s presence within the connexion as he stated, “Both the man and the book were favorably received.”¹⁸ Alline had already died prior to the 1784 meeting and George Rawlyk, former professor at Queen’s University, correctly pointed out the mistake of Marini and Stewart and also offered a bold suggestion of his own, if Alline had in fact been able to attend the Freewill Quarterly Meeting. Rawlyk argued, “Had he lived and had he attended the meeting, there is every reason to conclude that he would have transformed the movement and pushed it, by his powerful charismatic presence, into a radically different direction.”¹⁹ Even though Rawlyk’s statement is mere speculation, such a comment does not recognize Randall’s

¹⁵*Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Selected for the Use of the United Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Free Will Baptist and for the Saints of All Denominations*, Compiled by John Buzzell, (Kennebunk, ME: James K. Remich, 1823).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, iii.

¹⁷Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England*, 139.

¹⁸Stewart, 81.

¹⁹George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline*, (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1984), 61.

existing authority and leadership within the connexion. Rawlyk's conjecture that Alline's "charismatic presence" would have taken the movement "into a radically different direction" is also confusing considering Rawlyk himself believed that Alline and Randall were theological soul-mates. What alternative direction is Rawlyk suggesting? Rawlyk argued that Alline "gave to the Yankee Free Will Baptist movement, in general, and to its founder Benjamin Randel, in particular, a ready-made theological system."²⁰ Randall and the Freewill Baptists did not publish anything to express their theology prior to the 1804 reprinting of Alline's work, and Rawlyk interprets this fact as proof that Randall and the connexion whole-heartedly adopted Alline's theological system.²¹ Historian Norman Baxter also expressed surprise at the scarce number of theological writings written to defend Randall and his movement as he stated, "this paucity (of documents) is startling when we recall that Randall separated from the Calvinistic Baptists for theological reasons."²² Unlike Rawlyk, Baxter did not assume Randall used Alline's work as his theological guide and suggested three reasons to explain the lack of written defenses within the connexion.

²⁰George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline*, (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 39.

²¹Stewart recorded that in 1793 the connexion republished and circulated Jeremiah Walker's *Fourfold State of Calvinism Examined and Shaken*, see Stewart, 201. Buzzell's history of the movement in *A Religious Magazine* and Randall's journal make no mention of Walker's work. If the connexion did republish the work there are no longer any extant copies. The only known versions of Walker's work were published in Virginia and Georgia. See Jeremiah Walker, *The Fourfold State of Calvinism Examined and Shaken: being the substance of a sermon preached at Hebron, on Thursday the eleventh of September, one thousand seven hundred and eighty eight* (Richmond, VA: John Dixon, 1791) or Jeremiah Walker *The Fourfold State of Calvinism Examined and Shaken: being the substance of a sermon preached at Hebron, on Thursday the eleventh of September, one thousand seven hundred and eighty eight* (Augusta, GA: George F. Randolph, 1804).

²²Baxter, 55.

First, Baxter suggested that Randall and other Freewill leaders were too busy with the practical work of the church to spend time drafting elaborate theological treatises.²³ He also suggested that the “Elders Conference served as a theological seminary where doctrinal questions were raised and given thoughtful consideration.”²⁴ Lastly, Baxter surmised that the humility of the leaders made them “unwilling to enter into arguments that would invariably generate more heat than light.”²⁵ Baxter’s first suggestion, that the early leaders of the movement, Randall included, focused on the practical work of the church over against drafting theological defenses of their beliefs and practice is the most convincing. Baxter was right to view the Elders Conference as a theological clearinghouse but it did not originate until 1801, a full twenty years after the movement began, and therefore would not have contributed to theological unity in the early days of the movement. Baxter’s suggestion that the humility of Randall and the other Freewill leaders precluded them from participating in theological disputes is also not convincing because Randall never demonstrated any willingness to defer to the spiritual authority of any other individual. Randall was a very busy man as he traveled literally thousands of miles supervising the affairs of and providing leadership to the congregations within the connexion. He did not have spare time with which he could draft a theological defense of his beliefs. Even if Randall did have enough time to draft a theological defense of his beliefs, there is no indication that Randall felt the need to explain his beliefs to anyone. After forming the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1780, Randall did not continually look for affirmation from those within other established congregations, but rather focused

²³Ibid., 57.

²⁴Ibid., 58.

²⁵Ibid., 58.

on his own preaching ministry as he led revival services and recognized new congregations.

When contemplating the lack of a published defense of Randall's beliefs, Rawlyk concluded that written defenses were not necessary because, "they already had a spokesman, whose work was always being reprinted, perhaps they felt little need to involve themselves directly in the literary fray."²⁶ Rawlyk's conclusion that Randall was completely dependent upon Alline for his theology and merely accepted Alline's theological system as his own is incorrect and does not give Randall due credit for organizing a new religious tradition based upon his own theological system that developed long before he encountered Alline or his publications. It is more accurate to say that Alline's work presented Randall and the connexion a theology that Randall accepted and believed to be consistent with his own theology. On this point Baxter is correct as he considered Alline's *Two Mites*, to be "more a reflection of his (Randall) thinking than a source of it."²⁷ Rawlyk sees further evidence for his contention that Randall adopted Alline's theology in the fact that the connexion did not publish any theological defenses of their beliefs. Rawlyk is unable to believe that such a theological divergent group as the Freewill connexion did not use the press to explain publicly and defend their theology and he argued that they did not need to do such a thing because they used Alline's *Two Mites* as their published defense of their theology. Rawlyk inaccurately stated that early in his public ministry, "Randel was desperately looking for something like Alline's theological writing in order to deal with the increasingly virulent

²⁶Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, 60.

²⁷Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists*, 115.

counterattacks of his Calvinist critics and also to provide his Free Will Baptist movement with some kind of articulated framework.”²⁸ It is unclear why Rawlyk would make such an assumption when there is no evidence to suggest Randall needed or wanted any support for his theological position. Rawlyk assumed Randall was constantly warding off theological attacks when there is no evidence to indicate Randall was concerned with answering any criticism from those outside of the connexion.

Rawlyk continued in his overstatement by suggesting, “Randel, on a more personal level, needed some kind of intellectual justification for his Free Will commitment.”²⁹ After his mystical cornfield experience following his call to ministry in 1780, Randall never again demonstrated any concern or caution in regard to his theological beliefs. The supernatural experience in the cornfield provided Randall with all the support needed for him to proceed. It is erroneous for Rawlyk to suggest that Randall was in constant search of theological affirmation for his belief in free will. Randall’s supernatural experience in the cornfield in 1780 provided him with the affirmation and encouragement that sustained him in his ministry for the next twenty eight years.³⁰

Despite the differences of opinion that exist when discussing Alline’s theological influence on Randall and the Freewill connexion, there is scholarly consensus in regard to the theological similarity that existed between the two. In 1804, twenty years after the members of the connexion approved the idea, Randall amended Alline’s *Two Mites*, and it was republished by the connexion. This fact cannot be overlooked and Randall’s

²⁸Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, 57.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰For Randall’s recollection of the event see Buzzell, *Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 88-89.

amended version provides insight into his theology and that of the connexion. Similarities and differences between the theology of Randall and Alline can be discovered when comparing Alline's original work to the edition that included Randall's amendments. It is safe to assume that Randall approved of the 1804 edition he amended and the differences can be found in the material that is missing from the 1804 edition that was in the original non-amended version.

The similarities between Randall and Alline begin with their conversion experiences as both endured months of spiritual anxiety prior to feeling secure in their relationship to God. Like Randall, Alline kept a journal and in it he included the events of his conversion as well as information about his ministerial labors. Alline's experience before conversion was similar to Randall in that he was often plagued by anxiety after enjoying a social activity with his friends.³¹ He was convinced that his immoral behavior had damned him to eternal separation from God. He recounted, "I was so burdened at times, that I could not rest in my bed; when I had been to any frolick or into carnal company I was often afraid to close my eyes for fear that I should awake in hell before morning."³² Alline's conversion experience also included a supernatural vision in which he was encircled with light that "seemed like a blaze of fire." Alline's anxiety instantly returned as he was certain that the "great day of judgment was come."³³ As quickly as the light appeared it seemed to disappear and Alline's anxiety faded as the light vanished. Years later he recalled his experience:

³¹For an examination of Randall's conversion see Chapter 3, "The Awakening of Benjamin Randall."

³²*The Life & Journal of the Rev. Mr. Henry Alline*, ed. James Beverly & Barry Moody, 39-40.

³³*Ibid.*, 47.

when the light seemed to vanish, and the scene to withdraw, my whole soul seemed to be engaged to implore mercy and grace. O mercy, mercy, mercy, was every groan of my soul, and I began to make promises, that I would never hear to sin as I had done, nor rest another day, unless I had found a Savior for my poor soul.³⁴

Like Randall, Alline discovered Jesus to be the savior for his wretched soul and following his own conversion he also went on to experience a call to preach the gospel that he had received. Their similar conversion experiences only begin to tell the story of the theological similarities that existed between Benjamin Randall and Henry Alline.

The most obvious similarity between the theology of Randall and Alline is their belief in the free will of humanity. Neither Alline nor Randall accepted the idea that God alone determined salvation and instead, believed that human beings had the power to choose to either accept or reject God's grace. When discussing the process of salvation Alline made clear that it was the decision of the individual that initiated the conversion process:

And when he is thus brought to a sense of his condition, and is willing to be redeemed out of his fallen state, ... turned after God, panting after redemption from his fallen state, and depends wholly on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; then the redeeming love enters into his soul.³⁵

For Alline, salvation was not something that could be earned or achieved by the efforts of humanity. All people were in fact dependent upon God for salvation but in Alline's opinion it was the choice of the individual that initiated the process and allowed Christ in to perform his redeeming work. In the same way that Alline believed salvation to be the choice of each person, he also believed that eternal separation from God was the choice of the individual. He argued that God wanted to do good by all of his creatures and those

³⁴Ibid., 49.

³⁵Alline, *Two Mites*, 1804 ed., 88-89.

that are not redeemed, “is occasioned by the will of the creature.”³⁶ The end result of eternal separation from God was not God’s desire for humanity but it was the decision of individuals who rejected God’s grace and chose to separate themselves from God and his love.

Alline’s belief in human free will paralleled Randall’s own belief in the free will of humanity, which Randall emphasized in one of his letters to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting. Illness prevented Randall from attending the 1804 meeting and he wrote a letter to make certain that his voice was still heard at the meeting. In the letter he reiterated his convictions as he wrote, “I am strong in the belief of the universal love of God to all men in the atonement; of the universal appearance of the light, love and grace of God to all men; and that the salvation or damnation of man kind, turn upon their own receiving or rejecting the same.” In the same letter Randall also affirmed his repudiation of the “shocking, inconsistent, Calvinistick doctrine of election and reprobation.”³⁷ Salvation, for both Alline and Randall, was dependent not on God’s election but on the free will of individuals who had the power to embrace or reject the grace of God.

While Randall and Alline both believed that humanity had the power to chose to either accept or reject the grace of God, they also agreed that the act of salvation itself was totally dependent upon the person of Jesus. For both Randall and Alline external actions did not in any way bring human beings closer to God. The grace of God provided salvation and the external actions of the Christian life demonstrated the change that had

³⁶Ibid., 107.

³⁷July 31, 1804 Letter from Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting. in the Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book II, 2:130

already occurred within the life of an individual. Alline elucidated his dependence on the person of Christ as he stated:

there is not one Spark of true Religion in all the Externals, that ever were performed by Man, without this vital Union to the Lord JESUS CHRIST; Therefore how groundless and dangerous, as well as unscriptural, is the Dependence on any Externals for Salvation; since all Religion is a Work of the Holy Spirit on the inner man.³⁸

Individuals such as Alline who advocated the free will of humanity to accept the grace of God were often charged with practicing and teaching a theology of works righteousness, in which individuals earned their salvation. Alline made certain that he could not be falsely accused of advocating works righteousness and clearly elucidated his belief that only the person of Jesus could provide salvation. Humans had the right to accept or reject God's grace and if they chose to accept it were then dependent upon the person of Jesus to provide salvation.

Randall also rejected man's ability to contribute in the salvation process and expressed sole dependence on God's grace as the agent of salvation. There is only one extant sermon delivered by Randall that was published during his lifetime and it provides good insight into Randall's theology, specifically his reliance on the person of Christ to bring about salvation.³⁹ In the sermon he asked, "Can we create ourselves anew in Christ Jesus? Can we make ourselves children of God?...Answer, no; this is not the power of any creature...Nothing but grace, the grace of God in Christ Jesus can save."⁴⁰ For both

³⁸Alline, *Two Mites*, 1804 ed., 90.

³⁹ Randall, *A Discourse Delivered Extempore at Farmington, N.H., February 27, 1803 at the Interment of Murmoth Fortune Herrick, Son of Hallibut and Sally Herrick*, (Dover, N. H.: Samuel Bragg, 1803).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

Alline and Randall, the works of humanity did not contribute anything to the process of salvation and only the person of Christ was able to bring about salvation.

Alline and Randall agreed on the free will of humanity to accept or reject God's grace and both maintained complete dependence upon the person of Christ to bring about salvation in the life of an individual. They also exhibited theological agreement in their belief in universal atonement, the belief that the death and resurrection of Christ was beneficial for all humanity. Belief in the universal atonement is present in Randall's theology from the point of his conversion in 1780. In recounting his conversion experience he stated, "I saw in Him a universal love, a universal atonement, a universal call to mankind, and was confident that none would ever perish, but those who refused to obey it."⁴¹ His belief in the universal atonement is also evident in his published sermon from 1803 in which he celebrated "the glorious universal atonement."⁴² The sermon was delivered at the funeral service for a young boy and in a portion of the sermon Randall spoke about the spiritual state of children which included his celebration of the universal nature of the atonement. In the sermon he quoted the words of Jesus, "Suffer little children to come unto me of such is the Kingdom of heaven."⁴³ He went on to explain that Jesus did not make a distinction between the children of believers and non-believers and welcomed all children into his presence. He pointed out that the children of godly parents had no special privileges to God and the children of ungodly parents were not hampered in their efforts to God either. All were welcome and Randall celebrated the open invitation stating, "the children of the human family, in aggregate, are all freed from

⁴¹Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 11.

⁴²Randall, *A Discourse* 7.

⁴³Matthew 18:19.

the condemnation of the Adamic law; and through the precious universal atonement of the glorious second Adam (Jesus), belong to the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁴

In the sermon, Randall had previously explained that young children were not condemned for the sin of Adam because they had not yet learned for themselves the difference between right and wrong and as a result were not held accountable for their sins. Randall believed that the death and resurrection of Jesus nullified Adam’s sin and as a result, the sin of Adam was no longer passed on to successive generations.⁴⁵

Consistent with his belief in the free will of humanity to chose or accept the grace of God, Randall believed that each person was individually accountable to God and each was condemned based solely on their own decision to reject God’s grace. Randall’s sermon illustrates his belief that God’s grace showed no impartiality and was available to all people. This point is made plain at the conclusion of the sermon in which Randall celebrated God’s grace stating, “Glory to God for the equality of his ways to the children of men! Glory to his name, for the universal call!...and whoever will may become little children, and have a right to the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁶

Alline shared Randall’s belief in the universal nature of the atonement but demonstrated a slight variance with Randall’s perspective on original sin. In contrast to Randall, Alline did not think that the death and resurrection of Jesus nullified the consequences of Adam’s sin for all of humanity because he believed that all people were spiritually present with Adam in the garden. All of humanity was spiritually present in

⁴⁴Randall, *A Discourse*, 13.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 4-8.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 13-14.

the garden and in the mind of Alline each person was “really capable of action.”⁴⁷ He did not believe that Adam was responsible for the condemnation of humanity but humanity itself was responsible because they were “active in that sin, as if every one had been there in a separate station.”⁴⁸ As a result of the spiritual presence of all persons in the garden with Adam, Alline could conclude that all were “really guilty of, and justly condemned for original sin.”⁴⁹ Alline anticipated criticism for his opinion and suggested that each of us would remember our participation in Adam’s sin in the garden once our earthly lives ended. He wrote, “when you throw off this mask of mortality, and awake in a world of spirits, you will as certainly remember your rebellion in the garden of Eden, as any sin that ever you committed.”⁵⁰ Though Randall and Alline differed slightly in their understanding of original sin, they both agreed that each person was condemned for their own actions and not because of Adam’s sin in the garden. Randall believed all people condemn themselves for their actions on earth and Alline believed all people condemned themselves on account of their participation in Adam’s sin in the garden.

Individuals such as Randall and Alline, who understood the atonement of Christ to be beneficial for all people, were often charged with rejecting the doctrine of election. Randall and Alline realized the cultural implications of rejecting the doctrine of election and both opted to present modified versions of the doctrine instead of denouncing it outright. In 1790 the connexion received a letter of inquiry from the Winslow family asking if the rumor that Randall and the members of connexion denied the doctrine of

⁴⁷Alline, *Two Mites*, 42.

⁴⁸Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 46.

election was true. The Yearly Meeting responded by supplying an alternative understanding of the doctrine. They wrote, “as to Election we firmly believe that none are saved but those who are heirs and partakers of the Electing love of God in Christ Jesus our Dear Lord and Saviour.”⁵¹ In the letter, the Yearly Meeting neither denied the doctrine of election nor affirmed the Calvinistic belief that the atonement was only beneficial for the elect. They affirmed their belief in the “Electing love of God” but did not limit God’s love only to the elect.

Alline also did not openly denounce the doctrine of election and in *Two Mites*, he wrote specifically of his hopes to help his readers better understand the complicated doctrine. Alline believed that the traditional view of election, that included the belief that the benefits of the atonement were limited only to the elect, to be inconsistent with God’s character. In Alline’s opinion, if the traditional view of election were true then God could be charged for demonstrating “partiality.”⁵² Alline hoped to present a different perspective that would help his readers “sing electing love on a higher key, than what you have been taught.”⁵³ For Alline, the higher key of election included the unlimited nature of the atonement “as to elect all that could possibly be elected.”⁵⁴ Alline was confident that God’s love and grace were available to all people and as a result he presented the election of God as an unlimited possibility dependent not on God’s decision to elect some and reject others but dependent on the free will of all individuals to either accept or reject the grace of God. He concluded his explanation of his view of election by stating,

⁵¹Letter to Kenelm and Elizabeth Winslow Sept 7, 1790 in *The Yearly Meeting Book*, 132.

⁵²Alline, *Two Mites*, 1804 ed., 99

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

“Christ is not only at some particular men’s doors, (as I have been taught) but really at every man’s door; offering redeeming love, and elects every one that can be elected.”⁵⁵

The men were also in agreement over the importance of good works in the lives of believers. Both rejected the idea that good works had an impact on one’s salvation but they both expected true believers to demonstrate their salvation through their actions.

Alline wrote, “that a true Principle of divine love will produce an external Conformity to the Ways of God; For it is as certain that this internal Work of the Spirit of God will reflect a cheerful Conformity to the Externals of Religion, as a Fire will reflect Light.”⁵⁶

Randall also expected that the actions of believers would demonstrate the conversion that had occurred within. This is evident in the high ethical standards Randall established for members of the connexion. To maintain one’s status as a member of good standing within the connexion, men and women had to exhibit external behavior that was consistent with the scriptures, which was the established rule for faith and practice within the connexion. Randall expected members of the connexion to demonstrate piety in their daily lives and if they did not exhibit the proper behavior, then they would be subject to the church discipline process within the connexion. A good example of Randall’s expectation of virtuous living can be found in the second covenant established at the reformation of the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1791. The covenant outlaws certain behaviors and also describes the kind of behavior that is expected. Randall made clear that the members “should not conform to the customs and fashions of the world” and

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Alline, *Two Mites*, 1804 ed., 90.

should adopt as regular practice both “secret prayer” and “family worship.”⁵⁷ Randall expected members of the connexion to reject the frivolities of the world and to embrace the religious activities that demonstrated the conversion that had occurred within.

Randall and Alline also shared the belief in the primacy of scripture. For both ministers, the scripture served as the guide for the spiritual life. The Bible provided the key to understanding the person of Jesus and served as the instruction book for virtuous living. Randall and Alline both demonstrated a skepticism in the traditions they observed in other denominations and believed that the Bible alone contained what was necessary for the faith and practice of the church. Randall made his dependence on scripture clear in the original church covenant of the Church of Christ of New Durham as the new congregation decided to “agree to take the scriptures of truth for our rule of our faith and practice.”⁵⁸ His dependence on scripture as the source of information for the practice of the church is also evident in one of the last letters Randall wrote to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting. He urged the participants at the 1807 New Durham Quarterly Meeting to “cleave to the scriptures, and make them your only rule of faith and practice, both in temporal life, and for the government of the church.”⁵⁹

Alline’s belief in the primacy of scripture as the guide for the faith and practice of the church is also evident in *Two Mites*. He also rejected the man-made traditions that were not based upon the scripture and urged his readers to look to the Bible in order to

⁵⁷See the second covenant of the Church of Christ of New Durham in New Durham Church Record Book I, I: 57-60 Dated April 13, 1791.

⁵⁸Church of Christ of New Durham covenant New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:1-2. Entry dated June 30, 1780.

⁵⁹1807 letter to New Durham Quarterly Meeting cited by Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (1812): 269.

live and worship in the correct way. He wrote, “Let me likewise intreat you to divest yourselves as much as possible of the strong Ties of Tradition....But as the Word of God is yet an unexhaustible Fund, make that your chief Study.”⁶⁰ For Alline, it was only through the thorough and lifelong examination of scripture that one could discover the truth in regard to the correct faith and practice for believers. One could not trust in man-made traditions that were not found in scripture but could trust only in what they discovered in the scriptures themselves.

Randall and Alline also shared the same opinion on the doctrine of annihilation, or the final end of the wicked. In his discussion about the final judgment, Alline made clear his position on the doctrine of annihilation that eventually prevented Elias Smith from becoming part of Randall’s connexion. Alline did not believe in the annihilation of the soul and believed that separation from God for the condemned would in fact be eternal. He stated, “O could they (the condemned) cease to exist! But no, they must exist strangers to annihilation, and endure the approaching shock. O intolerable!”⁶¹ For Alline, annihilation was but a dream for the unconverted who were condemned to eternal of separation from God. Alline’s perspective on annihilation is similar to that of Randall who wrote about the doctrine in one of his final letters to the connexion. In the letter, Randall admitted his dislike for “the new-fangled doctrine” and suggested the doctrine of annihilation was the invention of the wicked who hoped their eventual separation from God would not be eternal and at some point come to an end. Randall believed the

⁶⁰Alline, *Two Mites*, 1804 ed., 141-142.

⁶¹Alline, *Two Mites*, 1784 ed., 205.

scriptures did not support the doctrine and as a result he rejected the belief in the annihilation of the condemned.⁶²

The most notable difference between Randall and Alline is Alline's acceptance of infant baptism, which is not included in the 1804 version of *Two Mites* that was amended by Randall. In contrast to Randall, Alline neither rejected the practice of infant baptism nor insisted that baptism by immersion to be the only acceptable mode of baptism. Alline also indicated no preference for either infant or believer's baptism and made clear that he did not want the controversy regarding the kind of baptism to disrupt the fellowship of believers. Alline stated, "If any true Christians are conscience bound to be sprinkled, they and their Children, by no means forbid them; and if others are conscience bound to omit the baptizing of their infants, but choose to go all under Water themselves after Conversion, why should they not go."⁶³ For Alline, whether a person believed in infant baptism or believer's baptism was a personal decision for each person and one particular way was not made clear in scripture. Alline emphasized the unifying nature of the baptismal event and did not want the difference of opinion in the matter to disrupt the harmony and witness of the congregation. He made his perspective clear stating, "different sects and denominations or the circumstantial differences about water-baptism concerning infants or adults, sprinkling or immersion ought to be no more a bar in uniting building and communing together at the Lord's table, and all other gospel privileges, than the difference of their voices and looks:"⁶⁴

⁶²See Letter from Benjamin Randall to New Durham Quarterly Meeting, May 14, 1808 cited by Stewart, 247-8.

⁶³Henry Alline, *Two Mites*, 1784 ed., 259.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

Alline's lenient approach to the topic of baptism was unacceptable for Randall who advocated and practiced believer's baptism. For Randall, baptism was initiation into the church community and had to be preceded by the testimony of faith from a prospective member. In the original church covenant of the Church of Christ in New Durham, the individuals declared their willingness to "all the commands of and the ordinances in the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."⁶⁵ One of those ordinances was the practice of baptism and in the mind of Benjamin Randall, it was not an optional rite. One of the early conflicts within the original Church of Christ of New Durham revolved around the necessity of the ordinances. Robert Boody, Nathaniel Buzzell, and Ebenezer Bickford believed the command to practice the ordinances no longer applied however, the congregation did not agree with their opinion and rejected them from membership of the congregation.⁶⁶ The issue of baptism was of such importance to Randall that he deleted Alline's tolerant approach to the baptism issue in the 1804 edition of *Two Mites* that he amended.

Elias Smith

Elias Smith⁶⁷ (1769-1846), was a Baptist clergyman who early in his ministerial career was related to the Calvinistic Baptist churches in Massachusetts and benefited from close relationships with Thomas Baldwin, Samuel Stillman, and Samuel

⁶⁵Entry dated June 30, 1780 in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:1-2..

⁶⁶The incident is covered in more detail in the previous chapter.

⁶⁷For a autobiography of his life and career See Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, N.H.: 1816, Beck & Foster ed.; reprint, New York, NY: Arno Press, 1980). For a recent treatment of his ministry and theology see Michael G. Kenny, *The Perfect Law of Liberty: Elias Smith and the Providential History of America*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1994).

Shepherd.⁶⁸ Gradually Smith began to question the ardent Calvinism of many of his Baptist colleagues and eventually rejected the doctrines of Calvin. He recounted in his memoir, “I concluded that of course, universalism must be right, and my mind consented that it was so.”⁶⁹ Smith remained a universalist for fifteen days before rejecting that opinion because in his words it was “contrary to the doctrine of Christ.”⁷⁰ Smith became convinced of the need to simplify the practices and beliefs of the church to be consistent with the practices and beliefs found in the New Testament.

In October 1801 Smith became pastor of a church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and came in contact with the Freewill Baptists in 1805. Smith attended the 1805 New Durham Quarterly Meeting and then the Yearly Meeting in Gorham in November. He related his Christian experience as well as related some of his theological opinions. He also expressed a desire to join the connection. While many in the connection recognized Smith as an able orator and gifted leader they were not comfortable with some of his theological beliefs. John Buzzell expressed his concern regarding Smith’s entry into the connection because of his questionable theology including his belief that non-Christians would not be separated from God for eternity. Smith was convinced that unconverted individuals would not be separated from God for eternity and both the body and soul of the unconverted would be eventually be annihilated in order to bring their suffering to an end. In his work, *The Doctrine of the Prince of Peace*, Smith refuted both Calvinism and Universalism, and explained his

⁶⁸William H. Brackney, *The Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 229.

⁶⁹Smith, *Life*, 292.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 293.

belief in the final destruction of the condemned. After using a number of references to support his contention, Smith concluded by stating, “The end of the righteous is life, the end of the wicked is death, which cannot mean existence in any sense whatever.”⁷¹ The Freewill leadership believed that non-Christians would in fact be eternally separated from God without hope for the suffering to end as a result of the extermination of their body and soul. Randall made his position on the issue of annihilation clear in one of his final letters addressed to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in 1808. “Again, there is that new-fangled doctrine—the final end of the wicked (or that they will finally cease to be)—preached by some, said to be of this connection, which I think should not be allowed. My dear brethren, I appeal to you, if this is not the very doctrine the carnal mind wants to be true.”⁷²

Smith realized the opposition from Buzzell and withdrew his expressed desire for admittance into the connection. In his spiritual memoirs Smith recounted how close he was to becoming a member of the Freewill connection. “But for one man I should have become a member with them, so far as to be held in fellowship as a fellow-laborer; and that man objected on the ground of my believing that the wicked would be destroyed.”⁷³ Smith’s willingness to become part of the Freewill movement demonstrates the theological similarity between Smith and Randall’s connexion. Both groups wanted to follow the scripture as their guide for faith and practice and they shared many opinions on the practice of the church. Smith’s belief in the annihilation of the wicked however,

⁷¹Elias Smith, *The Doctrine of the Prince of Peace and his Servants, concerning the End of the Wicked*, (Boston, MA: n.p., 1805), 34.

⁷²Letter from Benjamin Randall to New Durham Quarterly Meeting, May 14, 1808 cited by Stewart, 247-8.

⁷³Smith, *Life of Elias Smith*, 354.

kept the Freewill connexion from welcoming Smith into their ranks. Smith's desire to join the connexion forced Randall and the other Freewill leaders to make an official decision on the matter. Randall was convinced that belief in the annihilation of the wicked could not be supported in scripture and the remainder of the connexion agreed and Smith was not permitted to join.

Randall's Effort to Control the Connexion

Randall was not the sole founder of the Freewill movement in New England but one of a number of like-minded ministers in Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine who rejected the prevailing doctrines of Calvin and believed in the availability of God's free grace for all people. While he was not the sole founder, he quickly emerged as the leading organizer of the movement as he worked to establish a network of communication and organization among the like-minded congregations. As the leading organizer of the emerging movement, Randall demonstrated his desire for control over the connexion in four different ways: through his personal presence throughout the connexion as a result of his itinerant ministry; the unique organizational structure that he established within the movement; the implementation of church discipline within the connexion; and the institution of the Elder's Conference as the theological clearinghouse for the ministers of the connexion.

Randall never expected to be a minister only to the congregation he founded at New Durham, New Hampshire, but expected it to be the base of his operation as he ministered throughout Southern New Hampshire and Maine. Randall was given many opportunities to preach outside of New Durham and these opportunities provided him the opportunity to expand his influence outside of the New Durham congregation. When

citizens in other communities wanted to form a church of their own, Randall was available to examine the members in order to determine if they were spiritually fit to join with the already established Church of Christ of New Durham. New methods of organization became necessary as the movement continued to grow and it was no coincidence that Randall organized the meeting schedule of the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings so that he could attend each one. Randall viewed all the congregations as part of the New Durham congregation and as a result the business of other congregations was technically the business of the New Durham congregation as well. If a matter of church business involved the New Durham congregation then Randall was involved as demonstrated by his presence and participation at the majority of the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings that occurred during his lifetime. Randall was not only involved in the official business meetings that occurred within the connexion but also took part in numerous activities including resolving church disputes, examining an individual for ministerial service, and recognizing new congregations. Occasional journal entries recorded by Randall give us insight into the magnitude of his travels. For example, at the close of 1785 he wrote, "I have travelled above twelve hundred miles in the service of truth, and have attended above three hundred meetings."⁷⁴ Randall was not content to supervise the activities of the connexion from his home base in New Durham, and traveled extensively throughout the connexion in order to participate in and lead the various activities that occurred throughout the movement.

Since Randall and the Freewill Baptists were charting a new course as an emerging religious tradition, certain aspects of the movement took years to resolve,

⁷⁴Stewart, 87.

including the organizational structure of the connexion. The polity of the movement was not immediately established from the beginnings of the movement in 1780 and it developed over time as the movement continued to experience growth into the nineteenth century. Their developing polity is evident in the reorganization efforts that occurred during Randall's lifetime. As discussed in the previous chapter, at the beginning of his ministry Randall viewed all the congregations that he started to be part of or branches of his local congregation at New Durham, the Church of Christ of New Durham. John Buzzell, Randall's successor and the first historian of the movement, recounted that during Randall's life "all the churches were considered one general assembly, one church of Christ."⁷⁵ In detailing the early history he explained, "They were all churches of Christ, and all the churches of Christ, were one church of Christ."⁷⁶ The movement experienced growth to the point that reorganization was necessary and Randall reorganized the connexion first with the institution of the Quarterly Meetings in 1783 and second with the establishment of the Yearly Meetings in 1792.

The unique polity of the Freewill Baptist connexion developed over a period of twenty years as Benjamin Randall tried to maintain communication with and supervision over a rapidly expanding movement. The end result was the implementation of a unique organizational system never before practiced by Baptists in the colonies or in England.⁷⁷ What worked successfully at his home church, the Church of Christ in New Durham,

⁷⁵John Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 87.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷For a full treatment of Baptist organization see Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, (Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press, 1963). For a specific treatment of the organization of Colonial Baptists see Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Association in Colonial America: 1707-1814," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (Winter 1986): 105-120.

Randall implemented throughout the connection. The core of the organizational system was the separation of the monthly meeting from the worship service of the church. The monthly meeting was designed to handle the business of the church and to help monitor and provide supervision over the spiritual condition of each individual member of the congregation.

As the number of churches recognized to be in connection with the Church of Christ in New Durham continued to grow, Randall adapted the organizational system and implemented the quarterly meeting as a way to continue the same practice as that of the monthly meeting. The activities of the quarterly meeting were largely the same as that of the monthly meeting as the congregations gathered to report on the spiritual condition of their congregations and brought disputes and conflicts to the quarterly meeting for mediation.

As a result of the traveling ministries of the Freewill ministers, the connection continued to grow and the distance that separated the churches grew as well. The growth of the movement merited further reorganization in 1792 as Randall implemented an adaptation on the old organizational system and introduced the yearly meeting as the final authority within the connexion. The yearly meetings occurred four different times a year in four different locations so that individuals throughout the connexion could attend a meeting to learn about the condition of the churches within the movement. The yearly meeting was an expansion of the quarterly meeting as the various quarterly meetings reported on the spiritual condition of its member congregations to the yearly meeting. Disputes and controversies that could not be resolved at the quarterly meetings were brought to the yearly meeting for final adjudication.

The majority of the unresolved conflicts and controversies that were sent to the yearly meetings involved the discipline of a particular member of the connection. The churches in connection with the Church of Christ in New Durham placed a great emphasis on living according to the covenant agreements established at the inception of a congregation. The monthly meetings were designed in part to verify that the behavior of each member of the congregation was in fact consistent with the covenant they had agreed to when they came into membership. The high ethical expectations were too great for some individuals to bear and the congregation itself was obligated to discipline the offending parties so that they could be returned to the flock. The strong emphasis on ethical behavior made church discipline a regular part of the life of the Church of Christ in New Durham.⁷⁸

John Buzzell, Randall's successor as leader of the connexion and the first historian of the movement, detailed the process of church discipline within the connexion. A lengthy citation from Buzzell's history is necessary to explain the details of the church discipline process.

When any member of the church, got out of joint any way, or disordered by any means, the brethren spared no pains or cost to get the member into place, or to have the disorder healed. Therefore, as soon as they had information that any brother or sister had erred from the truth, the first thing was to go and see them, talk and pray with them, and exhort them to confess and forsake their sins. If that would not do, they would two or three go and labour in the same manner; and if that would not reclaim them, then they would call their little church together, and let all the brethren try; and if the transgressing brother or sister remained impenitent, they would go to the next quarterly meeting and request help; then a number of the most discerning and skillful brethren must be sent to assist them in labouring with such impenitent disorderly brethren. If those members still remained obstinate, the brethren would then lay them under a written admonition, and send them a letter full of heart-felt, heart-melting expressions; and then a second upon the back of it,

⁷⁸The Church of Christ of New Durham practiced church discipline according the scriptural mandate of Matthew 18.

in the name of the quarterly meeting, ‘Line upon line; precept upon precept;’ and good faithful brethren every time to bear the letters, to labour with them. And if after all these trials and labours, they still remained disorderly, and it appeared necessary that such members should be cut off; that the body was in danger by their staying on any longer; then with much weeping and heart-aching, a letter of rejection was sent.⁷⁹

It is clear from Buzzell’s description, as well as the minutes from the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings, that Matthew 18 served as the guide for implementing the discipline process within the connexion. The passage instructs individuals to approach offending parties privately at first and then if the issue remains unresolved to bring it before the entire congregation. Randall and the connexion added an additional level of accountability as a result of the organizational structure of the movement. The monthly meeting was part of a quarterly meeting and the quarterly meeting belonged to a yearly meeting and as a result, the church discipline process started within a monthly meeting but could be passed on to the next level of administration if the issue remained unresolved.

Church discipline was not an optional practice within the movement but was considered to be a part of the covenant agreements established at the founding of a new congregation or upon an individual’s entrance into the community of faith. The covenants included the expectation that congregations would work diligently to return individuals to the congregation that as a result of their disobedience had fallen away from the faith. The covenant of the original Church of Christ of New Durham founded in 1780 serves to illustrate the congregational expectation involving the practice of church discipline. The founding members and all subsequent members of the congregation agreed “to bare one another burdens and so fulfill the Law of Love,” and “to Submit to

⁷⁹ Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 21-22.

order and Discipline.”⁸⁰ Within the connexion, the obligation to implement church discipline fell on the congregation as they had to intentionally seek out a member who had gone astray with the hopes of bringing them back to the congregation through the implementation of the church discipline process. The goal of the process was always to bring back the erring brother or sister but it was not always successful. Buzzell pointed out that the implementation of the church discipline system fulfilled the covenant obligations of the congregation no matter the end result of the effort. He wrote, “those that they could reclaim, they reclaimed, and those that they could not reclaim, they disowned; and so cleared themselves of the charge of not fulfilling their covenant to their former brethren.”⁸¹

Randall’s congregation at New Durham was no different than the other churches in connection with it as the church discipline process was a regular practice in every church in the movement. A couple of examples from Randall’s congregation in New Durham serve to illustrate how Randall’s desire to control the movement is evident in how church discipline was implemented in the Freewill movement. The following examples also demonstrate the developing nature of the polity of the movement as the power to excommunicate members shifted in the early years of the movement.

The developing polity of the movement is evident in the practical application of church discipline within the connexion. Church discipline was a regular part of church life in the Freewill Baptist movement and in the beginning days of the movement church discipline was practiced within each congregation or monthly meeting of the connexion.

⁸⁰New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:1-2. Entry dated June 30, 1780. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁸¹ Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 78.

The church discipline process was intended to bring individual members of the congregation who had broken their covenantal vows back into the congregation. If the offending party would not repent however, then the church discipline process resulted in the dismissal of the offending member from the congregation. The excommunication of a member was a decision of such significance that the responsibility for the practice shifted from the local congregations to the yearly meeting. From its inception, Randall's congregation in New Durham took seriously its responsibility to supervise, and if needed, to discipline the constituents of the congregation. The church record book provides numerous examples of the congregation using church discipline in an effort to restore an individual back to membership within the congregation or to exclude a member from the congregation of the congregation.

In 1781, one year after the church at New Durham began, the congregation used the church discipline process to admonish Robert Boody concerning his relationship with his neighbor. The church records recount the actions of the congregation, "as there had been Something In Br Robert Boody's Conduct with Regard to his Neighbour Pevey that was not Consistant with the Christian's Duty he has acknowledged asked forgiveness and Recd It and all the Brethren have Lovingly Recd him again."⁸² The congregation heard about Brother Boody's inappropriate behavior with his neighbor and was obligated to question him in regard to his conduct. This example illustrates the ideal end result of the church discipline process as the offending party immediately confessed his mistake and asked for forgiveness from the congregation so that he could be welcomed back into membership.

⁸² New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:7. Entry dated September 15, 1781. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

Unfortunately, the church discipline process within the Church of Christ of New Durham did not always work as quickly as it did in the case of Brother Boody. Another example from the Church of Christ of New Durham illustrates the lengths the church would go to in an effort to bring an offending brother or sister back into right relationship with the congregation. The record book details a controversy between the congregation and Deacon Eleazer Davis that lasted for more than five years.

The initial entry detailing the difficulties occurred November 30, 1781, and makes clear that Davis asked to be relieved of his membership from the Church and from his duties as Ruling Elder. The entry states that “he gives no Reason that is Satisfactory” to explain his decision to leave the congregation but the church did not comply with his request and instead advised him “to a more deliberate consideration of the matter.”⁸³ Another response from the congregation to Brother Davis occurred in June of 1782 as Davis’ failure to comply with his covenant obligations led the congregation to send him a letter of admonition. The official letter of admonition was necessary because, in the view of Randall and the congregation, Davis did not supply the necessary scriptural evidence to defend his decision to withdraw from the congregation. The Church of Christ of New Durham defended their decision on account of Davis’ expressed desire to leave the congregation and for his failure to fulfill his duties as a deacon. The church record indicates the action was justified because, “for no Reason that thou Can Support from Scripture and Reason thou hast withdrawn from us and hast Refused to act In thy place Both as a Deacon and private member.” While the letter of admonition was in fact a disciplinary measure meted out by the Church of Christ of New Durham, it was not

⁸³Ibid.

intended to shame or embarrass Davis but instead was written so that Davis would reconsider his actions and decide to rejoin the congregation. The humility of the congregation is evident as they indicated their action was made “In the Bowels of Love and meekness” and was prompted by God himself. God’s leadership in the church discipline process is evident as the record book states, “Believing that we are moved by the kind and tender Spirite of Jesus, Admonish thee to Return to thy Duty.”⁸⁴

The letter of admonition was not simply a heartless disciplinary action of the congregation but included a plea for Davis to return to his rightful position as member and Deacon in the congregation. The letter concluded, “And Do now bid thee a harty welcome to Return and Travle with us In Love and fellowship again....Beloved Brother we pray thee to take this letter In Love from us and not as If It was an act In hast for It Is the Result of the Chh (meeting) from the Eight of May last.”⁸⁵ The congregation may have been led by God in the disciplinary process and they did indicate a sincere desire that Davis would in fact be reunited with the congregation; however the letter is not simply a disciplinary action that can be forgotten by the congregation and the seriousness of the disciplinary action is clear as the letter concludes, “this if the first admonition.”⁸⁶ Brother Eleazer Davis also recognized the seriousness of the official admonition from the congregation and responded by admitting his fault and returning to the congregation. The

⁸⁴New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:10. Entry dated June 12, 1782. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

November 13 entry states, “Rec’d Deacon Eleazer Davise upon his acknowledgment Into fellowship again.”⁸⁷

The Church of Christ of New Durham received Davis back into fellowship eleven months after the first indication of difficulty can be found in the church record book. The process almost took a year but would have been considered successful as Davis did in fact return to the congregation. Unfortunately for the Church of Christ of New Durham, Davis’ return to the congregation was short-lived and in 1785 Davis again stopped attending the congregation and failed to fulfill his responsibilities as a deacon in the congregation. Davis’ actions again obligated the Church of Christ of New Durham to initiate the church discipline process.

The congregation decided to send Benjamin Randall and Zachariah Boody to talk with Davis about his relationship with the church so they might understand why he no longer participated. Following their visit, Boody and Randall reported back to the congregation that Davis said he withdrew from the congregation because “He things he saw temper in Br Randel at two several times.”⁸⁸ Boody and Randall also reported that Davis “allegeth against Brother Randal and the whole Church is that they have not laboured with him as soon as they should have done.”⁸⁹ Randall did not address the first allegation regarding his temper but did accept responsibility for the second and confessed to Davis of their mistake in not moving quicker to resolve the issue. Despite Randall’s confession, Davis was unwilling to return again to the congregation and Randall and

⁸⁷New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:18. Entry dated November 13, 1782. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁸⁸New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:30-31. Entry dated January 11, 1786. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁸⁹Ibid.

Boody reported back to the congregation that “after much conversation we left him (Davis) in much the same mind as we found him”⁹⁰

Boody and Randall’s personal visit with Davis did not resolve the dispute and as a result the Church of Christ of New Durham continued in the church discipline process as they viewed Davis as a backsliding member who failed to live up to his covenantal obligations. The church record book indicates that Davis joined a Congregational Society in April 1786⁹¹ however, in the mind of the Church of Christ of New Durham, Davis remained a member of their congregation and despite joining a different congregation was still subject to the discipline of the New Durham congregation. The New Durham congregation authorized a second letter to Davis in August 1786. Like the previous admonition the letter asked why he failed to live up to the covenant that he previously affirmed. Also, like the first official letter from the Church of Christ of New Durham to Brother Davis, the second letter was an official admonition from the church and concluded, “This is our second admonition.”⁹²

With no response from Davis following the second official letter of admonition, the New Durham congregation was left with no choice but to send Davis an official letter of dismissal from the congregation. The actions of the congregation are explained in the letter as they indicate their belief that Davis’ own actions were responsible for his dismissal, “we are constrained by thy Practice to take the Scripture Rule Viz after the first and second Admonition to Reject.” The scripture guided the congregation in the

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:34. Entry dated April 19, 1786. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹²August 24, 1786 letter from Church of Church of New Durham to Eleazer Davis, New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:36. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

discipline process and Davis' failure to respond to two admonitions left the congregation with no choice but to dismiss Davis from fellowship. The congregation would have disobeyed scripture if they did not seek after the disobeying member. The gravity of the decision is clear in the letter as the congregation completed the action out of their reverence for God and his commands. The letter states, "(we) Do Now with grief in our souls in this solomn manner in the fear of the GREAT and Dreadful God reject Thee from the membership, Deaconship, and Fellowship of this Church so Long as thou remain left in the state thou art now in."⁹³ For the Church of Christ of New Durham the rejection of a church member from fellowship with the congregation was akin to damning the dismissed individual's soul to eternal separation from God. The Matthew 18 passage that guided the congregation in the discipline process concludes "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."⁹⁴ As a result of the responsibility given by God to the Church, the New Durham congregation did not reject members hastily and went to great lengths to allow offending individuals to admit their mistakes and return to the congregation. Even though they did reject Davis from the congregation, the letter of dismissal concluded with a slight hope that Davis will in fact repent and return to the congregation as the letter suggested his rejection was conditional, "so Long as thou remain left in the state thou are now in." If after receiving the official letter of rejection, Davis were to show remorse and return to his covenantal responsibilities, then the congregation would consider removing the rejection.

⁹³April 12, 1787 letter from the Church of Christ of New Durham to Eleazer Davis in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:37-38. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁴Matthew 18:18 (KJV)

The letter of rejection did not prompt Davis to repent and the saga concluded with a letter from Davis to the Church of Christ of New Durham expressing his frustration over how the events transpired. In the letter Davis returned to one of his original allegations suggesting that if the church had responded sooner to the initial problem then the entire episode would not have occurred. He stated, “I verry well Remember and still believe that if my arguments had been attended to these People would not have been in such a confusion as they are now.” Davis also rejected the idea that the New Durham congregation had power to determine his eternal destination. He confidently joked, “But if you are the only favorites of God that are in the world and have the keys of heaven, I know not what I shall do for I shall be in a bad box.”⁹⁵

The letter from Davis is not the last entry in the church record book of the interaction between Davis and the Church of Christ of New Durham. Randall, who also served as the Clerk of the congregation, did not want Davis’ letter to be the last word on the subject and concluded the matter by referring to the lengthy discipline process the church undertook in an effort to restore the fallen brother. After copying the letter from Davis in the record book, Randall wrote the following, “Now Let the Reader judge from the Letters Recorded in Pages 33th, 35th & 37th of this Book wether the above Eleazer Davis has been delt roughly with or not.”⁹⁶ The pages referred to by Randall include the two letters of admonition and the letter of rejection written over the course of the events by the Church of Christ of New Durham to Eleazer Davis. In Randall’s opinion, the congregation followed the scriptural rule for the church discipline process and the letters

⁹⁵April 16, 1787 letter from Eleazer Davis to the Church of Christ of New Durham in New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:39. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

⁹⁶New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:39. Entry dated April 17, 1787. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

justified the actions of the congregation. Five years after the initial incident between Davis and the congregation was recorded the matter was finally resolved. The church discipline process was followed as described in scripture but did not end with the desired result as Davis refused to repent and as a result was rejected from membership in the Church of Christ of New Durham.

The dismissal of an individual from a congregation was such a significant decision that eventually the decision was taken out of the hands of the individual congregations. As the Freewill movement grew and expanded, the ability to reject an individual from church membership was given first to the quarterly meetings and then to the yearly meeting. When the movement was reorganized for the final time by Randall in 1792, the ability to dismiss an individual from a congregation was given to the yearly meeting.⁹⁷ Since the dismissal of an individual from fellowship was akin to damning an individual to eternal separation from God in the Freewill movement, Randall believed such disputes should be resolved at the yearly meeting so that participants from throughout the connection could participate in the decision. Shifting the responsibility for dismissal from the congregations to the yearly meeting also ensured that all the congregations within the connection adhered to the same practice of church discipline. This decision kept the process of church discipline including the power of exclusion to be held not by the individual congregations but by the yearly meetings as all the representatives gathered together to conduct the business of the movement.

Despite this change in the official policy the New Durham Quarterly Meeting continued to exclude individuals from their ranks. In May 1802, the New Durham

⁹⁷See the previous chapter.

Quarterly Meeting sent Amos Drew of Bridgewater an official letter of rejection. The New Durham Quarterly Meeting believed themselves to be “constrained by Love to God and his cause” and as a result of the “obligations which our covenant engagement lays us under” were forced to bring disciplinary action against Drew.⁹⁸ The Quarterly Meeting charged Drew with being a “Publick Transgressor of the Laws and Commands of the Blessed Jesus” which demanded disciplinary action. His transgressions left the Quarterly Meeting with no choice but to “Reject thee Amos Drew from the membership and fellowship of this connection and from all the Privileges of Yearly—Quarterly, and Monthly Meetings.”⁹⁹ The rejection of Drew released the New Durham Quarterly Meeting from their covenantal obligations to Drew as they denounced him as a Brother. As in the previous examples the rejection was conditional and included the possibility that Drew could be restored to the community if there was a “reformation” in his behavior.¹⁰⁰

Near the end of Randall’s life and ministry however, the power of exclusion shifted back to the congregations. At the New Durham Yearly Meeting of 1803, the question was raised whether or not the local church should have the power to reject individual members from membership since the local congregations were the ones that accepted the individuals into membership in the first place. The question was debated by the participants and eventually they agreed to grant the local congregations the power to reject members. It was a shift in the policy of the movement as it was “voted that the

⁹⁸Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book 2 (1801-1808), 2:32. FFWBC. New Durham, NH.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

Discipline be so far altered as to give each branch (church), with the assistance of a teaching elder, the privilege of rejecting transgressing members.”¹⁰¹ As in other matters of church discipline the decisions of the local congregations were still subject to review by the Quarterly Meetings and the rejection of a member was no exception. At the meeting it was also decided that the rejected members maintained “the right of appeal to the Quarterly Meeting, for a re-hearing.”¹⁰²

Randall’s desire to mold and shape the clergy within the movement is also evident in the institution of the Elder’s Conference, which functioned as the theological and ethical clearinghouse for the ministers in the connexion.¹⁰³ The ministers, or teaching elders within the connexion, were not subject to the same disciplinary methods as the ordinary members. The Elder’s Conference was established in part to monitor the behavior of the ministers within the movement. The first meeting was held in 1793 but the meetings did not occur regularly until November 1799 when the meeting was held at John Buzzell’s house in Parsonsfield on the Friday following the Yearly Meeting in Parsonsfield.¹⁰⁴ The success of the early meetings is evident as Elder’s Conference meetings were soon established in conjunction with each of the four sessions of the Yearly Meeting. Since the elders always played a role in the ordination of new ministers within the connexion, the meetings of the Elder’s conference usually included the

¹⁰¹Minutes of the 1803 New Durham Yearly Meeting cited in Stewart, 268.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Participants in the Elder’s Conference included ordained ministers, ruling elders, teaching elders, and exhorters. Female exhorters are also listed in the record books of the Elder’s Conference. Women exhorters were not a source of controversy within the connexion as individuals that demonstrate the gift of exhortation were expected to use it. There is a clear distinction between an exhorter and an ordained minister as there is no evidence of a woman being ordained a minister in the connexion during Randall’s lifetime.

¹⁰⁴Stewart, 188.

examination of new ministers. It was more expedient for a ministerial candidate to attend a meeting of gathered elders than for a committee of elders to travel to the home of the candidate.

The New Durham Quarterly Meeting held its first Elder's Conference meeting in 1801 in part to help train the "public speakers" in the area, so many of whom were considered to be "young and inexperienced."¹⁰⁵ The establishment of the Elder's Conference¹⁰⁶ enabled all church discipline matters involving ministers to be adjudicated only by other ministers within the connection. The establishment of the Elder's Conference prevented congregations from practicing church discipline on a church leader and forced the elders within the connection to monitor themselves. The establishment of the Elder's Conference also precluded the details of the church discipline process involving a church leader from becoming public knowledge. Participants included the minister, ruling elders, and deacons within the connection and the meetings were not open to the public, as in the minds of the ministers the publicity would "defeat its design."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Record of the Elder's Conference, 1801-1813, 1. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

¹⁰⁶The records of the Elder's Conference indicate the presence of Ebenezer Moulton of Salisbury at the August 23, 1805 meeting held at Somersworth. In records prior to and following the August 23 meeting an Ebenezer Knowlton is listed as a participant. Ebenezer Moulton was part of the contingent of Baptists in the First Baptist Church of Boston that approved of and embraced the Whitefieldian revivals. Moulton became pastor of a Baptist congregation in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, prior to leaving the American colonies for Canada after encountering some financial difficulties. In Canada, Moulton continued his ministry by starting new congregations in Nova Scotia. See William H. Brackney, "The Planter Motif among Baptists from to Nova Scotia, 1760-1850," 283-302 in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, eds. William H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). It is uncertain if the participant in the Freewill Elder's Conference was the same Ebenezer Moulton or a different one or simply an error. Ebenezer Moulton or Knowlton participated at the following meetings: Oct 19, 1804; Aug 23, 1805; Oct 18, 1805; May 22, 1807; and May 20, 1808. See the Record of the Elder's Conference, 1801-1813, pages 40, 53, 56, 69, 70, and 77.

¹⁰⁷Stewart, 189.

One of the major reasons for establishing the Elder's Conference was to prevent the church discipline of ministers within the connection from becoming a public affair that would have hampered the witness of the connection and tarnished the image of the leadership of the movement. Among the first challenges for the Elder's Conference was the behavior of Jeremiah Ballard.

Benjamin Randall baptized Jeremiah Ballard of Unity, New Hampshire, at the June 1798, Yearly Meeting in New Durham.¹⁰⁸ Prior to his baptism, Ballard had preached as a Methodist minister but faced inner turmoil regarding his baptism which prompted his interest in the Church of Christ of New Durham. Also at the June Yearly Meeting, Ballard submitted himself to the participants to be ordained as a teaching elder within the connexion so that he might embody churches and administer the ordinances. Ballard recited his Christian experience to a delegation from the meeting and it was decided to send a group of ministers to Ballard's hometown of Unity, New Hampshire, so they could examine him for the purpose of setting him apart for ministry within the connexion. The delegation sent to Unity included Randall and Buzzell, and following their examination the representatives agreed to ordain Ballard as a minister. On July 2, 1798, Randall preached the ordination sermon and a group of people who already enjoyed Ballard's ministry in Unity were recognized as a new congregation within the movement.¹⁰⁹

Ballard did not reveal all of his theological opinions during his ordination examination and after Randall and the other council members left Unity, word began to

¹⁰⁸Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1812): 161.

¹⁰⁹Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 176.

filter throughout the connexion regarding the unique worship practices that occurred during worship services under the direction of Jeremiah Ballard. Under Ballard's leadership and direction the worship services in Unity included "religious extravagances" that included "kissing, loud laughing, and screaming in meetings."¹¹⁰ Upon receiving word of the excesses within Ballard's ministry, the connexion sent numerous delegations to Unity in order to reprimand Ballard so that he would end the fanatical demonstrations that the leaders of the movement considered to be inappropriate. The New Durham Quarterly Meeting determined a delegation was necessary because the congregation in Unity and those organized by Ballard in neighboring towns were in "a very broken and irregular condition."¹¹¹

Ballard, however, did not change his fanatical ways and the Elder's Conference held at New Hampton in 1802 discussed Ballard's unique worship practices. The participants discussed Ballard's "extravegancies in Expressions-conduct-principels" and it is recorded that those present "declare unanously their disapprobation of the same."¹¹² Following the established church discipline practice, the participants agreed to send Ballard "a Letter of Loving intreaty to Consider on his State."¹¹³ Ballard responded to the letter of censure with a letter of his own addressed to the Yearly Meeting.¹¹⁴ By addressing the letter to the Yearly Meeting and not to the Elder's Conference we can assume that Ballard wanted the opportunity to defend himself before the connexion as

¹¹⁰Ibid., 177.

¹¹¹Stewart, *History*, 228.

¹¹²Record of the Elders Conference 1801-1813, 13. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴1802 Letter from Jeremiah Ballard to the Yearly Meeting as cited in Stewart, 231-2.

well as voice his complaints about how he was treated by the Elders within the movement.

Ballard's letter offers a view of the inner workings of the connexion and provides criticism of Randall and the other leaders of the movement. Ballard believed that the government of the movement was wrongly in the hands of the common people of the connexion and not solely in the hands of the ministerial leadership. He criticized Randall for teaching "that all should speak, and all vote," and with showing "his unwillingness that ministers should lord it over God's heritage." In contrast to Randall's belief, Ballard believed Paul's writings suggest that there were "men called by the Holy Ghost to rule, and the people were called by the same Holy Ghost to submit to it."¹¹⁵

In the letter, Ballard also questioned the administration of ordination within the connexion. He questioned the practice of basing the decision to set apart an individual for ministry solely on the examination by the ministerial council. He lamented, "if the person fail, the one to be ordained must be entirely useless in that respect, and the work of God suffers."¹¹⁶ Ballard did not propose an alternative to the established practice but simply questioned the power of the ordination council to authorize or reject certain individuals from leading a congregation and administering the ordinances.

Ballard also expressed his frustration that the participants in the Elder's Conference and then the delegation sent from the Quarterly Meeting judged the worship services in Unity to be fanatical. Ballard believed that the actions in the services were justifiable by scripture and therefore acceptable practices. Ballard rejected the

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

connexion's opinion of the practices in Unity stating, "I do not think that Randall and the church give the liberty in worship which the Scriptures justify, or the Spirit leads to."¹¹⁷

In the conclusion of the letter, Ballard made certain that he was not rejected by the connexion but in fact he rejected the connexion based upon the above complaints as well as other problems he observed within the movement. He defiantly concluded, "Therefore I do notify you, my brethren, that I have withdrawn myself from your visible order, and wish you to give yourselves no trouble in labor about the matter, for I am irrecoverably gone."¹¹⁸

Ballard's removal from the connexion did not end the difficulties as the movement still had to decide what to do about the congregation in Unity as well as the congregations in neighboring communities that Ballard organized. Ballard was instrumental in the formation of the Unity Quarterly Meeting which was officially recognized at the Yearly Meeting held at New Durham in 1799. The 1802 Yearly Meeting decided it was best to dissolve the Unity Quarterly Meeting and the churches that were formerly part of the Unity Quarterly Meeting were welcomed into the New Durham Quarterly Meeting.¹¹⁹

Ballard's letter provides insight into the ecclesiology of Randall and that of the congregations in connexion with the Church of Christ in New Durham. Ballard was an ordained minister in the connexion but his ministerial authority was questioned by other ministers at the Elder's Conference indicating that his ministerial authority was not based upon his ordination alone but was subject to continual examination by the other ministers

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 232.

¹¹⁹Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (1812): 190.

within the connexion. This type of administrative oversight is common in other denominations such as the Methodists and Presbyterians whose ministers receive their ordination from an administrative body of the denomination. Within the Baptist tradition the ordination is administered by a group of ministers and once ordained the minister is not subject to further examination by any outside authority. The Elder's Conference, led by Randall, functioned as the administrative body that not only authorized the ordination of ministers but also continually examined the ministers within the connection in an effort to determine if the individuals set apart for ministry continued to live up to their callings as ordained ministers within the connexion.

The significance of the Elder's Conference meetings within the Freewill movement is also evident in an event involving the theology of Simon Pottle. The Elder's Conference did not solely monitor the behavior of the ministers within the connexion but also played a formative role in establishing the acceptable theology of the ministers of the movement. The ordained ministers gathered regularly to discuss theological questions so that a uniform theology would be present throughout the connexion. The resulting Elder's Conference was similar to what transpired among the Methodists in colonial New England.¹²⁰ University of Missouri historian John Wigger stated that, "newly licensed Methodist preachers were tutored on the job by more

¹²⁰Before becoming a part of the Freewill Baptist movement, Jeremiah Ballard preached for a time with the Methodists. One cannot deny the similarity between the itinerant system adopted by Randall and the Freewill Baptists and that used by the Methodists. Any direct link between the two is difficult to prove as Randall began his ministry long before Methodists arrived in Southern New Hampshire. It is possible that the term "connexion" was introduced by Ballard into the Freewill connexion but its true origins within the movement are unknown.

experienced colleagues.”¹²¹ At the beginning of his public ministry Randall and the other early leaders in the movement including Samuel Weeks, Tozier Lord, and Edward Lock made public their rejection of the doctrines of Calvin and it proved to be the cornerstone for the growth of the movement. Randall and the other early leaders rejected Calvin’s doctrine of election including the idea that it was impossible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation. Randall, as demonstrated by his belief in the adherence to a strict ethical code of conduct, believed it was possible for a church member to lose his or her salvation as a result of their disobedient behavior.

At the Elder’s Conference meeting at New Durham in 1801, “the possibility of a Christian’s falling from grace, and being finally lost, was freely discussed....and all but one, Simon Pottle, in a Conference of fifty-one, were agreed believing in the doctrine.”¹²² Simon Pottle of Middleton, New Hampshire, had been ordained a teaching elder in the connexion at the New Durham Quarterly Meeting in October, 1799.¹²³ Concern about Pottle’s personal conduct soon began to filter throughout the congregations in the movement. Buzzell reported that Pottle’s “works were such in private, that it destroyed the force of his public testimony, and grieved the souls of thousands of his brethren and acquaintance.”¹²⁴ An investigation by a delegation of ten ministers from the Elder’s Conference revealed the true nature of Pottle’s behavior and the delegation was stunned

¹²¹John H. Wigger, “Fighting Bees: Methodist Itinerants and the Dynamics of Methodist Growth, 1770-1820,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* eds Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 120.

¹²²Stewart, 189.

¹²³Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1812): 190.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 191.

as Stewart reported, “every one stood aghast when the true character of Simon Pottle was publicly known.”¹²⁵

Pottle’s reprehensible behavior left the Elders Conference with no alternative but to send Pottle a letter of dismissal. While Pottle did not believe a Christian could lose his salvation, the members of the Elder’s Conference certainly did as demonstrated by the opening line in their letter: “O Simon How art thou fallen from being an Heir of Heaven to an Heir of Hell; from a Child of God , to a Child of the Divil; from a minister or servant of Christ, to be a Servant of Sin and Satan!”¹²⁶

In the mind of the Elders, Pottle’s actions determined him to be outside the fellowship of the connection and they were obligated to their commitments to exclude him as a member. “We feel bound in Duty in the Fear of the Great God to Reject thee from being a Member in our Connection.” Since Pottle’s behavior earned his rejection from the connexion he also lost his authorization as a minister of the connexion. The letter continued, “and Do now Hereby Revoke and Disanul your credentials which we gave thee and request and demand you to deliver them up to the Barers of this letter.”¹²⁷ Stewart reported that the official rejection took place at the Yearly Meeting in Parsonsfield, “where he (Pottle) was unanimously excluded. Randall presided on the occasion, was deeply affected, and made the declaration in tears, but with the firmness of conscious duty.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵Stewart, 238.

¹²⁶Nov 6, 1805 letter from Elder’s Conference to Simon Pottle. in Record of the Elder’s Conference 1801-1813, 45. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

¹²⁷Record of the Elders Conference 1801-1813, 45. FFWBC, New Durham, New Hampshire.

¹²⁸Stewart, 238.

In recounting the event, John Buzzell made a clear connection between Pottle's "despicable" behavior and his inaccurate theology, believing in the final perseverance of the saints. Buzzell commented, "a notion that the Christian has a stock in himself, or, that he has got a spark which he cannot lose, has proved the downfall of a multitude of preachers and other professors." Pottle believed in the final perseverance of the saints and his actions bore that out as he made numerous mistakes in his personal conduct and constantly asked for forgiveness. Eventually the connexion had exhausted all options and "they were constrained through love to the cause of God and precious souls, to reject him from their fellowship, and publicly note him as a disorderly walker."¹²⁹

Enacting discipline upon a minister, including the decision to reject a minister from the connexion, was a difficult task for Randall, particularly when he had participated in the ordination process of the offending individual which he had done in the cases of both Ballard and Pottle. The established ordination process attempted to prevent individuals who were not fit for ministry because of theological or ethical reasons from being ordained as ministers in the movement. Ballard and Pottle both harmed the integrity of the ordination process within the movement as well as tarnished the reputation of those ministers who examined them and considered them to be "fit" for ordination. Despite the damage inflicted upon the integrity of the ordination process, Randall and the other participants in the Elder's conference meeting believed the fanatical worship practices of Ballard and the theological deviation and immoral behavior exhibited by Pottle necessitated their removal from the connection. Ministers in the Freewill movement may not have been subject to the church discipline process within the

¹²⁹Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (1812): 192.

local church as were the regular members, but the Elder's Conference made certain that the same high expectations and standards were imposed upon the clergy of the connection. Randall made certain that the church leaders who had been set apart through the ordination process demonstrated both the correct theology and the appropriate behavior that was required of ministers in the connexion. Buzzell recounted Randall's antipathy for rejecting a member of the movement, "He considered it an awful thing, for a member to be rejected from the communion of saints on account of sinful conduct. He often on such occasions repeated the words of the Savior, 'what is bound on earth is bound in heaven, what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.'" ¹³⁰

Church discipline was a crucial element of both the theology and polity of the Freewill Baptists as the members attempted to live according to strict ethical standards so that they could best witness on behalf of Christ. Benjamin Randall himself, the great organizer of the Freewill Baptist movement in New England, was not free from examination and at times was investigated for inappropriate behavior. ¹³¹ Allegations regarding ethical misconduct were too serious to ignore and were routinely investigated so that the members and ministers of the connexion could live above reproach. At the August 1804 New Durham Quarterly Meeting held at Hartland, Vermont, which Randall was unable to attend because of illness, allegations regarding the divinization of Benjamin Randall were investigated as one individual claimed some members of the connection worshipped Randall. In response to the allegations, the New Durham Quarterly Meeting, "chose a committee to investigate reports in circulation against him.

¹³⁰Buzzell, *Life* 257-258.

¹³¹The incident involving Eleazer Davis, who accused Randall of demonstrating a temper on two separate occasions, has already been covered.

They were traced to a member of the church, who declared to the committee that ‘the connection did worship Randall, and got down upon his knees, and held up his hands, to show how they pray to him. He also said that if Randall should murder a man, and could conceal it, he could preach the next day.’ Such malicious charges could not be endured, and he was immediately rejected.”¹³²

Summary

The theology and polity of Benjamin Randall were based on scripture but were also supernaturally affirmed during his mystical cornfield experience. The supernatural affirmation of his free will theology and not Alline’s theological treatise, *Two Mites*, gave Randall confidence to preach and travel throughout New England, despite the fact that his theology was at odds with the prevailing Calvinism of his era. Randall rejected the “Calvinistic” understanding of the doctrine of election and believed salvation was available to all people if they chose to accept the grace of God. The decision to accept the grace of God was not a once in a lifetime decision for Randall, however, as he believed it was possible to lose one’s salvation if an individual stopped living according to the scriptural commands. Randall expected a true believer to demonstrate his or her relationship with Jesus through a lifetime of piety. Church members that did not adequately demonstrate the life of faith instigated the church discipline process within the connexion as the congregation was obligated to try to assist the erring member back into membership within the congregation. The church discipline process was not limited to the local congregation but was a connexion-wide practice that provided multiple levels of adjudication and appeal culminating in the ultimate authority of the Yearly Meeting.

¹³²Stewart, *History*, 237.

Randall's theology is also apparent in the administrative decisions he initiated as he attempted to maintain control over the fast-growing movement. His need for control over the movement is evident in the elaborate organizational structure that was established within the connexion as the monthly meetings were held accountable by the quarterly meetings and the quarterly meetings were held accountable by the yearly meetings. Through his participation in the quarterly and yearly meetings, Randall was able to maintain supervision over the activities in the monthly meetings throughout the connexion. The fact that the church discipline process included the quarterly and yearly meetings also allowed Randall to maintain control over the discipline with the movement as Randall was regularly present at the yearly meetings where the matters of controversy were ultimately resolved. The establishment of the Elder's Conference illustrates Randall's desire to maintain control, both theological and ethical, over the ministers within the movement. The Elder's Conference served as the final authority for all doctrinal disputes and also functioned as the clearinghouse for all individuals who wanted to be set apart for ministry within the connexion. Randall's regular participation in the meetings of the Elder's Conference enabled Randall to provide leadership in the theological discussions as well as the ordination process of new ministers.

While not the sole founder of the Freewill Baptist movement, Randall undoubtedly served as the great organizer of the connexion as he helped found and recognize congregations throughout New England. Randall's leadership was instrumental in defining the relationships between the local congregations and the quarterly and yearly meetings as he proposed the system that was eventually adopted and implemented. The system of organization took years to develop and Randall was at the

forefront of the changes throughout his life. Randall's organizational efforts resulted in a unique polity among eighteenth century Baptists. Randall's free will theology was the galvanizing concept of the movement and his personal theology became the driving energy of the connexion. Randall's impact on the connexion did not end with his death as it continued long after his life ended. The following chapter will assess Randall's enduring legacy on the connexion.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Legacy of Benjamin Randall

The Freewill connexion did not end with the death of Benjamin Randall but it did enter a time of transition as Randall's death became a significant loss for the emerging movement. Randall was one of the founding ministers of the movement and at his death was considered by many to be the voice of authority within the connexion, in essence a self-styled episcopacy. Randall's prominence in the movement was a result of his tireless efforts in preaching and in organizing the congregations into one organization. This final chapter will assess Randall's legacy not only on the Freewill Baptist connexion that he helped organize and lead but also on the American religious landscape. Randall's ministry coincided with the birth of a new nation as the colonies united together in their struggle for freedom. Randall and the Freewill connexion he led will be assessed in light of their unique contribution to the story of the practice of religion in the early republic era of the United States. Before evaluating Randall's lasting contribution to the connexion the changes that occurred following Randall's death must be explored.

Randall died October 22, 1808, and was buried on the hill in New Durham, New Hampshire. The connexion was not surprised at his passing, however, as the last five years of his life included numerous bouts of serious illness that Randall himself was surprised to overcome. When illness prevented him from attending a Quarterly or Yearly Meeting, Randall sent letters expressing his thoughts and concerns about the current state of the movement as well as his anxiety about the future of the connexion. The letters are

filled with exhortations and instructions that demonstrate Randall's ownership over the movement. When illness prevented him from attending the May 1808 New Durham Quarterly Meeting, Randall wrote the participants and urged them to discipline the negligent ministers in the connexion. The reader can sense Randall's anxiety as he appealed to the connexion "to actually take some measures to rectify the irregularities, and remove the disorders prevalent."¹ Randall was not able to attend the meeting but instructed the participants to take the necessary disciplinary actions to correct the problems within the existing clergy. A previous letter written by Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting also illustrated his ownership over the movement as an illness prompted him to think his death was imminent and he wrote, "Now, brethren, I am going to leave the Connection with you, and I know not on whome my mantle will fall;"² Randall recognized his own position of authority within the connexion and did not downplay his significance as the leading voice of authority within the connexion. His position of leadership in the connexion was unquestioned and Randall recognized his departure would result in changes within the movement.

The last four years of Randall's life were marked by serious illness and it did not surprise the members of the connexion when Randall passed away in 1808. Even though the members of the connexion were not surprised by Randall's death, his death still marked a turning point as the leading voice of authority for the previous twenty eight years was no longer present. Randall's life and ministry within the connexion cast a long

¹Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting, May 14, 1808, cited by Stewart, *History of Freewill Baptists*, 247.

²Benjamin Randall to the New Durham Quarterly Meeting, July 31, 1804, Church of New Durham Quarterly Meeting Record Book 2, 2:131. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

shadow that was not easy to erase and his impact on the connexion continued to linger long after he passed away.

The significance of Randall's leadership over the Freewill connexion is first evident in the response of the members to his death. Randall's burial was delayed a few days after his death so individuals from throughout the connexion could travel to New Durham, New Hampshire, in order to be present for the funeral service. The service was held October 26, 1808, and Buzzell recounted "Seventeen Teaching Elders were present at the funeral."³ The lay members of the connexion also traveled to New Durham to honor the life of the great organizer and leader of the movement. "The time came, and the attendance was like that of a Yearly Meeting, and on these occasions then there were frequently two thousand or more. Probably few, if any funerals in New Hampshire, ever had so large an attendance."⁴ In recounting the events of Randall's death, Buzzell referred to the funeral as "the most solemn scene I ever witnessed."⁵

Randall demonstrated his desire for control even in his death as he planned out every detail of his funeral service. One of the details Randall decided was who would serve as the presiding minister and deliver the sermon at his funeral service. Randall selected John Buzzell to officiate at his funeral service and Buzzell preached a sermon from the text Randall had selected, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."⁶

³John Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1812): 274.

⁴Selah Hibbard Barrett, Ed., *Memoirs of Eminent Preachers in the Freewill Baptist Denomination* (Rutland, OH: Printed by the Author, 1874), 33.

⁵Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1812): 274.

⁶Ibid.

Evidence of Randall's lasting impact on the Freewill Baptists is seen in his organizational structure that he implemented and which the connexion continued to use for nineteen years after his death. Randall's unique polity that included the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings continued to be the structure of the connexion long after his death. The system of accountability that Randall implemented continued to serve the movement and it was only as a result of the continued growth of the connexion that Randall's system was modified in 1827.⁷ Even after the modifications in 1827, the basic system of accountability Randall implemented remained in place as the monthly meetings continued to report to the quarterly meetings and the quarterly meetings continued to report to the yearly meetings. The only change was the addition of the meeting of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptists.

Another example of Randall's lasting influence on the Freewill Baptist connexion is the continuation of Randall's system of recognizing and ordaining new ministers within the connexion. Even after the General Conference was formed in 1827, they encouraged the same practice of allowing only a handful of ministers to examine and ordain a ministerial candidate. The elected members of the General Conference decided that a minister could not be "received or excluded without the advice of an Elder's Conference, or a council of ministers."⁸ While the suggestion of the General Conference was not binding on the congregations of the connexion, it affirmed the accepted practice within the movement and affirmed the system that Randall himself had instituted. Only

⁷The General Conference of the Freewill Baptists met for the first time in 1827. It did not have governing authority over the congregations but functioned as a representative body of the movement. It authorized the publication of a statement of faith as well helped keep the members abreast of the activities of the connexion. See Stewart, 435-437.

⁸Minutes of the 1827 General Conference of Freewill Baptists as cited in Stewart, 440.

the ordained elders within the connexion had the authority to affirm the gifts of a ministerial candidate and set them apart for ministerial service.

The authority of the ordained elders to set apart new ministers eventually came under scrutiny with the establishment of a theological school sponsored by the Freewill connexion. In 1839 a group of Freewill Baptist clergy came together to organize a theological school, “for providing the means of Biblical instruction for pious young men who promise usefulness to the Church.”⁹ The idea of a formal theological training school was opposed by John Buzzell and others who believed theological training could not replace the call of God on a man’s life. Buzzell and other like-minded opponents of the theological school pointed to Randall as their model minister who was called by God and not trained by men.¹⁰ The Elder’s Conference also functioned in part as a de facto theological school as the ministers within the connexion joined together to resolve and discuss theological as well as congregational conflicts. The advocates of the theological school remained firm in their commitment to begin a new theological school but in response to the outcry of Buzzell and others did recognize the importance of God’s call on a minister’s life and formally stated, “no man, . . . can preach the Gospel unless he has been called of God to that work.”¹¹

Further evidence of Randall’s legacy on the Freewill connexion was the fact that his unique theology remained the theology of the connexion following his death. As

⁹*The Morning Star*, December 11, 1839.

¹⁰Buzzell was not averse to education in general as he founded the first Freewill Baptist education institution, the Parsonsfield Academy in Parsonsfield, Maine. The Parsonsfield Academy, founded in 1832, provided a general education but originally did not offer theological training for ministerial candidates. The name changed to Parsonsfield Seminary when theological training was added.

¹¹*Third Annual Report of the Freewill Baptist Educational Society*, (Dover, NH: Freewill Baptist Publication Society, 1841).

discussed in the previous chapter, Randall shared theological similarities with other peers of his era but the implementation of his theology remains unique. Randall was not alone in rejecting the Calvinism that dominated the religious landscape of New England in the early republic.¹² His particular theology however, was in fact unique. In her analysis of the rise of Arminianism in colonial New England, Wright State University professor Ava Chamberlain draws a monolithic sketch of colonial Arminianism in order to compare it to the Calvinistic theology that dominated the region during the eighteenth century. In her sketch, Chamberlain offers definitions and generalizations of Arminianism that does not adequately describe Randall's theology, thereby demonstrating the uniqueness of Randall's theology.

For example, in contrasting Arminianism with the accepted Calvinism of the day Chamberlain concluded the prevailing Arminian position put humanity at the center of the salvation process and relegated God to the position of passive observer waiting for humanity to take steps toward salvation. She wrote, "Arminianism, on the other hand, empowers humankind to such a degree that the divine initiative is lost and redemption becomes the product not of God's good pleasure but of human effort."¹³ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Randall did not give the efforts of humanity any role in the process of salvation and was totally dependent upon the person of Jesus Christ to bring about salvation. Randall's position was more consistent with Chamberlain's summary of the classical Puritan and therefore Calvinistic belief that "the divine sovereignty demands an image of human nature that in its radical sinfulness is incapable

¹²Like Randall, the Shakers and Universalists also rejected Calvinism, see Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹³Ava Chamberlain, "The Theology of Cruelty: A New Look at the Rise of Arminianism in Eighteenth-Century New England," *The Harvard Theological Review* 85 (July 1992): 342.

of affecting its own salvation.”¹⁴ Randall’s emphasis on the person of Jesus as the agent of salvation would qualify him by Chamberlain’s definition, as a traditional Calvinist, a label Randall would not accept.

Chamberlain also concluded that the enthusiasm associated with the revivals contributed to the growing discontent with the doctrines of Calvin. She wrote that the “excess emotionalism of the Awakening increased the appeal of rationalism and drove many into the antirevival camp.”¹⁵ In Chamberlain’s assessment the anti-intellectual aspect of the revivals led many to reject not only the emotional elements of the revivals but also the theology associated with it. If Chamberlain’s conclusion is correct, Randall proves to be a rare exception who accepted and adopted the revivals but did not accept the Calvinistic theology associated with them. Also, in contrast to other Arminians, rationalism played no part in Randall’s rejection of Calvinism as his rejection of the doctrine of election originated from his personal mystical experience that occurred in 1780. Randall was not alone in his rejection of the doctrines of Calvin but according to Chamberlain’s summary of the rise of Arminianism, Randall’s theology precludes him from being associated with the other Arminians of his era.

Another example of Randall’s theological legacy can be found in the hymns he wrote that the congregations in the connexion used for worship. The first hymnbook of the movement was not published until 1823 and it included some hymns written by Randall. Before the publication of the hymnal Randall’s hymns would have been known and used throughout the connexion both during his life and after. For example, one of

¹⁴Ibid., 341.

¹⁵Ibid., 346-347.

Randall's hymns was sung at the conclusion of the Gorham Quarterly Meeting in 1785.

Randall himself, the clerk of the meeting, recorded the hymn in the records of the event.

Randall's hymns are so scarce today that the inclusion of the entirety of this piece is merited. No title was assigned to following hymn written by Randall.

If we indeed, are what we say,
 the followers of the Lamb;
 The children of the glorious day,
 Let love our hearts inflame.

Love only love in word and tongue,
 Will not endure the fire;
 We all must bare the test ere long—
 In love, O be Intire.

Love O love the lovely One
 Whome love brought from above,
 Who bled to raise us to a crown,
 That we might swim in love.

Love, love, pure love fulfills the law,
 Love purifies the heart;
 Love will us into union draw,
 Love will not let us part.

O love My brethren, let us love,
 And shew the world that we
 Are children of our Lord above,
 All bound in unity.

Love, all the hosts above inspirs,
 In love they all agree;
 To live in love be our desires,
 Then launch into that sea.¹⁶

The organizational structure, the process for ordination, and the theology introduced by Randall remained in place in the connexion long after Randall's death.

The fact that the policies and procedures he introduced in the movement as well as the

¹⁶ Untitled hymn sung at the Gorham Quarterly Meeting Dec 7, 1785. The Yearly Meeting Book, 59. FFWBC, New Durham, New Hampshire.

theology he received directly from God remained authoritative after his death illustrate Randall's lasting impact on the movement that he helped supervise and organize. Throughout his ministry, Randall traveled extensively throughout the connexion attending quarterly and yearly meetings, investigating and adjudicating church conflicts, and examining both congregations as well as ministers. Randall's commitment to spreading the gospel and organizing the connexion was a model for other ministers to follow and in recounting Randall's life, Buzzell remarked on Randall's seemingly endless energy. Buzzell lamented the fact that the current ministers of the connexion did not share Randall's zeal for the activities of the ministry. He stated that if other ministers, "possess the same zeal for its promotion, and in proportion to their abilities, exerted themselves to the same degree that he (Randall) did, in public and private, the world would soon be evangelized."¹⁷ Buzzell also published Randall's journal in an attempt to inspire the ministers of the connexion. Randall regularly totaled up his ministerial travels at the close of every year and Randall's travels would have inspired others to follow his example. At the close of 1785 Randall wrote, "I have travelled above twelve hundred miles in the service of truth, and have attended above three hundred meetings."¹⁸ Randall's commitment to the gospel and the Freewill connexion that he helped organize could not be questioned and during his life and after his death, Randall served as the model for the other ministers in the movement.

Randall's status within the connexion is also evident in how the members of the connexion spoke of Randall and his ministry and how they treated Randall's family

¹⁷Buzzell, *A Life of Elder Benjamin Randall*, 196.

¹⁸Stewart, 87.

members after his death. His status was such that the letters he wrote to the connexion before his death were often used as sources of inspiration years after they were originally written by Randall. Enoch Place, who later served as the first Chairman of the Freewill Baptist General Conference, recorded an incident in 1811 in which John Buzzell read one of Randall's letters to a collection of ministers at an Elder's Conference meeting.¹⁹ Place recorded in his journal, "It was a very melting time, especially when Elder Buzzell read a letter; that our departed, Brother Randel, sent to the Brethren; at Quarterly meeting a short time before his death."²⁰ Randall's letters or copies of them circulated throughout the connexion and continued to serve as sources of instruction for the connexion even after Randall died. More than twenty years after his death, Randall's letters continued to be used as a source of instruction and authority within the connexion. Place recorded an incident in 1832 at Randall's grave in which Elder David Marks read one of Randall's letters and preached a sermon.²¹ The fact that they were gathered at his gravesite and that his letters were still read two decades after his death indicate Randall's lasting influence on the ministers and members of the Freewill connexion.

¹⁹Originally from Rochester, New Hampshire, Place was converted and called to preach under the ministry of Micajah Otis at Crown Point, New Hampshire. He served as the first chair of the General Conference of Freewill Baptists when it formed in 1827. See G.A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, "Rev. Enoch Place," in *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, (Boston, MA: Arthur Stockin, 1889): 533-534. His journal gives a first-hand account of the growth and development of the connexion during the early part of the nineteenth century, see Enoch H. Place, *Journals of Enoch Hayes Place*, 2 vols, trans. William E. Wentworth, (Boston, MA: The New England Historic Genealogical Society and The New Hampshire Society of Genealogists, 1998).

²⁰Tues November 5, 1811 entry *Journals of Enoch Hayes Place* 2 vols, trans. William E. Wentworth, (Boston, MA: The New England Historic Genealogical Society and The New Hampshire Society of Genealogists, 1998) 1:41.

²¹Thursday, August 16, 1832 entry *Journals of Enoch Hayes Place* 2 vols, trans. William E. Wentworth, (Boston, MA: The New England Historic Genealogical Society and The New Hampshire Society of Genealogists, 1998), 1:346.

Randall's impression on Enoch Place was such that Place concluded that if Randall had been alive in 1833 when the Freewill connexion began to be involved in missions work outside of New England, Randall would have been not only supportive but Place assumed Randall would be one of the leading voices supporting the new missions endeavor. The Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society incorporated in 1833 and its first venture into foreign missions involved offering financial support for a General Baptist missionary from England who served in India.²² The mission work of the connexion was in part prompted by a letter requesting financial support from the English General Baptist missionaries already on foreign soil. The initial efforts of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society focused on raising financial support for missionaries already serving abroad.²³ Randall's lasting influence on the members and ministers of the connexion is evident in the fact that Place concluded Randall would have been a leading voice in supporting the missions cause. Place wrote, "that had Randal lived to this or near this time...that he would have been one of the foremost in Sending the gospel to all the world, and in promoting all other usefull benevolent objects."²⁴ Although foreign or home mission societies were not considered by Randall during his lifetime, Place was convinced that if Randall had lived to see the start of the connexion's involvement in missions he would have been one of the leading advocates of the movement. Place's

²²John Buzzell served as the first president of the Freewill Baptist Foreign Mission Society. In 1832, Buzzell received a letter from Amos Sutton, a missionary supported by the General Baptists of England. Sutton was alerted to the existence of the Freewill Baptists in America by a widow of missionary from the American Baptist Mission in Burma. See G.A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, "Foreign Mission Society," in *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, (Boston, MA: Arthur Stockin, 1889): 198-200.

²³The first missionaries from the Freewill Baptists of New England did not sail for India until 1835.

²⁴ Saturday, June 11, 1842 entry *Journals of Enoch Hayes Place* 2 vols, trans. William E. Wentworth, (Boston, MA: The New England Historic Genealogical Society and The New Hampshire Society of Genealogists, 1998), 1:601

reference to Randall's theoretical support for missions work also indicates Randall's continued place as an authority within the connexion. Thirty years after his death, Randall's name is mentioned in support of a project in part to add his authority to the endeavor. Place assumed that people would be more agreeable to the idea of missions work if Randall, the leading organizer and first voice of authority within the movement, supported the concept.

Evidence of Randall's legacy within the Freewill movement is not only evident in the use of Randall's letter to the connexion or his name alone but also seen in how Randall's family members were treated following his death. In his memoirs, early nineteenth century Freewill Baptist minister and evangelist David Marks (1805-1845), recorded an incident from April 3, 1830, at Ossipee, New Hampshire, in which he met one of Randall's sisters.²⁵ Marks referred to Randall's sister as "a mother of Israel" and commented "we were much delighted by her plainness and humility."²⁶ He also recorded his conversation with Randall's sister as she offered a memory of her brother. Marks wrote, "She remarked that her brother, Elder Randall, was a very plain man, and was ever opposed to the pride and superfluousness that too often dishonor professed Christians."²⁷ More than twenty years after his death, Randall's opinion on spiritual matters was still

²⁵Originally from New York State, Marks began preaching at the age of fifteen and preached in New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Connecticut and Canada. He was also involved with the establishment of the Freewill Baptist Foreign and Home Mission Societies. See G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, "Rev. David Marks," in *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia*, (Boston, MA: Arthur Stockin, 1889): 383-384. His memoir was published by his wife two years after his death and along with the journal of Enoch H. Place, provides a first-hand account of the connexion during the early part of the nineteenth century. See *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel*, ed., Mrs. Marilla Marks, (Dover, NH: Free-Will Baptist Printing Establishment, 1847).

²⁶*Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel*, ed., Mrs. Marilla Marks, (Dover, NH: Free-Will Baptist Printing Establishment, 1847), 247

²⁷Ibid.

important to his sister and Marks as well who made a point of recording the incident in his journal.

The Freewill Baptist connexion also demonstrated their affection for and appreciation of Randall by financially supporting Randall's widow, Joanna, after Randall's death. Again, Enoch Place's journal provides a first-hand account of the respect the members of the connexion had for Randall's family as he wrote, "I preached at Crownpoint to a verry full assembly, and the friends and Brethren made a Collection for Elder Randals widow."²⁸ Even though Randall himself was not paid for his ministerial service during his lifetime and believed ministers should follow the example set by Paul and be tent-makers that were financially supported not by their ministerial efforts but through another capacity, the connexion felt indebted to Randall's widow for Randall's life of service to the connexion so they honored his life and ministry by providing financial support for his widow the remainder of her life.

As has been demonstrated previously, Randall was not the sole founder of the Freewill Baptist connexion, but soon after the group organized, Randall quickly became the leading figure of authority within the movement. Despite the fact that Randall was not the sole founder of the movement, the members of the connexion viewed Randall as the founding father of the movement. By 1810 the connexion extended into Rhode Island and the Rhode Island constituents commenced publishing a periodical, *The Freewill Baptist Magazine* in 1826. In their opening edition, the publishers identified themselves as part of the movement founded by Benjamin Randall. The opening article entitled, "A

²⁸Sunday, January 31, 1819 entry *Journals of Enoch Hayes Place*, 1:132.

general View of the Free-Will Baptist Connexion,” provided the history of the movement as a clue to the identity of the group. It stated:

The first church gathered of this order was in New-Durham, N.H. in the year 1780, principally by the instrumentality of Elder Benjamin Randall, who then resided in that town. Soon after, several branches were collected, which united with this church, and several preachers of different persuasion were brought to see the beauties of a free salvation, and united as fellow-laborers with Elder Randall.²⁹

More than twenty years after *The Free-Will Baptist Magazine* in Rhode Island labeled Randall the founder of the movement, another publication by a Freewill Baptist minister, also affirmed Randall’s role in founding the movement. Notable Freewill Baptist minister, David Marks, referred to Randall in his memoirs as the “founder of the Free-will Baptist denomination.”³⁰ Marks’ journal was published by his widow in 1847, two years after Marks’ death. Nearly forty years after Randall’s death, a minister of the denomination considered Randall to be the founding father of the movement.

Randall’s influence was so strong over the connexion that he led and helped organize that he was even glorified in verse. In a poem published in the *The Free-Will Baptist Magazine*, Randall is compared to such notable Reformers as John Wycliff, Martin Luther, and John Calvin! Randall is labeled as the reformer proclaiming the truth of “free salvation.” This unique poem, “Elder Randall,” demonstrates the connexion’s esteem for Randall and the contribution of his life and ministry merits its inclusion in full.

Whitefield and Wesley, shook old Satan’s throne;
Whose kingdom, fell from heav’n, like lightning down.
And thus, at times, though not in ev’ry age,
Reformers in the work of truth engage.
So Randall rose in free salvation’s cause,
To vindicate th’ Eternals ways and laws.

²⁹*The Free-Will Baptist Magazine* (May 1826): 6.

³⁰*Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel*, ed., Mrs. Marilla Marks, (Dover, NH: Free-Will Baptist Printing Establishment, 1847), 247

This precious gospel won its holy way
 In early time, it cheers the present day!.....
 ..And lit with glory the broad gospel day.
 Randal was bless'd! When preaching for his God....
 That all should come and love the Savior's name,
 And shout, free-grace, with sweet and loud acclaim!...
 And south and north, this cause divinely blest
 Has widely spread: the hills, the vales, the shores
 Resound with Free Salvation!! While implores
 Ten thousand, thousand, that the heav'nly strain,
 Will all its changes, sound again! Again!....
 Ye ministers of God! catch, catch his fire,
 Burn, burn your souls with ardent, strong desire
 To preach Salvation Free, Unfetter'ed, Free,
 Nor bound with chains of fatal destiny!³¹

For the author of the poem, the success enjoyed by Randall demonstrated God's blessing on his ministry and his unique message of "free salvation." The poem concludes by urging other ministers to follow Randall's example and proclaim a gospel that is "unfetter'ed" and not limited to the elect. Randall's belief in the unlimited nature of the atonement is clearly demonstrated as one of his lasting contributions to the Freewill movement.

Randall's influence over the affairs of the connexion was such that his death prompted a number to challenges to policies and practices within the connexion that Randall himself had established. Stewart reported that Randall's death was a sad time for the connexion and "still more sad in its effects upon the peace of the denomination."³² Individuals were hesitant to challenge Randall's authority while he was alive and they "seemed not to revere his memory" as they waited until he died to bring up their complaints and suggestions.³³ One of the controversies centered upon the organizational

³¹"Elder Randall," *The Free-Will Baptist Magazine* (August 1826): 63-64.

³²Stewart, 264.

³³Ibid.

structure that Randall had established for the members of the connexion. A question regarding the necessity of the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings was brought before the Elder's Conference held at Gorham, Maine, in November, 1809. The question was then discussed at the various monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings but only a slight alteration to the existing system was approved. Buzzell recounted that at the 1810 Yearly Meeting held at Gilmanton, New Hampshire, it was decided to "drop the practice of calling the Churches Monthly Meetings."³⁴ The decision reached by the connexion was in reality only a superficial change that did not alter the organizational system established by Randall. Randall's death prompted those who feared Randall and his authority to question some of the practices that he established. The connexion itself however, did not do away with Randall's system but confirmed it and continued to follow it until 1827.

Randall's lasting influence over the Freewill connexion is evident in the fact that the polity and theology established by Randall remained the polity and theology of the movement following his death. The magnitude of his influence is also evident in how the the majority of the minister's in the connexion revered Randall following his death and continued to use his letters written to the connexion as sources of authority and instruction. As the first and greatest organizer of the movement, Randall's death also served as a point of transition for the movement as the death of Randall helped move the church from an emerging sect to an institutionalized church or denomination.³⁵ Several characteristics of a sect offered by former Yale University professor, H. Richard Niebuhr, are worth noting. The first observation is that sects often change or develop with the

³⁴Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine* (1826): 277.

³⁵See Ruth B. Bordin, "The Sect to Denomination Process in America: The Freewill Baptist Experience," *Church History* 34: 1 (March 1965): 77-94.

death of an early leader. Niebuhr wrote, “The sociological character of sectarianism, however, is almost always modified in the course of time by the natural processes of birth and death, and on this change in structure changes in doctrine and ethics inevitably follow.”³⁶ Randall’s death served as the point of transition for the Freewill Baptist movement as they had to move on and continue their ministerial efforts following the death of their beloved and respected leader of the previous twenty-eight years.

Niebuhr’s evaluation of and characterization of sects aptly describes the Freewill Baptist connexion as it existed under Randall’s leadership. Niebuhr observed that the sect, “attaches primary importance to the religious experience of its members prior to their fellowship with the group.”³⁷ The emphasis on the personal conversion narrative of prospective members was present at the founding of the Church of Christ of New Durham under Randall and remained an instrumental part of the initiation process into the Freewill Baptist connexion. Another observation provided by Niebuhr is also applicable as he noted, “It [the sect] holds with tenacity to its interpretation of Christian ethics and prefers isolation to compromise.”³⁸ Like the emphasis on the personal conversion experiences, high ethical expectations of the members were a regular part of the church covenants of many congregations throughout the connexion. The reformation of the Church of Christ of New Durham in 1792 serves as a good example as ethical expectations in regard to public behavior and business dealings dominated the new covenant that was drafted to end the inappropriate behavior that resulted in the

³⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, (Hamden, CT: The Shoe String Press, 1929), 19.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

dissolution of the original Church of Christ of New Durham.³⁹ The importance of separation from society is also evident in the circular letters drafted by the quarterly meetings. For example, the 1784 circular letter to the congregations of the New Durham Quarterly Meeting warned of the existing dangers in the world and urged the members to reject the ways of the world. The list of vices included, “indulging in pride and fashions, vain talking and jesting, cursing and swearing, drunkenness, adultery, carnal company, gaming, frolicking and dancing, anger, malice, revenge, and worldly-mindedness.” The letters urged the members to reject the vices because embracing them “is choosing the way to hell, because they are the things that lead there.”⁴⁰ In a religious movement that believed it was possible for each member to lose his/her salvation, the high ethical expectations were not merely suggestions but commands as Randall and the other leaders imposed the high ethical standards in part to protect the salvation of the members.

Niebuhr also noted that the educational expectations of the clergy often changed as a sect matured into a denomination. He wrote that in the transition from sect to church, “an official clergy, theologically educated and schooled in the refinements of ritual, takes the place of lay leadership.”⁴¹ This shift occurred in the Freewill Baptist movement as the 1840’s saw the establishment of the Freewill Baptist Educational Society that was instrumental in the founding of the first theological school.⁴² Even though John Buzzell and others opposed the idea of mandating the need for theological

³⁹See the second covenant of the Church of Christ of New Durham in Appendix II.

⁴⁰1784 New Durham Quarterly Meeting Circular Letter as cited in Stewart, 79.

⁴¹Niebuhr, 20.

⁴²In its beginnings, the first theological school enjoyed a nomadic existence as it was located in a variety of places including Parsonsfield, Maine; Dracut, Massachusetts; Whitesboro, New York; New Hampton, New Hampshire; and Lewiston, Maine.

education for ministers, the development of the Education Society and the founding of the theological training school indicate growth within the movement and mark a shift in the history of the movement.

Part of the development and growth within the movement occurred out of necessity as a result of Randall's death. Randall's death served as a turning point in the movement as the leading voice of authority was no longer present. Randall chose John Buzzell to officiate at his funeral and this selection served as Randall's affirmation of Buzzell as his successor in leadership over the connexion. The members of the connexion recognized the importance of Randall's selection of Buzzell as his successor as well and affirmed Buzzell as the next leader of the connexion at the first Yearly Meeting following Randall's death. At the October 1808 meeting, the members decided to give Buzzell the administrative responsibility that previously had belonged to Randall, "Whereas, our dear and well-beloved brother, Elder Benjamin Randall, deceased on the 22d, Voted that Elder John Buzzell take and keep the records of the Yearly Meeting, and record the minutes of the same."⁴³ The position of clerk of the Yearly Meeting was the unofficial place of authority within the connexion as all matters of church business and discipline were brought before the Yearly Meeting and recorded by the appointed clerk. The decision to elect Buzzell as the clerk of the meeting demonstrated Buzzell's new position of authority in the connexion as the successor to Randall.

Buzzell himself was converted under Randall's ministry and had worked closely with Randall from the point of his entrance into the connexion.⁴⁴ Buzzell spent the

⁴³ New Durham Yearly Meeting, cited in Stewart, 269.

⁴⁴See Chapter Four for treatment of Buzzell's conversion and call to the ministry.

majority his ministry as pastor of the Freewill Baptist congregation in Parsonfield, Maine. Buzzell remained the visible leader of the connexion for fifty years following Randall's death in 1808. Buzzell was instrumental in a number of new initiatives begun as the connexion continued to mature including the use of the press to disseminate news of the activities and to make known the theology of the connexion. In 1811, John Buzzell, began to publish the periodical, *A Religious Magazine*, which included a history of the movement as well as "a particular account of late reformations and revivals of religion."⁴⁵ The periodical communicated the events and activities of the different congregations within the connexion and served to keep the members informed of the activities of the different congregations, and the decisions reached at the various quarterly and yearly meetings. The publication was started in part to prevent the ministers of the connexion "from imbibing the erroneous opinions which at that time were zealously propagated among them."⁴⁶

In 1826 the weekly publication the *Morning Star* began with John Buzzell as the senior editor of the periodical. The *Morning Star* served as a key piece of communication within the connexion as it was "devoted to Religious Intelligence and Christian correspondence...to News in general, and whatever may be attractive to the candid reader."⁴⁷ The publication communicated information about upcoming meetings as well as reported on the events that occurred at other meetings that already occurred. The *Morning Star* also functioned as guide for both ethical behavior and theological instruction within the connexion. In the first edition, editor John Buzzell offered articles

⁴⁵Buzzell, *A Religious Magazine*, (1811): 1.

⁴⁶Stewart, 339.

⁴⁷*The Morning Star* (Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman, & Co., 1826), 1.

entitled, ““Extravagance in Dress,” “Religious Conversation,” and “Christian Forbearance.”⁴⁸ The impact of the *Morning Star* was such that Stewart commented, “A series of seventeen articles, published the first year, on the ‘Order and Discipline of the Church,’ contributed greatly to the increase of system and uniformity in the denomination.”⁴⁹ The *Morning Star* did not have any kind of authority over the members of the connexion but it clearly influenced the members of the connexion and Buzzell used the publication to disseminate not only news about the activities of the movement but also his views on a variety of subjects, both ethical and theological.

Buzzell also played a significant role in the publication in the first official hymn book of the movement. In 1823, the Freewill publishing agency published a collection of hymns that were compiled by Buzzell.⁵⁰ That Buzzell was authorized to compile the acceptable songs and hymns that were selected to be in the official hymnal of the burgeoning denomination signified his status as a theological authority within the movement.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Randall did not take the time to publish a theological treatise explaining and defending his unique theology. It was argued that he was too busy with the practical application of the theology in preaching and organizing churches to take the time to publish his beliefs. As the Freewill movement continued to spread farther away from New England to include churches in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Upper and Lower Canada, the organizational system established by Randall no

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Stewart, 462.

⁵⁰*Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Selected for the Use of the United Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Free Will Baptist and for the Saints of All Denominations*, Compiled by John Buzzell, (Kennebunk, ME: James K. Remich, 1823).

longer met the needs of the growing denomination.⁵¹ John Buzzell served on the committee that recommended the establishment of the General Conference, which met for the first time in 1827.⁵² As the movement continued to grow, the General Conference decided that an official statement of faith needed to be published. The introduction to the work explains the publication was necessary as a result of the widespread growth of the movement. The General Conference justified the publication with the following statement, “As our Connexion has become so extensive that all cannot meet and confer together as formerly...whereas, the Bible requires us all to ‘speak the same thing.’”⁵³ Explaining the correct interpretation of scriptures was not the only reason the statement of faith was published as the authors recognized that the document would introduce the faith and practice of the Freewill connexion to many people outside of the movement. The hope was that the publication “may be instrumental of gathering into our Connexion many independent societies, and many individuals, who believe as we do, but who, as yet, have little knowledge of our sentiments.”⁵⁴ As a result of the expansive growth, it was no longer practical to expect all participants to be able to join together in order to decide matters of faith and practice within the movement. The statement of faith served to provide a theological guide for members of the connexion and as the editor of the Committee that drafted the statement, John Buzzell played a significant role in

⁵¹On the Freewill Baptists in Canada, see Craig Bruce Cameron, “The Freewill Baptist Experience in Lower and Upper Canada, 1800-1867: Crosscurrents of Canadian-American Religious Life.” (Thesis Submitted to Toronto School of Theology, 1994).

⁵²Members of the recommending committee included Buzzell, John Foster, Enoch Place, Zachariah Jordan, Samuel Burbank, Ziba Pope, Thomas Moxley, Jeremiah Bullock, Andrew Hobson, Henry Hobbs, Samuel Moulton, and Winborn A. Drew. See Stewart, 437.

⁵³*A Treatise on the Faith of the Freewill Baptists; With an Aappendix, Ccontaining a Summary of their Usages in Church Government*, (Dover, NH: David Marks, 1834), 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

perpetuating the theology that was originally introduced by Randall as the orthodox faith of the movement.⁵⁵ Fifty four years after the movement began, the Freewill Baptist Connexion published its first official statement of faith.⁵⁶

Buzzell's leadership of the connexion is evident in his leadership in the publication efforts of the movement as he was instrumental in the publication of *A Religious Magazine*, the *Morning Star*, and *A Treatise on the Faith of the Freewill Baptists*. His leadership in those publication efforts demonstrated his theological authority as he explained the proper doctrines of the movement to a wide audience. He also became the spokesperson for the movement as he initiated correspondence with the General Baptists in England. He corresponded with Adam Taylor, the leader of the General Baptist Connexion in England, and informed the members of the connexion of the communication by publishing the letters in the *Morning Star*.⁵⁷

Summary

Benjamin Randall's influence on the Freewill Baptists of colonial New England did not end with his death in 1808. The influence of Randall on the movement persisted for much of the nineteenth century as the Freewill Baptists continued to use the organizational structure and the system of accountability introduced and implemented by Randall. Randall's lasting influence on the movement is also evident in the fact that the connexion continued Randall's practice of maintaining control of the ordination process

⁵⁵ Selah Hibbard Barrett, ed., *Memoirs of Eminent Preachers in the Freewill Baptist Denomination* (Rutland, OH: Printed by the Author, 1874), 52.

⁵⁶ *A Treatise on the Faith of the Freewill Baptists; With an Appendix, Containing a Summary of their Usages in Church Government*, (Dover, NH: David Marks, 1834).

⁵⁷ July 6, 1826, *Morning Star*, includes a copy of a letter from Adam Taylor, General Baptist from London and a response from John Buzzell to Adam Taylor, 2.

within the movement. Randall believed only ministers and not congregations were eligible to set individuals apart for public ministry and the Elders' Conference functioned as the clearinghouse for all ministerial candidates within the movement.

Randall was held in high esteem by the members of the connexion which is demonstrated by the numerous published claims of Randall as the founder of the movement. Many periodicals and individuals were proud to declare their indebtedness to Randall as their founding leader when in reality he was one of many like-minded ministers who began the movement. Randall's tireless efforts to organize the movement and the high standard of excellence he set as a model minister contributed to his lasting impact on the members of the connexion who proudly claimed him as their founder. Randall's influence on the Freewill Baptists of colonial New England continued for many years after his death, but his death also marked a point of transition in the movement as the first great organizer and voice of authority within the connexion left a void of leadership and authority that was difficult to replace.

Randall did not survive to see the full maturation of the movement that he helped organize and develop. Following his death in 1808 the connexion outgrew both numerically and geographically the organizational structure he established. The growth culminated in the organization of the General Conference of the Freewill Baptists in 1827. While his organizational system may have become obsolete as a result of the rapid expansion of the movement, Randall's high ethical expectations and unique theology continued to influence the connexion long after his death. Randall himself was the model minister for the burgeoning movement as he quickly achieved saintly status after his death. His family members received special recognition within the movement and his

letters to the connexion carried slightly less authority than the epistles of Paul.

Randall's greatest attribute was his tireless energy as he traveled thousands of miles in order to supervise the activities of the connexion and maintain communication between the congregations in the movement. Randall functioned as the eyes and ears of the movement as he either saw or heard everything that occurred within the connexion.

While he clearly was just one of the founders of the movement, Randall's organizational and leadership efforts earned him the title of "founder" in numerous Freewill publications following his death. Randall's designation as founder is probably appropriate in the sense that without his leadership the movement would not have galvanized as it did. Randall's ownership over the connexion is also evident in the fact that his theology became the theology of the movement. His life and ministry left an indelible mark on the movement that was impossible to replace. John Buzzell succeeded Randall as the leader of the connexion, but the character of the movement was forever altered in 1808 with the death of Benjamin Randall, the founder of the Church of Christ of New Durham and the chief organizer of the Freewill Baptists of New England.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Historians of American religious history often draw a sharp distinction between the First Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and the Second Great Awakening that occurred a century later. The first wave of revivals challenged the authority of and the practice of the established churches while the second wave was dominated by the rise of the common man. The Freewill Baptists serve as a unique religious movement that bridges the supposed gap between the two revivals as they began as a result of the eighteenth century revivals and developed and matured during the revivals of the nineteenth century. The origin of the Freewill Baptists can be traced back to the first wave of revivals, as the great organizer of the movement, Benjamin Randall, experienced conversion immediately after hearing of the death of George Whitefield in 1780. Randall himself adopted many of the same worship practices and followed Whitefield's example by implementing an itinerant ministry of his own. Randall spent the next twenty eight years organizing and leading a new religious movement that grew and developed largely in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

This examination of Benjamin Randall and the Freewill Baptists of New England that he organized and led, suggests refinement in the way religious movements of the early republic should be understood. Randall was far from the typical convert of Whitefield as his conversion led not only to separation from the established Congregational church but eventually to leadership of a new religious movement. An

examination of Randall's life and ministry forces the student to take his supernatural theology at least as seriously as he did. Randall's freewill theology was not the result of a lifetime of scriptural study but developed as a result of a supernatural vision. Randall was not a learned clergyman who relied upon his educational training but rather on his revelations from God, both at his conversion and again while in his cornfield, served as the theological impetus he needed to preach free salvation, establish new congregations, and supervise the affairs of the connexion.

Randall's desire for a pure and pious church that demonstrated the characteristics of the Christian life led him to establish rules for membership within the movement. In order to be accepted into the connexion, individuals first had to relate the details of their conversion experience so that the community would remain an institution composed only of the converted. Relating one's conversion experience was not enough to maintain one's membership in the connexion as Randall placed high ethical expectations on all members of the movement. The high ethical expectations were not suggestions to be considered, but were mandates to be obeyed as Randall implemented a rigorous system of church discipline in order to maintain the piety of the members. Randall expected members of the movement to demonstrate the faith in the daily actions. Individuals who were unable or chose not to live up to the high expectations placed upon the members of the connexion were eventually excluded from the movement.

The church discipline system that was implemented was connected with the unique polity that Randall established within the connexion. The congregations were distinct and yet interrelated. Matters of dispute and discipline within a congregation were passed along to the Quarterly Meeting. If a dispute or conflict arose at the Quarterly

Meeting then the Yearly Meeting was consulted for assistance. The polity established by Randall enabled him to supervise all the affairs and activities of the connexion to insure that their actions were consistent with his theology. Interestingly, Randall himself was not greater than the system he established as the great organizer of the movement was subject to the church discipline process on a number of occasions.

With the expansion of the movement that developed as a result of Randall's itinerant ministry, adaptation was necessary and Randall organized the movement around the practices that he had adopted and implemented at the Church of Christ of New Durham. The practices of his home congregation became the practices of the movement as the members covenanted together and kept one another accountable through the church discipline process.

The Freewill Baptists of colonial New England stand out from their colonial Baptist peers not only for their free will theology but also for their unique polity. In contrast their Calvinistic Baptist brothers and sisters who recognized the authority of each congregation, the Freewill Baptist connexion believed all the local congregations were part of a larger organization that demanded and expected accountability. This accountability was demonstrated through the implementation of church discipline as well through the control over the ordination process that was maintained by the clergy within the movement.

The free will theology of the Freewill Baptist connexion also set them apart not only from their Calvinistic Baptists but also the prevailing Calvinistic tradition that dominated colonial New England. Unlike other theologically divergent groups such as the Shakers and Universalists, the Freewill Baptists did not reject the revivalistic

practices of the Calvinistic majority. Under Randall, the Freewill Baptists adopted the revivalistic practices of George Whitefield but modified his theology as Randall's supernatural vision, in which he saw universal grace available for all people, served as the impetus for his personal ministry and for that of the movement as well.

Randall provided his peers with the opportunity to take ownership over their salvation and the people responded. Hearers heeded Randall's message of free grace and free salvation, first in New Durham, New Hampshire, and then in surrounding communities throughout Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine. Randall's itinerant ministry and his numerous trips to oversee the activities of various congregations soon developed into a network of believers that recognized the pastoral authority of Randall as the congregations were recognized to be in connexion with the Church of Christ of New Durham. The movement continued to grow and expand and Randall was instrumental in suggesting and implementing the changes that were necessary as a result of the dramatic growth. The last years of Randall's life afforded him the opportunity to oversee the growth and expansion of the movement throughout all of New England and into Canada. Randall's impact on the movement continued far beyond his earthly existence as he became recognized as the founder and first voice of authority of the connexion. The structures he established remained in place and his theology continued to be that of the connexion as well. Under the leadership of Benjamin Randall, the Freewill Baptists of Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine emerged into a new religious tradition that believed that all people were free to accept the universal love of Jesus. Ultimately, this New England religious tradition expanded its territory to the west and south to become a national phenomenon.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

June 30, 1780, Covenant of the Church of Christ of New Durham

Therefore we do now declare that we have given ourselves to God and do now agree to give ourselves to each other in love and fellowship and do agree to take the scriptures of truth for our rule of our faith and practice. Respecting our duty toward God, our neighbors, and our selves. We promise to practice all the commands of and the ordinances of the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so far as they are or shall be made known unto us by the light of the Holy Spirite of truth, without which, we are sensible, we cannot attain to the true knowledge thereof.

and Do promise to bare one another burdens and so fulfill the Law of Love which is the Law of Christ. and we Do agree to give Liberty for the Improvement of the Gifts of the Brethren. and to keep up the publick worship of God amongst our selves and not to forsake the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is. and also agree not to Receive any person into fellowship, except they give a satisfactory account of a change of Life and heart.

and also they shall promise to Submit to the order and Discipline as above. May God Enable us to keep covenant. Amen.¹

¹Entry dated June 30, 1780 in the New Durham Church Record Book I, 1:1-2. FFWBC, New Durham, NH.

APPENDIX B

April 13, 1791, Covenant of the Church of Christ of New Durham

First, Conduct of professors among the world of mankind that they should not conform to the customs and fashions of the world Viz in Vain and unprofitable conversation foolish jesting and talking no not so much (when the Ungodly talk Vain) as to Laugh at it and thereby Countenance them but Rather Reprove them.

Secondly, Charitableness that professors shall do good to all men as much as in them say and communicate to the Church Stock for the Use of the Church according as the Lord as Prospered them and if any appear to be covetous he shall be admonished to Liberality

Thirdly, Pride that professors shall not indulge Pride of heart in Looking with Contempt upon others or Esteeming them selves More highly then they ought nor pride of apperrel in adorning themselves with superfluities as any thing that is unnecessary or when they can give no other Reason for it then because it is the custom or fashion and Looks better.

Fourthly, Trade and commerce that professors can't be Looked upon to be walking with the limits of the Commands and ordinance of Christ when they in there trade Make the Custom of the unbelieving World their Rule of their Dealings for Christ has given this as a Rule in all thing to his Church that they should Do as they would be Done by—and not as they are Done by.

Fifthly, Law suits, that professors within the commands of Christ should by no means go to the common Law for the Decision of any matter but should Deside all Matters in the Church one among another but if one that is not in the Church is indebt to a believer and Refuseth to pay him and is better able to Pay then the Brother is to go Without it, that he may then take the Debts in Sivel Law 'for the Law is made for Lawyers and Disobedeant.'

Sixly, Exortation and Speaking on to another Professors can't be looked upon to walk in the commands of Christ who when they are together Make the Maine point of the discourse about Earthly things but that it is a sign their not fearing God 'for they who fear God speak often one to another.'

Seventhly, Secret prayer is also within the commands of Christ and the professor who lives in the Neglect of secret prayer cant be considered a Living Christian.

Eighthly, family worship that all professors should in the practice of family prayer reading the scriptures and Discoursing of Religion in their families that they may not only say that they acknowledge Chrsit but by their Conduct and practice may be an example and declaration outwardly of their inward Life and Love.

Ninthly, that professors cant consistent with the commands of Christ Bare the carnal weapon which is intended to Destroy mens lives. But as Christ came not to Destroy Mens lives but to Save them so the Children of God Should all be possessed of a kind and loving dispoision.

Tenthly, that professed Christians should use all their Endeavors both in advice and command by authority to keep their Domestick from all carnal frolicking—gaming

superfluities bot in practice and apparel—and strive to suppress Vice and Encourage Virture at all times.

Eleventhly, that it is the Duty of Professors to Practice in the ordinances of the Supper outward by Baptizm and washing one anothers feet in water.

Covenant together and promise by grace to walk in the ordinances and commands of our Lord Jesus Christ as we Do or Shall Understand. and we will take the scriptures of truth (which we believe to be an Unerring Rule) for the Rule of our Practice in our Conversation Dealing and Commerce and if any of us are Convicted of not walking according there to or of Violating thereof We shall be Deem'd Disorderly and be Delt with as Such as the afforsaid Rule shall Direct. Amen.¹

¹ New Durham Church Record Book I, I: 57-60. Entry dated April 13, 1791.

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