

# How Churches Should Associate

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We need to consider very carefully from the Scriptures just how churches should associate. Much is being done at this present time in terms of church association. However, faced with such developments, many have concerns, but they do not always know exactly why they are unhappy. To help with this we shall make an attempt to get to grips with the principles that are involved, by means of historical study and Scriptural analysis. We hope we shall be able to give some practical guidelines. This paper is divided into three parts: (1) historical, (2) doctrinal and (3) practical.

## **(1) How Churches Associate Considered Historically**

Churches have, in the past, associated together without losing their autonomy, and have flourished. However, it seems there is always a human tendency to depend upon numbers and organisational structure. Just as in the Early Church, while our fathers resisted heresy concerning the Person and Work of Christ, they succumbed to the temptation to build ecclesiastical structures that were unscriptural. In the end these proved to be the great enemy of the people of God. It is amazing how rapidly it happened after the death of the apostles, and it is amazing how rapidly in our day those who began with good intentions have fallen into the same trap.

### **Small Associations**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a loose association of churches but steady growth. In the years prior to the Great Ejection of 1662 there were small associations in various parts of the country. The Baptist Historical Society has produced three volumes of "Association Records", which are full of instruction. We learn from these how it was that churches related to each other. Anything from half-a-dozen to twenty churches would meet together in a local area by means of their appointed representatives. These representatives were described as 'messengers', and messengers they were and *not* delegates.

It is striking to see the way in which the authority of the local church was respected. The messengers would carry questions from their respective churches to the meeting of messengers, and thus convey these queries to

the other churches, and would return with queries from those other churches communicated to them by the other messengers. The answer would be carried from the local churches to the next meeting of messengers, and so carried back again to the various churches. It is quite clear, therefore, that the local church considered the questions that were presented to it, *at its church meeting*, and asked questions of other congregations. Thus they respected the role of the church meeting, and did not delegate authority to a meeting of messengers.

### **A Biblical Framework**

When the Midlands Baptist Association was begun in 1655, messengers from seven churches met together and determined the objects of this new association. Then they returned to their churches with the proposed objects for the churches to consider. It is important to note that no decision was made by a body external to the local churches on behalf of the local churches. It is also interesting to note the five rules setting forth the objects of their association, because they were worded so as to go no further than what Scripture warrants:

They deal **firstly** with giving advice after serious consultation in matters of controversy, following the example of the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 15, 23 etc.);

**secondly**, in sending gifted brethren to use their gifts for the edification of churches that needed the same, as the church at Jerusalem sent some to Antioch (Acts 15, 22);

**thirdly**, in ministering to the poverty and want of any particular churches, as the Gentile church helped the church at Jerusalem (Romans 15, 26);

**fourthly**, in the joint carrying on of any part of the work of God, as is commended to the churches as they shall have opportunity to join therein to the glory of God (II Cor. 8:19, 23);

and **fifthly**, in watching over each other and considering each other for good, being all members of the Body of Christ.

When these met together by means of their messengers, many subjects were discussed which still have great interest but are more related to matters raised at a small ministers' fraternal than practical ways in which churches could work together. They did, however, enter into a firm recognition of one another, knowing each church well enough to have

confidence in them. This was possible in a small association. These small gatherings of churches in different areas may not have continued for many years. Persecution may have been responsible for their dissolution, but it is difficult to know if they were revived when easier times came about. Only the Western Association and the Midland Association continued. There is a lack of information on the Northern Association. Nearly all the other associations that sprang up throughout the country belonged to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **The Larger Assemblies**

There was, however, the well-known Assembly of 1689. Deputies were present from more than a hundred churches in England and Wales. The Assembly zealously disclaimed all manner of authority over the churches, and professed that it was their sole intention to recommend in the way of counsel what may be for their benefit, which they wished to be received no farther than as it appeared agreeable to the Word of God. A fast was recommended for lamenting national iniquities, and imploring a blessing on the union of the churches. A fund was established for relieving ministers in distress, for the support of itinerating preachers, and for assisting persons of promising talents in the acquisition of the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew tongues, with a view to the work of the ministry. Various questions proposed to them by the churches were considered, and answers given. They then published a confession of their faith which had been drawn up by them in the year 1672.

So great was the harmony of the members, who amounted to a hundred-and-fifty, that scarcely one brother dissented in his sentiments from the assembly in any one thing which was proposed to their consideration.

Another general assembly of the same kind and for the same purposes was held in London, by the elders and messengers of the Baptist churches in England and Wales, in the summer of the year 1691.

A third meeting was assembled in the year 1692, consisting of ministers and messengers. It continued sitting from the third to the twenty-fourth of May. 'The churches numbered 107, and it did not include the whole of the particular Baptists; for there were other churches of the same faith and order, which never joined the assembly. Those who did unite, feeling the

inconvenience of coming from so great a distance, agreed to divide the assembly into two meetings to be held annually, the one in Bristol, and Easter, for the western part of England and Wales; the other, in London at Whitsuntide, for the eastern part of the kingdom: and they devised various regulations for the advancement of the common cause. Besides, there were associations in a narrower circle, where the members could frequently meet without inconvenience. The London ministers had a meeting for consultation every month.' (Bennett and Bogue, 'History of the Dissenters 1688-1800).

It is evident, however, that nothing of a permanent nature endured on the national level. It must not be forgotten, however, that much local and spontaneous fellowship existed between congregations.

### **The Precious Unity of the Local Church**

Many Particular Baptist churches had their own church covenant which was of a very different character. It was not a schedule of doctrine, but drew attention to the spiritual obligations of church members to one another. It was a way in which members could pledge themselves to one another and thus the different members of the body were joined together.

The unity of the local churches, that treasured their independent form of church government, is a lesson to us all. There was a very real unity in the local congregation which is strangely lacking in these days. This led to an instinctive recognition of their responsibility to their local congregations. This showed itself in the passing on of members with the consent of the local congregation, and particularly with regard to the removal of a minister from one congregation to another. It was normal practice among many to follow Owen's principle that no minister should be called from one church to another without the church he was to leave releasing him.

When the Bedford Baptist Church (with which John Bunyan was later so closely associated) lost their pastor they approached a neighbouring congregation for a certain Mr. Wheeler, believing he would be suitable to take pastoral charge. However, the congregation would not release him, and consequently neither Mr. Wheeler, nor the local church that was calling him, felt they could proceed. There was such brotherliness and unity among the local churches because of the unity that existed within the

membership that they behaved in a spiritual manner towards the other, without being yoked together by an external bureaucracy. It was their view of the local church that gave them this concern for individual members and, at the same time, preserved them from a connectional system that could destroy their independency.

### **Differences Amongst Independents**

It may not be widely known that the Particular Baptists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century differed considerably in their views of the church from the Independents. They were more akin to the 'separatists' who crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower. The Independents of the Westminster Assembly did not wish to be associated with these. Cromwell was an Independent and believed in a 'State church'. The 'Massachusetts Bay' colony of Independents absorbed the smaller Mayflower settlement at Plymouth and persecution followed later in New England.

The reason for this is not difficult to find. The Independents of the 17<sup>th</sup> century believed, in common with the Presbyterians, that the Scriptures present three views of the church. They modified this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the 'Savoy Declaration' of 1658, (Ch. 26), not only refers to the 'universal church' that consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are or shall be gathered into one in Christ, and also the local congregation, but also speaks of the whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, may be called the visible catholic church of Christ. This is modified in the 1689 Baptist Confession, where the words, 'visible catholic church of Christ' are replaced by 'visible saints'. While the Independents did not believe in any fixed combination of churches, and thought synods should only be occasional, they had this third view of the church which made them more ready than the Baptists to enter into close association visibly. This fact should make us wary of relying too much on Goodwin and Owen who were both Independents.

For instance, Goodwin maintains that if a man is cast out of one particular church, he is cast out of all like churches. This assumes that to join one church is equivalent to joining all like churches. This pushes things too far. While it is recognized that an excommunicated member should not be received into membership in another church lightly, the authority of one church does not extend over all others.

## **No National Structures**

It is significant that during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries no national structure for Baptist assemblies was formed. Though there were few associating together formally, there was much spontaneous co-operation and, at the same time, a steady growth of particular Baptist congregations. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a continual increase in the numbers of churches. This may surprise some who have been led to believe that, prior to the Evangelical Awakening, every part of the spiritual life of the country was at a low ebb.

If we look at the number of churches that were established during the years in question, we shall find there was a continual growth, and churches were established and survived, unlike many that were formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that appeared strong but became modernistic. There is no question whatever that the Particular Baptist churches of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries grew steadily and were strong in quality. Indeed, Bogue and Bennett, in 'The History of the Dissenters', state that the quality of the life of the churches at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was *not* as strong as it was in the earlier years.

We can see, therefore, that formal structures for church association were *not* necessary to the health and growth of Particular Baptist churches. There were, however, many occasional meetings that did, indeed, prove of benefit. The two associations that went right through to the present day, namely, the 'Midland' and the 'Western' Associations, afford us much instruction because in the earlier centuries there is no question but that they were helpful and sound, but decline took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Decline & Un-Biblical Practices**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Baptist churches were growing throughout the country, both in size and number. This growth continued until about 1910, well after Modernism had flooded into the churches. We learn from this that outward prosperity is not a safe guide of spiritual health. Even as early as 1783, the Midland Association was troubled by those who wanted to omit the Confession of Faith from the letters to the churches of the Association. This was resisted by those who feared Arminianism. Later,

however, in the following century subscription to the Basis was relaxed. Decay set in early in the Midlands.

There is a most interesting booklet entitled 'Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches – 1823-1973'. (The Bristol Association was one of the four divisions of the older Western Association, that split up in 1823 into the Bristol, Western, Southern and South Western Associations.) Having been written by one who would have an opposite point of view from ourselves, attention is drawn to particular points that would concern us. We can as a result, see plainly what was going on at the time. It is evident that, while in the main the earlier years were sound, the changes came suddenly, and with increasing momentum.

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century what was described as 'preliminaries' were read out at the outset of every meeting. These are full of instruction. They include:

2. 'That we disclaim all manner of superiority or superintendency over the Churches... our whole intention is to be helpers together of one another, by way of counsel or advice in the right understanding of that perfect rule which our Lord Jesus Christ... hath already given in His Word.
3. We propose, therefore, at our annual assemblies to manifest our brotherly love by uniting in solemn worship and fervent prayer for each other in particular... and to communicate to each other the knowledge of our spiritual state that we may sympathise with each other, and if occasion require, lend each other assistance in any difficulty that may arise in the respective churches thus associated'.

But, in spite of 2, they assert under 4:

4. 'That the Association shall be at liberty to discuss and advise upon any matter affecting the welfare of any individual church, which shall be submitted to the committee of the Association by letter signed by at least five members and which shall appear after

investigation by the Committee sufficiently serious to demand the intervention of the Association’.

This attitude was also reflected in the way in which the Northampton Baptist Association operated. The Association was appealed to when there were difficulties in local churches and ‘built up for itself a moral authority over the constitutive churches’. They acted cautiously, and apparently did some good, but it was a dangerous tendency.

This view of the role of the Association was accepted most definitely by the Philadelphia Association that was so important in Baptist Church history in the USA. The Association would be invited to intervene in the life of local churches. This, again, was known to bring benefit, *but set up an unscriptural practice*. We cannot imagine the Apostle Paul advocating an ‘association of churches’ in Asia Minor, whereby church members from Sardis could appeal to this association about what was going on in their congregation.

We must recognize, then, that even at this early stage there were certain developments that were not scriptural. However, the sovereignty of the local church *was asserted* in these ‘preliminaries’, but in 1882 they were no longer read, and in 1914 no longer printed.

With regard to the structure of the Bristol Association, one can see changes developing. The Moderator was originally nothing more than a ‘Chairman’ for the annual meetings but then became the ‘President’, chosen a year in advance. Letters giving news from the churches were gradually faded out, and civil and social matters became important. In 1842, two secretaries were necessary to carry on the work, and the bureaucracy developed: ‘The Association followed the fashion of the time in the proliferation of committees and sub-committees’.

### **A Change in Doctrine**

The most alarming feature of all is the shift in opinion on the matter of the Doctrine of the Church. In 1864, the title ‘Baptist Churches Belonging to the Bristol Association’ was changed to ‘Baptist Churches Forming the Bristol Association’. This was done because the Association was not a separate organization to which churches belonged. This was a good move.

However, pressure to develop the Association into an unscriptural, ecclesiastical body was mounting.

It was argued in 1879 that, as individual believers are bound in one congregation, so congregations are bound together in association for mutual help. In 1885 it was asserted that the Association is like a body, 'fitly framed together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth'. So the Association of churches must be one of 'manifest, extensive mutual benefit, each church bearing as distinctive a relationship to the rest as any given member does to the human frame'. It will be seen, therefore, that before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the local churches in the Association were only regarded as a *part* of the whole. In 1899 it was said, 'We make too much of the individual churches and too little of the one church'. Baptist congregations in one place should become one church. A new century called for such oneness. Thus, the way was prepared for the inroads of modernism to sweep throughout the denomination, and though a hundred years ago, all looked well until Spurgeon sounded the alarm, the foundation of the churches was crumbling. The Baptist Union embraced the majority of Particular Baptist Churches and was overrun with error.

### **Developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches was first formed in 1922. In common with the preliminaries of the Bristol and District Association it asserts the independency of the local church. However, in a number of ways it has taken over the prerogatives of the local church by means of the Annual Assembly, its Council and Committees. It also seeks to shape the direction in which local churches move. Apart from the general influence of the organizational structure, there are specific areas where it has clearly infringed upon the rights of the local church (see next section 3).

This, too, applies to the much more recent Assembly of particular Baptist Churches. This, again, asserts the independence of the local church but has made similar mistakes (see section 3).

### **(4) How Churches Associate Considered Doctrinally**

It would appear that the main reason why Christians and churches have associated in a way that has become unscriptural is because of the failure to mark out and define precisely the boundaries of their association. It has

not been enough simply to assert the independence of the local church. There has been too great a readiness to accept and justify developments that took place all too easily than to apply Biblical principles in a thoroughly consistent way.

### **The Priority of the Local Church**

It is vitally important for us to recognize that in the Word of God the word 'church' is only used in two senses, describing either the church universal, which comprises the body of all the elect, or the visible expression of this church in a local gathering. There is no third way of using the word in Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul describes the church at Corinth as the body of Christ – “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular”. They were not a part but the whole of the body in miniature. In Acts 20:28, the Ephesian Elders were exhorted to “feed the church of God”. The church at Ephesus was the church of God, the church universal in miniature, a microcosm of the whole, and not a part.

Nothing can be more important to us than to understand this at this time. Evangelicals frequently react to the Ecumenical Movement by trying to copy it. Indeed, they are using ecclesiastical terms quite wrongly. How often the word 'church' is being used, when the word 'churches' would be appropriate. A booklet produced by the BEC in recent years had as its title, “The State of the Church”. It was not referring to any particular congregation but the church at large. This use of the word 'church' is quite normal among evangelicals but quite unscriptural, and leads to confusion. The words 'schism' and 'schismatic' are also being used. Schism is only possible *within* a local church.

The local church is the body of Christ. It is the Tabernacle, the Temple where God dwells and manifests Himself. It is, indeed, Mount Zion. Christ reveals His mind to the local church. It is there He exercises His authority. It should never hand over its authority to some outside organisation. The light of the Gospel is sent out from the local church – it is the pillar and ground of truth. There is nothing in Scripture to give the slightest support to the concept of anything external to the local church, whether meeting regularly or occasionally, that can dictate to the local church in making up its mind

on any issue, or shape its policy, or give it direction. It is unscriptural to consider that any association of churches, or gathering of Elders from separate churches, is intended by God to exercise authority over, or give direction to, a local church.

It is perfectly clear that while there was a clear recognition among the churches of one another, and respect for apostles, prophets and ministers in their churches and co-operation in certain ventures, there was never any authority exercised by one congregation over another, or by any groupings of churches over their respective members. The Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 is an exception, but the presence of the apostles accounts for the advice and exhortation given in pointing churches to certain behaviour.

As we have said earlier, the brethren in the Midlands Association recognized that it was Scriptural for churches to co-operate in evangelism and to minister to the want of particular churches, but its activities in *no way* infringed upon the rights of the local church. There is nothing in Scripture that can justify permanent missionary and extra-church bodies that engage in activities that persuade local churches to take a variety of courses of action. All church power belongs to the local church. Christ reveals His mind to the local church and exercises his authority in and through it. We must assert, therefore, that the mind of Christ is revealed first and foremost to a local congregation. This is the one place above all others where we can expect guidance and direction to be given.

### **The Authority of the Local Church**

Christ's authority belongs supremely to the local church. Those church officers who have authority only have it within the local church. It does not extend beyond its frontiers, and it must be exercised in harmony with the local congregation. When it comes, therefore, to guidance and decision-making, the local congregation is supreme. It gives direction, having been led of the Lord. Though it recognizes other local churches it does not receive direction from outside bodies, even from associations of churches.

There are many ways in which local churches can work together but, according to Scriptures, Christ reveals His mind and exercised His authority within the local congregation. We do not find in the New Testament any gathering together of groupings of churches, or representatives from

churches, even to consider matters, except in the one case of Acts 15 (when the apostles were present) and when *one* church approached another because of problems that came from that church. We reject, therefore, as totally unscriptural any attempt made by any gathering outside a local church to persuade that local church of a certain course of action, or any action that may be taken on behalf of that local church by any outside body.

Obviously, there are activities a local church can be helped by professional skill and practical assistance of organizations and groups outside the local church. Providing this does not infringe the authority of the local church, and try to persuade that church of a certain course of action; providing its recommendations are limited to that which is appropriate to their qualifications, namely in the practical execution of whatever initiatives and activities the local church desires, this is acceptable.

In Revelation 2 and 3 we have the supreme picture of the way in which individual churches should function in their relation to one another. Christ is seen walking amidst the churches, but each church is a separate candlestick. It is not responsible for the activities in other churches, but is answerable to Christ alone. They were informed of the state of each separate church. This was very important. Each church would have known of the letter written to the other churches. Indeed, the chastisement of the followers of Jezebel was for the sake not only of the church at Thyatira, but also for the benefit of the other churches, 'that they should know'.

It is clear from reading the Scriptures that there was much fellowship expressed between churches in spontaneous, natural ways; in commending one another, in helping one another forward in the work of the Gospel; but what is equally clear is that each local church was absolutely sovereign over its own affairs, and the temporary authority of the apostles was not to be replaced by anything external to the local churches, which infringed upon the rights of those churches. Let the Bible alone be our guide. We are in peril if we use pragmatic arguments. We shall go the way churches have always gone. When churches do not follow Scripture it always, in the end, results in disaster.

### **(3) How Churches Associate Considered Practically**

However, let it be said that not every local church can be considered a spiritual body. Paul left Titus in Crete to ordain Elders in every church where things were wanting. These churches lacked government, so outside help was necessary. We recognize that in church planting a new work should be an off-shoot of an existing work until it is able to function on its own. We should also recognize that some churches decline and become so low that they are no longer a truly spiritual body. Such churches should be prepared to see themselves as needing assistance and direction from another church that can make up that which is wanting. There many places where churches are so small that they should recognize that it is unscriptural to function on their own, and should seek help from other churches. They are no longer truly a body, and should seek to become such by joining themselves to others.

Local congregations must resist the attempts of well-meaning ministers and believers to intrude upon the rights of their local churches. The FIEC have clearly violated the authority of the local church in a number of ways. Two examples of this are: (a) In the matter of recognition of ministers and sending out of missionaries, this has been done by committees of the FIEC not by the local church. (2) It was decided by the Assembly of the FIEC for all FIEC churches to join the BEC. No FIEC church has made this decision in its own church meeting, nor can they in their own church meeting make the decision either to join the BEC or to separate from the BEC. It has been done for them. The officers of the FIEC are fully aware of the concern expressed by churches that had drawn attention to this very point, but to rectify such matters would mean a dismantling of an ecclesiastical structure that has been built up over the years and shows no sign of being diminished.

More surprising is the way in which the Particular Baptist Assembly has developed. When it first began, a considerable amount of time was devoted to sharing news of local church activities, which was extremely valuable. This has diminished markedly, and at this year's Assembly it was noticeable that various associations and extra-church bodies were given prime time to seek support for their activities. What was, however, the most striking departure from the principle of independency derived from

the Scriptures was the way in which the question of ministerial training was handled. After a general discussion on the question of ministerial training, a vote was called for to know how to proceed. It was asserted from the platform that we needed to know the mind of the Lord in order to proceed, and to this end a vote was necessary. This vote was taken, and so guidance was deemed to have been received, and it would appear that the gathered churches were assumed to have committed themselves to a certain course of action concerning ministerial training.

Without wishing to cast doubts on the motives of any who were responsible for such actions, it is perfectly clear that the gathering was being treated like a local congregation where it would, indeed, be appropriate to behave in this way to seek the mind of the Lord. (The very error into which, in 1879, the Bristol Association fell, the Particular Baptists have fallen into in 1982. In 1879, it was asserted, "As individual believers are bound in one congregation, so congregations are *bound together* in association for mutual help", but this is plainly unscriptural.)

### **"Top-Down" Authority**

These developments have come as a natural development of a tendency that has been there from the beginning. Initiatives have come from steering committees in addition to the Assembly, and churches have been persuaded to think in a certain way and to behave in a certain way. It is natural and easy to pursue such a course. Indeed, it seems that the only way in which things can get done in our day is if the churches hand over their responsibility to outside bodies.

We must demand adherence to the Word of God. Let it be made plain that we do not expect *direction from Christ* to come to us from outside bodies and associations, but directly through the Scriptures. Others may, indeed, help us with their understanding of the Scriptures, and tell us what they are doing in their own congregations, and how the Lord has led them, but this is another matter altogether. What is needed in these days is not large ecclesiastical structures, but local churches that set an example.

Some of the earlier gatherings of the particular Baptist Assembly were extremely profitable and helpful when it was made known what local churches were doing. It is good for churches to meet together by means of

their messengers, simply to inform their brethren of what they are doing. There is great benefit in exchanging information. This is what was done in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century – information was exchanged. We want to know what other churches are doing. We may follow their example, we may help them, we may even help them to send out their own missionary, or support them in some evangelistic work. One church may have produced some excellent literature which other churches would like to know about; another church may have found great success in certain methods of evangelism – and so we can go on. There is an enormous need for churches to discover from one another how the Lord has led them and what lessons have been learned. They can learn from one another, copy one another, ask questions and be warned also what is happening among the churches – it is this kind of association which is sorely needed in these days, but scarcely happens.

Let Spurgeon be the one to conclude this paper and have the last word. He is preaching on 1 Timothy 3:15, and his words carry certain implication though preached along time ago.

“We have fallen into the mistake with regard to the diffusion of the truth in order to spread the doctrine of the Gospel we have formed ‘Societies’. We have been wondering why our Societies have not had greater success. I believe the reason is because there is not a single word in the Book of God about anything of the kind. The church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth, not a ‘Society’. The church of God ought not to have delegated to any society a work which it would behove her to have done herself. Instead of sending our subscriptions to associations, we ought to have picked our own men, out of our midst and found the means to send them forth to preach the truth as it is in Jesus, ourselves. We have given up the work of our education of our young men to our colleges. I will not say that they have done it ill, but I do dare to say, they have not done it well. The reason I think has been because there is nothing in the Word of God that could warrant their accepting the trust. The church of God, not a college is the pillar and ground of the truth. Every church should itself see to the education of its own young men. It should look out..... should train its own soldiers, and send them forth to fight.

The church of God will never see things done rightly if shirking her own responsibilities she try to cast it upon other men. The church of God, the assembly of believers is according to the word of God to hold forth His truth and to be the pillar and ground of the truth. Now do not misunderstand me. I would not say a single word against any society for the spread of God's truth, but I must repeat yet again, that all societies of that sort spring from an irregular and unscriptural position of the church.

The Church, if she were in her right state, would do the whole work herself. The City Missionary would be member of the church sent out and supported by the church itself. The missionary to foreign lands would have the church at its back to whom it would look for support both in prayers and in subscriptions. Every work would be performed, not through this secretary or that but through the church itself. This I believe is the principle which will work a radical cure in all the errors that have been made and bring back the state of the system of evangelization into a proper and healthy condition.

I may be wrong but this has deeply laid upon my soul and I shall never be satisfied until I see this church an organization so complete that it does not need a supplement, able to do every work and to fulfill every need from office of itself and by itself ever welcoming the cooperation of others but never needing to depend upon a society for the accomplishment of any purpose to which the Lord God has pleased to call it. My dear brethren, if I were a minister of a society I should be in a miserable plight. What would the society care for me? What would they care about what I did? If there could be a smart report sent in at the end of a year, the secretary would smile at me. But what would they care for me? What prayers should I have from the subscribers? How should I like to be carried on in the heart of the secretary? Good man, he has twenty other Rachels to think of. How should he be thinking of me? But I am a minister of a church and there is not one member of this church but what prays for me. Suppose some young man from these galleries was sent out to preach the Word, why we should all notice him. When a letter came from John so and so at Canton and we read it at the prayer meeting how we should pray for him. We should feel he was one

of ourselves. When we made the collection for his support, we should give far more liberally than for another that we never saw who had no connection with us, however good the man might be was not a personal friend of ours. The church of God can naturally care for the state of her own ministers and her own missionaries. Their ministers and their missionaries cannot be greatly blessed until they are under a church and not under a society. Let us think this whole thing through and refuse to do anything that has not been sanctioned to the head of the church to whom alone we are answerable.”

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\*This article was written by David Fountain – once pastor of this church. Should you wish to use this article or any part of it, please email [info@springroad.org.uk](mailto:info@springroad.org.uk)

Many thanks