Abstract

REVISIONING BAPTIST MISSIONAL IDENTITY:

EDGAR YOUNG MULLINS' THEOLOGY OF "SOUL COMPETENCY"

AND CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MISSION

Stephen Gregory Smith

Baptists often debate the meaning of their denominational identity but rarely appreciate its significance for Christian mission. Southern Baptist theologian Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928) revisioned Baptist identity with his original phrase, "the competency of the soul in religion," as a means of relating his denominational heritage with Baptists' witness in the world. This dissertation interprets Mullins' theology of soul competency as a critical revision of his denominational tradition in correlation with a transdenominational model of identity and mission, in order to identify the significance of the Baptist denomination as interpreted by soul competency for the practice of Christian mission today.

Chapter 1 introduces the denominational, historical, and missiological issues that give rise to this study. Because soul competency originated with Mullins, Chapter 2 examines his "world-conscious witness" in light of his historical context and understanding of the kingdom of God to show that it possessed missionary, social, ecumenical, religio-ecclesiastical, and denominational dimensions.

Chapter 3 locates soul competency within Mullins' denominationalism, finding that his concept acted as a personal, orienting conviction to shed light on the meaning of the individual, the church, and the nature of religion. Chapter 4 discusses Mullins' application of soul competency, as well as that of American Baptist Foreign

Missions Society secretary James H. Franklin (1872-1961), to issues facing the church, the world, and cross-cultural missions in the early 20th century.

Chapter 5 presents a transdenominational model of identity and mission, grounded in missiological, denominational, and epistemological theory and employed, in Chapter 6, to evaluate the significance of soul competency for contemporary mission. Chapter 7 concludes the study by outlining the implications and contributions of soul competency for mission, applying its insights to present-day Southern Baptist mission strategy, and offering suggestions for future study.

The dissertation concludes that mission, in light of soul competency, affirms each person's importance and worth in mission, warns against coercion in missionary practice, encourages believers to participate as equals in the theological and practical development of the faith, and defends the human person against missionary structures and systems that deem the person as religiously incompetent.
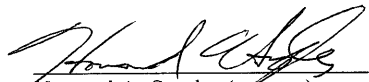
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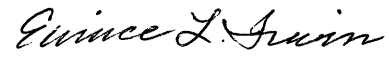
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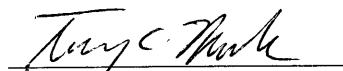
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Stephen Gregory Smith

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the faculty of the E. Stanley Jones School

of World Mission and Evangelism

Asbury Theological Seminary

Howard A. Snyder (mentor)

Eunice L. Irwin (reader)

Terry C. Muck (reader)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The fundamental principle of Christianity, as Baptists understand it, is the
direct relation of the individual soul to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The
individual is directly related to God through Christ in all matters of religion.
Edgar Young Mullins (1928b:356)

Baptists in the United States entered the 21st century in fierce debate over the

meaning of their faith and identity. Indeed, throughout much of their history they

have struggled mightily among themselves over who they are and what they believe.[1]

Though Baptist authorities Nancy Ammerman and Bill Leonard point out that many

churches and individuals in the 20th century relied on denominational agencies,

experts, programs, and connectional ties to define the meaning of their faith

(Ammerman 1997:270; Leonard 1997; 2000; see also Hankins 2002:19), the debates

never really ceased, and they continue to this day.[2]

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[1] For example, in *Not a Silent People*, Baptist historian Walter Shurden (1995) outlines Southern
Baptist controversies in the 19th and 20th centuries related to Baptist history, the Baptist church,
missions, theology, and other concerns. American Baptist historian Robert Torbet's book, *A History of
the Baptists* (1950), contains a chapter dedicated to various theological, missionary, and
denominational disputes among Baptists in the 19th century (1950:283-313). Both Torbet's book and
Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth's more recent book, *The Baptist Heritage* (1987), contain
additional background and exposition on the different controversies which have plagued Baptists since
their beginnings. Southern Baptist historian Robert Baker's compilation of primary source material
entitled, *A Baptist Source Book: With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (1966), includes
documents related to some of Baptists most contentious debates, including: 19th century struggles over
the Campbellite Movement, the Hard-Shell or Primitive Baptist Movement, home missions, the slavery
issue (1966:77-105), Landmarkism (1966:142-146; 174-176), the theological crises surrounding
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Professor Crawford Toy (1966:168-172) and President
William Whitsitt (1966:172-174), Gospel Missionism, and Haydenism (1966:176-180); and 20th
century quarrels concerning the outspoken Texas Baptist pastor Frank Norris, the ownership of church
property, the trustworthiness of Scripture, and the fundamentalist-modernist debate over science and
religion (1966:196-205).

[2] The theme of the Third International Conference on Baptist Studies in 2003—hosted by the
International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, the Czech Republic—was "Baptist Identities."
Books and essays probing the question of Baptist heritage and identity in recent years include: Lotz
(1978); McClendon (1982); Garrett, Hinson, Tull (1983); Hinson (1984); Howe (1984); Land (1984);
Hine (1985); Leonard (1985); Brackney (1986); Handy (1986); Ohlmann (1986); Neely (1988);

This is true especially within today's more conservatively-controlled and

evangelically-aligned Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).[3] In recent years, moderate

Baptists have criticized Southern Baptist leaders of radically revising the Baptist faith

with changes in 1998 and 2000 to the SBC's confessional statement, "The Baptist

Faith and Message." In particular, moderates decried conservatives' stress on

doctrinal conformity over individual freedom in religion, the elimination of wording

in earlier versions that held Jesus Christ to be the criterion of Scripture, and the

assertion of women's submission to men in the church and the home (Parker [2000];

see also Dilday 2002). Moderates continued to cry foul in 2003 when the Southern

Baptist International Mission Board began to require that all its missionaries pledge

doctrinal fidelity to the 2000 revision of this doctrinal statement (Cartledge 2003).

As a Southern Baptist missionary to Costa Rica from 1987 through 1999 and a

Baptist all my life, I approach this dissertation deeply interested in the intersection of

Baptist identity with the Christian world mission. Through the years, different

Baptist writers have offered a number of interpretations of the meaning of their

denominational heritage.[4] One such person was Edgar Young Mullins, a prominent

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Ammerman (1990); Leonard (1990a); Leonard (1990b); Dockery (1993); Shurden (1995); Brister and Leonard (1996); Deweese (1996); Garrett (1996); Nettles (1996); Richards (1996); Roberts (1996); Thompson (1996); Freeman (1997); Maddox (1997); Humphreys (1998); Shurden (1998); Stassen (1998); Freeman, McClendon, and da Silva (1999); Jones (1999); Mauldin (1999); Leonard (2000); and Norman (2001).

[3] Often called the Fundamentalist-Moderate Controversy, the latest Southern Baptist brawl dates to 1979 when the Southern Baptist Convention changed hands from moderate-conservative to more fundamentalist-conservative leadership. The latter group accused moderates of exchanging Baptists' 19th century Calvinist and evangelical heritage for 20th century liberalism (Land 1993; George 1993:276-277), while moderates claimed that their counterparts wanted to convert the convention from a traditionally conservative to a fundamentalist body (Shurden 1995:83-112). See Land (1993), Leonard (1993), and Shurden (1995:83-112) for summaries of the two opposing perspectives.

[4] Baptist historian Walter Shurden lists a number of 20th-century interpretations of the Baptist "vision," along with their originators, including: "soul competency" (E. Y. Mullins); "the sovereignty of Christ"

Southern Baptist theologian during the first three decades of the 20th century, who

coined the phrase "the competency of the soul in religion" to express his vision of

what it meant to be Baptist.

Yet, Mullins' vision extended beyond Baptist identity to include what that

vision potentially held for the larger Christian church and for the world. His concept

thus represents a way in which Baptist faith and identity can inform Baptists' practice

of Christian mission. *This dissertation interprets Mullins' theology of the competency*

of the soul in religion as a critical revision of his denominational tradition in

correlation with a transdenominational model of identity and mission, in order to

identify the significance of the Baptist denomination as interpreted by soul

competency for the practice of Christian mission today.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the life and career of E. Y. Mullins

before looking at the primary missiological issues which give rise to this approach to

his Baptist theology.

<u>Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928)</u>[5]

Born in Mississippi and reared in Texas, Edgar Young Mullins (January 5,

1860–November 23, 1928) is arguably Southern Baptists' most innovative and

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and "His personal, direct and undelegated authority over the souls of men" (James D. Freeman);
"experimental religion" (Walter Rauschenbusch); "the doctrine of the church" (W. T. Whitley);
"spiritual individualism" (H. Wheeler Robinson); "the evangelical experience" (a 1948 British Baptist
statement); "shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the
eschatological community" (James Wm. McClendon, Jr.); "believers' baptism by immersion" and "the
voluntary spirit" (William H. Brackney); "soteriology" (Eric H. Ohlmann); "voluntarism" (E. Glenn
Hinson); "the Lordship of Christ" (Glen Stassen); "the two-fold freedom of God" (Philip Thompson);
and "freedom" (Walter Shurden) (1998:322-323).

[5] Biographical information on Mullins in this dissertation comes from a number of sources including:
Robertson (1925), Isla May Mullins (1929), McGlothlin (1943), Tribble (1952), Dobbins (1958) and
Ellis (1985). Additional sources are cited in the text.

original theologian in their nearly 160-year history. Harold W. Tribble, successor to Mullins as professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, referred to his former teacher as "the greatest thinker produced by Southern Baptists up to his time" (1952:132). Historian Sydney Ahlstrom noted that few stood out more prominently in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention than did Mullins (1961:303). Biographer William Ellis concluded that, by 1920, Mullins had established himself as "the most important moderate Baptist leader" in the United States (1985:145). Jewish literary critic Harold Bloom identified Mullins as *the* major Southern Baptist interpreter of all time (1992:199).[6]

Mullins' earliest dream was not to write or teach theology but to serve as a missionary to Brazil with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB). To this end he dedicated himself and his training at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky), from which he graduated in 1885 (Mullins 1929:18-19). However, with his plans cut short due to poor health and lack of mission board funding, he turned to the pastorate, taking local churches in Harrodsburg, Kentucky (Harrodsburg Baptist Church, 1885-1888) and Baltimore, Maryland (Lee St. Baptist Church, 1888-1895). For a brief period in 1895 and 1896, he served with the FMB as Associate Corresponding Secretary (International Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2202a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002j)[7] before assuming

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[6] Other recent writers who have recognized Mullins' unique contributions to Baptist life are Burr (1961), McClellan (1978), Howe (1984), Leonard (1990b), Fletcher (1995), McBeth (1996), Richards (1996), Adams (1999), and Norman (2001:49-63).

[7] Mullins' pastorate in Baltimore, along with his service with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, is covered in more detail in Chapter 2.

his final pastorate in Newton Centre, Massachusetts (First Baptist Church, 1896-1899).

Mullins was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for almost three decades (1899-1928). He was president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at the height of his denominational prestige (1921-1924) and of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) at the close of his life (1923-1928). Mullins played a leading role in shaping Baptist confessional thought, authoring major portions of the SBC's 1914 statement, "Pronouncement of Christian Union and Denominational Efficiency" (Southern Baptist Convention 1914; Carter 1970), its 1919 declaration, "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists" (Mullins, et al. [1919]), the BWA's 1923 document, "A Message of the Baptist World Alliance to the Baptist Brotherhood, to Other Christian Brethren, and to the World" (Whitley 1923:223-228; Cody 1924:36-37) and the SBC's 1925 statement, "The Baptist Faith and Message" (Southern Baptist Convention 1925:71-76).

As a seminary professor, Mullins taught systematic theology, historical theology and apologetics, and authored over a dozen books and pamphlets along with numerous journal articles and essays. His systematic theology text, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917a), interprets theology from the standpoint of religious experience. Other important books included *Why Is Christianity True? Christian Evidences* (1911i; originally published in 1905), *Baptist Beliefs* (1912a), *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (1913a), and *Christianity at the Cross Roads* (1924a). His most important and far-reaching work—*The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (1908a)—dealt with what the late James

McClendon called his "baptist" or Free Church theology (1982:24; 1986:29-30).[8]

Here Mullins explored the meaning and purpose of the Baptist faith with his concept

of the competency of the soul in religion. The meaning and missiological

significance of this concept serve as the focus of this dissertation.

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Identity, Mission, and Questions of Meaning[9]

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"What does it mean to be Baptist?" Often, this question is about faith and

theology. Yet being Baptist—indeed, being Christian—is more than simply what one

believes (orthodoxy); it also has to do with one's life and witness in the world

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[8] McClendon interprets the "baptist" or Free Church vision as a "way of seeing," that is, a particular hermeneutical stance which views the church now as being the primitive church, and Christ's commands as being to and for today's Christian disciple (Freeman, McClendon, and da Silva 1999:6). Donald Durnbaugh describes the Free Church or "Believers' Church" tradition as holding to voluntary church membership, covenantal relationship between believers and God, separation from the world, a commitment to perform Christian works, living under mutual discipline within the church, offering mutual aid to those in need, the balance between formalism and spontaneity in worship, and the Christian experience centered around Scripture, prayer, and the practice of love (1968:32-33). Barry Callen writes:

> The key emphases of the Believers Church focus on experienced spiritual reality, committed lives of genuine obedience to Christ, and the fostering of communities of faith that function visibly, voluntarily, and in Christlike ways, thus witnessing to the living Word of God by being present expressions of God's coming reign. Featured are the priority of an authentic visible manifestation of the believing community, the mounting of a significant critique of the institutional church, the high valuing of the daily life and practice of believers, and a vibrant community of faith in which obedience, discipline, and mutual support and service are constant concerns. (1999:xii)

[9] Throughout this dissertation, reference is made both to Christian "mission" and Christian "missions." South African missiologist David Bosch indicates that one of the "important consequences" of the introduction of the concept of the *missio Dei* in the mid 20th century to missiology has been the distinction made between these two related, though distinctive, terms (1991:391). "Mission" speaks of God's redemptive activity in the world and, consequently, of God's sending of the church into the world as co-laborers with God in that global task. Mission responds to God's commission to follow the Spirit into the world for spiritual, social, and global wholeness and renewal. "Missions" are derived from mission and serve as the church's missionary activities in support of its witness, such as evangelism, church planting, justice, mercy, and healing (1991:391, 493-494). As adjectives, "missional" and "missionary" are employed in missiological discussion to designate either God's or the church's public witness. In most cases, Baptists traditionally use "missions" more often than "mission" when expressing both divine and human witness in the world. In this dissertation, I normally employ the word "mission" to refer to such witness, except in those instances where the context of the discussion warrants the term "missions." See Chapter 5, pp. 128-133, for a more complete explanation of the concept of the *missio Dei*.

(orthopraxy).[10] This suggests that Christian identity is in some sense a missional, as well as a theological, concern. The larger question, then, is, "What relationship exists between Baptist identity and Baptist witness?" This section explores this question, introducing those issues out of which this study arises. I begin with personal experiences from my own missionary work in Costa Rica with the Foreign (later, International) Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, because it is through this experience that I first began to examine the relationship between mission and denominational heritage and identity.

A Question of Baptist Mission[11]

In 1987, when our family arrived in Costa Rica under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB), Southern Baptists marked 48 years of international, cross-cultural missions work in this tiny, Central American republic. Before 1949, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board had sponsored missionary work in Costa Rica from Panama. Over time, missionaries came to control the direction and shape of the work ([Buttemere] 1998:1). By the time our family arrived in Costa Rica, the work still depended on missionary support for such things as no-interest building loans, low-cost theological training, reduced camp fees, and, for some congregations, the maintenance of their legal status before the government. Though the national Costa Rica Baptist Convention (CRBC) had voted in 1973 to operate on full self-

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[10] Indeed, James McClendon devoted the first volume of his systematic theology to ethics arguing that, while there is no priority of ethics over doctrine logically (nor doctrine over ethics), chronologically the priority goes to ethics (1986:42).

[11] In addition to personal reflections in this section, I am using (with permission) a summary of the history of the Costa Rican Baptist Mission (CRBM) work compiled in April 1998 by CRBM missionary Nancy Buttemere, called "General History of the Costa Rica Baptist Work." Buttemere drew her material from yearly histories included in the CRBM Operations Manual ([Buttemere] 1998:10) and written by CRBM missionaries between 1975 and 1995.

support (1998:2), local Baptists as well as FMB missionaries found it difficult to break old patterns and expectations.

Missionary control of the Baptist work frequently caused tensions between the churches and the Costa Rica Baptist Mission (CRBM, the legal entity of Southern Baptist missionaries in the country). When the CRBM refused in the late 1970s to transfer control of its work and finances to the Costa Rica Baptist Convention, the CRBC voted to sever relations with the missionaries on January 11, 1981. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed lethargic growth and uneasy relations in the Costa Rica Baptist work. Relations began to warm in 1993 when the CRBC, the CRBM, and the UNIB (the National Union of Baptist Churches, a splinter group from the CRBC) publicly pledged to "forget the past and strive together to build the Lord's work of the future" ([Buttemere] 1998:7). Two years later, the Costa Rica Baptist Convention invited the Costa Rica Baptist Mission to its annual meeting for the first time since 1981 (1998:9), and leaders from the CRBM, CRBC, and UNIB began meeting on a regular basis.

Movement toward reconciliation did not, however, automatically translate into increased numbers of new congregations, which was what the International Mission Board (IMB) viewed as its primary concern worldwide. To stimulate church planting throughout the world, the IMB introduced in 1998 its "New Directions" program with this vision statement: "*We will facilitate the lost coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ by beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements among all peoples*" (Garrison 2000b:36; emphasis original). The IMB interpreted church planting movements—a strategy tracing to the Lausanne Movement and the AD2000 and

Beyond Movement (AD2000 and Beyond Movement 1995:15)—as "a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population movement" (Garrison 2000a:35). My job as the CRBM's Field Leader during this period was to introduce both missionaries and national Costa Rican believers to the embryonic stages of this new program.

Though filled with promise, New Directions caused concern among missionaries as well as national Costa Ricans, especially regarding the parameters which the program set. Under New Directions, Christian mission meant "reaching the unreached" and "harvesting the harvestable," intentionally shifting the work away from denominational, institutional, and established church involvement and toward "the edges of lostness" by concentrating efforts solely on those already responsive to the gospel (the "harvestable") and those with little access to it (the "unreached") (Myers and Slack 1998:Section 2:3-5). The missionary's "church growth agenda," the IMB believed, was "not so much what a missionary does, but where a missionary does it" (1998:Section 2:11). In practical terms, the effects of New Directions meant that (1) the IMB continued to determine the meaning of Christian mission, (2) Christian mission excluded denominational and pastoral work, (3) the CRBM continued to maintain control over the work, and (4) already-established congregations were isolated from the CRBM's main focus.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of New Directions, though, had to do with the program's stated origins. According to an early training manual (Myers and Slack 1998), the antecedents to New Directions' ethnolinguistic approach to church planting and mission traced to Scripture, evangelical church history, the Church

Growth Movement, the Lausanne Movement, the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, and others. All these were and are important—some truly essential—to the success of global Christian mission. The problem was that New Directions recognized no antecedent rooted in traditional Baptist faith and identity (1998:Section 2:15-16).[12] In time, I came to feel that the strategy's lack of appreciation for Baptist identity created an unnecessary chasm between how Baptists approach the Christian faith and their missionary witness to that faith. Subsequent readings in the Western missionary history,[13] Baptist history,[14] and the missiological principle of the *missio Dei*[15] led me to question the validity of this apparent separation.

In Costa Rica, this disconnection became most noticeable as traditional structures of shared leadership among missionaries gave way to unilateral decision-making on the part of the Field Leader. No longer free to respond to new opportunities under the Holy Spirit's leadership and CRBM supervision, missionaries were required to form teams responsible only to their assigned people group. Likewise, local Costa Rican churches previously established under missionary or national leadership felt the pressure either to cooperate with the IMB's New Directions strategy or be left to themselves. An atmosphere of individual freedom and initiative in missionary work gave way to control and strict guidelines for doing the work. As it turned out, New Directions reflected very little some of Baptists'

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[12] Reference was made to two Baptist-related programmatic antecedents: the IMB's Cooperative Services International Division, and the Baptist World Alliance's ethnolinguistic work (1998:Section 2:15-16).

[13] See this chapter, pp. 16-19.

[14] See this chapter, pp. 19-23.

[15] See Chapter 5, pp. 128-133.

most cherished historic principles and ideals, especially those of individual freedom

and responsibility and non-coercion in matters of religion and faith.

A Question of Baptist Identity

The meaning of Baptist identity has never been easy to determine with

complete accuracy. Walter Shurden, Executive Director of Mercer University's

Center of Baptist Studies, writes, "Baptists do not agree on where they came from,

who they are, or how they got that way. In other words, Baptists do not agree on their

historical origin, their theological identity, or their subsequent denominational

history" (1998:321). This problem, observes Baptist historian William Brackney,

stems largely from the fact that no one individual or historical moment serves as *the*

key to defining the essence of the Baptist vision (1986:68). Soon after the first

"baptizing" congregations formed around 1608 (Brackney 1983:15), Baptists divided

into a number of separate, identifiable groupings, each with its own distinctive

heritage, beliefs, and practices. According to Baptist theology professor W. Wiley

Richards, by 1790 the Baptist tradition included at least six groups: General Baptists,

Particular (Regular) Baptists. General Six Principle Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists,

New Light (Separate) Baptists, and Freewill Baptists (1991:10).[16]

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[16] The first grouping were the English General Baptists, who arose out of English Separatism in defense of believers baptism and general atonement around 1608/1609. A second independent origin came in 1638 with the English Particular or Regular Baptists, espousing Calvinist or particular atonement (though Glenn Stassen argues that Arminian theology influenced some Particular Baptist thinking [see Stassen 1998]). American Six Principle Baptists organized in 1670 and, like their English General Baptist counterparts, based their faith on the six principles of Hebrews 6:1-2. English Seventh-Day, or Sabbatarian, Baptists date to 1653 and stressed, among other things, Sabbath worship and radical millennialism. New Light (Separate) Baptists arose out of American Regular Baptist churches during the First Great Awakening to stress evangelism and emotional conversion. Finally, the Arminian Freewill Baptists organized in 1729. See Torbet (1950) and McBeth (1987). In terms of Continental (European) Baptists, though they emerged in the 19th century 200 years after the first British Baptists and have had extensive contacts with British and American Baptists from their beginning, Baptist historian Leon McBeth notes that their spiritual heritage is more in line with the 16th

By the 19th century, many Baptists (particularly in the U. S. South) distinguished themselves as staunch Calvinists (Nettles 1996), though by the beginning of the 20th century increasing numbers began to move away from high Calvinism toward a more moderate Calvinist/Arminian position (Richards 1996). Today Southern Baptists, organized as a body separate from their Northern brethren in 1845, draw from a number of sources to define their character and faith.[17] There is thus a tremendous amount of theological and denominational diversity among contemporary Baptists. Recently, a number of competing perspectives of what it means to be Baptist have taken shape. At least three main perspectives are discernible.

First, some Baptists locate their faith and identity within the larger stream of American evangelicalism.[18] Though some writers question the usefulness of the category "evangelical" (Dayton 1991), Baptist historian Timothy George looks forward to a Southern Baptist "evangelical future" (1993). Rooted in the theology of

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century Anabaptist movement and 17th and 18th century Pietism than it is with English Puritanism/Separatism (1987:464-469).

[17] Baptist historian Bill Leonard (Wake Forest Divinity School) expands an earlier taxonomy developed by Walter Shurden to find six traditions which have influenced Southern Baptist identity: (1) The Charleston Tradition, which is Regular Baptist in history and Calvinist in theology, emphasizing order and theological, ecclesiastical and liturgical integrity; (2) The Sandy Creek Tradition, arising from Separate Baptists and emphasizing revivalistic conversionism, individualism, congregationalism, biblicism, egalitarianism, and spontaneity in worship; (3) The Georgia Tradition, stressing southern sectionalism and cooperative denominationalism; (4) The Landmark Tradition, emphasizing local church autonomy, Baptist successionism, baptism by immersion, and the Lord's Supper celebrated exclusively by and in the local congregation; (5) The Evangelical Denominational Tradition, with its stress on pragmatism, conformity, and missions; and (6) The Texas Tradition of Baptist imperialism, conservative and practical theology, and the Christianization of society (1990a:32-37).

[18] Baptists of this stripe include Carl F. H. Henry, E. J. Carnell, Billy Graham, Harold Lindsell, Bernard Ramm, Vernon Grounds, and George Ladd (Dockery 1993:101), along with Timothy George (Beeson Divinity School, Samford University), Tom Nettles (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary).

the Protestant Reformation (George 1989), this position often takes on a Calvinist

perspective (Nettles 1996).[19] Baptists who favor this view believe that they represent

the "truth" party as opposed to the "liberal" party (Mohler 1993:227-228). The

greatest fear is that, unless Baptists stand upon solid biblical, evangelical and (for

some) Reformed ground, they will wander into the morass of religious relativism and

secular pluralism. In essence, these Baptists seek to defend their tradition's

theological integrity.

Others, however, stress Baptist distinctives over evangelical uniformity.[20]

Refusing to be categorized strictly within the Reformed evangelical tradition,[21] these

"denominational evangelicals"[22] underscore such traits as personal freedom, religious

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[19] Since 1983, a network of Southern Baptists called Founders Ministries has promoted "both doctrine and devotion expressed in the Doctrines of Grace and their experiential application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness" (Founders Ministries 2002). Their theological framework is the "The Abstract of Principles," the Calvinist confessional statement of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, adopted in 1859. Founders Ministries encourages "the return to and promulgation of the biblical gospel that our Southern Baptist forefathers held dear" (2002).

[20] Baptists who favor this position—mostly *former* Southern Baptists—include Walter Shurden (Mercer University), Bill Leonard (Wake Forest Divinity School), and William Brackney (Baylor University). Glenn Hinson (Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, retired), who at one point identified Baptists as "other than" evangelicals (Garrett, Hinson and Tull 1983:209), later modified his approach, calling on Baptists to be "truly evangelical, truly catholic and truly Baptist" (Hinson 1993).

[21] Donald Durnbaugh (1968) agrees. Drawing on the typologies of Ernst Troeltsch and of Angus Dun and Lesslie Newbigin, he locates Baptists to the left of center along the Spirit-Word side of his Christian traditions triangle, with the Reformed tradition at right center abutting the Tradition-Word side (1968:22-32). Robert Johnston also concurs, finding that the "baptist" stress on experiential religion primarily grounds them in a theology of the Spirit rather than a theology of the Word, the latter being where the Reformed tradition resides (1991:265-266).

[22] For Baptist theologians J. Leo Garrett and David Dockery, "denominational evangelical" describes those Southern Baptists who view themselves as Baptists first and evangelical second (Garrett, Hinson, and Tull 1983:126; Dockery 1993:100-101), an accurate description of those who hold to the second perspective in the above text as opposed to those Baptists previously described who tend to see themselves as evangelicals first and Baptists second.

liberty, voluntarism, individualism,[23] soul competency, and nonconformity when discussing Baptist identity (Neely 1988; Shurden 1993; Deweese 1996; Cothen and Dunn 2000). Truth from this perspective is personal, not propositional, experienced through an intimate relationship with Jesus, who is Truth (Mauldin 1999). These Baptists seek to defend cherished Baptist principles against the rising tide of mainstream evangelicalism. At issue is the defense of their denomination's historical identity.

Recently, other Baptists have voiced a third perspective with their statement "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America" (*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 1997). Baptists holding this view[24] believe that denominational identity on both sides of the Baptist/evangelical divide has been captured by the modernist paradigm of the past 200 years. Following the theological trajectory of contemporary Baptists Stanley Grenz, Harvey Cox and James McClendon (Freeman 1997:302), the *Manifesto* calls Baptists to "re-envision" their identity and theology within a postmodern and Free Church framework that stresses God's freedom, Bible study in "reading communities," a shared, communal life of discipleship, and the sacraments/ordinances as "remembering practices."[25]

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[23] Walter Shurden, who shares this viewpoint, believes the Baptist idea of individualism reflects the position of the "individual-in-community" (Shurden 1998:327-328).

[24] Fifty-eight individuals—mostly moderate in theological persuasion—endorsed the Baptist *Manifesto* when it was first published in 1997. Many of those who signed the document were mostly non-Southern Baptists or former Southern Baptists. Among the original signers were Nancy Ammerman (Hartford Seminary), Curtis Freeman (Duke Divinity School), Stanley Grenz (Cary/Regent College), and the late James McClendon (formerly of Fuller Theological Seminary).

[25] Seeking to defend God's freedom and the priority of the community in the Christian faith, the *Manifesto* dismisses as illegitimate for today those arguments from the 19th and 20th centuries which defended the place of the individual in the Christian faith. Yet, as Baptist theologian A. J. Conyers points out, modernity's problem was not that it stressed the value of the individual; indeed, the church has defended the worth and dignity of the individual in varying degrees for 2000 years. Rather,

These Baptists call for the complete disestablishment of the church from the control of the state to create a platform for the "public message" of the gospel (*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 1997:308). They regard Baptist identity as capable of speaking "to the external lives of believers," of calling out "a distinctive community seeking to embody the reign of God" (1997:309), and of having an "important contribution to make in God's mission of freedom" (1997:306).

Two things stand out from this overview of Baptist heritage. First, Baptist identity draws from a variety of historical and confessional sources, making it likely that Baptists will continue to debate their heritage for some time to come. Second, while the discussion has merit, it frequently bogs down in the mire of merely shielding Baptist heritage from various sorts of damning impurities such as theological relativism and historical revisionism. Often, the argument is framed primarily by such "in-house" concerns as the ability to pass on the Baptist heritage to the next generation (Brister and Leonard 1996:55) or the need to safeguard the integrity of Baptist theology for tomorrow (George 1990a). While such matters are in no wise trivial, nor are they foreign to the missional import of the Baptist tradition, they often fail to articulate the relationship between who Baptists are and how that may inform their missionary witness in the world. Happily, the third perspective outlined above does attempt to overcome this deficiency, yet its weakness lies in the

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modernity improperly elevated the individual by rejecting "the 'givenness,' the irreducible limits and obligations of human life" (1998:33-34), a position which Baptists, such as E. Y. Mullins, have historically opposed. For his part Mullins rejected the "New Theology" of liberal Protestant progressivism which claimed that humanity possessed an indelible "godlikeness" such that not even sin could blot it out. His view of sin, like most evangelicals of his day, was that it was an objective reality that separated each person from God and thus required Christ's atoning death to make redemption possible (*Watchman-Examiner* 1917f:166). Baptists, however, have historically affirmed since their beginnings, as Walter Shurden phrases it, the "centrality of the individual" and the "primacy of the personal" (1993:23-26; see also Shurden 1998:323-331).

manner in which it dismisses too quickly the contribution which the concept of the competency of the soul in religion, and others, can make to this discussion (Freeman 1997:289; *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 1997:305-306).

This dissertation examines how E. Y. Mullins' vision of the competency of the soul in religion can indeed inform the way in which Baptists carry out the task of missional witness in today's world.

A Question of Missional Identity

Early English and American Baptists drew upon their distinctive approach to the Christian faith to inform their public witness in the world, a matter which I address in the following section of this chapter.[26] This fact is often obscured by those who credit the Baptist cobbler-turned-missionary William Carey and his 1792 treatise, *An Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians....*(1991[1792]),[27] as that which turned Baptists and other Protestants toward their missionary obligation (Torbet 1955:1-13; Estep 1994:5-26) with the appeal of the *Enquiry* to the Great Commission texts of Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15 (Carey 1991[1792]:E.4-E.8). That Carey greatly influenced the direction of Western Protestant mission is not in question. What is in question is how the church should understand the basis of its missionary witness. As David Bosch explains, since the 19th century mission theorists and practitioners have often considered the Great Commission to be the *Magna Carta* (Bosch 1984:17) for the church's worldwide evangelistic activity and the prime

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[26] See "A Question of Baptist Missional Identity," pp. 19-23.

[27] The full title is, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered* (1991[1792]).

rationale for mission (Bosch 1991:340-341; Bosch 1993:175-176; see also Kane 1976:43-44; and Estep 1994:76, 78[footnote # 98], 381-382).[28]

This position, though, is problematic. Mennonite missiologist Wilbert Shenk points out that the Great Commission fell prey in the 19th century to what he calls "the hoary Christendom tradition" (1999:131), a political arrangement between church and state dating to the 4th century which altered the voluntary nature of the church and identified the Christian faith with political power structures and cultural hegemony (1999:143; Guder 1998:6). Under the influence of Christendom, mission in Europe soon shifted from being primarily a volunteer movement to an elitist, state-subsidized and often coercive enterprise (Stark 2001)[29] that tended to absorb whole societies into the church rather than confront society with the claims of the gospel (Shenk 1999:123). During the "Great Century" of Christian mission (1815-1914)[30] and beyond, mission often meant replicating Western beliefs, practices, and structures in non-Western lands (Guder 1998:4). When interpreted in light of the Great Commission's mandate of obedience (Bosch 1991:134) with its commandment to

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[28] It should be noted that, as David Bosch observes, Carey's point was not to build the whole of mission on a single text but to silence his critics by urging a return to the Bible's clear, and contemporary, missionary call (1984:17).

[29] In a recent article Rodney Stark, professor of sociology and comparative religion at the University of Washington, maintains that this shift ultimately resulted in Europe in the failure of the church to Christianize the masses, especially in Northern Europe (2001:116). Stark concurs with Andrew Greeley's startling assessment that Europe's current low church participation is not the consequence of the continent's modern-day "de-Christianization" because "there never was any Christianization in the first place" (as quoted in Stark 2001:105).

[30] This is mission historian Kenneth Scott Latourette's designation for the period from the early 19th century until the start of World War I in the 20th century, when European and North American churches undertook unprecedented missionary activity on a worldwide scale. See Latourette's seven-volume work, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (1937-1945). This 100-year period also coincides with what Latourette called the "revolutionary age" in Christian history. See his five-volume work, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* (1958-1962).

"go" (Blue 1984), mission soon came to be viewed as that which happened "out there" in the "territory of heathendom" rather than what happened in the "territory of Christendom" (Shenk 1999:131). As a result, the church often approached mission as a church program (1999:123) or as the responsibility of voluntary missionary societies within or alongside the church (Bosch 1991:368-369) for the planting of the church and the evangelization of the non-Christian.[31]

Within the past half century, interpreters have begun to question the church's reliance on the Great Commission for framing its missional identity.[32] The *missio Dei*, an ancient concept adopted in the mid-20th century to interpret the church's missionary work, instructs the church that mission is not an activity realized outside the bounds of the church, nor is it simply an organized program within the church. Rather than being auxiliary to the church's nature, mission is essential to its nature

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[31] It is also instructive to recall the history behind the use of the word "mission," and how that, too, figured into the interpretation of the missionary impulse of the time. In both the early and the medieval church, the Latin *missio* designated the "sendings" of the Trinity (that is, the sending of the Son by the Father into the world, and the sending of the Spirit into the world by the Father and, in Western Christendom, by the Son). In 1598, the Jesuit Order adopted and consequently adapted the term *missio* to mean the church sending its representatives, or missionaries, into the world to preach the gospel in new lands (Bosch 1993:1, 176; *Oxford English Dictionary* 1989:889). Before this time, the church had used other words or phrases to speak of its evangelistic and preaching program, such as "propagation of the faith," "preaching the gospel," "planting the church," "illuminating the nations," and others (Bosch 1991:228). At the time that the Jesuits, and later others, adapted the word "mission" to speak of their global evangelization efforts, European colonial expansion was taking wing on a global scale. Thus, as the colonial powers—both Catholic and Protestant—sent their government and military representatives to new and unexplored lands the church, often accompanying these powers, entrusted its religious 'mission' to 'missionaries' who were commissioned to extend the influence and authority of the church and state wherever they went (1991:228). This view of mission fit nicely with the Protestant interpretation of the Great Commission as movement from Christian to non-Christian nations, further verifying the idea of "going" as *the* key to a biblical understanding of mission (Blue 1984; Bosch 1993:176).

[32] Dutch missiologist and Netherlands Missionary Council secretary Johannes Blauw argued in *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (1962) that a theology of mission rested on more than " the narrow strip of some 'missionary texts,' but on the whole witness of both the Old and the New Testament" (1962:16-17). As the above discussion shows, even the important focus of the Great Commission can become skewed and the larger testimony of Scripture can get lost when co-opted by the Christendom approach to mission.

(Bosch 1991:372-373). Likewise, mission speaks of the church's public confession "in relation to the whole life of the whole world" (Newbigin 1995:17) in a way that necessarily includes, but is not restricted by, various cross-cultural activities like church planting, evangelism, and other related works (Bosch 1991:391). In the words of former missionary and Church of South India Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, the church's mission is essentially "to act out in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all" (1995:17). This approach to mission opens the way forward for the church's missionary identity to inform the meaning of its missionary witness in the world.

Though Mullins himself cited the Great Commission when discussing the church's missionary task (*The Mission Journal* 1895i),[33] this dissertation shows that his concept of the competency of the soul in religion serves as an important source upon which Baptists can draw for understanding the meaning of their denominational heritage for Christian witness.

A Question of Baptist Missional Identity

As early defenders of universal religious liberty, English and American Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries gave public witness to the meaning of Christ's lordship within the context of the ancient Christendom tradition. Arising within what Timothy George calls the "Calvinist-Puritan-Separatist" tradition (1984:39), Baptists also belonged to the larger Free Church or Believers Church tradition (Durnbaugh

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[33] As Associate Corresponding Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB), Mullins edited the "foreign department" of Southern Baptists' *Mission Journal* (International Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2002b). See Chapter 2, pp. 44-45, for reference to his short-lived service with the FMB.

1968:22-33; Freeman 1997:279; Callen 1999:9)[34] with its stress on voluntary and

non-coerced religion, a creedless faith, religious liberty, and rejection of all forms of

church-state union (Durnbaugh 1968:32, 247-254; Callen 1999:78). According to

George, Baptists promoted a view of church-state relations that was revolutionary in

early Stuart England (1984:39) with their "distinctive Baptist doctrine" of universal

religious toleration or liberty (1984:37). Baptist historian William Brackney concurs,

noting that early Baptists stood out supremely as being among the first to plead for

liberty of conscience for all people (1983:78).

The first English Baptists, indebted to earlier Continental Anabaptist witness

(Stassen 1998), rejected infant baptism and state establishment of the church as a

violation of God's gift of freedom to practice or not practice religion without state

coercion. Baptist voices in both England and America soon championed the cry for

universal religious liberty.[35] Though American Baptists later joined forces

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[34] Different authors write the phrase, "Believers Church," with or without the possessive apostrophe at the end of the word "Believers." Thus the various options are "Believers' Church" (for example, Durnbaugh 1968) or "Believers Church" (for instance, Callen 1999). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use "Believers Church."

[35] Among the most well-known are English Baptist pastor Thomas Helwys (c. 1550 – c. 1615), English Baptist Leonard Busher (early 17th century), and American "baptist" Roger Williams (1603-83). Helwys argued in *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1998[1611/1612]) that people's "religion to God is between God and themselves"—be they Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jew or unbelievers (1998[1611/1612]:53). Historian Richard Groves claims that Helwys' work constitutes the first exposition in English that advocated the notion of complete freedom of conscience and religion (Helwys 1998[1611/1612]:xxxi-xxxiv); William Brackney states that this treatise charted the end of the medieval church-state synthesis (1988:5). Leonard Busher (late 16th and early 17th centuries), a member of Helwys' congregation, directed his *Religious Peace*—which, according to Baptist historian Leon McBeth, was "the earliest Baptist treatise devoted exclusively to religious liberty" (1987:104)—to King James I in 1614 in opposition to the "monstrous and cruel beast" of religious persecution which "hindereth the gospel of Christ, and scattereth his disciples that witness and profess his name" (as cited in Brackney 1983:78). Roger Williams—"briefly a Baptist, long a baptist" (McClendon 1986:46) and supremely distinguished for his defense of religious liberty (Torbet 1950:220)—wrote in 1644 that God mandated that "the most paganish, Jewish, Turkish [Muslim], or anti-Christian consciences and worships be granted" to all people everywhere (2001[1644]:3). Particular Baptists' Second London Confession of Faith of 1689 clarified this Baptist conviction, that being that God alone was Lord of the conscience, not the state or the church (Lumpkin 1959:279-280).

strategically with Enlightenment rationalists to promote religious liberty in the 18th

century,[36] their intention was not to promote Enlightenment thought. As Baptist

theologian Curtis Freeman points out, their convictions clearly pre-dated by several

decades John Locke's 1689 statement, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1997:280).

Instead, Baptists defended religious liberty based on the belief that freedom was

God's gift in Christ based on God's authority as the only Lord over the conscience,

granting every person (both Christian and non-Christian, individuals and

communities) the right to choose his or her own religious path (Freeman 1997:280;

Shurden 1998:334-335). For Baptists, "[f]reedom came with creation, as well as with

redemption" (Shurden 1998:334).

Timothy George finds that early English Baptists' distinctive view of religious

toleration affirmed, in part, the inviolability of the conscience and "the competence of

each soul for establishing its own spiritual condition" (1984:42), the non-coercive

character of faith, and the need to evangelize all people (1984:42-45).[37] Historian

Robert Handy comments that their cry for the freedom to follow Scripture and the

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[36] Baptist historian Leon McBeth admits that Enlightenment thought did influence some early American Baptist leaders (1987:259-260). Still, though joining secular humanists and others to advocate church-state separation (Handy 1986:29-30), Baptists had a different agenda, that being, to defend freedom *for* religion rather than freedom *from* religion (McBeth 1987:253). However, there is a sense that Baptists fundamentally do not completely separate these two ideas, on the basis that genuine religious faith cannot be coerced (Shurden 1993:45-54).

[37] Citing four General Baptist treatises written between 1612 and 1620—*A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (Thomas Helwys, 1612), *Religion's Peace* (Leonard Busher, 1614), *Objections Answered by Way of Dialogue* (John Murton, 1615), and "A Most Humble Supplication" (Murton, 1620) (George 1984:40)—George uncovers seven specific accents to Baptists' distinctive view of religious toleration (1984:41-47): (1) the division of the "temporal" kingdom from the "spiritual" kingdom, allowing for the possibility of a "Christian magistrate" but not a "Christian magistracy"; (2) the inviolability of the conscience, which presupposed "the competence of each soul for establishing its own spiritual condition" (1984:42); (3) the non-coercive character of faith; (4) an intense desire to evangelize all people, requiring universal toleration and opposing all means of conversion by coercion; and the confidence that religious toleration would (5) produce true Christian unity, (6) lead to political and civil peace, and (7) contribute to economic prosperity.

Spirit's guidance was, at heart, "a protest against the oppressive power of the realities of historic European Christendom with its monolithic state-church systems" (1986:24). In America, the appeal for the free exercise of religion became a demand for separation from the establishment of state-sponsored religion and freedom against state-enforced and church-authorized retribution against religious dissent (Handy 1986:25-31; Brackney 1988:95-100). In short Baptists, believing themselves to be following the example of their Lord whose own witness challenged the notions of force and manipulation (George 1984:44), forged their identity through missional protest in the face of powerful religious and state persecution.[38]

In short, the public witness of early English and American Baptists arose not on the basis of one primary text of Scripture nor as a particular practice of cross-cultural missions, but rather in response to their distinctive Christian identity shaped in historical context in light of the Scriptural message. Their public witness to the truth of the gospel resulted largely from the conviction that faith was fundamentally a voluntary act of the person in response to God, that religion could not be coerced, and that therefore no union between the church and state government was permissible. Their experience affirmed a fundamental principle that underlies the ensuing discussion in this dissertation: that the witness of the church in history arises out of its unique identity and faith developed under God and in response to the challenges and circumstances that create its character. In this way the church truly is "essentially

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[38] Examples of Baptists persecuted for their faith include Thomas Helwys (who died in prison in 1615 for publishing *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*), Roger Williams (who was banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636 for questioning the colony's church-state union), and Lewis Craig, John Waller, James Chiles, James Reed and William Marsh (who were imprisoned in Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1768 for publicly preaching the gospel[Darter 1960:17-22; McBeth 1987:270]).

missionary" (Bosch 1991:372). If the church's very being is missionary, then out of a sense of who it is—and who the church understand itself to be—the church witnesses of its faith in the world. In important ways, God's people called Baptists evidenced this principle in their early history.

Baptists have not always lived out their faith of non-coercion in religion and the liberty of the conscience perfectly. In the 19th century, many Baptists in the United States, like other Protestant denominations, often sought to "Americanize" minority groups through their missionary efforts (Ammerman 1990:31; Brackney 1988:102). In the American South, Baptists shifted from being 18th century cultural dissenters to 19th century regional powerbrokers (Freeman, McClendon, and da Silva 1999:186-187; Leonard 1990a; Ammerman 1990:43; Boles 1993). Today, many Baptists are among those who advance the notion of a "Christian America" (Brackney 1988:105; Hankins 2002:61-70; Parham 2002). Baptists have thus shown signs of religious and cultural coercion in their application of the faith.

This dissertation explores the idea that E. Y. Mullins' theology of the competency of the soul in religion—as an interpretation and application of Baptists' historical identity rooted in their defense of religious liberty (1906c:4)—opens a way forward to reconnect their identity and mission in ways that allow their witness to reflect better their sense of what it means to be both Baptist and Christian.

The Competency of the Soul in Religion: A Missional Approach

The centerpiece of Mullins' Baptist theology is his original concept of the competency of the soul in religion, or "soul competency." Though at times confused with the notion of "soul liberty" or "soul freedom" (Grenz 1985:84-85; Shurden

1993:23-32), soul competency is not the same as—though it is akin to—that other, much older concept.[39] In his book *The American Religion*, Jewish literary critic Harold Bloom confirms Mullins' original authorship of the concept of the competency of the soul in religion when he writes, "I have tried, with the skilled assistance of the Reverend John Doe [Bloom's Southern Baptist informant], to find some instance of the phrase 'soul competency' before Mullins, but neither of us has uncovered it in Southern Baptist writing or anywhere else" (1992:206).[40]

For Mullins, the concept of soul competency represented the essence of the Baptist denomination. As a theological conviction, soul competency comprehended and interpreted the many particulars of the Baptist faith and tradition, including the tradition's position on Scripture, religious liberty, the church, the priesthood of believers, and church-state separation (1908a:56-57; 1923c:536-537). In essence, soul competency was the capacity, under God, of every person to relate directly and personally to God without the state, the church, or any other entity meddling in that relationship or interposing itself between God and the individual (Mullins 1908a:53-58).

Soul competency received widespread attention among Baptists and others throughout the 20th century after Mullins first introduced it in 1906.[41] Within the past

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[39] "Soul liberty" or "soul freedom" is another way of saying "religious liberty" or "religious freedom." As Timothy Maddox points out, soul competency goes far beyond the idea of religious liberty (1997:90 [footnote # 1]) yet, as I argue in this dissertation, soul competency's debt to religious liberty opens a window onto the meaning of Baptists' public witness in the world.

[40] Though writers throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries have referenced or commented upon soul competency, no source traces the phrase before the time of E. Y. Mullins and most, though not all, directly attribute it to him. See Chapter 3, p. 78 (footnote # 21).

[41] William Carrell (1993) devotes a large portion of his first chapter to some of the more prominent 20th-century Baptist interpreters of soul competency and their reactions to it. Accompanied by my own

40 years, at least three doctoral dissertations have interpreted its theological and/or

philosophical significance in Baptist life.[42] Baptist authority Walter Shurden

understands it to be one of the more significant "motifs" for revisioning what it means

to be Baptist (1998:322). Significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, one of the

earliest proponents of soul competency for Christian mission was James H. Franklin,

foreign secretary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) from

1912 through 1934.[43]

    Mullins introduced soul competency in November 1906 before Virginia

Baptists in an address entitled "The Historical Significance of the Baptists" (1906c).

He focused his talk on the nature of the concept and its meaning for the human

individual and the individual's relationship with God. In a second address given

shortly thereafter to the same group of Baptists, Mullins linked his original concept to

six "axioms of religion" (1906e), a set of religious propositions that he had first

presented to Baptist audiences a year earlier (1905a; 1905d).[44] Later, in 1908, he

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characterization of their responses to soul competency in parentheses, these include: English Baptist H. Wheeler Robinson, Southern Baptist Timothy George, and "baptist" James McClendon (qualified acceptance); Northern (American) Baptists D. C. Macintosh and W. R. McNutt and Southern Baptists Herschel Hobbs, Walter Shurden, Bill Leonard, and James Dunn (unqualified acceptance); and American Baptists Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson (unqualified rejection) (1993:4-23).

[42] Bill Thomas' "Edgar Young Mullins: A Baptist Exponent of Theological Restatement" (1963) described soul competency as its originator's "polemic theology" designed to restate the denomination's faith in ways acceptable to his own generation and time (1963:333-370). William Carrell explored the theological and philosophical sources behind the concept in "Edgar Young Mullins and the Competency of the Soul in Religion" (1993), concluding that it sprang from Mullins' missionary and ecumenical vision though being today in need of restatement in line with a postmodern climate (1993:143-169). On the other hand, Timothy Maddox's dissertation, "Revisioning Baptist Principles: A Ricoeurian Postmodern Investigation" (1997), looked at soul competency (and other Baptist principles) through the postmodern grid of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, determining that its view of the human person as a free and responsible being open to change, was in line with the postmodern demands for human interdependency and responsibility.

[43] Franklin's interpretation of soul competency is explored fully in Chapter 4, pp. 115-122.

[44] See Chapter 3, p. 73, for a listing of Mullins' religious axioms.

authored *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (1908a),

in which the concept of soul competency, along with the religious axioms, were fully

and definitively developed.

However, in *The Axioms of Religion* Mullins prefaced his exposition with a

particular overriding concern, introduced in the book's first chapter entitled, "The

New Test of Denominationalism" (1908a:11-26). Under the subheading "Fresh

Statements Needed" (1908a:25-26), Mullins wrote:

> What is the distinctive message of the Baptists to the world? How far does
> our simple congregational polity embody the essential things in New
> Testament Christianity and to what extent is it adapted to the present and
> future progress of the gospel on earth? The question here is not primarily
> concerning baptism or the Lord's Supper or even church polity as these have
> been discussed in the past. The attempt is rather to state our case in the light of
> primary and universal principles, and to show the relation of the ordinances
> and polity to these principles. (1908a:26)

In this brief statement, Mullins declared that his concern was to determine the

meaning of "the Baptist message" for the larger "world." Clearly his interpretation

placed stress on congregational polity and thus had an ecclesiological bias and

direction. Also, by locating this concern within a denominational context, he aimed

to provide a response that reflected the Baptist approach to the church and the world.

Yet his goal was not simply to rehash church polity and the ordinances as Baptists

had done time and again.[45] Instead, he wanted to explore the essential principles that

underpinned their congregationalism, and why these principles were needed for "the

present and future progress of the gospel on earth." These principles were rooted in

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[45] Baptists had, since the 19th century, attempted to argue the "superiority" of their faith based on their perceived doctrinal fidelity to the New Testament teachings regarding, among other things, believers baptism, the Lord's Supper (often in terms of closed communion), and congregationalism. Among these authors, a partial listing includes: D. C. Haynes (1856); T. G. Jones ([1860]); Edward T. Hiscox (1868); Alvah Hovey (1876); J. M. Pendleton (1882); Joseph E. Carter (1883); J. L. Burrows (1895); Henry C. Vedder (1897); Jeremiah B. Jeter (1902); and A. E. Dickinson (1902).

Mullins' Baptist theology of soul competency and explained in the six religious axioms. A few years after the publication of *The Axioms of Religion* in 1908, ABFMS executive James Franklin applied the fundamental ideas which Mullins attributed to soul competency to the specific problem of the indigenous church in cross-cultural missions ([1916]; 1920b; 1923a).

As a revision of Baptists' denominational identity, soul competency served as more than a Baptist doctrine or philosophy. It signified for Mullins, as well as for Franklin, a significant means for revisioning the missionary relevance of the Baptist faith for the world, holding promise—as I argue in this dissertation—for Baptists' missionary witness today.

<div align="center">Conclusion and Chapter Summaries</div>

Mullins' sensitivity to how the Baptist faith could address the needs and challenges of the world forms the heart of this dissertation. Evaluating his concept of soul competency from the perspective of mission serves as its culmination and goal. In light of Baptists' continuing attempts to understand the meaning of their denominational identity, the difficulty of drawing their missionary witness from their identity, and the connection between their early witness and their characteristic perspective of the Christian faith, this dissertation examines Mullins' Baptist theology of soul competency in association with a transdenominational model of identity and mission in order to understand the extent to which it is capable of contributing to the contemporary practice of Christian mission.

Chapters 2 through 6 analyze historical, missiological, and denominational sources used to interpret Mullins' concept of soul competency, while Chapter 7 draws

the study to a close. Against the backdrop of his historical context, Chapter 2 examines the character of Mullins' Christian witness in light of different models or approaches to the kingdom of God. In Chapter 3, I examine soul competency as a critical revision of Mullins' Baptist tradition that directed his thinking outwardly toward the world. Chapter 4 presents the ways in which Mullins and Mullins' contemporary James Franklin applied soul competency to the needs of the church, the world, and to the issue of the indigenous church in mission.

Chapter 5 develops a transdenominational model of identity and mission, built upon missiological, denominational, and philosophical principles and designed to evaluate Mullins' vision of soul competency as a source of Christian mission. In Chapter 6, I apply this transdenominational model to the concept of soul competency in order to shed light upon its missiological significance. Chapter 7 concludes the study by drawing out the implications of soul competency for mission, clarifying its contribution to the practice of mission, applying its conclusions to the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's New Directions strategy in Costa Rica, and proposing additional lines of research.

CHAPTER 2

E. Y. Mullins' World-Conscious Witness In Kingdom Perspective

In his address as General Secretary before the Fourth Congress of the Baptist

World Alliance (BWA) in Toronto, Canada, June 23-29, 1928, British Baptist James

H. Rushbrooke (1870-1947) paid special tribute to BWA President E. Y. Mullins.[1] In

Rushbrooke's view, Mullins' presidency had uniquely given the BWA "an awareness

of new values in our fellowship, a wider horizon" (Rushbrooke 1928a:65) through his

1926 tour of Europe, his correspondence and writings, his defense of religious liberty

in Romania, and even his efforts to oversee the production of a "Baptist film."

Mullins, the BWA secretary remarked, had made the "Baptist world-consciousness"

an "effective reality and a growing power" (1928a:65). Rushbrooke concluded his

comments on Mullins by calling him the "Baptist *par excellence*," a leader who had

"most worthily embodied the fraternal and ecumenical spirit of the Alliance"

(1928a:66).

Shortly after Mullins' death in November 1928, Mullins' wife and first

biographer Isla May Mullins pinpointed the source of her husband's own "Baptist

world-consciousness." Referring to his column "Our Signal Station" for the weekly

Baptist[2]—penned while he was pastor of Lee St. Baptist Church in Baltimore (1888-

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[1] The Baptist World Congress in Toronto adopted Rushbrooke's speech—entitled "The Baptist World Alliance in Retrospect and Prospect"—along with two others as its official "Message" to Baptists of the world (Rushbrooke 1928b:vii; Whitley 1928:63). The other two were the convention sermon, delivered by Charles Brown of Ferme Park, London, on "The Universal Sovereignty of Jesus Christ," and Mullins' own presidential address, "Baptist Life in the World's Life." The title of Mullins' address became the Congress theme for that year, as suggested by Mullins (Rushbrooke 1928b:vi).

[2] Isla May Mullins referred to the paper as *The Maryland Baptist* (Mullins 1929:68). E. Y. Mullins wrote his column while the paper was named *The Baptist* (1891-1894) and then *The Evangel* (from 1895).

1895) between 1892 and 1895[3]—she described her husband as a "keen observer" and

a "conscious participant in the onward movement of religious and civil life," a person

who recorded "bright flashes from denominational interests at large, and of events

great and small in the outside world" (Isla May Mullins 1929:68). "World

consciousness," she continued, "was a thing inherent with him" (1929:68). Early in

his career as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, E. Y. Mullins

voiced his world-conscious perspective this way: "A Christian is a man who has

Christ in his heart, but Christ has the world in his heart and so to be a Christian is to

have the world in one's heart. *No man is an all-around Baptist until his heart is

twenty-five thousand miles around*" (Mullins 1900a; emphasis added).[4]

In the Preface to the first volume of Kenneth Scott Latourette's five-volume

series *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* (1958-1962), the famed mission historian

noted the active role the church took in the 19th and 20th centuries in shaping the

world into a giant neighborhood, putting to the test as in no other time in history its

claim to universality (Latourette 1958:viii). By the close of the 1800s, several

denominational families were making good their contribution to this "one world"

neighborhood by organizing comprehensive global structures, among them the

Reformed Churches (1875), the Methodists (1881), and the Anglican Communion

(1888). Following in their footsteps, the Baptists founded in 1905 the Baptist World

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[3] William Ellis (1985) records that Mullins assumed responsibility for the "Our Signal Station" column in January 1894 (1985:24). However, Mullins took over the column from A. C. Dixon, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church (Baltimore, Maryland) and Hanson Place Baptist Church (Brooklyn, New York), on September 21, 1892 (Mullins 1892b). His last column, penned the same month he became Associate Secretary at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, was written September 4, 1895 (Mullins 1895t).

[4] Many sources from the 20th century and earlier often did not use gender-neutral or inclusive language with reference to humans. Rather than editing these sources to make the language inclusive, I have chosen in this dissertation to quote all sources as found.

Alliance, an organization embodying what Southern Baptist historian William Wright Barnes called a true "Baptist world consciousness" (1923). From its beginning, Mullins took an active role in molding the character and shaping the direction of the Baptist World Alliance, eventually serving as its president from 1923 to 1928. Mullins' own world consciousness developed during this "revolutionary" age of rapid global change.

This chapter assesses the nature and meaning of Mullins' "world-conscious" witness in light of his approach to the kingdom of God. I begin the chapter with an overview of the historical context in which Mullins lived. I then turn to Howard Snyder's book, *Models of the Kingdom* (1991), to aid in my assessment of Mullins' witness. There are two reasons for choosing this approach. First, as Snyder argues in the book's Introduction, one's interpretation of the kingdom sheds light on how one views "God's saving work in the world" (1991:11) and the meaning of the church's mission in the world (1991:13). Second, Mullins specifically grounded his concept of soul competency in the kingdom of God and its meaning for the church and the denomination (1908a:27-43).

Locating Mullins' vision of the kingdom using Snyder's eight-fold schema thus offers a framework in which to interpret the witness of this "Baptist *par excellence*" and, as a result, aids in understanding the missional significance of his soul competency concept. Essentially, Mullins' witness signified not only his outlook on the world but also the way in which he responded—and encouraged fellow Baptists to respond—to the world and its needs on behalf of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Historical Context (1860-1930)

E. Y. Mullins lived during a period of American history described by Sydney Ahlstrom as "The Ordeals of Transition" (1972:731-872) and by Winthrop Hudson as "Years of Midpassage" (1981:207-326). This period, bounded by the United States Civil War (1861-1865) and World War I (1914-1918), witnessed momentous change, challenges, and problems of adjustment for the church in America. The 1920s, generally a time of economic prosperity, tended toward national retrenchment as well as religious unrest with the fundamentalist-modernist crisis. Within the period's new intellectual, social, political, and religious currents, the modern American society was born.

Intellectual and Philosophical Currents

Spanning the major thought forms of the day was the worldview of modernity, grounded in the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment (Snyder 1995:218). Modernism endorsed such ideas as progress, knowable objective reality, detached or neutral observation, personal freedom, rationality, the autonomous self, a mechanical universe, and society built upon rational self-interest (1995:218; Guder 1998:20-25; Rikfin 2000:188-190; Ambler 1996:139-143). From modernism sprang scientific naturalism, with its stress on the empirical and rational nature of truth (Guder 1998:21-22), and pragmatism, which located truth not in metaphysical thinking but instead in *"last things, fruits, consequences, facts"* (James 1955:47;emphasis original)[5] and "what worked best" (Morison, Commager, and Leuchtenburg 1977:455; see also Smith 1961:424-427).

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[5] This quote is taken from the book, *Pragmatism*, which was originally published in 1907 by William James (1842-1910), one of the major proponents of this philosophy.

Americans also exhibited an increased activist and optimist approach to the world. Activism alluded to the "the spiritual significance of vigorous moral action in the world" and the "concern to uplift individuals, reform societies, and participate energetically in the economic and political spheres" (Tweed 1992:xxiv). Optimism stressed "the possibilities of man and society" (Jamison 1961:196). Together with the fires of revivalism that spread throughout the mid-to-late 19th century, America's activist and optimistic spirit birthed a number of religious, missionary, and humanitarian groups such as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations (1851 and 1858 respectively), the Student Volunteer Movement (1886), and the World Student Christian Federation (1895) (Yates 1994:17-21).

Socio-Political and International Currents

America emerged from the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction (1865-1877) not only reunited as a nation, but more wealthy, more powerful, and more determined to extend its influence throughout the world (Persons 1961:389-390). By the close of World War I, observers such as Kenneth Scott Latourette were calling on America to "make democracy more possible" both at home and abroad (1919:158). From 1861 to 1930, close to 36,700,000 "new immigrants" (Ahlstrom 1972:749-750), mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America (Schlereth 1991:8-9), arrived on America's shores in search of the nation's promised democratic freedoms. Their arrival swelled America's urban centers, with some cities growing as much as fifty-fold between 1860 and 1890 (Hudson 1981:295). This "demographic revolution" (Ahlstrom 1972:749), ignited by immigration, paved the way for the creation of the so-called "institutional church" with its charitable ministries to the

urban poor (Sweet 1950:373-375), as well as sparked the rise of urban nativism and racism (Schlereth 1991:11).

Under the spell of democracy and a sense of manifest destiny, many Americans believed the nation to be divinely chosen to spread American values to the four corners of the world (Hutchison and Lehmann 1994:298).[6] American Protestants particularly felt their country to be pivotal to the coming of God's kingdom on earth (Moorhead 1994).[7] The post-bellum American South took this attitude a step further, defending "with a vengeance" the notion that this region was the most righteous, the most pure, the most virtuous, and the most favored by God in all America, especially when compared with the heterogeneous, industrious, and urban North (Wilson 1980:7). Many Southerners believed that their defeat in the Civil War had merely disciplined their society—considered genteel, chivalrous, neighborly, and nurturing (Leonard 1990a:13)—and its churches for greater and more righteous service (Stowell 1998:37-40; Wilson 1980:35-36; Yance 1978:9-14).

Religious Currents

American religion in the 19th century inherited the frontier revivalism of earlier generations, characterized in large measure by: (1) pietism, emphasizing faith as immediate, personal, subjective, relational, and free; (2) individualism, favoring

[6] Editors William Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann conclude from the essays in *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism* (1994) that other nations during this period besides the United States—including Great Britain, France, Germany, and South Africa—also combined nationalistic expansion with the theme of chosenness. In each case, these nations exhibited a mixture of universal ideals, humanitarian aspirations, and even a sense of anguish and divine judgment upon themselves if they failed to carry out God's plans through them (1994:7-18).

[7] Senator Albert J. Beveridge (Indiana, 1899-1911) clearly voiced this attitude in a speech delivered on January 10, 1900, when he said: "And of all our race, [God] has marked the American people as His chosen Nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world. This is the divine mission of America, and it holds for us all the profit, all the glory, all the happiness possible to man. We are trustees of the world's progress, guardians of its righteous peace" (as quoted in Sullivan 1996:49).

private morality over public ethics and an immediate relationship to God that could

not be violated by church or state; and (3) perfectionism, the belief that a person

should and must move past conversion toward sanctification with a concern to reform

and perfect both self and society (Gaustad 1966:144-149).[8] As the century came to a

close, though, Americans alternately reflected both religious confidence and

skepticism. Though many still considered themselves very religious (Schlereth

1991:260)—"awash," as it were, in a "sea of faith" (Butler 1990)—large parts of the

country struggled with doubt in the face of philosophical modernism and scientific

naturalism (Carter 1971). On the other hand, in the more culturally- and socially-

isolated American South, the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches became

important centers of sectional sentiment and popular "heart-felt" religion perpetuated

from the immediate pre-Civil War period (Hudson 1981:218-221). As Bill Leonard

reports, many Southern Baptists came to see themselves as God's "last and only

hope" (1990) for the world's spiritual redemption.

A number of factors shaped religion in America in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. First, denominational Protestantism entered a time of growth and strength

(King 1993:343), fixing itself firmly "in the American scene" (Persons 1961:372).

As the denominations grew, America's "Protestant Establishment"[9] came to influence

the country's religious and moral direction, proving instrumental in launching and

guiding important ecumenical and missionary endeavors such as the Laymen's

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[8] Historian Edwin Scott Gaustad labeled this revivalist spirit by the term "methodism," akin to, but not the same as, the denomination by the same name.

[9] Harvard professor William Hutchison specifically identifies this "Protestant Establishment" as a group of mainstream denominations and their leaders, representing principally the Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, United Lutherans, and white (mainly Northern) Baptists and Methodists (1989:3-4).

Missionary Movement (1906), the Federal Council of Churches (1908) and, in cooperation with non-American Protestant bodies, the World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh 1910) (Hutchison 1989:4-5; Schneider 1989:97).[10] Yet not all was well within the Protestant complex, as evangelical liberals and conservatives battled over issues of biblical authority and the "fundamentals" of the faith (Hudson 1981:268-286).[11] By the 1910s and 1920s, the battles erupted into the Fundamentalist-Modernist crisis.

Second, this period of rising urban growth, industrial strife, and inner-city squalor led to new efforts for meeting social and human need. Examples included: the Social Gospel movement under the leadership of Washington Gladden (1836-1918), Francis Greenwood Peabody (1847-1936), Josiah Strong (1847-1916), Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) and others (Sweet 1950:355; Ahlstrom 1972:793-804); and the Salvation Army, founded in the slums of East London in 1878 by British evangelists William (1829-1912) and Catherine (1829-1890) Booth (Schlereth 1991:268) and later established in America in 1880. In 1908, the Federal Council of Churches was formed largely to battle social and urban injustices identified by the advocates of social Christianity (Hudson 1981:316).

Finally, Christians marked this period with increased attention to worldwide mission. A number of 19th century missionary conferences in India, Japan, China, and the West paved the way for the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York

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[10] See this chapter, p. 33, for a short list of other such organizations founded by Protestants during this time.

[11] Winthrop Hudson outlines the "specific doctrinal items" or religious fundamentals of the period's Protestant conservatives as "the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection of Christ, and his bodily return to earth" (1981:285).

in 1900 and the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910

(Hedlund 1993:7-19, 33-34). The formation in 1921 of the International Missionary

Council (IMC) was intended to continue the momentum of the church's missionary

drive, but by the time of the IMC's Jerusalem Council in 1928, much of

Protestantism's optimism for "the evangelization of the world in this generation"

(Mott 1900) had dissipated (Hedlund 1993:55-70; Wacker 1990; Showalter 1998).

These currents formed the context in which Mullins developed his world-

conscious witness. Though it frequently bore the markings of his day and time, his

witness offered important perspectives on the human person, the church, the nature of

religion, and the role of the denomination that are made clearer by examining his

witness in light of his approach to the kingdom of God.

Kingdom Models in Christian Thought

In *Models of the Kingdom*, Professor of the History and Theology of Mission

Howard Snyder (Asbury Theological Seminary) addresses the "mystery of the

kingdom," using the methodology of models as a way to "dispel the vague cloud of

confusion that often forms around this theme" (1991:15). His book explores eight

models of the kingdom of God in Scripture and Christian history, each one suggesting

a different way of approaching such topics as salvation, the mission of the church,

and Christian discipleship (1991:18). These eight models are: (1) the kingdom as

future hope, or the future kingdom; (2) the kingdom as inner spiritual experience, or

the interior kingdom; (3) the kingdom as mystical communion, or the heavenly

kingdom; (4) the kingdom as institutional church, or the ecclesiastical kingdom; (5)

the kingdom as countersystem, or the subversive kingdom; (6) the kingdom as

political state, or the theocratic kingdom; (7) the kingdom as Christianized culture, or the transforming kingdom; and (8) the kingdom as earthly utopia, or the utopian kingdom (Snyder 1991:18-19, 25-120).

Snyder observes that, in recent years, scholars have frequently adopted the use of models to explain difficult or complex topics such as Jesus Christ, the church, and revelation (Snyder 1991:15, 157). The use of models presupposes diversity in belief and interpretation (1991:15). This methodology reflects the epistemological perspective of critical realism—representing, according to Catholic missiologist Stephen Bevans, "a knowledge that is always partial and inadequate" yet, at the same time, "never false and merely subjective" (1992:25)—rather than the positivist approach of naïve realism which holds that human knowledge accurately reflects reality as it really is (Kraft 1979:25-26). Models thus afford interpreters the luxury of allowing for a variety of authentic interpretations of reality without necessarily assuming that any one viewpoint captures the whole of reality.

Snyder also points out that the different, sometimes conflicting views of the kingdom that these models represent are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Individuals or movements in history have often embraced more than one model to interpret the kingdom. Usually one particular model, though, dominates their approach (1991:20).

Of the book's eight models, three in particular help to sort out Mullins' own interpretation of the kingdom and the character of his Christian witness in the world. I will show that Model Two (Interior Kingdom) is the dominant model, but is combined with particular features of Model Five (Subversive Kingdom) and, to a

lesser extent, Model Seven (Transforming Kingdom). These models may be outlined as follows:

Model Two: The Interior Kingdom

Model Two is the Interior Kingdom or the kingdom as inner spiritual experience (1991:40-55). Drawing on such texts as Luke 17:21,[12] the Interior Kingdom—the most individualistic of the eight models—contains a strong doctrine of the soul, frames salvation in terms of participation in God, and defines the spiritual, as opposed to the material, world as what is really real. The kingdom points to an inner experience of God through Christ that leads toward sanctification. While early formulations of the model stressed mystical union with God, classical Protestant versions typically represented the kingdom more objectively as a "spiritual reality with inner, ethical, and eschatological dimensions" (1991:49). Later Protestants— such as the Lutheran Pietists and the Methodist reformer John Wesley—held both the mystical and the classical Protestant elements of this model, combining to some degree the inner and outer dimensions of the kingdom (Snyder 1991:49-50). In this model, the church witnesses to the individual's spiritual regeneration through a personal, inner experience of faith in Christ. Snyder believes the Interior Kingdom to be the dominant, though not the exclusive, model of the kingdom in Protestantism (1991:46).

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[12] Luke 17:20-21: "Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you'" (NIV).

Model Five: The Subversive Kingdom

Model Five, the kingdom as countersystem or the Subversive Kingdom (Snyder 1991:77-85), holds that the kingdom of God is to be lived out now, in the present order, in radical obedience to Christ and in opposition to the powers of the world. This model, interpreting passages like John 18:36[13] in the context of Christ's servanthood, calls for justice according the values of the kingdom, focuses on a life of discipleship, peace and justice, and understands the Christian community to be countercultural in faithfulness to Christ. The community thus opposes and is opposed by the principalities and powers, both invisible and visible, including the fallen church which, in alliance with the government and other forces in society, is in need of restitution and restoration (1991:77-79). Speaking to this model's view of the church, Snyder writes, "The church as a missionary minority is seed and sign of the kingdom precisely in the church's weakness and suffering" (1991:79). In history, this model is found in the example of Francis of Assisi, the 16th century Radical Reformers, and in contemporary authors such as Ronald Sider, Andrew Kirk, Stanley Hauerwas, and William Willimon (1991:79-82). The sign of the kingdom, according to this model, is demonstrated fidelity to Christ (1991:79).

Model Seven: The Transforming Kingdom

Model Seven describes the kingdom as Christianized culture or the Transforming Kingdom (Snyder 1991:101-111). Signs of the kingdom in this model are justice, peace, and the success of reform efforts in society. Having a strong ethical focus, proponents of this model look to prophetic passages such as Isaiah

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[13] John 18:36: "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place'" (NIV).

$42:1-4^{14}$ to call Christians to transform their society through social and humanitarian engagement. The model stresses the relevance of the kingdom to the present order, the transformation of the present order by the gospel, and an optimistic attitude that God's people in concert with God can effect social reconstruction. In history this model was especially strong in the Social Gospel movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and in the kingdom-centered theology of Methodist missionary E. Stanley Jones (1991:104-108).

Kingdom Models and Mullins' Witness

In their published memorial to Mullins' life and career, the Faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary called special attention to the late president's "self-forgetting altruism" (1929:13-15). Dedicated throughout his life to the preparation of students for Christian ministry (1929:14), Mullins' witness also contained an intense missionary fervor, a vision of the denomination as a "living organism" (1929:15) for God's kingdom, an interest in social service, a passion for the individual or the "common man who had a cause but no voice" (1929:15), and an interest in the Christian principle of brotherhood (1929:15-16). These broad commitments suggest at least five dimensions of Mullins' world-conscious witness: his witness through global mission (missionary witness); his witness through social service (social witness); his witness through ecumenical cooperation (ecumenical

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[14] Isaiah 42:1-4: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope" (NIV).

witness); his witness in defense of religious liberty (religio-ecclesiastical witness); and his witness through the denomination (denominational witness).

Mullins' Missionary Witness

In their memorial, the Southern Seminary faculty wrote that Mullins possessed "an intensified missionary fervor" based on the "firm conviction that, aside from any objective commands to evangelize, sufficient dynamic [was] found in the imperatives of redeemed nature to hasten on with the good news of the Saviour. His doctrine of missions was a spiritual correlate of the New Birth" (Faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1929:14). In Mullins' mind, the missionary consciousness was a direct consequence of a person's union with Christ. As Mullins stated it, those who were united with Christ shared Christ's "redemptive passion, his redeeming purpose for all mankind, and show[ed] it by devotion to the task of making Christ known to the ends of the earth" (Mullins 1917a:415).

Mullins' missionary passion reflected especially the Interior Kingdom model. His reading of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 led him to conclude that the chief concern of mission was "the regeneration and salvation of the individual soul" (*The Mission Journal* 1895d:3). God's kingdom was essentially a "spiritual kingdom in Christ" constituted "not on the principal of natural propagation, but on moral and spiritual sonship which is the result of a divine inworking upon condition of faith" (Mullins 1917a:266, 287). Faith, in Mullins' view, was a "vital union with Christ, not mere historical belief" (*Watchman-Examiner* 1917g:261). Drawing on America's pietistic and revivalist roots which stressed the spiritual, affective, and personal nature of religion (Gaustad 1966:145; Balmer 1993:1; Mullins [n. d]e:5-7;

1917a:20), Mullins defined the kingdom as a "divine society wherein God and men

are associated in loving fellowship; where the will of God is done by men; where love

is the expression of their relations with, and conduct toward, each other; and where

God graciously manifests himself in the fulness [sic] of his grace to men...."

(1917a:91).[15]

Mullins' commitment to mission predated his fame as a world Baptist leader.

His theological training at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was meant to

prepare him for foreign missionary service in Brazil, though his dream was never

fulfilled (Mullins 1929:18-19). William Carrell attributes the formulation of Mullins'

soul competency concept in part to his early missionary ambition and "world vision"

(1993:42-44). As pastor of Lee St. Baptist Church in Baltimore from 1888 to 1895,

he approached his task as mission work focused on evangelism and church growth,[16]

as well as on service to the urban poor (Mullins 1929:70). For a time during this

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[15] Compare this statement to the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention confessional statement, "The Baptist Faith and Message" (BFM 1925) (Southern Baptist Convention 1925), subsection 25, on "The Kingdom." Mullins chaired the committee which drafted the BFM 1925 and served as one the document's principle authors. Although much of this confession was taken from the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1925:71), the paragraph on the kingdom is original to this document. This paragraph takes up elements of both the Interior and the Transforming Kingdom models— demonstrating that social, as well as spiritual, concerns determine the meaning of the kingdom—yet maintains the spiritual kingdom as first in order of importance:

> The Kingdom of God is the reign of God in the heart and life of the individual in every human relationship, and in every form and institution of organized human society. The chief means for promoting the Kingdom of God on earth are the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and teaching the principles of righteousness contained therein. The Kingdom of God will be complete when every thought and will of man shall be brought into captivity to the will of Christ. And it is the duty of all Christ's people to pray and labor continually that his Kingdom may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Southern Baptist Convention 1925:75)

[16] In the first three years of his pastorate, the church added 175 new members—130 "new baptisms" (new baptized Christian believers) and 45 transfers of membership "by letter"—and contributed $2,400 total to missions (The Baptist 1891). By the end of his pastorate in 1895, the church had gained over 400 new members, averaged $1,200 annually in support of missions, and maintained a "prosperous mission" in the needy Locust Point area of the city (The Evangel 1895).

pastorate. he chaired the City Mission Society of Baltimore (Mullins [n. d.]h; *The*

Baptist 1892c),[17] and in 1892 he was a member of a Centennial Committee charged

with collecting funds for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for the building

of church sanctuaries in celebration of the 100th anniversary of William Carey's

missionary voyage to India (*The Baptist* 1892a; 1892b).

In 1895, Mullins agreed to work for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission

Board on the condition that his title be "associate," rather than "assistant,"

corresponding secretary in order to free him to initiate new programs in mission

(Mullins 1929:71; International Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2002a,

2002b, 2002c).[18] As associate secretary, he announced in October 1895 the novel

idea among Baptists of annual lectures on mission in Baptist colleges (International

Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2002d),[19] claiming that mission

education for both potential pastors and church leaders in training was crucial to the

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[17] At one point, comparing rural church planting to a "splendid operation" on the wrong tooth, Mullins demonstrated his awareness of the spiritual needs of the urban center by calling for the multiplication of "mission churches" in the "great plague spots of the cities" (1894h). This attitude contrasted sharply with that of some in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who not only saw the city as a source of America's unchurched, irreligious, and secular population but also as a menace to civilization, and who preached a withdrawal from urban secularism and a return to the stability of the small town, tribal "Bible" religion (Christiano 1987:15-16).

[18] Mullins served as Associate Corresponding Secretary with the Foreign Mission Board from September 1, 1895 through March 15, 1896 (*Religious Herald* 1895b; International Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2002j). Several of his letters to field missionaries are included in this dissertation's "References Cited and Selected Bibliography" (see Mullins [1895]a-h and [1896]b-j; see also the several small columns written on him in the Virginia Baptist *Religious Herald* during this time (Religious Herald [1895c-1896h]).

[19] Mullins gave the lectures in December 1895 at Richmond College (Virginia), the first Baptist college to sponsor such addresses on missionary themes (Daughtry 1895b). His topic was "The Missionary Interpretation of Christianity" and the lecture was coordinated through the local chapter of the YMCA (Daughtry 1896).

success of global mission (Mullins 1895i; 1895m).[20] In 1907, as president of

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he oversaw the organization of the Woman's

Missionary Union Training School as an adjunct to the seminary (Ellis 1985:91; Ray

1925:42-43). He continued to support world mission and evangelism through

participation in ecumenical and Baptist missionary conferences and conventions, and

by actively training others in evangelism.[21] Mission, he believed, was the "test

question of Christianity." In 1899, he wrote:

> The world is going to view Christianity as a success or a failure according as
> the churches solve the problem of missions. Infidelity, in whatever form it
> makes the attack, cannot damage the Bible or the cause of religion as it will be
> damaged by the failure in the mission work. Heresy here is the most fatal of
> all heresies. God make us true and loyal in this supreme test of our age.
> (1899b:435)

Mullins' Social Witness

Although William Ellis attributes to Mullins a "moderate Social Gospel"

compatible with his evangelicalism (1985:27-28, 91,119), Mullins' social witness did

not principally follow the Transforming Kingdom model, where the Social Gospel is

most at home (Snyder 1991:104-106), but rather the Interior Kingdom. This is not to

say that Mullins was unconcerned about the implications of the gospel for the social

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[20] Mullins believed that Baptists could not afford simply to rely on seminary-trained pastors to educate the churches in mission because, for one thing, laity as well as pastors needed missionary training in order to lead local churches in mission and, for another, so few pastors received a seminary education in his day (1895m). In her dissertation on the Southern Baptist "Whitsitt Controversy" of the 1890s, Rosalie Beck notes that, while fewer than 6% of all Southern Baptist pastors had earned a seminary degree in 1899, over 40% had received some level of college training (1984:66-69).

[21] Mullins served as a representative of the Southern Baptist Convention to the 1900 Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York (International Mission Board Archives and Record Services 2002i; [Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions] 1900:408); he addressed the Men's National Missionary Congress of the United States in 1910 (Mullins 1910b); and he attended as an observer to the Baptist World Alliance-sponsored London Missionary Conference in 1920 (Mullins 1920b). His 1920 book, *Talks on Soul Winning*, came from a series of lectures to religious leaders at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, while Mullins was Director of Religious Activities at the camp during World War I (1920h:7-8; Mullins 1929:158-161).

welfare of the poor and needy. In a pamphlet dedicated to young people in ministerial service ([1918]a), he identified God's "moral kingdom" as that which relieved human misery and preached a gospel of hope. He urged young ministers to devote themselves to "bringing in the reign of righteousness," removing "moral plague spots in our cities," and planting "Christ's banner of truth" among all nations ([1918]a:11-12).

In describing the Interior Kingdom, Howard Snyder cites John Calvin as an example of a major Protestant figure who represents the model of the kingdom as inner spiritual experience. Unlike some who have followed this model, Calvin took seriously the church's responsibility for social involvement, teaching that Christians must engage redemptively all aspects of life to the end that God's sovereignty might be universally recognized. Calvin's theology of social engagement flowed out of, rather than replaced, the spiritual and inner nature of God's kingdom (1991:48-49).

Mullins' approach to social ethics traced much the same course. "It is impossible to build a social order that will abide without regeneration," Mullins wrote in the late 1910s ([n. d.]f). The kingdom of God, Mullins argued, could never be realized by the regeneration of society as it currently existed, but instead depended foundationally upon the conversion of individuals to the gospel of Christ (1894d). "To regenerate the individual is the sole condition of permanent moral progress in the social sphere" (Mullins 1908a:204). In the March 15, 1893 edition of "Our Signal Station," Mullins lamented the fact that many believed that the "new theology" of liberal Protestantism stood for morality in religion while the "old theology" merely preached justification by faith (1893e). Almost 25 years later, he defended the "old

theology" centered in the "historic demonstration" of the incarnation and atonement

of Christ as the cause of ethical living in society (*Watchman-Examiner* 1917k:422).[22]

In his view, the transformation of the social order was predicated upon the "severe

task" of bringing "divine forces to bear to construct men" ([n. d.]k:4).

> We are to take the individual and bring regenerating forces to bear upon him. We are to plant in him a principle of endless growth. We are to inaugurate in him a new moral and spiritual enterprise. We are to make him a dynamic of righteousness and then return him to the social order, the civic order, the commercial order and intellectual order. Thus we plant ourselves on the platform of the divine architect at the beginning when He said, "Let us make man." ([n. d.]k:4)

In places, though, there are aspects of the Transforming Kingdom in Mullins'

theology. Though he remained undecided as to whether pre- or post-millennialism

was doctrinally the most correct (1917a:466-472; 1923e:28), he understood the

kingdom to come in three senses: "in its beginning....in its progress....in its

consummation" (1917a:456). This meant that not only was there a present and future

kingdom taught in the New Testament, but also that Jesus taught the gradual coming

of the kingdom (1917a:452). To a very real extent, humanity possessed the "capacity

for moral progress under God in a well-ordered society" where culture, religion, and

morality all blended "into a perfect harmony of achieving and progressing humanity"

(1908a:67).

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[22] The essay from which this citation is taken was written by Mullins, though his name is not associated with it in the *Watchman-Examiner*. On January 25, 1917, the Baptist weekly *Watchman-Examiner* initiated a series of eleven articles under the general title "The Old and New Theologies" (1917a-k). Written anonymously, these articles were dedicated to exploring the characteristic features of traditional evangelical theology and more liberal Protestant thought. In a letter to Mullins from the former foreign secretary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and Mullins' personal friend Henry C. Mabie dated February 15, 1917, Mabie acknowledged Mullins' authorship of the articles. In a hand partly illegible, Mabie wrote, "I cannot tell you with what pleasure I have read your first three articles on the Old and New Theologies which have appeared in the *Watchman-Examiner*. Dr. [Curtis Lee] Laws [editor] whom I met in Waco, told me of the real authorship which I [....] No one that I know could do this work more satisfactorily, or as well, as you are doing it. It is surely time for real believers who know their grounds to speak out" (1917).

On this basis, Mullins could champion a number of social causes for the sake of the gospel. As editor of "Our Signal Station," he wrote often on such issues as poverty, the sale and abuse of alcohol, the evils of lynching and "mob violence," the unfair treatment of Native Americans, the brutality of boxing, better naturalization laws, public safety, government corruption, unsanitary conditions for "colored prisoners," and others.[23] As Southern Seminary president, Mullins served in a number of humanitarian positions: as the Kentucky chair for the American Committee for China Famine Fund (Mullins [n. d.]i);[24] on the Industrial Commission of the Churchmen's Federation (Mullins, McVey, and Atherton 1919); and on the Kentucky State Committee on Race Track Gambling (State Committee [on Race Track Gambling] 1921).

Mullins knew and worked alongside Northern Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch, perhaps the most well-known advocate of the Social Gospel movement.[25] Two differences stand out in their approaches to social justice and the kingdom of God. First, Rauschenbusch spent his energies interpreting the kingdom of God as a social reality, whereas Mullins most characteristically described the kingdom as a personal

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[23] In most editions of "Our Signal Station,", Mullins treated one or more social problems connected to these and other issues of the day. Many, though not all, of them related to problems he identified in the city of Baltimore. For representative selections from his column, see the following sources: Mullins 1892b; 1893b; 1893c; 1893d; 1893g; 1893i; 1893j; 1893k; 1894c; 1894d; 1894f; 1894g; 1894i; 1895p; 1895q; 1895r; 1895s.

[24] Mullins' service on the American Committee for China Famine Fund came at the request of United States President Woodrow Wilson ([n. d.]i).

[25] Mullins and Rauschenbusch, along with 13 others, served together on the Committee on Social Progress, formed at the Second Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911 (Baptist World Alliance 1911:xvi, 333-334).

reality.[26] Second, Rauschenbusch typically viewed the contemporary situation as a

social crisis that called for direct application of the gospel to society (1907; 1911); for

Mullins, the church faced a great *social task* that required fundamentally the

application of the gospel to individual lives who would then work toward a better

social order (Mullins 1908a:201-205).[27] It is wrong though, as does Sydney Ahlstrom

(1961:307), to conclude that Mullins, unlike Rauschenbusch, showed almost no

ethical passion. Rather, Mullins' social concern followed a considerably different

model of the kingdom than did that of his Northern Baptist colleague.

Mullins' Ecumenical Witness

Mullins had a tremendous ecumenical impact among Baptists worldwide

(Stubblefield 1980; see also Carter 1970; Ellis 1985:61-82; George 1990b),

participating in more denominational and interdenominational activities than any

other Southern Baptist leader of his day (Ellis 1985:61). Besides relationships forged

with Northern Baptists and others through the Baptist World Alliance, he cooperated

with the International Sunday School Association, the American Bible League, the

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[26] In *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), Rauschenbusch spends much of his time looking at the social teaching of the Old Testament prophets, of Jesus, and of the early New Testament church. In his book *A Theology of the Social Gospel* (1978[1917]), he writes, "This doctrine [of the kingdom of God] is itself the social gospel. Without it, the idea of redeeming the social order will be but an annex to the orthodox conception of the scheme of salvation" (1978[1917]:131). On the other hand, Mullins describes the kingdom of God in *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a) as representing a personal rather than a positive or legalistic religion, as emphasizing divine personality and love, as distinguished by the principle of revelation, and as pointing to Jesus as the medium of revelation and personal redemption (1908a:28-30).

[27] A good comparison can be made between Rauschenbusch and Mullins from their addresses at the Second Baptist World Alliance Congress, held in Philadelphia in 1911. Rauschenbusch's message, "The Church and Social Crisis" (1911), outlined the economic and political disparity between "the business class" and the "working class," and called on Christians to promote the "collectivist conception of the new working class" of justice, peace and brotherhood. Mullins' sermon on "The Lordship of Christ" (1911c), delivered Sunday morning, June 25, after Rauschenbusch's Saturday evening address, praised the Alliance for taking up the "great social task" of Christianity—a task that included fighting corruption, unfair business and industrial practices, ending graft, equalizing human conditions, and others—but offered no specific proposal for the Alliance to consider (1911c:390-391).

Kentucky Anti-Saloon League, the Federal Council of Churches, the National

Committee on American-Japanese Relations, the World Alliance for International

Friendship Through the Churches, and other organizations (1985:67-72, 171-172).

As a leading Baptist theologian, Mullins led in the drafting of a number of

important Baptist faith statements that addressed the issue of ecumenical cooperation

and "church union." Among these were the 1914 "Pronouncement on Christian

Union and Denominational Efficiency" of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

(Southern Baptist Convention 1914; Carter 1970); the SBC's 1919 "Fraternal Address

of Southern Baptists" (Mullins, et al. [1919]);[28] the Baptist World Alliance's 1923

statement, "A Message of the Baptist World Alliance to the Baptist Brotherhood, to

Other Christian Brethren, and to the World" (Whitley 1923:223-228);[29] and the

SBC's 1925 confessional statement, "The Baptist Faith and Message" (Southern

Baptist Convention 1925).[30] These documents acknowledged Baptists' historic

commitment to cooperation and fellowship across confessional lines and affirmed

those common beliefs Baptists shared with other evangelical Christian bodies

(Southern Baptist Convention 1914:76; Whitley 1923:224). Yet Mullins also

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[28] Though the SBC appointed a committee of five to draft this document, Mullins' letter to Albert Ehrgott dated January 25, 1921, confirms that he was its author (1921f). The other committee members were J. B. Gambrell (President of the Southern Baptist Convention), Z. T. Cody (Editor, *Baptist Courier*), L. R. Scarborough (President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), and William Ellyson (President, Foreign Mission Board, SBC) (Mullins, et al. [1919]:16).

[29] As chairman of the BWA commission to draft this document, Mullins was its principle author, termed in short "The Baptist Message" (Whitley 1923:xi; Shakespeare 1922; Cody 1924:36-37). This "Message," published in booklet form in 1923 by Judson Press under the title *A Declaration of the Baptist World Alliance*, carried Mullins' name as the document's author (Mullins 1923f).

[30] The 1925 "Baptist Faith and Message" (BFM 1925) was adapted from an early Baptist confession of faith, the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith (revised in 1853). The BFM 1925 shares 16 of the 18 articles in the New Hampshire Confession. The committee charged with drafting the BFM 1925, chaired by E. Y. Mullins, added nine additional articles, these being on The Resurrection, Religious Liberty, Peace and War, Education, Social Service, Co-operation, Evangelism and Missions, Stewardship, and The Kingdom (Southern Baptist Convention 1925).

contended that cooperation must be spiritual and voluntary in nature and not organizational, thus ruling out coercive "church unions" with their authoritative bureaucracies (Mullins, et al. [1919]:14). When cooperation did occur, its purpose was to carry out the "the missionary, educational and benevolent program for the extension of Christ's Kingdom" (Southern Baptist Convention 1925:74).

Significantly, Mullins' ecumenical position reflected certain aspects of Snyder's Model Five, the kingdom as countersystem. In essence, Mullins understood the Baptist position to be in opposition to larger Protestant efforts at organic or organizational church union which threatened the voluntary principle upon which he believed obedience to Christ was predicated (Mullins et al. [1919]:14; Whitley 1923:223-224). His position fell in line with the Free Church or Believers Church tradition and its suspicion of all church leaders who impose systems, structures or beliefs capable of destroying Christian faith and witness. Writing on this tradition, Barry Callen observes: "To be in Christ must be a free choice that leads to voluntary communities of real believers in which room remains for honest searching and total obedience to what comes to be seen as the divine will" (1999:82).

In Mullins' view, unity was not achieved under a "great centralized bureaucratic organization" (Mullins et al. [1919]:14), but rather through fidelity to Jesus Christ (Southern Baptist Convention 1914:73-74)[31] and on the freedom to

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[31] In his final address before Baptists of the world entitled "Baptist Life in the World's Life," Mullins placed loyalty to Christ at the center of his approach both to ecumenical unity and to Baptist liberty. Reflecting on Ephesians 4:3-6, he stated:

> We do not seek unity at the expense of liberty. Hence we oppose great ecclesiastical systems under episcopal authorities. We do not seek liberty at the expense of unity. Hence we oppose irresponsible individualism which would convert the denomination into a free lance club but with every man doing and believing that which is right in his own eyes. We seek rather the Pauline standpoint and make loyalty the centre [sic]of liberty and unity. Loyalty to the one Lord makes the unity Christo-centric. Loyalty to the one faith makes it coherent and self-

witness to the gospel (Mullins 1920e) without hindering or embarrassing other denominations in their efforts to carry out these same tasks (Mullins et al. [1919]:14-15). Only on these principles—which were spiritual and not organizational in nature (Whitley 1923:224)—could union and cooperation be effected. The bottom line was that church union "on the basis of compromise would be morally wrong" (Mullins 1918g; Southern Baptist Convention 1914:76).

Mullins' Religio-Ecclesiastical Witness

The same sense of protest against organic ecumenical alliances energized Mullins' march against coercive church-state structures that inherently denied religious liberty to those who resided in lands where those structures still held sway. Mullins, like other Baptists of the day (Franklin 1920a; Rushbrooke 1923:92-93), voiced strong support for religious freedom as a fundamental Baptist principle, and denounced those institutions and governments which denied such freedom to its citizens. Mullins frequently recalled Baptists' early witness in England and America on behalf of religious liberty in the face of strong political and religious opposition (1906c; 1908a:44-49; Whitley 1923:66). Again, the operative model of the kingdom of God was that of countercultural system. In his view, religious liberty—and particularly that form which found its fullest expression in America (1908a:266-270)—ran counter to the historic patterns of church-state coalitions still prevalent in much of the world (and particularly in Europe [Mullins 1921k]) and which, by the

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consistent. Loyalty to the one baptism gives it an impressive and convincing outward symbol. (1928a:57)

Stressing loyalty as the center of the equation, Mullins summed up his thoughts by saying, "The Baptist formula for Christian unity is: unity plus loyalty plus liberty" (1928a:57).

very nature of their hierarchies and doctrines, hindered the religious quest for God and truth and engendered religious oppression and opposition.

Throughout his career, Mullins defended the person's right to exercise, or not exercise, a religious preference. Early in his ministry he called for the repeal of discriminatory laws against Seventh-Day Adventists in Maryland (1894c), and later he led in drafting the 1923 BWA "Baptist Message" supporting religious freedom for "unbelievers and atheists, as well as Christians" (Whitley 1923:226). His sense of the church as "the medium through which [God] should declare the wisdom [of salvation] hidden before the foundation of the world" caused him to lament the deplorable condition of the European state churches which had lost their spiritual power as "agencies for the spread of God's truth in the world" due to political dominion by the state (1918c).

Mullins considered it of paramount importance that, with the end of World War I, religious and political autocracies—hardly distinguished in Mullins' mind—be uprooted and replaced so that the individual may be freed spiritually (and politically) to be gathered into free (democratic) churches, thus leavening society (1921k:3-4). He recognized, however, that liberty had its limits, pleading that it be balanced with what was good, lawful and true (1893a; 1893g). Nevertheless throughout the 1920s, and especially as BWA president from 1923 to 1928, Mullins championed religious liberty on behalf of Romanian Baptists and other "minority religionists" in that country at a time when religious oppression by the government was active and strong (1921j; 1927; Mullins 1929:195-196; *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* 1931; see also Adorian 1923).

Mullins' most eloquent exposition of religious liberty came before the Third

Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in Stockholm in 1923, in "The Baptist

Conception of Religious Liberty" (1923a). Here, liberty as non-coercion surfaced as

a major theme.   Mullins outlined what religious liberty excluded, what it included,

and what were the duties of those who defended it (1923a:68-72). In all that religious

liberty excluded,[32] coercion was the primary evil Mullins exposed. In all that

religious liberty implied,[33] the right to exercise one's faith before God, in the church

and in society without coercion and hindrance, was exalted. In the duties religious

liberty imposed upon believers, service—to and for the truth, to believers of other

faiths and to non-believers alike, to the state, and supremely to Jesus Christ—was the

central feature. Of the third duty—"to protect with all our souls against religious

oppression" (1923a:70)—Mullins echoed earlier Baptist witnesses, while connecting

it with his characteristic stress on individual freedom and direct access to God, when

he said:

> Baptists believe in religious liberty for themselves. But they believe in it
> equally for all men. With them it is not only a right; it is a passion. While we
> have no sympathy with atheism or agnosticism or materialism, we stand for
> the freedom of the atheist, agnostic and materialist in his religious or
> irreligious convictions. To God he stands or falls. He will render his account
> to the Eternal Judge, not to men. So also the Jew and the Catholic are entitled
> to protection in the exercise of their religious liberty. Baptists do not desire to
> share the errors of men, but we are, and ever have been, and ever will be
> passionate and devoted champions of the rights of men. The supreme and

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[32] Religious liberty excluded state authority in religion; mere religious toleration; the imposition of taxes for the support of religion; the imposition of religious creeds over conscientious objection; centralized ecclesiastical government; ecclesiastical and sacramental mediation in salvation; and proxy faith, best represented in the baptism of infants for their salvation (Mullins 1923a:68-69).

[33] Religious liberty implied the right of direct access to God in faith; the right to search for truth in religion; the right to propagate one's faith freely; the right of equal privileges in the church; the right to organize for religious purposes; and the right to demand protection from government for religion (Mullins 1923a:69-70).

inalienable right of all men is the right to direct and free and unhindered approach to God. (1923a:70-71)

Mullins' Denominational Witness

Chapter 3 of this dissertation will examine in greater detail key aspects of

Mullins' denominationalism and the light it sheds on his concept of the competency

of the soul in religion. In brief, Mullins argued in Chapter 2 of *The Axioms of*

Religion that the personal and spiritual nature of the kingdom of God imposed upon

ecclesiastical polity and practice a particular pattern that—by implication when read

in light of the remainder of the book—ran counter to the predominant interpretations

of the church found in Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism (1908a:27-

43).[34] Being the institutional embodiment of kingdom principles for practical

purposes, church polity thus carried within itself the very life of the Christian faith,

though it could be limiting and repressive if tied to church hierarchies and

sacramentalism (1908a:37). In the end, the kingdom had everything to do with

church polity, and polity had everything to do with the life of the church in the world.

Thus the Interior Kingdom and the Subversive Kingdom operated to define the

church for Mullins.[35]

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[34] The title of Chapter 2 in *The Axioms of Religion* is "Denominationalism in Terms of the Kingdom of God." His intention was to explore the relationship between "the churches" or "church organization" and the kingdom (1908a:27-28). Yet when Mullins spoke of the relationship of "the church" to the kingdom (1908a:35-37), he often referred to the local church or congregation (1908a:36). By denominationalism, Mullins was not thinking in terms of denominational organizations or bureaucracies, such as the Southern Baptist Convention or Northern Baptist Convention, but rather in terms of ecclesiastical models of church order. As he indicated in Chapter 1 of *The Axioms of Religion*, the two models which he saw as representing opposing viewpoints were the episcopal and the congregational (1908a:23-24). Chapter 2 was his biblical/theological apology for congregational church order.

[35] Mullins' description of the kingdom, greatly reflecting the Interior Model previously examined in this chapter (p. 39), also bore marks of the Subversive Model in the seven "spiritual laws" of the kingdom which Mullins attributed to it (1908a:38-41). These "laws" were the law of salvation, the law of worship, the law of filial service, the law of liberty, the law of interdependence and brotherhood, the

Overall Mullins, supremely a denominationalist in theology and sentiment ([n. d.]o:4-5), envisioned the Baptist denomination as a channel of witness and service to and for the world. He reminded Southern Baptists that, as Moses, Isaiah and the Apostle Paul were saved to deliver others, so God privileged and blessed them for service as well.

> So also the vision which God has given Southern Baptists is not for their entertainment. The wealth he has given them, the numbers he has given them, the influence he has given them, the principles he has entrusted to them, these are not merely to enrich them. They are to enrich the world. They are not given to us to keep, but to disseminate. Our privileges, our blessings, our visions are given to us for service. ([n. d.]m:2)

In Mullins' view, the Baptist denomination was to be a means, not an end, in the service of God's kingdom (1914a:11; Faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1929:14-15). Baptists could only realize God's plan for themselves as they remained loyal to Christ and his commandments, desirous to cooperate within their own denominational family, and open to cooperate with other Christian communions as long as this did not impair their own effectiveness and violate the Baptist conscience (Mullins 1918g). Arguing in support of missionary cooperation through the Southern Baptist Convention, Mullins stated: "The [Baptist] denomination exists to carry out the great commission. The church exists, not for its own sake, but for Christ's sake and for the redemption of the world. In proportion as we can transfer

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law of edification, and the law of holiness. In general, he found these laws to be opposed to episcopacy and sacramentalism embraced by the Roman Catholic Church and, to varying degrees, by all non-Baptist forms of Protestantism. In later portions of the book (1908a:94-126), Mullins argued that the Catholic and non-Baptist Protestant approaches to the sacraments and church order were in violation of Christ's revealed will in Scripture, even claiming them to be a form of "spiritual tyranny" (1908a:92, 94, 104, 105). As Mullins saw it, a congregational approach to the church not only answered to Christ's commands in Scripture, it also stood in stark contrast to the more widely-accepted episcopal form of church government.

the emphasis from mere self-preservation to self-giving for a lost world shall we reach thee [sic] New Testament standard" (1914a:11).

Mullins' vision of the kingdom as principally spiritual and countercultural (and somewhat transforming) interpreted the denomination to be an instrument of spiritual/social, ecclesiastical, and religious change in the world. In Chapter 3, I explore the implications of this change in light of Mullins' denominationalism as expressed in his soul competency concept.[36]

Conclusion

E. Y. Mullins lived during a time of tremendous change in American and world history. Being a product of his time, his witness reflected much of America's and American Protestantism's values and worldview. Using imperialist language common to his day, he described mission and the Christian faith at times in terms of power and conquest ([n. d.]f:7-11; [n. d.]m:2; 1914a:11), yet he viewed the church— "untrammeled by fetters which bind it to the intrigues and politics and to the varying fortunes of the State" (1908a:209)—fundamentally as a "dynamo" of righteousness and service in society (1908a:209-211). Viewing the poor and disadvantaged as objects of the church's social compassion and concern, he devoted his time to a number of humanitarian efforts and encouraged Baptists to do the same (Thompson 1982:47-51). Finding organic church union to be hazardous to the Baptist spirit, he nevertheless welcomed Christian cooperation for the cause of mission and world evangelism (Southern Baptist Convention 1914:76-77; Mullins, et al. [1919]:15). Standing up for religious liberty where it did not exist, he lent his voice to the pleas of

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[36] See Chapter 3, "Revisioning Baptist Identity with the World in View" (pp. 60-97).

fellow Baptists and others, such as those in Romania, who expressed the hope of religious freedom (Mullins 1929:195-196),[37] while defending the right of even the atheist to refuse to believe if the person so chose (Mullins 1923a:70). In each instance of his public or missional witness, Mullins trained his vision on the needs which he perceived the world to have and on the Baptist denomination's responsibility in meeting those needs.

By viewing Mullins' witness through the lens of the kingdom of God and within the context of his historical period, we see that his vision of God's purposes in the world, and of the world's greatest needs, revolved around the spiritual, the ecclesiastical, and the religious. He remained firmly opposed to anything—visible or invisible, personal or structural—that stood between the human person and God, including individual sin, governmental structures, and church hierarchies. Coercion, of whatever form, was considered among the world's greatest evils.[38] Only as the individual embraced God through a vital union with Christ by faith could social, civic, political, and industrial woes be eliminated. This approach and perspective to religion and faith guided his development and application of the principle which he

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[37] In terms of Mullins' political witness, he maintained an internationalist, rather than an isolationist, stance (1920d; 1922b). A supporter of the League of Nations (1920d), Mullins made his sentiments eminently clear in a sermon published in *The Baptist Observer*, September 21, 1922, where he remarked that America as a nation, and American Christians in particular, were evading their responsibility to provide moral, political, and spiritual leadership following World War I. "America," Mullins stated, "is on the pinnacle of the world's life, and she is in danger of making the fatal jump by ignoring her moral obligation to mankind. We are living in a fool's paradise in our vain delusion that we can live a separate life" (1922b:2).

[38] Mullins' comment, in connection with war and spoken during World War I, clarifies his strong views against coercion: "This affirmation [of the individual] sheds light also upon the slow progress of the world. War is the worst of our foes as men. It keeps on recurring at intervals. We hope now to abolish it. But even war is better than coercion for mankind. Men must *learn* wisdom. They must *choose* peace. They must grow spiritually into brotherhood. These things cannot be imposed upon men" ([n. d.]g:3; emphasis original).

introduced to Baptists in 1906, "the competency of the soul in religion." To an examination of Mullins' development and use of this concept we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

Revisioning Baptist Identity with the World in View

Martin E. Marty (University of Chicago Divinity School) has commonly
described the American Christian denomination of the late 19th and early 20th
centuries as a "sheltering canopy," a socio-religious structure which afforded
denominational loyalists not only protection and nurture for their own faith tradition
but also—as befitting a canopy with open sides for free ingress and egress—greater
ecumenical openness and cooperation among the Christian traditions (1986:150-156).
The problem with this model, Marty observed, was that it "did not square with old
rationales for denominational integrity. It led to some confusion for that integrity"
(1986:152).

While E. Y. Mullins possessed a certain ecumenical outlook, he was, above all
else, a decided denominationalist, committed to preserving denominational integrity
because, as he put it, the "denominational group" stood for the "highest known form
of Christian efficiency" and was the "most effective means for spreading
Christianity" [n. d.]o:4-5). For this reason, he called on the denominations to revisit
their distinctives (1908a:11-26; 1920a). Writing two years after World War I, he
remarked:

> It is fitting that the various denominations should in this portentous era of
> change take stock of their resources and position and seek to relate themselves
> to the great world and its needs. No denomination of Christians has a
> monopoly of all the truth or all the good things in the Kingdom of God. Most
> of them have put the emphasis upon certain elements of Christianity and have
> made their contribution to the world's life in this particular direction. It will
> be very profitable if all the denominations can survey the field at large as well
> as their own field. (1920a:402)

As a Baptist by conviction as well as by heritage (Mullins 1997[1926]:268, 270), Mullins felt that his own tradition was well suited to meet the needs of the contemporary world (1905b:4), provided that Baptists could guard against isolating their message by overemphasizing the church, weakening the faith by underemphasizing the church, ignoring ecumenical cooperation, making Christianity an intellectual rather than a spiritual enterprise, and failing to incorporate a social consciousness in their evangelistic witness (1911a). During the latter years of his life, Mullins concentrated his attention on the communication and application of Baptist principles to the war-torn environment of Europe,[1] convinced that the continent's chaotic situation, its slow but sure acceptance of religious liberty, the rise of the individual, the failure of church and state autocracy, the spread of democratic values, and other factors all presented the denomination with unprecedented opportunities for service (1921b; [n. d.]a). In general, Mullins believed the Baptist denomination to be a "means" to the larger "ends" of the kingdom (1914a) and an important key to God's purposes in the world (1925b:2). Significantly, he identified the Baptist message of the competency of the soul in religion and the concomitant axioms of religion as being both "broad as Christianity and as deep as human need" (1926b).

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[1] Though the political and religious scene in Europe did on occasion occupy Mullins' thoughts prior to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 (Mullins 1911a: 347-348), it tended to dominate his writing during and after the war's end, such as: "Nietzsche and His Doctrine" (1915c); "The Church in the Present World Crisis" (1917b); "The Church's Message for the Coming Time" (1918b); "Baptist Theology in the New World Order" (1920a); "A Baptist Opportunity in Europe" (1921b); "[The Baptist Program Outlined]: 6. Its Application to Present World Conditions" (1921c); "Trailing the Indigenous Church" (1921m; 1921n); "The Moral Side of America's World Position" (1922b); "Southern Baptists at a Crucial Hour" (1922d); "The Dangers and Duties of the Present Hour" (1923e); "God and the War" (1924b); "The Baptist Message" ([n. d.]a); and "The Churches and the Problem of Reconstruction" ([n. d.]d) (by their tone as well as their location in the Mullins' file in the James P. Boyce Centennial Library at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the two undated papers in this list date to the early 1920s).

This chapter examines Mullins' understanding of the competency of the soul in religion, or soul competency, as a critical revision of his denominational tradition aimed at focusing that tradition outwardly on the world and its needs. Baptist observers have frequently interpreted soul competency as an important revision or restatement of the Baptist faith (Thomas 1963; Humphreys 1990:335; Shurden 1998:322-323, 338) which reflected that tradition's unequivocal stance against religious coercion (Shurden 1998:331). To be sure, it was this, but much more as well. By showing how soul competency functioned within Mullins' larger denominationalism, this chapter argues that his revision was not simply a statement about who Baptists are, but rather a statement about what Baptists are to do in terms of their public witness in the world. Specifically, the chapter clarifies the larger denominational framework within which Mullins positioned and developed his concept, the manner in which he used soul competency within his Baptist theology, and those elements in his denominational tradition that the concept re-envisioned.

The Axioms of Religion: Context, Motive, and Aim

Soul competency received its clearest and most complete treatment in Mullins' 1908 book, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (1908a). Baptist theologian Fisher Humphreys describes it as Mullins' most original book and one that defined Baptist identity in the 20th century more than any other (1990:335-337). Clearly, soul competency cannot be understood apart from the revisioning agenda of Mullins' most seminal published work.

The "Axioms of Religion" in Context

In his overview of the metamorphosis of American denominationalism over the past 300 to 400 years, Methodist historian Russell Richey (Duke University) outlines five stages or styles through which the denominations evolved (1994).[2] The third style, which he calls "Churchly Denominationalism" (1994:82-84), encompassed the historical period in which Mullins first developed his denominational perspectives. This third style—in contrast to the "purposive denominationalism" of the second stage and its sense of pietism, revivalism, and nation-building (1994:80-82)—evidenced denominational introspection and debate over issues like church tradition and principles, denominational legitimacy, ecclesiological principles, polity, and others. This period lasted into the early 20th century when the fourth, or "Corporate Organization," stage of denominationalism refocused the denominations' attention outward on institutional, professional, and ecumenical efforts at global mission (1994:84-86).

William Owen Carver (1868-1954), long-time professor of comparative religion and mission at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1896-1943) and Mullins' colleague and friend, suggests that Mullins was—along with himself— sensitive to the denominational introspection of the early 20th century and therefore anxious to reorient the denomination toward larger concerns.[3] Carver shared these

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[2] These five stages are: ethnic voluntarism, purposive missionary association, churchly denominationalism, corporate organization, and postdenominational confessionalism (1994:77-90).

[3] In his 1993 dissertation on E. Y. Mullins and soul competency, William Carrell understands the historical context of Mullins' "axioms of religion" theme as being the Baptist quest for historical identity in light of the 19th century Landmark movement, the "Whitsitt Controversy" of the mid-to-late 1890s that unveiled the fallacies of that movement (1993:27-41; see Shurden [1995:39-52] for additional historical background), and Mullins' missionary and ecumenical concerns driving him to demonstrate the universality of Baptist principles (1993:42-47).

thoughts in his book *Out of His Treasure: Unfinished Memoirs* (1956), in which he briefly referred to Mullins' "axioms of religion" theme while discussing his own 1907 book, *Baptist Opportunity* (1907), itself originally being a paper that Carver had given a year earlier at the Baptist Pastors' Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

In his memoirs, Carver described his 1906 paper as a response to "a widespread revolutionary movement of that period and the stirring of new life in the various evangelical denominations." He noted that the formation of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905 and the Laymen's Movement for Foreign Missions in 1906 led Baptists and the larger church respectively to ponder anew the "impact of Christianity on the world's life" (1956:108), and challenged them "to define and, where necessary, to re-define their principles and message with a view to making effective contribution to the new era in evangelical Christianity" (1956:108).[4]

Within this context of denominational contribution to the "world's life," Carver specifically cited Mullins' "axioms of religion" contribution (1956:109) from his 1905 London speech, "The Theological Trend" (Mullins 1905d),[5] and from his book, *The Axioms of Religion* (Mullins 1908a). Carver judged "The Theological Trend" to be "one of the greatest addresses" of Mullins' career and his 1908 book to be his "greatest published work" (1956:109). In Carver's view, Mullins' London address "laid hold upon basic teachings and implications of the Christian gospel and

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[4] Throughout Carver's original 1906 speech and contained in his 1907 book, *Baptist Opportunity*, he punctuated his remarks with references to the period as "the greatest opportunity in history" for Baptists (1907:11), the "day of ascendancy of the Baptist doctrine" (1907:14), and a "peculiar opportunity for Baptists" (1907:58). In his mind, world conditions promoting the worth of the individual, democracy, religious freedom, the demand for a simpler (as opposed to a creedal and hierarchical) Christianity, and others made it particularly promising for the Baptist faith.

[5] Carver mistakenly called Mullins' 1905 address, "Axioms of Religion" (1956:109). In this address, Mullins simply listed, but did not explain, his six original axioms of religion (1905d:520-521).

the Christian movement and stated them in each instance in terms of the Baptist understanding but without the Baptist label and without formal polemic spirit" (1956:109). Carver implied that Mullins' thought, like his own, took seriously the opportunity and responsibility that Baptists had before them in this new climate of missional enthusiasm (1956:108-109).

Carver captured an important element of Mullins' thinking regarding soul competency and the religious axioms. Mullins' 1908 book, *The Axioms of Religion*, clearly evidenced a desire to move the Baptist denomination toward a more responsive engagement with the world. In his view, continual recourse to competition, controversy, and "propagandism" (1908a:18) as a means of denominational justification no longer served any real purpose. Baptists were not primarily defined by their polity and ordinances,[6] but instead by certain "essential elements" inherent in the Baptist message for the good of the world (1908a:26, 70-74). This attitude permeated the pivotal first chapter of *The Axioms of Religion*.

The Motive and Aim of *The Axioms of Religion*

In the first sentence of the Preface to *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins pointed to Chapter 1, "The New Test of Denominationalism" (1908a:11-26), as essential to the book's overall concern, writing: "The motives which led to the preparation of this volume are set forth in the first chapter" (Mullins 1908a:7). In the following paragraph, he explained that the book's aim was to outline "New Testament Christianity" as Baptists understood it, because God had given to "the Baptists of the

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[6] Preoccupation with church polity and the Christian ordinances was one of the features of Richey's "Churchly Denominationalism" period (see this chapter, p. 63). During this period, Baptists frequently appealed to their own unique doctrinal perspectives (see Chapter 1, p. 26, footnote # 45).

world a great and sublime task in the promulgation of principles on the preservation

of which the spiritual and political hopes of the world depend" (1908a:8).

These brief comments point to a number of conclusions. First, Mullins wrote

Chapter 1 on denominationalism[7] as an important key for interpreting the book's

material. Second, he intended his book to speak not simply for Baptists in America,

but for Baptists worldwide. For his purposes in this book, the Baptist denomination

did not denote a particular organization or convention but instead represented a

specific Christian movement or tradition. Third, Mullins wanted to show the

relationship between Baptist "principles" and their importance for the world. Fourth,

the theology presented in the book was not of a systematic or academic sort, but of a

practical or pragmatic nature, intent on showing how the Baptist faith could make a

difference in the lives of others.[8] Finally, Mullins' hinted at his desire to see that the

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[7] Later interpreters of Mullins' book, in their attempt to re-present its concepts for a new day, do not always carry forward Mullins' denominational concerns in Chapter 1. Harold W. Tribble's 1935 adaptation of Mullins' book, called *The Baptist Faith* (Mullins and Tribble 1935), relocated Mullins' original denominational concern within a more biblical-theological framework by placing the gist of his first chapter within the material of his second chapter on the kingdom of God (1935:7-20). Tribble's book also obscured the original book's ultimate aim—anticipated in Mullins' first chapter (1908a:26)—by eliminating the latter's final chapter on "Baptists and World Progress" (1908a:277-308). For his part, Bill Thomas (1963) barely mentioned Mullins' first two chapters in his haste to explain the meaning of soul competency and the axioms of religion as Mullins' "polemic theology" (1963:341). Recently, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president R. Albert Mohler reissued an exact reproduction of Mullins' original 1908 work *minus* the book's final five chapters—which deal with the practical application of soul competency to more global concerns (1908a:212-308)—without signaling this omission (Mohler 1997).

[8] Mullins favored, though not uncritically (1908b; 1913a:162), the pragmatic "method" (1913a:153) of knowing, arguing that it denied that knowledge was the product of abstract or pure reason, and that it singled out the human will as an important factor in all knowledge, including religious knowledge (1913a:151-155). Mullins also recognized the moral and religious value of pragmatism in that it placed ethical conduct as primary and thought as secondary to human life; it validated the reality of faith by acknowledging that all forms of human knowledge—including the scientific, the philosophic, and the religious—rested upon faith awaiting verification; and it emphasized human freedom (1908a:512-514). The person thus knows, Mullins believed, through the engagement of the will, the emotions, and the intellect with life (1913a:161-162). For Mullins, the pursuit of knowledge was not merely a process of the mind but rather one that shaped life and was shaped by life.

principles he would outline in the book be "promulgated" or disseminated by fellow Baptists for the sake of the world.

Mullins opened Chapter 1 by referring to denominationalism as the "characteristic expression of Christianity on its ecclesiastical side" since the time of the Protestant Reformation (1908a:12). He urged all denominations to reexamine themselves in light of certain contemporary "problems of adjustment," "practical conditions," or "new emergencies" they all faced. The forces of history were upon them, he believed, but history was not to be feared; indeed, these forces served to make clearer the meaning and intent of Scripture, thus demanding that Scripture be interpreted in ways that met human need in history (1908a:12-13). In other words, the denominations had the dual responsibility of interpreting historical events in light of Scripture and of reading Scripture in light of historical events, with the common aim of meeting world need.

Mullins identified five adjustments or problems confronting his day's denominational world: (1) increasing doctrinal divisions; (2) the problem of Christian union; (3) the proper relationship between evangelism and social service; (4) the question of Western church polity in Eastern missionary fields; and (5) finally, as a "matter of far-reaching significance" (1908a:18), the need of each denomination to renounce interdenominational controversy and, instead, to discover "some motive or incentive or cohesive principle" within itself that was strong enough to unify it, extend its usefulness, and promote denominational "self-respect" (1908a:19-20).[9]

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[9] Though Mullins made no direct reference with this statement to his principle of "soul competency" as that "cohesive principle" for Baptists, his reference to "denominational self-respect" recalled his earlier 1906 address on soul competency before Virginia Baptists, where he claimed that it afforded Baptists with "denominational self-respect" (1906c:6), thus exposing his thinking here.

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Baptists faced their own unique set of problems, Mullins believed, related to their growing wealth and influence, the difficulty of balancing interdependence with independence in church life, and the challenge of anti-institutional elements in the denomination (1908a:21-23).

This discussion of specific problems facing the denominations led Mullins to peer intently into church order or polity and its relationship to these problems (1908a:23-25). For the two major church polities—which he identified as the episcopal and the congregational[10]—to address these problems, they had to pass two "tests": the test of fidelity to "New Testament ideals and principles" and the test of ability to "accomplish the enlarging task of Christianity in the world" (1908a:24). Passing the second or "practical" test meant correctly deciding which of the following choices best represented Christianity to the world: episcopacy or democracy; "systems of corporate authority or those of corporate freedom"; the church as a body of "spiritual equals" or of superiors and inferiors; and trust in the laity and the clergy or trust placed only in "clerical superiors" (1908a:25). This led Mullins to disclose fully the reason for his book:

> Now it is the conviction of the present writer that the time has come for the various Christian bodies to give a fresh account of themselves to the world, and in an entirely new way. The questions should be not one of past service merely, but of fitness for present service. The question of conformity to Scripture properly understood always involves the total question of conformity to racial needs and advancing civilization. Is there flexibility and elasticity or is there rigidity and petrefaction? Is Christianity conceived as a rule or as a principle? Are the tests those of life or those of the square and compass? Do the church polities contain in themselves heterogeneous and

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[10] The usual classification to distinguish the various church polities are three: the espiscopal, the presbyterial, and the congregational. In Chapter 1 of *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins actually joined the episcopal and presbyterial together in an apparent attempt not only to distinguish all other church polities from congregationalism but also to argue that congregational polity better reflected the spirit of the New Testament and more practically addressed the changing needs of the world (1908a:24).

alien elements or are they in harmony with the genius and spirit as well as the express teachings of the New Testament? What contributions have the various polities to make to the subjects discussed in the preceding pages, such as missions, social service, Christian union, evangelism, civic righteousness, and family life, and others?

The aim of this book is to make this statement from the point of view of the Baptists. What is the distinctive message of the Baptists to the world? How far does our simple congregational polity embody the essential things in New Testament Christianity and to what extent is it adapted to the present and future progress of the gospel on earth? (1908a:25-26)

Mullins clearly believed that the way the church organized itself in the world

could make a difference in its ability and effectiveness to respond to the crises which

the world faced. With this in mind, he moved in Chapter 2, "Denominationalism in

Terms of the Kingdom of God" (1908a:27-43), to outline his view of the kingdom of

God *in order to* argue that church polity *must* conform to the kingdom. As he put it,

the church was "the institutional embodiment of the principles and ideals of the

kingdom for practical purposes" (1908a:36). The kingdom, he believed, impressed its

ideals on the church's total life, including its polity—for "under certain conditions,"

church polity involved "the very life of Christianity itself" (1908a:37)—which in turn

could properly serve the needs of the world. For Mullins, church polity was not an

issue of doctrine alone—much less was it a question of mere expediency

(1908a:27)—but it was at heart a practical matter which determined the church's

ability for service in the world.[11] Yet the issue, Mullins insisted, was not to rehash

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[11] On the significance of church polity in Baptist thought Alan P. F. Sell, professor of Christian Doctrine and Philosophy of Religion and director of the Center for the Study of British Christian Thought at the United Theological College, Aberystwyth, Wales, remarks: "It would be a serious mistake to suppose that among Baptists (or among heirs of Old Dissent generally) polity is to doctrine as rules are to constitution. On the contrary, the polity is doctrinal; it is ecclesiology. In particular, it is a churchly working out of such interrelated themes as the covenanted saints of God, the regenerating power of the Spirit, and the Lordship of Christ" (1999:24). Free Church theologian Miroslav Volf brings out this same point when, in reference to the theology of early English Separatist and later Baptist John Smyth, he writes "Differently than for the Reformers, the English Separatists did not consider questions of church organization to be part of the ecclesiological *adiaphora*. According to

old arguments about polity and the ordinances, but it was about explaining the

principles that lay behind their polity and what enabled it to meet the challenges of

the world (1908a:26).

In summary, Mullins' presentation in Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Axioms of*

Religion states the problem with which he wished to deal: how the Baptist faith,

concretely represented in its congregational polity, could meet the challenges and

issues facing the church and the world of his day. His presentation, then, was an

attempt to connect the Baptist faith with world need as he understood and interpreted

it. Yet he was not interested merely in defending the biblical and doctrinal integrity

of Baptist denominational polity. More true to his purposes was the need to uncover

the principles which buttressed that polity and which made the Baptist denomination

useful and contributed to its self-respect (1908a:18-20), in order to demonstrate the

Baptist denomination as having a real and important role to play in addressing the

practical needs facing the church and the world. Soul competency and the

accompanying axioms of religion represented those principles.

Soul Competency as Personal Conviction

Mullins unveiled the concept of the competency of the soul in religion in an

address before the Virginia Baptist Historical Society in November 1906 entitled

"The Historical Significance of the Baptists" (1906c). Identifying it as Baptists'

"historical significance" and their "conception of Christianity" (1906c:5), the 46-

year-old seminary president claimed that soul competency was "deeply imbedded" in

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Smyth, 'Gods word doth absolutely describe vnto vs the only true shape of a true visible church'"
(1998:132). From the denomination's beginning polity has been central to the Baptist view of the
Christian faith, a point to which Mullins' presentation in *The Axioms of Religion* attests.

their "historical struggle for religious liberty" (1906c:4), was rooted in the

individual's creation in the image of God, and was the summary of progressive

civilization (1906c:6). A few days later, he sought to "enlarge" and "complete" his

first presentation in a second address before Virginia Baptists on "A New Defense of

the Baptist Position" (1906e) by explaining the axioms of religion (1906e).[12] Shortly

thereafter, he developed in greater detail the meaning of soul competency and the

religious axioms in the aforementioned book, *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a). From

this point, and throughout his career, Mullins continued to allude to and, to some

extent, develop the meaning of his vision.[13]

The Meaning of Soul Competency in Mullins' Theology

      Mullins made little distinction between "the competency of the soul" and the

"axioms of religion." He spoke of their relationship in the closest of terms,

describing soul competency as the axioms' "mother principle" and the religious

axioms as "springing from the soul's competency in religion" (1923c:539; see also

1908a:73).[14] Mullins also understood soul competency and congregational polity to

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[12] For the six (later seven) axioms of religion, see this chapter, p. 73.

[13] Additional locations where Mullins referenced and refined the concept of soul competency and the axioms of religion include: "Pronouncement on Christian Union and Denominational Efficiency," 1914 (Southern Baptist Convention 1914); "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists," 1919 (Mullins, et al. [1919]); "Baptist Theology in the New World Order," 1920 (1920a); "The Contribution of Baptists to the Interpretation of Christianity," 1923 (1923c); "The Future Tasks of the Baptists," 1925 (1925b); "Why I Am a Baptist," 1926 (Mullins 1997[1926]); and "Baptist Life in the World's Life," 1928 (1928a). The principles implied in soul competency can also be found throughout Mullins' corpus of writings, as the bulk of the current chapter attests.

[14] It is significant to note the chronological relationship between soul competency and the axioms of religion. Although Mullins had anticipated for years interpreting the Baptist faith in terms of religious "axioms" (1901e; 1908a:7; Thomas 1963:337-338), and although he had twice sketched in outline form the six axioms of religion in 1905 (first before the American Baptist Publication Society in St. Louis in June [1905a] and at the first Baptist World Congress in London in July [1905d]), he did not explain their meaning until after he had introduced the concept of soul competency before Virginia Baptists in November 1906 in a paper entitled, "A New Defense of the Baptist Position" (1906e). Then, in 1908, he provided his more complete explanation in *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a:70-211).

exist in mutual agreement, with the latter visibly expressing the ideals and values of

both soul competency and the religious axioms (1908a:26, 71-73).

Taken together, the references in Mullins' writings to soul competency and

the axioms of religion illuminate a number of interrelated ideas. The competency of

the soul in religion essentially is the capacity that God has given to every person, by

virtue of being created in the image of God, to relate to God directly without the state,

the church or other entity—either individual or corporate—interposing itself between

that person and God (Mullins 1908a:53-56, 58, 103-104; Mullins 1923c:536; see also

Mullins 1913a:288-302). The soul's competency is "under God" and "in Christ"

(1908a:68), meaning that the divine-human relationship does not rest on the

competency of the human person but only on God and through Christ. It also means

that God's approach to humanity is possible only on the basis of a person's "divinely-

constituted human nature" and in accord with the person's mental and moral abilities

(1908a:68).

Human competency encompasses both an individual as well as a social

competency (Mullins 1906c:5). It involves the individual, social and political

conscience of the person (Mullins 1908a:277-308) and, in the church, competency

points to the values of freedom and equality for all believers (1908a:55-56, 134).[15]

This shows that, though the first six axioms of religion preceded soul competency by over a year, they found their meaning only in light of the soul competency concept. For this reason, references to "the axioms of religion" or the "religious axioms" in this dissertation necessarily encompass the concept of soul competency as well.

[15] Mullins often used the notion of "democracy" in *The Axioms of Religion* to describe the meaning of congregational polity, especially in the context of the ecclesiastical axiom (1908a:127-149). One of the meanings assigned to it was the idea of spiritual freedom and spiritual equality (1908a:134) in a body where Christ could direct his people by his Spirit in accord with his revealed will in Scripture (1908a:55-56). Democracy carried with it distinct biblical/theological implications, not simply political connotations.

"Competency" also extends to God as well. in that Jesus Christ represents the "divine competency," that is, Christ is the means by which God relates to humanity and humanity relates to God (1908a:68).

When coupled with the "axioms of religion," soul competency demonstrates the extent of the divine-human and human-human relations comprehended by the term. The axioms of religion are: (1) The Theological Axiom: The holy and loving God has a right to be sovereign; (2) The Religious Axiom: All people have an equal right to direct access to God; (3) The Ecclesiastical Axiom: All believers have a right to equal privileges in the church; (4) The Moral Axiom: To be responsible the soul [person] must be free; (5) The Religio-Civic Axiom: A free church in a free state; (6) The Social Axiom: Love your neighbor as yourself; and (7) The Political or Civic Axiom: The sovereignty of the state resides in the citizen (Mullins 1908a:79-167; Mullins 1923c:393; Mullins 1926b).[16] In essence, the axioms of religion exalt God's sovereignty and mercy, human freedom and equality in the church, and the moral and social responsibility of the individual Christian and the church in the world.

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[16] Mullins added the seventh axiom in 1923 (1923c:393). Of the original six axioms, the order in which he presented them changed the first four times he discussed them: (1) in his Spring 1905 address in St. Louis before the American Baptist Publication Society, the order was: the theological axiom; the religious axiom; the moral axiom; the ecclesiastical axiom; the social axiom; and the religio-civic axiom (1905a:[13]); (2) in his July 1905 presentation before the Baptist World Congress in London, the moral and ecclesiastical axioms switched positions, with the other four axioms following the original order (1905d:520); (3) in his 1906 paper before Virginia Baptists called, "A New Defense of the Baptist Position," he returned to the first ordering of the axioms (1906e:4); and (4) the fourth presentation, given in Mullins' 1908 book, *The Axioms of Religion*, changed the order to that which appears above (1908:79-167, 185-211). Mullins' final full presentation in 1923 kept the order he used in his 1908 book (1923c:539-540). The only two axioms to remain in their original position through the years were the first two, possibly indicating their primacy to the others (although in the 1919 "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists" [Mullins, et al. (1919)], Mullins' list substituted the theological axiom with soul competency itself [(1919):13], for reasons not readily apparent). If this is the case, then the contention that soul competency spoke primarily of human freedom rather than God's freedom, as Paul Harrison argues (1959:17-37), is questionable; rather, in almost all cases Mullins set the pattern for what soul competency meant by placing God's nature and action toward humanity as the first religious axiom.

Soul competency does not deny human interdependence within the church nor the important role of other believers as mediators between God and the individual person. The individual, argued Mullins, "finds himself only as he finds his true relations to his brother man" ([n. d.]c:5), an idea that complimented his conviction that God reached out in salvation and sanctification to the individual only by means of divinely-chosen human as well as non-human mediators (1908a:32, 84-89; 1917a:346). References to the individual as being "alone with God" (Mullins 1908a:60) or allusions to "the lonely soul and the only God" (Mullins 1925b:13) in the context of soul competency are warnings against the intrusion of ecclesiastical systems or rituals between a person and God in ways that coerce faith without honoring personal choice. God's approach to humanity always occurs in terms of persuasion rather than coercive power (1908a:32, 84-86). Individuals or groups who stand between God and the individual are guilty of spiritual tyranny (1908a:92, 94, 104, 105).

Congregational polity visibly expresses the meaning of soul competency in the world (1908a:128-131). The principles involved in soul competency—particularly the second religious axiom of direct relations between God and the individual person—foster a "creative type" of denominationalism that stresses personal responsibility for one's faith and denies anyone else the right to make faith decisions on another's behalf (Mullins 1925b:13; Mullins 1928a:301-302). Far from being reserved for Baptists alone, soul competency and the religious axioms are fundamental New Testament principles that, when applied to situations facing the

church and the world, are capable of contributing to global progress and kingdom advance (1908a:212-308; Mullins 1920a).

Throughout his career, Mullins never wavered in his conviction that soul competency and the axioms of religion represented the essence of what it meant to be Baptist. Only a few months before his death Mullins wrote, "The fundamental principle of Christianity, as Baptists understand it, is the direct relation of the individual soul to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The individual is directly related to God through Christ in all matters of religion" (1928b:356).[17]

Baptists' "Historical Significance"

Mullins, though, did not view soul competency as a new Baptist doctrine. Instead, he insisted that it was foremost a historical concern for Baptists. In an address before South Carolina Baptists entitled "The Principle of Baptist Progress," Mullins explained his understanding of human history and the seminal role of the divine element within the progress of history. History, he reasoned, did not lie under human control nor respond simply to the human will. Rather, history was like a flower which, though cultivated by human hands, nevertheless owed its development to an inner "vital principle" that, over time, revealed the flower's true beauty and

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[17] Bill Thomas concluded that Mullins at times "lapsed" from his singular emphasis on soul competency to stress the lordship of Jesus Christ—or "obedience to Jesus Christ"—as Baptists' basic article of faith (1963:343-344, footnote # 31). Indeed, it is true that Mullins wrote that Christ's lordship was the best way of stating "the fundamental Baptist purpose" in practical terms ([n. d.]o:3). As well, in another place Mullins asserted that the central Baptist "claim" was the idea of the New Testament as the sole guide and authority in their faith (1921l). However, Mullins' assertions concerning the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures were not shifts or lapses in his thinking. For instance, in *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins denied that "[o]bedience to Christ's will as revealed in the Scriptures" was the "all-inclusive Baptist principle" (1908a:51). Elsewhere, he placed the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Scriptures within the framework of soul competency to interpret them as convictions which arise within the individual rather than as doctrines imposed from the outside (1923c:536). Soul competency remained Mullins' fundamental conviction because it interpreted and comprehended all aspects of the faith (1908a:56-57).

perfection ([n. d.]k:2). Within human history, that vital principle was God. Baptist

progress meant developing a "clearer consciousness" of the denomination's "historic

mission" in line with this principle. "What is our constructive mission to the human

race?" Mullins asked. "What are we in the world to do?" ([n. d.]k:2).

In 1908, Mullins described the competency of the soul in religion in this way:

> The sufficient statement of the historical significance of the Baptists is this:
> The competency of the soul in religion. Of course this means a competency
> under God, not a competency in the sense of human self-sufficiency. There is
> no reference here to the question of sin and human ability in the moral and
> theological sense, nor in the sense of independence of the Scriptures. I am not
> here stating the Baptist creed. On many vital matters of doctrine, such as the
> atonement, the person of Christ, and others Baptists are in substantial
> agreement with the evangelical world in general. It is the historical
> significance of the Baptists I am stating, not a Baptist creed. (1908a:53)

Fifteen years later, Mullins referred to soul competency as the historic Baptist

"contribution" to the interpretation of Christianity (1923c), and finally in 1926 as

"one great principle which expresses the historical attitude of the Baptists" (Mullins

1997[1926]:276). History, not doctrine, is the key to understanding the meaning of

soul competency.

What Mullins meant by rooting soul competency in Baptist history is made

clear in his address before Virginia Baptists called "The Historical Significance of the

Baptists" (1906c). Within the first few minutes of his paper, Mullins claimed that

"the historical significance of the Baptists" was "deeply imbedded" in Baptists'

"historical struggle for religious liberty" (1906c:4). What he meant was that, in soul

competency, Baptists held a view of Christianity that favorably disposed them to

engage in that struggle (1908a:5). In his view, persecution did not drive Baptists to

fight for religious liberty, nor did its supposed inevitability due to colonial America's

many religious faiths, nor did the fact that the world was ready for it. Instead, what

drove Baptists to defend religious liberty was their prior commitment to the ideals

inherent in soul competency. For Mullins, soul competency was in essence a

platform for action upon which Baptists engaged in the battle for religious freedom in

the United States. Not as a doctrine did soul competency stand out, but as an

approach or "attitude" (Mullins 1997[1926]:276) that oriented their thinking and

action in the world.

Through the years, the meaning of soul competency has evolved in the minds

of Baptist interpreters. In 1913, Rev. W. C. Bitting called it "the fundamental Baptist

position" (1913). For Rev. Chester Ralston in 1914, it was the Baptist "apologetic"

(1914a; 1914b). A few years after Mullins' death, Professor Harold Tribble of

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary viewed it as practically synonymous with the

whole of "the Baptist faith" (Mullins and Tribble 1935).[18] Later, he attempted to lend

it increased theological legitimacy in his article "The Competency of the Individual in

Religion" (1944) by addressing somewhat systematically its relation to "true

religion." In time, as soul competency grew in importance and stature, Baptists began

to include it in their faith statements.[19] Many Baptists eventually came to embrace

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[18] Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Harold W. Tribble published in 1935 a revision of *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* and titled it *The Baptist Faith* (Mullins and Tribble 1935).

[19] Baptist faith statements which reference soul competency include: the "Pronouncement on Religious Liberty" by the National Baptist Convention, the Northern Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention in 1939 (Shurden 1993:81); the Southern Baptist Convention's "Statement of Principles" from 1945 (Southern Baptist Convention 1945) and 1946 (Southern Baptist Convention 1946); the "Preamble" of the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention's "Baptist Faith and Message" (Baker 1966:205-207); and the 1964 statement, "Baptist Ideals" (Shurden 1993:105). Of interest is the fact that the original "Baptist Faith and Message," adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925 with Mullins serving as the chair of committee which authored it and recommended its adoption (Southern Baptist Convention 1925), did not include soul competency in any part of the document, whereas every revision of that document—those published in 1963, 1998 and 2000—have all included

the competency of the soul in religion as one of their most enduring principles or

doctrines, interpreting its meaning in a variety of ways.[20] Interestingly enough, some

who have accepted the legitimacy of soul competency as an identifying characteristic

of the Baptist faith have failed to give Mullins credit for it, sometimes leading to false

conclusions and impressions about it.[21]

Mullins' Personal Conviction

Though at times he referred to soul competency as a "doctrine" (1908a:57,

63), Mullins did not develop it as a formal statement within his theological system on

a par with the doctrines of God, the Scriptures, salvation, and other Christian beliefs.

He did not mention soul competency in his 1917 theology text, *The Christian*

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references to it in their "Preambles." See Chapter 7, p. 196, for the history behind its inclusion in the
2000 version of "The Baptist Faith and Message."

[20] American Baptist historian Robert Torbet places soul competency in his list of "Baptist principles"
as synonymous with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believer (1950:24). Baptist historian Walter
Shurden interprets it in the context of "soul freedom," or religious liberty, as one of Baptists' "four
fragile freedoms" (1993). In *Defining Baptist Convictions* (Deweese 1996), Baptist historian Leon
McBeth also understands it in line with the priesthood of all believers (1996:62-70), while Shurden
distinguishes it as a "Baptist Affirmation" rather than a "Baptist Attitude" or "Baptist Action"
(1996:12). More recently, Baptist executive Gary Parker decried its devaluation in the 2000 version of
the Southern Baptist "Baptist Faith and Message" ([2000]:2-4), while Baptist leaders Grady Cothen
and James Dunn featured it (in the context of "soul freedom") as the "Baptist battle cry" (Cothen and
Dunn 2000).

[21] Among those who have interpreted soul competency without referencing Mullins or Mullins'
authorship of the concept are Ralston (1914a), Brown (1921), Tribble (1944), Torbet (1950), Harrison
(1959), Grenz (1985) and Mauldin (1999). Failing to do so can lead to one of two problems. First, it
can give the false impression that the concept predates Mullins in Baptist history. Mullins at times
contributed to this misunderstanding, arguing that its core teachings and principles were found in the
New Testament (1908a:74) and that they were practiced in early American Baptist history (1906c:4-5)
(see Bloom 1992:206). Yet there is no indication that Mullins intended to convey the idea that the
phrase "the competency of the soul in religion" predated its introduction in 1906, only that its core
ideas were found in Christian Scripture and history. Second, by avoiding Mullins in any explanation
of soul competency, it becomes easy to misread it, as does Paul Harrison in *Authority and Power in the
Free Church Tradition* (1959). Here, the author implies that soul competency—in the context of soul
freedom—speaks only of human freedom rather than God's freedom (1959:17-35; see this chapter, p.
73, footnote # 16). Yet, Mullins positioned soul competency and the axioms of religion within a
theocentric framework from the start by arguing that soul competency was "under God" (1908a:53)
and by beginning his religious axioms with the theological axiom, which reads "the holy and loving
God has a right to be sovereign" (1908a:79-91).

Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression, although the book shares many of the ideas that

are integral to soul competency, such as religion being the direct relationship between

the individual and God (1917a:152, 167). He did not include it as a doctrinal item in

his short book on *Baptist Beliefs* (1912a). Also, soul competency did not appear in

any list of Baptist doctrines which he authored or co-authored.[22]

Although Mullins did draw out theological and practical implications of soul

competency in *The Axioms of Religion*, he did not provide an extensive biblical,

theological, or philosophical discussion of the concept apart from his chapter on the

kingdom of God (1908a:27-43).[23] He claimed that soul competency assumed

humanity's creation in God's image and that Christian theism was the concept's basic

philosophy (1908a:58), yet he did not provide an explanation of his thinking. In fact,

his discussion of the concept itself—apart from his treatment of the religious

axioms—consisted of only 20 short pages in his book, *The Axioms of Religion*

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[22] See Chapter 1, p. 5, for the Baptist confessional statements to which Mullins contributed. Soul competency and the religious axioms do appear in the 1919 statement, "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists" (Mullins, et al. [1919]:13; see also this chapter, p. 73 [footnote # 16]). However, the "Fraternal Address" does not include them in the list of Southern Baptists' "peculiar beliefs and observances," this list referring specifically to their doctrinal views of: (1) "God"; (2) "The Word of God"; (3) "The Atonement"; (4) "Regeneration and Attendant Blessings"; (5) "A Church: Its Form, Functions and Limitations"; (6) "The Ordinances"; (7) "The Rights and Responsibilities of the Individual Soul"; and (8) "Civil Government and Religious Freedom" ([1919]:5-13). Instead, the "Fraternal Address" introduces soul competency and the axioms of religion in its concluding discussion on "the question of Christian union" ([1919]:13) in order to explain that Baptists approach this question from the standpoint of soul competency and the religious axioms ([1919]:13-15).

[23] William Carrell (1993) exegeted soul competency's theological and philosophical sources as a way of understanding its meaning (1993:62-162). He attributed it to the influences of Scottish Common Sense Realism, a modified Kantian idealism, personalism, Christian experience, pragmatism, and others, leading him to conclude that soul competency spoke of "an unmediated relationship with Christ" whereby the believer became "his or her own authority," making soul competency an "intolerably individualistic claim" (1993:145-146). While many if not all of the sources Carrell identified surely did feed into the concept, his conclusions about soul competency end up placing more emphasis on the sources than on what Mullins' explicitly said about the concept itself. This becomes apparent in Carrell's study from his inability in large measure to link these sources, and his interpretation of them, to anything Mullins himself directly said about soul competency, the reason being that Mullins did not go into an extended theological or philosophical treatment of the concept. In the long run, then, Carrell's interpretation of the sources arrive at what might be called an "intolerable individualism," not necessarily the concept of soul competency itself.

(1908a:50-69). For Mullins, soul competency—while remaining central throughout his life—did not serve as the focus of his doctrinal system.

Instead of acting as a typical doctrinal tenet, soul competency functioned within Mullins' Baptist theology as a type of personal, orienting conviction, providing him with a window on concerns of historical, theological, and practical importance to Baptists. Both Baptist historian Walter Shurden (1998) and Church of Christ historian Richard Hughes (1999) provide clear, visually-oriented metaphors that capture the function of soul competency along this line. Along with other "integrative approaches" to Baptist faith and identity, Shurden describes soul competency as a hermeneutical "door of entrance" to understanding Baptist identity (1998:322-323). Addressing the resources needed to enrich and sustain the "life of the mind," Hughes asks Baptists not to view Mullins' idea as a "shibboleth" or "traditional Baptist formulation" around which they gather to distinguish themselves, but instead as a "window" onto the Reformed, Lutheran, and Anabaptist traditions that have historically shaped Baptist theology (1999:5). In their own ways, both authors interpret soul competency as a way of access to larger realities.

Yet soul competency as a personal conviction functioned for Mullins at even deeper levels. To a great degree, Mullins' revisioning concept acted in much the same way as Methodist theologian Randy Maddox's portrayal of John Wesley's theology of "responsible grace" (1994:17-19). Maddox describes responsible grace as Wesley's "orienting concern" meaning, in part, that it interpreted his situation-related or practical theology and gave it consistency, served as the central symbol of his theology, and focused Wesley's thought on God's interaction with humanity

(1994:18). Maddox argues that Wesley's theology of responsible grace[24] oriented his perspective and gave consistency in his approach to the Scriptures (1994:36-40), the witness of the Spirit (1994:124), justification by faith (1994:148-151), the Lord's Supper (1994:219-221), eschatology (1994:252-253), and other aspects of the Christian faith.

In similar ways, soul competency functioned within Mullins' Baptist theology as a specific attitude or concern by which he approached larger issues of faith and life. For instance, it reoriented the meaning of God's sovereignty to suggest the ideas of divine love and persuasion rather than "predestinating omnipotence" (1908a:79) as older theories of Calvinism had done. As mentioned earlier, Christ became the "divine competency," meaning that God approached humanity on the basis of each person's "divinely constituted human nature" (1908a:68). Mullins' rejection of episcopacy as an "impertinence" in the context of soul competency (1906c:6) influenced his development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, attributing the doctrine's neglect in history and in the lives of contemporary believers to "centralized and hierarchical perversions of the Christianity of the New Testament" (1912a:37-38). Also, Christ's lordship meant the exclusion of "merely human authorities" and "proxy faith" in matters of religious faith (Whitley 1923:223; Mullins [n. d.]o:3-4), and regenerated church membership meant the local church was competent to conduct its own affairs in accord with the will of Jesus Christ (Whitley 1923:224).

As well, Mullins treated soul competency as, to use Michael Polanyi's phrase, "personal knowledge" (1964). Polanyi maintained that all knowledge was personal,

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[24] Maddox interprets Wesley's theology of responsible grace to mean that, without God's grace, no one can be saved, yet without a person's participation, God's grace will not save (1994:19).

functioning essentially as an act of faith in which the knower became personally involved in the act of knowing. Personal knowledge was subsidiary knowledge, or tacit knowledge, being that of which a person was only subsidiarily or tacitly aware as the person trained her/his attention on another object. Thus he concluded that "*we can know more than we can tell and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell*" (1964:x; emphasis original). In this light, knowledge functioned like a tool or, in Polanyi's own illustration, a medical probe in a physician's hand, that is, as something absolutely essential to the physician's work and that to which the physician was totally committed, but not as that upon which the physician's concentration was fixated (1964:56-59).

Though soul competency is not the same as personal knowledge, Mullins regarded his concept of soul competency in like manner. The main principles of non-coercion, freedom, persuasion, and moral responsibility inherent in soul competency (1908a:53-58) gave meaning and import to the various religious axioms, which served as the primary subject matter of his book, *The Axioms of Religion*. When explaining the Baptist denomination as representing the "creative" type of denomination (1925b:13-17; see also 1928a:301), Mullins described it in terms of soul competency's fundamental principles of direct relations of the human person to God and the denial of human interposition in religion. Rather than being focally aware of his concept, Mullins remained more often subsidiarily aware of it, indwelling it in order to interpret concerns of larger importance.

Finally, soul competency possessed characteristics that recall "baptist" theologian James McClendon's theology of "convictions" (1982; 1986:17-46;

McClendon and Smith 1994). Convictions, claims McClendon, are "gutsy beliefs that I live out—or, in failing to live them out, I betray myself" (1982:20). They demonstrate the link between saying and doing (McClendon and Smith 1994:37-54) so that, within religious communities, convictional language functions as an illocutionary act or speech-act, whereby the act of saying something serves as a real act of doing something (1994:42-52). Convictions, then, not only describe what one holds to be true, but they carry the power to make a difference or cause change. The act of theologizing on the basis of one's convictions means discovering, transforming and relating them to the world and all there is in it in critically new ways.

Similarly, Mullins envisioned soul competency, the axioms of religion, and their concrete expression in congregational polity as having the ability to make a difference in the world of his day. Being original to himself, soul competency never served Mullins simply as a thing to which he gave mental assent. Rather, the principles that underlay soul competency and which gave meaning to the religious axioms were for him "gutsy beliefs" to which Baptists should give their witness for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ and for the forward progress of human civilization (1908a:277-308; 1920a:407; 1923c:544; Mullins, et al. [1919]:3-5).

Thus as his personal conviction, soul competency served not as that which Mullins looked *at* (that is, as the object of his attention) but instead that which he looked *through* (as an interpretive lens) to see and evaluate other realities, particularly regarding the nature of the individual person and the person's relationship with God, the nature of the church and the church's role in society, and the nature of religion vis-à-vis the state. Soul competency provided consistency to his perspective of the

Christian faith, casting faith and life in terms of freedom, responsibility, persuasion, and non-coercion. Within his writings, the principles in soul competency and the axioms of religion acted as a type of knowledge which he indwelt, as well as a conviction which made him who he was as a Baptist theologian. As the historical significance or attitude of Baptists in the world, it embodied the characteristic way in which they approached and interpreted the Christian faith in history. In effect, soul competency functioned in much the same way that Mullins interpreted the role of the Baptist denomination, as a "means" to the greater good of the kingdom and not as an "end" in itself (1914a). It thus revisioned the Baptist faith and witness in the world, rather than being a principle around which their faith and witness revolved.

<div align="center">Revisioning Baptist Identity in Soul Competency</div>

In "Revision-ing Baptist Identity from a Theocentric Perspective," Robert P. Jones (1999) introduces what he calls "the Baptist principle of revision" (1999:37). Utilizing James M. Gustafson's theme of the primacy of human experience in knowing to explain this principle, Jones finds that Gustafson's stress on experience as prior to theological reflection, on meaning as socially constructed, and on religions as historical phenomena that respond to experience all underscore the need for theology to reinterpret religious traditions within each new context (1999:40). This model, Jones believes, accords well with how Baptists historically approach the revisioning of their faith. The fact that Baptists own no single definitive tradition that decisively defines their faith and practice means that, for them, tradition in and of itself carries no inherent authority. Instead, representing at best a collection of principles and beliefs widely held in common, the Baptist tradition remains open to revision in light

of contemporary experience. Revisioning Baptist identity means that contemporary visionaries must conscientiously and critically select those strands or ideas within Baptist history which, in important ways, resonate with how Baptists currently experience God, the world, and themselves (1999:38).

Mullins intentionally selected from early American Baptist history the struggle for religious liberty as the basis of his soul competency concept. What features of the Baptist tradition did soul competency revision or, returning to McClendon's definition of theology, in what ways did Mullins relate soul competency to certain issues of "whatever else there is" (McClendon 1982:20)? As their distinctive historical "attitude" to the Christian faith (1997[1926]:276), soul competency gave prime attention to: (1) the nature of the individual, created in God's image, as a being non-coerced and free; (2) the nature of the church as possessing no hierarchies, priesthoods or sacraments that could legitimately interpose themselves between God and the person; and (3) the nature of religion as supporting a direct relationship between God and the human person and forbidding compulsion and coercion. Each of these ways of revisioning the Baptist faith contained important implications for their witness in the world.

Revisioning the Human Person

Mullins interpreted soul competency and the struggle for religious liberty as an affirmation of the worth of the individual (1906c:4-5). Walter Shurden comments that Baptists throughout their history have adhered to a posture of "stubborn individualism" (Shurden 1993:24).[25] During Mullins' lifetime, Baptist writers placed

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[25] Early statements on religious liberty clearly defended the claims of the individual and the community to worship God without the state dictating the terms or controlling the process. See

great stress on the primacy of the individual (Biting 1913; Barnes 1913; Ralston

1914a, 1914b; Owen 1915), with statements of faith during the 20th century doing the

same.[26]

Inheriting his tradition's, as well as the general culture's, appreciation for the

worth of the individual (1997[1926]:268-269), Mullins relied on the philosophy of

personalism of Boston University professor Borden Parker Bowne to focus his

thinking (Sandon 1977; Bowne 1908). Mullins deemed personalism "the highest

stage in the development of philosophic idealism" (1908b:510; see also1928c:227-

231) with its teaching that "ultimate reality is a Person; that we are the creation of his

hands as true persons; that we are endowed with freedom; that the divine Person is

working out a purpose in human society; and that the goal of history is a perfect

society of men and women in fellowship with God" (Mullins 1917a:112-113). The

Baptist message, he believed, valued above all else "the infinite worth of the

individual soul in the sight of God" (Mullins [n. d.]a:2). Each person was capable of

"rising to God" because the individual was created in the image of God (1904a:249;

[n. d.]g:1). Christ's interpretation of personality "set man up as the one great value in

this world in God's sight" (Mullins 1911c:381), making personality—both human

and divine—central to the Christian faith (Mullins 1928d:83).

Helwys (1998[1611/1612]) and Williams (2001[1644]). Baptist historian H. Leon McBeth cites
English Baptist John Murton, who stated that it was "heinous…in the sight of the Lord to force men
and women by cruel persecution, to bring their bodies to a worship whereunto they cannot bring their
spirits" (1987:105), and attributes English Baptist Leonard Busher as being the first to compare forced
worship with spiritual rape (1987:104). A recent American Baptist confession of faith states that "We
believe…[t]hat the Freedom to respond to the Lordship of Christ in all circumstances is fundamental to
the Christian Gospel and to human dignity" (Shurden 1993:118).

[26] Among these are included the Southern Baptist "Statement of Principles" (Southern Baptist
Convention 1945; Southern Baptist Convention 1946) and "Baptist Ideals" (Shurden 1993:105-106,
110).

Mullins feared, however, that both the church and the state were guilty of degrading the person and lowering the individual's worth. He interpreted all church structures which inserted a priest or other official between a person and God as asserting the soul's "incompetency" in religion (1908a:59-63), and he believed that certain religious acts—such as infant baptism—represented a type of "proxy faith" that destroyed personal initiative and moral responsibility in religion (1908a:63-65; 1921e). Likewise, he interpreted the pre-World War I "theory of European civilization" (1921k:3) in Germany, Austria and Russia as elevating the state above the citizen. Governments that "made the state everything and the citizen nothing" were in violation of the high value Jesus placed on the worth of the "common man" in God's sight (Mullins 1921i:4). Thus Mullins touted the benefits of congregational polity as, among other things, safeguarding human equality and freedom before God, upholding democratic as opposed to authoritarian rule in ecclesiastical affairs, and affirming the direct relations of each member of Christ's body to the member's head (1908a:127-149).

In *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins elevated the worth of the individual by defining both God's nature and God's kingdom in terms of personality, love, divine revelation, and the divine-human relationship (1908a:27-43). In essence, religion meant "fellowship with a personal God" (Mullins 1924a:96), with reciprocal relations between God and human persons wherein God safeguarded human freedom and personality (Mullins 1913a:288). In religious experience, God was known as real, active and personal (1913a:254). The ability to know God implied that the individual

had capacity for God (Mullins 1917a:50-54), yet knowing God demanded that the

individual person submit to the divine will (Mullins 1911c:382).

Mullins' first, or "theological," axiom (1908a:79-91) further accentuated this

approach toward the individual person. God's sovereignty as a holy and loving

Father framed the meaning of divine election, which signified persuasion rather than

coercion in the act of redemption and sanctification. Limited by human freedom,

human sin, and human agents as "channels of his saving grace" (1908a:85), God

approached the task of redemption slowly and deliberately without violating the

individual's freedom and moral nature (1908a:84-89).[27] Likewise, the moral axiom

(1908a:150-167) taught that the gospel—and the faith response to it—was essentially

founded upon the principles of freedom, persuasion and moral responsibility.

When Mullins referred to soul competency as the "capacity to deal directly

with God" (1923c:536), he did not mean unmediated access to God that situated

religious authority in the individual alone, but rather of unhindered access to God that

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[27] Mullins applied this thinking in an article originally written during World War I and republished in 1924. Tying together the themes of the purpose and immanence of God with the moral freedom of humanity, he wrote:

> It is clear, then, that the immanence of God in the human world is not merely a "life principle" which works unerringly, without defeat, without delay, towards a given end, as in the world of physical objects. It is rather a personal presence which regards personality in man as the supreme treasure to be conserved, protected and developed. And here we have a new light upon our question. The task and problem and the method of God with the race of man do not imply finiteness and limitation in Him. They imply rather self-limitation for a high end. They imply and require, indeed, moral omnipotence in God. To deliver man and society, to save them and at the same time to leave them free—this is God's great undertaking, His difficult problem. To reproduce His own image in men—His self-mastery, His perfect equity, His unerring impulse to fellowship and love, His freedom, in a word His holiness—this is God's great problem with which we should sympathize. His self-restraint, His everlasting importunity in our consciences and through our ideals, His appeal to our reason, our emotions, our wills, are but the ways of the Infinite One who can afford to wait. This is why He cannot use compulsion without defeating His own end. Free personality cannot be coerced. It must be trained. Omnipotence merely cannot make a son of God. The very essence, the golden heart of sonship, is our free choice of God and our free imitation of Him. In its social expression this sonship means democracy. (1924b:456-457; for Mullins' view of democracy, see this chapter, p. 72, footnote # 15)

warned against human and material interposition between the individual and God. Compulsion, coercion and interference framed his case that all people "have an equal right to direct access to God" (the "religious axiom"; 1908a:92-126). Likewise, soul competency did not deny human agents as real mediators between God and the individual (1908a:30); indeed, God's salvation "works through human agents and agencies [involving] a great series of human relationships and influences" (Mullins 1917a:347), for without such, salvation and sanctification would be nothing more than divine coercion (1908a:167). Likewise, soul competency did not deny the value of the church in the life of the believer, for the local church, in its congregational expression, was the only adequate institutional embodiment of the principles of God's kingdom (Mullins 1908a:37). Plus, soul competency embraced the individual as "a social being" who had "relations to his fellows in the Church, and in the industrial order, and in the State" (1908a:51; [n. d.]c:5). Above all, soul competency signified capacity for God "under God," not human self-sufficiency (1908a:53, 68).

The aim of soul competency was freedom to experience total "self-realization in Christ" (1908a:51; [n. d.]c:2) as well as self-discipline, self-development, self-direction, self-sacrifice, self-renunciation, and self-denial ([n. d.]c:2-3). Therefore, the Baptist mission was not to construct creeds, confessions of faith, hierarchies and sacramental systems but to "bring divine forces to bear to construct men" ([n. d.]k:4), making the individual "a dynamic of righteousness and then return[ing] him to the social order, the civic order, the commercial order and intellectual order" ([n. d.]k:4; see also [n. d.]g). Essentially, soul competency was an effort to confront the "spiritual tyranny" (1908a:94) of intentional coercion and interposition in matters of

faith and religion that blocked the person's total self-realization in the kingdom. "The

work of Jesus Christ therefore with the person is the work of preparing the person for

the Kingdom of God, which is an eternal Kingdom" ([n. d.]c:5-6).

Revisioning the Church

Sydney Ahlstrom accused Mullins' writings of displaying a "relative

disinterest in the Church" (1961:307), including Mullins' most important theological

work, *The Christian Religion In Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917a).[28] Yet Mullins

evidenced great interest in what it meant to be the church in the world, even if he did

not feature it heavily in his systematic theology. David Moore (1999) even finds that

the theology of religious experience of both Mullins and of English Baptist H.

Wheeler Robinson held real "ecclesiological implications," establishing that their

ideas of the church pervaded all aspects of their thinking (1999:90).

Concerns about the proper biblical organization of the church date to Baptists'

earliest years. Miroslav Volf—whose book, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the*

Image of the Trinity (1998), attempts to retrieve the ecclesial life within the Free

Church tradition in dialogue with the Catholic and Orthodox traditions (1998:24)—

argues that the essential ecclesiality of the Free Church tradition is found in the notion

that Christ's rule occurs through the whole congregation and not in the bishop alone

(1998:131-133). Mullins utilized terminology in vogue during his day—primarily

that of "democracy," "rights," and "equality"—to signal this same idea for, in his

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[28] Timothy Maddox (1997) points out two reasons for the absence of the church in Mullins' 1917 text. For one thing, Mullins' text followed the same pattern that many of his predecessors and contemporaries had followed in their own systematic theology works, including J. P. Boyce, C. H. Hodge, E. H. Johnson, and William Newton Clarke. Second, Mullins himself explained in an article published in the *Baptist World* that he excluded the doctrine of the church from his book because it was written as a seminary class text, and that the doctrine of the church was covered in another course (1997:261, footnote # 26).

mind, a Christian body in which the laity stood on a par with the clergy (equality) and where the laity possessed the God-given capacity or competency (the basis of their "right") to govern their own affairs (democracy) was a true Christian church. This, in essence, served as the meaning behind the "ecclesiastical axiom" (1908a:127-149) and congregational polity. Being essentially democratic in nature and guided by congregational polity, the church thus safeguarded the equality of every person before God, and fostered the individual's direct relations with God in an atmosphere of non-coercion, demonstrating thereby the personal nature of God's kingdom (1908a:134).

Mullins' congregational interpretation of the church served as the context out of which he voiced his concerns on the church union or ecumenical issue of his day. In "Our Freedom in Christ" (1920e), an essay penned in response to this issue, Mullins rooted the question of non-involvement in church union fundamentally in "[o]ur freedom in Christ and our loyalty to Christ," in combination with the principles of individual regeneration and the person's "direct relation to Christ." Certain democratic freedoms in the kingdom governed inter-church relations: (1) individual freedom to respond to Christ and witness to Christ without hindrance; (2) denominational freedom to propagate its message and cooperate with others; and (3) Christ's freedom to move among his people. Mullins summarized his argument by stating, "Any overhead authority and any binding agreement which interfere with the individual's opportunity to witness, with the denomination's opportunity to propagate and with Christ's opportunity to work freely through his people must be rejected" (1920e). The matter, then, revolved around a three-fold freedom stemming from a loyalty to Christ more fundamental than loyalty to organic ecumenical union.

It was in this sense that Mullins concluded his presentation of the sixth, or "social" axiom (1908a:201-211). Beginning with the person as both an individual and a social being (1908a:201), Mullins pointed to some of the social sins of his day, such as the breakdown of the family, graft, child labor, problems associated with charity and the relief of the poor, and the highly competitive nature of business (1908a:202-203).[29] The duty of a "free Church in a free State," he believed, focused equally on individual regeneration leading to a transformed social order and on the exertion of the church's influence on the state, not in the sense of taking over the state but rather in the sense of taking the citizens of the state into itself (1908a:204-205). Mullins called this approach of the church in the world the "missionary life"—as opposed to the privatized "monastic" life, the self-isolated "mystic" life, and the individualistic "moralist" life—wherein believers became a force "for civic, commercial, social, and all other forms of righteousness" (1908a:207). The only form of church polity capable of equipping the church to engage the world missionally, he felt, was the congregational form, where the church was free from state entanglements and heavy ecclesiastical institutionalism to empower and free the believer to be "an agent of righteousness in society at large" (1908a:210).

Therefore, for Mullins the Free Church perspective meant standing against all ecclesiastical alliances—between both church and state and between churches in organic union—which adopted measures that imposed those alliances and created unwanted entanglements. He believed that, as desirable as Christian unity was for his day and time, when the individual suffered either from state-controlled or church-dominated religion, and when congregations and denominations were blocked from

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[29] See Chapter 2, pp. 45-49, for a general presentation of Mullins' social witness.

serving God as they believed the Spirit so moved, the chief plea was for the "spiritual

rights of mankind: the competency of the soul in religion under God, the equal rights

of believers in the church, [and] the principle of responsibility as growing out of the

freedom of the soul" (1908a:232).

Revisioning Religion

As previously noted, Mullins located soul competency within the historical

context of the Baptist struggle for religious freedom in America. His approach agreed

with that of Charles James who, in *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious

Liberty in America* (1900), defined religious liberty in part as a act of voluntary

service to God which prohibited the church or state from compelling religious

conformity (1900:9; Mullins 1906c; 1906e; 1908a:196).[30] He also agreed, in accord

with the 1644 Particular Baptist London Confession of Faith, that religious liberty

entailed the notion of passive civil disobedience when obedience to Christ and

conscience so ordered (1908a:188-189).

Yet Mullins took his greatest inspiration from the 17th century sometime-

Baptist Roger Williams (1603-1683), whom Mullins repeatedly cited (1896a;

1908a:45-46, 268-270; 1909c:699-700; 1915b:9; 1921i:9) and whom he regarded as

"the great pioneer of religious liberty" (1908a:269). According to biographer Perry

Miller, Williams' typological rendering of the Old Testament led him to criminalize

all attempts—whether Catholic or Protestant—that sought to establish a state church

modeled after the religion of Israel and its history of enforced belief (Miller 1963:15-

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[30] William Carrell reports that James' book influenced Mullins' thought in the preparation of his papers before the Virginia Baptist Historical Society in 1906. These papers were: "The Historical Significance of the Baptists" (Mullins 1906c) and "A New Defense of the Baptist Position" (Mullins 1906e) (Carrell 1993:36-37).

21). Williams did not simply protest intolerance, he issued impassioned pleas to

"true" Christians to "resist the self-appointed virtuous trying to inflict communal

formulations upon others" (1963:20), because, in his mind, no one "could say for

certain what [was] ultimate truth" and thus no one must impose their brand of truth on

others (1963:23). Williams' plea was ultimately "for an awareness of the infinite

depths of human consciousness" (1963:24).

For Williams, this approach to faith and life had missional implications, as

seen in his missionary work among the New England Narragansett Indians. In

Christenings Make Not Christians (1963[1645]),[31] he demonstrated himself to be

supremely a missionary (Garrett 1970:119-144; McBeth 1987:132-133), whose

appeal sprang largely from his religious and political convictions. In essence, he

refused to enforce upon the Indians what he called "monstrous and most inhumane

conversions" which, he believed, typified the work of the Jesuits in Canada and the

West Indies (1963[1644]:36; Garrett 1970:142). Though some charged Williams

with caring little for the eternal salvation of the "poore Natives" (1963[1644]:36), he

countered by arguing that the worse course of action would be to force the Indians

from their own false worship to the equally false worship found in European

"Christendome" (1963[1644]:36-37).

Mullins also harbored few doubts that Europe's centralized state churches

were steeped in a worldly and corrupt form of religion. He particularly found the

practice of infant baptism offensive on the grounds that it created non-spiritual (non-

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[31] The full title of this work is *Christenings Make Not Christians, or a Brief Discourse Concerning that Name Heathen, Commonly Given to the Indians: As Also Concerning that Great Point of Their Conversion.* Lost for almost 250 years, it was discovered in 1881 in the British Museum in London by Henry Martyn Dexter (Miller 1963:27-28).

regenerated) members by taking the decision to be Christian out of their hands and lodging it in those of their sponsors (1921e). Such churches had thus lost their identity as "agencies for the spread of God's truth in the world" (Mullins 1918c) due to the political influences under which they had fallen.[32] Soul competency, he maintained, excluded "at once all human interference, such as episcopacy and infant baptism, and every form of religion by proxy" (1908a:54). Thus he interpreted the "Baptist Message"[33] as wholly opposed to any kind of interference and coercion in matters of religion ([n. d.]a:9-10), including and especially that which derived from the state.

For Mullins, religious liberty was not simply an attitude or confessional statement; instead, it represented a lifestyle in which he urged Baptists to be engaged. He actively defended religious liberty, especially in his service as president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1923 to 1928 (Mullins 1926a; 1926d; Rushbrooke 1928a:66). Animated by soul competency and its exclusion of coercion in religion (1906c:5; 1908a:54), he viewed religious liberty as a living heritage that all people

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[32] In an article entitled "Efforts to Christianize Europe. 400-2000," Rodney Stark (2001) arrives at a similar conclusion from a sociological perspective. Stark makes the case that Europe's extremely low church attendance today is due not to a recent slide toward secularization and de-Christianization after centuries of faithful Christian practice, but instead to an ancient re-conceptualization of Christian missions dating to the Constantinian union between church and state in the 4th century. Stark argues that, rather than depend on the "rank-and-file" members to spread the faith through social networks, the church under Constantine and his successors looked to professional missionaries, such as monastic communities, to convert kings and nobility while ignoring the masses. The converted elite created a top-down, state-supported ecclesiastical institution that often resorted to the "sporadic application of violent coercion" (2001:113) to control their people, unwittingly mixing together pagan and Christian elements into the faith. In Stark's opinion, the lack of "person-to-person" Christian missions (2001:116) in Europe's religious development has created a mass of people almost wholly unconverted to the faith and with little regard for the church.

[33] The "Baptist Message" refers to the title of a chapter which Mullins was to contribute to a book to be jointly written by Mullins and J. B. Gambrell. For the background to this book and chapter, see Chapter 4, pp. 98-99.

should enjoy (1923a:70-71),[34] especially those in Europe in the aftermath of the fall

of "autocracy in church and state" following World War I (1921k). The things that

both religious liberty and soul competency excluded, the human rights they both

implied and the duties they both required spelled out actions in which Baptists should

participate.[35] As Mullins understood it, religious liberty had been for Baptists

alternately a dream, a theme, a solace and a battle cry, but the one thing it had always

been was "a passion deep as life welling up from the depths of being in eternal faith

and hope" (1923a:66), a passion Mullins believed Baptists should diligently hold and

live as a Christian people.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

The competency of the soul in religion, lodged within Mullins' passionate

defense of Christian denominationalism, recalled Baptists' historic opposition to all

forms of coercive and compulsive religion. It was Mullins' own personal conviction,

serving as a hermeneutical vehicle which he inhabited and through which he

interpreted faith and the world. Rather than being that upon which he fixated his

thought, soul competency functioned as that which focused his thoughts on larger

issues that impacted the gospel and faith in the world.

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[34] The defense of all people against religious oppression was strongly implied in Mullins' approach to soul competency in that, like religious liberty, it rested on the Christian doctrine of the image of God (1908a:58; 1923a:67-68).

[35] Comparison of Mullins' 1923 religious liberty address (1923a) with sources specifically on soul competency—including Mullins 1908a:48-49, 54-55, 59-69, 92-149, 185-200; Mullins, et al. [1919]:13-16; and Mullins 1923c—reveals that these exclusions, inclusions and duties consist of: the exclusion of state authority in religion, of mere toleration in religion, of the imposition of ecclesiastical creeds, of centralized church government, of priestly mediators and sacraments as means of salvation, and of infant baptism; the inclusion of the right of direct access to God and the right of equal privileges in the church; and the duties of protecting others against religious oppression, of loyalty to the state, and of ultimate loyalty to Christ. See also Chapter 2, p. 54 (footnotes # 32 and # 33).

Mullins depended greatly on terminology readily understood in the world of his day, such as "democracy," "freedom," "equality," "rights," "individualism," and others. By employing these ideas, he meant several things. He meant that being human pointed to the individual who was competent to stand before God without any church or state structure dictating the meaning and extent of that divine-human encounter. He meant that the church was competent to stand before God and conduct its own affairs (Whitley 1923:224), and that it was composed of believers equally responsible before God, each other and the world in matters of faith and religion. He meant that religion was opposed to external force and cognizant that all people could approach God according to conscience. Mullins, then, intended soul competency to reflect not simply on the Baptist faith alone but on the larger church and the world. It fit hand-in-glove with his own world-conscious witness.

Soon after Mullins introduced and explained his theology of soul competency, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society executive James H. Franklin entertained the notion that Mullins' revisioning principle could address important challenges that Baptists faced in cross-cultural missions. Combining the insights of Mullins and Franklin permits the missional value of soul competency to come through more clearly. This is the focus of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Uniting Vision and Task for Baptist Witness and Mission

At its annual meeting held in Washington, D. C. in 1920, the Southern Baptist

Convention (SBC) appointed E. Y. Mullins and SBC president J. B. Gambrell to tour

Europe and Asia in the late summer and fall of that year as "fraternal messengers"

(Mullins 1920c) to their Baptist brethren abroad. As it turned out, they were only

able to complete their tour of Europe. Upon returning to the United States in late

1920, the two sojourners planned to write a book about their travels (1921i); the book,

though, was never completed due, most likely, to Gambrell's death in June 1921. In

February 1921, Mullins sent to Gambrell a draft of one of the chapters he planned to

write, tentatively titled "The Baptist Message" (n. d.]a) and which contained, as he

put it, the "gist" of the usual address he gave at the various stops on their European

tour (1921i). Mullins opened the draft chapter by describing the two most important

aspects of his own fervent denominationalism:

> It has been said that there are two things required to make a great life: first, a
> great vision, and second a task to match the vision. A vision without a task
> makes a visionary and a task without a vision makes a drudge. A vision
> coupled with a task makes an apostle, a hero and a conqueror. This is not only
> true of an individual, but it is also true of a religious denomination. The
> greatest danger which could at any time befall the Baptist denomination
> would be the loss of its great vision and sense of mission to mankind. Baptists
> have always thought of themselves as being sent of God to proclaim certain
> great fundamental truths of the New Testament, and wherever they have been
> zealous in the proclamation of these truths they have flourished, but whenever
> the Baptist vision has waned and whenever the Baptist task which matches the
> vision has been neglected Baptists have begun to decline in numbers and in
> influence and power. There is need in the present age of the world that
> Baptists shall come back again to a full realization of their mission to

mankind, and there is an imperative call upon them to take up with renewed vigor their great task. ([n. d.]a:1)[1]

Confident that the Baptist denomination was a means to the kingdom of God and not the end or goal of the kingdom (1914a), Mullins developed the competency of the soul in religion—within the context of his own fervent denominationalism—as the essence of the Baptist identity, convinced that it illuminated the meaning of the human person, the church, and religion for the cause of Christ in the world. His chief aim, then—not only in terms of his general approach to the denomination but also in terms of his soul competency concept—was to link the Baptist "vision" with the Baptist "task." Soul competency as a revision of the Baptist faith and tradition was not simply another way of presenting the Baptist vision; it was also a way of pointing to Baptists' global task.

Mullins, though, was not alone in applying soul competency to the missional task of the Baptist witness in the world. Within a decade after Mullins first announced his soul competency concept in 1906, American Baptist mission administrator James H. Franklin (1872-1961) employed the concept to interpret the meaning and relevance of indigenous Christianity for the international mission field. This chapter narrates the ways in which both Mullins and Franklin attempted to unite the Baptist vision of soul competency with their understanding of the Baptist task for

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[1] In this address/draft chapter, Mullins does not mention directly the principle of soul competency nor the axioms of religion. However, the fundamental ideas of soul competency and the religious axioms—such as non-coercion, Christian service, freedom, and personal responsibility—are woven through the six emphases that make up "the Baptist message" as presented in the original address, these being: (1) the worth of the individual; (2) the direct approach of the individual to God; (3) the principle of individualism and human personality; (4) a spiritual or regenerate church membership and the need of the new birth; (5) religious liberty; and (6) the importance of evangelism and theological education in God's kingdom ([n. d.]a).

the world of their day, beginning with Mullins' own practical application in *The Axioms of Religion*.

<div align="center">Soul Competency and Early 20th Century Challenges</div>

Mullins' overriding concern in *The Axioms of Religion*—to uncover "the distinctive message of the Baptists to the world" and its ability, by means of their "simple congregational polity," to represent faithfully New Testament Christianity and meet world need (1908a:24-26)—moved him from an explanation of soul competency and the axioms of religion in Chapters 3-12 to their application in Chapters 13-17 (1908a:212-308).[2] The meaning of the individual person, of the church, and of religion pervade these final chapters. In short, Chapters 13, 14, and 15 focus on the importance of the church and its polity for addressing contemporary concerns, covering issues such as the voluntary principle in religion, church union, and the danger of anti-institutionalism within Baptist ranks. Chapter 16 presents Mullins' interpretation of the relationship between the Baptist expression of religion and American representative government. Chapter 17 concludes the book by considering how soul competency and the religious axioms can shape the world religiously, intellectually, politically, and socially.

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[2] In his interpretation of soul competency and the axioms of religion as Mullins' "polemic theology" (1963:333-370), Bill Thomas provides a summary of Chapters 3-17 of *The Axioms of Religion*, including the book's final five chapters under the heading "The axioms of religion applied" (1963:355-365). However, Thomas' summary ignores Chapters 1 and 2 of that book except for a brief comment which serves to introduce his understanding of the book's third chapter (1963:341). As Chapter 3 of this present dissertation shows (pp. 65-70), the first and second chapters of *The Axioms of Religion* explain the book's aim and are therefore crucial for interpreting its meaning. Thomas interprets Mullins' soul competency concept as offering a "restatement" of the Baptist position, though not in the sense that Mullins sought to lay down a principle—rooted in Baptist history and focused beyond merely the Baptist faith—for the specific purpose of outlining what difference Baptists and their identity can make in the world. The contention of this dissertation is that Chapters 13-17 of *The Axioms of Religion* were written to demonstrate this difference.

Though not systematically, these final chapters generally give an answer to the denominational "problems of adjustment" as well as the more specific Baptist issues which the book introduces in Chapter 1,[3] although these were not Mullins' only concern. Rather than limiting his application to those specific issues, he endeavored to prove why both the church and the world needed the principles inherent in soul competency and what, if so adopted, those principles could do to shape Christianity's witness in the world and satisfy humanity's deepest spiritual, political and social longings.

Soul Competency and Religious Authority

Embedded within Mullins' defense of the voluntary nature of religion in Chapter 13 of *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a:212-220) was his concern to safeguard the source of authority in the Christian life and in the church. Baptists' congregational polity assured that religious authority, being direct from God and not indirectly mediated through human priests (1908a:213), lay fundamentally and ultimately in Christ, whose Spirit illuminated the mind of each person in the church through the private interpretation of and obedience to the Scriptures. Soul competency and the religious axioms thus preserved both Christ's monarchical authority over the church as well as the people's democratically-exercised authority within the church under Christ. In Mullins' view, this approach mitigated against internal church schism and divisions which often came as a result of centralized church systems that served to deaden the conscience, convert Christianity to mere formalism, and suck the spiritual vitality out of faith (1908a:215-216). The voluntary principle, grounded fundamentally upon soul competency, promoted the notion that

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[3] See Chapter 3 of this dissertation, pp. 67-68.

people could indeed become "spiritual enough" to be trusted to cooperate toward spiritual ends, and not simply to look after each one's own affairs (1908a:217). It also made clear that God's authority, far from being coercive and manipulative, was governed by persuasion that moved slowly to convince the human person, not forcibly stamp the divine will upon the human will "with authority" (1908a:219).

Mullins clearly advanced soul competency and the religious axioms as a response to the political and religious autocracies which he believed had inflicted so much damage upon the European state and church. Authority centralized in the hands of a few was repressive and stifling. When coupled with proxy faith (as represented by infant baptism) as opposed to a personal trust relationship with Christ growing out of "the competency of the soul to act for itself in religion" (1920a:403), such authority removed the spiritual motive in religion (1920a:406). Mullins meant none of this as an argument against Christ's authority in the church. Rather, it was a defense of where the authority truly lay: in "God in Christ" (1908a:215) ultimately and in God's people who, under Christ, exercised their authority collectively. Baptists, then, as the subtitle to Chapter 13 in *The Axioms of Religion* indicated, must continue to develop "after their kind" by strictly following the voluntary principle in their practice of the Christian religion if they were to make a difference in a world steadily realizing the destructive nature of imposed authority upon all fields of human effort (1908a:219-220).

Soul Competency and Christian Unity

In Chapter 14 of *The Axioms of Religion* on church union (1908a:221-234), Mullins argued against "organic" or institutional church union in favor of Christian

unity predicated upon the fundamentals of the Christian life as these were explained in soul competency and the religious axioms. He could not accept the Church of England's 1888 Lambeth articles with their appeal to the "historic episcopate" as the basis of Christian unity, nor could he agree that the principle of Federation was capable of effecting real church union, even though it stressed democracy and the voluntary principle in religion (1908a:221-226). Baptist congregationalism refused to add anything to "the simple undeveloped polity of the New Testament" (1908a:229) in order to arrive at church union. Yet, in Mullins' opinion, simply achieving a certain form of "ecclesiasticism" was not of utmost importance to the Baptist mind; rather, what concerned Baptists most was attaining a particular "life" that involved "certain relations to God through Christ" (1908a:231), relations that spoke of human competency under God, human equality in dealing with God, equality in the church, and responsibility in religion. Christian unity, Mullins reasoned, could only come about when those elements within the Christian bodies which contravened these principles were removed (1908a:232).

Later, in the Southern Baptist Convention statement entitled "Fraternal Address" (Mullins, et al. [1919]), Mullins argued against both institutional church union as well as centralized church structures in the concluding section on "Baptists and Christian Union" ([1919]:13-16). After claiming that the essence of Christianity was found in soul competency and the religious axioms and maintaining that they allowed for broad Christian cooperation across denominational lines, he argued that any form of church union that did not safeguard these principles of the faith must be abandoned. Not only did Baptists hold these truths as essential to Christianity, he

believed that they were also called to bear witness to them, thus denying any form of

union that might bring embarrassment upon others because of the Baptist witness and

which might hinder the Baptists' own witness ([1919]:14-15). For Mullins, soul

competency pointed to the fundamentals of the Christian life which, more than

external unions, not only must be safeguarded but must inform the Baptist witness in

the world.

Soul Competency and Ecclesiastical Identity

Chapter 15 of *The Axioms of Religion*, on "Institutional and Anti-Institutional

Christianity" (1908a:235-254), concluded Mullins' interpretation of the church and its

purpose in light of his Baptist revision.[4] In opposition to the position of "open

membership" among some Baptists—mainly in England and Australia—who made

baptism and the Lord's Supper binding for individual faith but not for church

membership, Mullins defended the ordinances and ceremonies of the church as

necessary for the life of the faith (1908a:236). Church ordinances and polity had the

power to express the life and truth of great ideas, though they did not possess the

ability to produce that life (1908a:246). An individualistic and spiritualized approach

to Christianity would simply dissolve the essence of the church and, in effect, join

forces with the "moral culturists" of the day who renounced the church entirely

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[4] Chapter 15 is a bit of a curiosity. Nowhere in the chapter does Mullins mention soul competency nor any one of the axioms of religion, though he does allude to "great truths and ideals" (1908a:249) in religion that require institutional embodiment. Congregational church polity is throughout assumed, but not defended. Bill Thomas even begins his explanation of Mullins' application of the religious axioms with this chapter, rather than Chapter 13, to make the point that Mullins' individualism in the axioms is offset by his equally-high regard for the institutional church (1963:355). However, the sequence of the chapters as Mullins has them in his book is important. Chapter 15 clearly serves as a continuation of Chapters 13 and 14 on the nature, purpose and importance of the church and its order/polity in the world. As Chapter 13 argues on behalf of the voluntary principle as assuring harmony and reflecting the way God dealt with people, and Chapter 14 defends congregationalism as a polity that—because it contains no hierarchical or authoritarian structure—is concerned primarily for spiritual life, Chapter 15 attempts to counter among some Baptists the idea that external form has nothing to do with spiritual growth and progress.

(1908a:253). "Great truths and ideals must have institutional embodiment if they are to become great historic forces" (1908a:249). He continued:

> To remove the ceremonial barrier between the church and the world would mean in time the removal also of the spiritual barrier. The spiritual principles and ideals would become corrupted. The necessary proportion and symmetry of statement and emphasis would be lost, whole truths would become half-truths, vital and saving faith would become intellectual and historic faith, the church as a redemptive and militant spiritual force would become a social club with moral and esthetic ideals. (1908a:249)

Earlier in Chapter 1, Mullins had flagged this tendency to "anti-institutionalism" among those Baptists who wanted "the spirit of religion without a body" (1908a:22). Now, Mullins returned to address this Baptist oddity in order to emphasize in the strongest possible terms the necessity of the church and the church's Christian ordinances as vehicles for communicating the essential concepts of the Christian faith in the world. Yet, in the final paragraph of the chapter, he cautioned against merely establishing ceremonies and rituals without considering the life that they were meant to express. In other words, form must express, embody, and symbolize the life of the faith. He concluded:

> We must not...commit the blunder of confounding ceremonial and symbolic expressions of life with the life-giving forces which lie in the background of all forms and ceremonies. When we would rejuvenate our Christianity and bring the tides of spiritual life back again we must seek the eternal sources of life in the spiritual sphere. (1908a:254)

Although Mullins strongly favored congregationalism as the only New Testament form of church polity and that which best expressed the principles of soul competency and the religious axioms, at heart he was unwilling to equate the "life" with the "form" of Christianity, placing the primary stress on the life of the faith, which he previously outlined in terms of the competency of the soul in religion under

God. Later, in Chapter 17, he demonstrated his commitment to congregational polity, arguing for its importance on the international mission field (1908a:290-293). Still, for Mullins the fundamental principles of soul competency and the religious axioms were broader than any church form, ordinance, or ceremony could capture.

Soul Competency and Political Ideals

In Chapter 16, Mullins incorporated an earlier address delivered at the Baptist Convention of North America in May 1907 called "The Contribution of Baptists to American Civilization" (1908a:255-276). In essence, he attempted to show the ability of certain ideals—inherent within the Baptist approach to the Christian faith— to shape a nation religiously and politically. According to Mullins, Baptists contributed to American society in five ways: (1) "Baptists have been the only adequate interpreters of the Reformation" because they embodied more consistently than others the Anabaptist and Reformation principles such as church-state separation, justification by faith, individual freedom and church autonomy under Christ, and others; (2) "Baptists have furnished to American civilization the most spiritual interpretation of Christianity the world has seen," by holding to believers' baptism, regenerated church membership, a symbolic interpretation of the Lord's Supper, baptism by immersion, and democratic church polity; (3) "Baptists have exhibited to American civilization the most striking example of denominational unity" ; (4) "Baptists gave to American civilization the complete idea of liberty," and; (5) "Baptists have furnished the spiritual analogues of our entire political system," that is, soul competency and the six axioms represented the religious counterparts to basic political and social ideals within American society (1908a:258-274).

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In many ways, this chapter/address appears as an unfortunate glorification of the Baptist faith and the American way of life. Indeed, Mullins gave Baptists too much credit for the democratic shape of America's political system. Likewise, he uncritically assumed American democracy to represent the culmination of all political and social progress in history (1908a:274). Yet he was not blind either to Baptists' or to America's weaknesses. He often cautioned against Baptist excesses in faith and doctrine (particularly against a "false individualism"; see Mullins 1908a:19, 51, 55, 57; 1911h:5), and he recognized that improvements were needed in America's social and economic life in order to guarantee moral and just relations between people (1920f:165-166). In the overall context of *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins' faith in Baptist "ideals" expressed in Chapter 16—though giving evidence of sectarian pride and an overzealous patriotism—served for the author as further justification of the power of these values to shape and guide those beyond the Baptist fold. As he saw it, the world of the early 20th century was approaching "the Baptist age" because it was approaching "the age of the triumph of democracy" (1908a:275).

Soul Competency and Global Advance

Mullins' concluding chapter in *The Axioms of Religion*, titled "Baptists and World Progress" (1908a:277-308), considered how Baptist principles might shape the world religiously, intellectually, socially and politically. Because the "pivot of modern civilization" was grounded in human personality—"the value of man as man" (1908a:279)—and religion fueled the forward march of civilization in all areas of life, the soul's competency in religion and its accompanying axioms held great potential for the world. They under girded evangelism's approach of the divine to the human

person; they restored Christianity as a social force, safeguarded against the loss of humanity's "spiritual rights," and imparted the polity necessary for Christian growth in Eastern mission; and they supplied the voluntary principle necessary for church union (1908a:280-295). They supported human freedom for research in education, science, and philosophy (1908a:295-302). Finally, as a social and political force, soul competency and the religious axioms made possible democracy and self-government, and ultimately stood against the rising tide of socialism with its forced equality and "compulsory adjustment" (1908a:305) that denied the basic premise of individual initiative.

Over a decade after Mullins published his *Axioms of Religion* book, Professor John R. Brown (1870-1926) of Rochester Theological Seminary touted soul competency as a force capable of helping Northern Baptists face the challenges of their day.[5] In a 1920 address before the Northern Baptist Convention called, "The Baptist Principle in a Time of Reconstruction" (1921),[6] Brown urged his fellow Baptists to stay true to their "principle," one which arose in history in opposition to

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[5] Like other interpreters of soul competency, Brown did not mention Mullins as its author and originator (see Chapter 3, p. 78, footnote # 21). However, Brown's interpretation of soul competency—as a principle capable of informing Baptists' response and witness in the world—did apply soul competency in much the same way that Mullins' interpretation did.

[6] Professor Brown did not elaborate on the reasons he labeled this period as a "time of reconstruction," but he hinted at them in the course of his address: movements toward doctrinal conformity, authoritative "creeds" (1921:78-82), and the fear of "new ideas" (1921:84-86); the rejection by some of the social gospel (1921:86-89); and reactions against traditional views of the doctrine of Christ and the ordinances of the church (1921:89-91). William Brackney (1983) enumerates the major currents in American religious thought and life which Christians in general, and Baptists in particular, were facing during the period in America leading to 1920, along with some Baptist responses to these currents, including: the debate over the relationship between evangelism and the social gospel, the "theological cleavage" within liberal and conservative Protestantism, the changing role of women in the church, increased denominational organization for missions, ecumenical cooperation and Baptist unity, and others (1983:255-349). See also Chapter 2 of this dissertation, "The Historical Context (1860-1930)," for additional background (pp. 32-37).

the "coercions" of belief, ritual, and ecclesiastical authority (1921:76-77). This principle assured that truth could reside in every person, that sometimes dangerous or risky approaches to faith could result in new interpretations of truth, and that people could not be standardized and stereotyped. It was also an idea that encompassed "the whole world, its sin, need, and wrong" (1921:87). Because soul competency was a principle "with the high courage of *application*" (1921:86; emphasis original), it responded to the social, individual, political and economic demands of humanity. By creating discontent with everything that discouraged the full flowering of human personality, soul competency was capable of bringing about widespread change. "The Baptist principle is the fighting principle, which, based on the value of a human soul and recognizing God's direct contact with that soul, is one that does not rest till the last wrong of that life has been righted and the last contribution to that life has been made" (1921:88-89).

Mullins agreed. Soul competency and the axioms of religion served not only to elevate human personality and worth, it signified humanity's revolt against all forms of oppression and tyranny in all human aspects and endeavors in life, starting with religion and including the social, philosophical, scientific, and educational fields (1908a:279-280). In words characteristic of the optimistic spirit of his day, Mullins concluded *The Axioms of Religion* by summarizing the importance and purpose of soul competency, the religious axioms and congregationalism:

> We conclude this long chapter and end our task by declaring that the axioms of religion derived from the gospel of Jesus Christ are fitted to lead the progressive civilization of the race for the following reasons: First, because as religious ideals they supply the profoundest basis for civilization. Secondly, as ideals preserved through the religious life of man in a Church which is separated from the State they can influence civilization from without and be

exempt from the peril of becoming themselves involved in political movements and thus suffering corruption. Thirdly, because they embody the laws of man's intellectual progress. Fourthly, because they respect and conserve every fact of human nature and the providential order of the world; man's freedom and personality; his capacity in art, morals, government, and religion; his passion for growth and progress, his hunger and thirst for God. In the fifth and last place, because they conceive the universe as a kingdom of free spirits wherein under the tutelage and guidance of God man is to work out his destiny. This is the guarantee that that kingdom will in due time become a kingdom of perfect justice, of spotless righteousness, and enduring love. (1908a:307-308)

In addition to *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins combined his interpretation of

the Baptist vision with the Baptist task in several articles either dedicated to, or

referring to, the concept of soul competency and the religious axioms, including the

previously-cited "Fraternal Address" of Southern Baptists (Mullins, et al. [1919]),

and "Baptist Theology in the New World Order" (1920a). In "The Contribution of

Baptists to the Interpretation of Christianity" (Mullins 1923c)—written originally for

a British audience[7] in order to apply soul competency and the axioms to issues like

institutional Christianity, the nature of religion, church union, democracy, human

progress, religious liberty, and the adaptability of Baptist congregational polity to the

various forms of government—Mullins closed with this challenge: "If, as the

profounder thinkers hold, religion determines civilisation [sic]; if civilisation [sic]

turns upon religion as the rim of a wheel turns upon its centre [sic]—is it not the duty

of all men who bear any treasure of religious truth to make it known to our troubled

world? It seems to the writer that there can be but one answer to the question"

(1923c:544).

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[7] This article first appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* (Mullins 1923c)—published between 1902 and 1968 by Harris Manchester College, Oxford University, England—and later in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary faculty journal, *The Review and Expositor* (Mullins 1923d).

Soul Competency and Cross-Cultural Missions

Soon after Mullins introduced soul competency in November 1906, the home

secretary of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Henry C. Mabie (1847-1918),

wrote in January 1907 to congratulate Mullins for introducing his soul competency

concept, calling it "a foundation we can stand on" and viewing it as a defense against

the formation of a single Protestant church in China with its potential to eliminate

"the Baptist testimony" (1907:1). Mabie was the first executive of a missionary

organization to apply the potential of soul competency to cross-cultural missions.

Four years later, he included soul competency as one of five principles or convictions

Baptists could contribute to the world because of its stand for a "personal, firsthand,

and immediate" relationship with Christ, and because it supported civil obedience as

well as opposed interposing hierarchies in the church (1911:356-357).

A "Simpler Form of Christianity"

In *The Axioms of Religion* Mullins, too, was quick to apply soul competency

to the mission field. In the book's first chapter he questioned, as one the five

problems of denominational "adjustment," the wisdom of replicating Western church

organizations in Eastern mission fields, writing:

> What form of Christianity is best adapted to the civilizations of the East? Is it
> wise to attempt to urge our Western forms of ecclesiastical organizations upon
> the Orient? Should there be a fusion of the various Christian elements in
> India, China, and Japan, into as many national or racial organizations, which
> shall omit the distinctive features of the West? These are vital questions to-
> day in all these countries and will engage attention in increasing measure in
> the near future. (1908a:18)

In his final chapter, under the sub-headings "Foreign Missions and the

Churches" (1908a:290-291) and "Denominationalism and Missions" (1908a:291-

293), Mullins elaborated on that earlier concern by arguing that "church democracy"—or congregational church polity—was a "religious force in civilization" that opposed the more authoritarian and hierarchical forms of church government found particularly in Europe (1908a:283). As Mullins saw it, congregationalism did not constitute one of those "Western forms of ecclesiastical organizations," but rather was more a product of the New Testament. To prove his point, he summoned three non-Baptist "witnesses," using the first two—Loring Brace (1826-1890) and Adolf Harnack (1851-1930)—to testify against, in Harnack's words, the "fanaticism, the despotic tendency, impatience, a mania for persecution, clerical uniform, and clerical police" of Europe's historic church-state unions (1908a:287).[8]

Mullins' third "witness" was Charles Cuthbert Hall (1852-1908) of Union Theological Seminary (New York), particularly citing Hall's book, *The Universal Elements of the Christian Religion.* In Hall, Mullins found an ally who strongly opposed the contention that the Eastern mission fields had need, in Mullins' words, for "the highly developed ecclesiastical armor of the West." Rather, the Asian churches required "some simpler form of Christianity which contains only its universal elements as these lay in the mind of Christ" (1908a:291). Two years earlier, in a favorable review of Hall's book, Mullins interpreted the author to hold that only by imparting "certain universal elements which constitute the essence of Christianity" could "Oriental Christianity" develop indigenously or "after its own kind" (1906g:294). In Mullins' view, his own principle of soul competency and the

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[8] Cited by Mullins from Harnack's essay, "Thoughts on Protestantism" (Mullins 1908a:286-287).

religious axioms[9] met the criterion of this "simpler form of Christianity" (1908a:292-293).

Thirteen years later, in two separate essays both bearing the title "Trailing the Indigenous Church" (1921m; 1921n), Mullins made essentially the same point he had made in 1908. In these later articles, Mullins reported that, on his trip to Europe with Southern Baptist Convention president J. B. Gambrell in late 1920, he had frequently heard references to "the indigenous church" as a concept which promised variety in church life and organization according to the uniqueness of each nation or culture in which the church was planted. "A Chinese church, an African church, a German church, a Swedish church, an Italian church, may be so many ecclesiastical organizations, each with a different constitution," he heard these voices say (1921m:4).

Mullins, though, interpreted the "the indigenous church" concept differently. Surveying the rise of the Baptist movement in 19th and 20th century European history—while no doubt pondering the many "inner" or spiritual renewal movements he had witnessed within the European state churches that exhibited, in his view, Baptist-like qualities of freedom and the right of private interpretation of Scripture (1921k:4)—Mullins argued that indigeneity properly meant *uniformity* not variety, that is, uniformity according to the New Testament pattern of the church. He reasoned that when a people or group depended strictly on the New Testament for patterns of faith and order and were free from external imposition, such people

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[9] In this passage, Mullins listed as "the substance of the 'Axioms of Religion'" to be the following: "The soul's direct relation to God's Spirit, the union of believers in the truth, the equality of men before God, the central position of the cross of Christ in human redemption, and the competency of the soul in religion under God" (1908a:292-293).

naturally produced church structures and beliefs in accord with Scripture (1921m:4; 1921n:5). In this way, not only were they free from the stifling effects of external patterns exogenous to their culture, their freedom effected similarity of belief and organization with other like-minded groups of people. An indigenous church for Mullins, then, was a church in conformity with the faith and order of Scripture and which showed patterns of faith and order similar to those in other groups who followed the Scriptural model. Variety in the national or state churches came when external church authority—particularly from Catholic Italy and Protestant Germany— was intermixed with and imposed upon local cultures. Repeated throughout the two articles was a favorite phrase of the writer: "Sow a New Testament and reap immersion, believer's baptism, a spiritual membership and democratic church" (1921n:5).

In the context of cross-cultural missions, Mullins regarded the Baptist witness as introducing the basic New Testament message—interpreted fundamentally in soul competency and the religious axioms—into indigenous cultures, with one of the results being a congregational form of polity and faith capable of changing the religious, social and political landscape of the culture. He believed that all other forms of church polity pointed to centuries of Western accretions that no indigenous culture should have to bear. Congregationalism attempted to strip polity down to the bare minimum, adding nothing to the form of the faith except what could be found in the Bible (1908a:228-231). It also best represented the essentials of the faith found in soul competency and the axioms of religion. Without a doubt, then, Mullins understood soul competency and congregationalism as intimately related to each

other, although he did not equate the "form" of the faith with the "life" of the faith,

giving the latter the priority in his thinking. In doing so, he left the door open for

James Franklin to apply soul competency cross-culturally without necessarily

insisting upon congregational church polity.

"For Such a Time As This"

Mullins was not the only person to consider the meaning of soul competency

for indigenous mission. James H. Franklin (1872-1961), foreign secretary for the

American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (1912-1934), believed the competency of

the soul in religion to hold the key for planting the gospel indigenously in cross-

cultural settings. Yet Franklin did not hold soul competency and congregationalism

as tightly together as Mullins did, allowing Franklin to interpret the practical

application of soul competency to cross-cultural missions and indigenous Christianity

differently while incorporating many of the same ideas Mullins built into his concept.

This is important, inasmuch as Franklin was quite familiar with Mullins' book, *The

Axioms of Religion.*[10]

A native Virginian and graduate of Richmond College (1895) and Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary (1898), Franklin served as a missionary in the frontier

territory of Colorado after seminary graduation, becoming district secretary of the

American Baptist Home Mission Society (1904-06) before assuming the pastorate of

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[10] In the James H. Franklin file, housed in the Manuscript Collection of the American Baptist Historical Society at the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York, are found typewritten notes that Franklin took from Mullins' 1908 book, *The Axioms of Religion* (Franklin [n. d.]a). While no notes were taken from the book where Mullins specifically applied soul competency to indigenous Christianity, it seems safe to conclude that Franklin was familiar with the whole of Mullins' work, especially in light of the fact that Franklin frequently referred not only to soul competency itself in his writings and addresses, but also to the fact that the concept originated with Mullins, something which not all commentators have consistently done (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation, p. 78, footnote # 21).

the First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs (1906-12) (American Baptist Historical

Society 2003). Later, as foreign secretary with the American Baptist Foreign Mission

Society (ABFMS), he oversaw the work in China, Japan, the Philippines, the Belgian

Congo, and Europe (Torbet 1955:181). Franklin also served on a number of

ecumenical missionary councils and committees and as trustee of several schools and

universities.[11] On the copyright page of Franklin's 1933 book, *The Never Failing*

Light, the publishers of the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and

Canada wrote, "His wide travel and large experience in mission administration have

qualified him to an unusual degree as an interpreter of the Christian movement in the

modern world" (Franklin 1933).

    Indigenous Christianity. Franklin came to the ABFMS at a time when the

Christian church exhibited a greater awareness in world mission of the cultural

implications of missionary work, of the negative associations of mission with

Western culture, and of the need for greater interdenominational cooperation on the

mission field, without denying the continued importance of evangelism in mission

(Torbet 1955:382; see also Hedlund 1993:21-51; Yates 1994:21-33). The American

Baptist Missionary Union (the forerunner to the ABFMS, which was organized in

1910) had, to varying degrees, supported the idea of indigenous mission since the mid

19th century (Torbet 1955:123. 130), but the principle got an added boost under the

Union's foreign secretary S. W. Duncan in 1898 (Torbet 1955:168-169). By 1912—

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[11] These committees were: the Continuation Committee of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference; the International Missionary Council (1921-1934); the Committee of Reference and Counsel of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America; the Committee of Direction of the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill; and chairman of the Committee on Relations with the Orient of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. He served as a trustee of West China Union University, University of Nanking, and Shanghai Baptist College (American Baptist Historical Society 2003).

the year of Franklin's installation as foreign secretary—the ABFMS adopted what they called an "intensive policy" in the interest of indigenous Christianity and better mission administration (Torbet 1955:182-183; 358).[12]

From the beginning of his service with the ABFMS, Franklin strongly supported an indigenous approach to mission and the training of national Christian leaders for directing and controlling their own work (Franklin 1934:3-4; Board of Managers, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society 1934:1). "Indigenous" Christianity came to be an important concept not only to Franklin (Franklin 1922) and the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society but also to the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (*Foreign Mission Policies* 1925:7-10). Franklin often praised efforts by indigenous or national Christians to assume control and direction of the missionary work in and where ABFMS missionaries were found (1913:51-52; 1922; 1923b; 1925b). He called for the "devolution" of administrative responsibility (1933:158) from missionaries to national Christians, urging that "paternalism" give way to "partnership" in the work (1933:156-160).

Yet Franklin's concerns embraced matters beyond simply the transfer of church leadership to national bodies and councils. Early in his administration, he

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[12] Specifically, the Intensive Policy directed the ABFMS to undertake more intensive mission work on currently-operated fields, by seeking to establish self-supporting and self-perpetuating churches, rather than open new mission fields. It gave prime attention to the education of current and future church leaders, as well as to greater ecumenical cooperation on the mission field (Torbet 1955:182-184). Torbet reports that this policy was not appreciated by all missionaries under appointment with the ABFMS, including those in areas over which James Franklin had administrative supervision. The South China Mission, for instance, favored a more "extensive" missionary policy (that is, one which stressed direct evangelism in new fields), though the East China Mission favored the new, intensive approach (1955:294). The intensive policy somewhat tempered the general tone of "expansion and extension" among American missions following the 1910 Edinburgh conference and prior to World War I (Yates 1994:31-33). Torbet notes that, in China, the year 1911 "marked the end of the expansionist movement" (1955:312) with calls urging increased consolidation of Missions on the field and the "devolution" of control from the missionaries to the Chinese (1955:312-313).

supported efforts by indigenous or national Christians to contribute to the church's

theology and interpretation of the faith. In March 1913, Franklin accompanied John

R. Mott, chairman of the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh World

Missionary Conference, to the China National Conference in Shanghai (Franklin

1913). Typical of Mott's approach to global mission, the chairman called for a

"larger understanding" of Chinese as well as denominational convictions, for a

"larger comprehension" of the church's history, and for "larger leadership and...co-

operation" in light of the urgency of the moment (1913:50).[13] Franklin

enthusiastically endorsed this approach, calling for greater Chinese input in matters of

theology and faith (1913:51), a position quite similar to Mott's own interpretation of

"a larger Christ and a larger gospel" (Mackie, et al. 1965:94-95; see also Irvin 1984;

Mott 1928:426, 427-428; Mott 1944).

    Soul competency and indigenous Christianity. Shortly thereafter, Franklin

began to promote among his Baptist constituents the competency of the soul in

religion as an idea which lent both theological and denominational support for the

indigenous church approach to mission (Franklin [1916]; 1920b; 1921; 1923a; [n.

d.]c). In an address before the Northern Baptist Convention in Minneapolis,

Minnesota on May 21, 1916 on "The Triumphant Gospel Abroad" (Franklin

[1916]),[14] Franklin called the assembled brethren to consider their "historical

[13] See Mott's "Closing Address" before the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (Hedlund 1993:49-51), in which he repeatedly urges the audience to consider "larger" aspects of faith and mission as a result of the conference's accomplishments and anticipated missionary victories ahead.

[14] This paper is located in the James H. Franklin file at the American Baptist Historical Society on the campus of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, New York. The first 22 pages of the original manuscript is located in Box 5, Folder "Clippings 1906-1943;" the final pages are found in Box 6, Folder "Christian Mission—International Forces, Qualifications of Missionary, Paternalism, Miss[ion] B[oar]d—Facing Future." The final pages of the manuscript in this folder are reproduced

significance" as especially suited for "such a time as this" ([1916]:21), that is, a time

of success in foreign missions and increased attention to the ability of national

Christians to lead and direct their own work. He continued to call attention to the

missiological significance of soul competency in later essays and addresses,

including: "Baptist Missions in the New World Order" (1920b);[15] "To the Ends of the

Earth" (1921); Franklin's Baptist World Alliance "Address" in Stockholm (1923a);[16]

and in an additional paper probably dating to the late 1920s ([n. d.]c).[17]

In his 1916 address, delivered on the heels of his trip to Japan, China and

other Eastern points, Franklin reported on the successes of the work. By "triumphant

gospel abroad," he meant the kind of Western approach to mission that featured

sacrificial service ([1916]:6-10) and recognized the abilities of Asian believers to

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from an unidentified magazine/journal source, and do not carry page numbers consistent with the
original manuscript. Therefore, all future citations of pages beyond p. 22 of the original manuscript
carry the abbreviation "ff" to signify that material beyond the first 22 pages is being cited.

[15] The *Review and Expositor's* "Baptists and the New World Order" edition appeared as the third
(July) and fourth (October) numbers of Volume 17 (1920). The July edition carried the majority of the
articles dedicated to this theme. Interestingly enough, four of the ten total articles in these editions
were given to mission, the first three in the July edition: "Baptist Missions in the New World Order,"
by J. F. Love of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board; "Baptists and the Christianizing of
America in the New Order," by Victor I. Masters of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; and
"Baptists and the Problem of World Missions," by W. O. Carver of Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary. The fourth article on mission, accompanied by Mullins' own contribution to this theme and
titled "Baptist Theology in the New World Order," was Franklin's article, curiously titled the same as
the one by Love. Though it is nothing but conjecture, it seems possible that one of the reasons both
Mullins' and Franklin's articles appear in the October rather than the July number is their common
reference to soul competency, or perhaps because Franklin's article relies heavily on that particular
theological concept of Mullins.

[16] Here, Franklin does not mention soul competency *per se*, although in this address he does quote one
sentence from *The Axioms of Religion* to support his contention for indigeneity in mission (1923a:183;
the line comes from p. 106 of *The Axioms of Religion*).

[17] Again, Franklin does not mention soul competency but rather the need to be faithful to Baptist
"principles" and "tradition" in the context of the indigenous church ([n. d.]c:6-7). Located in the
James H. Franklin file at the American Baptist Historical Society in Rochester, New York, this paper is
missing the first two pages along with the title. It probably dates to the late 1920s, since in the text
Franklin remarks that the paper is the result of his fifth tour in China in 15 years. Since his first tour
occurred in 1913 when accompanying John R. Mott to the China National Conference (see Franklin
1913), this paper was probably written around 1928.

administer their own work and evangelize their own people ([1916]:7, 16-17). "China," Franklin said, "must be evangelized by the Chinese. Western missionary agencies are but as John the Baptist preparing the way. We must give place in all lands to the native forces...." ([1916]:16).

Facilitating indigenous responsibility for mission work, and encouraging the national Christian to "think and act for himself in religion without pressure from any source" ([1916]:21) was, in Franklin's opinion, what soul competency represented on the mission field. In particular, the "holy mission" of soul competency ([1916]:22) meant that the "triumphant gospel" signaled an "untrammeled" gospel—one which invited Eastern interpretations of the gospel, the rapid decrease of Western influence and imposition, and an acknowledgement that the "Oriental" believer was fully free and equal to the Western believer. Soul competency stood *for* the right of every person to think for him/herself while standing *against* external interposition of priests, bishops, boards, church officials, conventions, popes, and denominations. "We [Baptists] assert," said Franklin, "that it is quite safe to trust Christ, the New Testament and the Holy Spirit among any people" ([1916]:22). Franklin announced that there was no room for Western superiority or any other form of "spiritual tyranny" because, as the Jerusalem church discovered in Acts 2 and Peter understood in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit made no distinction between people, falling on all believers regardless of race or tongue ([1916]:22ff).

In 1920, Franklin penned his "Baptist Missions in the New World Order" article (1920b) to call Baptists to their unique mission based on the principle of soul competency. Though Baptists stood with other evangelical Christians in promoting

spiritual regeneration, an international viewpoint and, above all, the cross of Christ,

their unique denominational heritage of soul competency—which paralleled, he

believed, the ideas of democracy, self-determinism, and freedom (1920b:394)—aided

the "growing and encouraging tendency" on the part of national believers to "claim

their divine right to interpret Christ and the New Testament for themselves,"

(1920b:396). Franklin believed the missionary task to be clear: "We would lead all

the world into an acquaintance with that Christ, and, as Baptists, we should have no

fears as to leaving them alone with Him" (1920b:400).

American Baptist interpretations of the indigenous church during this period

also pointed to some of the more prominent ideals within the Baptist vision of soul

competency. In 1925, the Boards of Managers of the American Baptist Foreign

Mission Society and the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society jointly

issued a document entitled *Foreign Mission Policies: A Report of the Special*

Conference of the Boards of Managers and Delegates from the Ten Missions

(*Foreign Mission Policies* 1925). The characteristics ascribed to an "indigenous

church" in this document go beyond the standard, three-self description of such a

church, and hint at Mullins' soul competency concept as Franklin interpreted it. The

section labeled "Characteristics of an Indigenous Church" reads:

> Although an indigenous church is not easily defined, yet there are certain
> characteristics which are clearly discernible. While such a church is
> commonly described as self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating,
> yet the essential characteristics of a truly indigenous church are spiritual. It
> will be conscious of its own direct relationship to Christ and responsibility to
> Him, and will have full confidence in the power of the Spirit alone to energize
> and direct it. A church may be small in membership, simple in its
> organization and activities, and even partially dependent on foreign financial
> aid, but if it has real life and is doing its utmost to express such life it may
> properly be considered indigenous. This essential life inevitably seeks to

express itself, however, in complete self-government, self-support and self-propagation. It follows that a truly indigenous church will not merely appropriate those values which have been brought to it by others, but will make use of any permanent values in its own heritage and will endeavor to make its own contribution to the world's knowledge of the riches available in Christ. (1925:7)

Of importance is the fact that Franklin's interpretation and application of soul competency to indigenous mission did not tightly relate the concept to congregational church polity. In fact, his own approach seemed to mitigate against concluding that soul competency required any particular polity at all. Instead, Franklin was concerned with looking at the fundamental principles of non-coercion, non-interference, and a direct relationship with God that were deeply embedded in Mullins' own formation of the concept in *The Axioms of Religion*. In this way, Franklin could endorse soul competency as an important principle that encouraged the theological and organizational integrity of indigenous Christianity. This is not to say that Franklin would have been unfavorable to congregationalism, but only that the employment of the soul competency concept did not require that congregationalism *per se* develop within specific global mission contexts. Rather, his primary concern was two-fold: that national believers be given the freedom to develop the Christian faith within their own context, and that Baptists fulfill their God-given mission to grant that freedom in their missionary endeavors. As Franklin wrote in his essay, "To the Ends of the Earth" (1921):

Surely we [Baptists] must stand for the acknowledgement of our fundamental principles, and for their practise [sic], here and at the ends of the earth. We have a mission to fulfil [sic], in common with others, in taking Christ to men everywhere. We have also a mission of our own, if we are to be true to our heritage. We must claim for all men the right to interpret Christ for themselves, whether they live in the centers or at the ends of the earth—in Orient or Occident. (1921:223)

<u>Conclusion</u>

As expressed in *The Axioms of Religion*, the question Mullins wanted most to answer was what difference the competency of the soul in religion—along with the more substantive religious axioms and their visible manifestation in congregational church polity—could make outside the Baptist fold, both in the larger church and in the world. He intended that the last major section of his book address this question, demonstrating what it meant for the church and the denomination, what it meant politically in America, and what it meant religiously, socially, educationally, intellectually, and missionally in the world.

Outside of Mullins himself, American Baptist mission executive James H. Franklin went to the greatest lengths to interpret and apply the principle over a period of many years, doing so specifically within the context of cross-cultural missions as a way of addressing the issue of indigenous Christianity. He clearly believed that their historical principle fundamentally meant absolute equality among all Christians in God's family, and the granting of all believers the right to interpret the Christian faith as God's Spirit so led. For Baptists, the matter of achieving an indigenous church rested upon complete fidelity to New Testament teachings and to their own Baptist principles ([n. d.]c:6-7).

Like Mullins, Franklin believed that soul competency represented an important part of Baptists' global witness, not in the sense of convincing others to "believe in" the truth of soul competency, but rather in the sense of applying its truths where they lived. Again, for Franklin as for Mullins soul competency as a revision of the Baptist faith did not simply entail a rethinking of what Baptists believed or who

Baptists were. Instead, as a new Baptist vision it fundamentally involved explaining the nature of their witness for global impact.

The question remains as to whether Mullins' vision is capable of informing the Baptist mission and witness today. Coming to a decision requires evaluating soul competency through the lens of a missionary model that incorporates the relationship between Christian mission and the denominational expression of the Christian church. The following chapter presents the development of such a model and how it can aid in uncovering the missiological significance of the competency of the soul in religion for today.

CHAPTER 5

A Transdenominational Model of Identity and Mission

Though highly favored in the 19th and early 20th centuries as a legitimate

expression of the church in the United States, the American denomination began to

suffer criticism in the middle years of the last century from neo-orthodox and

ecumenical theologians who considered it to be a sign of Christianity's "moral

failure" that was secular in nature and guilty of rending asunder the kingdom of God

(Richey 1977:11-12; Mullin and Richey 1994:4). With the close of World War II,

mainstream denominations further experienced a crisis of direction as they began to

suffer a loss of prestige in American life, witnessed the formation of new evangelical

and non-denominational bodies, fervently supported the rising ecumenical movement,

and willingly submerged their own histories within America's larger religious story

(Richey 1977:9; Hutchison 1989; Richey 1994:74, 87; Mullin and Richey 1994:3-4).

In his magisterial volume, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission*, South

African missiologist David Bosch (1991) leaves out any reference to the role that

Christian denominations may play in an "emerging ecumenical paradigm" of mission

(1991:368-510). His only reference to the denomination locates it squarely within a

Western Enlightenment paradigm (1991:328-330) that, he believes, is slowly giving

way to a global, postmodern, and ecumenical missionary paradigm (1991:349-362).

That modernity's Enlightenment project is clearly and rapidly waning is

acknowledged by most observers who write on the church and its mission today.[1]

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[1] Just a handful of sources include: Guder (1998:18-45); Hiebert (1999); *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (1997); Roxburgh (1993); Shenk (1999:153-165); and Van Engen (1996:207-229).

Should modernity's demise, though, automatically dismiss the significance of the

denomination for the Christian faith and its global mission?

Despite the skepticism of some quarters, sociologist Robert Wuthnow

(Princeton University) forecasts that the "church as denomination" will continue to be

an important source of Christian identity in the 21st century. The global, "Christian"

identity which all believers in Christ share with one another needs, according to

Wuthnow, the enrichment and strength of a local identity that a Christian

denomination can give (1993:522-523). Others observe that postmodernism's

appreciation for particularity and story, as well as the alternative cultural worldviews

it engenders, favors the denomination over the denominationally-neutral ecumenical

and evangelical approaches to faith with their overarching Christian "meta-

narratives" (Ammerman 1994:111-112; Mullin and Richey 1994:6-7).

Also, in a recent study conducted by Faith Communities Today (FACT) of

The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (Hartford Seminary), researchers found

that 62% of the 14,301 congregations surveyed expressed their denominational

heritage "quite well" or "very well," with denominationally-strong congregations

claiming to be "vital and alive" and having a clear sense of mission and an excitement

about the future. Based on these findings, Scott Thumma of the Hartford Institute

concludes, "Denominational identity still makes a difference. And if this identity is

strongly held, it makes a positive difference" (2003:3; see also Ammerman 2000).

The fact is, writes the authors of the *Missional Church* (1998), the church in

North America cannot rewrite its script; in other words, from a historical standpoint

the church must start within its own setting and attempt to understand how God

shapes and sends the church within that setting, which includes dealing constructively with the reality of denominations. "It is important, then, to reflect carefully on the formation of denominations from a biblical perspective and to draw out lessons from that study for translating the gospel into the current context of the church in North America" (Guder 1998:69-70). Denominations can have a place in God's mission provided they are founded upon solid biblical-theological grounds, reach out to encompass the full social context of their communities, and organize on the basis of the church's nature and ministry (1998:68-72).

As observed in previous chapters, E. Y. Mullins passionately believed that the denominations of his day had an important role in the advancement of God's kingdom in the world of the early 20th century. His principle of the competency of the soul in religion sought to link the Baptist "vision" and "task" for the sake, as he put it, of the "spiritual and political hopes of the world" (1908a:8). As well, American Baptist mission executive James Franklin viewed soul competency as an important principle for understanding and promoting the concept of the indigenous church in cross-cultural missions ([1916]:20ff; 1920b:393-397; 1923a:182-183).

Today, Baptists are almost 100 years removed from the era when Mullins first introduced his revisioning concept in 1906. How can his vision of the competency of the soul in religion be assessed and understood for contemporary missional relevance? This chapter seeks to establish a model by which Mullins' idea of the competency of the soul in religion can be evaluated in Chapter 6. Designated as a transdenominational model of identity and mission, this tool serves as an original contribution to the study of Christian mission as such mission relates to, and is

realized through, the denominational expression of the Christian faith. The model is grounded in the missiological principle of the *missio Dei*, informed by the denominational perspectives of Winthrop Hudson (1963[1953]; 1977[1955]), Robert Bruce Mullin (1994), Sydney Mead (1977[1954]), and Russell Richey (1994), and strengthened by a critical realist approach to faith and mission as clarified by Paul Hiebert (1999:68-116). Incorporating a variety of denominational approaches to the missionary task, the model yields several key elements of denominational mission useful for evaluating Mullins' vision. This chapter, then, sets the stage in Chapter 6 for unfolding the potential missiological significance of soul competency for Christian witness today.

<div align="center">The Missionary God and the Missionary Church</div>

Within the last half century, patterns of ecclesiocentric mission that dominated the Christendom paradigm of mission[2] have been challenged, as the authors of the *Missional Church* state it, by "theocentric reconceptualizations of Christian mission" (Guder 1998:4). Since the International Missionary Council's 1952 Willingen Conference, missiologists across the denominational and confessional spectrums have employed the phrase *missio Dei* or "mission of God" to speak of the meaning of global Christian mission (Bosch 1991:390-391). Of its meaning, Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl writes: "God the Father sent the Son, and the Son is both the Sent One and the Sender. Together with the Father the Son sends the Holy Spirit, who in turn sends the church, congregations, apostles, and servants, laying them under obligation in discharging his work" (1978:3; see also Bosch 1991:390).

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[2] See Chapter 1, pp. 16-19.

According to this model, mission does not fundamentally describe an activity of the people of God—not even their "going" as many have interpreted the biblical Great Commission to imply—but instead defines the very *nature and essence of the God of the people* (Bosch 1991:390). The person of God so conceived—in traditional Trinitarian terminology and in the context of mission—points to the reality that mission is not simply something which God possesses, but something which speaks to who God is; thus the "mission of God" translates into the "missionary God," that is, the one who both sends and, in the Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, is sent into the world (Guder 1998:4). From the Triune God, then, the church is sent into the world, taking on the very nature and purpose of the divine Sender.

In this light, as God is missionary in nature, the people of God are to be missionary by their very nature (Bosch 1991:372). *Mission*—not location, institution or culture as in the Christendom paradigm—defines the nature and being of the church (Shenk 1999:16). The missionary church thus relocates mission at the center of its being. In other words, *the identity of the church is missionary*. Of the local congregation, Lesslie Newbigin writes, "A congregation is not missionary just because it supports the work of a board or society; the question always is whether or not it is itself missionary, whether it exists as a witness to the people around it" (Aagaard and Newbigin 1989:102). Consequently, who the church is—its nature and being—has direct implications for the larger society in which the church is located (Bosch 1982), demanding that God's people first uncover who and what the Spirit created them to be in order to know how God seeks to utilize them in witness to their world.

Recent biblical and congregational studies show that this relationship between ecclesial identity and global mission enables a radical shift in the way mission is interpreted and applied. On the congregational level, studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s by the Center for Congregational Ministries at McCormick Theological Seminary reported on the key role that congregational identity played in shaping a local church's community ministries (Dudley and Johnson 1989; Dudley 1991). Research by Carl Dudley and his associates on Illinois and Indiana congregations led them to identify the congregation's historian/reporter as a key player in its community outreach inasmuch as this person had unique access to the congregation's identity, both past and present, and thereby could potentially offer penetrating insight into how to express that identity in community ministry (Dudley and Johnson 1989:31-32). Of the intimate relationship between a congregation's identity and its life and witness, Dudley writes:

> Congregational identity incorporates the beliefs and commitments that hold a congregation together, motivate its members, and make it distinctive from others.... Embedded in congregational identity are the criteria for what is acceptable and the sources of energy for ministry. The identity of the congregation sifts through and tests the recommendations for a social ministry, as it does with all other decisions. The decision to begin a social ministry is more than a procedural or political process: it is an important affirmation of the basic commitments we share as a community of Christians. (Dudley 1991:43-44)

Addressing both the local and the global church, Mennonite missionary John Driver interprets the many images of the people of God in the Bible as missionary descriptions of what it means to be God's "contrast-community" in the world (1997). "The church," Driver maintains, "is God's mission in the world, as it understands God's purpose for it so to be," an idea that he maintains is radically different from the

Christendom view of the church (1997:210). Divided into pilgrimage images, new-order images, peoplehood images, and images of transformation, his twelve descriptions of the church speak both to who God calls the church to be (such as sojourner, the new creation, the family of God, a witnessing community) as well as to how the church is to live that calling in the world. For example, of 1 Peter 2:9-10 and the call to be a holy nation, Driver powerfully links the church's identity with its mission, writing: "[The text] shows clearly that the primary concern in the biblical vision is not merely the private holiness of individuals, important as this may be. The fundamental thrust of the passage is that the people of God (as a people) give witness to his saving purpose for all humanity. The unambiguous identity of the early church is the prime ingredient in the fulfillment of its mission" (1997:35).

Finally, Charles Van Engen (Fuller Theological Seminary) offers a missiological interpretation and application of Paul's vision of the church universal in Ephesians (1996). Drawing upon the apostle's description of the church as unity (4:1-16), holiness (1:1-14; 4:17-5:5; 5:6-20; 3:14-21), and universality (1:15-23; 2:1-22; 3:1-13),and coupled with the Nicene confession of the church as apostolic (1996:105-117), Van Engen converts the four ancient "marks of the church—"one, holy, catholic and apostolic"—from static adjectives to "missional verbals" that speak of the church's mission as a unifying force, a sanctifying event, a reconciling event, and a proclaiming event (1996:117-124). The force of his argument is clearly that these missionary actions derive from the essence of the church, thereby giving the church guidance for its missional witness in the world.

Though usually described in terms of its local (congregational) or its universal expressions, the church may also be understood, to use Wuthnow's designation, "as denomination" (1993:522). Differentiating it from the more recent phenomenon of denominationalism,[3] Methodist historian Russell Richey describes the denomination (such as Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, or other denominations) as simply a religious movement "denominated" or named within history (1994:76, 92). Baptist historian Winthrop Hudson, reflecting on early Reformation and English Puritan thought, depicts Christian denominations historically as "differing attempts to give visible expression to the life of the church in the life of the world" (1977[1955]:22). He further claims that each denomination "could and should be regarded as constituting a different 'mode' of expressing in piety, thought, and organization that larger life of the church" in which they all share (1977[1955]:23). Thus, a denomination fundamentally represents a particular ethos, heritage, or tradition of the Christian faith in history expressed in terms of particular beliefs, traditions, organizations, and identity. Because it expresses, as Hudson phrases it, the "larger life of the church" within particular theological, sociological, and historical boundaries, it also constitutes a means by which those congregations affiliated with it can together carry out God's mission in the world.

In light of the *missio Dei*, the missionary witness of the church as denomination fundamentally depends on "whether it exists as a witness to the people around it" (Aagaard and Newbigin 1989:102) and on the extent to which it seeks to

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[3] Russell Richey defines denominationalism historically as a "constellation of denominations" within American society and culture, and sociologically as "a complex of theory and practice, of process and form, [that] has taken different complexions over its life" (1994:76).

understand its unique tradition, heritage, and identity to be missionary.[4] In other words, the measure of a denomination's missional commitment is not found in the number of missionary agencies it creates or the number of missionaries it employs but instead in how well the denomination itself represents, as well as presents, a missional witness to the world. The *missio Dei* denies the validity of relegating mission to the status of a denominational program. Who and what the denomination is, derived from history and realized in local situations, determines its viability as a channel of God's missional activity in the world. It follows, then, that the transdenominational model of identity and mission developed in this chapter requires an appreciation of how God has shaped and guided the different denominational identities which are represented in the model.

The Denomination as a Cooperating and Purposive Community of Discourse

Hudson's denominational theory, introduced in the mid 20th century at a time when many were scorning denominational Christianity while stressing the virtues of

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[4] The narrative above seeks to be true to a Baptist interpretation of the terms "church" and "denomination." Strictly congregational in polity, Baptists characteristically balk when church is defined to mean ecclesiastical structures beyond the local body of believers. However, most Baptists also accept the "church" to include the universal body of believers in Christ. Therefore, both the local congregation and the universal Christian church can take on the meaning of "church" and "missionary church," though for Baptists the primary emphasis is usually on the congregation. When "denomination" is thrown into the mix, caution is required in the way it is interpreted. The concept of denomination can take on a variety of meanings. Baptist sociologist Nancy Ammerman interprets it to mean a tradition of beliefs and practices, ecclesiastical organization, and a cultural identity (1994). As noted in the above narrative, Baptist historian Winthrop Hudson interprets early Puritan theology to describe denominations as "differing attempts to give visible expression to the life of the church in life of the world" (1977[1955]:22). Therefore, while Baptists do not typically accept any organized ecclesiastical structure beyond the local congregation to constitute the biblical meaning of "church," the "denomination" is capable of taking on all the qualities of Christ's universal body, including its missionary nature, as a historical expression of the larger, universal church without, as Hudson carefully points out, claiming to represent the whole church of Christ (1977[1955]:22).

ecumenical faith,[5] sought to demonstrate that ecumenicity and denominationalism were not necessarily opposing ideas. The force of his argument was especially felt in his now classic essay, "Denominationalism as a Basis for Ecumenicity: A Seventeenth Century Conception" (1977[1955). Hudson's reading of 17th century Independent theology within the Church of England—and particularly in the thought of the Dissenting Brethren in the Westminster Assembly (1977[1955]:23-42)— brought to light the fundamental conviction that no church system could be identified exclusively with the larger church of God and that, therefore, no form of "coactive violence" could be used to force conformity of opinion or belief (1977[1955]:25-27, 34). As these Independents saw it, "Christians can live together in love and peace, 'notwithstanding their differences,' if they will grant liberty of conscience to those who disagree with them, if they will keep ever in mind the very real unity they have in Christ, and if they will cease to regard all other churches as false and schismatic" (1977[1955]:41).

Ultimately, the views of the Puritan Independents—that is, those of the Baptists, Congregationalists, and other "sectaries" (Hudson 1963[1953]:43)—were enacted into law in the Act of Toleration of 1689 and transported to America in the 17th and 18th centuries, thereby forming the basis of a denominational conception of the church that was, at its inception, ideally ecumenical and cooperative rather than sectarian and divisive. In his book, *The Great Tradition of the American Churches* (1963[1953]), Hudson writes:

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[5] Sydney Ahlstrom notes that the impact of the ecumenical movement came to be felt especially after the Edinburgh conference on Life and Work and the Oxford conference on Faith and Order, both taking place in 1937 (1961:316).

> Thus it [the denominational system] stands athwart the tendency of any religious institution to absolutize itself and to claim God as its own exclusive possession, and provides a basis for co-operation between denominations in areas of common agreement by acknowledging that all denominations or bodies of Christians, however imperfect, may be regarded as true churches to the extent that they are striving by the grace of God to become a more perfect representation of the universal Christian community. (1963[1953]:258)

Hudson recognized, though, that the very fact of the existence of different denominational traditions and viewpoints testified to the pervasiveness of sin and human fallibility in religion (1963[1953]:258). So, too, thought the early Puritan Independents (1963[1953]:43-60; 1977[1955]:31-33). Indeed, Reformation theology insisted that "no mortal man and no human institution was infallible, and any attempt to absolutize the fallible could only be interpreted as idolatry" (1963[1953]:55). Truth, then, could only break through by means of free, open, persuasive, and unfettered discourse among all God's people. The Spirit, insisted the Independents, was no respecter of persons; "[e]ven the humblest layman might be its instrument" (1963[1953]:57). The ultimate consequence of this desire to protect the Spirit's liberty in divine disclosure was denominationalism, "involving, on the one hand, freedom to organize ecclesiastical communities and, on the other hand, equal opportunity for individuals and churches to submit their claims in the forum of public discussion" (1963[1953]:58).

Robert Bruce Mullin (1994) sheds further light on American denominations as non-exclusive and cooperative communities by describing them as "bilingual communities" (1994:163) His model is an effort to understand the role that the denomination plays in society, conceived either religiously or socio-politically. Building upon the works of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, theologian George

Lindbeck and philosopher Janet Martin Soskice (1994:164-165), Mullin views the denomination as a distinct cultural and linguistic system, in which members share a common language, story, and tradition that connects the denomination both to its "pre-American roots and its non-American compatriots" (1994:166).

At least two ideas come to the fore. First, as a non-exclusive, bilingual community, the denomination participates in fellowship and communication across denominational boundaries within the larger society. Denominational participants thus live in the "tension between particularity and ecumenism" (Mullin 1994:166). Second, denominations generally do not make exclusive demands upon their members to the point of requiring them to eschew the claims of other traditions. This grants a denomination the capacity to inform an individual's perspective without necessarily dictating the person's understanding of the larger world. It also means that a denomination is free to follow not only its own ecclesiastical past but also the guidance of the general culture as well (1994:167).

Finally, historian Sydney Mead notes that the American denomination has been primarily "purposive," rather than confessional and territorial as the church in Europe had been traditionally conceived. In Mead's estimation, the denomination is "a voluntary association of like-hearted and like-minded individuals, who are united on the basis of common beliefs for the purpose of accomplishing tangible and defined objectives" (1977[1954]:71). According to Russell Richey, the denomination in America has gone through two intentionally mission-focused stages in its long history, which he describes respectively as the "Purposive Missionary Association" stage of the 19th century and the "Corporate Organization" stage of the early to mid

20th century (1994:80-82, 84-87). Within the fabric of American denominationalism, then, the denomination is geared to look outward for the purpose of accomplishing what it believes to be God's directives within society.

Hudson's and Mullin's views, coupled with those of Mead and Richey, provide historical and sociological perspectives that balance and extend the biblical-theological approach to the church offered in the concepts of the *missio Dei* (missionary God) and the *missio ecclesiae* (missionary church). Essentially, a denomination's witness depends on more than its own vision of the Christian faith and its application in the world. In theory as well as in practice, denominationalism implies the ability to cooperate between denominations and search mutually for the truth. Because denominations can speak the language of the general religious culture across ecclesiastical lines, they do not have to be restricted by their own hermeneutical limitations.

Of course, being "denominational" does not guarantee a cure for myopia and exclusion. Yet being denominational does not automatically consign a group to sectarian defensiveness. The potential exists for denominations to contribute to, as well as receive from, other denominational (and non-denominational) interpretations and applications of Christian faith in the world. Given the denomination's purposive nature, one may conclude that particular denominational conceptions of mission depend not only on fidelity to one's own tradition and heritage as required by the *missio Dei*, but they also require a willingness to enter freely and openly into the give-and-take of transdenominational interaction and dialogue.

<u>The Critical Realist Dimension of Transdenominational Dialogue</u>

The epistemology of critical realism serves as a final resource for informing the shape of a transdenominational model of identity to mission. Missionary anthropologist and professor Paul Hiebert (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) offers an explanation and application of critical realism to theology, anthropology and mission in his book, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (1999). In essence, he finds this approach more biblically and philosophically satisfying than the "arrogance and colonialism" of positivism and the "relativism" of instrumentalism (1999:xv).

In the book's third chapter, Hiebert approaches "critical realistic epistemology" as a "middle ground between positivism, with its emphasis on objective truth, and instrumentalism, with its stress on the subjective nature of human knowledge," because it affirms "the presence of objective truth but recognizes that this is subjectively apprehended" (1999:69). Knowledge in critical realism represents the correspondence between a person's mental images of reality and the real world, so that knowledge is "objective reality subjectively known and appropriated in human lives" (1999:74).

From the critical realist perspective, knowledge functions much like a map does for charting distances and directions in the external world. No matter how crude or sophisticated a map may be, it is "true" but only in certain, limited ways. The usefulness of a map is not found essentially in the amount of information it holds—though more detailed maps can provide greater clarity—but rather in the way it configures information into a coherent whole. It is therefore the configurational

nature of knowledge—that is, the accuracy in which bits of information are connected together—which gives meaning to the map. Thus, no map need contain every conceivable bit of information for it to depict reality and guide a person's ability to maneuver within that reality (Hiebert 1999:76-81). From this standpoint, then, we can say a critical realist approach to the denomination and its missional witness affirms that a particular denominational vision can hold truth without the burden of presuming to represent a literal one-to-one correspondence to truth. Truth is not found in the denomination's ability to reflect all aspects of reality but in the relative coherency of one's presentation.

Hiebert also states that critical realism operates on the basis of complementarity and commensurability. Unlike the naïve realists of positivism and the idealists of instrumentalism, critical realists do not feel compelled to incorporate diverse knowledge systems into one single, comprehensive whole. As long as these systems share a common worldview and do not contradict one another in the areas of their overlap, diverse views of reality built on different premises can lead to deeper insights into the complexity of truth (Hiebert 1999:81-85). Beyond the ability to complement each other, knowledge systems can also be made commensurable through the process of translation involving "metacultural translation grids" that stand detached from all particular theories in order to allow people who hold these theories to translate them from one system to another in the search for truth (1999:88-89). Though the interaction of different knowledge systems in community dialogue can potentially cause friction and confrontation, Hiebert believes that critical realists are more prone to irenic debate in a spirit of humility than are positivists, given the

critical realists' view that all theories and systems are by nature limited, finite, and thus open to correction (1999:95-96).

The critical realist approach to knowledge and reality, as Hiebert outlines it, clearly supplements the previously delineated views of Winthrop Hudson and Robert Mullin. From the critical realist point of view, different denominational visions of mission not only can communicate and cooperate with each other, they can also complement each other in the common quest for truth. Being ecumenical in nature, denominations can work together for purposes larger than any one denomination itself. By holding common ground in the Christian faith, the denominations can arrive at shared truth concerning the meaning of witness and mission in the world. Indeed, different denominational voices within the larger Christian tradition are needed if the truth of mission within the denominational context is to be heard.

However, the search for truth in mission and its practice in the world is not meant to result in one, overarching denominational approach to mission. In terms of the specific transdenominational model of identity and mission developed in this chapter, this quest serves—much like the metacultural translation grid—not to replace particular denominational approaches to mission, but rather as a means for dialogue between these approaches. To play off Hiebert's description and use of "metatheology" in the context of theological pluralism (1999:97-103), a transdenominational model recognizes that different denominations representing different theological and cultural identities will approach mission differently. As Hiebert notes in reference to the implications of critical realism for theology, the aim

is to come to a common understanding of the truth of Scripture while providing a means whereby biases and errors are more clearly seen (1999:101-102).

Also, a transdenominational model of identity and mission does not have to reflect all denominational visions of identity and mission in order to represent and communicate truth about denominational mission. The integrity of transdenominational dialogue is not dependent on whether every conceivable denomination's vision is represented, only on whether the invitation is open for all visions to enter the dialogue. The hope is that, as models of mission dialogue across denominational lines, greater clarity of mission will result. Surely conflict and confrontation between viewpoints will occur, but controversy and division are not necessarily inevitable.

A transdenominational model of identity and mission does not seek to advance any particular denominational model. Preaching a specific model of identity and mission would make that model, and the denomination which sponsors it, an "end" in itself and goal of the kingdom. Instead, a transdenominational model of identity and mission encourages denominations and their members to stand firm in Christian witness both in fidelity to their own unique heritage and identity as well as in recognition and appreciation of the ways God has spoken through other denominational traditions and of what these other traditions potentially have to say about the meaning of denominational witness in the world. Ultimately the transdenominational model outlined below seeks to shed light on what denominational mission can mean that takes seriously its own identity and heritage for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.

<u>Visions of Denominational Identity and Mission</u>

In recent years, a number of denominational spokespersons have begun to call upon their own traditions to interpret anew their distinctive identity and heritage as a way of illuminating the mission of the church. These may be characterized, as one such title indicates, as intentional attempts to relate "Identity and Mission" (Mikolaski 1980). Believing that certain aspects of their denominational genius correspond to world need and the church's missional call, these models propose to link what it means to belong to one's denominational tradition and what that belonging may suggest for world Christian mission. When taken individually, each specific proposal offers a glimpse of God's mission in the world; taken together within a larger transdenominational model of identity and mission, it becomes possible to discern a more complete picture, one capable of unveiling a larger panorama of Christian mission that springs from denominational identity.

<u>Criteria</u>

A number of criteria govern which patterns or proposals of denominational mission are included in the transdenominational model outlined in the paragraphs to follow. The criteria are chosen on the basis of their ability to represent and reflect primary aspects of the missiological, denominational, and epistemological principles introduced in the above discussion.

First, each model selected accepts, either implicitly or explicitly, the basic premise of the *missio Dei* that the church is missional in nature and identity. In other words, the models or proposals understand that mission has much to do with how God has formed and continues to form the identity of the people of God in history.

The faith that the church holds to be true is not abstract truth but rather motivates the church to become actively engaged with the world for the sake of the gospel. Mission, therefore, is identified as central to the people of God—that is, as centrally located within the core of its faith—rather than being consigned to the margins of the church.

Second, each model approaches mission from the standpoint of denominational heritage in order to illuminate the contribution(s) that that heritage can make to the practice of Christian mission, but not to deny the validity of other denominationally-based proposals for mission. Thus, the models selected are not consciously sectarian to the point of dismissing out of hand other ideas which do not match their own specific denominational viewpoints. On the other hand, it is accepted as a given within the dialogical process that each model will seek to pinpoint those aspects within its tradition that shed favorable light both on itself and on its interpretation of Christian mission.

Third, each individual model shares in the common worldview of the Christian religion or faith. The theory of complementarity in critical realism suggests that different views of reality—in this case, views of or approaches to Christian mission—can be accepted as complementary and, therefore, can exist alongside each other in dialogue and interaction, only if they are each rooted in a common worldview and do not contradict one another within that worldview (Hiebert 1999:85). Hudson grounded his own denominational theory within the theology of the Protestant Reformation and its application in early (Independent) Puritanism (1977[1955]). For the purposes of the transdenominational model of identity and mission outlined

below, Christian faith is considered to be solidly Trinitarian and biblically based. Most proposals selected for the transdenominational model are Protestant in nature, though one arises out of the Catholic tradition.

Finally, the individual patterns of identity and mission considered for the transdenominational model seek to point their denominations toward greater missionary witness for the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They demonstrate a desire to relate the gospel to the challenges the church faces today. In its own way, each individual model understands that denominational identity serves little good if its only contribution is to show what God did in the past. Rather, the proposals attempt to give witness to what God wants to do in and through the denomination today. At the same time, only modern-day perspectives can adequately critique older interpretations of denominationally-inspired mission, such as Mullins' vision of soul competency, in order to evaluate their relevance for contemporary faith and witness.

Denominational Mission: Interpretations

Not all interpretations of denominational witness are included in the particular transdenominational model of identity and mission outlined in this chapter. However, each particular model or proposal represented is an interpretation and application of its denominational heritage, developed intentionally to apply that heritage to the church's mission in the world. The following proposals are identified by the tradition represented, the title of the article, book, or decree that describes the proposal, and the date when the model was promulgated or published. In most cases, these models correspond to the interpretations of individual scholars or leaders within their

respective traditions. In the case of the first model presented below, the summary given reflects an official decree or declaration by the tradition in question.

Roman Catholic: <u>*Ad Gentes* (1965)</u>. Soon after the "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church," or *Ad Gentes*, was published on December 7, 1965, the strong connection between this document and the Second Vatican Council's more fundamental decree, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*), became clear (Alexander 1966:580). Indeed, *Lumen Gentium* provides the necessary ecclesiological background for understanding the church's "updating" (*aggiornamento*) of its mission and witness (Yates 1994:168-175; Hedlund 1993:199-202; Abbott 1966:14-96). In *Lumen Gentium*, the church recasts its image as "the universal sacrament of salvation" (Abbott 1966:79) and as the "People of God" in pilgrimage, over against the static and overly-hierarchical emphases of traditional Catholic teaching (Yates 1994:168-169; Abbott 1966:24-37).

Ad Gentes builds upon this message by declaring from the outset, "The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation'" (Abbott 1966:584). The church by its very nature is missionary, sent from the mission of the Son and the Spirit in accord with the decree of the Father (1966:585). Therefore, because of the missionary nature of the whole church, the duty to spread the gospel of Christ is not something reserved only for the bishops and priests; rather, it also exists "in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into His members" because, as Ephesians 4:16 says, the "whole body" receives from Christ its increase according to the functioning "of each single part" (Abbott 1966:589).

Baptist: "Identity and Mission" (1980). In "Identity and Mission," Samuel J.

Mikolaski (1980) argues that Canada's lack of social cohesion and identity following

World War II serves as the context for Baptist mission within and to the country.

"The integration of a society," he believes, "is more a spiritual, social and cultural

reality—an issue of social and cultural ideology of faith—than of politics,

jurisprudence and consent" (1980:5). Mikolaski contends that Baptists should enter a

renewed commitment to the "primitive radicalism that produced us" (1980:8)

embodied within their anti-monolithic values of individualism, social, religious and

political diversity, and freedom, and out of this radical posture minister to the larger

contexts that face their nation and the world. Baptist pluralism, he maintains, is not a

value opposed to national cohesion and identity, because "[p]luralism cannot work

without fraternity, and fraternity requires equality and liberty for its operating

framework" (1980:9). Committed to a pluralist ethic, Baptists can thus give

themselves to greater interregional cooperation, a new sense of "people-

appreciation," the training of leaders who will speak prophetically to the times, a

clearer message of evangelical faith, a keen ability to minister without

depersonalizing the human being, a dedication to their heritage and witness within the

Believers Church tradition, and the grace to repent of past failures (1980:9-17).

Methodist: "John Wesley on the Mission of the Church" (1992). John

Wesley, remarks Ted Campbell in "John Wesley on the Mission of the Church"

(1992), affords contemporary Christians not only an opportunity to understand the

origins of early Protestant mission, but also "the root from which specifically

Methodist missionary endeavors have grown" (1992:46). Campbell finds that early

Methodist mission took its cue from Wesley's conviction that "his own people, their society and their culture, were not themselves Christian, and thus stood as much in need of the Gospel as any foreign people" (1992:54). Wesley's "extraordinary" ministry of preaching followed the pattern of the early apostles, and he organized his system of classes, societies and bands as venues of evangelistic outreach to English society. He believed that global evangelism could extend outward toward the whole world only by converting the "baptized heathen of England" (1992:56) who formed the core as well as the focus of his evangelistic efforts (1992:60). Mission, though, was not just about the evangelization of one's own people; it also meant recognizing the failures of one's culture to follow Jesus and, on this basis, refusing to transmit those failures to foreign lands. The intention of Wesley and early Evangelical proponents of mission was "to advocate a Christ who stood over their own culture as well as the 'heathen' world in judgment" (1992:61).

Disciples of Christ: "People Obsessed With Bread" (1993). Michael Kinnamon draws inspiration from his tradition's regular Communion celebration as well as its own denominational name to define the meaning of mission within the Disciples of Christ church. In "People Obsessed With Bread: Images of Disciples' Identity and Mission" (1993), he suggests that the act of breaking of bread calls his denomination to a renewed celebration in worship, the recovery of the commitment to Christian unity, and the remembrance of Christ's broken body for the sake of a broken and hungry world. "To be obsessed with bread is *not* to be consumed with questions of denominational identity, but to look beyond ourselves to the one who said, 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven...for the life of the

world'" (1993:9; emphasis original). Kinnamon also draws upon the "Disciples"
name to suggest that his church's mission should include a greater commitment to
education, a rejection of the world's idolatries, and an obligation to become a
community of discipline (1993:9-12). Disciples identity also speaks to their call to be
a loving, inclusive community with a sacrificial, passionate witness and a mutual
responsibility for each other and the world (1993:13-15).

      Lutheran: *Lutheran Identity and Mission* (1994). In *Lutheran Identity and
Mission*, co-author and Bishop Emeritus in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America William H. Lazareth (Lazareth and Rasolondraibe 1994) reflects on his
heritage in order to critique and inform the discipline of missiology and the practice
of mission today. Lutheranism's foundational mark of identity, writes Bishop
Lazareth, is its "evangelical catholic confessionality" (1994:18). This
"confessionality" bears significance for the church's mission in today's world.
"Authentic Confessional fidelity is not merely servile submission to the doctrinal
laws of an authoritarian church (*sacrificium intellectus*); no, it expresses rather our
grateful acknowledgment of the liberating gift of God's saving truth" (1994:24).
Possessing a "normed-norm quality" under the Word of God (the norming norm), the
Lutheran Confessions—and particularly Luther's Large Catechism—serve as a
faithful guide for the practice of mission in today's pluralistic society (1994:23).

      With his position explained, Lazareth critiques segments of David Bosch's
"emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm" from Bosch's book *Transforming
Mission*. Though finding Bosch's descriptions useful, Lazareth believes that the
Lutheran Confessions provide a clearer witness as to the inclusiveness of mission and

exclusiveness of the Christian faith, as well as a sharper vision as to the central role of the church in mission. Uniting Lutheranism's two-fold stress on catholicity and evangelicalism with the denomination's confessionalism, Lazareth finds that Luther's "theology of the cross" in the Large Catechism "would guide us to unite both a mission-centered view of the church (evangelical *missio Dei*) with a church-centered view of mission (catholic *missio Dei*)" (1994:88).

      Lutheran: "Proposition 187" (1996). Douglas Groll provides a further interpretation of Lutheran missional identity as that identity has been shaped in America in "Proposition 187: Catalyst for Reflection on Our Immigrant Identity as Impetus for Mission" (1996). In this essay, the author reflects on the immigrant status of the whole church, as well as his own denomination, and what that means for ministry among Hispanic migrants. Proposition 187 refers to the 1994 California law designed to deny education and welfare benefits to undocumented immigrants except in emergency situations. Cross-cultural ministry, argues Groll, is essentially a matter of understanding identities, both that of the people to whom the church ministers and that of the church's own identity within biblical and historical contexts (1996:166). Measures like Proposition 187 demonstrate immigrants' vulnerability and expose everyone to the temptation to force them to yield to the dominant culture's identity. Christian mission, though, requires that the sending church understand its own self as being an immigrant people. "To the degree that we are able to rediscover our own identities as a sojourning, immigrant people of God in the Biblical sense and remember the immigrant nature of the Lutheran movement in the United States over

the past 150 years, we will be availing ourselves of rich resources for relating to the present and subsequent generations of sojourners" (1996:170).

Methodist: "Connectionalism and Itinerancy" (1997). John Wesley's idea of connectionalism, writes Richard P. Heitzenrater in "Connectionalism and Itinerancy: Wesleyan Principles and Practices" (1997), was intimately related to his understanding of mission or the spreading of "scriptural holiness." For Wesley's lay preachers, to be in "connexion" with him meant uniformly submitting to his rules and instructions—as well as living in covenantal relationship among themselves as "connected brethren" (1997:29)—because, as Wesley viewed it, this was the best means for effecting the mission of the movement (1997:31). Within the Wesleyan system, itinerancy became a means to deploy preachers who were willing to be placed where they were most needed so as to spread scriptural holiness. "Together, these traditions of connectionalism and itinerancy both speak to the covenanting of preachers to a common mission to spread scriptural holiness, connected by a vision of God's purpose for humankind as presented by John Wesley" (1997:36).

Anglican: "Anglican Identity and the *Missio Dei*" (2000). In "Anglican Identity and the *Missio Dei*: Implications for the American Convocation of Churches in Europe," Ian Douglas (2000) posits a new definition of Anglicanism and Anglican identity based neither on doctrine, language, nor a shared cultural history. In light of the "glorious mess" (2000:462) of a pluralist, multicultural church, he defines Anglican identity as *"the embrace and celebration of apostolic catholicity within the vernacular moment"* (2000:462; emphasis original). In the first instance, this means that Anglicanism is "a community of God's incarnation in Jesus, enlivened by the

ongoing revelation of Christ in eucharistic fellowship, connected to the universal

Church, particularly through the historic episcopate, and forever new in the

contextualization of the Gospel in local cultural realities" (2000:465-466). In other

words, Anglican identity is found in the experience of locality in universality

(2000:466). Anglican identity, though, does not stop there. It moves to answer the

larger question, "To what end are we as Anglicans called?" (2000:466). This end is

located in the *missio Dei*, which Douglas interprets as God's desire to restore unity to

a broken creation. So Douglas writes:

> Our identity as Anglicans is dependent upon, and judged against, how faithful
> we are to the mission of God, to the making real of God's redemptive love in
> the world. Embracing and celebrating apostolic catholicity in the vernacular
> moment must always be oriented toward this greater call to the restoration of
> all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. Anglicanism for
> Anglicanism's sake, no matter how free from English cultural captivity, is not
> of God or for God. Anglicanism is not an end but a step on the way to the all-
> embracing Shalom of God, the all-embracing Reign of God where the
> particularities of peoples and cultures are both affirmed individually and
> brought into a new relationship of wholeness and universality one with
> another. As Anglicans, as Christians, we are called to live beyond ourselves
> trusting that God will use us to effect God's restoration to unity, God's
> redemption of creation to wholeness and oneness in Christ. (2000:470)

Elements of a Transdenominational Model of Identity and Mission

The preceding representative interpretations of denominational identity and

mission suggest at least eight key insights or elements concerning the meaning of

mission which take seriously denominational identity. Taken together, these elements

aid in putting flesh on the meaning of God's mission in the world. They also aid in

validating the role that denominations can play in forwarding God's missional

purposes in the world. In Chapter 6, these elements are used to evaluate the

missiological significance of soul competency for the contemporary practice of Christian mission.

A few disclaimers are in order before outlining the insights or elements. First, none of the insights listed below receive equal stress from all the denominational visions featured, nor is there any attempt to interpret any one insight within all of the denominational visions. Second, the explanation of each element receives support from several of the denominational visions above, but this should not leave the impression that those visions not used to explain a particular element are necessarily opposed to that element. Third, though each in its own way reflects the essence of *missio Dei*, no one element is permanent or fixed, allowing for later missionary visions to challenge or reshape those which are listed.

Fourth, each key element should be understood as ideals located within the essence of the denominations' identities rather than as realities that reflect the way these denominations actually do mission. Fifth, the elements often overlap onto and even build upon each other, thus demonstrating their interdependence. Finally, no pretense is made to have captured all the elements conveyed in these documents about the nature of denominational mission, only some of the most important ones.

Denominational Identity as Missional in Nature

First, in light of the *missio Dei*, denominational identity holds tremendous potential for shaping denominational mission. For this reason, denominationally-inspired mission should look to its identity and heritage for appropriate ways to express the faith. Thus Samuel Mikolaski comments, "The substance of religious identity should not be confused with its accoutrement nor with peripheral activities of

special interest groups. Identity is best reflected in a powerful current that sets the direction and pace of a religious tradition. In this sense, it has a clear theology, is deeply religious and is powerfully motivated to mission" (1980:2).

For Ian Douglas, the strong bond between identity and mission means that the establishment of an Anglican province and identity among expatriate American Episcopalians in Europe must look to the *missio Dei* for its reason to be. In other words, Anglican identity—as Douglas envisions it—unfolds under the guidance of the *missio Dei*, ever seeking to promote unity and ecumenical cooperation among all European Churches (2000:473). He contends that Anglicanism in Europe must learn to embrace and celebrate the different cultural manifestations of Jesus in their midst, seek unity with the Church of England's European diocese and ecumenical cooperation with other European Churches, and pursue the "vernacular moment" presented in the challenges of gospel contextualization, the advent of the European Union, and the Balkan crisis (2000:471-473).

Likewise, the Roman Catholic decree *Ad Gentes* captures the essence of this element by claiming that the "pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature" (Abbott 1966:585), interpreted in the sense of being sent to all nations as, in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, "the universal sacrament of salvation" (1966:584). "Missions" and "missionary activity" describes specifically the evangelization and planting of the Catholic Church among those peoples where, as yet, the Church is not yet found. When such happens, though, the Church's missionary responsibility does not cease, but continues through increased preaching and, more indirectly, through works of mercy and charity. "It is plain, then, that missionary activity wells up from

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the Church's innermost nature and spreads abroad her saving faith. It perfects her

Catholic unity by expanding it. It is sustained by her apostolicity. It gives expression

to the collegial awareness of her hierarchy. It bears witness to her sanctity while

spreading and promoting it" (1966:592).

Denominational Identity as Essential to Mission

Second, because the denomination's identity is essentially missional, its

identity is essential to mission. For this reason, one's heritage is to be celebrated and

recognized for the important contributions it has and can continue to make to God's

missional purposes in the world. Samuel Mikolaski calls fellow Canadian Baptists to

draw upon their "primitive radicalism" of individualism and human diversity in order

to offset both liberal and conservative tendencies to create monolithic societies of

political, social, and religious uniformity and determinism (1980:7-9). He reminds

Baptists that their ideals strike against the "monolithic culture" of the medieval

European model of religion and society. Baptists, indebted to the voluntarist and

pluralist emphases of the Believers Church tradition in Canada, are "strategically

placed" to reorient and reeducate the public mind in matters of political and religious

structure (1980:9).

Ted Campbell praises the early Wesleyan and Evangelical critique of their

"sub-Christian" cultural context (1992:48) as a model for today's approach to genuine

Christian evangelization and cross-cultural mission. Wesley reminded the church

that, if evangelism were to radiate outward from God's people in contiguous mission

toward the peoples of the world, it was necessary that his own people be converted

(1992:59-60). As well, Bishop William Lazareth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in America argues that the Lutheran Confessions, as the *norma normata* of doctrine and mission, offer the appropriate lens through which to interpret and apply the *missio Dei*, and restores the importance of the church for missionary witness (Lazareth and Rosolondraibe1994:87-91).

Scripture as Foundational to Denominational Mission

Third, authentic denominational mission draws from Scripture to understand the meaning of its identity and its mission in the world. *Ad Gentes*, like *Lumen Gentium* which precedes it, is rich in its citations of and allusions to Scripture. It roots the mission of the Church in creation, the sending of the Son and the Spirit, the revealing of the Church, and the sending of the apostles, and interprets the Church's mission as walking "the same road which Christ walked: a road of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death he came forth a victor by His resurrection" (Abbott 1966:590). Douglas Groll also works to locate the meaning of Lutheran identity and mission squarely in Scripture, connecting the Lutheran Church's immigrant status in the United States to the Bible's interpretation of the church as transcending all national boundaries, its occupancy of time and place as provisional, its ministry as including the ethical treatment of the sojourner, and its worship as inclusive of all nationalities (1996:171-175).

God's Purposes as the Aim of Denominational Mission

Fourth, denominational mission seeks not to promote its identity but instead to advance God's global purposes in the kingdom of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be "obsessed with bread," says Michael Kinnamon, means that Disciples of Christ are concerned with more than simply themselves. Rather, their identity rooted in the

regular celebration of the Lord's Supper finds meaning in their witness to Christian unity and to the service of those who go without "daily bread" (1993:8). To be obsessed with bread is not a matter of being obsessed over denominational identity, concludes Kinnamon, but rather to be consumed with mission (1993:9).

Speaking of his Anglican identity, Ian Douglas argues that his tradition must not be an end in itself. Anglicanism is not about preserving or defending Anglican identity, neither its Englishness nor its multiculturalism, but rather it is about God's redemptive purposes of human reconciliation, wholeness and oneness in Christ (2000:470). The denomination is therefore not the end but a means toward God's greater redemptive purposes.

Denominational Mission and Contemporary Need

Fifth, denominational mission is capable of responsiveness to contemporary realities and needs. Samuel Mikolaski sensed a lack of national identity and cohesion in Canadian life in the 1980s. In his opinion, the "granularism" plaguing all Canadians, Christian and non-Christian alike, could not be met by left-wing economic and political solutions commonly heard at the time. He understood Baptists' historic commitment to pluralism and diversity, rooted supremely in the "person-preserving" ideals of liberty and equality, as necessary to bring about nation-wide fraternity (1980:9) which is "the corollary of cultural cohesion and national identity" (1980:4). On the basis of their inclusion within the Believers Church tradition, he called Baptists to promote "a new wave of people-appreciation" no matter their culture, status or class, as well as the stimulation of a cooperative spirit (1980:10-14).

Douglas Groll believed his Lutheran identity to be uniquely qualified to address the issues of Hispanic and ethnic mission facing the church in the United States at the end of the 20th century. Lutheran immigrant identity informed the Church's approach to mission among other immigrant groups. On the basis of their immigrant past, Lutherans could recognize and accept the diversity within immigrant groups; they could help immigrants cope with the pain and grief of leaving their homeland; they could walk with immigrants through the process of English language acquisition as well as defend immigrants' use of their native language; they could identify with the immigrant dream of a better life; and they could thrill to this new opportunity in mission which the ill-advised policies of Proposition 187 presented to them (1996:172-176).

The Universal Church and Denominational Mission

Sixth, denominationally-grounded mission has the capacity to address consciously not only one's own denominational tradition but also the church at large. Though William Lazareth clearly writes with the Lutheran tradition in mind, his application of the Lutheran Confessions to mission clarifies God's intent that, as he puts it, the "whole [of] Christ's body, the church, be sent forth as God's unique instrument for the salvation and service of humankind" (Lazareth and Rosolondraibe 1994:89). Though he recognizes the false identification of God's mission with the church's mission committed by earlier generations, Lazareth is equally vociferous in rejecting the notion that mission excludes the "organized" church (1994:89). He believes that the Confessions rescue the idea that mission should result in a "responsible churchliness as the current form of faithful discipleship (1994:88).

Ted Campbell, though, provides the clearest example of this element. John Wesley's critique of Western culture was, preeminently, an indictment against the whole church and its culture of post-Christian paganism. Campbell writes, "The Methodists, then, did not understand themselves as weary, life-long believers who simply needed to be revived; they understood themselves, rather, as new converts from paganism. Their mission was not just to *revive* Christians (that's putting it too mildly); their mission was to *convert* the baptized heathen of England" (1992:56; emphasis original). Such mission was part of Wesley's global desire to reach all peoples, beginning in nominally Christian Western Europe and proceeding to the conversion of the Roman Catholics, the Jews, the Muslims and the rest of the world. The conversion of his own country's "baptized heathen," then, was the key to his vision of contiguous proclamation from one area to the next (1992:56, 59). Early Methodist identity supplies the larger church with an important reason to examine itself in light of Wesley's own convictions about the true nature of the Christian faith.

The Intra- and Intercultural Nature of Denominational Mission

Seventh, a denomination's global outreach necessarily includes mission to one's own cultural context and other cultural contexts. Samuel Mikolaski's application of Baptist identity to mission in Canada takes in the denomination's response to the political, social, spiritual, and economic needs facing the country (1980). As demonstrated in the above paragraph, Ted Campbell looks at how the early Wesleyan vision of identity and mission addressed the cultural context of 18th century England, and how that same vision, applied to the culture of today's sending church, is needed for the success of contemporary cross-cultural mission (1992). On

the other hand, *Ad Gentes* primarily applies its view of Catholic mission to the billions who have never heard the gospel (Abbott 1966:596-597).[6] Douglas Groll relates Lutheran mission to the cross-cultural context of witness among Latinos in the United States (1996).

Denominational Mission and the People of God

Eighth, genuine denominational mission occurs in and through the whole people of God in the denomination, and not just through the church hierarchy or official leadership. The Roman Catholic decree *Ad Gentes* consistently makes it clear that mission demands the direct participation of the laity in announcing and living out the good news of Jesus Christ in witness to those without this knowledge. It is not enough for lay believers simply to be gathered into the Church and live an honorable witness before non-Christians. Lay people, or the whole people of God, are "organized and present for the purpose of announcing Christ to their non-Christian fellow-citizens by word and deed, and of aiding them toward the full reception of Christ" (Abbott 1966:603). As well, the Church can never claim to be the perfect sign of Christ in any locale until there is present lay people working alongside the hierarchy in worship and witness. "For the gospel cannot be deeply imprinted on the talents, life, and work of any people without the active presence of laymen. Therefore, even in the very founding of a Church, the greatest attention is to be paid to raising up a mature Christian laity" (1966:610-611).

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[6] The "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church" itself indicates that, at the time it was published in the mid 1960s, there were some two billion such people in the world. In clarifying where these people were primarily located, footnote # 36 to *Ad Gentes* reads, "The chief *locus* of missionary activity is given here, namely, the two billion non-Christian peoples in Africa, Asia, and Oceania whose diverse cultures and the vast majority of whose immense population have yet to be markedly affected by the gospel" (Abbott 1966:597).

Along these same lines, both Ted Campbell and Richard Heitzenrater confirm that Wesley's mission in England depended heavily on laymen and laywomen as preachers in connection with him and with each other (Campbell 1992:55; Heitzenrater 1997:28-29). His unique system of bands, classes, and societies not only represented spiritual nurture and extraordinary "prudential" means of grace for those who were "progressing or regressing in the 'way of salvation'" (Campbell 1992:55). Wesley's connectional system supported a program of outreach on behalf of the poor, the children, preachers' widows and children, and other needs (Heitzenrater 1997:30). Wesley therefore multiplied his ministry through the many who committed themselves to grow in grace and preach the word.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to the book *The Mission of the Church in Methodist Perspective: The World Is My Parish*, missiologist and general editor Alan Padget (1992) reminds us that the mission of the church can never be identified with the mission of God in the world. Rather, the church's mission is only a part of the *missio Dei*, because it can never know all, nor even participate in all, that God's Spirit is doing in the world. "Fidelity in mission requires only that the Church be *faithful to the commission it has already been given*" (1992:10; emphasis original).

If this is true for the church universal, it is true for the church "as denomination." As each denomination is only part of what God is doing to extend the kingdom in the world, its mission is only part of what the whole church is doing in the world. In light of the *missio Dei* and the genius of its own approach to issues of faith and Christian identity, denominational mission should never mean trying to

emulate all that God is doing within and without the church in the world, but instead it should mean communicating and living the gospel of Jesus Christ in fidelity to its own identity and in dialogue with other denominationally-derived approaches to mission.

More positively, though, denominational mission in touch with its heritage and tradition puts flesh on the concept of the *missio Dei*. Within its own denominational tradition, each particular pattern of identity and mission offers a more complete view of God's work in the world. When invited to cooperate and communicate with each other in a climate of peaceful dialogue, these patterns converge to form a more comprehensive picture of the work of the Spirit in mission through the denominations.

How does this picture critique, as well as sharpen, the concept of the competency of the soul in religion as a model of Baptist mission for today? This is the critical question the following chapter addresses. Chapter 6 thus utilizes the key elements of the transdenominational model of identity and mission outlined in this chapter to assess the missiological value of soul competency for contemporary missional witness.

CHAPTER 6

The Competency of the Soul in Religion and Christian Mission

E. Y. Mullins was not, nor did he consider himself to be, a mission theorist or practitioner. Though he prepared himself academically at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for missionary service to Brazil, his dreams were never realized, and for only a short time did he serve in the employ of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board as an executive of that agency. He was, by profession, a Baptist theologian, seminary administrator, and world denominational leader (Ellis 1974), whose concept of the competency of the soul in religion represented an innovative attempt to interpret the Baptist faith. He therefore did not develop soul competency primarily with the "mission field" in mind, though the application of his concept to issues current to his day and time was an attempt to demonstrate the relevancy of Baptist identity for the Christian life and witness as well as challenge fellow Baptists to understand their heritage and give testimony to its significance for the sake of the church and the world.

Missionally-oriented theology, though, does not necessarily require a theologian to have been a commissioned missionary nor a trained missiologist, though both (ideally) should help. It does require that the theologian frame her or his interpretations within an abiding interest in what the gospel of Jesus Christ can mean for the sake of the world and the church's witness in the world. In *Transforming Mission* (1991), David Bosch convincingly locates the rise of Christianity's earliest attempts at theology within the context of the missionary crises which the first New

Testament communities faced in their time.[1] He argues that theology was not the product of academically-trained theorists nor even professional missionaries, but of the whole church coping with how to present the message of Christ faithfully within their own world(s). Mission, as Bosch notes (quoting New Testament scholar Martin Kahler) was essentially the "mother of theology" (1991:15-16), and it was carried out by the whole people of God.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this dissertation positioned both Mullins' witness, as well as his concept of soul competency, within a framework of mission and world engagement. As one of Southern Baptists' most outstanding theologians, he was actively engaged in missional witness during a time when Baptists were becoming more conscious than ever of their denomination's global responsibilities. He modeled a world-conscious witness before his contemporaries that evidenced concern for the personal, social, ecclesiological, and religious dimensions of the faith. While he admired the growth and progress of the Baptist denomination, he believed it should never be the main focus of the Baptist program, but rather it should serve as a means for carrying out God's global kingdom purposes.

When developing his Baptist theology of the competency of the soul in religion, Mullins embedded it within this denominational perspective, and challenged other denominations to look within their own traditions to uncover those nuggets of belief and practice that could make a difference in the world of the early 20th century.

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[1] Bosch defines the meaning of "crisis" after the Japanese character for crisis, being a combination of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity" or "promise" (1991:3). His point is that it is normal for the church to live in crisis situations, that is, in times of missionary engagement with the world which force the church to reexamine the gospel and mission in new and promising ways. In terms of the New Testament-era church, Bosch discusses how the Matthean, Lucan and Pauline communities expressed their faith out of a sense of missionary witness to the worlds in which they lived (1991:56-178).

True to form, his Baptist vision attempted to address the religious, political, and social circumstances of his day. In so doing, he made soul competency available to further applications in ways he never envisioned himself, as James Franklin demonstrated by using it to inform his own understanding of the indigenous church. Soul competency arose, then, as an attempt to identify and describe the fundamental element of Baptists' historical identity in order to show the significance that their faith had for the church and the world. As such, soul competency demonstrated itself to be missionally-oriented theology.

This chapter evaluates and presents the missional significance of the competency of the soul in religion today in light of the transdenominational model of identity and mission developed in Chapter 5. As previously argued, mission informed by diverse denominational identities possesses tremendous potential for informing the meaning and practice of church's missionary witness, even in the so-called "post-denominational" environment of the 21st century. The question before us now is, What contribution, if any, can the Baptist theology of soul competency make to the church's contemporary practice of Christian mission?

Soul Competency and the Transdenominational Model

The transdenominational model outlined in Chapter 5 functions in two ways to assess the missional significance of a particular denominational proposal of identity and mission such as, in this case, soul competency. In one sense it serves as a window, exposing Mullins' vision to the insights of other denominationally-grounded perspectives in order to clarify and critique its own approach to Christian mission. In a second sense, the model acts as a forum that offers soul competency a chance to

suggest additional interpretations of mission that stay true to its own denominational identity. Both of these purposes are served as soul competency engages the transdenominational model's key elements as identified in Chapter 5. Before examining soul competency and the model's key elements, we will first look at whether Mullins' concept meets the criteria proposed in the previous chapter for the transdenominational approach to mission.

Soul Competency and the Model's Criteria

In summary, the four criteria used to choose which patterns of denominational mission enter the transdenominational dialogue are: (1) a denominational perspective's agreement with the essence of the *missio Dei* as previously outlined; (2) its non-sectarian approach to the denomination's witness; (3) its fidelity to a commonly-held Christian heritage and worldview; and (4) its attempt to point the denomination and its witness forward rather than glorying in its past. Meeting these criteria enhances the possibility that soul competency can constructively dialogue with other denominational perspectives within the transdenominational model.

Missio Dei. Though unaware of how the term *missio Dei* would impact Christian mission in the mid-20th century, Mullins reflected the essence of the concept by relating soul competency and its heritage of religious liberty to concerns facing the church and the world of the early 1900s. His aim to provide the biblical, historical, and denominational grounding for Baptist congregational polity in *The Axioms of Religion* attempted to demonstrate what the "distinctive Baptist message" had to say to the world of his day (1908a:26). He recognized that God wanted to work in and through Baptists; making this possible required that Baptists consider anew what their

purpose was in God's kingdom (1925b:2). Mullins consistently demonstrated his understanding that the Baptist identity of soul competency involved more than simply describing what it meant to be Baptist in the past, and even in the present; it also involved what, under God's leadership, it meant to be Baptist in the world for the sake of the gospel.

Non-sectarian witness. In *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins invited each denomination to locate that particular "motive or incentive or cohesive principle" that could serve to unify it as well as extend is usefulness in the world (1908a:19). Twelve years later, he again called upon the Christian denominations to "take stock of their resources and position and seek to relate themselves to the great world and its needs" (1920a:402). Mullins' own ecumenism gave evidence of his appreciation for, if not always his agreement with, other denominations and their value in God's kingdom.

At times, Mullins' rhetoric came close to devaluing other denominational perspectives in defense of his own Baptist views. He accused Roman Catholicism of preaching the soul's "incompetency" in matters of religion and religious faith (1906c:5; 1908a:60; 1923c:537) and blamed non-Baptist Protestantism for adopting a dualistic form of Christianity (1908a:63; 1923c:538) that combined both Reformation and Catholic doctrines.[2] Still, Mullins' invitation to other denominations gives every

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[2] Mullins' comparison of Catholic and Protestant views with soul competency and the axioms of religion comes especially to the fore in *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a:59-65, 92-149, 185-200). Another example, which serves to illuminate his general approach to non-Baptist expressions of the faith, is found in a response to the Presbyterian minister George C. Flett of Hanna, Illinois, on the question of infant baptism. In his letter to Rev. Flett, Mullins writes:

> In my opinion, Presbyterianism is wholly inconsistent in maintaining infant baptism, because Presbyterianism does recognize the direct relation of the soul to God, whereas infant baptism is built upon the conception of proxy faith. The Roman Catholic church adopted infant baptism in the early centuries on the general supposition that infants would be saved thereby.

impression of being genuine, in line with his own ecumenical witness and practice. There is every reason to believe him when he states that his critique of other denominational positions—severe and incorrect as it was at times—was nothing more than an attempt to "secure clearness" (1923c:536) regarding the Baptist position and not to denigrate the faith of others.[3]

Common Christian heritage. While Mullins passionately believed in the Baptist faith and witness, he considered Baptist theology to reflect not simply distinctive denominational tenets but also beliefs and principles common to all evangelical bodies (1920a:402). His major theological work, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917a), was a systematic interpretation of orthodox Christian doctrine, specifically though the lens of religious experience (1917a:1-34). Significantly, he rooted the competency of the soul in religion in the Scriptural teaching that all people were created in God's image (1906c:5; 1908a:58) and, more fully, in a personalist interpretation of the Kingdom of God (1908a:27-43).

Mullins understood Baptists to be inheritors of the Reformation tradition along with other Protestant denominations, though he believed Baptists to live out the "inner logic of the movement" more consistently than did any other branch of

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There is no reason whatever for the practice of infant baptism except this supposition. If the Catholics are right and it is a saving sacrament without personal faith, then it ought to be applied to all infants. If it is not such a saving sacrament, then it ought not to be applied to any infant, because the New Testament certainly enjoins baptism upon believers only. The very essential nature of Christianity itself, as based upon a conscious personal choice of Christ, precludes the idea that baptism should be administered to those incapable of the exercise of faith. All of the non-Catholic bodies which practice infant baptism draw it from the Roman Catholic church. (1921g:1)

[3] This, however, cannot be said of Mullins' position toward Roman Catholicism. Like many Protestants in his day, Mullins protested—even attacked—what he considered the biblical inaccuracies of the Catholic faith, though he did at least credit Roman Catholicism with logical coherency (see the preceding footnote). At the same time, he defended the right of Catholics to worship and serve God according to conscience (1923a:70-71), even if he strenuously believed them to be wrong.

Protestantism (1923c:538). He also argued that "the direct relation of the soul to

God"—a major facet of soul competency—along with God's sovereignty in election

represented "'the mother principle' of Calvinism" (1921e).[4] Though he championed

the "Old Theology" of traditional Protestant faith over the "New Theology" of

Protestant liberalism (*Watchman-Examiner* 1917a-k), he claimed to hold little regard

for what he called the "barren orthodoxy" of intellectualism that traded human-made

creeds for the substance, life, and power of religious faith (1912a:8-10).

    <u>Forward-looking witness</u>. Mullins' consistently beckoned his co-

denominationalists in the Baptist faith to examine the meaning of their faith for the

contemporary needs of the world. At heart, as he wrote in the Southern Baptist

"Fraternal Address" (Mullins et al. [1919]) following World War I, he believed that

religion was vital for the reconstruction of the world, in that it alone could "conserve

the true values and promote the highest interests of society" ([1919]:3).

Simultaneously, he believed that the Baptist message held out the greatest promise for

"the reconstruction of the world and the social fellowship of the race" ([1919]:4).

The "Fraternal Address" itself represented a short confessional statement designed to

communicate to the Baptists of the world not simply what Southern Baptists believed

as true but also what served as the foundation upon which the new world could be

built ([1919]:15). Though Mullins was careful to show that soul competency bore a

striking resemblance to Baptists' historic struggle for religious liberty (1906c), he did

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[4] From Mullins' lecture notes to his Graduate Theology class, in point # 3 under "Some of the
Imperishable elements in Calvinism"—in which he distinguishes between Lutheranism and Calvinism
in his argument against church and state mediation in religion—the text reads, "Direct relations
between man and God. All priestly mediation excluded from Calvinistic view. In Lutheranism the
prince is *summus episcopus*, and the church *ecclesia docens*. Thus it is seen that Calvinism and not
Lutheranism was the consistent expression of the protestant principle of the anti thesis to Rome. This
direct relation between God and man cuts up by the roots every form of despotism" ([n. d.]j:23).

not leave his idea in the past, but brought it forward to address his time of advancing

religious, social, and political democracy and equality (1908a:277-308).

Soul Competency and the Model's Key Elements

Gauging the missiological significance of soul competency according to the

transdenominational model of identity and mission requires evaluating its witness in

light of the model's key elements. Each element from Chapter 5 is re-stated below,

followed by a question designed to orient both the sense of the element as well as the

response soul competency makes to the element. As might be expected, responses to

these insights are uneven and, at times, overlap from one element to the next.

Throughout this process, the ways in which soul competency contributes to the

practice of mission are clarified.

Denominational identity as missional in nature. *How does soul competency

contribute to a deeper understanding of the missional significance of denominational

identity?* By nature, Christianity is "outward-turned," according to Catholic

missionary Vincent Donovan. Thus he writes, "Christianity must be a force that

moves outward, and a Christian community is basically in existence 'for others'"

(1978:104). Mullins, too, understood the Christian denomination to be a means to the

larger end of serving the kingdom of God in the world (1914a; [n. d.]o:4-5, 10-11).

Soul competency, chiefly a denominationally-based theology within the Baptist

tradition, thus served Mullins—and Franklin as well—as a way of addressing the

larger religious, social, political, and cross-cultural issues that faced the church and

the world of the early 20th century.

As observed in Chapter 3, soul competency did not function within Mullins'
Baptist theological system as a standard "doctrine" or belief. Instead, it acted more as
a lens or, more accurately, as a personally-owned conviction, that is, as an instrument
which its originator inhabited in order to understand and engage the larger issues of
the day. By handling his vision in this way, Mullins set the stage for suggesting that
the missional value of the Baptist heritage lies in its ability to function as a
hermeneutical tool, or means of interpreting the world, the church, and the Christian
faith. Franklin also used soul competency in much the same way, by using it to
evaluate the practice of international mission according to how well it granted
national believers the freedom to interpret Christ and organize the church in line with
local custom and culture. Soul competency thus demonstrates the truth that the ideals
and basic presuppositions of one's denominational identity—in the case of soul
competency itself, these include the worth of the individual, non-coercion,
persuasion, and religious inclusion both for the individual and, in Franklin's view, the
indigenous or national church—can and should operate as a means for understanding
where these same ideals may be missing in the church, the world, and the church's
witness in the world of today.

This truth is an important way of reiterating the underlying significance of the
missio Dei as outlined in Chapter 5, that is, the idea that the mission of the church
arises out of its very nature or identity, thus making the church's identity
fundamentally missional. Being missional, the church's identity serves as a lens on
the way mission can be, and should be, carried out in the world. Therefore, a
denomination's own heritage and identity should also provide clues as to how its

missional witness can develop. In the case of soul competency, issues which recognize the value and worth of the individual should aid in framing how the church carries out its mission in the world. Yet Mullins' essential ecumenical orientation to denominational identity and mission, demonstrated in Chapter 1 of *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a:11-26), acts to deny that any one perspective serves as *the* key for realizing Christian mission.

Denominational identity as essential to mission. *In what way does soul competency demonstrate Baptist identity as containing essential insight for the practice of Christian mission today?* Fundamentally, mission in light of soul competency requires that the church take a positive, creative, and affirming attitude toward the human person. The value of Mullins' vision of soul competency is that it shines the spotlight on the worth of the human individual. Soul competency is often interpreted as tending to an extreme individualism (Hudson 1959:213-218; Carrell 1993:145-146), yet Mullins was no stark individualist. He believed that each person's life was bound to that of others, not only by physical unity but also by humanity's common likeness in being made in God's image; thus interdependence served as the goal of life and the church (1908a:40; 1917c:48-57). In *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (1913a), he decried the "unwarranted extreme" of modern individualism, and wrote, "All human interests are social as well as individual. If a man is incomplete apart from God, so is he incomplete apart from his brother" (1913a:40).

Interpreting Mullins' individualism can be done correctly only by taking note of what he argued against in making his case, not by assuming that references to the

individual were a denial of the importance of the Christian community. Essentially, his individualism was an attempt to strike against the "suppression of the individual" and the individual's personality ([n. d.]a:5) in a way that denied the very essence of what it meant to be created in God's image ([n. d.]g). He believed that soul competency's advocacy of the person saved it from the selfish tendencies of Anglo-Saxon individualism, because it redefined individualism in terms of a moral and religious impulse under the direct leadership of Jesus Christ (1908a:57-58). He did not believe that freedom as self-determination meant being free from external motives, influences, and environment. Rather, true freedom meant being free from external compulsion, because a person's actions were "in the last resort determined from within" (1917a:258), not from without. Mullins' chief desire was to safeguard the individual from the "spiritual tyranny" that the church and religion can impose on the person (1908a: 92, 94, 104, 105).

As Chapter 2 of this dissertation pointed out, Mullins' Christian theology and witness primarily reflected the kingdom model described by Howard Snyder as "inner spiritual experience" or the Interior Kingdom. Within the framework of this interpretation of God's kingdom, Mullins underscored his concern for the church to meet the total needs of the human person, including both the spiritual and social dimensions. Though this position is liable to extreme forms individualism, it also underscores the fact that the church's social witness is not only about transforming society but it is also about bringing the gospel to bear on individual lives as well. If anything, soul competency can remind the church to maintain the tension between the individual and the community in its missional ministry.

Scripture as foundational to denominational mission. *How does soul*
competency's use of Scripture interpret the practice of Christian mission for today?
Soul competency draws from several biblical and theological concepts, as interpreted
and applied by both Mullins and Franklin: the image of God; the kingdom of God;
and the New Testament church's missional experience in Acts. Based on these
concepts, mission in light of soul competency attempts to hold in tension both human
creation and humanity's need for Christ; it affirms persuasion and eschews coercion
in matters of faith; and it seeks to include rather than exclude the contributions that
the whole church can make to the meaning of faith and witness.

Fundamentally, the missional witness of soul competency—based on the idea
that each person is made in God's image and thus has the capacity to respond to
God's appeal (1906c:5)[5]—means that there are no superiors or inferiors in the
Christian faith. This applies not only to matters of religion, but to all other areas of
human endeavor, such as art, philosophy, science, political life, and others, since
"[t]he competency of man in religion is the competency of man everywhere"
(1908a:65-66). Mullins did not make the leap from Western forms of art, science,
and others to non-Western forms when affirming humanity's total competency but, in
the realm of indigenous leadership and theology, James Franklin did. Mullins did
affirm, though, that no one could truly know God—and thus no person could fully
exercise his or her competency under God—apart from Jesus Christ as revealed in the
Scriptures (1908a:68-69).

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[5] In *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, Mullins explained that being created in God's
image meant possessing a rational nature, a moral nature, an emotional nature, a will, freedom in terms
of self-determination, original freedom from sin and an inclination to righteousness, dominion over the
lower orders of creation, and immortality (1917a:258-262).

Soul competency also attempts to take seriously the Scriptural ideas of the sovereignty of God as well as God's missional actions in human history. As Chapter 1 noted, early Baptists affirmed God to be the only Lord over the human conscience, meaning that God's sovereignty had been delegated to no one, neither in the church nor in the state.[6] By rooting his interpretation of God's kingdom in the philosophy of personalism, Mullins viewed the meaning of the divine sovereignty in terms of personal relationship rather than rules and externally-obligatory laws (1908a:28), whereby God drew near to human beings in Jesus Christ and humans responded in faith (1908a:27-30).

Soul competency also recalls God's inclusiveness in the New Testament church, in which the Spirit moved among both Jewish and Gentile congregations to formulate the meaning of the faith. James Franklin particularly found parallels between Acts 2 and 10 and Baptists' "historical significance" of soul competency ([1916]:20ff; [n. d.]c), interpreting the Spirit's advent in Acts 2 to mean that the gospel was not limited to any one particular race ([1916]:22). Likewise, soul competency affirms that all peoples are competent to interpret the gospel message under the Spirit's guidance, in accord with Peter's experience in Acts 10 that no one race of people was superior to any other (Franklin [n. d.]c:6-7; [1916]:21ff). Of the Chinese Christians, Franklin remarked:

> Of course there must be confidence in the Chinese Christians and we must believe that the Holy Spirit is given unto them even as unto us. God led the church at Antioch as truly as the church at Jerusalem. Once more we need to read the Acts of the Apostles if we are tempted to dictate to the churches of Asia. Let us dare to be loyal to New Testament teachings and our own Baptist traditions at such an hour. Much depends on our attitude. "According to your faith be it unto you." ([n. d.]c:7)

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[6] See Chapter 1, pp. 20-21.

Yet Mullins' application of Scripture to the concept of soul competency needs balance and correction. Though he spoke of human interdependence (1913a:40), his approach to the image of God from the standpoint of the individual (1917a:258-262) lacked an adequate foundation upon which to ground interdependence in relation to human competency. Theologian Colin Gunton (1997) locates this foundation in a trinitarian approach to the image of God, which affirms not only the *otherness*, or the particularity and freedom, of the person but also the *relatedness* of each person to the other (1997:109-116). Theologian Miroslav Volf speaks of the *perichoretic personhood* within the church that, reflecting God's triune nature and made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, invites the person to give him/herself to others and receive others into him/herself (1998:208-213). God's triune interrelatedness, clearly reflected in the concept of the *missio Dei* itself, instructs those who draw from soul competency for missional witness that competency is always *under the triune God.* Mission thus affirms not only the competency of each person individually, but also the competency of each person in relational reliance upon the other.

God's purposes as the aim of denominational mission. *How are God's purposes advanced by the missional witness of soul competency?* Before Canadian Baptists in 1925, Mullins proclaimed, "Thank God for the Baptist man and woman who is [sic] gradually coming to see that the greatest thing in this earth is the Kingdom of God, that the greatest thing in the world is the helping forward of that kingdom, and that the investment of a human life is greatest and finest when it is put into the service of the Kingdom of God" (1925b:7). Mullins located soul competency within a strong denominationalism that, ideally conceived and applied, represented an

effective means by which God's kingdom purposes in the world could be accomplished (1908a:12; 1914a; [n. d.]o). Central to the kingdom of God, in his view, was the freedom of the individual person to take responsibility for his or her own life in matters of faith. Franklin applied this same idea to the national or indigenous church. Thus, as a missionally-oriented concept, soul competency assists the church to work toward personal as well as cultural responsibility in the living and the thinking of the Christian faith in the world.

Mullins chiefly applied soul competency and the religious axioms to personal fulfillment in all walks of life, including the religious, the social, the political, the educational, the scientific, the missionary, and the philosophical (1908a:277-308). Like many of his contemporaries, he possessed an overabundant optimism when it came to the growth and progress of the human person (1908a:67). Yet, he insisted that human reason had limits, especially when it came to the "facts" of religion and the Christian faith (1913a:294-296; 1917a:192). Soul competency was "under God" (1908a:53), not derived out of one's own person, and depended both upon the mediation of Christ, through whom access to God was available (1908a:68), and the work of the Holy Spirit, who deals directly with the person (1912a:38). Personal and moral responsibility, Mullins believed, was only possible if the person was free and not coerced, that is, if responsibility issued from the will and not by external pressure (1908a:150). In connection with the moral axiom, Mullins wrote:

> Now freedom is self-determination. Of course it does not mean that the will is without bias, or that human choices are uninfluenced by external forces or other human personalities, or by divine influences of grace. It only means that when a man acts he acts for himself. The choice is his own. He is not compelled but impelled. He is self-determined. This is the core of manhood

and personality. This is the inner glory of our being. It is the one spark of fire which kindles about our humanity its unique splendor. (1908a:152)

Soul competency also supports the notion that the church, in cross-cultural witness, should actively encourage and support the efforts of other peoples and cultures in expanding and deepening Christian faith and theology. This means that, within the cultural dialogue of constructing what Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter calls "local theologies" (1985:16-20), everyone within the community is responsible for the process and the content of local theologizing. James Franklin, who recognized Mullins' concept as applicable to the task of indigenous theologizing, never gave any indication that others besides the Christian community and, in particular, its indigenous leadership, were responsible for carrying out this function. It would be difficult, as well, to conceive of Mullins as including non-Christians in the task of Christian theology. However if, as several commentators have observed, the competent soul describes not just the redeemed but also all people at their creation,[7] it is conceivable that soul competency supports the notion that even those outside the Christian fold may also participate in the process of interpreting the nature of the divine and of religious faith. At the very least, soul competency opens the door to this option. This makes it possible to sustain the idea that the witness of God's Spirit is not limited to the church.

Denominational mission and contemporary need. *What contemporary problem(s) facing the church and the world does soul competency address in mission today?* In *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins believed that soul competency, the axioms of religion and Baptists' "simple congregational polity" (1908a:26) could

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[7] Among these observers are Timothy George (as cited in Carrell 1993:17-18) and Harold Bloom's anonymous Southern Baptist informant (1992:203-204).

meet the challenges of "an ever advancing civilization" clamoring for greater liberty,

equality and trust in the common person both inside and outside the church

(1908a:24-25). Franklin, on the other hand, applied it to the challenge of indigenous

Christianity in his day. Though he apparently never directly mentioned the concept in

the presence of non-Baptist groups, he did at times strongly hint at it through other

denominationally-neutral means, such as in his book, *The Never Failing Light* (1933),

in which he wrote in reference to the International Missionary Council's 1928

Jerusalem Conference:

> If one had entertained any doubt of the ability of Oriental and African and
> Latin American Christian leaders to plan and direct religious and social work,
> a few days on the Mount of Olives in the spring of 1928 would have
> dissipated such skepticism. Men and women, many of whom were East
> Indians, Chinese, Japanese, South Americans and Africans, had come together
> to ascertain if possible just what changes were required in order to enable the
> Christian forces of the world to witness more effectively for Christ and his
> gospel in modern times. *It was soon evident that many of the men and women*
> *with brown, yellow or black skins were as competent as any of the delegates*
> *from North America, the British Isles or Europe to interpret the gospel for the*
> *redemption of individuals and society.* Furthermore, it was clear that many of
> them were already experienced in the administration of important movements.
> It was clear also that these Christians from the younger churches were
> qualified to open their own spiritual treasure-chests and to present the older
> churches with some of the riches which they found in Christ. Again and again
> did some man or woman from the Orient or Africa reveal an understanding of
> Christ and his gospel that enriched the hearts and minds of delegates from
> Europe and North America. (1933:156-157; emphasis added)

Today, one of the many issues facing the church that has been identified

within missiology is the contextualization of the gospel in culture. In "Missiology

Yesterday and Tomorrow," German Lutheran missiologist Theo Sundermeier (1990)

defines missiology essentially as "the encounter between the church and those who

are strangers to it; indeed," he continues, "this encounter is the inevitable founding

principle of missiology" (1990:266). Mission, he feels, is more than simply what the

church does for, or what the church communicates to, those who receive the

missionary message. Thus, he objects to what he calls the evangelical *Heilsgechichte*

or "salvation history" approach, as well as to the ecumenical "liberational" approach,

to mission, both being attempts to establish an overarching missionary priority which,

in the end, treats the recipient of mission as merely the object of its own concerns.

He believes that the church exists not *for* others (*contra* Dietrich Bonhoeffer) but *with*

others, that is, the church stands alongside others but does not determine for others

what seems best for them (1990:266; Bosch 1991:375). The "strangers," then, are in

truth the *subjects* of mission who, under the Spirit's guidance, hear the word,

understand it, and reinterpret it under the Spirit's guidance and within their own

contexts (Sundermeier 1990:262-264). In essence, mission means that the church

needs all cultures to interpret the message. "No interpretive tradition may claim

exclusive validity. Each has the right, nay the duty, to contribute its understanding to

the ecumenical discussion, because by this means alone can the interpretation be

made relevant and be protected from arbitrariness" (1990:264).

Though Mullins did not develop soul competency as a model for the

contemporary practice of mission, his defense of the individual as competent under

God in matters of religious faith provides a strong theological defense for the role of

the "stranger" in the task of theological interpretation. By embedding his vision

within early American Baptists' struggle for religious liberty, he allied soul

competency against the ancient notion of church-state union and the resultant idea

that the church held dominating sway over the lives and consciences of the individual

person (1906c). The fact that each person was created in God's image guaranteed

equality of access to God for all people and denied that anyone, including the church, could cut off that access (1908a:103-105). His reliance on personalism to interpret the kingdom of God (1908a:27-43), coupled with his insistence on God's "fatherhood" to mean God's unwillingness to manipulate human beings in Christian salvation and discipleship (1908a:79-91), accentuated the idea that God freely revealed the divine will to God's people, and that God's people possessed the capacity to receive God's messages (1908a:29-30).

On this basis, Franklin applied soul competency specifically to cross-cultural missions, arguing that each person and every race of human beings were able to think and act for themselves in matters of religious faith ([1916]:20ff; 1920b:394-396; 1923a:182-183). No Western church, nor Western church official, could dictate the meaning nor the content of the Christian faith to any Eastern believer (Franklin [1916]:21). As he put it, "Christ must be freed from the ecclesiasticism with which he has been bound if the truth is to triumph. We would strike the shackles from the gospel and give it a free course to run and be glorified. We assert that it is quite safe to trust Christ, the New Testament and the Holy Spirit among any people" ([1916]:21-22). In other words, soul competency represented a theological rationale for recognizing that each person, made in God's own image, was capable of expressing his or her religious faith even if those views went counter to the prevailing orthodoxy of the period.

Soul competency thus runs parallel to, and offers support for, the notion of gospel contextualization. Contextualization—first coined in 1972 by Theological Education Fund director Shoki Coe in relation to theological education—claims, as

Wilbert Shenk notes, that the gospel message must not only be authentically Christian but also culturally authentic, and that control of the process resides with cultural insiders rather than with cultural outsiders or external agencies (1999:56). "Mission as contextualization," in David Bosch's words (1991:427), involves the construction of "local theologies" (Schreiter 1985), in opposition to the traditional, Christendom practice of "indigenizing" standard (and dominant) Western theology in Third World cultures on the premise that only Western theology has universal validity (Bosch 1991:427). As noted above, soul competency recognizes that each "local theologian" within the community—including the community as a whole, its professional theologians, prophets, and poets, and other insiders and outsiders (Schreiter 1985:16-20)—can play a part in the ongoing task of making the faith meaningful within the context.

As implied throughout this chapter, mission in light of soul competency places the focus on the capacity of the recipient of mission to contribute both to the meaning of the Christian faith and to the realization of the missional task within context. Mission is not fundamentally about plans or strategies, and not even about "church planting movements" or other short- to long-range goals, regardless of their merit or worth. Instead, mission entails the act of recognizing what God has already granted—that each person is made competent by God, thus local believers can indeed be trusted with Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit—and partnering with believers in witness to the gospel within the culture. This does not make plans or strategies necessarily wrong, but it does deny their centrality in the missional task.

Soul competency does not deny the role of the church in faith formation. Neither Mullins nor Franklin possessed a bias against the church; indeed, *The Axioms of Religion* attempts to underscore the fundamental value of congregational church polity for missional witness. Therefore, soul competency does not deny the role the culturally-exogenous church can play in assisting local believers in interpreting the faith. Rather, soul competency denies that any group of people—including the sending church—can, by sheer power or dominance, mandate the meaning of the Christian faith and witness. Cross-cultural missionaries, then, may not devise strategies and plans and "invite" the mission recipient or "stranger" to work in tandem with them. If both outsider and insider are equally competent, the only way to proceed in developing a truly indigenous witness is through prayer, dialogue and mutual planning that engages all mission partners.

The universal church and denominational mission. *What does soul competency say to the global church about its practice of Christian mission?* In Mullins' opinion, the church in general too often stood for dominance and control over the lives and faith of its members. In particular, he held that the European state churches, and European civilization in itself, denied individual freedom and personal responsibility in the expression of faith. Their centralized church organizations, designed to govern a largely unregenerate membership, produced a state of tyranny and autocracy in both religious and secular life. Their "sacramental and sacerdotal" forms of Christianity empowered priests with authority over the hearts and consciences of the redeemed that resulted in an excessive use of power and the subservience of the laity. Plus, official church-state unions implicated the church in

the autocracy of state government, whereupon "a thousand evils have arisen as a

result" (1920a:405-407). One of the "evils," which sociologist Rodney Stark

identified almost 75 years after Mullins' death, was the excessive control that the

church exercised from the 4th century onwards over the spreading of the Christian

faith, converting it from a movement dependent on mass voluntarism and persuasion

to one dependent on professional missionaries and enforced conformity, resulting in

the eventual de-Christianization of the European continent (2001).

In essence, Mullins felt that humanity represented the climax of all creation

(1917c:97). In a sermon entitled, "The Lordship of Christ," he deemed humanity to

be "the diamond point on the golden pen of the universe" (1917c:11). This made

human personality "the supreme thing," and wedded Christ's own lordship to the

exaltation of the person, for in Christ God was a searching and patient deity longing

to achieve human salvation (1917c:11). Christ came to make people free and give

them autonomy so that they would freely and consciously bow to his own authority in

salvation (1917c:16-17), and so that each believer could become the medium of that

authority in the world. "The Kingdom of God will come when the lordship of Jesus

is transferred to His people and they become lordly in moulding [sic] and guiding

human progress" (1917c:19). Yet Mullins interpreted lordship as service, not

dominance (1917c:19). As he saw it, God's final judgment of his people would turn

on whether they served others. Indeed, for Mullins election meant service. God

elected people even before creation itself to become "the incarnate love of God and

the purpose of God to redeem" (1917c:40).

Mission, in light of soul competency, reminds the church that its witness is of service, not of dominance; that the individual is highly important to the work of the kingdom; and that the individual's witness, like that of the church as a whole, is primarily that of service, not honor. Rooted in early American Baptists' historic defense of religious liberty (1906c), soul competency stresses the fundamental importance of safeguarding human liberty against all forms of spiritual/ecclesiastical and social/culture forms of bondage. Indeed, this is the primary theme woven throughout the religious, ecclesiastical, moral, and religious-civic axioms (1908a:92-200).

The problem, claims social commentators like Francis Fukuyama, is that excessive individualism, with its "no limits" message and insistence on personal freedom, contributes to the breakdown of community and the depletion of the social capital needed to create healthy civil society and associations (Fukuyama 1999:12-20). Professor of political science emeritus Glenn Tinder (University of Massachusetts at Boston) agrees that individual liberty has many risks, including that of hindering the church's own efforts to resist evil in the secular realm (1989:104). Indeed, trusting the individual Christian, whether indigenous to Eastern or Western cultures, with the freedom to interpret and apply the gospel to life and society can open the door to deviant, perhaps even dangerous, doctrines and ideas. Any use of soul competency to inform Christian mission must take into account this risk and not allow individual freedom to trump responsibility to and for the larger community.

Yet in his book, *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (1989), Tinder maintains that liberty is a thoroughly Christian concept, one that

promises "full and uncompromising individual existence" and "authentic selfhood" (1989:104) and, from the Christian perspective, is not opposed to the ideal of Christian community (1989:117). Interpreted through the lens of *agape* (which Tinder believes is the basis of all Christian political action [1989:19-22]), community fundamentally means assisting one's neighbor in need, in line with Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Yet humanity's greatest needs are not physical or social, Tinder maintains; instead, the greatest need is to know truth, which can only be discovered in the context of unfettered dialogue in community (1989:120). "Can we not say," Tinder asks, "that community is what comes into existence when people speak to one another, and listen, in an effort to discern the truth?" (1989:121). Liberty, from this vantage point, means entering into community with others in the search for truth, an act opposed to the notion that community forms around the pretense of already possessing the truth and, consequently, enforcing the truth through coercion and compulsion (1989:121-122).

Fukuyama confesses that not all forms of social capital and civil society are good; some have quite negative and destructive purposes, being detrimental to the health of the larger society and having destructive purposes that negate the good they might possess (1999:18-19). So it was, in Mullins' mind, with coercive forms of society, represented in both the church and the state. Any creedal authority that sought to compel religious belief, any ecclesiastical authority that legislated the conditions of faith, and any priestly authority that canceled the priesthood of each believer by denying free access to God, was wrong and must be opposed (1913a:301-302). Likewise, any church-state union, or any organic union between different

denominational expressions of the Christian faith, that stifled the individual's—as well as the local church's—service to and pursuit of God's purposes was wrong (1908a:185-200, 221-234; 1920a:405-407). Both individual and local church liberty were to be defended that they may serve (1908a:209-211).

Mullins strongly felt that "the religious principle" was "always the dominant force which gives its leading characteristics to any civilization" (1908a:65). Thus, if people were competent in matters religious, they were also competent in matters political, scientific, social, artistic, philosophical, educational, and in all other areas of human endeavor (1908a:65-67). "Every significant movement of our day is one form or another of that high purpose of man to make his way back to God" (1908a:66). By implication, then, if ecclesiastical hierarchies, priesthoods, rituals, and creeds could not stand between the competent soul and God nor between God and the competent soul, no barrier should be erected between the human person and the person's quest for self-expressions and progress toward human ideals. From the perspective of soul competency, one aspect of the church's mission is to defend the competent person from demeaning and dehumanizing structures and forces that would deny the person's competency and, in effect, categorize the person as incompetent. In this sense, the missional witness of soul competency stands up to Christendom's attempt to ally the church with social and state structures.

The intra- and intercultural nature of denominational mission. *In what way can soul competency, as a Baptist-oriented and American-born concept, speak to both its own and other contexts?* It is truly unfortunate that Mullins, while applying the principles of soul competency to both non-Baptist and non-American (specifically

European) contexts, did not employ it to evaluate the state of the Baptist faith in America nor, for that matter, of America itself. He was seemingly too busy trying to prove the Baptist faith as the way forward for the church and society to be able to question in what ways Baptists themselves might be a dominating and coercive socio-religious and political force in society. While he utilized Baptist principles to question the church-state entanglements in Europe, it did not seem to dawn upon him to ask if perhaps the church in America, including and especially its Baptist manifestation, might be intimately intertwined with its own culture as well, though recent scholarship has left little question along these lines (Spain 1967; Eighmy 1972; Yance 1978; Wilson 1980; Leonard 1985; Ammerman 1990; Leonard 1990a; Queen 1991; Hankins 2002). In the end, soul competency was left with little if nothing meaningful to say in Mullins' theology either to Baptists themselves—apart from the need to live by and promote its values and principles—or to American culture.

Franklin's application, though, did carry a particular critique of Western culture. By applying soul competency to indigenous Christianity in international (particularly "Oriental") mission fields, he directly challenged the Western assumption that only the "older" churches could properly interpret the meaning of the Christian faith. For Franklin, soul competency removed all barriers between national Christians and God that would falsely imply their inferiority in matters of faith. This simply meant that the West could claim no monopoly on what it meant to be Christian nor what it meant to express the Christian life in and through culture, for the Spirit spoke directly to God's people in modern times even as at Pentecost ([1916]; see also 1920b; 1923a; [n. d.]c).

The postmodern perspective has corrected the modernist notion of complete objective neutrality; no idea, viewpoint, or concept rises out of a cultural or situational void. Soul competency is thus no exception. It is solidly Baptist and solidly American. Admitting this should not automatically dismiss it as irrelevant to the church or the world; it should, though, caution its missional interpreters as to where and when its application is best served. This means that it should also speak the gospel to its own cultural and denominational environment. What does soul competency say to Baptists and to the American experiment? More accurately, how does the church's missional witness in light of soul competency confront Baptists in America with the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps soul competency should remind any Christian body, including and especially the Baptist body, that it is not the final arbiter of the Christian faith and life in our society. Soul competency is the antithesis of remaking culture and society after any group's own image. Increasingly missiologists and other observers are pointing out that America and the West can no longer claim itself to be Christian in nature and orientation (Newbigin 1989; Guder 1998; Hunsberger 1998). American society is as much, if not more so, a mission field as any other context anywhere in the world. Barry Hankins, in *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (2002), portrays today's Southern Baptist conservative leaders as convinced that America is in the throes of a full-scale culture war between Christian and pluralist-pagan values. Casting the denomination as the lead combatant in this war is what frames the conservatives' overriding agenda. Whereas former moderate Southern Baptist leaders were comfortable within traditional southern culture,

becoming as it were "at ease in Zion" (*a la* Rufus Spain's critique in a book by the same name), today's leadership feels totally uneasy within what they consider the fragmented nature of the entire American milieu, including the South. Southern Baptist conservatives thus see themselves as "cultural warriors" (2002:41-73), believing American culture to be in decline due to its abandonment of a formerly moral, largely Judeo-Christian base. Their ultimate aim is to "fight and win that culture war" (2002:10) in an attempt, as they see it, to curtail if not stop the decay.

Neither Southern Baptist conservatives, nor any others for that matter, should be chided for seeking to witness publicly of their faith within and toward their own culture. As Hankins concludes, these conservatives have recaptured an important part of the Baptist tradition, that of cultural dissent, which was largely lost when the denomination was dominated by its "southernness" (2002:274-275). Soul competency, though, cautions any group of Christians—conservative or liberal, Baptist or non-Baptist—against shaping that witness in a way that reflects only its values, for no one perspective is capable of containing the full truth of the gospel. This does not mean theological compromise as much as theological and denominational humility. All people, Mullins reminds us, are made in God's image; no one—not church nor state—can legitimately place barriers between God and others with the intent of manipulating a person's faith or viewpoint to suit one's own. Missionary witness according to the truths of soul competency not only encourages a shared search for truth but also encourages an appreciation, though not necessarily an acceptance, of the ideas and opinions shared by others. If the Holy Spirit, as Franklin noted in 1916, speaks with more than one voice to communicate God's truth

([1916]:20ff), then it behooves the church to listen to all the voices engaged in the conversation.

Denominational mission and the people of God. *In light of soul competency, what is the role of all God's people in global Christian mission?* If anything, soul competency is the great equalizer. In Mullins' vision, there are no superiors or inferiors in the church. He did not deny the importance of the pastoral office. Of the ecclesiastical axiom which reads, "All believers have a right to equal privileges in the church," Mullins wrote, "No one regards all men as possessing equal natural ability or learning. Nor does the axiom assume that one man is as well fitted as another for official position in the church. Diversities of gifts and offices and administrations are clearly recognized in the New Testament churches and as clearly set forth for our guidance" (1908a:127). His main point, however, was that no one, including and especially the "common man" or layperson, could be ignored in the church's life and witness (1908a:25). Mission, in light of soul competency, means that the church's witness is fundamentally dependent upon all God's people, and not uniquely upon any one set of individuals within the church.

With this in mind, mission requires the equipping of the laity in order to exercise their gifts in support of the church's mission or, as Mullins phrased it, to "produce righteousness in individual character and at the same time set the man free as an agent of righteousness in society at large" (1908a:210). For Mullins, this required adopting a congregational form of church polity, which is one of the central reasons he insisted upon congregationalism as the only legitimate New Testament organizational structure of the church. He viewed congregationalism as essentially

enabling personal and spiritual maturity better than any other polity, and as absorbing less of the church's energy and resources than other ecclesiastical polities, thus freeing it up for service in the world (1908a:209-211).

Yet Miroslav Volf, whose book *After Our Likeness* (1998) interprets anew the theological significance of Free Church ecclesiology, rejects the notion of one particular ecclesial model as necessary for the church's mission (1998:20-21) and argues for the polycentric character of the church's ministry (1998:224), in line with the "polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity" of the Trinity (1998:217). The church as polycentric community is grounded theologically in both the Christian call to faith and in the specific charisma (or specific charismata) within the general call. Volf explains the relationship between the call and the charismata, and how this works itself out in ministry.

> The call to new life and to practices commensurate with this life comes to everyone without distinction through the words of the gospel. At the point of its individual appropriation, this general call becomes specific in gifts given to each person for concrete and changing tasks in church and in world. *That* all Christians have a task in church and world is grounded in Christian calling; *which* concrete ministry (or ministries) they have is determined by the gifts of the Spirit given to them at the moment. (1998:226; emphasis original)

Congregationalism, or any other particular ecclesiastical polity, is not the ground upon which the call to missional service springs forth. Rather, that ground is the general Christian call extended to all people, without exception or distinction, which is accepted on the basis of one's faith response to the gospel of Christ. Mission, in light of soul competency, cannot simply insist upon a congregational form of church polity as the key for global missionary interaction and witness. Indeed, even the Second Vatican Council, with its insistence upon the centrality of the

papacy, the bishops, and the priests to the life of the church (Abbott

1966:38,40,48,146,406.535), demonstrated the integral importance of the laity to the

church's renewal and mission.[8] Rather, soul competency as a missionary model of

witness must learn, following Volf's conception of the "charismatic church"

(1998:228-233), to stress not only mutual responsibility but also mutual submission

and true interdependence (1998:230-231). These ideas are not foreign to soul

competency, but may need greater force if the laity are to be equipped fully to extend

the missional witness of the church in the world. Service over structure is the key.

Conclusion

Interpreted within a framework of mission the competency of the soul in

religion, as an important revision of Baptist identity that supports a non-coercive and

person-affirming relationship between the Divine and the human persons, shapes the

Baptist witness to mean approaching mission from a standpoint of trust placed in both

individuals and churches—including those outside the orbit of religious and political

power—to participate meaningfully in the common quest of knowing God, of

expressing in relevant ways the meaning of the faith, and of engaging in Christian

witness that responds to contemporary needs. Specifically, and in light of the above

discussion, the missiological significance of the competency of the soul in religion—

and of the Baptist denomination as defined by this concept—can be stated in at least

four ways:

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[8] See particularly those Vatican II documents related to the church ("Dogmatic Constitution of the Church" or *Lumen Gentium*, and "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" or *Gaudium et Spes*), the laity ("Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity" or *Apostolicam Actuositatem*), and mission ("Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" or *Ad Gentes*) (Abbott 1966).

(1) Soul competency underscores the truth that the church's denominational identity serves not only to describe who the church is, but also functions as a lens on the way the church's mission should be carried out in the world. From the perspective of soul competency, Christian mission means evaluating the extent to which such ideas as the worth of the individual, the non-coercive nature of the Christian faith, persuasion as a means of missionary witness, and religious inclusion inform the church's witness in the world.

(2) In light of its stress on the image of God and its interpretation of mission in the Acts of the Apostles, the missionary witness of soul competency means that there are no superiors or inferiors between the "sent" church and the "receiving" church. All those in Christ are capable, under the Spirit's guidance, to interpret and apply the gospel message to their contemporary reality. This underscores the need for the church to work toward personal as well as cultural responsibility in the living and thinking of the Christian faith in the world. Applied cross-culturally, soul competency supports the idea that the church, in cross-cultural witness, must actively encourage and support the efforts of other peoples and cultures in expanding and deepening Christian faith and theology, even when this means that the views of others may run counter to the prevailing orthodoxy of the period. Soul competency lends support to the cross-cultural contextualization of the gospel.

(3) Mission, in light of soul competency, reminds the church that its witness is that of service, not of dominance, and that the individual is highly important to the work of the kingdom. Therefore, the "sending" church serves, rather

than controls, the "receiving" church in the act of mission. At the same time, because there are no spiritual superiors or inferiors in the kingdom of God, Christian service moves both ways within the church, that is, from the sending to the receiving church, and from the receiving to the sending church.

(4) From the perspective of soul competency, the church's mission includes defending the competent person from demeaning and dehumanizing structures and forces—whether ecclesiastical, social, or political—that would deny the person's competency and, in effect, label the person as incompetent. In the end, the church's mission is fundamentally dependent upon all God's people, and does not uniquely rely upon any one set of individuals within the church.

Soul competency does not pretend to address all the concerns the church faces in its witness to the world. It enters the dialogue offered through the transdenominational model of identity and mission as one conversant among many, in an attempt to learn as well as to contribute. As this chapter demonstrates, when it does offer its perspectives soul competency supplies some answers and, at times, comes away wanting as well. No one who desires to speak meaningfully to his or her contemporary context on the basis of a denominational tradition should expect that tradition, or any other, to do otherwise.

Mission is fundamentally dialogical and cooperative. God's people are missionary as they cooperate with their missionary God and with each other. This means the whole church must listen to each other without presupposing that any one approach is superior to another. The same holds true for those who would interpret their witness in accord with the insights of soul competency. Mission needs all

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denominationally-derived, and non-denominationally-derived, forms of witness. What soul competency lacks, other perspectives can and should help to supply although mission is always more than the sum of its parts, being grounded not in the church but, as the *missio Dei* confirms, in the church's God, whose mystery exceeds all comprehension.

Yet at its core, the truth that the global church needs all its members to begin to comprehend God's global missionary task is what soul competency itself seeks to uphold. All individuals have direct access to God. All people are equal. All nationalities, races, and tribes can interpret and apply the meaning of their faith within their own contexts. The whole church needs each person, and each person needs the whole church. Soul competency is both denominational and ecumenical and, at its core, missional.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Implications for Mission and Suggestions for Further Study

When the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) voted in 1999 to revise its 75-

year old confessional statement, the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee[1]

charged with leading this process endeavored to remove all traces of E. Y. Mullin's

concept of the competency of the soul in religion from the 1963/1998 revision.[2] The

"Preamble" to the 1963 version of "The Baptist Faith and Message" (BFM) in part

read: "Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom of religion,

and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted

to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe,

cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified" (Southern

Baptist Convention 2003b). Yet, when word spread among the messengers to the

2000 Southern Baptist Convention of the deletion of these words, strong criticism

mounted, forcing the committee to reinsert a reference to soul competency only one

hour before the report was brought to the floor for a vote (Dilday 2002). As adopted

by the SBC on June 14, 2000, the BFM 2000 states: "We honor the principles of soul

competency and the priesthood of all believers, affirming together both our liberty in

Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God" (Southern Baptist

Convention 2003d).

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[1] Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee members included: Committee chair Adrian Rogers, Max Barnett, Steve Gaines, Susie Hawkins, Rudy A. Hernandez, Charles S. Kelley, Jr., Heather King, Richard D. Land, Fred Luter, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., T. C. Pinckney, Nelson Price, Roger Spradlin, Simon Tsoi, and Jerry Vines (Southern Baptist Convention 2003c).

[2] The 1963 revision of "The Baptist Faith and Message" (BFM) was updated in 1998 to include an article on "The Family" (Southern Baptist Convention 2000d).

I have argued in this dissertation that the competency of the soul in religion is a significant contribution to the faith of the Baptist community. I have reached this conclusion not because soul competency is simply a doctrinal concern which should be honored for its interpretation of Baptist identity and heritage. Instead, soul competency possesses important insights that can inform the way in which Baptists, in dialogue with the larger Christian church, should approach the task of missional witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in today's world.

The previous chapter offered an interpretation of soul competency's missiological value in light of the transdenominational model of identity and mission developed in Chapter 5. The final chapter of this dissertation has several aims. First, I summarize the major contributions and implications of this study of the competency of the soul in religion for missiology. Second, I apply some of the insights of soul competency identified in the previous chapter to the issues introduced in Chapter 1 concerning the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's New Direction strategy in Costa Rica.[3] Finally, I close by suggesting several lines of possible historical and missiological investigation related to soul competency and the practice mission.

Contributions and Implications of Soul Competency for Mission

Throughout this study of soul competency, a number of contributions and implications for the theory and practice of mission have been suggested. These are summarized in the following paragraphs.

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[3] See Chapter 1, pp. 7-11.

First, a fundamental contribution of this study of soul competency to the theory of mission is the finding that a denomination's heritage and identity can serve to inform as well as critique its missionary practice. The application of the *missio Dei* to Christian mission reminds us that even the "church as denomination" is capable of possessing a missionary identity. This does not mean, as in the case of soul competency, that that identity translates into a particular missionary strategy or plan. Instead, denominational identity best operates as an aid in clarifying the meaning of mission within a given context.

This implies that the practitioners of denominationally-informed mission must be aware of their own heritage and identity in order to tap into those unique ways God may be seeking to realize mission in the world through that denomination. It also means, following the truth of the transdenominational model of identity and mission developed in Chapter 5, that these same practitioners should be somewhat well-versed in how God has moved in and through other Christian denominations for the purpose of mission. Ignoring its own identity and heritage can have negative consequences for the denomination's witness in the world. Mission theory thus needs to reflect a better understanding and study of the reasons, circumstances, and situations which called the denominations into existence, in order to discern the movement of the Spirit in their early formation and witness and what that could mean for the practice of mission today.

Second, this study of soul competency recognizes at the same time that denominational identity can function as a means to critique and evaluate denominational mission in context. In the case of Mullins' own revisioning principle,

soul competency can act for the missionary witness as a personal, orienting conviction to remind the witness of the pivotal importance of the human person for the practice of mission as well as of the need to defend the person against any and all missionary structures, plans, strategies, or systems that work to dehumanize the person and declare the person incompetent before God. Because it does not function as a particular missionary strategy or plan, soul competency cannot replace (or should not be forced to replace) existing plans but it can judge the validity of those plans on the basis of how well they evidence an appreciation for the worth of all believers and their contribution to the church's theology, to its leadership, and especially to its theory and practice of mission.

In terms of denominational mission as a whole, then, this implies that missionary and cross-cultural witnesses should be made aware of how their heritage and tradition can enlighten their missionary service. It means developing the skills, as well as the tools, required to reflect on one's denominational heritage as more than simply stories from the pages of history. It further means that, where missionary training occurs in denominational circles, ordinary believers along with professionally-trained mission students and candidates can learn to appreciate and utilize the significant ideas and concepts in their particular denominational and confessional heritage to evaluate the contexts in which the church's mission takes place. They can also learn to accept the limits of their tradition—and value the contributions other traditions can make to the evaluation of mission—without necessarily feeling the need of arrogantly defending it or abandoning it in shame.

Third, the missiological approach to soul competency undertaken by this dissertation underscores mission as being more than, though no less than, cross-cultural church planting and evangelism. Following Newbigin's insight, mission fundamentally means acting out "in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all" (1995:17). Early Baptists publicly confessed their faith in the Lordship of Christ in the face of Christendom and its oppressive church-state system. Drawing upon Baptists' heritage of religious liberty, Mullins developed soul competency to point toward their "historic mission" ([n. d.]k:2) in defense of the individual against coercive and oppressive structures. Franklin utilized soul competency to educate Baptists that mission fundamentally meant the glad and gracious acknowledgement that national or indigenous Christian believers were equally competent with all Christians to lead the church and interpret matters of faith and theology.

Mission, then, is not simply about church extension. Rather, it is about God's movement toward the world for the purposes of human salvation and wholeness (Bosch 1991:390). Some Western Christians, including Southern Baptists, continue to think of the church's missionary activity primarily along the lines of "missions," that is, in terms of church planting and evangelism. Even the theologically-moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship—whose mission objectives are both to reach the unevangelized as well as the marginalized of the world with the gospel, and who use the language of the "missional church" to speak of mission in North American culture (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Missional Task Force 2003)—have yet to place their missionary personnel in all regions of the world leaving, as a result, certain areas such

as Latin America untouched by their witness. Baptists, and perhaps others, are in particular need of reeducating themselves to the fact that God's missionary movement toward the world is not limited to certain regions defined by inaccessibility to the gospel or by certain activities or programs of the church. God's mission involves the whole church in missionary outreach toward the whole world, even in those places where the Christian church enjoys a long history or in areas where culturally-exogenous efforts at church planting and direct evangelism may not be recommended.

Fourth, this study accentuates the important role that contemporary issues and challenges can play in helping to inform the church's mission in the world. Mullins alluded to this in the opening pages of *The Axioms of Religion*, where he argued that the denominations of his day not only must interpret contemporary events in light of Scripture, they also must learn to interpret Scripture in light of contemporary events, in order to meet the urgent challenges they faced (1908a:12-13). As he saw it, the tendencies of both church and state to dominate the individual in matters of religious faith underscored the biblical affirmation of the person's competency under God, a teaching that Baptists historically upheld. For James Franklin, the issue of Western dominance of Eastern missionary fields brought to mind the difficulties that the early church faced in Acts when Jewish believers attempted to control the life and development of the Gentile church. The Baptist concept of soul competency, he believed, ideally addressed this concern.

The danger of giving current issues a voice in the church's missionary outreach is that this might permit the world to "set the agenda" in mission. Yet the danger of not giving these challenges such a voice is to make the church's mission

irrelevant to the needs of the world. Denominational mission must listen carefully to the world's concerns, endeavor to understand Scripture in light of these concerns as well as understand these concerns in light of Scripture, and explore how its own unique identity can meet these challenges in ways that are faithful to Scripture.

For Baptist mission in North America, this implies listening to a culture that sometimes groans under the weight of evangelical Christianity's dominance in culture and society, while persisting in the call to provide a positive public witness of faith in the Lordship of Christ. Can Baptists, in light of soul competency, offer a way forward that both respects and challenges its culture, in fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ? For cross-cultural mission, this means encouraging indigenous, contextual theologizing without denying any context the theological insights which God has gifted the larger church. In terms of Christian theology itself, this means that Baptists may need to learn to think about the human person in categories that go beyond and expand Mullins' and Franklin's original use of soul competency without denying the essential truths of the concept itself. Ideally, denominational mission represents the intersection of Scripture, contemporary issues, and denominational identity, in order to respond appropriately to the needs of both the church and the world.

Fifth, this study of soul competency highlights the need to distinguish clearly what the church means when it addresses the human person and, specifically, the individual in the context of Christian faith and mission. Postmodern approaches to theology evidence a particular bias against the "individual" and in favor of the "community" (Guder 1998:18-31). Even today's more conservative Southern Baptist thinkers who tend to disdain postmodernism (Cabal 2001) favor corporate

"accountability" as a check on individual "liberty" (Southern Baptist Convention 2003d; Parker [2000]:2-4; Dilday 2002). Soul competency does seek to elevate the individual person; for this reason, Baptists may need to find language suitable for today that clearly positions the individual within a decidedly communal framework to avoid giving the impression that the individual stands apart from others either ontologically or socially. Yet Mullins' point was not to isolate the human person from the community, nor to depreciate the importance of the community, but rather the defend the human person from the tendency of the "community"—be that the church, the state, or another collective within society—to interpose itself between the person and God. In other words, soul competency is an attempt to check the sin that often plagues the community when it thinks that the collective possesses greater value and, indeed, greater "competence" than does the individual. As soul competency frames the matter, opposition is not found between the individual and the community but rather between the individual and tendency to community aggrandizement.

The practice of mission should not avoid the individual as a legitimate topic of theological and missiological concern. The missionary witness, though accountable to the missionary culture in which he or she is found, should remain free to speak even as a lone voice "crying in the wilderness" when the action of the community violates faith and mission. Even in cultures where indigenous people think of themselves first and foremost as communal beings, missionary practices must never ignore the individual nor fail to listen to and respect that person who may challenge and seek to change her or his community and its culture. Each person and each

person's voice is valuable not because the person is communal but because the person is a human creation of God which, in part, means the person is communal.

A final contribution of this study to mission is the introduction of a model designed to assess the missiological value of denominational proposals of identity and mission. Called a transdenominational model of identity and mission, the model serves as a forum whereby particular denominational proposals of identity and mission can dialogue concerning the meaning and importance of denominational identity for the practice of the Christian world mission. The assumption is that, as the conversation broadens to include other proposals and participants, the elements suggested in Chapter 5 of this dissertation and utilized in Chapter 6 to evaluate the significance of soul competency for mission will develop and change over time. The hope is that different proposals may learn from each other about God's movement within the different denominational traditions represented in the dialogue as well as discern how that movement can enrich the practice of mission carried out in and through the denominations.

Applying this model most effectively comes not at the level of denominational bureaucracies nor in academic discussion, but rather on the local level as congregations representing multiple denominational and confessional traditions talk with one another about their traditions and how their traditions have shaped their witness in the world. Indeed, the different key elements outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 may take on a more local feel; for instance, in an area where congregations are grappling with homelessness, poverty, and issues of justice, the dialogue may center around how the denominational traditions represented have grappled with the Bible's

prophetic calls of mercy and Jesus' compassion for the sick and the poor. In the case of Mullins' concept of soul competency, Baptists who identify with this concept can contribute to the conversation on the basis of the concept's stress on human equality and congregational service, but they potentially have much to learn from other traditions whose heritage and denominational identity offer insights and feature strong missional action in this particular direction.

Soul Competency Applied: "New Directions" Church Planting Strategy

Throughout their history, Baptists have placed much emphasis on direct evangelism and church planting in their missionary work (Torbet 1955:122,402-403; Crawley 1985:186-190; Estep 1994:208,341). Under the leadership of President R. Keith Parks (1980-1992), the objective of the (formerly named) Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board was "evangelism which results in churches" (Crawley 1985:186). The "New Directions" strategy of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) represents simply that agency's newest approach for the cross-cultural planting of new congregations.

As previously explained, New Directions is a church planting effort designed to facilitate the starting of rapidly-multiplying and indigenous "church planting movements" among the world's unevangelized people groups, guided by the idea that indigenous congregations serve as the best means for the evangelization and discipleship of those among whom these congregations are begun. The missionary's main responsibility involves the beginning and initial development of local congregations, while the long-term growth and maturation of these congregations falls to the local Christians themselves. As it was applied in Costa Rica, New

Directions significantly changed the way the Costa Rica Baptist Mission (CRBM) carried out its work. It placed the work's administration and oversight into the hands of a few missionary leaders; it placed missionaries on teams responsible only to their assigned people group; it prioritized new churches above already-established congregations; and it promoted methodologies and procedures not open to debate or change. Above all, and reflected in all that has been stated, the IMB's New Directions strategy failed to utilize the Baptist heritage to inform its approach and interpretation of mission.

To the credit of those who developed the program, New Directions correctly recognized the importance of planting culturally-sensitive, indigenous congregations for the long-term success of a people group's evangelization and Christian growth. Its aims evidenced genuine concern for the spiritual redemption of those without faith in Christ. In addition, this approach reminded missionaries that the development of the national church lay in the hands of local leadership and not with "foreign" missionaries. Yet, by failing to draw upon their denominational heritage, the architects of the IMB's New Directions strategy deprived themselves, and the work in general, of a valuable resource for critiquing the strategy's weaknesses and constructing its design more in line with how Baptists approached the Christian faith.

In the following discussion, I employ the four summary statements in Chapter 6 on the significance of soul competency for Christian mission as a guide to suggest how Mullins' vision both critiques and responds to the situation that we faced in Costa Rica under New Directions.[4]

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[4] See Chapter 6, pp. 192-194.

First, as a lens on the IMB's New Directions strategy, soul competency functions to interpret those ways in which this particular plan does not reflect, or does not reflect well, the principles and ideas which Mullins' vision upholds. For its author, soul competency was a personal conviction which he intuitively inhabited in order to interpret his world and, ultimately, champion such ideas as the dignity and worth of every person, the non-coercive nature of the Christian faith, persuasion as a means of missionary outreach, and the equality of all people in the common search for God and faith. Soul competency, as Baptists' historical significance and an important part of their identity and faith, thus validates the truth of the *missio Dei*, that within the identity of the church (in this case, "as denomination" [Wuthnow 1993:522-523]) lie the seeds for its missional witness in the world.

By understanding what soul competency represents, the missionary witness can use its principles to evaluate the contexts in which the witness lives and works always, though, in dialogue with those who hold other perspectives on the Christian faith and its mission. Thus the first step in applying soul competency to New Directions is simply to ask, *To what extent does or does not this approach to missionary church planting adequately incorporate and reflect the central ideas contained in soul competency for Christian mission and witness?*

Second, asking this question leads the missionary witness to draw some conclusions about what the competency of the soul in religion says in regard to the IMB's New Directions strategy. As the background material in Chapter 1 indicated, Southern Baptist missionaries had controlled and managed the missionary work in Costa Rica since the late 1940s. Regrettably, New Directions did not reverse this

course, but instead reinforced it by implying that, with this strategy, Western (North American) missionaries and their agencies knew best when it came to planting the church in "overseas" lands. Although New Directions relied on several internationally-known and -accepted missionary "antecedents" to inform its ethnolinguistic people-group focus,[5] the strategy itself came to Costa Rica from the North American headquarters of the International Mission Board. That a missionary strategy or program should originate in North America was not the problem; that it came from North America as the way cultural outsiders should do church planting in Costa Rica did present a problem.

Soul competency applied to the New Directions strategy changes this pattern in mission. By affirming the dignity and equality of every person and the competency of indigenous Christians to interpret the faith within culture, this Baptist principle encourages indigenous believers to explore, in dialogue with outside sending agencies and the larger Christian church, the meaning of mission and church planting within their own culture. This dialogue may produce ideas and insights very similar to those proposed under New Directions. On the other hand, they could be quite different, stemming from different theological, missiological, and ecclesiological assumptions and beliefs. Under the guidance of soul competency, missionaries cannot define the meaning of mission for their national colleagues, nor can they simply inform them of what their intentions are in their colleagues' own culture and society.

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[5] Such antecedents include the Church Growth Movement, the Lausanne Movement, the "Great Commission Christians for World Evangelization" within the Lausanne Movement, the A. D. 2000 and Beyond movement, and the International Society of Frontier Missiology (Myers and Slack 1998:Section 2:15-16; see also Chapter 1 of this dissertation, pp. 9-10).

Rather, guided by soul competency, New Directions invites both national Christians and missionaries alike to examine together the implications of this strategy for ecclesiology and missiology in their particular context. No culturally-foreign agency should expect or require any local setting to adopt or even to adapt its strategies simply because they originate from supposed mission theorists or experts, for that amounts to missionary coercion. Rather, mission in light of soul competency assumes—or at least expects—that strategies or philosophies created outside of a particular culture and introduced to that culture will invite contrasting ideas and vigorous debate that can be healthy not only for the culture in question but also for the long-term usefulness of the strategy itself.

In this light, soul competency critiques the assumption on the part of New Directions that the initiation of church planting and evangelism rests primarily with missionaries and mission agencies, while the ongoing task of church growth and development is the work of already-established churches and (in Baptist terminology) national conventions (Myers and Slack 1998:Section 2:6-12). God, as the author of mission, creates the church to be missionary and charges it with the task of missional witness in its world. For this reason, it is important that the church in Costa Rica discern the movement of God's Spirit for the meaning of all aspects of mission, including church planting, and not leave this to mission agencies, whether indigenous or exogenous to culture. Mission that draws upon the concept of soul competency understands that indigenous mission depends upon the local or national church as local leaders grasp the meaning of God's will for extending as well as developing the church within their culture. Under soul competency, missionaries in Costa Rica trust

national leadership and congregations to interpret Scripture and follow the Spirit without outside agencies requiring that national Christians think or believe as they do. This should not lead to an isolationist mentality, but rather it can lead to the development of a true missionary ecclesiology in culture.

Third, mission in light of soul competency understands the sending church or agency to be service oriented rather than control minded. An instance in which this principle can inform missionary work in Costa Rica relates to leadership development under the New Directions strategy. New Directions rightfully stresses the need for discipling Christians and training new leaders as a major part of its church-planting methodology. Yet, because it instructs missionaries to launch rapidly-multiplying church planting movements, it also encourages them to stay with a newly-planted congregation only for a brief period of time so that they may reposition themselves quickly "on the frontiers of lostness where other segments need the gospel" (Myers and Slack 1998:Section 7:3). As New Directions sees it, "the missionary calling narrows the missionary's focus to minister only in those areas of church growth where evangelism, church planting and the initial development of churches and denominations exist" (1998:Section 2:8).

Costa Ricans, though, are a relational people. They live, learn, and work by means of strong personal relationships that are not created in short periods of time. The missionary witness, whether cross-cultural or not, whose work is to train and develop indigenous leadership needs to devote longer periods of time than New Directions may anticipate, because the quick departure of missionary leadership could be more detrimental than helpful to the long-term success of a new congregation.

Following the guidance of soul competency, New Directions thus modifies its approach and techniques for leadership training in new church plants when culture so dictates. Cultural outsiders, like missionaries and the agencies/churches that support them, must approach their task as servants and learners rather than experts and leaders. Culture is one of the missionary's best teachers for what God is doing and how God wants the work done.

Finally, mission in light of soul competency trusts more people than agency-appointed leaders to administer its missionary work. Both in their churches and on the mission field, Baptists have historically encouraged—or at least allowed—open dialogue, discussion over stated policies, procedures, and even doctrines. Though the Costa Rica Baptist Mission had a less-than-perfect history in how it related to national leaders, church members, and coworkers before New Directions, the overall direction of its own work remained in the hands of the entire missionary body who, by the early 1990s, began to work more cooperatively with formerly-estranged national colleagues.

New Directions informed by soul competency does not change this. It accepts that both missionaries and national Christian workers, called and empowered by God for service to the church and the world, are competent to know God both individually and corporately and thus, under God, to work together to understand and carry out their missionary charge. Such an approach to mission permits flexibility, not simply within the stated parameters of official programs, but even the flexibility to challenge programs and structures that seem out-of-step with the prevailing mindset. If anything, soul competency refuses to tolerate the notion that only an appointed leader

is able to interpret the Spirit's will, even on the mission field. Indeed, because each person is equally competent before God, mission best occurs as it springs up from the field among those missionaries who are incarnationally committed to working together with national coworkers to discern the mind of Christ for that field.

Again, the Baptist vision of soul competency applied to New Directions—or any other missionary plan, strategy, or agenda—does not pretend to be the only source from which the missionary witness draws to interpret and apply Christian mission. Indeed, mission is best carried out in dialogue with other Christian traditions—denominational and otherwise—which faithfully reflect different but needed aspects of the church's missional identity. Yet soul competency does represent a particular and potentially important interpretation of that identity in an effort to inform Baptists, and others, about the meaning of Christian mission for today.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study on soul competency and Christian mission has raised additional questions that cannot be addressed fully in this work. The closing section of this chapter first suggests issues for possible future research of an historical nature related to Baptist missions in the 20th century, while the final line of inquiry addresses a more theological and missiological concern.

Soul Competency and 20th Century Baptist Missions

Chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrated the important ways in which soul competency influenced how Secretary James H. Franklin of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society interpreted and applied "indigenous" Christianity during the

decades of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. Soul competency not only shaped the

weight he gave to indigenous expressions of the faith in context ([1916]; 1920b), its

stress on the principle of direct access to God may have also inspired the definition

which the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the Woman's American

Baptist Foreign Mission Society gave to the concept of the "indigenous church"

(*Foreign Mission Policies* 1925).[6] This raises interesting questions about the theory

and practice of Christian missions by American Baptists after Franklin retired in

1934. Did the American Baptist approach to missions after James Franklin continue

to utilize soul competency to interpret the Baptist approach to indigenous Christianity

and missionary witness? How did the definition of the indigenous church in 1925

evolve in American Baptist missionary thought beyond this earlier view?

Also from previous discussions in this dissertation of soul competency in

Franklin's thought, it has become clear that he understood the principle to support the

idea of trained, indigenous leadership over the national churches, rather than a

continued reliance upon Western missionaries and Western practices. As Franklin

proclaimed at the Baptist World Alliance in 1923, Baptists had only to recall their

historic denominational principles, in light of New Testament missionary practice, to

support this important trend (1923a:181-183). Do later American Baptist mission

board leaders in the 20th century continue to call the denomination to review "their

distinctive historic principles" (1923a:182) as an important basis for the development

of indigenous Christianity or, for that matter, for its wider missionary practices?

Another matter of potential interest concerns the respective approaches to

mission of American Baptists and Southern Baptists during this same time period.

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[6] See Chapter 4, pp. 121-122.

How did American Baptist foreign missions differ under the influence of Franklin, who employed the principles of equality and fraternal cooperation derived from soul competency to interpret and support the notion of indigenous Christianity, from the Southern Baptist approach to missions, whose executives do not seem to have adopted soul competency in the same way? An interesting comparison could be made between the thought of Franklin and that of James F. Love, corresponding secretary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board from 1915 to 1928. Both men wrote identically-titled articles for the "Baptists and the New World Order" issues of the *Review and Expositor* in 1920 (Franklin 1920b; Love 1920). Both also published addresses which were read at the 1923 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Stockholm under the theme "Mission Boards and Home Churches Facing the Future" (Whitley 1923:179; Franklin 1923a; Love 1923).

Franklin's 1920 article implored Baptist readers to recognize that the modern cry for democracy, self-determinism and freedom called them to make a "fresh enunciation of our historic principle" of soul competency which supported human equality in religion and denied human control over another in religion (1920b:394) . This, indeed, was the "*mission* of Baptist missions" (1920b:390; emphasis original) required in the "new world order," a mission supportive of Baptists' traditional evangelistic purpose as well as evangelistically-motivated indigenous leadership training. Missionaries were not indispensable to the missionary work (1920b:399). Baptists should "lead all the world into an acquaintance with...Christ, and, as Baptists, we should have no fears as to leaving them alone with Him" (1920b:400).

For his part, Love also reflected on the meaning of Baptist missions in light of the "elements characteristic" (1920:251) of the new, post-war order in his corresponding essay, believing that renewed stress on a common humanity, mutual responsibility among nations, the immanence of God, the "superiority" of evangelical Christianity, democracy, and non-mystical forms of religion brought new missionary opportunities to Baptists because of their stress on religion as personal and vital as well as democratic in nature (1920:259). Yet, unlike Franklin, his recommended program for increased missionary witness included the appointment of missionaries who were not timid in proclaiming the Christian gospel and the Baptist faith, and intentional global Baptist cooperation in missions (1920:259-266). Comparing Franklin's application of soul competency to missions and Love's interpretation of missions without soul competency, the American Baptist approach bears a less triumphal demeanor than does the Southern Baptist attitude under Love.

Three years later, immediately following Franklin's plea before the Baptist World Alliance for equality among Eastern and Western churches, cooperation rather domination by Western missionary agencies, and openness to Eastern missionaries in Western lands (1923a:181-184), Love's paper called for an increased missionary program worldwide among Baptists. "The hour for Christian offensive is upon us. The world has been mapped, the survey is made, the reports are in, councils of war have been held, battle fronts have been formed, and the voice of Providence is 'Forward'....The supreme task of the churches for the future is Foreign Missions" (1923:191). Interestingly enough, without referencing Mullins or his soul competency concept, Love concurred that what indigenous Christians needed was not

a "Chinese" or "Japanese" or "national" church nor did they need an "exaggerated national and race consciousness" (1923:187). Instead, they needed "New Testament Churches" (1923:187) designed to meet the paramount spiritual needs of the people.

Clearly the different perspectives which Franklin and Love take on missions reflect the general philosophies of their respective missionary agencies, that is, the former who represented American Baptists' "intensive policy" of missionary retrenchment and indigenous leadership training,[7] and the latter whose board valued missionary expansion and the opening of new mission fields. Indeed, as William R. Estep writes in his history of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, under Love's 14-year leadership its global missionary force grew dramatically, from 298 missionaries in nine fields in 1915 to 489 missionaries in fifteen fields in 1928 (1994:209), all during a time when Southern Baptists experienced increasing financial burdens and indebtedness (1994:207-209). Yet it is interesting that soul competency figured prominently into the justification of Franklin's approach to missions, while Love—who ignored Mullins' principle altogether—seemed to mirror many of Mullins' own concerns. Franklin proved that soul competency was flexible enough to guide (or at least confirm) a particular missionary theory. Is it also capable of critiquing mission theory and practice even when that theory seems consistent with some of its originator's own biases and presuppositions? If so, then soul competency becomes a primary tool for self-critique, applied specifically to Baptists and their approach to mission.

Also, in continuing to explore Franklin's use and support of soul competency in Christian mission, it may be of interest to investigate if and whether the seminal

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[7] See Chapter 4, pp. 116-117.

ideas which he found in soul competency to support indigenous Christianity found

their way into the ecumenical dialogue and its interpretation of mission. As noted

previously, Franklin was a member of the International Missionary Council (IMC)

from 1921 to 1934 representing the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society

(American Baptist Historical Society 2003; American Baptist Foreign Mission

Society 1921:41). Although no evidence has yet been found indicating that he

employed Mullins' phrase in any other than Baptist circles and among Baptist

audiences, traces of the concept can be found in sources produced for the wider

evangelical and Christian world, such as his book, *The Never Failing Light*, in which

he described the non-Western delegates to the IMC's 1928 Jerusalem Council as

being as "competent" as their Western colleagues "to open their own spiritual

treasure-chests and to present the older churches with some of the riches which they

found in Christ" (1933:156-157). It does not seem unlikely that he would have drawn

upon his denominational convictions to guide any discussions he might have had on

the subject of indigenous Christianity. If so, the question of whether these

convictions played a part in underscoring the importance of indigenous—that is, local

or national—interpretations of the Christian faith might prove important.

Finally, Mullins' principle of soul competency also played a leading role in

shaping a "joint meeting of fellowship" between the Northern and Southern Baptist

Conventions meeting in St. Louis, Missouri on Monday, May 18 and Tuesday, May

19, 1936. Entitled "The Historic Baptist Principle for Today: The Soul's Competency

in Religion Under God" (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:108-115), the meeting

evidenced a decidedly "missionary atmosphere" determined from the outset when Dr.

J. R. Sampey, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and of Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary and the first session's presiding officer, called the meeting to

order using a gavel made from the bedstead of famed Baptist missionary Adoniram

Judson (Lipphard 1936:342). The themes which were chosen for the meeting's

sessions also reflected a missionary orientation: "The Historic Baptist Principle in the

Affairs of State;" (Monday evening); "The Historic Baptist Principle in Human

Brotherhood" (Tuesday morning); "The Historic Baptist Principle for World-Wide

Christianity" (Tuesday afternoon); and "International Fellowship in Winning the

World" (Tuesday evening). On the final evening, Japanese Christian Toyohiko

Kagawa addressed the meeting's largest crowd, estimated at 11,000. One observer

noted that Sampey introduced Kagawa as "a genuine Christian who bears in his body

the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Bradbury 1936:640) and who spoke to the assembled

crowd on the poverty of Christ and his own love for the poor and oppressed. The two

day program was sponsored by the American Baptist Publication Society and the

Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:115).

From the scant materials available that were published on or about the

program, it is not readily apparent why Mullins' soul competency concept was chosen

as its general theme. According to the program outline, no address was given

specifically on soul competency. While the Southern Baptist Convention Annual for

1936 contained the program outline wherein quotes from Mullins' book, *The Axioms

of Religion*, headlined the opening (Monday afternoon) session, no further reference

to Mullins nor to soul competency within the printed program appears. Indeed,

differing interpretations of "the historic Baptist principle" are cited within the

program, such as spiritual regeneration, spiritual Christianity, liberty of conscience, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and others. In fact, at least two Northern Baptists reporting on the joint meeting failed to acknowledge at all soul competency as the meaning of "the historic Baptist principle" (Bradbury 1936; Lipphard 1936). Yet the meeting's primary presiding officers—J. R. Sampey as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and James H. Franklin, now serving as president of the Northern Baptist Convention—would have understood quite well that any reference to Baptists' "historic principle" pointed to soul competency.

Why did American Baptists both North and South decide that "the historic Baptist principle" should frame a joint Baptist meeting given distinctly to themes touching upon the political, social, and religious implications of the Baptist witness? Addresses on regeneration, indigenous Christianity, church-state separation, nationalism and international relations, race relations, economic justice, the cause of peace, and a number of specifically missionary papers were featured within this larger framework of "the historic Baptist principle." Representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Northern Baptist Convention, and the National Baptist Convention (African-American) spoke; even a quote from Oscar S. Strauss—"a distinguished Hebrew" according to a joint statement by Sampey and Franklin (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:115)—was printed in the program. Did the organizers of this event wish to imply that "the historic Baptist principle" lies behind the way Baptists conceive of and carry out their total mission concerns? If so, what does this say about how soul competency can and should shape these issues?

The Doctrine of Election and Missionary Responsibility

Mullins once commented to a group of seminary students that God's election of the church was the "foundation and inspiration of missions" (1906b). Specifically, he considered the doctrine of election to answer the question of "God's sovereignty in its relation to human salvation" (1917a:338). In *The Axioms of Religion* (1908a), Mullins examined the doctrine of election in the context of the first religious axiom, which he entitled "The Theological Axiom: The Holy and Loving God Has a Right to be Sovereign" (1908a:79-91). Later, he offered a more complete understanding of the doctrine of election in Chapter 14 of his 1917 systematic theology text, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917a:338-358).

Mullins' interpretation of this doctrine brought several key missiological insights to the fore. First, the doctrine of election referred fundamentally to the nature and purposes of God to save and sanctify humanity. Mullins summarized his thought succinctly: "We conclude therefore that God's electing love is his effort to save the greatest number in the shortest time under the conditions imposed by human freedom and the necessarily slow processes of moral growth" (1908a:89). Mullins understood election as a process that moved slowly and deliberately through time in a way that exercised moral persuasion but never raw coercive power (1908a:85). Simply put, election was "God's initiative in salvation," as the subtitle to Chapter 14 of his systematic theology text put it (1917a:338).

Second, as Mullins phrased it, God's gracious purposes in electing humanity for salvation were not "national" but "racial," that is, God's election envisioned not simply one nation or people but the entire world. God, Mullins believed, "has had in

view not one family or nation, but the whole of mankind. There were chosen families and a chosen nation. But these were not only ends in themselves, they were also means toward a larger end" (1917a:340). Thus, the larger dimensions of the doctrine included the entire world, not just those whom God elected for salvation.

Third, God's sovereign election in salvation included a person's response not only to God's gracious salvation but also to God's missionary outreach to all people everywhere. Thus, while God elected no one on the basis of merit, God did choose people for missionary service in the kingdom, as seen in the examples of the election of Abraham, the nation of Israel, the apostle Paul, and the twelve disciples (1917a:352). The underlying presupposition to this position, though, was Mullins dogmatic insistence that God elected people to salvation only by using morally persuasive means—such as the witness of the church, the Scriptures, and the lives of ordinary Christians (1917a:346)—and never by means of directly confronting a person with the demands of the gospel, for such would destroy a person's free response in faith. This meant, then, that the successful outreach of God's electing love to people was dependent, in large measure, upon those whom God had saved to be agents of that love to others. Mullins boldly illustrated this principle as follows:

> When God saves *A*. he wills two things, *viz.*, that *A*. shall be an agent or medium for conveying those blessings to *B*. In like manner he wills that *B*. shall be a means of blessing to *C*., and so on through the entire list. Now God's grace saves *A*., not by a bare forgiveness and justification. God's grace in saving *A*. means the love, the sympathy, the prayers, the efforts, and strivings of *A*. to save *B*. Grace does not fully work itself out in saving *A*. unless *A*. permits grace to awaken in him a desire, yearning, prayer, effort for *B*. This desire, yearning, prayer, effort is an essential part of the salvation of *A*. God's purpose in *A*. comes short unless grace reappears in *A*. as tender love for the lost, for *B*. The salvation God brings to men is a far richer gift than men sometimes imagine. It is not the mere plucking of a human unit here and there as a brand from the burning. It is this, but far more. It is a salvation

which works through human agents and agencies which involves a great series of human relationships and influences. (1917a:347)

Mullins' approach to the doctrine of election in light of his contention for human freedom leaves open the possibility to suggest that human competency—which enables a person to relate freely to God without outside interposition or interference—may in some way stand behind a person being missionally responsible before God to the world. In other words, his thinking may lead to the proposal that *because* God makes the person competent to relate to God freely and therefore directly, then by exercising that freedom in faith the person not only receives God's salvation but also God's commission to share the faith with others, for God will not impose salvation on anyone. Because Mullins insisted that a believer's moral growth was also a matter of human interdependence and not divine fiat, he would certainly conclude that the person stood in need of the church, the Bible, and other means for education and direction in order to know how to exercise his/her missionary witness in the world. Still, Mullins' treatment of election may provide a clue into at least one facet of the basis for the Christian's missionary responsibility in the world.

Conclusion

It is doubtful that Baptists will ever cease to debate the meaning of their faith and identity. In truth, such debate is good among a people such as Baptists who possess multiple streams of tradition. E. Y. Mullins' concept of the competency of the soul in religion, as one important expression of what it means to be Baptist, serves best by assisting Baptists to see that their heritage and tradition should not be cited simply to highlight their beliefs or to distinguish their approach to life and faith from

that of other Christian communions. Instead, it should and can serve as a platform upon which to act in witness for the sake of God's mission in the world. By approaching soul competency in this manner, Baptists may come to learn even deeper truths about who they are and what their purpose is in God's kingdom.

Appendix

Mullins' life spanned almost seven decades, from his birth in 1860 to his death in 1928. The following brief outline lists some of the major dates and events in his life. See Chapter 1, pages 3-6 for the corresponding narrative material that supplements this appendix. In terms of his publications, only Mullins' books are listed. Sources used to compile the data are from: Robertson (1925); Isla May Mullins (1929); McGlothlin (1943); Tribble (1952); Dobbins (1958); and Ellis (1985).

1860 (January 5):	Born the fourth of eleven children to Seth Granberry and Cornelia Blair (Tillman) Mullins, in Franklin County, Mississippi
1868:	The Mullins family moved to Corsicana, Texas, where Seth would come to establish a school and found the first Baptist church in Corsicana
1879:	Graduated from Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (later renamed Texas A. & M. University)
1880 (November 7):	Baptized by his father at Corsicana, after being converted in a revival conducted by Major W. E. Penn, a lay evangelist
1885:	Graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (entered in 1881)
1885-1888:	Pastor, Harrodsburg Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky
1886 (June 2):	Married Miss Isla May Hawley of Louisville, Kentucky (formerly of Marion, Alabama)
1888-1895:	Pastor, Lee St. Baptist Church, Baltimore, Maryland

1891 (June 26):   Died, Roy Granberry Mullins, the couple's second child, at less than 1 month of age

1894:   Published *Christ's Coming and His Kingdom: A Brief Study of the Literal Passages of Scripture, Bearing on the Second Coming of Christ* (C. W. Schneidereith and Sons)

1895-1896:   Associate Corresponding Secretary, Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond, Virginia (September 1, 1895 – March 15, 1896)

1896:   Granted the Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) degree from Carson and Newman College (Tennessee) (in subsequent years he was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree from McMasters University [Canada] and the Doctor of Laws [LL.D.] degree from Richmond College and Baylor University)

1896 (February 20):   Died, Edgar Wheeler Mullins, the couple's first child, at age seven

1896-1899:   Pastor, First Baptist Church, Newton Centre, Massachusetts

1899-1928:   President and professor of theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

1905:   Published *Why Is Christianity True? Christian Evidences* (American Baptist Publication Society)

1908:   Published *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Griffith and Rowland Press)

1912:   Published *Baptist Beliefs* (Baptist Publishing Company)

1913:	Published *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (Griffith and Rowland Press) and *Studies in Ephesians and Colossians* (Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention)
1917:	Published *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* and *The Life in Christ* (both by Judson Press)
1917-1918:	Religious Director, Camp Zachary Taylor, Louisville, Kentucky
1920:	Published *Spiritualism: A Delusion* and *Talks on Soul Winning* (both by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention)
1921-1924:	President, Southern Baptist Convention
1924:	Published *Christianity at the Cross Roads* (George H. Doran)
1923-1928:	President, Baptist World Alliance
1928 (November 23):	Died, Louisville, Kentucky. During his presidency of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, enrollment at the seminary increased by almost 100% (from 256 to 501); total number of professors by 100% (from six to twelve); endowment by about 300% (from $471,000 to $1,814,000); and total assets by about 500% (from $796,000 to $4,622,000).
1930:	Published (posthumously) *Faith in the Modern World* (Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention)

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