"A Ministry of Enlarged Culture": Characteristics of the First American Baptist Seminaries

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Baptists have always had an interesting relationship with education. On one end of the spectrum, some have seen education as a necessity, while on the other end, some have seen it as a scandal. While the debate over the place of education (in a general sense) in Baptist life can be passionate and produce hard feelings, the question of the education *required* for ministry preparation is almost always heated and filled with real animosity.[1] David Benedict, writing in 1860, describing the Baptist attitude toward ministry education of fifty years prior, said that few "had acquired anything more than a common school education on the limited scale which was then in vogue." This was not seen as a problem either, according to Benedict: "Indeed, it was no uncommon thing to hear passing remarks of a disparaging nature on *college learned* ministers, in the language of the times, as greatly deficient in the pathos and unction of their ministerial performances."[2] However, Benedict said this sentiment changed "as these old members passed off the stage, and a new race took their places." These were those "who required more cultivation in their preachers, and as these preachers themselves became more and more sensible of their deficiencies in mental culture, they began to cast around them for the best means of attaining it."[3] Not only did this new generation "cast around" in the early nineteenth century, but they pushed American Baptist theological education to new heights, influencing Baptists for generations.

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[1] The most well-known anti-education group was the anti-mission Baptists. As the name indicates, anti-mission Baptists primarily derided missions work, but it followed that education was likewise a problem. They were generally against the idea of cooperative effort and especially disliked what they saw as wasted funds and pride. Further, the rural versus urban and southern versus northern dynamics were at play. For more, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapter 5; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture," *The Journal of Southern History* 36, no. 4 (Nov. 1970): 501–29; and James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists: A Cultural and Intellectual History of the Anti-Mission Movement, 1800–1840* (New York: Routledge, 2004). The push for more education (among other things) was led by what some have called the "federalists." Obbie Todd explains that "Baptist Federalism was animated by the idea that social and political stability and a reputable, virtuous, ecumenical class of Baptists were necessary in order to build 'civil trust' and to preserve the hard-earned spoils of religious liberty" (Obbie Tyler Todd, *Let Men Be Free: Baptist Politics in the Early United States, 1776–1835*, Monographs in Baptist History [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022], 84; see also his longer discussion of early American Baptist education in this milieu on pages 96–101).

[2] David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 297, italics his.

[3] Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*, 298–99.

The interest of this paper is the motivation and implementation of one form of ministerial preparation: post-baccalaureate (graduate-level) theological education—or, what is now known as seminary education.[4] This all raises the central question of this essay: what precisely was the character of the earliest American Baptist seminaries? What was their purpose, their plan, their support, and their theology? To answer these questions, this essay will provide a sketch of the history of the foundings and first steps of these seminaries in an effort to unearth key purposes and characteristics. This will demonstrate that several descriptors are essential. The primary motivations were not only to become more cultured, but also to do so from an explicitly Baptist perspective. As this was pursued, a few secondary developments shaped this new endeavor, namely the models of financial and constituency support, and the driving theological method. The story begins with the push for more Baptist education.

Primary Motivators

Those looking to prepare for Baptist ministry in America in the early nineteenth century had a few options for what they could do, though this was dependent on what sort of prior education one had.[5] Leon McBeth has said that before Baptist institutions existed "Baptist ministers who desired education had three choices. They could return to England, which a few did before the Revolution made that less feasible; they could read on their own; or they could attend Harvard or Yale, especially later in the century."[6] The most common of these three was self-study (often because that was the only real option). Studying at other denominational schools, such as Harvard or Yale, brought out a key motivator for Baptists starting Baptist schools. McBeth explains that "Baptists faced harassment and second-class treatment at these schools. Further, many were proselyted to the state religion before graduation, giving rise to the saying that you could send a Baptist to Harvard but could not get one out."[7] This sentiment was pervasive. Irah Chase, who we will see later as a key figure in the founding of Baptist seminaries, told a similar story of a Protestant who went to a Catholic school in Montreal and was eventually ordained a Catholic priest. Chase also

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[4] The term "seminary" was not used exclusively of graduate-level education. Rather, it was used for theological or ministerial training, no matter the educational level. Thus, seminary could refer to high school level, collegiate, or (eventually) graduate level. This is apparent in the Benedict text previously referenced.

[5] For a more extended presentation of these options and the reasons for each, see Matthew C. Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity: Alvah Hovey and the Problem of Authority within the Context of Nineteenth-Century Northern Baptists*, Monographs in Baptist History (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 51–59.

[6] H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 235.

[7] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 235.

related how, while he was a student at Andover, he felt a pull toward Congregationalism.[8] Baptists clearly wanted more options, and they stressed the necessity of having explicitly Baptist schools.

A half century prior, in the 1760s, Morgan Edwards, pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, understood the need for more educated ministers.[9] Having been trained at Bristol Academy in England he desired to see Baptist colleges spring up in America, but he also knew that there needed to be ecclesiastical organizations that could support such schools. Edwards was key in the development of both endeavors. The Philadelphia Association, of which Edwards's First Baptist Church was the flagship, was a leader in pushing for wider associational cooperation with the purpose of educational support (not that that was the only reason to have wider cooperation). The College of Rhode Island (which was later renamed Brown University) became the first Baptist college in America in 1764 and was the standard-bearer for those who sought the liberal arts foundation for ministry with its emphasis on producing a well-rounded individual (minister or otherwise) who would contribute to society from a Baptist perspective.[10] With Brown, Baptists had their own collegiate option, and many future ministers attended there.

Mentoring was another common method of training because it fulfilled legal requirements in many locations to be recognized as a minister.[11] Often mentoring was done with a well-known and respected pastor. Those who did not have any formal collegiate education could take this option, but it was more normal that one with collegiate education would spend a period of months or years with a highly respected pastor or pastors, sometimes with those who were not Baptist.

Those who were on the frontiers often had little or no formal education—certainly less than what was required for entrance into a liberal arts college— and strongly felt the need for ministers to get out quickly and start preaching. Yet, some still wanted preparation. A unique set of options developed to fill this need. One was the manual labor school, which was an older European option

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[8] See Irah Chase, "Rev. Irah Chase, D.D.: An Autobiographical Sketch," *The Baptist Memorial and Monthly Record* 9 (1850): 74–75.

[9] William H. Brackney, *Congregation and Campus: Baptists in Higher Education* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 51.

[10] The liberal arts idea was centered around developing intellect and civic virtue. See Michael S. Brooks, "'Baptist Piety and Civic Virtue': Francis Wayland and the Intersection of Early American Evangelicalism and Higher Education," (Ph.D. diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 99–101; and Robert L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 196–208.

[11] William H. Brackney, "The Development of Baptist Theological Education in Europe and North America: A Representative Overview," *American Baptist Quarterly* 18 (June 1999): 86–87.

that trained students in some manual/skilled labor as well as theology or ministry preparation.[12] The idea was that the graduate would be developed as a person and a minister but also have a way to support themselves monetarily. These schools often served as college preparation, but they were not designed for such a purpose.

Another route was the Literary and Theological (L&T) school. This was a blend of high school and college level courses in various liberal arts subjects (the "Literary" portion) as well as ministry preparation (the "Theological" portion). The difference between the manual labor and the L&T model was not only whether a trade skill was taught, but also whether one considered a liberal arts foundation necessary for ministry training. The L&T model insisted on such a foundation, though it was a more expedient model than a full college education.

Though Baptists now had several options, what they still lacked was advanced training beyond the baccalaureate level. And, as the opening quote from Benedict above showed, advanced education was not only not a priority, it was a problem to some. The immediate need for pastors, the antipathy toward education (especially the liberal arts), and the lack of opportunity meant that many had no college education, which seemingly made graduate-level theological training gratuitous. This began to change, and the reason was a general demand among Baptist people for church leadership that could speak to the issues of the day. One nineteenth-century author put it this way:

> With the growing intelligence of the people, there was a demand for a ministry of enlarged culture. For all that had been done, there was reason for congratulation. But then the able and judicious councillors (*sic*), both among the ministry and the people, began to feel the want of a well-furnished ministry. As there had been a marked development of the missionary spirit with reference to foreign and home fields, so must there be commensurately with this, enlarged effort to provide a ministry equal to the times, adequate in number and efficiency to the demands of the denomination.[13]

In sum, two primary motivators spurred the pursuit of Baptist seminary education. More Baptists recognized the need to go beyond collegiate training, because even those with that level of training recognized it did not compare to the graduate school level of education that was offered at places like Harvard, Yale, and Andover. Plus, Baptists needed Baptist education. Experience told them that outsourcing the advanced education that they desired usually meant that the best and

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[12] The most comprehensive source on these schools is Laura Graham, "From Patriarchy to Paternalism: Disestablished Clergymen and the Manual Labor School Movement in Antebellum America" (Ph.D. diss. University of Rochester, 1993).

[13] S. W. Adams, *Memoirs of Rev. Nathaniel Kendrick, D.D., and Silas Kendrick* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1860), 113.

brightest left their Baptist convictions behind. If there was a need for advanced education, if the most promising candidates were committed to that need, if they were going to go find it where they could, and if outsourcing meant losing these promising men, then Baptists needed advanced Baptist ministry education. The need for a "ministry of enlarged culture" that was Baptist by conviction were the primary motivators for Baptists to develop graduate-level schools. The story of how this took place is one of initial movement, recalibration, and foundations for the future.

Initial Movement: General Support and a National School

Having found sufficient motivation, American Baptists started their first graduate-level theological schools (seminaries) by the 1820s. In a few ways beyond the motivators above, the time was ripe for the development of seminaries. Baptists were growing exponentially,[14] they were associating together on regional and national scales, and they were slowly developing into cultural insiders.[15] As Baptists grew and worked together in some ways, cooperation for the purposes of education followed. In other words, that Baptists were willing to invest in missions naturally (maybe even necessarily) led to a willingness to invest in ministry preparation. The push for increased Baptist education—by which I mean graduate-level education—happened alongside missions work, and it began within the regional Baptist associations.

In the North, this drive was most forceful in New York (the New York Baptist Association), Philadelphia (the Philadelphia Baptist Association), and New England (the Warren and Boston Associations). As early as 1791, the Warren Association founded an educational *fund* for potential ministers, an idea proposed by Samuel Stillman, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Boston.[16] The Philadelphia Association called for an education *society* as early as 1799, though it would not be until 1812 that the Baptist Education Society in the Middle States was founded, and it was William Staughton, the pastor of Sansom Street Baptist in Philadelphia, who was the driving force and its

[14] In 1780, Baptists were a small denomination with around 450 churches. By 1850 they were the second largest Protestant denomination in America with 9,300 churches and 750,000 members. By 1900 they would have 4.5 million members. See Edwin Scott Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–10, 219, 374, 390.

[15] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins argue this happened over the course of the entire nineteenth century. See Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptist in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially chapters 8 and 9.

[16] Nathan E. Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston, 1665–1899* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 279.

first official tutor in 1813.[17] In 1814, the Warren and Boston Associations combined and developed the previously existing Warren educational fund into the Baptist Education Society of Massachusetts.[18] A few years later, in 1817, the New York Baptist Association formed the New York Baptist Education Society, which then sponsored its first student in 1818.[19] The point is that the regional associations began their own modest educational efforts,[20] which would eventually turn into seminaries, though that is several steps in the future.

While these regional efforts were taking place, the other key movement toward seminary education was on the national level. In 1814, the national spirit was rising among Baptists, and they organized the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions (commonly known as the Triennial Convention beginning in 1817). As the long name suggests, this group was initially formed for the express purpose of organizing foreign missionary work. But this first meeting also brought up the issue of education, though nothing was formally done about it. At the second meeting in 1817, Richard Furman and Luther Rice asserted themselves as leaders of the Convention, and it was Furman who made the formal appeal for more education.[21] Thus, while the Convention was formed to specifically address missionary effort, it did not take long for theological education to be introduced as well.[22]

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[17] Samuel W. Lynd, *Memoir of the Rev. William Staughton, D.D.* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands, and Company, 1834), 160; and Thomas J. Nettles, "William Staughton," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America*, edited by Terry Wolever. Volume Seven (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2016), 123.

[18] William H. Brackney, "Nurseries of Piety or the School of Christ? Means and Models of Baptist Ministerial Education in Early America," in *Faith, Life and Witness: The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1986–1990*, ed. by William H. Brackney and Ruby J. Burke (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 1990), 117.

[19] Adams, *Memoirs of Rev. Nathaniel Kendrick, D.D., and Silas Kendrick*, 121.

[20] These regional groups became more numerous as more regional groups, and state conventions, were formed beginning in the 1820s. Some of the educational societies and funds supported seminaries, some individual students, some colleges, some L&T schools, and some manual labor schools. See Brackney, "Nurseries of Piety or the School of Christ?," 117–118.

[21] William H. Brackney, "Triumph of the National Spirit: The Baptist Triennial Conventions, 1814–1844," *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 (1985): 168.

[22] There is more to this story. A background debate was whether the Convention should be a society focused only on foreign missions (similar to what the English Baptists had done or what was followed on a regional level) or a general convention. See Brackney, "Triumph of the National Spirit," 167. Those in favor of an association were generally less willing to support educational efforts on a national scale. This was perhaps a larger issue than has been normally recognized and is distinct from the anti-mission impulse previously noted. The decades following the founding of the Triennial Convention contained repeated debates over whether a convention or a society was a better model. The forming of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 is often pointed to as a parting of the ways, and this certainly was a unique split. But there was already disagreement brewing as early as the 1826 Convention meeting, when the society idea became the de facto model (despite retaining the name of Convention). See Roger Hayden, "Bristol Baptist College and

Furman's appeal at the 1817 Convention was the major turning point in Baptist seminary education. He challenged the group to take seriously the need of a well-educated ministry. The convention made the momentous decision to authorize the board to use funds "to institute one or more classical and theological schools for 'aiding pious young men in preparation for the ministry.'"[23] The first step the board took was to look to William Staughton and the mentoring school he had been running under the auspices of the Philadelphia Education Society. The board authorized Staughton in 1818 to be principal of a formal theological institute, with Irah Chase the full-time assistant.[24] The board, largely being pushed by Luther Rice, also made plans for a more permanent school (which was much more than just a theological school) to be set up in the relatively new national capital of Washington, D.C. These plans for the broader college would have to be approved formally at the 1820 meeting of the Triennial Convention,[25] after which the Columbian College was officially established. However, the theological school already had its start in Philadelphia under the leadership of Staughton and Chase. This was the first graduate-level theological institute that Baptists had in the United States.

To summarize events: the theological school was authorized in 1817 by the general convention, given specific definition in 1818 by the convention board, and opened in 1818 in Philadelphia with some success. In fact, "from 1818 to 1821 a total of twenty-one students finished the course in Philadelphia."[26] In 1820, the Columbian College was formally approved and opened. The theological school then moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. in 1821 to join with Columbian.

By 1820, Baptists had begun to work together toward certain ministry goals, including education. The initial efforts were on a regional level and were to raise money to financially support

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America," *Baptist History and Heritage* 14, no. 4 (October 1979), 33. The integration of education within a national body was not followed in the North following the 1826 meeting, as will be discussed shortly. The movement away from a general convention back to a simple foreign mission society is sometimes called "The Great Reversal." See G. Thomas Halbrooks, "Francis Wayland and 'The Great Reversal,'" *Foundations* 20, no. 4 (1977): 196–214.

[23] Brackney, "Triumph of the National Spirit," 170.

[24] Roger Hayden, "William Staughton: Baptist Educator and Missionary Advocate," *Foundations* 10, no. 1 (January–March 1967), 26–27. It should also be noted that the Baptist Educational Society of the Middle States footed the bill for Chase's salary. See Irah Chase, "The Theological Institution at Philadelphia, 1818–1821," *The Baptist Memorial and Monthly Chronicle* 1 (April 15, 1842): 102.

[25] This took an amendment of the constitution of the Convention to do this. See Brackney, *Congregation and Campus*, 106. The official name of the convention was also lengthened to: The General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions and Other Important Objects Relating to the Redeemer's Kingdom. See Halbrooks, "Francis Wayland and 'The Great Reversal,'" 202.

[26] Brackney, "Nurseries of Piety or the School of Christ?," 123.

potential ministers to be mentored or to attend a college. This blossomed into support for specifically Baptist schools on the collegiate and preparatory levels. What makes 1817 and 1820 significant is that they signaled two important changes. For the first time, (1) there was a nationally organized group of Baptists supporting (2) graduate level ministry preparation. Unfortunately, the theological school at Columbian would not survive long. And though it would be short-lived, its existence, efforts, and failures provided a foil for future efforts.

Recalibration: The Collapse of Columbian and the Newton Way

After the 1820 approval of a national school to be built in Washington, D.C., it took some time for the school to take shape. Academic activity in the classical department began in September of 1821 at Washington D.C.[27] Despite some outward appearances of success, the school struggled immediately.[28] Luther Rice, who had assumed much of the early leadership, was aggressive in having buildings constructed, despite having neither the support of the Convention board nor having paid off the already constructed buildings. This was ambitious, and most Baptists were not supportive of such a fast development.[29] Mounting debt combined with waning support meant that both Rice and Staughton had to give increased attention to the school, including several different tours across the country (and even England)[30] attempting to raise new funds. Despite these efforts the school had a crushing debt of $50,000 in 1824.[31] These financial difficulties, combined with some differences of

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[27] Obtaining a charter for the school was uniquely difficult as the charter had to approved by the United States Congress, since they had responsibility for the governance of the District of Columbia. In the end, the charter was approved and several members of the US government donated money, including President James Monroe, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, and many others. One oddity was that Congress mandated that the school have no control by a religious group (Brackney, *Congregation and Campus*, 107), meaning that students, teachers, trustees, or presidents could come from "every religious denomination" (See Elmer Louis Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw: The Evolution of George Washington University* [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970], 32). Another was that Congress demanded the school be opened with all departments fully functioning from the beginning (Hayden, "William Staughton," 30). This meant that the theological school, which was still in Philadelphia, had less attention than before

[28] The school, and by extension, the denomination, enjoyed much attention as the school had its start. The first graduation in 1824 was attended by President Monroe, Secretary of State Adams, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, Speaker of the House Henry Clay, and the world famous French General the Marquis de Lafayette ("Staughton, William," *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Volume III [New York: James T. White & Company, 1893], 151). Despite this highpoint, Columbian was already fighting for its survival, particularly the theological section. As a matter of fact, the theological school, once it moved to Columbian, never conferred a degree: William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 278n71. See more details in Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw*, 50ff.

[29] Hayden, "William Staughton," 30.

[30] Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw*, 46–47.

[31] Hayden, "William Staughton," 31.

theological views, led to the emptying of the theological school in 1825 with the departure of Irah Chase.[32] The truth was that as soon as the school moved to Washington, D.C. it struggled. Evidently, it had decreasing enrollment each year. In December 1825, Staughton was put in charge of the theological school. But "from that time on, the report by classes of students registered lists none for the Theological Department."[33]

The Columbian College went through difficult years that radically transformed the institution. Staughton stayed at Columbian past the time that the theological school left, attempting to raise funds until he finally resigned in 1827. Luther Rice faced unsubstantiated charges that he had misappropriated funds.[34] The school was unsupported by the Triennial Convention after the 1826 meeting,[35] and it had to be financially bailed out by Congress in 1828.[36] In short succession it lost its Baptist identity and eventually combined with other denominational groups and was renamed George Washington University in 1904.

Yet, for its short-lived and seemingly ineffectual attempt at a theological college, Columbian played an important role in the development of Baptist theological schools. It was founded by a national group and it attempted graduate-level theological education, though the theological school had more success when in Philadelphia as opposed to Washington, D.C. But after the 1826 Convention, these hopes were dashed. Further, its failing in some ways forced North and South their own directions. The stumbling momentum from Columbian toward theological education would be taken up in the North, though by regional associations. From this point forward, historically, it is possible to speak of a northern and southern seminary tradition. The vision of a larger national group supporting seminary education would not be taken up until a new group had been formed elsewhere (the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845) and had gained enough

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[32] William Hague, *Christian Greatness on the Scholar. A Discourse on the Life and Character of Rev. Irah Chase, D.D. Professor of Biblical Theology in the Theological Institution at Newton, Mass. Delivered before the Society of Inquiry, at Newton, June 27, 1865* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1866), 19.

[33] Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw*, 51.

[34] Brackney, *Congregation and Campus*, 108. What was more likely, was that Rice had been "unbusinesslike" and not kept good books. And thus, when audited in 1826, the financial straits of the school were shown to be dire and his books somewhat of a mess. See Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw*, 63. Further, the general anti-education sentiment of the anti-mission Baptists were at play. The primitives were fundamentally against the idea of cooperative work but they also especially despised wasted funds. See footnote 1 above.

[35] This meeting was key for the change in the Triennial Convention away from the Convention model that supported multiple ventures (foreign missions, home missions, and education) to only supporting foreign missions. Thus, the idea of "the great reversal." See, Halbrooks, "Francis Wayland and 'The Great Reversal,'" 207–13.

[36] See Kayser, *Bricks Without Straw*, chapter five.

momentum to support such an endeavor (the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859). Thus, arguments over conventions versus associations bled into educational models. After the stumbling start of Columbian College, northern Baptist education lost a national identity and a platonic notion of working together and favored a more atomistic approach being supported by only those in favor of advanced education, at least until 1907 and the founding of the Northern Baptist Convention.[37]

The immediate effect of this was that one of Columbian's star professors, Irah Chase, took his dreams of a graduate level theological school elsewhere. The short story is that he went from Washington, D.C. to Boston and found support for a theological school to be founded. This school was not an embedded theological school, meaning it was not attached to any larger college or university. It was instead supported by pastors in that region.[38]

New England had always been a friendly place for theological education. And the Massachusetts Baptist Education Society had supported students financially since 1814. Two years after Chase submitted his proposal for a theological school to be attached to Brown, Jonathan Going, a prominent Baptist leader in Worcester, Massachusetts and Agent of the Education Society of the Warren Association, submitted a proposal in 1819 for an L&T school to be founded somewhere in New England.[39] And, when Columbian College had remained under the auspices of the Triennial Convention, New England Baptists had been heavily involved both in its administration and its financial support. All these efforts show that New England Baptists were

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[37] In this story one could ask why it was that Brown University was not the site of a theological school, seeing how it had the distinction of being the most successful Baptist college of the time. While there is much that would go into an answer, it suffices to say that an attempt was made previously, in 1817, to look at Brown. Irah Chase, before going to work for Staughton, via the auspices of the Boston Association, presented a plan for a theological school to be attached. This did not go forward due to the fact that Brown's charter limited the school to the arts and sciences, the unwillingness of its prominent leaders to seek to change the charter to be able to adopt a theological school, and some dissatisfaction with the theology of Brown (Hayden, "Bristol Baptist College and America," 33). Further, Michael S. Brooks has shown that Brown was in shambles. The president, Asa Messer, was actively participating in a Unitarian church and would publicly declare his Unitarian beliefs in 1826, which was one key reason for his removal that year. Also, the college atmosphere was not conducive to ministry preparation in general. When Francis Wayland became president in 1826, he also continued the evolution of the school away from a classical model to an elective approach (Brooks, "'Baptist Piety and Civic Virtue,'" 42–49).

[38] Chase, "The Theological Institution at Philadelphia, 1818–1821," 102.

[39] See Jonathan Going, "Outline of a Plan for Establishing a Baptist Literary and Theological Institution in a Central Situation in New-England. By a Friend to an Able Ministry," 1819, reprinted in the *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16 (January 1976): 177–87. See the discussion in Brooks, "'Baptist Piety and Civic Virtue,'" 127–30.

committed to the idea of a theological school. And so, when Chase looked to New England in 1825, there was real promise.[40]

On May 25, 1825, at a meeting of the Massachusetts Baptist Education Society at Boston's First Baptist Church, a decision was made to create a graduate-level theological school. They chose Newton, a quiet town just outside the western limits of Boston as the location. Newton was suitable because of its rural atmosphere and the support of the local pastor, affectionally known as "Father" (Joseph) Grafton. The trustees purchased land quickly and elected Chase its president and first professor. And in November 1825, Chase was teaching Newton's initial three students. Newton's beginnings were sparse, but important.[41]

Notably, even with Columbian's demise, the momentum toward graduate education was not stopped. Enough Baptists wanted advanced Baptist ministry education. But Columbian's failure required a recalibration. Rather than a national movement, Newton was a regional school with regional support. Northern Baptists (particularly in New England) were ready for a graduate level school. Newton set the pace for Baptist seminaries in the north. When Newton was formally incorporated the following February (1826) there were only a handful of basic procedures put in place. Conspicuously absent were a constitution, course curriculum, or doctrinal confession.[42] It would be Chase, again, who would prove the architect of what would become a key foundation for Baptist seminary education that was distinctively northern.

Foundations for the Northern Future

In this story, Irah Chase (1793–1864) plays an oversized role and proves especially important. He was educated at Middlebury College (Vermont) and Andover Theological Seminary,

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[40] The one issue that Chase had with New England was its geographical location. It was not central to the country, and Chase still had an idea that the school ought to be equally accessible to all regions. He looked first to the West and tried his connections in Cincinnati, but the timing was simply not right. He thought about New York City, but the New York Baptists were already supporting an L&T school in central New York at Hamilton. And so, Chase looked back to New England and the Boston group of pastors, including Thomas Baldwin, Lucius Bolles, Daniel Sharp, Heman Lincoln, Francis Wayland, and Joseph Grafton. These men were committed to the idea of professional training for ministers.

[41] To this day, Newton remains the oldest Baptist seminary, though it has gone through two significant changes. The first was a merger with Andover Theological Seminary in 1965, forming the Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. The second was a move to New Haven, Connecticut in 2017 when it affiliated with Yale Divinity School, where it is now known as Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. For more on this history, see Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover Newton across Two Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), and the seminary website (https://andovernewton.yale.edu/about/history).

[42] See "Newton Theological Institution," *American Baptist Magazine* 6 (1826): 128–129.

where he was one of two Baptist students at the congregationalist school.[43] After graduation (and seeing firsthand what theological education could look like) Chase served on the frontiers of western Virginia as a home missionary. This experience again convinced him of the need for educated pastors. From there, he was called to serve with Staughton in Philadelphia.[44] Despite willingly working underneath Staughton, when Chase had the opportunity to form a theological school, his vision looked decidedly different than what Staughton implemented at Philadelphia and Columbian. This key difference would shape northern Baptist seminary education for generations.

When Columbian's theological school was opened, Staughton was Professor of Divinity and Pulpit Eloquence, Alva Woods was Professor of Ecclesiastical History, and Chase was Professor Languages and Biblical Literature.[45] Chase's biographer, William Hague, described Staughton's model as "after the old medieval fashion of theological schools, and assigned no place to Biblical Theology, nor scarcely any sign of an approach of the idea that it enfolds."[46] The older model had a professor of Divinity who would teach a standard text of theology, and then, according to Hague, use that to understand the scriptures. "The office of 'the system' was to *anticipate* the Scriptures, as Calvin expressed it in the preface to the Strasbourg edition of his Institutes, where he says that the design of his work was, 'So to prepare theological students for the reading of God's Word, that they might easily commence their labors;' and that, therefore, he had so arranged and explained the subjects, 'that the reader might comprehend without difficulty what he *was to find* in the Holy Scriptures, and *to what end* he was to use all that to which they taught him.'"[47] This method, which the Reformers and their followers had used, was what Chase saw as the problem.

Chase's model was built after his alma mater and his favorite professor, Moses Stuart,[48] and his particular model of biblical theology. This put a premium on coming to the text without

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[43] Later in life, Chase recollected that he was the only Baptist student, see Chase, *Rev. Irah Chase, D.D.*, 73. Brackney relates that Francis Wayland was a fellow Baptist student at the time (Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, 280), when he quotes Francis Wayland: Francis Wayland and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland, D.D., L.L.D., Late President of Brown University* (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1867), 69.

[44] Chase had another offer, which was to go to Waterville College in Maine, but he rejected this for the chance to serve in a capacity that could have extensive influence on the entire denomination.

[45] Hague, *Christian Greatness on the Scholar*, 21.

[46] Hague, *Christian Greatness in the Scholar*, 21.

[47] Hague, *Christian Greatness in the Scholar*, 21, italics original.

[48] Much more can, and probably should be said about Stuart, but that is simply beyond the purview here. For a full presentation of Stuart, see John H. Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Founder of Biblical Science in America* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1988); and Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969). For a quick overview of Stuart in the Baptist context, see Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 36–38. A further comment about "biblicist" is important. This is a slippery term. By biblicist, some

preconceived notions. With intentioned contradiction to Staughton, Chase's model was described this way: "instead of allowing the student to have his mind subjected to the power of a logically-compacted system anticipatory of what he would find in the Scriptures, and thus prejudging what he *ought* to find, to constrain him to become thoroughly grounded in the original Scriptures themselves, and to make him, like Apollos, 'mighty' in those Scriptures by a conscious mastery of their meaning, their scope, and of their applications, according to those, fixed principles of interpretation that would stand the test of the severest scrutiny like pure gold tried by the fiery crucible."[49] The method was to teach students to draw out the simple truths of Scripture and use these as the sole building blocks of a theology.[50]

Not only was this the method of biblical studies, but it also was placed at the center of the curriculum. Like Andover, Newton originally had a three-year course of studies that included biblical languages, church history, biblical theology, and pastoral studies. Notably absent is systematic theology (or divinity as it was called at Columbian). In Andover's plan, Systematic Theology was still present, even with the emphasis on the method of Stuart. This was so because Andover was functioning underneath a dual confession of faith.[51] At Newton, systematic theology was replaced by the biblical theology of Chase, at least in the original plans.[52] More than that, Newton did not utilize a confession of faith for their seminary. Margaret Bendroth said it this way: "Newton had no constitution, and its leaders made no attempt to set forth a faculty creed, course curricula, or any

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simply mean that they prioritize the Bible and its authority above all others. When attached to Stuart, however, it had further connotations, which will be explained shortly.

[49] Hague, *Christian Greatness in the Scholar*, 23, italics original.

[50] More on the method and the significance of it can be found in Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, 279–282; and Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 29–31. Describing his own method, Chase insisted on the original languages so as: '"to analyze the most important portions of the Old Testament, and the whole, if possible of the New; exhibiting the scope of the respective parts and whatsoever of doctrinal or of practical import they may contain, and showing how they are applicable at the present day;'…then, 'to classify and arrange the particulars, and, for this purpose, to bring the student to the examination of a series of theological subject, in such a manner as to awaken the efforts of the genuine disciple of Christ and lead him to 'search the Scriptures.'" This is from Hague, *Christian Greatness in the Scholar*, 27–28, The small quotes are Hague quoting Chase directly. Chase struggled to find a suitable textbook that demonstrated this new method. In the end he utilized the book of Gottlob Christian Storr and Karl Christian Flatt, professors at Tübingen, which had additions by Samuel Schmucker, professor at the Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg. See Hague, *Christian Greatness in the Scholar*, 25–29.

[51] This dual confession was a unique circumstance which reflects the unique situation of its founding. For more, see Daniel Day Williams, *The Andover Liberals: A Study in American Theology* (New York: Octagon, 1970).

[52] It took some time, but Newton did eventually teach a Christian Theology course, though this course was still very much in the vein of Chase's method.

means of doctrinal oversight of the school."[53] The desire to have a particular place for biblical studies without recourse to divinity seems to be reflected in this decision.

Thus, Newton was not just a new way to do theological education, it was a new theological method. For a century, this method was a hallmark of Newton's reputation. A few examples demonstrate this: Chase's progressive method was one of the explicit reasons that Southern Baptist pastors did not want to send their sons to Newton and became an impetus to creating their own seminary in 1859 (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary).[54] In 1866, when the new library at Newton was dedicated, explicit reference was made to the method of Chase as the key achievement and identity of the seminary.[55] And in the 1890s Augustus Strong observed among Baptists that: "Doctor Chase taught a theology so unlike that of Princeton that some of our extremely orthodox ministers refused to put their sons under what they regard as heterodox teaching."[56] Chase's method was synonymous with Newton's theology for a century.[57]

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[53] Bendroth, *A School of the Church*, 31. See also "Newton Theological Institution," *American Baptist Magazine* 6 (1826): 128–9; "Newton Theological Institution" *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (October 1826): 308; and *Newton Theological Institution: Sketches of Its History, and an Account of the Services at the Dedication of the New Building, September 10, 1866* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1866).

[54] Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6–7.

[55] At the dedication, the chairman of the Board, Baron Stow, described the early work of Chase in relation to the current school this way: "He had a plan; the one that gave form and pressure to his own life work; a plan elaborated by years of patient thought; a plan that had failed elsewhere because not sustained or appreciated; a plan constructed with simplicity and accuracy of adjustment around that one central idea which has been so justly and beautifully delineated in the Memorial Discourse on that good man's life and character. That central Idea—THOROUGH BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION, NOT ACCORDING TO THE ANALOGY OF FAITH, BUT ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF EXEGESIS—was promptly accepted as the true one for a Baptist Theological Institution; and, God be praised, it has never been replaced by another; and woe to us as a Christian people when it shall come to be lightly esteemed. That Plan was adopted in all its particulars, and has not been found susceptible of essential improvement" (Baron Stow, "Address by Rev. Baron Stow, D.D." in *Newton Theological Institution: A Sketch of Its History, and an Account of the Services at the Dedication of the New Building, September 10, 1866* [Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1866], 35, emphasis original).

[56] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Miscellanies* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1912), 2:60.

[57] A further example could be given from the Baptist historian A. H. Newman in 1906. When speaking of some of the early seminarians, Newman gave this extended warning of the early nineteenth-century northern Baptist theological method and how it coincided with later German liberalism: "Thoroughly familiar themselves with German biblical criticism, so far as it had developed in their time, and admirers and emulators of German scholarship, they yet maintained relatively conservative views respecting the authority and the inspiration of the Scriptures, and gave no indication of any tendency to eliminate or to minimize the supernatural element in biblical history. By encouraging their students to become masters of German exegetical literature, to carry on exhaustive studies after the manner of the Germans, and when possible to study in the German universities, they greatly promoted learning among Baptists, and incidentally brought many young men under liberalizing tendencies" (Albert Henry Newman, "Recent Changes in the Theology of Baptists," *The American Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 [Oct. 1906]: 597).

Despite some pushback against this method, Newton's education and theology was "a model that influenced all other Baptist schools of the nineteenth century,"[58] according to William Brackney. I have summarized elsewhere Newton's founding this way: "The theological climate was one of high academic standards, free inquiry, no confessional standard, and biblicist theological reasoning."[59] This method was passed on to thousands of students over the decades by Chase and those who came after him. As a matter of fact, Chase taught this method to his protégé, Barnas Sears,[60] who then taught it to three famous students, Alvah Hovey, Ebenezer Dodge, and Ezekiel Gilman Robinson, who then, collectively, taught ***all*** northern Baptist theology professors through the end of the nineteenth century.[61] Put differently, the freedom to theologically improvise was part of the tradition from the beginning.[62]

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[58] Brackney, *Congregation and Campus*, 281.

[59] Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 31.

[60] When Chase stepped down from teaching in 1835, it was Barnas Sears who took over a year later as Professor of Christian Theology. Sears had studied with Chase and, when he went to Germany, had studied in Germany with August Tholuck and Wilhelm Gesenius at Halle. "Sears's method of teaching was not to utilize a textbook but to encourage students to build their own theology" (Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 32)."[60] Sears's biographer (and former student, Alvah Hovey), summarized his theology like this: "The theology taught by Doctor Sears was biblical in its source and evangelical in its tone. It was clear to those who sat at his feet that he was not in search of new opinions because they were new, or of old opinions because they were old, but rather of the truth, whether new or old. But, though his theology was biblical in its source, he did not shut his eyes to the lessons of nature. While he believed in Jesus Christ, as the highest and perfect revelation of God the Father, his mind was evermore hospitable to truth from any source" (Alvah Hovey, *Barnas Sears: A Christian Educator, His Making and Work* [New York: Silver, Burdett & Company, 1902], 64). Sears clearly stood in the vein of Irah Chase and Moses Stuart. Augustus Strong would later comment on Sears that: "Dr. Sears taught but little positive doctrine of any kind. His method was to suggest questions rather than to answer them. Scholarship and discussion were the main features of his classroom" (Augustus Hopkins Strong, "As a Theologian," in *Ezekiel Gilman Robinson: An Autobiography; with a Supplement by H. L. Wayland and Critical Estimates, ed. by E. H. Johnson* [Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1896], 164).

[61] This does not mean that they all accepted this exact method. But all of them attempted to construct a positive systematic theology out of this base, rather than returning to the older systems. How this happened in the nineteenth century northern Baptist seminaries is an extended and complicated subject, though I have given a brief attempt in Central Baptist Theological Seminary's 2023 MacDonald Lecture Series (which can be found here: https://centralseminary.edu/about-central/macdonald-lecture-series/). Briefly put, it was the second generation of seminary theologians (Hovey, Dodge, and Robinson), that inherited Chase's and Sears's method and had to construct a positive theology from the method. They did it in three different ways, but these were among the first northern Baptist seminary professors to publish systematic theologies.

[62] Similar phenomena have been pointed out in other nineteenth-century theologies. Douglas Sweeney notes that the Edwardsian strain at New Haven (Yale) was a precursor to further theological improvisation in the liberal New Theology of the later nineteenth century. See Douglas A. Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151–153. Sweeney also points to Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), and Williams, *The Andover Liberals*. Also see George M. Marsden, "The New School Heritage and Presbyterian Fundamentalism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 32 (May 1970): 129–47.

Newton was joined by Hamilton Theological Seminary in the 1830s, Rochester Theological Seminary in 1850, and then by both the Morgan Park (Chicago) Theological Seminary and the Crozer Theological Seminary in 1867. Each had their own path, but all had deep ties to Newton and the method of Chase. Thus, Irah Chase was a chief architect of Baptist theology in the North in a few ways. His educational model that the ideal graduate-level theological education should be built upon a classical education came to dominate the seminary landscape (though there were exceptions to the need for a classical education preparation). More surprisingly, his theological method, and his willingness to theologically improvise, set the tone for a long century of northern Baptist theological students.

Summary: New Directions for a New Baptist Venture

Among the first American Baptist seminaries a few primary characteristics surfaced that explained the fundamental rationale for why this specific endeavor was attempted. The first was the need for advanced training so that Baptist pastors could attain "a ministry of enlarged culture." Seminary level training was the solution. The second primary characteristic was the need for this education to be explicitly Baptist. Thus, Baptists wanted advanced Baptist ministry education. While these were the primary characteristics that shaped all early American Baptist seminaries, the history of the failure of a national school (Columbian College) and the founding of a regional school (Newton Theological Institute) resulted in secondary developments that consequently shaped the northern Baptist tradition. The first was the model of regional support for regional schools. The second was a theological tradition in the form of a biblicist theological method designed and implemented by Irah Chase at Newton Theological Institute and influential throughout all the northern seminaries for close to a century. In sum, what was included in the effort to attain a "ministry of enlarged culture" was more than just explicit purpose, it was also secondary developments forced by historical events. These explicit purposes and these secondary developments set new directions for a new Baptist venture.