

Help To Zion's Travellers

A Personal Response to Holding Communion Together (Dr. Robert P. Martin)

A Personal Response to *Holding Communion Together*

Dr. Robert P. Martin

Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones?

Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?

Psalm 58:1

Beginning in October 2013, a series of “Reflections on Reformed Baptist History” appeared on the internet. Written initially by Tom Chantry, and joined along the way by David Dykstra, these posts have created a firestorm among Reformed Baptists. Some are rejoicing, especially that these posts (now enlarged) are published as *Holding Communion Together* (Solid Ground Christian Books, May 2014, hereafter *HCT*—all page references in what follows are to this book, unless noted otherwise). Others denounce the work for a variety of reasons. Sadly I must take my place in the latter group.

I first became aware of these posts in late January, 2014. By that time they were far advanced and the announcement already made that Solid Ground Christian Books also would publish this material. I was alarmed by allegations that Chantry and Dykstra made against men whom I esteem highly. I subsequently wrote to the authors, to the publisher, and to those who reportedly were commending the book. I was grieved by the response. Dykstra chose to ignore most of my concerns and focused instead on his now much-repeated claim to accuracy of reporting based on documentation. Chantry chose to launch his response with an attack on A. N. Martin’s family. Those who commended the book offered various justifications for their approval.

I am, of course, more than a casual observer. As a former elder at Trinity Baptist Church (TBC), Montville, I have firsthand knowledge of the workings of the Trinity eldership from June 1985 to February 1991. This is something that the authors, publisher, and commenders do not possess. I will limit my remarks about the

Trinity elders' activities to that period. I also was a member of TBC from September 1983 until September 1995, during this period also serving as Dean of Trinity Ministerial Academy (TMA). From this experience I possess a knowledge of the climate in the church and in the Academy during those years. I have a right to speak, however, not just because of my firsthand knowledge but also because the accusations made in *HCT* cast aspersions not only on A. N. Martin and Frank Barker (who alone among the Trinity elders are accused of impropriety) but truthfully also on the other elders who served during the period in question, *i.e.*, Greg Nichols, Don Dickson, Paul Clarke, Lamar Martin, Jeff Smith, and myself. Doubtless I will be accused of self-justification. So be it. I appeal to all who have known me during my thirty-six years of ministry as a Reformed Baptist. You who know me, weigh my remarks in light of what you know of me by firsthand knowledge. In what follows, I will speak only of matters concerning which I have firsthand knowledge. To do otherwise would be to pass on mere hearsay or unconfirmed testimony. Sadly this means that I will not comment on cases in which several other good men are slandered in this book. I will say, however, that if the authors' allegations against these men are as unfounded as the allegations which they make in cases where I have firsthand knowledge, I hope those who do have firsthand knowledge in those cases will stand up and say so.

For reasons unconnected to the accusations made in *HCT* about TBC's elders, I left TBC in 1995 to become pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church (now Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church) in Seatac, Washington (ERBC). At the end of 2014, I will be retiring as ERBC's pastor and returning with my family to northern New Jersey and to TBC. I will not be an elder there but will devote my remaining years to writing and teaching. Our decision to return to TBC has no connection to *HCT*—in fact, my initial responses to the authors, informing them that I opposed their book, were sent before my wife and I considered returning to New Jersey. All of this is to say that I am not writing as TBC's representative nor for the purpose of gaining something for myself. I am writing because there are things which I must say in order to have a good conscience before God. I would say them regardless of my future plans.

The Manner in which HCT has been Promoted

The first publisher's advertisement (that I saw) began with the sentence: "This upcoming title promises to be one of the most controversial books we have ever published." Doubtless this is true. The sensational nature of this sentence, however, was designed to appeal to a certain kind of reader. I would have expected this kind of lead-in from *National Enquirer* or the *New York Post* but not from a Reformed publisher. The authors try to downplay the controversial sections of their book. Chantry writes, "we reject the idea that the book is entirely or even primarily controversial" (234). But the publisher created a different climate and expectation. In the end of the day, of course, this book is controversial not because it claims to report the result of differences of opinion among brethren who each were trying to be faithful to the Bible but because the authors use rumor, unfounded accusation, insinuation, and innuendo to make their theological opinions, ecclesiastical practices, and personal behavior appear more defensible than they actually are. And in the end of the day, this book has value not because it calls evil men to account but because it shows how much the mantra "confessional associationalism" has become a shibboleth with the authors and their ardent supporters and how far they are willing to go to justify their own actions and to promote the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in America (ARBCA).

Early on, I complained to the publisher about another marketing move. I wrote, "The fact that [this book] has already been posted on the internet is inexcusable. That may be clever marketing, but it betrays the insincerity of any representations that you men have made offering to let others correct inaccuracies before publication. It has already been published! It now has a thousand feet and has circled the globe a hundred times." I made the same complaint to the authors. Mike Gaydosh, owner of Solid Ground Christian Books, responded, "We have asked repeatedly for corrections of fact and have made changes where shown that facts were wrong." When, how, or to whom these "repeated" requests for corrections were made remains a mystery to me. As far as I know, none of those accused of misconduct were asked to respond. In the same timeframe, David Dykstra wrote to me, "So far no one has challenged the accuracy of what we have reported using as we have done the actual record of events." I don't see how both these statements can be true. What is true is that my complaint about a specific inaccuracy fell on deaf ears (more on this below).

HCT's Sources

In the above referenced correspondence, Dykstra claims that he and Chantry used "the actual record of events." They make this claim repeatedly also in *HCT*, saying, *e.g.*, that "we have not only studied this history; we have lived it" and we "have access to the necessary files and other resources to tell the story" (11). Chantry assures us: "It is this abundance—not our own reminiscences or those of our friends—which has formed the backbone of our research. . . . We remain convinced that it is all a matter of public record" (232-33). Before we even open the book, Fred Malone's commendation announces, "Having lived through most of [the recent history of the Reformed Baptist movement in America], and knowing firsthand many of the issues and people involved, I believe that [the authors] have accurately recorded the events leading to the formation of ARBCA. Using primary sources as they do silences false accusations on all sides." In his introduction, Earl Blackburn says that "for the Reformed Baptist, it is evident (or will soon become evident [*i.e.*, from the allegations recorded in this book]) that there are a few skeletons in our spiritual closets. What is to be done with those dangling, clacky bones?" (7). Mike Gaydosh (in the promotional blurb cited earlier) says, "HOLDING COMMUNION TOGETHER by Tom Chantry and David Dykstra skillfully takes us on a journey which began over fifty years ago Chantry and Dysktra draw from an incredible amount of documentation as they seek to explain for the first time how we have gotten where we are today." What shall we make of such claims, especially concerning the most "controversial" (*a.k.a.* accusatory) sections of *HCT*?

My first response is to say that Tom Chantry has not "lived" this history, if by this he refers to events pertaining to *HCT*'s accusations against the TBC elders and other men. I first met Tom Chantry in 1984 or 1985, when he was a young teen. While accompanying Al and Marilyn Martin on a trip through central Pennsylvania, we went out of our way to Carlisle to greet Pastor and Mrs. Chantry. Young Tom Chantry was there. The next time I saw Tom was at a Banner of Truth conference in San Diego in the late 1990s. He was a recent seminary graduate, and, I believe, a new pastor. In between those meetings (as far as I know) he never visited TBC. Nor has he done so subsequently. If he ever did so, it was as a child. Whatever he means by "lived" our history, it does not mean that he has personal knowledge of anything that actually took place in Montville, Pompano Beach, West Chester, etc. Whatever "reminiscences" he possesses are things alleged to

him by his father, who himself made only one visit to Montville (in 1985) from the time that I arrived in 1983 until this day.

As to David Dykstra's having "lived" this history, the claim is more credible but not so much so as to make him an expert on the inner workings of TBC and its elders or of Trinity Ministerial Academy. While Dykstra was an occasional visitor to Al Martin's pastoral theology class, he was not a TMA student. During the early years of the Trinity Pastors Conference (TPC), he attended, and so knows what did (and did not) take place in that venue. Several former TBC members eventually joined Dykstra's congregation in Monroe, NJ (later in Lafayette, NJ). But whatever complaints they may have shared with him about TBC's elders, he would have known only their side of the story. We regarded Dave as a friend, but he was not a confidant.

Fred Malone also claims firsthand knowledge. I doubt not that he witnessed many things in Reformed Baptist history that I did not. I would love to hear again from him, for example, about his experience of working with Ernie Reisinger in the ministry of North Pompano Baptist Church. Perhaps he knows things that shed light on some of the things reported in *HCT*. Conversely, there are many things in our history that I witnessed firsthand that Fred did not. This is true especially concerning the accusations made in *HCT* about Trinity's elders and about TMA. He may have heard rumors, but I was there. I don't say this to pick on Fred. I can say the same thing about the authors, publisher, and other commenders of *HCT*. Earl Blackburn references the "skeletons" of "clacky bones" in a closet allegedly owned by TBC and TMA, but neglects to tell us how he knows that the closet belongs to us or how the skeletons (if they are real and not just made up of the bones of rumor and accusation) got there. These men (including the authors) have heard rumors and accusations but they know nothing firsthand about the actual actions (much less the motives) of TBC and TMA's leadership in the matters most in question. If the accusations made in *HCT* were made in a criminal court instead of the court of public opinion, Chantry, Dykstra, Gaydosh, Malone, and Blackburn would not even be allowed to testify, because hearsay is inadmissible.

As to those who actually were eyewitnesses to the things alleged, Chantry (232) tells us, "The reader must remember that the Montville church had long insisted that it owed no explanation of any action to anyone outside the local eldership. In this circumstance, interviews were clearly impossible. Further, many of those who might have given interviews are now of an advanced age, and time has interposed to make matters less certain." How shall I graciously answer this?

First, TBC's elders have never made any such representation as alleged in Chantry's statement that "the Montville church had long insisted that it owed no explanation of any action to anyone outside the local eldership." The only proof offered is the now infamous Carlisle/Montville correspondence from 1987-1990." But that correspondence tells a different story than the one alleged by Chantry and Dykstra.

The allegation that "in this circumstance interviews clearly were impossible" at first may seem plausible, until we remember that Chantry really is talking about now, not twenty-five years ago. One of my strongest criticisms is that the authors have made no effort to interview those whom they accuse. My email address has not changed in the last twenty years. I'm not hard to find. Neither is my brother Lamar. Robert Fisher,

Mitch Lush, and Eugene Pinero are still around. These three men are spoken of by Dykstra and Chantry as though they are veritable devils. Were they ever asked if they had anything to say? No. Al Martin also still is alive and is sharper mentally than any of his accusers. He still has a telephone and even has an email account. Have the authors bothered to contact him? No. They have ignored one of the clearest warnings in the Bible about receiving accusations: "He who pleads his cause first seems just; but his neighbor comes and searches him out" (Prov. 18:17). And are we now all too old to remember what we did and did not do? I admit that the years have dulled my memory about many trivial things. But I still remember the big things fairly well, thank you. The authors decry those who will deal with disputed matters only "after everyone with a meaningful opinion has been banished from the room" (12). But is this not what they have done by refusing to seek out those whom they know might have an opinion or witness that contradicts theirs? We were not only "banished from the room," but we also were never invited to sit at the table. The injustice of this procedure led me to write to Dykstra:

I wish to appeal to you one last time either to abandon this project or at least to remove those parts which are supported only by the testimony of deeply biased witnesses, whom you have beatified and placed in the category of unimpeachable. You well know that there is another side to every allegation you make, and yet you have no interest in what those you accuse have to say. I was an elder at TBC when a number of the alleged "abuses" took place. I also know the real reason that TBC opposed a formal association. Have you ever asked me what I know? I doubt seriously if you have asked any of the men whose good names you slander what they have to say in response to their critics. Further, as to the idea that these men should have to prove their innocence in the court of public opinion, the burden of proof is not on them but on you. And not only have you not met that burden but also you have not conducted a defensible investigation.

Let me paint a scenario which surely you can appreciate. Suppose that I were to write a history of Reformed Baptists in NJ and include in it the unflattering reports circulating concerning your departure from Lafayette. Suppose also that knowing that you surely have something to say about these reports, I refused to ask you for your input. Suppose that instead, I wanted to believe the evil reports and thus pressed ahead, regardless of your reputation or any testimony which supports your side of the story. David, you answer—how many biblical principles would I be violating? Of how many sins would I be guilty? Would I be able to justify such a "history" by any means whatever? Would my calling it "accurate" and "objective" mean anything other than that I was a hypocrite? I have no intention ever of writing such a history, but you would be well-advised to take to heart the point of my hypothetical scenario. Ask the same questions concerning what you and Tom are doing—with judgment day honesty before God, whom you do not seem to fear.

Sadly, I must oppose this book by whatever righteous means are at my disposal. I am doubly saddened because I know that this is the end of whatever friendship we once had. I urge you to turn back. I fear that you and Tom and all who lend their names to this book are incurring great guilt before God and enduring shame on your own names.

I counsel you again, focus your energies in the congregation in which you labor, i.e., on a pastoral legacy worthy of God's approval. If the legacy of others is worthy of His reproach, He is capable of defending his honor. We are old men now and very soon must stand before Him. Please don't carry this great crime to the judgment. Whatever reviews men may write of your book is nothing compared to the review which He will publish at that day.

Dykstra's response was to say, "The book is not based on interviews. It is based on documents whether correspondence or minutes." That did not address my point at all but it does take us to my next point, which is, what about the alleged "trove of documents"? Where is this trove, which is spoken of as having almost canonical authority? Has anyone except the authors of *HCT* had access to it so as to validate its content and reliability and to impartially judge the character of the authors' interpretation of it? May I or others interested in these questions have access to it, *i.e.*, to all of it? Tom Chantry (*Chantrynotes*) promised that appended to *HCT* would be "a number of the critical and previously unpublished papers and correspondence which form the background of this history." Instead, we got something else. But where are the smoking guns, *i.e.*, the documentation proving the slanderous allegations with which this book is rife? In his "Afterword," Chantry admits that "no formal record exists" of "Paul Clarke's dismissal," but he clearly expects us to congratulate him and Dykstra for their courage in saying what they did while also saying that "there is much more that we *could* say" (233). But on what basis could they say anything? Further, in the body of *HCT* we hear nothing of this, yet he and Dykstra make their allegation nonetheless. There is in fact no unimpeachable documentation for any of the slanderous charges that *HCT* makes.

Chantry tells us about previous books written by Reformed Baptists. But there are no smoking guns to be found there substantiating the slanders leveled against Al Martin, Frank Barker, Robert Fisher, Mitch Lush, and other "Montville camp" men accused of pastoral crimes. The same is true of the unnamed Reformed Baptist Seminary professor's "Syllabus on the Modern Church." Ernie Reisinger's "Autobiography" is unpublished, and in the matter of Robert Fisher's ministry in the North Pompano Baptist Church, his account is not unimpeachable.

Chantry next points to the official minutes of the Reformed Baptist Association (RBA), Reformed Baptist Mission Services (RBMS), and ARBCA. I can't imagine that there is any smoking gun in these minutes. In fact, earlier in the book the authors tell us, "But even such files may be a pile of dry bones until life is breathed into them by someone who knew the participants" (11). Dry bones indeed! I will address the matter of the authors' biases below. Here I only ask: assuming that these files (if animated) actually would condemn Al Martin and others, are Chantry and Dykstra unbiased enough to breathe into them the breath of life?

As for the correspondence cited, I have only seen the "Carlisle/Montville Correspondence from 1987-1990." It contains no smoking gun. Most of the other correspondence noted belonged to individuals who were part of the campaign to discredit TBC and TMA and likely reflects the biases of the correspondents. I have no access to sundry reports and papers cited by Chantry (231-32) and so I will not comment further on them except to ask if they were "cherry-picked" in the same way that the authors treated the Carlisle/Montville

Correspondence, Jim Hufstetler's *Biblical Pastoral Oversight*, and Lamar Martin's letter to Mike Gaydosh (more below)?

There are no smoking guns in the trove of documents. The damning evidence against Al Martin & Co. must then be in the "other resources to tell the story" referenced by the authors (11). And what does this refer to? Does it refer to the unfounded rumors and allegations which Walt Chantry and others willingly received from anyone and everyone who might have a beef with these men? Is the real smoking gun then the "chorus of complaints" (95) that Pastor Chantry not only received but encouraged and supposedly recorded? Is the real source of HCT's allegations found in his biasing his son with his own unfounded perceptions, and then later cementing this in their weekly chats in a Wisconsin diner? Will we have access to this source as well?

Two things are clear. First, the authors have not made their case from evidence which passes the smell test. Second, along the way they have violated a host of biblical principles. I will not even try to open this last point—not because it cannot be done, but because it is undeniable. I urge the authors to take seriously David's prayer, as recorded in Psalm 64.

Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation;

Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,

From the rebellion of the workers of iniquity,

Who sharpen their tongue like a sword,

And bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words,

That they may shoot in secret at the blameless;

Suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear.

They encourage themselves in an evil matter;

They talk of laying snares secretly;

They say, "Who will see them?"

They devise iniquities: "We have perfected a shrewd scheme."

Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep.

But God shall shoot at them with an arrow;

Suddenly they shall be wounded.

So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;

All who see them shall flee away.

All men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God;

For they shall wisely consider His doing.

The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him.

And all the upright in heart shall glory.

The Authors' Biases

The authors tell us, "If their [the first generation of Reformed Baptist pastors] history is not told soon, it may never be told at all. . . . But who are we to tell it?" (HCT, 10). I do not wish to beat a dead horse, but if it is "their" history, why were not *all of them* consulted for their input? But more to my point now: who are the authors of *HCT*? The first is Walt Chantry's son Tom (b. 1970), who subsequent to his childhood has no direct knowledge of Trinity Baptist Church, Trinity Ministerial Academy, A. N. Martin, or of any of the other men accused of wrongdoing in *HCT*. All that he knows about any of the things alleged in this book has been told him by others, beginning with his father. Is Tom unbiased in his reporting and analysis of events? Are we to believe that he speaks objectively of those whom his father opposed? I don't know Tom well, but after my limited interaction with him, I did not come away with the impression that he would be able to do that. My correspondence with him in recent days confirms that opinion. As for David Dykstra, who also claims that he lived this history, he has said to more than one Reformed Baptist pastor, "I hate Al Martin." He also said this to me in the presence of my wife. How reliable then is his objectivity?

But didn't Chantry and Dykstra admit their biases? We read, "Are we biased in our dealing with these matters? Of course we are. No historian is ever truly free of bias, and we have our share. . . . [citing Carl Trueman:] 'in the writing of history, no one can be neutral, but historians can be objective.' . . . Our motto throughout the writing of this history has been, 'not neutral, but always objective.' We believe that what we have written is verified by the record" (13). *HCT* needs to have a stronger *mea culpa* than that. Not all biases allow for objectivity.

Blind loyalty to a parent falls into that category. If someone was arraigned on the charge of murdering my father, I doubt that I could objectively assess the evidence presented by the defense. That's why judges and juries and not bereaved children try such cases. I cannot say that Tom Chantry is as blindly loyal to his father as he could be, but I do assert that in *HCT* he does not show himself to be as objective as he should be to qualify him to be the narrator of events in which his father was deeply involved. Therefore, is it surprising that Walt Chantry gets a mild slap on the wrist for his Levite letter but A. N. Martin is called before the Inquisition and his ministry denounced as wicked?

Further, is not Dykstra's "I hate Al Martin" a disqualifier? Some years ago I read John Toland's excellent two volume biography of Hitler. Toland certainly was no fan of Hitler, so there was no danger that he would write with "Pollyanna idealism" (4). But if he had revealed in his preface that he hated Hitler because of something that Hitler had done to him personally, the reader could at least weigh the objectivity of his work in that light. I can't imagine that personal hatred for his subject would not have colored his biography of him. Before the Solid Ground edition of *HCT* was published, I wrote to Dykstra, reminding him of what he had said to me. At that time he responded, "As you will see in the introduction of the book should you care to get a copy, we openly admit our bias." In a subsequent letter he says, "We have admitted our bias in the introduction so that everyone that reads will know that as they begin." In response, I wrote, "You say, 'We have admitted our bias in the introduction so that everyone that reads will know that as they begin.' Have you done so in the same terms in which you have confessed your bias privately, saying 'I hate Al Martin'? If not, you are a hypocrite." Five days after my initial letter to Dykstra, in a letter in which he expressed his desire to close our correspondence, he denied saying that he hated Al Martin. In response, I wrote, "Go ahead and deny what you said to me and my wife about hating Al Martin. I am surprised that you made no denial of this in your previous letters to me. Had I been responding to my initial letter, I certainly could not have let such an accusation pass unaddressed. Our testimony stands." Subsequently, after he spoke with his wife, Dykstra wrote to me again: "I no longer will deny that I may have said what you & Colleen recall. It is possible." I do not know if Dykstra regrets what he said years ago to me and to others. If he does, to my knowledge he nowhere publically has repudiated his statements. I do know, however, that readers deserve to know about Dykstra's real bias "as they begin" to read *HCT*. The word "hate" is found at the extreme end of negative assessments, just as "love" is found at the extreme end of positive assessments. If an author "hates" one of his subjects, his objectivity is seriously in doubt.

HCT's Characterization of A. N. Martin

The number and seriousness of the accusations leveled at A. N. Martin by the authors of *HCT* is astounding. I will begin with the least of these. At first *HCT* tells us, "It would be incorrect to call Al Martin a fundamentalist" (35). And yet, on the same page an effort is made to identify him with the worst examples of a defective kind of ecclesiology found in certain (but not all) fundamentalist churches. Chantry and Dykstra tell us, "The student of Reformed Baptist history would do well, though, to remember that fundamentalism had also developed a unique ecclesiology in which all inter-church authority was rejected and congregational authority was increasingly vested in the personal charisma of a larger-than-life figure. It cannot be denied that from the moment of his conversion Al Martin has been such a figure. . . . Indeed his education and early

ministry were carried out in the context of extraordinary individualism which had come to characterize both fundamentalism *and* evangelicalism by the 1950s. . . . this was the unique soil of fundamentalism from which Martin grew. . . . his formative ministerial years had been spent in a context dominated by the hyper-individualism of the fundamentalists” (35-37).

In response, consider that what *HCT* describes as “a unique ecclesiology” in modern fundamentalism is nothing of the sort. The kind of thing described appears in every generation, including in men who were formerly more “associational” in their views and connections. One can hardly say, for example, that Edward Irving’s later independency from the Church of Scotland was the fruit of fundamentalism. Also, shall we say that the early Congregationalists were unduly influenced by a climate of “hyper-individualism”? Moreover, thankfully, A. N. Martin is not the only “larger-than-life figure” to break away from the ecclesiastical climate of his early exposure. *HCT* expects us to accept as fact that Walt Chantry did the same, becoming a Reformed Baptist in spite of his Presbyterian upbringing and education (24-27). And yet, repeatedly the authors of *HCT* keep pressing their conclusion concerning A. N. Martin:

By 1966 Reisinger and Chantry would make a positive move toward the creation of an association. During the same period Martin, having walked away from his childhood church and two Bible Colleges, was moving toward a departure from the C&MA. This would be the latest (and last) step in a trend towards personal independency in ministry. Martin would not return to any extra-church accountability, nor did he believe that he should. Trinity Church would prove to be a strictly anti-associational church throughout his ministry. The fundamentalist phobia of affiliations had found a home in the Reformed Baptist movement (37).

Furthermore, Al Martin possessed the personal dynamism which—together with radical independency—often creates a fundamentalist authority structure. Absent broader affiliations, fundamentalism had tended to grow through personal loyalties. Larger-than-life figures could command the loyalties of ever-growing movements. Martin, having rejected broader affiliations, was well-suited to step into this role. Al Martin at a Reformed Baptist Conference was a sight to behold. His physical athleticism, his personal warmth, and his winning sense of humor all made him the center of attention” (37).

The record of fundamentalism on the subject of church discipline is distressing. In a context in which personal loyalty to the leader is the glue that holds a church or a school together, disloyalty is the chief sin and the main target of discipline (38).

Realistically, when in each church one pastor has the most public ministry, this must mean institutions dominated by a single personality, a repetition of the fundamentalist pattern (56).

The radical independency which Trinity Baptist of Montville borrowed from fundamentalism had progressed to the point of outright anti-associationalism, producing a rift with those Reformed Baptists who understood the Confessional teaching on “communion” in a clearer historical light (177).

I will try to unravel these twisted knots below; however, for now I simply ask: if Walt Chantry managed to leave behind the dangerous aspects of Presbyterian ecclesiology, could not Al Martin (who is at least his equal in personal character and theological acumen) have managed to leave behind the dangerous aspects of fundamentalist ecclesiology? Are we supposed to conclude that Walt Chantry is a better ecclesiologist (and therefore a safer guide) than Al Martin simply because Tom Chantry and David Dykstra repeatedly try to plaster Al Martin with the onerous label “fundamentalist”? What if another book was written in which the authors continuously called Walt Chantry a closet Presbyterian because of his associational views? Would that be fair? Would that be “history” or propaganda?

Twisted Knot #1: The secret of A. N. Martin’s influence was not just the “personal charisma of a larger-than-life figure” or his “personal dynamism.” The authors initially tell us: “During the decade leading up to his ministry in New Jersey, Martin led an almost Pinkian existence” (36). Does this mean that he was like Pink, who was “always possessed of an abrasive personality” and “eventually retreated into isolation” (15). Is this the personal charisma and dynamism which attracted the attention of those who attended the early conferences? I don’t doubt that his persona and manner attracted some. The authors tell us: “Al Martin at a Reformed Baptist Conference was a sight to behold. His physical athleticism, his personal warmth, and his winning sense of humor all made him the center of attention” (37). Is that all there was? No, it was his skill in preaching—including the carefulness with which he handled God’s Word and the pointed applications which he made from it. He is not to be blamed for his athleticism, etc. We are not talking about Jimmy Swaggart (who said nothing worth hearing) but A. N. Martin, who is not to be blamed because he was not unathletic, cold, or dull. If his preaching was so much sought after by discerning people it was because he brought something to it that others perhaps did not. Again, is he to be blamed for his passionate style, which was never “fierce” or “ferocious” or “severe” (94)? I sat under it most Lord’s Days for twelve years, which is something the authors did not do. Yes, at times he did “preach in a very intense manner.” At times I wished that he had turned the thermostat down. At times I wished that he might have said some things more guardedly. But every Lord’s Day we got sixteen ounces to the pound of solid, thoughtful, well-prepared exposition and application. Sometimes I squirmed in my seat, but usually that was because I had been hit square between the eyes with the patent applicability of his words to my own case. I’m sure that there are things which (upon mature reflection) he now would say differently or not at all, but as I near retirement, I bet his list of such things is a lot shorter than mine. One thing is fact—throw out the highs and the lows, and we were not abused by Al Martin from the pulpit. And the secret of his hold over our consciences (for that is where he had his grip on us) was not his charisma and dynamism but the soundness of his preaching.

Twisted Knot #2: The authors assure us that, like fundamentalist demigods, all “congregational authority” at TBC centered in the larger-than-life person of Al Martin. Obviously, the authors never attended a fundamentalist church like that. When I was first converted, I became a member of such a church, in which the pastor literally was accountable to no one—not even to the members of the church. There were no other elders. The deacons had no power to do anything but walk out the door if they disagreed with the pontiff’s decisions. None ever did, of course, because his larger-than-lifeness did not attract men of personal

conviction and conscience and courage. TBC was not like that. Al Martin always had fellow elders. And we were not yes men. Ordinarily, when matters were discussed, he spoke last, after a consensus had begun to be formed as to what our position or decision should be. I never felt that we were playing some kind of fantasy game as we awaited a papal announcement. And he didn't always agree fully with the final decisions. We were an eldership, not a rubber stamp for his opinions. The deacons also were men of conscience and intelligence and integrity. And as for the people, some of the brightest theological minds and discerning consciences that I have ever seen were to be found in the membership. The officers and members of TBC during the years I was privileged to be there were not zombies waiting for the guru to hand out the Kool Aid.

Twisted Knot #3: The authors cast the mantle of tyrannical fundamentalist discipline over A. N. Martin's shoulders: "The record of fundamentalism on the subject of church discipline is distressing. In a context in which personal loyalty to the leader is the glue that holds a church or a school together, disloyalty is the chief sin and the main target of discipline" (38). First, I do not know of a single TBC member that was disciplined because he or she violated a fundamentalist moral code (e.g., for going to a movie, owning a television, dancing, drinking a beer, etc.). Nor do I know of any case in which a member of TBC or a student at TMA was disciplined for refusing to kiss Al Martin's ring. Such a thing was no part of TBC life. We expected members and students to be loyal to Christ and his Word. The only matters that I ever saw raised, or in which discipline was ever enacted (which was an exceedingly infrequent occurrence) had to do with sins which were blatantly inconsistent with being a Christian. But "disloyalty" to Al Martin or the elders was not a crime at TBC. Members were free to tell us what they thought when they disagreed with our policies—and not a few did! But we didn't then chase them out the door as traitors and subversives. That was no part of my experience as a member and elder at TBC. The authors of *HCT* would have us believe that this was regular fare. But their aspersions are as erroneous as they are evil.

Twisted Knot #4: The authors assure us, "Realistically, when in each church one pastor has the most public ministry, this must mean institutions dominated by a single personality, a repetition of the fundamentalist pattern" (56). But if this observation is true, it apparently applies only at TBC and its alleged clones. But if it applies in these cases, why not to Walt Chantry at Carlisle, Fred Malone at Clinton, Earl Blackburn at La Mirada, Tom Lyon in Tacoma, or David Dykstra in Lafayette? Were (are) these men preachers of the "most public ministry" sort also? When I first went to TBC, Greg Nichols preached as much as Al Martin did. And later on, in addition to these men, my brother Lamar and I preached regularly, including long expositions of Bible books (e.g., Hebrews, Acts, James). Did everyone preach the same number of messages? No. Did Al Martin share the pulpit with his fellow elders? Yes.

Twisted Knot #5: The authors tell us that "Trinity Church would prove to be a strictly anti-associational church throughout his ministry." They also speak of Al Martin's "radical independency" and of his "outright anti-associationalism," which, they allege, "produced a rift with those Reformed Baptists who understood the Confessional teaching on 'communion' in a clearer historical light." Is TBC's long membership in RBA what they mean by "outright anti-associationalism"? No. But apparently because TBC was unwilling to help Walt Chantry and the Carlisle church establish the kind of association that they wanted from the beginning, its lengthy membership in RBA is seen as "outright anti-associationalism." What about RBMS? Look at the letter

that *HCT* includes from TBC about RBMS (246-48). Is this a rejection of cooperative effort? No, it a statement of reservations about the proposed constitution of RBMS. The reader, of course, also needs to know that although TBC did not join RBMS, we did “shoulder our portion of the burden” and more than once sent money to RBMS missionaries through RBMS. And in closing this knot-untying session, it should be observed that it was not TBC that “produced a rift” by standing by its original position on associations. Instead, Carlisle produced the rift by leaving RBA when it did not become what they had wanted it to be from the beginning.

Throughout the book, the authors continue to attach opprobrium to Al Martin’s name, even summoning the worst biblical example of the usurpation of church power: “Our current context of exploding mega-ministries has shown us the dangers which surround any man who, absent the checks and balances of any affiliation, owns the loyalties of an expanding group. Few if any can resist the temptation to become a modern-day Diotrephes who wants to be first. By the mid-1970s Martin was in a similarly dangerous position within the Reformed Baptist movement” (38). What a wicked use of insinuation and innuendo! What the reader is meant to take away from this statement (given the context in which it is found) is that Al Martin is a modern-day Diotrephes “who loves to have the preeminence” (3 John 9). Those who actually know him know better.

As a final note in this section, the writers assert, “Our history is an ecclesiastical one, and so we did not allow ourselves to be derailed into any personal or family scandals” (233). While this is true in the accusations printed in *HCT*, it is not true in private correspondence addressed to me. Both authors descended into the lowest depths of insinuation and innuendo in order to justify their taking up arms against one of the objects of their “history.” I will not repeat their remarks here nor apologize for not doing so. I simply want to say publicly what I said to them privately: I am disgusted with their tactics. And I am inclined to think that they have restrained their pens in *HCT* because publishing their private remarks would make them odious in the eyes of their readers.

HCT’s Characterization of Robert Fisher

Before the publication of these remarks, Robert Fisher will not have known that I intended to say the things which follow or even that I am writing a response to *HCT*. Nor will my peaceable friend likely approve of my having done so. I’m sorry, Robert, if I am speaking out of turn; but I think that you deserve better than what men who hardly know you (if at all) have written about you.

I begin with the excerpt printed in *HCT* from Ernie Reisinger’s unpublished autobiography: “The church called an independent Baptist as my associate. He had been a member of the church for at least two years, therefore he knew that it was a Southern Baptist Church and intended to remain a Southern Baptist Church. It became obvious that his convictions were to have another kind of church. There was nothing sinful about his views, but it was ethically wrong for him to try to build a church within a church which was a form of stealing the church from its Southern Baptist roots. . . . There is much, much more but not for here” (91). There is much, much more, indeed!

Ernie Reisinger was my friend. I met him first when I was a doctoral student at Southwestern Baptist

Theological Seminary. He had come to the campus as part of his Boyce Project. I knew comparatively little then of the role that Ernie had had in the early years of the Reformed Baptist movement in America. The Ernie that I knew was a Southern Baptist pastor who was zealously engaged in a project aimed at calling the SBC back to its Calvinistic roots. This was Ernie's passion in those years. He was also a great encourager to the efforts that Ben Mitchell, Fred Malone, and I undertook for the same purpose. Ben and I published a magazine entitled *The Wicket Gate* and we held what we called "Wicket Gate Conferences" in Fort Worth. Ernie was one of the speakers. Within a brief time a Reformed Baptist church was formed in Fort Worth out of these efforts. Fred Malone became its pastor and Heritage Baptist Church (now an ARBCA church) remains to this day. I left the SBC in 1982. During the same year, growing out of those early efforts, the Founders Movement emerged, in which Ernie would play a major role.

I left the SBC as a matter of conscience. I could no longer be identified with the denomination in any way. I had been a Teaching Fellow at SWBTS for three years, teaching courses in the NT department. At that time the conservative resurgence in the denomination had not yet taken place. I was in increasing conflict with the seminary's faculty and administration because of my inerrantist and Calvinistic views, especially after the arrival of a new seminary president, who would try to take SWBTS down the same road that had gutted the rest of the SBC's seminaries. I was told by more than one well-placed person that there would be no room for me in the SBC. I eventually came to the same conclusion. When I decided that I could not contribute to any SBC cause without compromising my conscience, I left and took a teaching position at a Bible college that I attended before going to SWBTS in 1975. The next year (1983) I would go to teach at TMA.

In those days Ernie was espousing what he called "the principle of biblical accommodation." By 1984 his view would be published in *The Principle of Biblical Accommodation as Applied to the Invitation System*. Ernie's view, however, allowed for more than continuing to give invitations. It also included continuing to contribute to Southern Baptist causes which were overseen by liberals (Ernie would not say it that way, but that is how I saw it). I never argued with Ernie about this; but I could not continue to give to the SBC any more than I could continue giving the aisle-walking invitations expected among Southern Baptists.

I have not asked Robert Fisher for permission to speak about the allegations made against him in *HCT*. But as Ernie himself said in his autobiography (in the excerpt cited above), there is much, much more to say about Robert's departure from North Pompano. Ernie also knew when North Pompano called Robert that he was not a Southern Baptist and that he had been an elder at TBC. And yet he, as well as North Pompano Baptist Church (NPBC), called him to be his associate. If NPBC's denominational affiliation was not regarded in the same light by its two pastors, Ernie was as much to blame as Robert. Geoff Thomas is also right in pointing out that "another major point of difference focused upon the responsibility and authority of elders, particularly in their role of shepherding individuals under their care" (91). Presumably, Ernie's perspectives were like those practiced in Carlisle, while Robert's were more akin to those practiced at TBC. And yet, by the early 1980s, before Robert was called to NPBC, Ernie should have known that they would not be on the same page concerning "their role of shepherding individuals under their care." By the time he called Robert, he had a two year up close personal acquaintance with him. And yet he called Robert Fisher anyway. In the years which followed, my guess is that Ernie practiced his convictions about individual pastoral care and Robert

practiced his convictions. What is no guess is that by early 1984 conflict had erupted between them to the point that Ernie was speaking to and treating Robert angrily. When it became clear to Robert that their relationship could not continue, in May 1985 he resigned his office and left NPBC.

Events immediately following Robert's resignation would lead shortly to approximately thirty members of NPBC departing and eventually forming an independent Reformed Baptist church. I quote from letters bearing the signatures of the group's leaders: "The elders' strengthening allegiance to the Southern Baptist Convention surfacing after Pastor Fisher's resignation, stirred many here to wrestle through the implications of denominational affiliation. These people sought out personally and by phone each other and the elders, by letter as well. Emerging from our conversations with those who sought us out, was a growing awareness of the negative implications of such strong allegiance to a denominational superstructure in general and the Southern Baptist Convention in particular. Although there was an increasing dissatisfaction with the way the elders conducted the subsequent affairs of the Church, a group of people began to form who wanted to be in a church situation in which denominational allegiance no longer contested Reformed principles of worship and conduct." These sentiments also were confirmed in writing in a letter to the remaining NPBC elders on July 21, 1985. In this letter they also informed the NPBC elders that the departed group intended to form a Reformed Baptist church and that within the week had issued a call to Robert Fisher to be its pastor—but that "we have no indication of his intentions."

As a point of fact, the problems in NPBC over affiliation with the SBC predated Robert's coming to Florida. This is confirmed by *HCT*, which tells us: "Knowing that some of the members had a scruple about giving to the Convention, Reisinger and at times Malone had made a designated offering out of their own pockets to meet the nominal convention dues. Fisher objected strongly to sending even designated money to the Convention" (92). If we take the evidence seriously, it is not Robert Fisher but Ernie Reisinger who "precipitated a split." Before Robert's arrival in Florida, enough people "had a scruple" about giving to the SBC that Pastors Reisinger and Malone had resorted to the expedient of making the required contribution themselves. This was "the principle of accommodation" in action. With Robert's departure, "the elders' strengthening allegiance to the Southern Baptist Convention . . . stirred many here to wrestle through the implications of denominational affiliation." Robert was a catalyst of the split, not by his presence as an elder at NPBC but by his departure, when Ernie stirred up the scruples of some of the congregation by (with Robert now no longer a barrier) strengthening allegiance to the SBC.

During this period Robert also would receive a call from Grace Baptist Church, Canton, MI. When I spoke with him during this period, he was wrestling with what to do. Here were his options: (1) accept the call to Michigan and thus give no credence to the accusations (which were sure to come) that "Fisher precipitated a split" (92) and that he had tried "to build a church within a church which was a form of stealing the church from its Southern Baptist roots" (91), or (2) continue to shepherd people whose Christian lives had flourished under his pastoral care, but who had left NPBC and told him that they were going to form a new church and, if he would not be their pastor, they would call someone like him, but that they were not returning to NPBC if he declined. His dilemma, therefore, was either to go to Canton and abandon his former sheep to fend for themselves or to accept the call of those who had a prior claim to his ministry and whom he already loved

and knew. He chose to remain in Florida, which is what nine out of ten true shepherds in the same circumstance would have done. What he did not do was “build a church within a church,” or “take” these people out of NPBC, or “steal the church from its Southern Baptist roots.”

Again, I was a friend of Ernie’s during the years of his most earnest efforts to call Southern Baptists back to their Calvinistic roots. I have always admired him for the effort. But he believed that this could be done only while accommodating certain Southern Baptist realities, such as contributing to SBC causes, despite the doctrinally and morally degraded state of the denomination’s communion and institutions. I did not believe that this was acceptable, even for the sake of possible (albeit unlikely) reformation in the denomination. And so, not long before events unfolded at NPBC, I left the SBC. If I had known Robert Fisher at that time and if he had asked me what I thought about his accepting a call to NPBC, I would have counseled him not to do so—for if he was unwilling to “accommodate,” not long after walking through the front door he would be looking for the back door.

In closing this section, I ask: are there any ARBCA churches which began as the result of people leaving congregations following the departure of men who eventually would become the pastors of newly constituted works? If there are, and I find it hard to imagine that there are not, are those men spoken of more kindly than Ernie Reisinger and the authors of *HCT* have spoken of Robert Fisher?

HCT’s Characterization of Lamar Martin

Lamar Martin is my brother. Obviously I am biased. But I also know where he stands theologically and confessionally. *HCT* cites his recent letter of protest addressed to Mike Gaydosh and the authors (207-208). Dave Dykstra’s private response was to say, “We’re thankful that your brother has come out of the closet regarding his rejection of the Confession on 26.14-15. This is helpful.” Of course, Lamar has not suddenly (with the appearing of *HCT*) “come out of the closet.” Moreover, Dykstra’s use of that language is exceedingly insulting, since it suggests that my brother’s rejection of his brand of associationalism and his disagreement on the scriptural basis of 26.15 is to be classed with the sin of homosexuality.

Further, *HCT*’s authors somehow find in my brother’s letter an “acknowledgment that 26.15 teaches associationalism—coupled with a thorough rejection of the confessional teaching” and they assert that this “comes in the context of a letter insisting that associations are simply not a ‘Baptist’ idea” (207-208). *HCT* then continues:

A few paragraphs later Lamar Martin’s non-confessionalism leads to confusion over the nature of subscription: “Most Reformed Baptists do not believe the confession is accurate in its statement that the Pope of Rome is the Antichrist. Are we prepared to cast stones at those who believe the confession is wrong about the Pope simply because it is stated in the confession? NO! We are not prepared to break fellowship with such brethren because that statement has no clear biblical support.”

This statement represents the practice of strict subscription inaccurately. To reiterate, it is one thing to question the manner in which a paragraph of the confession expresses its doctrine—such as the awfulness of the Pope's usurpation of Christ's office of Head of the Church—but it is another to entirely reject the polity which the 1677/1689 men explicitly placed within the text of the Confession, where neither Westminster nor Savoy had placed it.

Earl Blackburn noted of the Acts 15 passage: "The Jerusalem Council was not about just two churches, but the entire church. This is seen in that the "elders and apostles" denotes (I believe) messengers from many churches and this is confirmed in that the findings (degrees, Gk. dogmata) were sent to the churches throughout Asia Minor (Acts 15:23 & 16:4)."

This reading is consistent with the manner in which the 1677/1689 men handled Acts 15, and is therefore a historically "Baptist" position. The Confession does not offer supporting passages as simplistic "proof texts," but rather as crucial texts to be submitted to careful exegesis (207-208).

In response, Lamar did not acknowledge that 26.15 teaches associationalism as these men practice it. Nor did he say that "associations are simply not a 'Baptist' idea." He grew up in the same multi-tiered associational Southern Baptist church that I did and would never on his worst day suggest such a thing. What he actually said was,

As is recorded in Chantry's Notes, Walter Chantry received his formal training at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, while Al Martin went to Bob Jones and Columbia Bible College. Since Westminster Seminary is a Presbyterian school, it is not surprising that its influence upon Walter Chantry would make him more sympathetic to some form of authority above the local church level. Since the schools attended by Al Martin would be more inclined to there being no legitimate authority above the local church level, it is not surprising that their influence upon Al Martin would make him more inclined to the Baptist view of local church autonomy. What is surprising to me is that Al Martin, a Baptist pastor, is being berated for holding to the Baptist position of the autonomy of the local church and for refusing to join an association which insists upon being involved in local church matters.

If Dykstra and Chantry had read Lamar's words with something other than glee at supposedly finding a smoking gun with a former TBC elder's fingerprints on it, *i.e.*, had they read his letter with objectivity and discernment, they would have discovered that Lamar was actually comparing the Baptist view of local church autonomy with the Presbyterian view of the same subject. In point of historical fact, "the Baptist view of local church autonomy" is that expressed in our Confession, which cannot honestly be read in any other way than as affirming that there is "no legitimate [ecclesiastical] authority above the local church." *2nd LCF* 26.15 reads: "howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so

called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers." If this is not "the Baptist view of local church autonomy," I am at a loss know what is.

Furthermore, how Lamar's remarks "lead to confusion over the nature of subscription" is not readily apparent from what follows. The authors of *HCT* imply that the language of 26.4 ("the Pope of Rome . . . is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming") refers to nothing more specific than "the awfulness of the Pope's usurpation of Christ's office of Head of the Church" (a sin of which he is guilty but not alone in history). And they imply that it is acceptable for a "confessional associationalist" to take the language of 26.4 in that rather general sense and to disregard the clear intent of the framers' words, which were drawn from 2 Thess, 2:2-9's description of "that antichrist" (*cf.*, 1 John 2:18; not "an antichrist," 1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). Whether we believe that 2 Thess. 2:2-9 refers explicitly and specifically to the Roman papacy, which many Reformed Baptists do not, there is no question that the authors of the language of this paragraph believed that it did (*cf.*, *WC* 25.6; Thomas Manton, *Works*, 3:1-186; Henry Wilkinson, *Puritan Sermons*, 6:1-25). And there is no question that this also is "the manner in which the 1677/1689 men handled" 2 Thessalonians 2 (*cf.*, Benjamin Keach, *Antichrist Stormed, or, Mystery Babylon the great whore, and great city, proved to be the Church of Rome*). But if we now allow those subscribing to the Confession to take exception at 26.4 to the framers' interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2 (a thing commonly done among us, and even made part of some Reformed Baptist churches' constitutions), why have we no liberty to take exception to the framers' alleged interpretation of Acts 15 at 26.15? Something far less than a definitive and defensible history of exegesis stands behind the use of both of these texts in our Confession. And the same is true concerning 10.3's remarks concerning "elect infants dying in infancy." Thus, Reformed Baptists commonly have allowed exceptions at these places. And yet, although previously one could take an agnostic view of 10.3, 26.4, and 26.15 and still not forfeit the title "Reformed Baptist" or be accused of "non-confessionalism" or "thorough rejection of the confessional teaching," apparently those days are past.

HCT's Characterization of Paul Clarke's Resignation

I served with Paul Clarke on the TBC eldership from 1985 until his resignation from the eldership and church membership in early 1987. I was present on the evening that he arose from his seat in our elders' meeting and resigned his office with the words, "Brethren, I bid you adieu." *HCT* reports: "His assertion was that he had been dismissed from the eldership by a decision of the board, and that the reason was his opposition to the disciplinary proceedings of the church. . . . He alleged that shortly after his disagreement he was informed that he would no longer serve as an elder" (93). He was not "dismissed from the eldership." There was no "decision of the board" (I was on "the board"). We had no authority to "dismiss" any of our number. That would have required a vote of the church. He resigned of his own free will. The circumstance which precipitated his departure was his vocal disagreement with the judgment of the rest of the eldership concerning a specific case. When he could not carry our judgment that his perspective was the course of righteous action, he arose and resigned. He did not simply "disagree" and then politely leave the room for a personal time-out. He abruptly resigned his office and left. We had no trouble understanding what he did.

And so it is ludicrous to say that “shortly after this disagreement he was informed that he could no longer serve as an elder.” If anything was said to him shortly after his resignation, it would have been something like this: “In view of your unruly behavior in our last elders’ meeting, you likely have done the right thing in resigning your office, for in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, your continuing as an elder (had you not actually resigned your office) clearly is inappropriate.” But that is to speculate. The rest of what I’ve said, however, is not speculation but eyewitness testimony—which, had I been interviewed by the authors prior to the publication of *HCT*, I gladly would have given (although my testimony, or that of the other men present on that occasion, would not have suited the narrative that the authors wanted to create).

In a rare instance of candor, Tom Chantry says, “In rare instances it was necessary to mention matters for which little documentation exists. For instance, it is impossible to explain the Carlisle-Montville rift without mention of Paul Clarke’s dismissal, but to our knowledge no formal record exists. In those cases we kept our comments brief and restricted them to details known to multiple persons. While there is more that we *could* say, we have every confidence regarding what we *have* said” (233). But who (besides the TBC elders present when he resigned) are the multiple witnesses to Paul Clarke’s “Brethren, I bid you adieu”? Where are the “multiple” witnesses to his “dismissal” (in fact, a thing which never happened)? I have no doubt that Paul went about telling his version of events, and found receptive ears in Carlisle; but unless we are to assign to him an unimpeachable status (which is done in *HCT* also with Walt Chantry, Ernie Reisinger, and Fred Huebner), the principle of Prov. 18:17 applies.

HCT’s Characterization of Fred Huebner’s Departure from TBC

Fred Huebner and I became good friends. Fred came to TBC about the time I became an elder. Because Trinity Book Service (TBS) and TMA shared the same general area of the church building, we saw each other almost every day. In addition to having invited Fred to manage TBS, TBC purchased the remaining inventory of his Herkimer Valley Book Service (HVBS). He then was paid a salary by TBC as manager of the new TBS. In time, owing to Fred’s skill and hard work, as well as to a growing demand for Reformed literature, TBS grew exponentially. From the beginning, the elders had established the policy that TBS would sell no items that were not approved by at least one of the elders—which usually meant one of the elders who were also teachers at TMA, whose academic qualifications especially suited them for this chore. This meant that a lot of books had to await approval and that quite a few new books would not be available for sale immediately after their release (a policy which continually put TBS at a competitive disadvantage). Fred had to work within these parameters and this doubtless made his job harder. We also doubtless lost sales because of this policy; but we were committed to the idea that we could not in good conscience sell books which we had not vetted.

This period also was a time of vigorous promotion of the NIV by Zondervan, whose admitted desire was to make it the standard Bible of the English-speaking world. The TMA faculty had no sympathy with that effort. In fact, we had serious complaints against the NIV’s claim to accuracy of translation. The evolution of my own concerns eventually would lead to my book *Accuracy of Translation* (Banner of Truth, 1989). Fred objected to our decision to cease selling the NIV through TBS. His reason was that the loss of revenue resulting from this

decision would wreck TBS financially (a concern which later proved to be wrong). When the elders did not yield to his objections, he offered to purchase TBS and to move it to some other location. For at least two reasons that did not take place: first, no terms could be agreed on; second, TBC wanted to continue selling books to those who had come to appreciate our vetting process, including our own people (a process which continues to this day through TBC's in-house book store). It was clear to everyone involved at the time that under Fred's sole management the vetting process would be significantly curtailed. At the time it also was clear that Fred believed that TBS should have been made available to him on his terms. And I partly understand his reasoning. TBS had begun with the purchase of Fred's inventory, but also with the use of his list of customers from HVBS. But fair value had been paid for those assets. Under his labor, the customer list had grown exponentially, as had the value of the inventory. But Fred also had been paid a salary as the manager of TBS, and thus he had been compensated for his labor. The greatly enlarged customer list had been the fruit of his labor but it was not his property, any more than the inventory was. What had been a modest book service run by a pastor in his spare time had become a business requiring several employees and which had sales in excess of \$500,000 a year. Any sale would have had to be at fair market value for a business of that sort—and this would have included the cost not only of the larger inventory but also of the larger proprietary customer list. When terms could not be reached, TBC was not obliged to sell TBS to Fred on his terms. And so we did not. His response then was in an agitated manner to resign his job and church membership and go to Carlisle, where, as an allegedly abused Trinity sheep, he had already been assured that he was welcome. The manner of his resignation, like the manner of Paul Clarke's resignation, was disorderly. No discipline, however, ensued. Instead, since no formal written resignation had been offered, his verbal resignation (made for both himself and his wife) was announced to the congregation and they were "dismissed" from membership. But according to TBC's *Constitution*, such a dismissal was not an act of discipline. Fred subsequently started Cumberland Valley Book Service in Carlisle and was successful in that venture.

HCT's Characterization of Mark Johnson's Departure from

Emmanuel Baptist Church, Seatac, Washington

In the original *Chantrynotes* blog post, the authors alleged that the elders of the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids and the deacons of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Seatac, Washington (the church that I have pastored for the past nineteen years, and which now bears the name Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church) "worked together to engineer the removal of Pastor Mark Johnson" in 1991 (118). In response I wrote to them, "I can only say that here also there is much, much more to the story. The aspersions which you cast on the Grand Rapids elders and on the people of our congregation in this matter should be withdrawn because they are unwarranted." Tom Lyon labeled Mark Johnson's removal as the fruit of a "new metropolitanism" (118), implying that Grand Rapids had usurped Pastor Johnson's authority in the church and appointed themselves, in prelatial style, as its new bishops. The truth is that Mark Johnson lost the confidence of the officers and people of Emmanuel Baptist Church. And when he (not they) called for a vote confirming his ministry and continuing role, the church unanimously voted not to confirm him. Initially, the deacons met with Tom Lyon and Don Lindblad (who at that time was still at Juanita Community Church) to ask for help in

going forward; but it was evident to EBC's remaining officers that no help would be forthcoming from the other Reformed Baptist churches in Washington. Then, and only then, did they seek out the Grand Rapids elders for counsel. They also sought counsel from David Dykstra, who advised them in the same way that Grand Rapids did (Dykstra neglected to mention this in *HCT*). But neither the Grand Rapids elders nor Dykstra acted like overseeing prelates imposing their opinions and will on anyone. And to say that those involved "engineered" Pastor Johnson's removal suggests that he was an innocent victim of a clever plot to remove him from office. Nothing could be farther from the truth. But when I informed Dykstra and Chantry that this was the case, they refused to retract the allegation. So much for correcting errors when they are pointed out. And so much for asking someone who conceivably might know something about the case (*i.e.*, me) if the allegation is true before sending it around the world via the internet.

HCT's Characterization of Trinity Ministerial Academy

The authors tell us that while Walt Chantry, Wayne Mack, and Ernie Reisinger "had a vision of what an academically rigorous seminary would look like," A. N. Martin and Charles Barnhart "had been street preachers while in high school, and perhaps did not share the same conception of the place of formal education" (61). Really? Was TMA simply a glorified Bible College—a little Bob Jones or an imitation Columbia Bible College? Had A. N. Martin no vision for "rigorous" seminary training? No. Initially requiring a three year program of study and then a four year program, its curriculum included two full years of Greek and two full years of Hebrew, plus courses in textual criticism and hermeneutics, four semesters of Biblical Theology, four semesters of Historical Theology, eight semesters of Systematic Theology plus a course in Christian Ethics and a course in Apologetics, eight semesters of Pastoral Theology, and required exegetical courses in the OT Poets, Isaiah, the Gospels, Acts, Romans, and Hebrews. In many of these courses we used the same textbooks used at Westminster. Reading assignments were extensive and evaluation of student performance was rigorous. A number of the courses required writing position papers, which were then critiqued by the faculty. January term courses (also required) were taught on various subjects by men like David Kingdon and Tom Nettles. Say to any TMA graduate that the curriculum was not rigorous and he will wonder where you got that idea, because that was not his experience.

The authors further tell us that "the Academy took a real step forward (in the eyes of Grace Baptist), when brothers Robert and Lamar Martin (no relation to Al Martin) came as instructors" (63). I am glad that someone has noticed the opinion of Grace Baptist regarding my going to TMA in 1983, because I also have a story to tell. I knew about the opening at TMA many months before I applied. And when I finally was at liberty to apply, my first step was to call Ernie Reisinger to ask if he knew if the opening had been filled. He told me that it was still unfilled and that I should call his home again the following Saturday to speak to Al Martin, who then would be his house guest. I told Ernie that I was a grown man and could call Pastor Martin on my own, but he would not hear it. He wanted to put in a good word for me first. Anyone who knew Ernie in those days knows that there was no arguing with him once he made up his mind, so I agreed to my esteemed senior brother's plan. The rest is history. But several years later, when I learned that Ernie and Pastor Chantry already had serious concerns about TBC and TMA in 1982-83, I was faced with a question. Why had neither of these men (especially Ernie) taken me aside and warned me that going to TBC and TMA

was going onto dangerous ground, where I might be infected with fundamentalist authoritarianism, anti-associationalism, and abusive shepherding practices? I was just out of seminary at the time and many of my ideas about church life and pastoral work were still moldable. Why no warning to a junior brother who (in their judgment) was walking into a minefield? If TBC and TMA were so bad, why did Ernie help me go there? Why no concern for my soul or future ministry? I have no answer to these questions. But I also never fully trusted Ernie after that.

The authors of *HCT* also suggest that TBC was an example of a church that had become “solely responsible for the training of its [the Reformed Baptist] movement’s pastors” (66). That was never true. Nor did TBC think it was true. Classes began at TBC due to growing requests from its men for the elders’ help in ministerial training. Eventually this evolved into TMA. When TMA was in operation, other churches sent students. Not every Reformed Baptist church did so, nor did those who did always send all of their students to TMA. Some continued to go to Westminster or to other schools. And at no point, even at the period when the largest number of TMA’s graduates were actually serving as pastors, were the majority of Reformed Baptist churches in the USA (or even the churches whose pastors attended TBC’s Pastors Conference) TMA graduates. To this day, TMA graduates are a small minority among Pastors Conference attendees. And this was always the case. Simply put, when the need arose for a distinctive Reformed Baptist seminary, TBC did something. But they did not act for everyone. Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle even lent their name and support to the effort. If the Carlisle men wanted something different, they were free to enlist churches and brethren of like mind and sell their 170 acres of forest land and endow a seminary to be established wherever and however they chose.

At one point in *HCT* the authors complain, “In the East, it was not uncommon for Academy graduates to conclude that no qualified elders could be found in the small churches they were sent to pastor” (116-17). The phrase “not uncommon,” of course, means “common.” But where did this take place besides allegedly in West Chester (where that did not in fact happen)? TMA didn’t actually have a lot of graduates, and not all graduates became pastors. I know every graduate who subsequently became a pastor, and I know those who did not (with the exception of two who graduated before I came in 1983). Who are the authors of *HCT* talking about? And how would they know enough to make such a dramatic, sweeping statement? Is there any possibility that they have engaged in self-serving hyperbole, not only here but throughout their “history”? I don’t have the time or heart to challenge every statement in this book that is loaded with hyperbole and innuendo and *non sequiturs*. I have another life than responding to fiction by writers who try to hide their personal agenda under the guise of accurate “history.” But I could not let this slander against TMA’s graduates go unanswered.

Having discredited TMA (faculty and graduates), then asserting that “IRBS (Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies) has become one of the bulwarks of subscriptionism within ARBCA,” *HCT* turns also to attack IRBS’s present competition.

The Reformed Baptist Seminary in particular is pursuing the task of ministerial training along very different lines—both practically and doctrinally. As with the Montville communion, the churches and

ministries associated with Grand Rapids have also faced questions regarding their confessional identity. In 2011 Nichols published his studies on Covenant Theology, developed during his days teaching at Trinity Ministerial Academy. Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God's Covenants presents a clearly non-confessional position on this central doctrine. Nichols flatly denies the existence of a covenant of works, an obvious departure from chapter 7, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Confession" (209-210).

First, as a point of order, chapter 7 of the Confession says nothing whatever about the covenant of works (but this oversight is to be excused due to the hasty writing and inadequate editing of *HCT*). Of greater substance is the fact that Greg does not deny the existence of the covenant of works at all but calls it "the Adamic Covenant" (read his *Appendix2: The Adamic Covenant*, pp. 321-58). If I may be a bit snarky at this point, if Greg Nichols no longer can be called a confessional Reformed Baptist, then John Murray no longer can be called a confessional Presbyterian (see p. 333 of Nichol's book). We also are told that Robert Gonzales (Dean of RBS) has lost his union card because he "has written strongly against full or strict subscription" and because he himself "has taken issue with confessional teaching on divine impassibility in chapter 2 paragraph 1" (210). Bob has written in his own defense, but anyone who cares to examine the Confession at this point will discover that it offers no scriptural proof in support of the phrase "without . . . passions" (unlike the Westminster Confession, which hangs its whole weight on a comparison of Acts 14:11 and 14:15—a slender thread indeed, given that this is not even the best interpretation of the text—see Alexander, *Acts*, 2:59. Does this mean that Alexander was not a confessional Presbyterian?). Bob should get a pass on impassibility. I have not read Bob's writings on "Reformed Traditionalism," but as to his writing "strongly *against*" strict subscription in the way that the authors of *HCT* seem to want to apply it to our Confession (when it cannot be said that at every point the Confession represents the unquestioned teaching of the Bible), is he to be criticized and de-frocked because he cannot go along with *HCT*'s program? I appeal to every reasonable Reformed Baptist—are we supposed to shun some of the brightest men of our movement simply because Dave Dykstra and Tom Chantry say, "The Grand Rapids dispersion has meant that this weak confessionalism has become an issue for more than the Grand Rapids camp" (210)? Get real! Only Sam Waldron, among the Grand Rapids scholars, escapes *HCT*'s needle-in-the-haystack search for heterodoxy. I would counsel him, however, to watch his back. I would also counsel every ARBCA pastor to do the same, given the ominous nature of Dykstra and Chantry's question: "The associationalists have perhaps rejected fundamentalist isolation in favor of Reformed confessionalism, but have they adequately addressed the presence of an evangelical broadness within the national association?" (217).

Trinity's Undue Influence

HCT informs us that "Trinity's position as the lone proprietor of the Academy gave them unique pull over the other churches. The practice of hosting an 'invitation-only' pastors' conference enlarged this influence further" (133). TBC had no "pull" over the churches, either over those who sent men to TMA for training or those who did not. Students came voluntarily and their churches commended them voluntarily. Further, TBC and TMA did not impose graduates on anyone. Many Reformed Baptist churches (not just Carlisle)

would continue to call men who had been trained elsewhere. Further, if Carlisle wished to lessen the influence of TBC/TMA, at any time they could have consulted with others who felt the same way and started their own seminary. As to the TBC Pastors Conference (now, I believe, in its 31st year), had Carlisle continued its 1966-69 pastors conference, it would now be in its 48th year, and would have exercised considerable influence to this very day.

The Trinity Pastors Conference originally was an extension of TMA and was held in the January inter-term. Because of weather issues, subsequently it was moved to mid-October. As to its being “invitation-only,” this is cited as something sinister. But there is nothing sinister about it. For a variety of reasons we decided not to make the conference “come one, come all.” Such a conference not only would have overwhelmed TBC’s resources but also would have defeated our purpose in holding a conference to begin with. Due to our experience at pastors conferences where men were not on the same page doctrinally or practically, we wanted a conference where the men were agreed on most issues (although not on church polity—many Presbyterians attended) and where the daily Q&A sessions could be devoted to discussing practical questions submitted by the conference attendees. These sessions were not recorded because they often included frank discussion of actual cases with which men were wrestling. A. N. Martin moderated these meetings, but any conference attendee could speak in addressing the question being discussed. On numerous occasions he called on men with greater knowledge or experience than himself to make the initial stab at addressing the problem posed.

Men whose beliefs were unknown or who were known to promote idiosyncratic views usually were not invited, although rarely were requests to attend actually not granted. In most cases all that it took to get an invitation was knowing someone who attended and who would vouch for you. Men who attended but were ill-behaved were not invited back (like the brother who sat on the back row and read the newspaper during the conference sessions). But, then, David Dykstra attended many of the conferences and knows all this and also knows that the spin he puts on the Trinity Pastors Conference in *HCT* is unfounded.

“Investigatory” Pastoring

HCT warns about “investigatory” pastoring (65). “In Carlisle it was believed that pastoral oversight is primarily a ministry of encouragement, and that serious sin demanding some response will inevitably be discovered in God’s time. What they feared—and it was a fear born of interaction with students—was that the Trinity elders practiced a close, even prying, form of counseling designed to *discover* sin. . . . However, this style did not represent actual practice in Trinity church, where more than one graduate has spoken of their treatment at the hands of Trinity elders as a sort of ‘benign neglect’” (65-66). Which is it? Did TBC’s elders practice “a close, even prying, form of counseling designed to *discover* sin” or a kind of “benign neglect”? We are told also that “investigatory” pastoring did not originate with TBC but with Jim Hufstetler, although the practice spread through TMA (65-66). And how did this happen? Allegedly it came about through Hufstetler’s lectures at a conference at TBC in the early 1980s and his booklet *Biblical Pastoral Oversight* (1989). *HCT* tells us that these lectures “became standard fare at the Academy” (115). If they did, I was not aware of it—and I was the Dean of the Academy. Did some students listen to them? Probably. Were they required to listen to them?

No. If you actually want to know what TMA taught about pastoral oversight, listen to A. N. Martin's Pastoral Theology lectures, which have always been available to those who wish to hear them.

And have you read Hufstetler's booklet? I challenge you to do so. Tom Lyon bemoans it as the quintessence of "a philosophy of intrusive and mechanical oversight" which he dubbed "the New Baxterianism" (114). But is this warranted? Read it for yourself. And then ask yourself what Tom Lyon and other critics find so disturbing. To what does Lyon object and why? And does he offer us a better model of personal pastoral care? Does he practice a better method in his own congregation? If so, I hope that he also writes a book on private, personal shepherding and shares his vision with us. If we are not each trying to implement the basic principles set out in Hufstetler's booklet, then we do not have even remotely compatible visions of church life and pastoral ministry. In such a climate it seems to me that how to form an association or implement 26.15 is the least of the barriers to fellowship among us.

HCT practices an indefensible kind of cherry-picking when representing Hufstetler's book. The authors allege that Hufstetler urges pastors to ask "many probing questions concerning their [peoples'] spiritual condition' . . . Some have suggested that this approach places the pastor in the role of the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of sanctification" (115). But consider what Hufstetler actually said:

If you, dear Pastor, would implement God honoring and God blessed oversight of the flock in which God the Spirit has made you an overseer you must be spiritually intimate with your people and you must bring your people to understand the relationship you believe you sustain to them; the concern you genuinely have for them; the deep affection you feel for each one of them.

Some people rebel at the thought of their Pastors (elders) getting too close to them or asking too many probing questions concerning their spiritual condition. But is it proper for a young child to feel closed in on or insulted because his parents want to cultivate a close relationship with him? (And remember pastors, like Paul, are to be nursing mothers and manly fathers to their people.) And is it even consistent with natural affection for a mother or father to have no desire or longing to be close to their own children? And do we have a true Pastor's heart if we do not desire to be spiritually close to the precious saints God has committed to our spiritual charge? Pastors, if they would follow Paul's example must not be aloof from their people. (Biblical Pastoral Oversight, 11-12)

Let the reader judge if the authors of *HCT* have used this quotation properly. Following their assessment of this cherry-picked offering, Dykstra and Chantry offer us another object of their juicy fruit collecting (115-16):

However, in an even more disturbing passage, Hufstetler addressed the motivation of the church in holiness: "My dear brethren in the gospel ministry, we must be set free in our consciences to use the full

extent of our influence, our office, our legitimate authority, and the place we have in our people's affection to help them on to God." "It is right and at times necessary to motivate your flock by the fear of shaming you; by distress at the thought of breaking your heart; by concern that they may have encouraged your enemies to reproach you; by holy fear of accountability to you if they are backsliding." This breathtaking passage puts the pastor not in the place of the Third Person of the Godhead, but of the Second. One wonders how any Reformed pastor failed to substitute "Christ" for each use of "you."

I, indeed, am breathless, but not at Hufstetler's words. What is breathtaking is the way Dykstra and Chantry have isolated Hufstetler's remarks and put their own spin on them. These remarks are part of Hufstetler's development of a much larger point, in which he speaks of "the complex of legitimate biblical motivation" (not "the *motivation*") for biblical pastoral oversight. In opening up "the broad range of biblical motivation," Hufstetler first speaks of our being motivated by a desire for God's glory and by love for Christ, then he passes over to what he calls "more subordinate motives," e.g., fear of damnation, a desire to have a good name, and a desire to prosper. He then tells us that "God has made us to respond to a whole range of biblical motivation." The motivation that *HCT* cites is treated last. And the authors failed to include the next sentence: "This all assumes that you have so labored to win their hearts and have succeeded sufficiently so that they will care what you think and how you feel." At the best, *HCT's* citation of Hufstetler's book shows the poor scholarship of its authors. At the worst, it reveals their willingness to twist anything so as to make it say what they want.

Doubtless one church's ideas and practices influence others. I have no doubt that Hufstetler's and Grand Rapids' ideas about pastoral oversight have influenced many. But are they responsible for every irresponsible application of their ideas? Carlisle's "oversight" policy (65-66) likely influenced other churches also. Shall I blame Walt Chantry and his fellow elders for an ARBCA pastor who, when I tried to speak to him about one of his members (who was spreading lies about members of our congregation), foreclosed our conversation by stating bluntly that he did not interfere in his members' private concerns? No, of course not. Is it possible that some disciples have taken the examples/instruction they have received farther than their mentors ever would have—and that, without their advice or consent? For myself, I am not ashamed that I have done too much "investigatory" pastoring but too little of it.

"the novel practice of 'oversight'"

HCT informs us that "another practice of Trinity Church became intertwined with the Academy: the novel practice of 'oversight'" (66).

As churches came into contact with the Reformed Baptists, many were facing serious trouble. . . . Trinity's response to this was often to accept 'oversight' of such churches, effectively taking them under their pastoral authority. Once the Academy was operating, graduates became a means of cementing this oversight. A student from Trinity, already under the authority of the Essex Fells/Montville eldership, would

be sent to a church under oversight, where he would remain under the same authority as he conducted the local ministry (66).

Doesn't this sound like a conspiracy? Surely this was a cleverly disguised plan to become Mother Church! Really? Grand Rapids also is charged with the same crime. Were they trying to be Mother Church also? Tom Lyon, with his skill at crafting clever monikers, styles this the "new metropolitanism" (118), but what does he know about the manner in which church "oversight" was practiced, either by TBC or Grand Rapids or anyone else?

What about Carlisle and Stan Line: "Grace Baptist took complete oversight of Line's mission" (81)? What about La Mirada and its oversight of Grace Church in Mililani, Hawaii? Their oversight of this pastorless church (where I spent the summer of 1994) was no different from that which Grand Rapids had with Free Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Lethbridge, Alberta (where I spent the summer of 1990) or with Emmanuel Baptist Church, Seatac, Washington (where I went, under their oversight, in 1995), or from that which TBC had with a mere handful of churches. Is it possible that we all were responding as best we could to the multiplied appeals for help that we were receiving during those days? We all were struggling with how to respond to a movement that was growing exponentially. And is it possible that those who were being asked most for help made more mistakes than those who were being asked least? Yes. Is it possible that this was new to all of us (including Carlisle and La Mirada) and that we all tried to do the best we could with the light we had? Yes. Would most of us proceed differently with the light we have now? Yes. Was there an effort by TBC or Grand Rapids to become "mother church" and "cement" their "new metropolitanism" by funneling Borg with no minds of their own into struggling churches? NO. If that was what Grand Rapids was trying to do in my going to Seattle, they forgot to tell me or the people of ERBC. During the five month trial period before I was officially ordained as the pastor, the Grand Rapids elders were virtually invisible and did not interfere in any way in the pastoral oversight that I was giving to the congregation. And the day I was ordained, their "oversight" of ERBC ended. What an ingenious plan for on-going control! Breathtakingly clever and diabolical!

As to the accusation that TBC "cemented" its oversight of troubled churches who sought us out for help by sending TMA graduates to minister, who should we have sent? Should we have sent men we did not know and trust? Further, we did not require churches to relinquish their constitutions or adopt ours. And once a man was ordained as an elder, we ended the oversight relation to the church; although, in a few cases, with no fellow elder to watch over his own soul or those of his family, the new (lone) pastor asked that the TBC elders continue a personal pastoral relation.

As I will argue below, both associationalism and church oversight rest on a pragmatic base without explicit biblical foundation. The bottom line is that they are not in the Bible. But both are honest attempts to address problems. If they are warranted, it is on the basis of general principles and pragmatic grounds. But this much is plain, TBC and Grand Rapids did not implement a draconian scheme to foist a "new metropolitanism" on Reformed Baptists.

“Confessional Associationalism”

One of the most telling statements in *HCT* is this: “One might say that Grace Baptist and Trinity Church shared the same confession, but different ecclesiastical dreams” (39). That is true. And what also is true is that A. N. Martin and TBC are not to be blamed because Carlisle’s dream was not ours. And though we went as far as we could with a clear conscience, we could not help Carlisle achieve their ultimate goal.

Speaking of the state of affairs in the 1960s, *HCT* tells us: “The church in Carlisle had observed the confessional practice of the Orthodox Presbyterians at close hand and had drawn conclusions concerning Reformed Baptist life. . . . Carlisle envisioned a similar bond between Reformed Baptists, who would associate formally together under the terms of the Second London Confession. Al Martin’s fundamentalist background was, however, unleavened by the influence of confessional Presbyterianism” (47). Implied by this is that Carlisle not only was confessional but clear-sighted on the question of ecclesiastical polity as early as 1966 and the Carlisle pastors conference. But Ernie Reisinger’s 1964 letter to Iain Murray suggests that this was not the case. Doubtless the term “naïve” is too strong a word to describe it, but so is the statement that “his letter is more insightful than it may at first appear” (23). The letter shows that Carlisle’s full ecclesiology had not yet been settled and that Pastor Chantry had not emerged from Westminster as an expert on “confessional associationalism.” Even though he doubtless was exposed to Orthodox Presbyterian confessional associationalism at Westminster, ecclesiology was only a small part of his course of study. I doubt that he was immersed during his years there (1960-63) in a study of confessional associationalism. Further, in 1966, he was only three years out of a broad, basic seminary course (not an advanced program in church government); and even if he was the brightest student ever to attend Westminster, at that juncture he still had a lot of exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology to learn. I simply do not believe that he was as clear-sighted at this juncture as the authors imply that he was. He may have wanted to establish a Reformed Baptist confessional association, but he certainly was in no position to establish it going into the 1966 pastors conference in Carlisle, especially since “it is important to remember that at the time of the 1966 conference, Grace Baptist was the only confessional Reformed Baptist church in the nation” (54). TBC would not be constituted until 1967. In 1966, with whom did Pastors Chantry and Reisinger expect to form an association?

This brings us to the 1966 Carlisle pastors conference. *HCT* informs us: “By 1966 Reisinger and Chantry would make a positive move toward the creation of an association” (37). But did everyone invited to the conference know that this was so? In the letter of invitation, Pastor Chantry said, “we know of no Baptist fellowship which upholds the Faith as expressed in the London Confession of Faith Perhaps it is time to begin a Fellowship of like-minded brethren for mutual edification and encouragement” (235). *HCT* tells us, “Mutual edification and encouragement was a cautious way of expressing the desire for association” (50). But if Pastor Chantry had an “association” in mind (a term that all the invitees would have understood, why did he not use that word? Were those men misled who thought that they were coming only for “a Fellowship . . . for mutual edification and encouragement”? Later the authors will complain that RBA (formed two years later) could be more accurately described “as a pastors fraternal, not an association” (54). But is that not what Pastor Chantry advertised in the 1966 invitation to what he called a “pastors conference”? If he wanted more

in 1966, he should have said so from the opening bell (in the invitation). Perhaps fewer men would have come, but at least the Carlisle church readily could have known how many men (and churches) were ready to form an actual association on any terms. In the end, they got what they advertised—discovering along the way that only three other churches (including TBC) initially were willing to form an association of any kind.

Pastor Chantry has described the RBA: “It was the most that Al Martin would stand for” (54). The authors of *HCT* assert, “The early RBA did not fulfil the desires of the Carlisle men; nevertheless they participated in a *spirit* of associationalism, willing to not dominate the earliest decisions. Since it was evident that Al Martin did not view association as they did, why were Reisinger and Chantry willing to form the association with him? . . . [the answer:] these men were the only soil in which it might be planted” (54). What about the other men present in 1966—“more than one hundred men—mostly pastors” (50)? Why is A. N. Martin singled out as the spoiler of the associational party? Obviously RBA was the most that the four founding churches could agree on (*a.k.a.* “stand for”). The rest of the attendees in 1966 apparently didn’t even agree to that. Is this an accurate reading of the written record? Perhaps not. I wasn’t there. But if it isn’t accurate, it underscores how later generations can misread even documentary sources—a possibility that the authors of *HCT* seem unwilling to entertain about themselves.

HCT further tells us: “In Montville another understanding of confessional Reformed Baptist polity was emerging, with an emphasis on *radical independency*, on *narrow fellowship*, and on *personal loyalties*” (47, italics mine). Here I will focus only on the simplest of these slanders to refute, *i.e.*, “narrow fellowship.” As a matter of historical fact, TBC had fellowship with Grace Baptist Church and many other churches in RBA and participated in the association longer than Carlisle did. TBC also had broad fellowship with other Reformed Baptists, as well as with many Presbyterian and Dutch ministers—a fact that still is evident in the annual Trinity Pastors Conference, which is attended by both ARBCA and non-ARBCA ministers, and by Presbyterians, Founders, etc. from across the world. Speakers have been drawn from a broad range, included Presbyterians Ted Donnelly (a regular for many years), Sinclair Ferguson, and Warren Peel. Frankly, during my years at TBC, I met as many “famous” preachers of varying denominational backgrounds (because they preached at TBC) as I met at the many Banner of Truth conferences that I attended. But I digress.

Why did Pastors Chantry and Grace Baptist not simply go their own way and start the kind of association they wanted? The answer is that they didn’t have enough men of like mind to do so—nor would they by 1982, when RBMS was formed. Not until 1996 would Pastor Chantry get what he wanted with the founding of ARBCA. Not until Carlisle left RBA, had founded RBMS on terms that made it impossible for TBC to join, did Chantry, Dykstra and others morph RBMS into ARBCA.

HCT tells us that RBMS was “a major step forward toward a confessional association” (87). “RBMS provided the template for greater cooperative efforts to follow” (87). “After 1985, it was impossible to think of the movement except in terms of RBMS and non-RBMS churches. This was the beginning of the divide between associated and non-associated churches which remains a factor in Reformed Baptist life to this day” (87). But who took this step? Pastor Chantry and Grace Baptist, not Pastor Martin and TBC. Read carefully TBC’s “response” to the proposed RBMS constitution (246-48). A more irenic letter cannot be imagined. But Grace

Baptist already had left RBA and plainly was starting RBMS as a stepping-stone to what they really wanted. Knowing this, TBC declined to step on that stone. But TBC did not decline to cooperate in missions (as the letter shows).

HCT provides numerous examples of the axiom "It's all in how you say something." Dykstra and Chantry opine, "From the beginning the Reformed Baptist practice of associationalism was defined by Martin's anti-associationalism" (55). Why not say, "From the beginning the Reformed Baptist practice of associationalism was defined by Walt Chantry's accommodation of his vision to the theological and practical reservations of Al Martin and others"? At any time, Pastor Chantry could have quit doing this and gathered as many churches as would join Carlisle in an association of their liking—even if, as with those who originally formed RBA, the number of churches was few.

Al Martin and the TBC elders were not to blame when Pastor Chantry's dream did not come true. It was not our dream! At any time that he had Reformed Baptists ready to cooperate in forming the kind of association he wanted, he could have started ARBCA without us—which is what he eventually did. Instead of blaming TBC, which remained consistent with its beliefs from day one, it seems to me that the real question is, why did Pastor Chantry and Carlisle compromise their beliefs and join RBA? Why, when RBMS came along, did they not insist on what they really wanted and refuse to take half a loaf again? Could it be that a lot of Reformed Baptists, including many who participated in RBA and RBMS, didn't share Pastor Chantry's dream? TBC didn't exercise veto power, like the USA or Russia in the Security Council of the UN. Carlisle could have had what they wanted from the beginning, if there were others who would have joined them.

The men who formed ARBCA are not the only Reformed Baptists to wrestle with the question of associationalism and to act according to their sincere convictions. That story also needs to be told. On these matters I speak for no one but myself. My views are based on two things: my theology and my experience. First, I cannot find the ARBCA kind of association in the Bible. The texts usually cited will not bear the weight of proof that associational-minded exegetes (whether Presbyterian or Baptist) put on them. Does this mean that there is no warrant whatever for an association? No, but it does mean that you can't simply cite doubtful interpretations of a few isolated Bible texts and say "case closed." *HCT* assures us that "the Confession does not offer supporting passages as simplistic 'proof texts,' but rather as crucial texts to be submitted to careful exegesis" (208). I am still looking for proof of this statement, including the "careful exegesis" which warrants it. It is not found in *HCT* or in *Denominations or Associations*, edited by Jim Renihan.

Second, my own early experience of Baptist associationalism dampens any enthusiasm I might otherwise have had for ARBCA. *HCT* tells us, "The men who had gathered in Carlisle had in many cases suffered badly in other associations. . . . [But ANM's] objection to association came not from past troubles but from some other source" (52). But how do the authors know what A. N. Martin had experienced or seen during the years leading up to 1966? Was there something in his experience with the C&MA that made him reluctant to enter into a denominational organization again? Further, does one have to suffer the darker side of associationalism in order to be aware of it and desire to avoid it? In my own case, before I came to TBC, I had suffered abuse at the hands of denominational bureaucrats. When we held the first Wicket Gate Conference

in Fort Worth, a local SBC church complained to seminary bureaucrats that we were trying to start a Baptist church in their territory. That wasn't the case (at least not at that time). Nonetheless, I was called to appear before the Dean of Students and told that we would no longer be welcome on campus. I went away from that meeting also persuaded that my teaching fellowship was in jeopardy as well. I also was told by denominational "statesmen" that my beliefs in biblical inerrancy and Calvinism meant that going forward there would be no room for me in SBC institutions. This was my last but most memorable experience of Baptist associationalism run amok. I have had a belly full of denominational "statesmen."

Early on, I went to two ARBCA general assemblies at the invitation of brethren who suggested that I "come and see" for myself. I did not go because I had changed my views of associations, or because I had escaped the talons of TBC and Al Martin and was looking for a new nest to take up residence. I did not even go because my fellow-elder at ERBC was interested in joining ARBCA. I went with as open a mind as I could muster to see for myself. Recently I wrote to Dykstra: "Dave, when I visited the ARBCA meeting in La Mirada in the late 1990s, I came away with the impression that you were fishing for some negative comment about A. N. Martin or my time at Trinity. Others at that meeting left me with the same impression—so much so that I remarked to my wife that if being anti-A. N. Martin was the glue holding ARBCA together, then the association had no defensible rationale." I now think that the founders of ARBCA had a more noble bond than that, but at the time, the anti-Trinity atmosphere of the meeting was palpable. *HCT* serves notice that the ARBCA air still has not cleared. In the past few months, friends visiting an ARBCA church reported that many of the people were positively gleeful about the soon appearing of *HCT*. Their reason? The "Montville error" finally would be exposed and publicly rebuked. The ARBCA air is not yet clear, indeed!

Confessional Subscription

The authors of *HCT* affirm: "Some will insist that everyone see things exactly as do they. Others are willing to concede many crucial points of doctrine. True confessional subscription steers a path between these extremes" (22). I agree. But I also wonder if the authors of *HCT* mean what they say.

Speaking of Reformed Baptists in the 1960s, *HCT* tells us, "To enter the Reformed world, Baptists needed more than a document; they needed an agreed-upon way of handling that document" (28). If that is the case, we, along with our Presbyterian brethren, are still waiting for our entry cards. There is no such agreement at the present hour in either communion, nor has there ever been. The subject of confessional subscription is theologically, historically, and practically complex. And anyone who doesn't recognize this is a novice on the subject. I heartily recommend, as a primer on the theme, David W. Hall's (ed.), *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (The Covenant Foundation, 2001). Whether you come away from this book or not with a conscience persuaded as to the correct form of subscription to be practiced, you will derive a profound appreciation for the complexity of the question and the tentativeness with which the answers typically offered should be received.

The authors of *HCT* argue for "strict confessionalism," "strict subscription," and "strong associationalism" (29-30). On this last point, they tell us that "chapter XXVI, paragraphs 14 and 15 of the Second London

Confession expressly demand some level of association” (30). Later they define this as an ARBCA kind of association and speak of “ARBCA’s clear and unflinching confessionalism” (175).

At the 1998 ARBCA General Assembly, *HCT* tells us that Dr. Jim Renihan (newly appointed Dean of IRBS) “distinguished ‘absolute subscription’—or word-for-word agreement—with ‘strict’ or ‘full subscription,’ which means agreement with every doctrine. He distinguished both from ‘loose’ of ‘system subscription,’ in which agreement with the confessional standard is somewhat tenuous” (187). At the same meeting, with no further consideration by the associating churches, Renihan’s definition of “strict/full subscription” became part of ARBCA’s constitution. Renihan’s definition reads: “Full subscription honestly adopts all of the doctrines expressed in the confessional formulation. In the case of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, this means that by subscribing to the document commonly known as the London Baptist Confession of 1689, we receive all of the doctrines contained in it as true, founded on the word of God” (188).

In an earlier statement, *HCT* informs us, “Among these Presbyterians one could see the genius of confessionalism: a commitment to Scripture and an agreed-upon interpretation which gave the church (and the seminary) a settled position on the whole scope of Christian doctrine. . . . They had drawn a line at the point of a confessional statement beyond which they could not move” (28). I am happy for the Orthodox Presbyterians if that was the case (although subsequently the Shepherd case would strain this commitment to the limits, as had the Briggs case in a preceding generation). *HCT* tells us that Reformed Baptists are “now reaching maturity” (197). Is that so, or are we ignoring the history and debates of our Presbyterian brethren, who have discussed, argued, and written on the subjects of “confessional associationalism” and “confessional subscription” at levels we have not yet even approached?

The authors of *HCT* ask, “Is subscription [as defined by ARBCA] to the 1689 going to define our ecclesiastical identity, or are we going to acquiesce in a doctrinal downgrade and accept neo-evangelical broadness as part of our identity?” (198). This, of course, would be a more valid question with reference to a confession concerning which no statements of reservation were needed by those who have a legitimate right to the name Reformed Baptist—not only in ARBCA but outside. I agree—“It would be a tragedy to see that [confessional] tradition abandoned if indeed the confessional doctrine accords with Scripture” (199). But does it accord with Scripture in a way that makes full subscription possible for those who have scruples, *e.g.*, about the Pope’s identity, “elect infants dying in infancy,” “holding communion together,” the so-called “covenant of works,” or God’s impassibility? None of these doctrines can be proven from Scripture. And even where the Scriptures offer us texts with which to work, Reformed Baptists are not agreed as to their meaning. Every skilled exegete knows that there is a degree of exegetical uncertainty in the interpretation of some texts which makes it inappropriate to base theological constructions on them. Is this not the case with the texts cited at disputed points in our Confession? I agree that we need to define “the true nature of ‘communion’” and resolve “whether or not the Reformed Baptists will be a movement defined by a confession” (204); but ultimately those issues need to be resolved scripturally, not simply historically. Before Reformed Baptists—not just the Theological Committee of ARBCA—can police “full subscription,” perhaps we need to agree to remove some things from the Confession which cannot be supported with unequivocal scriptural testimony.

HCT already makes it plain that “confessional associationalists” (*i.e.*, the authors and the ARBCA men who share their notions of what “strict subscription” is) are not really able to have fellowship with those who differ from them on 26.15. Fine. That’s your choice, not ours. But the problem is bigger than 26.15. *HCT* never answers my brother Lamar’s question: “Are we prepared to cast stones at those who believe the confession is wrong about the Pope simply because it is stated in the confession? NO! We are not prepared to break fellowship with such brethren because that statement has no clear biblical support.” I ask the same thing about “elect infants dying in infancy” (10:3), about “the covenant of works,” and (presently in dispute) about “without passions.”

Beware an unblinking confessionalism. It isn’t truly Reformed. The Reformed faith’s genius is *Sola Scriptura*, not *Sola Confessio*. It is naïve to assert that these ideas do not necessarily come into conflict in our present situation. *Sola Scriptura* trumps any appeal to church tradition (including appeals to traditional interpretations of obscure scripture passages which manage to make their way into confessions of faith). Even writers of confessions are not exempt from having their exegesis examined and set aside if it is found lacking in conclusively demonstrating the biblical authority of the doctrinal formulations they publish. To argue anything else is to return to Rome.

Will the real Reformed Baptists please stand up?

HCT posits the dramatic conclusion, “If such churches [‘the Montville communion’] are to be thought of as ‘Reformed Baptists,’ they are certainly not in the tradition of those who wrote in 1689” (208). Later the authors tell us, “Well, quite simply, apply 26.15 or don’t say you subscribe to the 1689 Confession of Faith!” (267). I find these statements interesting on several fronts. Earlier, the authors profess,

We are both what might be called “confessional associationalists.” We believe that “Reformed Baptists” are by definition those whose churches subscribe to both the doctrine and the polity of the Second London, or 1689 Confession. We mean no disrespect to our other Christian friends when we say that our churches ought to formally associate with other churches sharing this confessional standard, which is Reformed, Puritan, covenantal, Baptist, and associational. Some would not draw the lines where we do, but we believe the history demonstrates both that this is where the lines have been drawn and that it is where they ought to be drawn. With all charity towards our non-Reformed Baptist brethren, we are convinced that our formal association should be with churches fully subscribing to our Confession of Faith. . . . And we do believe in formal association. . . . We are convinced that when our confession speaks of churches “holding communion together,” it is speaking of a formal and accountable association. The failure of modern Reformed Baptists to establish such an accountable association, together with all the troubles which have accompanied that failure, are, we believe, the strongest historical proof that the Particular Baptists were both biblical and wise in practicing this form of “communion” (13-14).

Does this mean that Tom Chantry, who by his own testimony “currently is the pastor of Christ Reformed

Baptist Church, a non-associated congregation in Hales Corners, Wisconsin" (11), isn't a Reformed Baptist after all, and yet he wants to scold those of us who still harbor the delusion that we are Reformed Baptists despite our present non-associational affiliation? Further, who assigned the authors of *HCT* the official task of defining the term "Reformed Baptist"? And are the rest of us just "other Christian friends" and "non-Reformed Baptist brethren" who have failed to see what real Reformed Baptists claim to see? Apparently so, for, as the authors tell us, by the late 1980s, "the proper interpretation of Chapter 26, Paragraphs 14 and 15 was the doctrinal issue in dispute, with those who understand the Confession in its historical context refusing to accept that the anti-associational men were fully confessional" (158). Continuing this line, they assert: "The question which remained was whether or not strict confessionalism should be the standard for participation in RBMS. . . . as strict demarcation of the boundaries of acceptable boundaries and practice" (158). Of course, that's not what happened. The question was whether RBMS would have any "church-power properly so called" (26.15)—the question of strict versus loose subscription was never raised. If it had been, it would have been addressed in TBC's response letter about RBMS (246-48). As a "non-Reformed Baptist" Reformed Baptist, I object to *HCT's* acting as if the borders of the Reformed Baptist world extend no farther than ARBCA.

What about 26.15?

Defending Ernie Reisinger's 1964 letter to Iain Murray ("at first glance this letter may seem naïve"), the authors say, "the Confession is less clear than it might have been on specific matters of polity; a handful of the early Particular Baptists had no plurality of elders" (23). This refers to chapter 26. But, in this same chapter, the Confession also is less clear than it might have been on the meaning of "holding communion together." Our ARBCA friends believe that this means holding communion together in a formal, standing association. As *HCT* tells us: "Some form of associational bond was . . . as Carlisle would always argue—*required* by the Confession" (49); "Confessional associationalism is the only form of Reformed Baptist polity which is consistent with both the language and history of our confession. Further, we are convinced that it is the only form of Reformed Baptist polity which is obedient to the biblical teaching on inter-church fellowship" (223).

In addressing these statements, first I must ask, why is a differing interpretation of 26.8 (on the question of the plurality of elders and their denomination as teaching elders, ruling elders, or pastors, or the nature of their parity) allowed (see *HCT*, 119-20) among us (and in ARBCA) but not when it comes to the interpretation and implementation of 26.15? Can we not discover by historical research the intended meaning of the words used in 26.8? I am not an advanced student of early Reformed Baptist history, but I suspect that the evidence is available to do that.

Of more importance, of course, is the scriptural support for 26.8 and 26.15. The scriptural basis for reading 26.15 in the way *HCT* does is onion skin thin at best. And yet we are told "confessional associationalism is . . . the only form of Reformed Baptist polity which is obedient to the biblical teaching on inter-church fellowship" (223). The scriptural materials on the nature and number of church offices, by comparison, form a vastly stronger base for the statement of 26.8. Why then do we not find greater clarity in 26.8? There the

authors of the Confession seem unnecessarily tentative in their use of language. And yet, tentative they were—and that on a question on which they had greater evidence than for their statement at 26.15. Is it just possible, that in 26.15 they also were deliberately tentative, at least some among them recognizing that confessing brethren would require some latitude in actual practice? Is it just possible that some among the framers recognized the thin nature of the biblical testimony in support of formal, standing associations and couldn't agree to language stronger than that which they finally used? Would all of the framers have agreed with *HCT* that “confessional associationalism is . . . the only form of Reformed Baptist polity which is obedient to the biblical teaching on inter-church fellowship” (223)? I do not know if the historical material is available to answer such a question; but if it is, I would be interested in the answer.

HCT further tells us that “Martin’s eyes . . . remained focused on the phrase ‘not intrusted with any church-power properly so called’ in Paragraph 15. He read this as a statement of complete local autonomy, regardless of its context” (53). I will not take the time at this point in my response to challenge the clever way this statement is made. I simply want to observe that if it is accurate, then Pastor Chantry’s eyes were focused just as firmly on “holding communion together.” Why was his concern legitimate while Pastor Martin’s was not?

The ideas found in 26.15, though not the precise language, are drawn from *The Savoy Platform* (1658) of the British Congregationalists. *The Savoy Platform* is explicit in speaking of “Synods,” but it also is explicit in stating that these were occasional meetings (as need arose for their proper work) and not a standing institution (*i.e.*, an association) with officers and a perpetual ecclesiastical identity and authority (as in Presbyterianism). See *The Savoy Platform* 25-27. My question is: if our Baptist forefathers borrowed the ideas of *The Savoy Platform* in framing 26.15, is the idea that they borrowed from the Congregationalists’ polity that of an occasional Synod or a standing association? Dykstra says, “While our forefathers chose to exclude the term ‘Synod’ from 26.15, they chose to retain the existence of a separate group that would be there to advise and assist in times of difficulties and differences” (261). But that idea (“the existence of a separate group”) is not in *The Savoy Platform*. Did they then “retain” this idea from Congregationalism (it seems not) or import it from Presbyterianism? Jim Renihan, also commenting on our Confession’s dropping the phrase “in a Synod or Council” from *The Savoy Platform*, says, “Since in some cases the Independent [Congregationalist] method of holding communion included the occasional convening of synods or councils, and this was not part of the Baptist practice, the deletion of this phrase argues for a peculiarly Baptist understanding of the words ‘holding communion.’ In their recension of the Savoy material, they recast the statement to reflect the well-established polity already in place” (*HCT*, 311). But is this the real reason for their dropping the word “Synod”? Is it not just possible that they dropped the word not because the Congregationalists used it to refer to their occasional meetings but because the Presbyterians used it to refer to the highest level of their hierarchical organization of the Church, which was indeed entrusted with church-power (see *Westminster Confession* 31 and *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*—“It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the church be governed by several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational, classical, and synodical”)?

I will refrain from commenting on *HCT* chapter 20’s account of the 1998 meeting in Grand Rapids. I was not invited. To date I have not read the various position papers delivered by Nichols, Renihan, Blackburn, or

Dunn. My only response at present is simply to say that while I do not know what else Alan Dunn said on that occasion, I do not find the statement quoted on p. 213 of *HCT* “tortured” but, given my present light, in its stand-alone form, I agree with it. I suppose that this means that I also am now “out of the closet” concerning 26.15.

Dealing with problems

Speaking of the RBA *Constitution*, the authors complain, “Reformed Baptist cooperation was consequently hamstrung by ‘local churchism.’ . . . Representatives from various churches could meet; they simply couldn’t *do* anything. . . . Any idea that the churches might hold one another accountable in the sense demanded in the Confession was unworkable” (56). In one sense this was correct. Dykstra informs us that 26.15 contains “a mailed fist” to be used when necessary by those who implement its polity (253). The problem of “the mailed fist,” of course, was foreseen. This was among the reasons for not giving RBA such a weapon. But this did not mean that churches could not seek counsel in matters of difficulty from other churches, nor did it mean that churches could not join together to consider a united response in matters of mutual concern when it came to suspicions about problems in a sister church. And to say that a formal association is the only means by which these kinds of things are workable is simply not true to our history.

Several years ago I received a call from the pastor of an ARBCA church, requesting that I come to help sort through a conflict between him and a member of his congregation. The member wanted a 26.15 council in which to air his grievance. Also to be present on that occasion were Don and Stefan Lindblad. This was not an official ARBCA council, nor did the pastor or the Lindblads imply that it was. When I got into the back seat of Don’s truck to go together to the church which had invited us, I jokingly asked what I was doing on an ARBCA field trip. Wasn’t this the kind of thing that ARBCA was established to handle? To Don and Stefan’s credit, they did not take the bait. After a few hours we arrived at our destination, heard the testimony of the witnesses that were called, consulted with one another, and assigned Stefan, as the junior member of our party, the onerous task of drafting a written statement of our conclusions and advice. We subsequently met with the parties, delivered our counsel, and departed. Our advice in turn was conveyed to the congregation and the aggrieved party, not getting what he wanted, took his ball and went home. Peace was restored in the church and justice was served, but not because a formal association had brought its “mailed fist” to town, but because brethren who trusted one another were able to work together to help a sister church in our region resolve a problem which they had judged was too big for themselves alone. The purpose of this story, of course, is to underscore the fact that you don’t need an association to do 26.15 work. All you need is brethren who trust one another and who are willing to work together on such matters when the need arises. I came away from that trip with a greater appreciation of Don and Stefan but not with a gnawing sense that we could have done more if I was an ARBCA pastor and if this had been a bona fide ARBCA field trip.

Like many, I was alarmed by recent accounts of pastoral abuse by David Dykstra, in what Paul Gordon called “the Lafayette Debacle.” I do not know what happened in Lafayette, although I have friends who were in the congregation when the events alleged took place. It is my understanding that ARBCA was called in, and a council was conducted, and the results published not just to the Lafayette church but to all of the ARBCA

churches. I have no official (associational) right to read that report, but I would like to do so—since in *HCT* Pastor Dykstra has made such bold accusations of pastoral abuse against others. My questions are simple: (1) Did the ARBCA council clear Pastor Dykstra of the allegations made against him? (2) Was the Lafayette case an ARBCA success story—so that we should look to it as an example of how Reformed Baptists should proceed in similar cases in the future? I guess my real question is: how is ARBCA doing in implementing 26.15? Is “the mailed fist” working? And are the rumors true that Paul Gordon is being censured by ARBCA for his postings allegedly slandering Dykstra but that Dykstra is not being censured for his role in publishing slanders against A. N. Martin and others? And are the complaints of *HCT* against Robert Gonzales (217-222) leading to censure or expulsion of him and Grace Baptist, Taylors from ARBCA? Is “the mailed fist” being raised to quash this threat to “strict subscription” and “confessional associationalism”?

Speaking of the cases which they cite as their smoking guns, the authors say, “In none of these cases was that prescription [26.15] followed. Three decades after the adoption of the Confession in the Carlisle church, the modern Reformed Baptists still had not learned to call a council” (124). Carlisle never called for a council in any of the cases cited in this book. Instead, they (and those who have participated with them in their smear campaign) have taken upon themselves the role of judge, jury, and prosecutor. Why did they not do what the Grand Rapids elders did in Webster, who “invited the churches in the region to send representatives to a meeting” (125)? *HCT*, of course, complains that “Waldron was clear that the meeting would *not* constitute a council: ‘We did not believe that it would be according to biblical church order for [the representatives] to participate in the action to be taken by the church in Webster.’ Instead, they were asked to advise and report” (125). But is this not all that 26.15 allows? And does not 26.15 actually prohibit the kind of action which would have satisfied the authors of *HCT*? Read 26.15 carefully for yourself. There is nothing there about the representatives of those churches “holding communion together” possessing presbyterial power to enforce their advice on the Webster church. We are told that “*on the face of it*, Grand Rapids reacted properly to a tragic situation. One might wish that the practice of church oversight had not obscured the situation and prevented the calling of *a proper council*, but within the available polity, they acted reasonably well” (127, italics mine). But what more would a “proper council” have done? What powers would a “proper council” have had that the ministers present at the Webster meeting did not have?

The authors allege that “they [the Grand Rapids elders] did *not* at *any point* acknowledge that Franklin’s abuses were in many cases directly traceable to his commitment to Jim Hufstetler’s *Biblical Pastoral Oversight*” (127, underlining mine). At the time, Tom Lyon, pontificating from the West Coast, complained that Grand Rapids should share the blame for the mess in Webster (127-28). On what basis did he do so? Was there anything more than Franklin’s claim to suggest that Hufstetler’s book was to blame for his behavior? Is it possible that Franklin was trying to shift blame from himself? Have we ever seen this before in church history? Was Paul’s preaching to blame for the antinomian behavior of some who heard his gospel and concluded, “as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,” that they may “do evil, that good may come” (Rom. 3:8)? If Franklin’s abusive behavior is “directly traceable” to Hufstetler’s book, I invite the authors of *HCT* to draw the straight lines for us that we may see the truth of their allegation for ourselves. No such lines can be drawn—not even in the case of the quotation that they offer us on p. 115 (see above). The bottom line is that the meeting in Webster led to a resolution of the Franklin case—all

without the need to start a formal association beforehand.

A Final Word

This personal response to HCT already has exceeded my original design and threatens to become a book on its own. And so I will bring it to a close—not because there’s nothing left to criticize but because I have another life than unraveling the twisted cords of this “history.”

The authors of *HCT* justify repeating old slanders by saying, “Over the years the elders of Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle heard the testimony of many persons that established the charge . . . (of) grave authoritarian abuses” (101). But how many were there in fact? And who were they (other than the three beatified and unimpeachable witnesses cited)? And were they all independent witnesses? And were their personal motives considered or investigated? And what about the accuracy of their tales of abuse? Carlisle would argue that a big boogey-man lived in Montville. But was that the problem? Could it be that a big ear lived in Carlisle, an ear that was ready to receive any tale of woe from anyone who left TBC while blowing a trumpet to cover the noise of their own sin? *Shepherding God’s Flock* (1988) was a cowardly slap at Al Martin, without naming him or TBC. *HCT* has made up for that, but it is not more creditable or less cowardly than its predecessor. Pastor Malone says, “It does no shame to Christ or His church to be as honest about the errors of His fallible church as is the New Testament itself” (7). I agree. But it does bring shame to Christ when innuendo and slander are used by those who call themselves Christ’s servants and chroniclers of truth. It is hard for me to believe that Tom Chantry and David Dykstra are men of good will. It grieves me to say this, but like politicians, they tear men’s statements out of context and display them in the darkest light and shadows. Stefan Lindblad is reported as saying: “Perhaps the main reason for rejecting . . . creedal orthodoxy, is pride, hubris, arrogance” (222). I can only hope that, as with so much that is cited in *HCT*, Stefan is quoted out of context, for *HCT* has more of pride, hubris, and arrogance about it than all the non-associational “camp” rolled into one.

Are those accused of wrong-doing in *HCT* supposed to address the charges leveled against them generically? What are they to do with unspecified accusations from unnamed accusers—an alleged “chorus of complaints” without specification (95)? How shall they address vague, yet sweeping, charges? If these crimes happened at all, they did not happen in the aggregate but one at a time—in which case names and specifics should be available. Chantry and Dykstra tell us that they do not have documentation to do that, or that the details are too difficult to reveal; but they still want to make the charges generically. We have been challenged to tell “our side of the story”—but are we supposed to write a defense of our alleged crimes, even though the allegations have never been made to us? Which allegations should we address? Speaking for myself, if I have abused sheep, whether at TBC or subsequently, I invite them to come to me with the specifications that I am to address. But if complainers aren’t willing to do that, why should I or anyone else take them seriously?

HCT offers the dramatic question: “Will the Reformed Baptists face their history?” (210). I have a better question: Will thinking Reformed Baptists, especially the ones who really lived our history, recognize it once

Dykstra and Chantry and those who support them are done with it? I doubt it.

HCT proposes to be a history, but really it is a polemic told in the form of an action novel, with heroes and villains. As I read it, I was reminded of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and could not help seeing certain parallels. Al Martin is Saruman the White, dressed in white but actually the evil servant of the dark lord Sauron, who dwells in Mount Doom. His army is comprised of Orcs, twisted elves bred to press his cause and extend his evil kingdom. I suppose that I am an Orc. Walt Chantry is Gandalf the Grey, who serves Good. He also is a powerful wizard. His army, however, is made up of a few brave Hobbits and dwarves, a single noble Elf, and Aragon, the future King of Middle Earth (I will refrain from casting these parts). The real hero of the story, however, is Frodo Baggins, who takes the ring of power (that Saruman and Sauron want so desperately) to destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom. David Dykstra is our Frodo. But instead of taking the ring of power to Mount Doom, modern Frodo instead rescues Gandalf's dream from the ashes of RBA and carries the cause of Good to victory with the establishment of ARBCA.

Some may complain about my comparing *HCT* to a work of fiction. But fiction may be produced not just by inventing characters and events but also by selective, biased reporting about real people, places, and things. In some cases this is in the service of a political or other purpose. We even have a genre for such works—oxymoronically calling them “historical fiction.” *HCT* makes for an entertaining read (if you like reading slander), but you wouldn't want to use it as a history textbook in a Reformed Baptist seminary.

HCT plainly was rushed into print. But why the haste that could not even slow down to use a spell checker (e.g., “covenantalist”) or check for goofy hyphenation? Why couldn't time be taken to interview living witnesses (other than Walt Chantry), or to ask for input from the men being charged with pastoral and ecclesiastical crimes? Why no careful listening to A. N. Martin's Pastoral Theology lectures to see what actually was taught at TMA? Why not ask the allegedly abused sheep if they wanted to confront their abusers now with the same stories they poured into the ears of Walt Chantry, David Dykstra, and others? Are they at long last willing to make their accusations with everyone in the room?

If you have purchased *HCT*, I must ask: what was your motive for buying this book? Are you really interested in Reformed Baptist history (in which case, you have been ill-served and will be disappointed), or are you just curious about the negative things said about Al Martin and others (in which case, shame on you)?

Does anyone care any more about truth and righteousness? Chantry and Dykstra tell us that they are concerned for young pastors! But where is their concern for our unconverted children? Will Satan not use the mud they are slinging to plug the ears of our children to the ministry of good men whose only crime is that they did not share Carlisle's dream of “confessional associationalism”? Does this book advance the cause of Christ in the earth? And are the churches helped? Every sword turned against a brother in an unjustifiable cause is a sword that is not turned against the enemy of us all.

Pastor Blackburn thinks he sees “two cunning enemies” (Satan and the flesh) at work in the persons and activities of those who have been “overly zealous and hurtful to precious souls” (5-6). And once we read the

rest of *HCT* we know that this suspicion has to do with Al Martin and his army of Orcs. But what about Walt Chantry and his seemingly innocent band of Hobbits and dwarves? Is the hiss of the serpent and the lust of the flesh absent from their camp? Earl also has warned us that “too easily, saints on earth allow ministers to come between them and eclipse the Sun of Righteousness in heaven, who is the head of the church” (6). I assume that he thinks that this took place at TBC and in TMA. Rest easy, my brother, we all knew then and now still know the difference between Al Martin and Christ, even if some don’t think that we do. I hope others also know the difference between Walt Chantry and Christ.

I wish to make a closing appeal to all who are concerned in this matter—to the authors, readers, detractors, and defenders of *HCT*. Our Reformed Baptist movement is at a crossroads. Truly non-confessional men have stolen our name and are using it to promote errors far more dangerous than anything that will come out of our debates over “holding communion together,” “the covenant of works,” or “without passions.” If we cannot find a way to put away the pens which are turned against fellow Reformed Baptists, we may as well hand the usurpers of our reformation the keys and go home. I have raised my own pen in this response (something I was loathe to do). Had Psa. 58:1 not bound my conscience, I would never have done so. And I do not want to do so again.

We need a fresh infusion of good will into our movement. And I believe that men of good will among us should meet to speak of the subject of “confessional subscription.” It does not seem to me that that conversation is over. Perhaps we also need to remove from our Confession language which is vague or scripturally unsupportable, so that “strict subscription” (which, it seems to me, is the only truly workable model) can actually work without treading on *Sola Scriptura*. But all of that is “I believe” and “it seems to me.” I *know*, however, that the Great Commission is still in force. And I *know* that the greatest legacy for any pastor is the record of his own godly life and faithful ministry in the flock over which the Lord has made him an *overseer*. And I *know* that, if these are not our real priorities, the rest is a farce. Let us be up and going, engaged in our Father’s greatest business, leaving little questions to little minds. And let us rejoice in the spread of the gospel, even by those who do not form every letter as we do. There is a great fellowship for God’s people to be had in the great things of God. Let’s not trade it away or lose it for the sake of getting our way in everything.

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