

LOCAL AUTONOMY: HISTORICO-CRITICAL REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The Need for the Study

The Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC) Board of Trustees formed a committee to study the issue of Local Autonomy.¹ Unfortunately, the committee did not work as expected. Consequently, on the 69th General Assembly of the CPBC, “a resolution for the study of the definition, scope, and limitation of the Baptist’s Local Church Autonomy” was passed and adopted.² Two years later, on the 71st General Assembly of the same, another resolution was passed and approved for CPBC “to pursue the attempt to study Local Autonomy and come up with an official interpretation.”³ These were official initiatives to resolve the growing problem among CPBC member churches’ and CPBC-related institutions’ attitude, participation, and support to the Convention. The hands of CPBC leadership are apparently tied up that they cannot right away intervene on the problems of their members. This is because local leaders or some involved parties would often invoke Local Autonomy as basis to push the CPBC leaders away. Apparently, most problems such as conflict management, property management and the like are prevalent among local churches. There are numerous cases that have ended up in civil courts, local church split, and other unpleasant outcomes.

Indeed, Local Autonomy is one of the historic Baptist’s principles. Baptist history, since Europe and USA can attest to this. This principle is enshrined in the Constitution and By-Laws of CPBC. However, the charter up to its latest amendment is silent about the nature of Local Autonomy as a Baptist principle.⁴ It is probable that the absence of standard definition (scope and limitation) is the cause for relative interpretation and practice among CPBC constituents. Thus, there is an urgent need to conduct an investigation on the history and development of Local Autonomy, as one of the Baptist principles and to uncover fundamental issues undergirding it. This paper is an attempt to respond to that need.

¹ See CPBC BOT Minutes, 13 February 2004 Meeting.

² May 19-21, 2004, Capiz Evangelical Church, Roxas City.

³ May 23-25, 2006, University Church, CPU, Iloilo City.

⁴ The three CPBC By-Laws (1935, 1996, 2005) are not only silent of the meaning of Local Autonomy but of other Baptist principles as well. It is not surprising that relative interpretations are surfacing. The By-Laws renders itself inadequate guide for CPBC constituents.

The Objectives

This study is an attempt to respond to the resolution passed and approved during the 69th CPBC General Assembly calling for the study of the definition, scope, and limitation of the Baptists local church autonomy. The urgency of such need was augmented when after two years another resolution was passed and approved on the 71st CPBC General Assembly. The other resolution, however, was more specific – to study Local Autonomy and come up with an official interpretation. Also, it is on this mandate that this study responds.

To do so, this paper attempts to review the history of Local Autonomy since the Sixteenth Century Reformation to the present, highlighting its development from Europe (Old World), North America (New World) and the Philippines (CPBC). Facts and data would not be novel to informed readers, only new interpretations will be.

Since the problem of Local Autonomy is fundamentally linked with ecclesiology, this paper also attempts to reconstruct the Baptist understanding of the church in the light of the New Testament.

The outcome of this paper will be offered humbly to CPBC as a suggested reference for institutional and organizational action on the issue at hand.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is it happens at a moment when Local Autonomy is deemed very controversial in the Baptist world, especially in CPBC. Second, it is significant because empirically, this is one extensive work so far that put emphasis on Local Autonomy. Third, it is significant because it digs deeper on the issue and finds out that the problem of Local Autonomy is fundamentally a challenge of ecclesiology. Fourth, it is significant because of its historical and critical nature. In times when many Philippine Baptists are becoming more critical of Baptist faith, a critical review of history is a liberating event. Finally, this study is significant because it is intended as a guideline but not prescription on how to address specific issues in the church related to Local Autonomy. Given the historic Baptist emphasis on the Authority of Scripture over faith and practice, this study refers to specific NT passages that could be used as imperative in dealing with issues such as conflict management, property management and the like.

The results of this study could assist CPBC on its earnest and urgent need to understand Local Autonomy and formulate official definition of this principle. If this official definition is institutionalized it will eventually flow down to the grassroots through the initiative of dedicated CPBC workers whom the constituents look up to as having integrity and worthy of respect.

Expectations

It is expected that this study on Local Autonomy and its underlying issues will contribute to arouse in-depth discussion and organizational action. It is hoped that the finding and recommendations of this study will not remain in library bookshelves and session halls after lectures but will be institutionalized and permeate the faith and governance of CPBC and member churches and institutions.

I. BRIEF REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF LOCAL AUTONOMY: PAST TO THE PRESENT

Local Autonomy as a Baptist principle cannot be seen apart from the whole spectrum of Baptist beliefs and history. Likewise, Baptist History cannot be dissected away from the arena of Church history, inasmuch as the latter is inseparable from world history. This brief review is an attempt to highlight Local Autonomy in Baptist history. It seeks to identify the historical context that gave birth to Baptist faith, especially its emphasis on Local Autonomy. Since Baptists and other church historians are unanimous that Baptists faith originated in continental Europe¹, contemporarily with the 16th Century Reformation, the writer opted to take the latter event as a starting point. This is without prejudice to citing pre-Reformation events and beyond that is found relevant to the presentation.

To see Baptist beginnings in the proper setting, we must retrace the stages by which they arose. Early Baptists claim they belong to the Protestants.² Thus, the 16th century Reformation is a strategic point to start. This is where a major paradigm shift in the Christian Church took place.

1. 16th Century Reformation

The word “Reformation” describing the revolution of the sixteenth century is in a sense, a misnomer. This is so for Robert Baker: “The principal events did not center in reform but in schism.”³ There were sporadic clamor and dissent against the Roman Catholic Church and the Empire. One can hardly separate the religious from the political because the two were grossly entwined.⁴ The church herself triggered the schism, clamor and dissent. For K. S. Latourette, “The Institutions which had been erected as bulwarks of the faith – monasteries, the clergy, and especially the papacy – were honeycombed with corruption.”⁵ This situation of the church was carried over from the Medieval Age when the disintegration heightened.

Schism, which eventually led to the Reformation, came into being as a reaction or opposition to the church by many of her own. The “prince” of them was a scholarly monk named Martin Luther.⁶ In studying the New Testament, especially Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Luther found out the error in the doctrine of Indulgence, which the Pope, for some financial motive was selling at that time.⁷ Luther, at first, did not intend to break away from the Roman Catholic Church; his

¹ Though there are varying positions to the historical events and factors that led to Baptist faith. H. C. Vedder declares that Baptist originated from English Congregationalists. Norman H. Maring & Winthrop S. Hudson denies that Baptist had some historical connection from Continental Anabaptists. But William L. Lumpkin and Franklin Hamlin Littell affirm so, citing historical and circumstantial evidence for indispensable connection between the two. The researcher adheres to the latter.

² This term was first coined in the Diet of Spier (1529) when the Lutheran princes made a formal protest against the action of the RC over Lutheran churches districts. (See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Harper and Brothers Publishers: New York, 1953, p. 727.)

³ Robert A. Baker, *A Summary of Christian History*, Broadman Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 1959, p. 86.

⁴ Cf. Lewis W. Spitz, *The Rise of Modern Europe: The Protestant Reformation 1517-1559*, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1985, p. 59-66.

⁵ K. S. Latourette, 1953, p. 684.

⁶ Cf. R. A. Baker, 1959, p. 196-197.

⁷ Cf. L. W. Spitz, 1985, p. 52-53; R. A. Baker, 1959, p. 147ff. “The financial gain secured by this fashion was not sufficient to care for the vast expenditures, legitimate and otherwise, of the papacy. Especially during the fourteenth century the papacy utilized every possible means for increasing its revenue. Some of these methods were through annates, collations, reservations, expectancies, dispensations, indulgencies, simony, commendations, the *jus spoliatorum*, tithing, and special assessments.” (For vivid explanation as to what these are, see p. 147-150.)

intension was only to reform her. But his attack on indulgences also became a grave assault on the authority of the pope and the church. The church authorities persecuted Luther that left him with no choice but to leave and start his own.

As mentioned earlier, there was, almost all over Western Europe, a sporadic clamor against Rome. The courageous act of Luther paved the way for the coming out of other Reformers, such as Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin in Switzerland, the Anabaptists and the Radical “left wing” Reformation, and the Anglican.¹

As charged, the church was guilty of the following excesses in the religious life like (a) Unhealthy veneration of saints; (b) Disorganized pilgrimage; piety was distorted (marked by immorality and corruption); (c) Reform was needed in ecclesiastical administration; (d) The papacy was defective; (e) The episcopate was feudal; (f) Church practices e.g. worship, rites and rituals had become degenerated and poor in quality; (g) The lower clergy and laity were in bondage of poverty and misery; and, (h) The whole church is under the hierarchical power of the Pope and the church was grossly entwined with the state.²

Thus the Baptist Movement somehow owed its development from the sixteenth-century Reformation.

2. In the Old World (Europe)

2.1. A look at Baptist “Origins”

Historians have differed in locating Baptist beginnings. Some Baptist historians such as W. H. Brackney declare, “It seems clear today that Baptist faith had its origin within English Congregationalism.”³ Although there is a widely circulated notion that Baptist churches have had an “unbroken succession” (Successionist Theory)⁴ from the first century, there is no reason to give credence to such a fanciful theory.⁵ Historical evidence does not support the idea that a chain of Christian churches with definite Baptists traits has existed apart from the mainstream of Christianity.⁶

¹ Cf. L. W. Spitz, 1985, p. 145-236.

² Cf. D. Diel, Jr. *Local Autonomy of the Baptist Church: A Review in Light of Tradition, Practice and Holy Scriptures*, in CPBC Assembly Souvenir Program. 2004; N. D. Bunda, *A Brief Review of Church History, Baptist Faith and Principles*, in N. D. Bunda, et. al., eds., *Revisiting Faith Resources*, Halad Prints Collective: Iloilo City, Phil., 2002, p. 88. While marked by the negative as mentioned, the time before the Reformation also displays encouraging aspects. These are the following: a.) The deeply religious trend of the time – gifts to the church, church constructions, impressive religious arts, brotherhoods/sisterhoods and charitable institutions (hospitals, alms, old-age houses); and b.) The church was also active in the religious education of the people that led to deep religious piety.

³ William H. Brackney, ed. *Baptist Life and Thought: A Sourcebook*, Judson Press: Valley Forge, 1998, p. 23-24.

⁴ See W. Morgan Patterson, *Baptist Successionism: A Critical View*, The Judson Press: Valley Forge, 1969, p. 13. Cf. Nestor D. Bunda and Francis Neil G. Jalandon, *A Review of Baptist Heritage and Principles*, “This viewpoint goes beyond mere “continuation of biblical teachings” and declares that Baptist churches actually existed in an unbroken chain since the time of Christ and John the Baptist. Commonly referred to as “Landmarkism” or the “Trail of Blood” theory (J.M. Carroll wrote a book of supposed Baptist history by this name), this view declares that those churches which stood outside the influence of the Roman Catholic Church at various times in church history were, in actuality although not in name, Baptist churches. What made them Baptists was their refusal to accept infant baptism, or, said another way, their refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church as a Christian entity. However, many of the historical churches which Landmarkists labeled as Baptist churches were actually “heretical” with regards to doctrine.”

⁵ Norman H. Maring, Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1991, p. 11.

⁶ W. H. Brackney, ed., 1998, p. 19.

The Baptist Movement appeared in Europe in connection with the “left wing”¹ of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.² For Lumpkin, “It has not been proven ... that the Baptist Movement has a genetic connection with any of the Pre-Reformation evangelical groups”. Nevertheless, there are manifestations of indirect connection. On this he wrote:

Careful study of their teachings leads one to judge that they reflected the outlook and some of the distinctive emphases of such groups as the Waldenses. At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were people in every country of Western Europe who earnestly protested against the corruption in the church who, therefore, welcomed the protests of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. Such were ... Anabaptists. Having much in common with the churchly reformers, these folks were at first identified with their movements, and they separated from them when the Reformation seemed to fall short of a full application of principles clearly enunciated by the Reformers.³

Another popular view connects Baptists with the Anabaptists⁴ on the continent of Europe, particularly with a Mennonite⁵ group in Holland. In spite of considerable research, no clear evidence has demonstrated that Baptist origins are traceable to a Mennonite source⁶, except for the association of John Smyth and his members with Mennonite, descendants of Anabaptists in Holland. Brackney records:

In 1610 John Smyth and his English followers in Waterland, after considerable discussion with the liberal Mennonite community there, agreed to accept the Dutch Confessions of 1580, which contained the Mennonites’ advanced views on baptism, war, oaths, and civil government. A shortened version of that confession was drawn up, translated, and submitted to Smyth’s congregation. The *Short Confession* (1610), signed by John Smyth and thirty-nine men and women, served as the basis for the General Baptist when they returned to England, *with their new leader, Thomas Helwys*.⁷

This may not be direct historical evidence, but for Dr. Diel, this is a “circumstantial evidence”⁸ or indirect proof that confirms historic relationship between the two. This will be discussed in detail in the next segment.

¹ Left – Socialistic, group or section favoring socialism; socialist collectively. See, Lawrence Urdang, ed., *The Oxford Desk Dictionary*, American Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995.

² William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confession of Faith*, Judson Press: Philadelphia, 1959, p. 11.

³ W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 11.

⁴ Cf. Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origin of Sectarian Protestantism*, Starr King Press: Beacon Hill, Boston, 1958, p. XV. Anabaptists literally means “those who baptize again”. It is a label given by the Reformers and Catholic Leaders alike to the “left wing” movement who were disappointed with the compromise reform done by Luther, Anglican Church, Zwingli, Calvin and others. They preferred to be called “Brethren” as how the NT believers preferred to call each other. Anabaptists is a sweeping and inaccurate classification of the movement because there were various beliefs among these left groups. Among them there were varying tendencies, which their enemies (catholic and reformers alike) simply labeled “rebaptizers” because of this common practice among them.

⁵ Followers of Menno Simmons, an Anabaptist leader. Menno with a colleague and contemporary, Dirck Philipsz, in “The Seven Ordinances of the True Church” (c. 1560) listed the institutions in terms familiar even today: 1. true teaching, correct ministry; 2. proper use of two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper; 3. foot-washing; 4. evangelical separation; 5. brotherly love (including mutual admonition and communal sharing); 6. keeping all His commandments; 7. accepting suffering and persecutions. (A section of *The Church of God*, “in the Enchiridion; GHW?M, Section 11, pp. 226-60, in F. H. Littell, 1958, p. 42.)

⁶ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 11.

⁷ W. H. Brackney, ed., 1998, p. 35. Italics mine.

⁸ D. J. Diel, Jr., in CPBC 70th Assembly Souvenir Program. 2005.

It should be acknowledged further that Baptists share with Anabaptist in general a vision of the believers' church. Nevertheless, "there is a spiritual kinship between these pioneers of the Radical Reformation and Baptist. The Anabaptists suffered persecution for their advocacy of believer's baptism and the believers' church, as did Baptists. In the United States, Baptists have joined with descendants of the Anabaptists in conferences devoted to strengthening support for their common acceptance of the concept of the believers' Church."¹

2.2. The Development of Baptist Faith

Baptists originated from English Congregationalists.² This is true as Lumpkin explains:

The English Reformation, in spite of formative influences from the Continent, is generally agreed to have its roots in native soil. Thus, in English manifestation, the Baptist Movement reflected, particularly, a heritage from an older native reform spirit as well as a heritage from sixteenth-century Continental Anabaptism and Calvinism...³

It should be noted that Anabaptism arrived in England, coming by way of the Netherlands, early in the reformatory period. This radical reform movement spread after 1525 with amazing rapidity, from Switzerland to many parts of Western Europe. About Anabaptism, Lumpkin wrote:

The Anabaptists held that the New Testament church is a voluntary community of individuals who have been transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit, in an experience of grace, and that the baptism is a "symbol and seal of the faith of the regenerated." From these views there followed the doctrines of the brotherhood of baptized believers and the separation of the church from the state and the world.⁴

With the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, Church and State were practically coexistent. All citizens of a territory, except those excommunicated, were held to be members of the established Church. The Anabaptists were despised by the reformers for insisting that the Church is composed only of deliberate followers of Christ, that admission to it is by confession and baptism, that it is autonomous, and it keeps itself pure by pure discipline.⁵ Anabaptists were bitterly persecuted in England, which years afterwards led to the loss of their organized life and witness. Yet the spirit and distinctive emphases of Anabaptism survived on the English scene. "Principles of Anabaptism became a part of the thinking of zealous Englishmen who were seeking a more thorough reformation of the church in their land."⁶ Evidently, Radical Reformation through Anabaptism has strongly penetrated England second to North Germany and Netherlands.⁷ With

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 11-12.

² See Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of Baptist*, American Baptist Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1891, p.108-109.

³ W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 12. As for "an older native reform spirit" Lumpkin mentioned the Lollards, fourteenth-century co-laborers of John Wyclif, whose movement of evangelical dissent continued in many part of England until well into the sixteenth century.

⁴ W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 13.

⁵ Cf. F. H. Littell, 1958, p. XII-XVIII.

⁶ Heath, *Contemporary Review*, p. 400, in W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 14.

⁷ Cf. F. H. Littell, 1958, p. 2-12.

these antecedents, we are ready to see how the Baptist Movement came to being in English soil.

Again, Baptists originated from English Congregationalists. The latter traces its origin from English Puritanism¹, which is a protest against the Anglican Church. Having expected a thorough housecleaning in the Church of England after the break with Rome occurred, many were disappointed that Queen Elizabeth chose middle way between Roman Catholicism and the stricter reforms inspired by Calvin's Geneva. Therefore, the Puritans sought to reform the English church more thoroughly "according to the Word of God." Their program called for the removal of certain practices reminiscent of what they called "popery". Objections were raised to the too much ritual of the Book of Common Prayer and the wearing of special garb at the Lord's Supper. As the movement developed, its aims were expanded to include a demand that a *presbyterial* system of church government be substituted for the Episcopal polity. The authority of bishops would then be transferred to presbyteries.

Although these Puritans stood for a deepened spiritual life in the churches, they did not reject two critical assumptions that were almost universally held in Europe. First, they expected everyone in a given geographical area to be a member of the parish church. Thus, they had no objection to laws requiring that all infants be baptized. Second, they acknowledged the right of civil ruler to supervise the life of the church. In their view, it was the duty of the state to support and protect the church by wise legislation, by financial support, and by suppression of heresy. In both of these views, the Puritan outlook accorded with that of the Church of England, as well as with those of the Roman Catholics and most Protestants in Europe.

Out of this Puritan wing of the Anglican Church, however, there developed a Congregationalist party which did not accept the idea that everyone automatically belongs to the church. Rejecting the concept of the "parish church" with its mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers, the leaders of this group declared that visible churches ought to be composed of "visible saints"; they insisted that churches should admit to membership only those persons who could testify to their own Christian experience. With membership restricted, congregations were transformed into "gathered" instead of "parish" congregations. Having covenanted to form a congregation, the members of each church became responsible for governing their own affairs.

In taking this step, however, the early advocates of Congregationalist principles still stopped short of pursuing their basic contention to its logical conclusion. Although they wished to limit church membership to believers, they were reluctant to exclude children completely. Thus, they retained baptism for the children of the church members, and said that churches are composed of visible saints and "their children". It was expected of course, that when these children grew up they would be able to testify to God's saving work in their lives. They would then be admitted to the Lord's Table and to full membership. In actuality, however, when the baptized children became adults, many of them were unable to testify to any experience of conversion. The presence of such persons who had been baptized, but had been unable to qualify for full membership in the church, was embarrassing. The practice of infant baptism is inconsistent with the idea of a "gathered" church. Dissatisfaction also arose at another point. The

¹ Cf. Heath, *Contemporary Review*, p. 400, in W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 14. "The Anabaptists were Puritans before Puritanism had sprung into recognized existence, and held substantially all that Puritans afterwards contended for..."

Congregationalist party still adhered to the idea that the civil government was responsible for the welfare of the church. Although they claimed the right to withdraw from the Church of England, they hoped for a day when they would enjoy state support as the official faith. It soon became apparent to some that this position too was also inconsistent.

Those who advocated a clean break with the Church of England were labeled *Separatists*. There were others who held a Congregational theory, but were unwilling to break away from the Church of England. Out of the Separatist group came the Pilgrims who eventually founded the settlement at Plymouth, New England in 1620, whereas the less radical Puritans started the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. In the New World, unhampered by the civil government or the older churches, both groups found opportunity to translate their theories into practice.

In the rise of a people with Congregationalists' sentiments may be seen a movement which reached the very brink of adopting principle that would have made them Baptists. In the ferment of religious ideas in the seventeenth century, it is not surprising that some persons decided to take the next step. Consistent adherence to the gathered-church principle required the rejection of infant baptism and of the state church concept. When people were ready to take these two steps, the Baptist arrived on the scene.¹

2.3. Origin from English Congregationalism Illustrated

In some cases Baptists emerged from Separatists. In other instances their background was that of non-separating Congregationalists. In many ways, the Baptists continued to resemble Congregationalist. They maintained the idea of the "gathered church", and they emphasized the importance of the local church in governing its own affairs. At only two important points did the Baptists take a different line: namely, by insisting that believer's baptism was necessary to the gathered-church idea, and by advocating the **freedom of churches from the control of civil government**.²

The first illustration of the transition from Congregationalist to Baptist principles is found in a Separatist congregation that fled from England to Amsterdam, Netherlands. When their pastor, John Smyth, concluded that infant baptism was wrong and persuaded the congregation of the correctness of his views, the church was reconstituted upon a basis of believer's baptism. Smyth was a *Se-Baptist*; he baptized himself and then baptized the others. Smyth was also convinced that a church, which is responsible to Christ as its head, must have freedom from ecclesiastical and civil interference. This conviction led him to publish one of the earliest defenses of **liberty of conscience**.³

Shortly after Smyth had baptized himself and his congregation, he was criticized by other Separatists-in-exile for his action. If he insisted upon being *rebaptized*, he could have applied to local Mennonites that might have led to a rebaptism and perhaps to union with them. Some members of his congregation, however, saw no reason to question the validity of their baptism by Smyth. When their pastor persisted in his negotiation with the Dutch Mennonites, this group,

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 12-13.

² N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 14. Bold for emphasis.

³ H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, Broadman Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 1990.p. 14. Bold for emphasis.

now led by Thomas Helwys, returned to England. In 1612, they formed the first Baptist church on English soil.

These first Baptists had been affected by current theological discussions about the role of free will in the process of salvation. They adopted an *Arminian*¹ position supporting free will, which was anathema to the strictly *Predestinarian* Calvinists. Because these Baptists asserted that the atonement of Christ was sufficient to save all human beings, not just the elect, their adherence to the concept of a general atonement led to their being called *General Baptists*. Although these General Baptists experienced some growth during the seventeenth century, their movement dwindled after 1700 and never had much influence upon the mainstream of Baptist development. It is important to note that these Baptists limited baptism to those who had made a profession of faith and **opposed all interference by the civil government.**² Thus, they were differentiated from the Congregationalist party with whom they had been associated.

A second instance of Baptist beginnings, unrelated to that of the Smyth group, came about in 1638. Several people withdrew from a Congregationalist church in London to form a new church on the basis of believer's baptism. The parent Church had been Congregationalist in its emphasis upon the concept of a gathered Church, but it had shied away from complete separation from the Church of England. Sharing the general outlook of the nonseparating Congregationalists, these Baptists were more typical Calvinists than were the General Baptists. Holding the doctrine of "particular" atonement (Christ having died only for the elect), they were known as Particular Baptists. Living in complete isolation from each other, the General and Particular Baptists developed in different ways. The principles that these groups had in common, distinguishing them from their fellow dissenters, were the practice of believers' baptism and a specific **theory of religious liberty.**

The third case of an independent Baptist beginning saw the leading spirit on an American colonist, Roger Williams. "Having moved from being a moderate Puritan to a strong Separatist, he **denied the right of civil government to interfere in matters of conscience** at all. Expelled from the Massachusetts Bay settlement, he established the new colony of Rhode Island, where in 1639 he joined with others to form a church on the basis of believer's baptism. He himself was associated with the Baptist church at Providence for only few weeks, and the Providence church exercised little influence upon the spread and development of the Baptist cause in America. Once more, however, it may be seen how Baptist emerged, logically and naturally out of the Congregationalist setting by refusing to baptize infants and by affirming the freedom of the church from the authority of the state."³

This historical development is implicit about Local Autonomy as evident in Baptist understanding of church polity. As stated, early Baptists asserted on their view of the church, different from that of the Reformers, especially the Anglican

¹ Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609 from 1603 professor at Leiden) rejected the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Salvation, he taught, certainly depends solely on God's grace. Man has the freedom to receive this grace or reject it. This view was more Erasmian and humanistic than Reformed. His opponents accused him of *Socinianism* (Unitarians) and semi-Pelagianism (Pelagianism). In 1604 he engaged in a public debate with his colleague Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641, who struggled a *Supralapsarian* doctrine of predestination). The struggle lasted until the death of Arminius, and its effect continued for some years. See Alasdair I. C. Heron, in, Erwin Fahlbusch, et. al. eds., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Brill. Vol. 1A, 1999. p. 128.

² Bold for emphasis

³ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 11-16. Bold for emphasis

reform. Baptists, like Anabaptists, as quoted above sees the church as “voluntary community of individuals who have been transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit, in an experience of grace, and that the baptism is a ‘symbol and seal of the faith of the regenerated.’” Thus, they differ from the Reformers’ understanding of the church. Believers’ baptism and regenerated membership are explicit here. However, the development does not end here. Baptist church, as an organization had to tackle its relationship with the civil government. Thus the principles, as highlighted above, such as, “**Freedom of churches from the control of civil government**”, “**liberty of conscience**”, “**theory of religious liberty**”, and the like, were developed. All these sprung out from the emphasis on the “Authority of the Scripture as rule of faith and practice”.¹ By this, the early Baptist believed that the church is autonomous from any authority – religious hierarchy and civil government – except for the authority of the Jesus Christ, as recorded in the scriptures, and as witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. It is on this milieu that Local (church) Autonomy, as a Baptist principle emerged.

The early Baptist churches emerged in 17th century England as autonomous units. Each church had an ordained leader (minister, pastor, or teacher) and deacons elected by the members. Some churches also had elders while others appointed messengers to organize new churches or minister to those churches lacking a leader. Each church disciplined its own member, using a variety of practices, and each congregation kept its own records of membership and discipline.

Congregational autonomy also resulted in a variety of worship patterns. Gradually the Particular Baptists (Calvinists) began to form loosely organized region and urban association so as to put forth a common confession. Afterwards the General Baptists (Arminian) followed suit. Eventually all but the Seventh Day Baptists followed this trend. With the formation of regional and national associations came more uniformity of polity, offices, praxis, and creed.²

Thus, the idea of Local Autonomy as a church polity was already manifest in the outlook of early Baptist in the Old World, most particularly in England. This idea is closely knitted with their struggle to be in the church that is consistent with the New Testament church polity.

Baptists Movement originated in Europe, but the movement flourished in the New World. Briefly, we will see how it started and whether Local Autonomy, as manifest in the Old World, was continued in America.

3. In the New World (USA)

The United States of America (USA), with more than 28 million Baptists, developed as the center of world Baptist strength. In the seventeenth century, the first Baptist churches were organized in America. Roger Williams initiated the establishment of the first Baptist church in Rhode Island in 1639. In 1638, Ezekiel Holliman baptized Williams by sprinkling. Afterwards, Williams baptized Holliman and ten others. About 1644, John Clarke established a second church in Newport. Mark Lucar, immersed in England in 1642, became a member of the Newport church, and introduced **baptism by immersion** in the US. Williams

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 7.

² See W. H. Brackney, ed., 1998, p. 47-61. Brackney records an English Baptists Confession of Faith, probably the earliest which Thomas Helwys (1556-1616) authored. The confession (1611) borrowed much from Helwys’ association with John Smyth, and the Dutch Mennonite community. It strongly asserts the congregational autonomy of believers’ church tradition.

soon left the church he founded and the Rhode Island Baptists were soon divided into three groups – General Six Principle Baptists who believed in Christ's general atonement, Particular Baptists, who as Calvinists believed in limited atonement, and Seventh Day Baptists.¹

Baptist Movement in colonial America, like in Europe, also suffered continued persecution because of their faith principles:

Neither the Puritan establishments in New England nor the Anglican establishments in the South would grant them liberty of worship. Weak and unsure of themselves, the early Baptists had to overcome years of prejudice stemming back to the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 and the Munsterite Rebellion of 1535-1536, both of them were blamed upon the Baptist (or Anabaptists, as their enemies continued to label them in America).²

3.1. The Struggle for Religious Liberty

The Baptist struggle for religious liberty in America can be viewed almost as two separate stories. Political and religious laws varied widely between the New England and the Southern colonies, with the middle colonies from the first forming a buffer zone of religious toleration.

In New England the Congregational Church was established by law and supported by public taxation. Baptists there struggled against popular prejudice and against the various Exemption Laws that at times regulated the terms of their payment of taxes to support their opponent's church. Their primary spokesman was Isaac Backus, a Massachusetts pastor who drew insights from such diverse sources as John Locke and Roger Williams to develop his view for religious liberty.

In the South, Baptists faced popular prejudice everywhere, and pressures from the Anglican Church in areas where the Church had any real establishment. John Leland of Virginia became the most prominent Baptist spokesman for religious liberty. Baptists in the South faced nothing comparable to the Exemption Laws of New England, but they did face other laws whose intent was to restrict their freedom of worship and preaching, and to coerce taxes and support of the Anglican Church.³

At first the Baptists in Puritan and Anglican colonies sought only toleration, the right to worship as they pleased; not until 1740s did they launch a concerted effort for **religious equality and separation of church and state**. The Baptists tried to persuade their neighbors to grant them exemption from religious taxes to support the established church. Occasionally, they appealed to the King in Council for justice. As a result, they were considered in the 1760s to be opponents of the movement for colonial independence. In Virginia, Baptist ministers were mobbed and jailed in the years 1763 to 1775 because they refused to ask civil authorities for license to preach.⁴

By 1800, according to some calculations, Baptists had become the largest denomination in America. Influences that led to such an incredible turn in Baptists conditions in the New World include such factors as the impact of Great

¹ Cf. H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, Broadman Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 1990, p. 82ff, 142ff ; William H. Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life and Thought: A Sourcebook*, Judson Press: Valley Forge, 1983, p. 95-161.

² W. H. Brackney, ed., 1983, p. 109.

³ H. L. McBeth, 1990, p. 170.

⁴ W. H. Brackney, ed., 1983, p. 109-110. Bold for emphasis.

Awakening¹, the improved social status of Baptists, this winning of religious liberty, their willingness to form associations to strengthen the churches and lead in planting new ones, and their preference for a style of theology and worship that encouraged evangelism and church growth.²

As soon as the Baptist churches became sufficiently numerous, they proceeded to organize into associations. This arrangement has proved eminently conducive to the prosperity of the body. Carefully guarding against the assumption of ecclesiastical power, and avoiding all interference with the affairs of individual churches, the ministers and the delegates who assembled from time to time exercised a brotherly supervision over the Baptist cause, and often “devised liberal things”³ on its behalf. Personal edification was promoted by the religious services; Christian friendship was renewed and extended; important questions of doctrine and practice were discussed, and advice given in difficult cases; weak and destitute churches were assisted; and plans for the wider diffusion of the Gospel truth were originated. Almost all Baptists denominational enterprises may be referred to the influence of these associational gatherings. The Philadelphia Association of 1707 was the first of its kind. This Association is still a large and flourishing body, notwithstanding the numerous offshoots that it has given out. There were seventeen other Associations in the United States during this time.⁴

At first, Baptists have preferred *cooperation* over exaggerated *independence*. Therefore, when they reached a sufficient number in an area, they grouped their churches into *associations*. In England, Particular Baptists associations leaned over backwards to avoid any hint of superintendency over the churches, but the General Baptist associations frankly assumed and exercised some power over the churches. The earliest continuing association in America, the Philadelphia Association, was founded in 1707. In its early years, the Association played its role by ear, so to speak, but some feared it might assume some church prerogatives.⁵

Local Autonomy, in the New World, took shape as a struggle for religious liberty. At first, it was an external struggle; later it became internal. At first, it was an attempt of the American Baptist to free the church from control of state authority and dictate of religious hierarchy. Later, when they won the struggle for religious liberty, they also had to struggle with the tension of relationship among local churches. Yet, as discussed above, local Baptist churches maintained their autonomy while engaging in regional and national associations⁶.

In 1814, the interest in foreign missions encouraged the Baptists to organize the first national Baptist organization: the General Missionary Convention of the Baptists Denomination in the US for Foreign Missions (or the Triennial Convention). Baptists later formed different national bodies to coordinate the work

¹ Also known as Revivalism – refers to concerted efforts among evangelical churches to revitalize the spiritual ardour of their members and to win new adherents. Revivalism in the modern form can be attributed to that common element in Anabaptism, Puritanism, German pietism and Methodism in the 17th and 18th centuries which stressed personal religious experience (*Herzensreligion*), the priesthood of all believers and holy living, in protest against established church systems which seemed excessively sacramental, sacerdotal and secularistic. Each of these pietistic movements contributed to the revival tradition. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, W. Benton Publishers, EB, Inc.: NY, USA, vol. 19, 1965, p. 240

² H. L. McBeth, 1990, p. 142.

³ J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Present Time*, Elliot Stock: London, 1871, p. 460.

⁴ J. M. Cramp, 1871, p. 460-461.

⁵ H. L. McBeth, 1990, p. 146.

⁶ The Philadelphia Association, in 1749, adopted an Essay, written by Benjamin Griffith, which defined the powers of an association as compared to the rights reserved to the churches. The full text appears in H. L. McBeth, 1990, p. 146-147.

of the various Societies or convention boards. The American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (ABFMS) that started missionary work in the Philippines in 1900 was the name adopted later by the General Missionary Convention of the Baptists Denomination in the US for Foreign Missions.¹

4. In the Philippines²

The history of the Philippine Baptists began in 1898 when Braulio Manikan was baptized by immersion and subsequently started to translate the Bible into Hiligaynon together with Eric Lund. By 1900, the American Baptist mission started in Iloilo, Philippines with Manikan and Lund as their first missionaries. The coming of the Protestant missions to the Philippines including the Baptist missionaries was a consequence of the victory of the United States over Spain.

Through the efforts of both Filipino men and women and American Baptist missionaries, congregations were organized in different places in Western Visayas, especially in the rural areas of the provinces of Iloilo, Capiz, Negros Occidental, Antique, Aklan, and Romblon; later in Mindoro, Palawan, Mindanao, and in some areas of Luzon. The missionaries brought with them their Baptist tradition and the American way of life, which greatly determined the features of the local congregations. The translation work and the distribution of the *Hiligaynon* Bible enabled the inhabitants to read in their own language. The Bible immensely influenced many people in the rural areas to join the Baptist churches.

Dr. Nestor Bunda, a Filipino Baptist historian, accounted the “six basic principles” that guided the American missionaries in teaching the converts and in organizing Baptists congregations³ or *local churches*. The idea of local autonomy was manifest in these six principles, but expressed in synonymous terms. These are the principles and their meanings, and how the rule of local autonomy is related to the rest of the principles. In other words, it is best to see these Baptists beliefs as whole and not as fragmented concepts.

The first basic principle introduced was ... “authority of the Bible”. Baptist adherents were expected to be “loyal” to the Scripture for it was regarded as the final authority superior to the authority of the pope, bishopric, creeds and confessions of faith....

The second principle stressed was “the competency of the soul to work out its religious destiny”. This principle recognizes the right of an individual person to interpret its own belief in Jesus Christ based on its understanding of the Bible. According to this principle, the individual is also able and responsible to work out its salvation by accepting Christ as the personal Savior. No other individual or a church could save a person. Salvation consists in faith in and through Jesus Christ only.

The third principle was the belief in “a regenerated church membership”. The church as revealed in the New Testament was composed exclusively of “regenerated persons”... In order to become a member of a Baptist church a person had to accept Jesus Christ in public and submit to baptism by immersion....

¹ N. D. Bunda, et. al., eds., 2002, p. 95-96.

² For comprehensive Philippine Baptist history, see Nestor D. Bunda, *A Mission History of the Philippine Baptist Churches 1898 – 1998: From a Philippine Perspective*, University of Hamburg Dissertation, 1999; and Raymond W. Beaver, *Partners in Mission: American Baptists and Philippine Baptists in Mission Together (1900-1985)*, ABC Printing Center: Iloilo City, Philippines, 1988.

³ N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 96.

The fourth principle, which should guide the action of the Baptist congregation was “democracy and independence of the local church”. The local church was important in itself and decided for itself. No higher ecclesiastical authority had the right to dictate in matters like ordaining, hiring or dismissing a pastor. The local church manages its affairs through democratic means whereby pastors and lay people had equal rights to decide on almost all issues affecting the church. Ecclesiastical structures were created in a way that the local churches were autonomous. This type of church structure had a close resemblance to that of the American Baptist churches which adhered to the same principle.

The fifth principle, the “separation of church and state”, stresses that the allegiance of the church is only to God through Jesus Christ. It was denied that the State should give favor to any religion or church bodies. It was supposed to rule only the political affairs of the country and not the church. Similarly, it was not accepted that the church meddled in politics and run the government.

The sixth principle, the “principle of religious liberty”, emphasizes the freedom of a person to choose a religion without external interference and the freedom to join any religious body.¹

Bunda added that many missionaries thought this was a way of “Americanizing” the recipient Filipinos. Charles W. Briggs, especially emphasized that to Americanize the recipients, he encouraged the building of separate Baptist communities² whose members were trained for the propagation of American ideals. Thus, the systems that were imbued in the establishment of schools and other Baptist institutions were patterned to that of the American Baptists’.

About the use of the word “independence”, Bunda noted:

The word “independence”, as used by the Philippine Baptist churches is not common. The usual term used by most Baptist congregation in other countries, especially in the United States of America is “autonomy”, rather than “independence”. Yet the word “autonomy” could mean either “independence” or “the condition of being autonomous. Perhaps the Philippine Baptists choose the word “independence” because in the 1930s they were struggling for independence not only from the American Baptist missionary leadership but also from the United States governance.³

4.1. 1935 – 1971

Under Japanese occupation, the Philippine population was always in mortal danger. Many of them including some of the numerous Philippine Baptists died in a war which was not of their own making. For the CPBC the war was a setback and in spite of its devastating effect, many Philippine Baptists continued to serve their churches. They survived and the war tested their faith. During the war, they continued to propagate the gospel, to study the Bible, to hold communion and worship services, to help the wounded in battle, and to visit American missionaries who were hiding or imprisoned. They also established closer

¹ N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 96-99.

² Examples of these Baptist communities are mostly found in the Province of Iloilo: Ito, Cabatuan; Good Hope and Forward, Janiway; and Bingawan; and Capiz: Bag-ong Bario and Libertad, Tapaz. Majority of the population in the said communities are Baptist by religious affiliation.

³ N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 98, footnote 6.

interdenominational relationships with other Christian churches and started to reconcile with schismatic Baptists who had separated from them in 1925. The latter was one among the noteworthy events during the war.

CPBC and Doane Baptist – which had split in 1925 as a result of a conflict among Baptist groupings in the United States. The reconciliation came to an abrupt end when the American missionaries returned after the war claiming the leadership position. Unfortunately the Baptist churches split again.¹

Women Baptists were prominent in serving their church and country. They supported or even participated in the guerrilla resistance movement against the Japanese invaders fighting for a nationwide liberation. The Philippine Baptists struggled for self-reliance. Church members organized financial and material support to their pastors and churches. Philippine Baptists took lead in their churches when the American missionaries vacated their positions implementing the programs of CPBC effectively.

The Philippine Baptists continued their religious activities not only for the survival of the Baptist churches in the Philippine but also in their service for the liberation of their country.

In many ways the desire of Philippine Baptist leaders, which was to empower the laypersons in the Baptist churches so that they could serve the people within their area became partly realized during the Second World War.

For the first time in the history of the Philippine Baptist churches, the work was carried out without any financial and personal assistance from the American Baptist Missionaries. On the contrary, the Philippine Baptists raised financial, economic, moral and security support for the missionaries who were hiding or in prison houses.

Evident during this war time experience, the competence (soul competency) of the Philippine Baptist individuals and churches marked by independence (local autonomy) in taking initiatives and working together (Interdependence/Associational) with other churches and even denominations in carrying over the work of the Lord for peace, justice and welfare of people.² On how they carried this out, Bunda wrote:

Without any exceptions all Baptist pastors accounted in 1941 continued their service in the churches. In danger and need the pastors remained with the people. It was reported that there was a constant demand for the Protestant pastor, especially in children's dedication, marriages and funerals of the Evangelicals, the Aglipayan, and even some liberal Catholics when a priest of either was hard to secure. This partly helped to ease out sharp edges of prejudice of other religions against the Evangelicals.³

¹ Johnny V. Dela Fuente, 1996, September 12, Interview, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 204. The cause of this controversy, D. Diel, Jr. asserted, was not just a matter of educational policy of the Home Board and of some missionaries. On the contrary it was "a result of a wider and deeper theological controversy" that swept the United States of America during the 1920s and early 1930s. The "main issue" he maintained, "being the 'pure Gospel' or the 'social Gospel'; which means, either the preaching of the 'pure Gospel' or the implementation of the consequence of the Gospel in all areas of human life. D. Diel, Jr., *A Story of the Baptist Churches in the Philippines*, 1975, p. 11, in, CPBC, SBMP, 9-14, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 102f.

² N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 168.

³ N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 200.

All Baptist churches in the different provinces, especially in Capiz, Aklan, Iloilo and Negros, continued their normal activities like conducting worship services and Sunday schools. At the time when private and public schools were closed down, Baptist churches maintained Bible study classes for children, youth and adults. There were those who took care of refugees in their villages and supplied their daily needs. Philippine Baptists also offered their assistance to their fighting fellow citizens by assisting and feeding wounded soldiers. They also visited and provided necessities for American missionaries who were imprisoned in provincial jails in Bacolod and Iloilo.¹ They also protected missionaries who were hiding from Japanese soldiers. In so doing, many of Philippine Baptists were persecuted; a number lost their lives in the hands of Japanese soldiers.

These historic events show that Philippine Baptists were autonomous with their decisions. There was no hierarchical or state authority that dictated them but they were united in rendering service to people regardless of religion and their country, in the name of their faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

4.2. 1972 – 1998

From the beginning of the Baptist mission in the Philippines in 1900, the American Baptist missionaries were either silent or supportive of the policies of the US government in the Philippines. When the US granted a limited freedom by creating a Philippine Commonwealth government in 1935, the missionaries supported it. When the Philippines was involved in the Second World War the missionaries identified with the US. When Marcos imposed a dictatorial regime with the backing of the US government Ralph L. George did not criticize it. He felt that martial law was better than other options of that time.

The change in the American missionaries' view of the US policy in the Philippines occurred in the 1980s. Missionaries like Sandra Mosher and Steve Mosher began to be critical. They learned to identify with the Philippine Baptist pastors and members in opposing the Marcos regime. They appealed to their mission board in the US to oppose the US policies that endangered the human rights of the Philippine people. Moreover, they tried to live a simple life as they learned that they had more financial privileges than their Philippine Baptist friends. Finally, they asked "difficult questions" and challenged "some time-honored traditions" of the ABC/BIM and hoped for the sake of God's mission that they will be taken seriously.²

The years from 1972 to 1998 have been a significant period in the history of Philippine Baptist churches. It began with the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos and ended with the presidency of Fidel Ramos, former military General of Marcos and the first Protestant president of the Republic. The dictatorial regime created economic and political crisis and a situation that forced the majority of the population into poverty. Yet the crisis situation became also an opportunity for the Baptists to witness to their Christian conviction and stand on issues like human dignity, human rights, social justice, and ecumenical relations. In the course of time, projects for the poor like in areas of health, income-generating projects, cooperatives and home for children multiplied. Moreover, the campaign for self-reliance intensified. Obviously, the missionary spirit has broadened to include not only the traditionally accepted "healing, preaching, and

¹ H. W. Munger, 1967, p. 189f, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 202f.

² N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 288-289.

teaching” work but also social projects for the poor, deprived and oppressed, ecumenical relations, self-reliance and foreign missions. Recently a project of writing and publishing religious songs in *Hiligaynon* was started, a move that is very meaningful in propagating the Christian message in the local language.

The shortage of pastors and church workers in the local congregations and church related institutions have been partly resolved through the creation of Bible Schools. It has to be added that more than 50% of all pastors are women. Recognizing their contributions and ability, the church ordained women during this period.¹

Since the “cutting of the umbilical cord” of the Philippine Baptist churches from American Baptists, they had been exposed to numerous blessings, problems and challenges. Like a young child they had to learn how to crawl before walking and running. The growing Philippine Baptist churches since the formation of CPBC in 1935 are facing problems in leadership, finances, mission, education, political and associational problems. However, Philippine Baptist leaders are optimistic about these setbacks, working in principles and plans to resolve the substantial issues.

Another major problem is on self-reliance. Although its financial crisis in 1975 has been partly resolved in 1996, the problem of self-reliance still confronts CPBC today. In 1997 only 28% (201 of 729) of local churches gave financial support to the CPBC. In addition, regular subsidy from the American Baptists has been gradually withdrawn. Hence, local generation of funds is a must. Domingo J. Diel, Jr. insisted that the idle properties of the CPBC should be developed to make them income generating.

The problems on leadership and self-reliance, however, are mitigated by the fact that the Philippine Baptists are now prime decision-makers on all matters concerning their own affairs. This is a reversal from their status before 1935 whereby the American Baptist missionaries were taking the lead. Now, they are really in the position to give immediate and long-term resolutions to solve those problems. They could even make use of their “culture of participation”. The resolution of those problems will largely determine the prospects in advancing the missionary task of the Philippine Baptist churches in the light of Philippine realities.

In spite of these problems and prospects confronting the Philippine Baptist churches, the statement of Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr. in 1975 seems to be relevant today:

The present work ... is open to the prospects of the future, when kingdoms shall become the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The past, the present, and the future achievements (of the CPBC) are no other but the work of God and though it is an ‘earthen vessel’ and through ‘earthen vessels’, nevertheless His work, and let no man claim the credit to himself, but let all say ... “To Him Be Thy Glory, All Things He Has Done.”²

5. Historic Baptist Emphases

Early Baptists migrated to Holland and America in their quest for a haven wherein their religious freedom would be realized. In both England and America,

¹ N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 331.

² N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 365-367.

the Baptist faith constantly faced bitter persecutions from established religious groups because of their convictions.

In America, two Baptist historians, Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson co-authored “A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice”. They wrote down a list of typical Baptist distinctives, which includes the following points:

The Scripture, or the New Testament, as the supreme authority for faith and practice; priesthood of believers; freedom of conscience; soul liberty, and the right of private interpretation; congregational polity and autonomy of the local church; religious liberty and separation of church and state; believers’ baptism by immersion; and regenerated church membership.¹

In the Philippine setting, mainly in CPBC, there are some available materials that provide information about historic Baptist principles. The Preamble of the CPBC 1935 Constitution & By-Laws states:

In order to more intimately unite the Baptist Churches in the Philippines and the Baptist missionaries, to work more effectively for the spread of the Gospel ministry, to give more harmony to the work of the different Baptist churches in the Philippine Islands, and to promote the Baptist principles which include **(a) the authority of the Bible, (b) the competency of the soul to work out its religious destiny, (c) a regenerated church membership, (d) democracy and independence of the local church, (e) separation of church and state and (f) religious liberty,**²

Evidently, the term “autonomy of the local church” was not the term used but “democracy and independence of the local church.” It is in the Amended By-Laws of May 24, 1996 that the former was used. The Preamble reads:

The Baptist Churches in the Philippines, reposing faith in the Almighty God and heavenly Father, in gratitude for the redeeming knowledge of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the missionary movement, ...to promote the spread of the Gospel in unity of purpose with other Baptist and Christian bodies engaged in the world mission of Christianity; to conserve and perpetuate Baptist principles which include: **authority of the Bible, competency of the soul to attain its spiritual destiny by the grace of God, baptism of believer by immersion, autonomy of the local church, separation of church and state, and religious liberty;** and to establish such charitable and religious institutions as may be necessary to implement this purpose,³

This is reiterated in Article II (Purposes) Sec. 1, b.

To conserve, develop and perpetuate Baptist principles which include (1) authority of the Bible, (2) competency of the soul to attain its spiritual destiny by God’s grace, (3) believer’s baptism by immersion, (4) autonomy of the local church, (5) separation of church and state, and (6) religious liberty.

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 7. For detailed definition of these principles see p. 7-10.

² See CPBC, Inc. 1935 By-Laws Preamble, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 385. Bold for emphasis.

³ See R. L. Lucas, ed., *CPBC Manual of Ministry*, CPBC, Inc.: Iloilo City, Phil. 1998, p. 9-10. Bold for emphasis.

In the new By-Laws (adopted May 26, 2005) the Preamble and Article II (Purposes) Sec. 1, b. are copied verbatim from the Amended By-Laws (1996).

As to the definition of these “Baptist principles”, the By-Laws of 1935, the amended By-Laws of 1996, and the latest amendment of 2005 are all silent. This fact is probably one of the many factors of varying perspectives and contradicting interpretations. However, early in the 20th century, these principles were already manifested in the work of American Baptist missionaries (ABFMS).¹

There are, however, available documents, written by some Filipino Baptists that provide definition to these principles.

In 1952, Juan P. Empig² wrote to explain these principles. For him, a Baptist church is a group of people who bind themselves together as a body of baptized (immersed) believers who place their faith wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. Moreover, this church believes in the teachings and practices of the Baptists and in those great distinctive principles for which they have ever stood. According to Empig, there are ten Baptist principles to be followed by Baptist churches in the Philippines.

1. The preeminence of Christ as our divine Lord and Master.
2. The supreme authority of the Bible and its sufficiency as our only rule of faith and practice.
3. The right of private interpretation and the competency of the individual soul in direct approach to God.
4. The absolute separation of Church and state.
5. A regenerated Church membership.
6. The beautiful, symbolic ordinance of believer's baptism in obedience to the command of Christ.
7. **The complete independence of the local Church and its interdependence in associated fellowship with other Baptist Churches.**
8. The solemn obligation of majority rule, guaranteeing equal rights to all and special privilege to none.
9. The spiritual unity of believers, for which the master so earnestly prayed.
10. A worldwide program of missionary fervor and evangelism in obedience to the final command of Jesus.

In 1999, Johnny V. Gumban³ delivered a lecture called “Basic Christian Doctrine”. He also discussed the historic “Baptist Distinctives”:

- I. *The authority of the Scripture as the sole norm for faith and conduct.*

This means that when it comes to our faith in God, the Bible is the faithful witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Allowing the Scripture to convey its own meaning, we understand the true meaning of our faith in God especially the truth about salvation. The scripture provides principles, upon which the conduct of Christian living can be based. Tradition is respected as long as it is not

¹ See N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 96-99.

² J. P. Empig, *How to Make Church Organization Work*, in, Dean Kirkwood, ed., *Outline of Theology Used in Baptist Work in the Philippines*, 1952, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 222-223. Bold for emphasis.

³ J. V. Gumban, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, in, N. D. Bunda et. al. eds., *Managing Faith Resources*, CBMA, Inc.: Iloilo City, Philippines, 2003, p. 260-263. Bold for emphasis.

contrary to the Scripture and as long as it embraces the meaning of the Scripture. The Bible is believed to be the Word of God because through it God reveals His will as it is supremely shown in His Son Jesus Christ. The Bible is the source of the Baptist belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

II. *Baptists believe in the Priesthood of all believers*

This means that believers in Christ share in His priesthood. In Christ, believers have direct access to God who is the Father by virtue of their adoption as children of God. God's grace in Jesus Christ is sufficient for man's salvation. Belief in grace as conferred by the church or by saints in order for us to be justified is denied. This principle of the Priesthood of all believers restores the importance of the laity in the church. All believers are people of God, including the pastors, ministers, and priests. All who believe are people of God who have different gifts, but they are all servants of God.

III. *Baptists believe that God has ordained two ordinances to be administered in the church.*

The two ordinances are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism as an ordinance is the symbol of the believers' participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of this, Baptists believe that the meaningful symbol of participation in the death of Jesus Christ is immersion in the water. Participation in His resurrection is symbolized by the believers' rising from the water. Baptists believe that since baptism is an expression of faith in Jesus Christ, only believers are to be baptized. The presence of God in baptism is a reality that is beyond human description.

The other ordinance is the Lord's Supper. It is a commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ and expectation of His coming again. The elements are taken as symbol. The bread is the symbol of His body, which was broken for us. The cup is the symbol of His blood, which was shed for the remission of sin.

The commemoration must be done with great reverence. Believers are reminded to enter this celebration after serious self-examination. If this is taken unworthy sin against the body and blood of Jesus Christ is committed.

Why ordinance and not sacrament? An ordinance is ordained by God to be celebrated. A sacrament is believed to be a means of conveying the grace of God. Baptists believe that God's grace is conveyed to man only through Jesus Christ. Such grace is sufficient for man's salvation.

IV. *Liberty of Conscience*

Thomas Helwys declared that a king has authority over his subjects in temporal matters. But he has no authority over the conscience of his subjects. In matters of faith human conscience is free to express man's relationship to God. In matters of religion, especially in worship, man's right to observe this must be kept inviolate. When it comes to religion, religious freedom means that man is accountable to God alone.

V. Authority of the Local Church

Because of religious freedom, a local church has authority to govern her own life according to what is deemed proper by the whole congregation. The Baptist polity (or church government) is congregational. The authority resides in the congregation. But, the right of the congregation to govern itself should be done under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In other words, the congregation can do anything if it is consistent with the will of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Local authority should not be observed as a license for anarchy and evil. Local autonomy of the Church does not mean for the church to be isolated by itself because Baptists believe that the church is by nature associational. This means that it seeks to associate and work with other movements of kindred spirit.

VI. Separation of Church and State

This is one principle that the Anabaptists Movement during the Reformation insisted on because Luther, Calvin and Zwingli opted to link their churches with state authorities. Separation here means basically separation of function. The state is ordained to provide physical well-being to its people. The church on the other hand is mandated to meet the spiritual needs of the people. By separation it means that the church cannot and must not determine for the state what the state is mandated to do for its people. But, when it comes to concerns that would enable each to fulfill its respective functions, both are mutually related to each other. Baptists are encouraged to participate responsibly in the life of the larger community according to the dictates of their conscience.

On the same theme, Rev. Danilo Borlado¹ gave a lecture. A portion of which was printed in the CPBC Manual for Ministry. It was not deliberately stated whether the definition is officially adopted or not. Clearly, there is discrepancy between what is provided in the By-Laws and indicated in Borlado's lecture portion. The relevant part of his discussion is as follows:

B – Believers' Baptism

Other churches practice infant baptism but Baptists insist on believer's baptism on the following grounds: (1) It is explicitly taught in the Bible (Matt. 3:13-13-15; 28:19-20); (2) It stresses public confession of faith and personal commitment to Christ; (3) It highlights the conscious, free and glad human response to God's grace of forgiveness.

A – Autonomy of the local church

The local church is a free and independent body in terms of determining and implementing its policies and programs. A

¹ This is summarized in the acrostic **B A P T I S T S**. D. Borlado, *Our Baptist Heritage: Becoming Faithful Baptist Disciples*, a Lecture during the 61st CPBC Annual Assembly at Bakyas Evangelical Church, Bacolod City, in, R. L. Luces, ed., 1998, p.21-22.

Baptist church is congregational which means that the congregation is the final authority. In the exercise of autonomy, a church joins the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. As a member of this national body, she submits herself to the decision of the general assembly and the Board of Trustees, and policies/guidelines as provided for in the CPBC Constitution and By-Laws.

P – Priesthood of all believers

All believers are equal and stand on the same level before God; all believers have equal and free access to God through Jesus Christ (Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-22).

T – Two ordinances: Baptism by immersion and the Lord Supper

For Baptists, both baptism and the Lord's Supper are not sacraments but ordinances. An ordinance is something that is required as expression of our faith but does not in anyway convey grace.

I – Individual liberty of salvation of the soul

The other name for this is religious freedom or freedom of conscience. It means that we are free to believe what we want to believe; we can follow the dictates of our conscience. No one could tell us what to believe neither should we force others to believe what we believe (Rom. 14:5-12).

S – Separation of church and state

The state has no right to interfere with the affairs of the church or to show preferential treatment to one religious group over others. The church on its part has no claim upon the state for financial support or any form of favor. Separation guarantees freedom, and freedom requires separation. In other words, union means compromise of message and mission for one is not free to challenge or correct the other. "Without separation, freedom is a fallacy, without freedom a responsible witness is impossible."

T – The authority of scriptures over life and practice

This means we accept the teachings of the Bible as the norm of life and practice. We believe that the writers of the scriptures were divinely inspired. By inspiration we do not mean literal and word for word dictation from God. When it was necessary to put into writing the oral traditions of their faith, God, through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, moved the writers to put into writing their experiences of God. There is no other book like the Bible, not only in terms of literary style and scope but also because of its content. It tells us about God's plan for and dealings with the world and how he works to accomplish it through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

S – Sanctity of Human Life and Creation

Human life and creation are good and sacred. They must be treated with respect and dignity not simply as tools for profit. To use people and the environment as means of our greed is not only insanity but idolatry. Life is precious because it is a gift from God. It must be respected and valued to the fullest. Creation is good and for the sustenance of human life. The resources of the earth must be shared not accumulated at the deprivation of others. Human beings are caretakers of the “garden” not destroyers.

Apparently, “Priesthood of all believers” and “Sanctity of Human Life and Creation” are not found in other documents, chiefly in the CPBC By-Laws, which should have been the operational basis of CPBC. It appears that this is just an added interpretation of the lecturers. Interestingly, “Priesthood of all believers” appears in the list of American Baptist historians.

Another list collaborated by Dr. Nestor Bunda and Pastor Francis Neil Jalando-on renders BAPTIST¹ as another acrostic. It reads:

- B – Baptists have regenerated church membership
- A – Authority of the Bible
- P – Persons have religious liberty
- T – The Independence and Democracy of the Local Church
- I – Individual Soul Liberty
- S – Separation of Church and State
- T – The American Way of Life

If we highlight all the documents’ positions and discussions on “democracy and independence of the local church” or “Local Church Autonomy”, we can infer consistency among them. J. Empig’s seventh (7th) distinctive is “The complete independence of the local Church and its interdependence in associated fellowship with other Baptist Churches.” On local church autonomy, J. V. Gumban explained, “Local authority should not be observed as a license for anarchy and evil. Local autonomy of the Church does not mean for the church to be isolated by itself because Baptists believe that the church is by nature associational. This means that it seeks to associate and work with other movements of kindred spirit.” Further, D. Borlado suggests, “In the exercise of her autonomy, a church joins the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. As a member of this national body, she submits herself to the decision of the general assembly”

Summarizing all these, Bunda and Jalando-on, after citing the development of Local Autonomy in comparison with other churches’ structures, quoted a reflection:

We can reflect that with freedom (autonomy) comes great responsibility. It is the responsibility of being the church – of listening for and responding to God’s call so that the congregation will remain faithful in its life and ministry. No one can tell a local Baptist congregation what it

¹ N. D. Bunda, FN G. Jalando-on, *A Review of Baptist Heritage and Principles*, 2005. “We will also use the acronym BAPTIS(T) to recall the Six Baptist Principles which were enumerated in the 1935 CPBC constitution. These six principles are still enshrined in the Preamble of our current CPBC Constitution. The T in the BAPTIST acrostic is an interpretation of the American culture left to us by the American Baptist missionaries.”

must be and do except God. It is the congregation's responsibility to listen and obey when God speaks. This means each local congregation needs to develop a listening stance, refusing to be so caught up in its own issues and survival that it cannot hear the voice of God. It means it must constantly be open to change, willing to move in new directions when God calls. It means that it must be willing to risk, seeing and doing things differently from others because of its sense of God's will for them. Each local congregation has this responsibility. It cannot rely on bishops or outside structures to tell it what to do in order to be faithful. It must claim the responsibility of faithfulness on its own.¹

Thus, Philippine Baptist, in the earnest attempts of some of its past and present members, include in its "distinctives" or emphasizes the fellowship or communal aspect of the life of the local churches. Though the "Association of local Baptist churches" as a principle is not specified or stated separately by most of Baptists records, but this concept and practice is clearly visible and dominantly existing since the early stages of the Baptist history.

Local autonomy, against modern misconception, is not against Association: it strengthens it. A document called "A Book Containing a Record of the Acts of a Congregation of Christ in and About Bedford" contains an article entitled "The Successor of the Apostles or A Discourse of the Office of the Messenger" (1671), by Thomas Grantham, provides a historic evidence of a concerted effort of the early Baptists. William H. Brackney paraphrased:

With other Independents, Baptists rejected episcopacy and grounded their leadership firmly on the local congregation. With Christ as the head of the church, each congregation elected a pastor, deacons, and, in some cases, ruling leaders. As the congregations grew in numbers and needs became more complex, regional assemblies approved messengers or traveling pastors.²

In the Philippines, the creation of the CPBC in 1935, perceived from another perspective was not only a Philippine Baptists' struggle for selfhood; it was also an attempt to be truthful to the historic emphasis of Baptist on associational life of local churches. The Philippine Baptists had only become true to their heritage that Jesus is the only Lord of the church; and not any society or other Baptists organizations abroad should replace that Lordship of Jesus Christ in the lives of Philippine Baptist churches. The Philippine Baptists wanted to be free: free to initiate, cooperate, witness, and worship together with other churches, in their commitment to serve the Lord.

The above stated facts and historical evidences confirm substantial reasons for affirming that while early Baptists emphasized Local Autonomy, they affirmed and organized *Associations*, or to mention a more significant term, *Communion*. Thus, communal life of churches should be considered a major Baptist emphasis. This is intended to safeguard the independence as well as the interrelatedness and/or interconnectedness of churches.

Terms such as *association and convention* are commonly used to mean the fellowship of local churches. English Baptist used the former and the Americans also followed through. Later, the American Baptist coined the term convention

¹ "Congregational Autonomy" by William F. Keucher, in, <http://www.judsonpress.com>, in, N. D. Bunda, FN G. Jalando-on, 2005.

² W. H. Brackney, ed., 1998, p. 53.

that missionaries brought to the Philippine Baptist mission. The terms, however, seem to only have sociological connotations that could not fully express the essence of the church as a theological body. It seems to appear that *association* and *convention* as terms limit the church only as a sociological entity that should not be.

The church should be understood theologically. Thus, the term *communion* seems appropriate and essential to the biblical nature of the church. The Greek word **κοινωνία** (*koinonia*) is its original equivalent. Communion had always been in the mind of the Philippine Baptists, inasmuch as it had always been in the system of the NT early believers and the OT people of God. This will be discussed thoroughly in chapter four.

Meanwhile, the term “Baptist Distinctive”, as commonly spoken and written of means Baptists’ beliefs and principles, is naming diverse convictions into a confused cluster or category.¹ The CPBC Manual for Ministry (Section IV) and a “Teacher’s Manual for Sunday’s School”² both called the Baptist historic beliefs as “Baptists distinctives”. Distinctive might be true in some but not in all. This is so because “Presbyterians and other Congregationalists and even Lutheran shared and practiced some, if not all, of the Baptist principles.³ Thus, Baptists have no absolute claim to call them their “distinctive”. In this paper, the writer prefers to use the term “emphases” rather than “distinctives”.

Before proceeding to the biblical and theological discussions on local autonomy, it is necessary to devote a chapter on the perspective of Philippine Baptists on the subject. It is important to mention this before we seek the judgment of the Scriptures on our understanding of our faith and practice.

II. LOCAL AUTONOMY IN THE CPBC CONTEXT

After a brief review of the history of Local Autonomy, it is now time to look into the context of CPBC in relation to this Baptist principle. In the review, the historical events in Europe, North America and the Philippines were concisely discussed. This segment is intended to investigate how CPBC, especially its key leaders understand its faith principles, highlighting Local Autonomy.

The investigation calls for a collection of qualitative data. The researcher opted to use “in-depth interview” as a methodology or a tool, as it is deemed fitting to serve the desired end. The informants were carefully chosen members of CPBC, clergy and lay alike. Most of them have occupied and are occupying key positions, mostly in the CPBC headquarters, institutions, related organizations, local congregations and other organizations, where CPBC is a member. Many of them have been members of local churches that have undergone schism and have ended up in split congregations.

Technically, qualitative data are subjective. Answers of the informants may be biased. By this, I mean, the informants are always seeing issues from their personal perspective, clouded by interests that only themselves can choose to reveal or not.

The researcher works on the principle that “learning precedes doing.” Informants’ views do not reflect the view of the office and the

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 17.

² Domingo J. Diel, Jr., Danilo Borlado, *Baptist Heritage, Beliefs and Distinctives*, (Pamphlet, Sunday School Manual) CPBC, 1998.

³ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 12.

organization/institution they occupy. No less than their views also reflect the view of the whole CPBC. This is intended for us to have a glimpse of what and how much CPBC members, especially its key leaders, know of the issue. How our leaders perceive the issue can lead us to surmise how they do as leaders who play vital roles in running CPBC affairs. Again, "learning precedes doing." One cannot do unless s/he knows. If one knows right, under normal circumstance, s/he does right. The opposite is also true: one who knows wrong...does wrongly.

Due to limited time and resources, the researcher has reached and interviewed more or less thirty-nine (39) key leaders and members of CPBC. Due to personal limitations, the researcher focused in Iloilo, Negros and Capiz. This does not mean that these three *Kasapulanans* are much more prominent than the rest. Two factors were practically considered for the preference: (1) Most, if not all key leaders are residing in these three provinces; (2) They are near to the researcher's base – Iloilo city. The desire to reach other *Kasapulanans* was intense, but the researcher's resources limit his wishes during the time this paper is written. The selection of the informants may have not covered other *Kasapulanans*, especially the distant ones, but those who were selected can help us see portion of the whole, if it is too ambitious to hear the whole for now.

To ensure the authenticity and the nuances of the material, the researcher opted to state verbatim the answers of the informants. They used "*Hilish*" (Hiligaynon and English) since most of the informants' native tongue is Hiligaynon, while most of them are also acquainted with the English language. *Italics* were added to clarify statements that are conversationally understood but blur when written.

1. Views

1.1. On Being a Baptist

On the question of "How long have you been a Baptist?" informants answered relatively. Three answers were prevalent: 1. Born in a Baptist family; 2. Converted and later baptized; 3. Both. Some informants trace their being Baptist from their parents and foreparents. They seem to look at being Baptist as an inherited faith. Some locate being Baptist at the time they were converted and baptized: some, while born to a Baptist family, trace being Baptist from their time of baptism.

1.2. On Understanding Local Autonomy in CPBC

Rev. Job Santiago, the CPBC General Secretary, understands Local Autonomy as "one of our Baptist practice or distinctive which was brought to us by the ABFMS when they started mission work in the Philippines and was instrumental in organizing our convention. It was based on the concept of "congregation" as a reaction to a hierarchical structure of other church denominations. The local congregation is having it's own governance and the final decision and plan lies with the congregation. The local church runs and manages its own affairs.¹

¹ Job Santiago, 2005, October 25, Interview. Rev. Santiago is an ordained minister of the CPBC. He pastored several local churches since 1981 after his graduation from CPUCT. He worked as Executive Minister of Capiz Kasapulanan of Baptist Churches (CKBC). At present, he is the General Secretary of CPBC.

For Rev. Elias P. Laprades, Local Autonomy means; “each local church is self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting. Indi madiktahan sang iban nga church kag sang state ang local church. Even though we cooperate with other churches kon may maaprobahan nga for the good of the whole. So the local church must be willing to support and cooperate with our association. CPBC’s practice is not consistent with my understanding. May mga dalok kag maiyayyahon nga leaders kag members, nga daw ginagamit lang ang Local Autonomy para indi mag-cooperate.”¹

Local Autonomy for Ms. Alpha Sorenzen is, “a local Baptist church’s prerogative to formulate ideas and decisions independent from other governing church bodies or institutions.”²

Pastor Alfred Morales, understands Local Autonomy as, “A local church under the CPBC can operate its church governance (polity) without external intervention from other local churches or from any external organizations, etc.”³

For Rev. Prudencio Bañas, the congregation is the authority of a local church (congregational). Lain sa may hierarchy nga may gadikta. Pero kon may kasugtanan, we can also cooperate. In CPBC, daw wala gaintindihanay: May Local Autonomy kita pero ano ang ginahimo sang Convention sa aton? May mga churches nga gusto sila giyahan sang Convention and yet they also assert their autonomy. Wala pa kita makalambot sa understanding nga ang autonomy kag cooperation mag-blend.”⁴

For Pastor Rudy Acosta, Local Autonomy means, “ang Convention wala nagagahom sa aton pagpili sang pastor kag paghatag sang contribution. Affiliation – nagabuligay – may reciprocal relationship. And Convention naga-help nga magnami ang local church by introducing programs and helping in training pastors and laymen”.⁵

Rev. Samuel Escobin explains Local Autonomy as “Gamay nga unit sang government. Nagadecide kita nga magcooperar kay nasadyahan ta kag ang desisyon nga ginhimo ta may benipisyo. May mga churches nga ang akon definition makita – may consensus sa pag-govern. Sa mga well-established churches, ang ila Local Autonomy ginaguba sang pila ka mga dalagkuan nga mga tawo: dalagko amot or support. Kon magtigulang sila nagadevelop sang sense of ownership. Batyag nila ang simbahan balay nila.”⁶

¹ Elias Laprades, 2005, December 06, Interview. Italics mine. Rev. Laprades is an ordained CPBC minister and has worked with numerous churches. In CPBC, he worked as Promotional Secretary of Total Integrated Church Development Assistance Program (TICDA); Field Secretary and Coordinating Minister in Capiz, Aklan, Romblon, Mindoro and Luzon. At present he is retired but still pastoring a congregation in Guimaras.

² Alpha D. Sorenzen 2005, December 13, Interview. Ms. Sorenzen graduated *cum laude* at CPUCT. She is involved as volunteer worker in the Curriculum Program of the CPBC. She visits and speaks, whenever she is invited to local churches where CPUCT students are assigned to work on weekends.

³ Alfred Morales, 2005, December 16, Interview. Pastor Morales, a church youth and student leader, was a Registered Nurse before he entered Master of Divinity program at CPUCT. At present, he works as Youth Pastor of UC-CPU.

⁴ Prudencio Bañas, 2005, November 30, Interview. Rev. Bañas, a retired ordained CPBC minister, worked as Pastor with Odiongan Baptist Church, Odiongan, Romblon (1962-64); Professor at CPUCT (1986-98); Director of Baptist Student Center (1999-2001); Member, CPU Corporation (1979-84); Philippine Bible Society (PBS) Translator (1968-76); Chairman, Baptist Center Church (BCC) (2003); BCC Radio Preacher (1965-2005 on and off).

⁵ Rudy Acosta, 2005, November 19, Interview. Pastor Acosta, a Summa Cum Laude graduate of CPUCT and has MA degree in Church History at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, has worked with Pulaw Baptist Church, Dumangas, Iloilo; Rizal Fundacion Baptist Church, Pototan, Iloilo; and Ma-o Central Evangelical Church, Negros Occ.; Director of Baptist Student Center; Professor at CPURE; presently, the Senior Minister of Jaro Evangelical Church and a part time professor at CPUCT.

⁶ Samuel Escobin, 2005, November 30, Interview. Rev. Escobin, an ordained CPBC Minister, is graduate of CBBC, CPUCT and has worked with Ginbirayan Baptist Church, Sta. Fe Baptist Church, Romblon; Forward Evangelical Church, Januiai, Iloilo; Bo, Ma-o Baptist Church, Rosario Heights Evangelical church, Negros Occ.; and University Church. He had been a staff of CPU Chaplain’s Office and presently works as Staff of University Student Center.

Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Fabula looks at Local Autonomy as “self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating; although some churches cannot support themselves. In CPBC, it’s not completely locally autonomous. Some would go to CPBC to seek help”.¹

For Pastor Ronny Luces, “Local Autonomy is both strength and a weakness. Strength because the local church can make its stand and implement its own programs; weakness because it manifests individualism, *indi makita ang cohesiveness*. How can local churches work together as a body? Baptists can be strong as a church but not as a convention. Ang mga members puede magbulig, puede *indi*. Local church should have local identity as well as identity as a national body.”²

For Pastor Ricarido Bata-anon, Jr. Local Autonomy is, “Miembro upod sa pastor may consultasyon kag pag-isa sa mga bagay nga tagaan importansya para sa pag-umwad sang iglesia.”³

Mr. Rey Bayot understands Local Autonomy as “self-governing local church. CPBC, as an umbrella organization of Baptist churches, has made Local Autonomy working without dictating or imposing its promulgated policies, even in problems of churches and pastors”.⁴

Ms. Martha Mae Luces defines Local Autonomy as “The local church has the power to decide matters on their own without consultation from their national, hierarchical order, especially pertaining to the implementation of their local church’s vision, mission, goal.”⁵

Ms. Excelyn Landero expounds on Local Autonomy as “Local governance. The power or authority resides within the local governing body. However, there is limitation in the scope of autonomy of the local church because it is under bigger bodies. There will be times that decisions must be consistent within the parameters of the bigger bodies. Therefore, local autonomy ... is not independence but interdependence with other bodies.”⁶

Mr. Geronimo Ortega likens Local Autonomy to local government *unit*. Local churches exercise their own authority but in consonance with the rules and by-laws of the CPBC. Membership should be subject to the rules. They prefer to be

¹ Nathaniel Fabula, 2005, December 01, Interview. Rev. Dr. Fabula, a graduate of CPUCT and has a Doctoral Degree at Tübingen University, Germany, is an ordained CPBC Minister and has worked with several churches; Member, CPBC BoT, has been the CPBC General Secretary, member and chair of several committees; President, CBMA; Faculty of CPUCT and CBBC; BoT Member, IMH, FCC, CEH. Presently, he is the VPAA of CPU.

² Ronny Luces, 2005, November 18, Interview. Pastor Luces is CPUCT graduate and has worked with Bucana Baptist Church, Negros Occ. & Sambag Baptist Church. In CPBC he has been the Coordinator of Stewardship & Resource Development, Research and Documentation; Technical Assistant, Development Ministries; and Editor in Chief of *Manugbatala*. At present, he is the CBMA Treasurer, Associate Minister of JEC and Project Administrator of Iloilo Kinder Home, Veterans’ Village, Iloilo City.

³ Ricarido Bata-anon, Jr., 2006, January 26, Interview. Pastor Bata-anon is a CPBC pastor and has worked with Barotac Viejo Baptist Church for seven years; Antioch Christian Church for one year; Puntalan, Navarro, Barrio Rojas, Ajuy for one year; Carles Baptist Church for ten years. It was during his time that the church in Carles divided into two. He stayed for five years with the main congregation, and five years with the “split”. Until now this two “churches” exist. Pastor Bata-anon has been the Vice President and Auditor of North Iloilo Baptist Ministerial Association (NIBMA) and President of Barotac Nuevo Circuit. At present, he works with Amuring Baptist Church, Sara, Iloilo.

⁴ Rey Bayot, 2006, January 05, Interview. Mr. Bayot has been an active member and leader of his home church; member, CPBC Personnel Committee; past President of Philippine Baptist Men; and BoT Member, Negros Baptist Men. At present, he is a BoT member and Corporate Secretary of Bacolod Christian Center.

⁵ Martha Mae E. Luces, 2005, November 16, Interview. Pastor “Matang”, as she is fondly called is a graduate of CPUCT. She has worked with several churches before she became the Christian Education Director of JEC, whose focus of work is with youth and children. She is married to Pastor Ronny Luces.

⁶ Excelyn Landero, 2005, November 05, Interview. Ma’am Ex, as she is fondly called, is a graduate of CPUCT and has worked as Pastor with Astorga Baptist Church, Dumarao, Capiz; Kinder Teacher, Bacolod Christian Center; Kinder Teacher, CPU. She had been the OIC of CPURED. At present, she is a fulltime faculty member of CPURED.

members, yet they violate the policy of “member of good standing”. CPBC, in terms of church growth, masyado ka hinay – tithing and practicing the teaching of Christ.¹

For Ms. Lucy Dela Fuente, “Local Autonomy means the church exercises self-governance in everything, in all aspects of its life as a church. Waay sing may makadikta. It runs its own affairs. CPBC as an organization respects the Local Autonomy of the church (although sometimes they fall into lapses).”²

For Ms. Sweet Calinawagan, Local Autonomy of the local church is, *local* church – may awtoridad sa pagtawag sang ila manugpangabudlay. May budget ang *local* church, nagahatag lang share sa Kasapulanang kag CPBC.³

For Dr. Elmer Pedregosa, Local Autonomy is self-governing; meaning, independence. “I am accountable for my actions, I will not be bound by anybody above.” The decisions are based on the organizations’ rules, guidelines and objectives.⁴

For Dr. Juanito Acanto, Local Autonomy is freedom to administer local affairs, including the right not to follow decisions of CPBC.⁵

Pastor Rudy Bernal defines Local Autonomy as “The right and power of local organizations to be self-supporting, self-financing, and self-propagating; their power is on themselves as an organization. They have not surrendered their power and authority to the national government and to national organizations. It is the capacity of members and leaders to decide on their own direction, mission, by their own leadership component. Yet Local Autonomy is not practiced in CPBC. Some churches do not want to be “pahilabtan”, but some look up to CPBC to help them as an organization. In coming to CPBC, the local church gives up or surrenders her right to be under the direction of the National Organization. My understanding of Local Autonomy is not consistent with what is practiced in CPBC.”⁶

¹ Geronimo Ortega, 2005 November 24, Interview. Mr. Ortega was a work student who had become one of the numerous successful graduates of CPU. He was “converted” and became a member at UC. He had been a member of the Finance Committee during the reign of W. Guanzon sa President, Rev. Sacapaño as GS and Antonio Dela Cruz as Finance Chair. He has been the Treasurer and Business Manager of IMH since August 1988 – present.

² Lucy Dela Fuente, 2005, November 25, Interview. Ms. Dela Fuente is a Pastor’s kid. She has been a member of BCC and elected President in 2002; Chair of the Board of Deacons, Worship and Search Committees. At present, she is the Editor of Church Bulletin; member, Baptist Student Center Advisory Council; member, CPU Corporation since 1993; CPU Retired English Teacher; member, FCC BoT; member, CPBC Amendments and Resource Generation Committees; Hostess, Eco forum, TV-8 Sky Cable, CPU Alumni Channel.

³ Mansueta Calinawagan, 2005, November 29, Interview. Manay Sweet is a CPBC pastor, retired. She worked with Libertad Baptist Church, Tapaz, Capiz (1975-76); CPBC Staff on Family Life (1969-75); Provincial Missionary in Capiz and Aklan (1963-68); Director, Veterans’ Village Community Center (1968-69); Director, Baptist Student Center (1977-79); IMH Chaplain, 1997-present.

⁴ Elmer Pedregosa, 2005, December 02, Interview. Dr. Pedregosa is a licensed Surgeon. He has been an active church member and had become the Business Manager at his home church in Pototan, Iloilo. He is still involve in church work as adviser. Member, CPU and IMH Corporations. At present, he is the Director of IMH and also an ex-officio member of its BoT.

⁵ Juanito Acanto, 2005, December 05, Interview. Dr. Acanto is a Lawyer by profession. He has been the president of Baptist Center Church (1985). At present, he is the President of CPU. He is active in supporting CPBC.

⁶ Rudy Bernal, 2005, December 15, Interview. Pastor Bernal used to work as Editorial Staff of Philippine Herald Newspaper and News Editor of French News Agency. As pastor, he worked with Kawayan Baptist Church, Carles, Iloilo; Central Ma-o Evangelical Church, Negros Occ. He also worked with Urban Industrial Mission (CPBC Pilot Program) in Insular Lumber Co., Hinobaan, Negros Occ. He helped strengthen rural churches in the area. Through the said program, advocacy work in Sipalay, involving Skills-Training and Labor Education, was started. He had been the Director of CPBC New Frontier Ministries, “new” because it explored programs that CPBC has not yet tested, such as Advocacy, Peasant Organization. The years 1984-86 were the most intense moments of Martial Law. The program helped to expose human rights violations to the public, particularly in Western Visayas. He had also been the Vice President of CPBC; Chair, Committee on Social Issues & Environmental Concern; Vice Chair, Development Committee; Member, Amendments Committee; Member, IMH BoT, Finance Committee; Member, CPBC Personnel and Executive Committee.

Local Autonomy, for Jessie Contreras, is “An organization has their own decision-making. CPBC, *has somehow*, become chaotic.”¹

For Rev. Webster Bedicir, Local Autonomy is independence, self-governance, self-administration. Sa CPBC, may bintaha kag disbintaha: Bintaha – may ligwa ang local churches sa pagpadalagan sang programa kag kabuhi sang iglesia; disbintaha – nagaduha-duha ang churches sa iya pagsupport sa CPBC. Confused ang local churches, indi klaro sa both parties (CPBC and local church) ang responsibilities.²

Dr. Suzette Elegado defines Local Autonomy as “The church has freedom to call its pastor; independent church polity and freedom to innovate. The local church is free to worship as it pleases. My understanding is consistent with how Local Autonomy is practiced in CPBC. You can hardly feel the presence of the Convention, daw wala gid man gabulig. As far as other services are concerned, indi gid felt.”³

For Mr. Wilson Guanzon, Local Autonomy is “No outside intervention for the local church in its administration, calling of pastor, budgeting, hiring and firing of employee. But the local church has the relationship with other government... Extremes *ang nagakatabo sa CPBC*. We follow Local Autonomy to the fullest even when the stability is at risk. Daw dinalok. *Tungod sina* slow ang growth sang Convention kay indi sia ka impose. Ang local church indi makaexercise Local Autonomy kon ang CPBC damo kwarta. We should follow Local Autonomy as one of the Baptist Distinctives.”⁴

Local Autonomy for Ms. Josita Alpha Jalando-on is, “The church has its own organization financing itself – and yet interconnected with others who share the same purpose and goals. In CPBC, daw ka ‘one-way: Akon ni kwarta, myembro’. Wala maka-establish from the past sang mutual relationship.”⁵

Local Autonomy, for Donato “Mike” Enabe is, “local church can make decision on its organizational structure; indi hierarchical, it is an inverted pyramid. However, Local Autonomy is not absolute in CPBC because we are members of both national and provincial organizations. That in a sense dilutes the essence of Local Autonomy. *Pero subong* daw kalaputyak *sang practice sa CPBC*, daw Local Autonomy daw indi man.”⁶

For Mr. Rey Pedrosa, Local Autonomy is independent governance *and* financial management. Ang pastor spiritual leader, overseer for the glory of God.

¹ Jessie Contreras, 2005, December 29, Interview. Mr. Contreras has been an active church member of Capiz Evangelical Church (CEC) of which he served as Deacon, Auditor and President. He is the Administrator of Capiz Emmanuel Hospital (CEH) at present.

² Webster Bedicir, 2005, December 09, Interview. Rev. Bedicir is graduate of CPUCT and an ordained CPBC Minister. He has worked with several churches and later as Chaplain of Iloilo Mission Hospital. He has been President of Capiz Baptist Ministers Association (CABMA) and BoT Member of Capiz Kasapulanang Baptist Churches. At present, he is the Chaplain of Filamer Christian College and preaches on Weekends at Bago Chiquito Baptist Church, Panay, Capiz.

³ Suzette Elegado, 2006, January 04, Interview. Dr. Elegado is a Physician by profession and is actively involve in church work as Chair of the local church's BoT; Chair, CBBC BoT; Member, CPU BoT; Vice President, Negros Kasapulanang; Member, CPBC BoT. At present she serve as member of the Board of Deacons at her home church, Rosario Heights Evangelical Church, Bacolod City.

⁴ Wilson Guanzon, 2006, January 04, Interview. Italics mine. Mr. Guanzon has been the CPBC President (1989-1992); President, NKBC; Vice President, NCCP (1992-93); Member, IMH Corporation and an active member of Cosmopolitan Evangelical Church. At present, he serves as Chairman of Bacolod Christian Center, Bacolod City.

⁵ Josita Alpha Jalando-on, 2006, January 04, Interview. Ms. Jalando-on is a Pastor's Kid. She has been an active member of La Carlota Evangelical Church and serves as member of the Board of Deacons. Vice President, CPBC; Vice President for women, NCCP. At present, she is the OIC of CBBC.

⁶ Donato “Mike” Enabe, 2006, January 04, Interview. Mike has been President of NEKCYFU; Chair, Deacon and Trustee of Bacolod Evangelical Church. He was the centennial President of CPBC. He is, at present, the Treasurer of the BoT of the Bacolod Christian Center.

Sa CPBC, sobra ang independence sang local church. There is relative understanding *among members*.¹

Pastor Edgardo Daitol defines Local Autonomy as “localized ang government *sang* local church; may kaugalingon nga policy kag rules. Pero indi maathag ang definition sang Local Autonomy sa mother organization (CPBC). Ginaemphasize lang ang freedom pero wala ang limitation. *Ano pa* lain-lain ang konsepto *sang mga myembro*.”²

Local Autonomy, for Ms. Glory Bullo, is “ang local church may right to call their pastor kag pagmanage sang ila finances.”³

For Pastor Elizer Distor, Local Autonomy is “the church has its own self-governing body. Indi sya madiktahan sang iban. But the practice of Local Autonomy in local church nagadepende sa maturity sang leader sa church kag sang pastor. There are leaders *and pastors* who do not really know. They should know their faith before they can learn *to cooperate properly*.”⁴

Ruben “Boy” Jalando-on likens Local Autonomy to government structure such as stated in the Local Government Code that gives freedom to Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), for instance. “May bintaha kag disbintaha and Local Autonomy sa CPBC: bintaha – madasig ang decision-making process, especially kon innovative ang leaders sa local church; disbintaha – indi centralized kag indi standardized and sweldo *sang pastor*. Daw indi gid mabatyagan ang programa sang CPBC sa *grassroots*.”⁵

Pastor Nobe Joy Fran understands Local Autonomy as “Ang isa ka church may iya kaugalingon nga officers kag iya kaugalingon nga decision. *The CPBC practice is not* purely Local Autonomy because may Circuit, Kasapulanang, Convention. Daw ‘earthly’ pero indi sya dapat mag go against sa whole system.”⁶

Pastor Francis Neil Jalando-on simply defines Local Autonomy as “Independent decision-making.” As to the nature of Local Autonomy, he says, it is related to ‘Competency of the Soul to work out its destiny and religious liberty’ (two of Baptist distinctives). Gapati gid ya ang mga Baptists sa kahilwayan sa paghimo sang decision. Ang original nga mga Baptists nagapati nga may ikasarang ang tawo sa pagpili; grabe ang emphasis sa liberty sang tawo, bisan pa ang tawo makahimo sang sakto/mayo ukon sala nga decision. *Surprisingly*, wala ang Local Autonomy sa term sang mga Filipino. In the 1920s, there was a widespread clamor for nationalism; 1935 was the Commonwealth year. The pastors became nationalists. Democracy and independence of local church is

¹ Rey Pedrosa, 2006, January 06, Interview. Italics mine. Mr. Pedrosa is the Chairman of Bacolod Evangelical Church and President of Negros Baptist Men.

² Edgardo Daitol, 2006, January 12, Interview. Italics mine. Pastor Daitol has been a youth leader before he entered and finished as CPUCT. He has worked with several churches. At present, he is the Pastor of Estancia Baptist Church, Estancia, Iloilo.

³ Glory Bullo, 2006, January 12, Interview. Pastor Bullo has worked with Kawayan Baptist Church and Batad Baptist Church. She has been the Treasurer of Women Federation. She has served as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of Carles Baptist Church. At present, she is retired yet active in church work as member of the local church.

⁴ Elizer Distor, 2006, January 12, Interview. Italics mine. Pastor Distor has worked with Estancia Baptist Church, Estancia; Binon-an Baptist Church, Batad; Capiz Evangelical Church, Roxas City; Cawayan Baptist Church, Carles. Sometime in the past, he has been a Staff of Medical Ambassador, a CPBC partner. At present, he works with Ajuy Baptist Church as Senior Minister.

⁵ Ruben “Boy” Jalando-on, 2006, January 13, Interview. Italics mine. Boy Jalando-on has been a Member of CPBC Property Committee; Vice President, Iloilo Baptist Men; and at present, the Chair of Ajuy Baptist Church.

⁶ Nobe Joy Fran, 2006, January 14, Interview. Italics mine. Manay Nobe, a graduate of CPUCT, used to be a Sunday School Teacher and a Leader when she was a young person. As pastor, she has worked with Hilltop Baptist Church, Astorga Baptist Church and Libertad Baptist Church. Now, she is the Christian Education Director of Capiz Evangelical Church, Roxas City.

political because early Baptists were independent, *not from each other*, but from America.”¹

Rev. Dr. Armando Kole looks at Local Autonomy as “It is the local church that manages its own affairs: finances. The local church is self-supporting, self-propagating, self-sustaining. It is somehow a misnomer, for the local church should be dependent. Local Autonomy is a carry over of the American Baptists who affirmed independence of local church from state control. In CPBC, there should be interdependence rather than independence, *because* centralized churches are strong churches.”²

Mr. Demy Sonza defines Local Autonomy as “Self-governance, local church governing itself. The local church is autonomous, not dictated upon by any other autonomy. In the Philippine setting, it is partial self-rule. The Convention as a body has been allowing churches under its umbrella to practice Local Autonomy. As I see it now, this practice has not been conducive to the growth of both the CPBC and local churches. Many are not viable economically. Even if they (local churches) want to help, they cannot because *wala sila nagdako*”.³

For Ms. Evangelica Padernilla, “Local Autonomy is independence or freedom from control of any organization where the local church is a member. It is disadvantageous to CPBC because it has no authority and control over its members.”⁴

Rev. Dr. Jerson Narciso looks at Local Autonomy as “Ang local church may autonomiya – self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing; *indi lang ang civil* government, but CPBC has no power over it. This is a misapplication because this is usually used by local church against CPBC.”⁵

For Rev. Joniel Howard Gico, “Ang local church manages/does its own day-to-day affairs, independent of others. There are good things as well as things that should be modified about Local Autonomy. Good thing is doing things in different context and situations; Local Autonomy helps address these. However, there is a kind of an extreme understanding that everything is cut off from anybody outside. This would lead to isolation. The local church should be aware that they are part

¹ Francis Neil Jalando-on, 2005, December 07, 05, Interview. Italics mine. Fneil is an Accountancy graduate before he took and completed Master of Divinity at CPUCT. He has been one of the advisers of the Convention Baptist Youth Fellowship of the Philippines (CBYFP) and member of the Pastoral Staff of La Carlota Evangelical Church. Now, he is the Administrative Assistant of Institute of Advance Theological Studies (IATS), a CPBC partner.

² Armando Kole, 2005, December 17 Interview. Italics mine. Rev. Dr. Kole, a graduate of CPUCT and has a Doctoral Degree, has worked with Maloblob Baptist Church, Astorga Baptist Church, Bakyas Evangelical Church, and Garden Ville Baptist Church; President, CBBC; President, CBMA; BoT Member, Bacolod Christian Center; Member, CPBC Overseas Mission Commission; Part-Time Faculty, CBBC, CPUCT, ATS Bacolod; Representative, Commission on Evangelism and Evangelical Concern; BoT and Corporation Member, CPU. Now, he is the Senior Minister of Bacolod Evangelical Church and CPBC President.

³ Demy Sonza, 2006, February 06, Interview. Mr. Sonza used to preach and teach at Bolong Baptist Church, Sta. Barbara; President, Bolong, Langka, Malawog, Pavia, Sta. Barbara (BLIMPS) Circuit; Member, CPU & IMH corporations; Director, CPU Planning & Development; Consultant to the CPU President. At present, he serves as the Vice President of CPBC.

⁴ Evangelica Padernilla, 2006, January 17, Interview. Ms. Padernilla has been Moderator, UC Council; President, Iloilo Kasapulanang of Baptist Churches (IKBC); BoT Member, CPBC; Vice President, CPBC; President (the only woman president so far), CPBC; BoT Member, CPU; Corporate Secretary, CPU Corporation; Vice Chair/Chair, CPU Centennial Celebration. At present she is involved in church work as Sunday School Teacher of the Professional Group in UC and active in the Widows Support Group, an organization she herself started.

⁵ Jerson Narciso, 2006, February 01, Interview. Rev. Dr. Narciso, a graduate of CPUCT, has worked as pastor with Forward Evangelical Church, Janiway (1988-90); Jaro Evangelical Church (1990-96); Calvario Evangelical Church, Janiway (1996-98). He has been the President of IBMA and CBMA; Member, CPBC Faith and Order Committee and NCCP Peace Commission. Now, he is the Chaplain of CPU and serves as Pulpit Minister of UC.

of a larger fellowship. Sharing of *gifts and resources* would help strengthen each other.”¹

For Dr. Lester Edwin Ruiz, “Local Autonomy is the prerogative of the local congregation to govern itself in relation to the larger context of the denomination. In the CPBC practice, local church does not want CPBC to be dictated by the denomination; Local Autonomy is misinterpreted as ‘freedom from the denomination’. Local Autonomy should include responsibility to the community; freedom has corresponding obligation.”²

Ms. Royena Asis comprehends Local Autonomy as “Ang isa ka organization/ local church may freedom sa pagdecide sa iya kaugalingon basi sa context kag kinahanglanon. Wala sang dikta halin sa outside. It is may be advantageous to some local churches but disadvantageous for CPBC as an umbrella organization. Ang CPBC ginabudlayan sa pagpapanaog sang mga decision ...basi wala makahangop ang local church sang Local Autonomy; basi wala ini madefine *sing nagakaigo*.”³

For Ms. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz Duremdes, “Local Autonomy is the local churches have a particular dynamism para maka decision based on the analysis of their local situation and identification of appropriate response on the local situation, within the framework of national organization’s understanding of mission. The problem seems to be that the local churches are not knit or consolidated. They are still inward looking and only look after their personal interests.”⁴

2. Synthesis

The interview shows that there is a relative perception among CPBC clergy, lay leaders and members alike. Some pointed out the absence of a clear-cut definition of Local Autonomy as a Baptist principle. Because of this local churches do not have an operational basis for practice. It seems to project that how the local churches operate depends on the personal perception and interpretation of their local leaders. One can infer that these interpretations usually serve personal interests at the expense of the whole organization. Thus, it is an utmost need for CPBC leaders to have an official definition of Local Autonomy and other Baptist emphases. This is important to secure the unity of CPBC as it seeks to fulfill the mission of the church (people) of Jesus Christ in the Philippine context.

Further, there is a need for CPBC to have a common ecclesiology. There seems to be no official CPBC understanding of the church’s nature and mission. CPBC members are at the mercy of pastors and leaders, who have varied interpretations. Perhaps it is time for CPBC national leaders to sit down and

¹ Joniel Howard Gico, 2006, February 2, Interview. Italics mine. Rev. Gico, a graduate of CPUCT, has worked with San Jose Evangelical Church and University Church; Dean, CBMA; Member, CPU Corporation; President, CBBC; Chair, CPBC Peace and Mediation Committee; Member, Theological Education & Pastoral Concern Committee; Vice Chair, SAO Philis. At present, he is the Vice President for Administration, CPU.

² Lester Edwin Ruiz, 2005, November 29, Interview. Rev. Dr. Ruiz, an ordained CPBC Minister, has been member of the Board of Stewards in Baptist Youth at JEC. He is, at present, the Associate Dean of New York Theological Seminary, New York. He usually visits and delivers lectures in CPBC and CPU.

³ Royena Asis, 2006, February 03, Interview. Italics mine. Ms. Asis is a pastor’s Wife. In her youth, she had been President of Antique Baptist Youth Fellowship Union; Secretary, Deaconess, Treasurer and President of Sambag Baptist Church; Secretary, IKBC and ICCBC; Member, CPBC Development Ministries, Camp Higher Ground, Personnel, Past Actions Committees. She is, at present, the Program Staff of Western Visayas Ecumenical Council (WVEC).

⁴ Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz Duremdes, 2005, November 11, Interview. “Nang Shar” as she is fondly called, a graduate of CPUCT, has served as IKBC President; BoT Member, CPBC; President, Women’s Federation; Teacher at CPUCT and CPUAS. Now, she is the first woman General Secretary of NCCP.

discuss historic Baptist principles, reconstruct official interpretation, and promulgate it to its members as guidelines for faith and practice.

The following is the analysis and synthesis of the views of the respondents.

2.1. What Local Autonomy IS NOT ... What Local Autonomy IS

Since there is no standard definition of beliefs¹ on which to base understanding by CPBC leadership and membership, relativity of perspective can be expected. The traditional understanding of Local Autonomy, i.e. “the ‘local church’ is self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting” is erroneously interpreted with perception such as, “Ang Convention indi makadikta sa local church”. It appears that the question is right away focused on power; on who should be followed. The main issue should be more on “what is to be done” than “who should be followed”. The latter, for an enlightened Christian, should have been resolved long before. Decision-making processes such as during elections, business meetings, calling of pastor, whether to make or not to make a statement on a social issue, and the like are usually critical for CPBC. The idea behind the expression “let us divide the house” has proven in essence to be more divisive than democratic.

Rev. Elmo D. Familiaran suggest a methodology which is “unitive” and faithful to the Christian and biblical ideals. He wrote:

... “Consensus” must not be understood as “uniformity.” ... Rather, “consensus” in the best sense of seeking the “mind of Christ” is about seeking “common ground.” Understood this way, consensus leaves room for disagreements around other aspects of an issue (as Baptists always do) but invites participants to coalesce around its vital center. Here a mechanism for negotiation needs to be in place that will provide for a systematic approach to analyzing the various layers of an issue, enabling all to sort out clearly what is secondary from the primary.²

From this statement we can infer a lot of questions about our life together as a ‘people of God’ (church, community of gifts) and lives as individuals. Do we seek the “mind of Christ” in our election, leadership style, evangelization and mission, education and the like? If we do not, whose mind are we following then? Dr. Domingo Diel, Jr. wrote a satirical statement about this:

...Wala kita Papa (luwas sa mga Katolico), wala Hari, wala Reyna. Apang tungod kay wala kita matudloi o wala kita kahibalo sing maayo sang patakaran/pagginahum sang Papa sa Iglesia, sang Hari o Reyna sa Iglesia, ang pila sang aton mga lideres – pastor o lay people – nangin magagmay nga papa, hari kag reyna sa mga ka-iglesiahanan. Ang awtoridad sang “gathered community of believers” nadula.

...We have no Pope (except the Catholic), neither king nor queen. But because we are not properly taught or we only have insufficient

¹ In the Preamble of CBPC By-Laws, Baptist Distinctives are stated, but they are not defined. The CPBC Manual of Ministry, “Yellow Pamphlet” adopts a definition from Danilo Borlado’s lecture, *Our Baptist Heritage: Becoming Faithful Disciples*, delivered during the 61st CPBC Annual Assembly at Bakyas Evangelical Church, Bacolod City. But probably, implementation and dissemination of this information has have not been institutionalized that it has not permeated the grassroots of membership.

² Rev. Elmo D. Familiaran, *Chaos or Community: A Reflection on the Baptist Principle of Autonomy as it is Lived Out in the Reality of the American Baptist Churches, USA*. Written for my Sisters and Brothers in the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches and their Own Struggle to Seek the Mind of Christ

knowledge of the governance of Pope, king and queen in the church, some of our leaders – clergy and laity – have become demi-pope, miniature king, and diminutive queen in the local churches. The authority of “gathered community of believers” is gone.¹

Autonomy is synonymous with “freedom”. It would be easier to understand Local Autonomy if we locate its place in proper historical setting. An account was laid in the first chapter that Baptists along with other Protestant groups emerge in the post-medieval period when the church and the state were erroneously entwined. Corruption of power, violation of human rights, suppression of creative ideas, and oppression of the poor by the clergy and civil nobles were as bright as the sun.² The early Baptists did not adhere to the state of being dictated by a corrupt and immoral religious hierarchy, and being ruled by an oppressive and unjust civil government.³

They only wish to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which they plainly followed on their assertion of baptism by immersion (which later became their label) and other New Testament-supported practices. Simply, the early Baptists struggled to be autonomous from “sinful” religion and “wicked” government.⁴ But among them they struggled to build an egalitarian community that is strictly patterned on the NT believers, where both community of gifts and goods were celebrated and lived. Evidently, for William Lumpkin, Baptists did not think of reforming the National Church (Anglican Church) but of building an entirely new structure on the New Testament pattern.⁵

Local Autonomy, in the context of the church as the body of Christ, should be understood as “freedom for” instead of “freedom from”.⁶ Where life is “no longer mine but of Him who lives in me” should be the constitutive meaning of freedom. It is no longer freedom from outside entities, but “freedom in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). The Golden Rule best illustrates this freedom: “Do unto others what you want others to do unto you”. And you do it not because of your own capacity, but by the gift (*charisma*) of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised and fulfilled.

Thus, autonomy, for those who believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, is complete submission to His will. Such people seek the “mind of Christ” through the Scripture and take it as a command, like the Great Commission. Because it is an imperative, disobedience is not an option. You are only free, using your own God-endowed creativity, to obey it. If one proclaims to be a follower of Jesus and does not observe Jesus commandments, he is guilty of what Jesus said, “You call me ‘Lord’ and yet you do not follow me.”

In concluding this section here are quotes from three prominent Christians: St. Augustine, Martin Luther and St. Paul. Augustine said, “Love God and do whatever you want”. Don’t get him wrong for “whatever you want” is bound within the boundaries of God’s will. Luther said, “Love and be freed. Love and be obligated”. He said this in the context of the church. The community of believers should not be a place of limitation but of freedom. But this freedom is always intimately linked with one’s obligation to love the neighbor as a spontaneous result of God’s love. Finally, St. Paul said, “But now that you have been set free

¹ D. J. Diel, Jr., in, CPBC 70th Assembly Souvenir Program. 2005. Translation mine.

² Cf. K. S. Latourette, 1953, p. 684

³ Cf. R. A. Baker, 1959, p. 154ff.

⁴ “Reformers within the Reformation, radicals or revolutionaries” were labels given to Anabaptists and Baptist for their attempt for painstaking cleaning of the Church by going back to the ideals of the Scriptures, especially the NT.

⁵ W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, p. 146.

⁶ Lester Edwin Ruiz, 2005, November 29, Interview.

from sin, and have become slaves to God, the benefit leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Rom. 6:22).

In other words, Local Autonomy is to be understood proactively. Freedom is to seek the mind of Jesus and the will of God, and obey them unconditionally. The Philippine Baptist is called to seek and obey the "mind of Christ" in its attempt to live as a church of God. CPBC is left with a challenge on how to incarnate the "mind of Christ" in a polity that will serve the mission of God best.

3. Towards a Faith as Foundation of United Practice

Some of our CPBC constituents have spoken, what is next? What is the problem? This is the very question that an informed person should ask in order to diagnose the situation accurately. Scientific way of solving problem starts with 'Identification of the Problem'.

Many informants mentioned that CPBC has problems such as "conflict management, property management, calling of pastor, discipline of members, priority, leadership crisis, reluctant membership, unenthusiastic leaders and staff, and the like." However, it seems to appear that they are only symptoms of a deeper problem. A number of informants cited the absence of CPBC definition of faith principles. Perhaps, many of CPBC members know the Baptist faith, but do they fully understand what they believe? How could they understand if they have no position to base their practice on? It follows then that the burden lies in the shoulder of CPBC leaders to address this urgent problem – "the challenge of faith."¹ Only by knowing and understanding her faith can CPBC regain her identity and nature. Only by understanding her faith principles can she have a clearer grasp of her past and future. Only by seeking the mind of Christ CPBC can respond faithfully to the call of God's mission.

CPBC, like other Protestants, also suffer organizational problems. Dr. Fely David said that when you know that others have problems equally bad or worse than yours, you feel better about yourself.² That is true. But that "better feeling" should not blind us to things that need to be done to resolve the problem no matter how minute they are compared with others'. A problem is always a problem no matter how minor it is. They are to be resolved; else, they become chronic or perennial. Of course, CPBC's problem is too enormous to be shunned. Rev. Dr. Lester Edwin Ruiz wrote:

I think that part of the problem that needs to be addressed when dealing with the notion of "autonomy" is the notion of "community" that almost always accompanies it. Part of the dilemma ... is that the problem of autonomy is tied to the fact that we inherited a particular, but often unacknowledged, "secular" understanding of the individual and the community (from the liberal philosophical heritage); which, in part conflicts with our local (cultural) understanding of the individual and the community. Part of the dilemma is also that when we interpret the Bible, we interpret it through the lens of this "secular" notion of the individual/community instead of letting the Bible and its non-liberal context speak to us about the meaning of individual/community. In other words, we have inherited a western, "colonized" understanding of individual and community (from our missionaries). Until we see it as that,

¹ L. E. Ruiz, *Thoughts on Local Autonomy: A Question of Faith* This paper was written as a critique to *The CBBC-CREED Committee's Study: Local Governance vs. Centralization: The Case of Pastors in the CPBC*. 2005.

² Quoted from Dr. Fely David's lecture on Research Methods, CPUSGS.

we will have very little real sense of the problems we face that come under the name "autonomy."¹

This quest affirms Dr. Ruiz's diagnosis of the CPBC situation to be sound. As a starting point it becomes evident that CPBC's main problem is not primarily structural or organizational, rather, a problem of faith. Further, he has explicitly drawn the separation or, shall we say, cleavage between theology and governance, where, normally, polity or system is "the confluence of governance and theology".² To illustrate this, he said, "We need to look into what I call our 'operative' faith (which may not be the same as our 'formal' faith, or the faith that we supposedly proclaim."³ Similarly, though in different setting, John Kavanaugh writes an accurate description of this separation between "formal" faith and operative faith. "Fideists and activists"⁴ are his terms to sketch the extreme leanings of present day Christians. Further "Fideists and activists need each other to be whole. They need each other even to be who they are."⁵ On these he proposes two things:

...to activists that they become more profoundly rooted in faith: in the life and action of Jesus and in the life of a believing people ... to fideists, who profess a serious belief in Jesus that they become more deeply activist in their loving service and fully critical of the ways their faith has become acculturated.⁶

So, this is a problem of faith. What CPBC needs is not a "formal faith" alone, but a faith that is "operative"; faith that permeates through the structure; faith that penetrates the lifestyle of the community, thus the individual. We need a faith that is active and relevant to the present time, not a faith that is alienated from the context where it is supposed to operate. We can only do that if we choose to become "radical in seeking the basics or fundamentals of our faith". "Radical" basically means, "from the root", and fundamental means "basic or essential". In other words, this quest seeks to be radical in digging the fundamentals of Baptist faith so that thorough change might be achieved.

One of the problems that the researcher met in the process of looking for material sources is the rarity of available literature on Ecclesiology, Christology, and Missiology written by Filipino Baptists. The interview conducted reveals the relativity of our people's understanding of what we believe. Most of the informants would say, "Well, we Baptists cannot do that ... the CPBC cannot dictate ... we have our own". It seems to appear that the issue is right away focused on whether CBPC should or not dictate on its constituents. We should bear in mind that Baptists, like Filipinos, detest autocratic or dictator leaders, but that does not mean we cannot unite. This is so true because according to Rev. Ernesto B. Carvajal, "*Kon nagakalasugot kita, waay na ya nagapierde sang doctrine of Local Autonomy.*" (If we agree among ourselves, it doesn't defeat the doctrine of Local Autonomy).⁷

¹ Lester Edwin Ruiz, *Thoughts on Local Autonomy: A Question of Faith*, 2005.

² LE. Ruiz, 2005.

³ L. E. Ruiz, 2005.

⁴ John Kavanaugh, *Still Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, St.Pauls: Philippines, (Revised Ed.)1996, p. ix.

⁵ J. Kavanaugh, 1996, p. ix.

⁶ J. Kavanaugh, 1996, p. xiii.

⁷ P. Bañas, Interview. Rev. Bañas mentioned this quote from the late Rev. Carvajal. Translation mine.

After one hundred years of Baptist mission in the Philippines, we have come to the point of transition. We are in crisis, whether we admit it or not. But this is not the time to be passive. This is the time to risk. We should be optimistic about this. When viewed from a bright side, crisis becomes a “dangerous opportunity”; dangerous, because when you do nothing about it, you will end up in chaos, meaninglessness and loss. But there is opportunity, in that, when you do something about it, growth is bound to happen. Dr. Diel’s assessment of CPBC’s present state says, in part:

Nagapatubo (sige gihapon), nag-edukar sang mga Lideres – babaye, lalaki – kag nagpagguwa sini sa ila agud maka-serbisyo sa mga National kag International Organizations nga sa diin ang Convention miembro. Ang ila positions indi man lahug-lahug!

CPBC is still grooming and educating leaders – male, female – sending them to serve in national and international organizations where CPBC is a member. They are occupying crucial positions.¹

No doubt, CPBC has produced leaders, making names for themselves nationally and internationally. Its “related-institutions” had become landmarks in the country, especially in Panay. But the “worldly” notion of “position as power” is still prevalent among its constituents, especially leaders. Using Jesus’ lifestyle and standard of leadership as servanthood, many of our leaders would be found wanting. However, this is not the time to point a finger on whom to blame. This is the time to seek God’s will for our life together as people who claim to belong to God.

Enough with the “war of each against all”² period! We need to start a new stage: an era of cohesiveness, collaboration, unity, communion, witness, service and celebration of abundant life with people. Let the work begin!

III. BIBLICO-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY ON LOCAL AUTONOMY

1. New Testament (NT) Perspective

Tolle, lege; tolle, lege – take it and read it; take it and read it.

*St. Augustine*³

One of the historic Baptist emphases is “The Authority of the Scriptures over faith and practice”. In Roy McNutt’s formulation, Baptists claim to be “Bible Christians”⁴. Against the common notion that Baptist emphasizes, “regenerated church membership”⁵ publicly expressed in Baptism, Henry Cook plausibly expounds:

But the doctrine of the church is in its turn largely conditioned by our conception of the origin, nature and purpose of the Church, and for that,

¹ D. J. Diel, Jr., in, CPBC 70th Assembly Souvenir Program. 2005. Translation mine.

² Cf. L.E. Ruiz, 2005.

³ Henry Cook, *What Baptists Stands For*, The Carey Kingsgate Press: London, 1958, p. 29. “This is what Augustine confessed to have heard in his mystical conversion experience.”

⁴ William Roy McNutt, *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches*, Judson Press: Philadelphia, 1935, p. iv

⁵ W. T. Whitey, *A History of British Baptists*, 1932, in, H. Cook, 1958, p. 17, 19.

Baptists argue, we must always go back to the New Testament, since it is in the New Testament that we have the revelation of the mind and will of Christ, the Church Founder and Living Head. That revelation is given partly in Christ's own life and ministry and partly in the experience of His apostles, the men who were his immediate followers and who by Him were endued with the Spirit at Pentecost. From the New Testament we learn the essential principles of faith and practice for the Church as Christ Himself conceived them, and it is our duty as Christians to make loyalty to these essential principles and constant aim and concern.

Everything for Christian thought and practice runs back to what Christ Himself revealed to those who knew Him best and who, under the guidance of the His Spirit, preserved for all time the record of "those things which are most surely believed among us.

This is the fundamental Baptist position. With this belief in the Supremacy of the New Testament, Baptists always begin, and from it they draw all their conclusions.¹

This was one of the manifold consequences of the 16th century Reformation. Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr. pointed out the discrepancy in the importation of Baptist faith from Europe to America and the Philippines. Perhaps American bias that "sifted" Baptist principles left the Philippine Baptist with "*Kulang kay Sobra*".

Ang ginapabugal nga ang Biblia, Sole Authority for Faith and Practice, nangin forma na lang, imbis nga **foundational** kag **substantial**, subong sang paggamit sang mga Baptists anay sa Europa kag England...

Sobra pa gid ang aton pagka-secular: ang decision – legal, binding – ang religio-spiritual, indi kay advisory lang?

The Bible, proudly claimed as Sole Authority for Faith and Practice, have only become in form, instead of being foundational and substantial, like how it was used by Baptists in Europe and England ...

We have become extremely secular: the decision – legal, binding – the religio-spiritual, became advisory only?²

It seems to appear that there had been distortions of the Baptist faith and tradition as it traversed in mission through the three continents. For Dr. Diel, Baptist faith and practice had been sifted principally in America.³ As mentioned earlier, this work seeks to be radical to locate the historical foundations of Baptist faith. So, seeking to be faithful to Baptist historic emphasis on the authority of the Scripture, the writer seeks to reclaim the Bible as "foundational and substantial" to Baptist faith. Meaning, in whatever we do as Baptist, we seek and pray for the "mind of Christ" and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as witnessed to by the Scriptures. Simply, Baptist should look at the Bible as the sole source of faith and practice imperatives. One should bear in mind that, while early Baptists created

¹ H. Cook, 1958, p. 17.

² D. J. Diel, Jr., in, CPBC 70th Assembly Souvenir Program. 2005.. Translation mine.

³ Dr. Diel notes the following which had been sifted through American Baptist mission: 1. Social Justice – the very issue that Anabaptists in Germany stood and struggled for, which was why they were bitterly persecuted; 2. Context – In Europe and America they had Pope, king, and queen. Unlike in the Philippine context, we don't have such. Because we were not properly informed of the policies and governance of that of the Pope, king and queen, some of our leaders – pastor and lay people – had become little Pope, king and queen in local churches. The authority of "gathered community" is gone; 3. Puritan Legalism (do's and don'ts) that has no biblical basis and are not of Baptist heritage, were added. Freedom in Christ (Gal 5:2), which is a "new yoke" that also enslaves, was not properly taught. D. J. Diel, Jr., in, CPBC 70th Assembly Souvenir Program. 2005. (paraphrased).

numerous Confessions of Faith, they were only supplemental guides to the interpretation of the Scripture; neither did they rule over nor replace the authority of the latter. With these in mind one can now ask, "What does the Bible say about Local Autonomy?"

The term "Local Autonomy" is not explicitly found in the Bible, specifically in the NT. But the term is a descriptive principle of the local church, which when stated in full is actually "local church autonomy". It appears that real issue is not whether Local Autonomy is in the NT, but whether Local Autonomy as a descriptive principle is coherent with the NT images of the church. Whether it is true to the normative polity or structure of the early believers. The researcher does not expect an absolute copy of the New Testament pattern to be literally transmitted to the Philippine Baptist context. Rather, a challenge to seek a foundation where to build our structure on and an essence to mold our form. In other words, while we lay emphasis on the decisiveness of the New Testament account as a "seed of faith", we also deem the significance of the context as a "soil" where it should be planted. This is where the interplay of "text and context" becomes integral. This will be discussed further in the next segment.

Meanwhile, what does the NT say about the church. The writer opts to cite explicit passages about the subject. Reflection and interpretation shall be made in the next segment.

The writer preferred to enumerate the accounts about the *church* in this order:

1. The Gospel of Matthew

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18a). "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or as tax collector."^{18:17}

The word *church*¹ is a derivative of the Greek terms *κήριακον* (*kyriakon*) and *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklesiā*), which literally means "a place of assembly or gathering".

2. Acts of the Apostles

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church, going from house to house, he dragged men and women and put them in prison." 8: 1b-3.

¹ See John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Geoffrey Chapman (The Bruce Publishing) Co.: London-Dublin, 1966. p. 133-134. The Anglo-Saxon group of words (Eng *church*, Scots *kirk*, German *Kirche*, Dutch *kerk*) are derived from the late Gk word *κήριακον* (*kyriakon*) "the Lord's (house)." The Gk word *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklesiā*) signified in classical Gk the assembly of the citizens of a city for legislative or deliberate purposes. This assembly included only the citizens who enjoyed full rights, and thus the word implies both the dignity of the members and the legality of the assembly. The Gk word *ekklesiā* had no religious usage. It was adopted by the LXX to render the Hebrew word *kāhāl*, which with the Hebrew *'ēdāh* signifies in later Hebrew the religious assembly of the Israelites. These two words were adopted for the local religious assembly of the Jews who lived outside Jerusalem, and *'ēdāh* is more commonly rendered in Greek by *συναγωγή* (*synagogue*); J. D. Douglas et. al. eds., *The New Bible Dictionary*, W.M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1962. p. 228. The English word *church* is derived from Gk. adjective *κήριακος* as used in some phrases as *κήριακον δωμα* or *κήριακε οικια*, meaning 'the Lord's house', i.e. Christian place of worship. 'Church' in the New Testament, however, renders Gk. *ekklesiā*, which mostly means a local congregation of Christians and **never a building**.

*“Then the **church** throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in fear of the Lord.” 9: 31.*

*“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the **church** and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” 11: 25-26.*

*“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the **church** of God, which he bought with his own blood.” 20: 28.*

1.1. Pauline, Pastoral, and General Epistles

*“To the **church** of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with those everywhere who call in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 1: 2-3.*

*“To the **church** of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia...” 2 Cor.1: 1b.*

*“To the **churches** in Galatia ...” Gal. 1: 2b.*

*“To the **church** of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” 1 & 2 Thes.1:1b.*

*“...To Philemon ... and to the **church** that meets in your home.” Phile. 1: 2b.*

*“To the seven **churches** in the province of Asia.” Rev. 1: 4a.*

The verses cited contain the use of the term church in some NT writings. Evidently, *church* is not a standard term used to mean the apostles, believers, followers, and the like of Jesus. The fact is it is only one of the numerous terms that were synonymous with each other and interchangeably used by NT authors. Maring and Hudson wrote:

At first there was no one standardized term by which the Christian community was designated. It was referred to by equivalent terms such as brethren, *followers of the way*, assembly, household, people, body, etc. It was not until later that the term *ecclesia* (meaning, in its broadest sense, a “calling out” or “assembly,” and translated “church” in the English versions of the Bible) came to be as the standard term. There is no special reason why a word meaning “people” (*λαος του θεο* – *people of God*) or “household” (*οικος*) could have not been adopted instead. Certainly such words occur *more* frequently than *church* in the New Testament.¹

¹ Maring & Hudson, 1991. p. 22. Italics except *ecclesia* mine.

Indeed, this is evident in the NT. Of the three synoptic authors, Matthew was the only Evangelist who used the term church (*ekklesia*); Mark and Luke, surprisingly, did not. Hans Küng wrote:

Only twice – and, moreover, in two passages from the same gospel which are hotly disputed by exegetes (Mt. 16:18; 18:17) – does the word “church”, or rather ἐκκλησία, appear in the gospels. On the other hand the words “kingdom of God” (βασιλεία του θεου) appear about a hundred times in the synoptic gospels. This is a disturbing fact for any ecclesiology, even today.¹

This eloquent catholic scholar sees the discrepancy of the evangelist’s use of the term. Küng quotes an often-quoted comment from Alfred Loisy: “Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, and what came was the church.”² The discussion on the relationship (if there is) between the *kingdom of God* and *church* may lead to another direction, so, that will be laid aside for the next segment.

For emphasis, a segment of the quote from Maring and Hudson is reiterated: “...brethren, *followers of the way*, assembly, family, household, people, body, etc...” Locating these terms in the NT and their Greek equivalents, the nuances of their original meaning can be gleaned. The following terms are synonymous and were more frequently used than the word *church*:

1. **Brothers**³ or **ἀδελφος** in Greek was a description of Jesus of those who obey the will of His Father (*Abba*) such as stated in Mk. 3: 31-35, Mat. 12: 46-50, Luke 8: 19-21. This was also used by Paul in his salutation to his Epistle to believers in Colosse that reads “To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ” Col. 1:2a.
2. **Followers of The Way**⁴ is another term used to mean the believers as in Acts 9:2; 19: 9, 23; 22:4; 24: 14, 22.
3. **Lord’s Disciples** or **μαθητης** such as in Acts 9:1, 2; 8:3. The term refers to learners and followers of a teacher (*rabbi*) or master.
4. **Saints and holy** have one Greek equivalent, **ἅγιος**. Paul often used this in addressing believer such as in Ephesus (Eph. 1:1a), Philippi (Phil. 1:1b), and Colosse (Col. 1:2a).
5. **People of God** or **λαος του θεου** is a dominant Old Testament expression referring to Israel as the chosen people of God. As used however in NT such as in 1 Pet 2:9, 10, it now refers to the people who believe and follow as the Lord. Thus, the fellowship of believers (church) is the New Israel; a chosen people called by his name; a holy nation that has a mission to do and a message to proclaim.⁵

Moreover, the following are salutation verses of the General Epistles to their addressees.

“To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations...” James 1:1a

¹ Hans Küng, *The Church*, Burns and Oates Ltd.: USA, 1967, p. 69.

² A. Loisy, *L’Evangile et l’Eglise*, Paris 1902, p. 111, in, H. Küng, 1967, p. 69.

³ Cf. F. H. Littell, 1958, p. XV. Anabaptist preferred to be called “Brethren” as how the NT believers preferred to call each other. This term is inclusive of women.

⁴ Cf. John 14:6. One of the “I AM” sayings of Jesus where he deliberately call himself “I am the Way...”

⁵ Cf. H. Küng, 1967, p. 155-177.

“To God’s elect, stranger in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithyna, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.” 1 Peter 1:1b-2a.

“To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” 2 Peter 1:1a.

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete.” 1John1:3-4.

“To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love with the truth-and not only, but also all who know the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever...” John 1:1a-2.

“To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ.” Jude 1: 1a.

From these NT passages one can infer how fluid was the usage of NT writers of terms, which the term *church* as used in NT writings (Matthean, Lukan-Acts, and Pauline) basically expressed. Be it *brothers* and *sisters* (to be gender sensitive), *followers* or *those who belonged to the Way*, *Disciples (Apostles)*, *people of God*, *the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*, *God’s elect*, *strangers in the world*, *receivers of faith*, *fellowship (κοινωνία - koinonia)*, *the chosen lady and her children*, *called and loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ*, are among the NT phrases used in referring to the believers of Jesus Christ.

Unlike the term *church* that is erroneously understood as a place or an edifice for religious rites, its NT synonyms are precise about their united sense, that is people who have decisively responded to the call of the gospel, believed, baptized and look at Jesus Christ as Lord (**κύριος**); that his words are imperative of their being and future; that they wholly offer themselves to the mission of the reign (kingdom) of God; that even the gates of hell cannot stand on their way because they are built on the Rock of their salvation – Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, geopolitical boundary is not definitive of the believers’ life and mission. It is interesting to note that the preposition used, for instance in “the church of God *in* Corinth and the churches *in* Galatia” is *in* and not *of*. This means that while the church or however one may call it is *in* Corinth or Galatia; it is not *of* (does not belong to) the said localities, for their citizenship is in heaven though they are on earth; “for they are in the world” but “they are not of the world” (John 17: 11, 16). It shows further that other than *church*, the terms used for “*believers (called out)*, *followers of the Way and doers of the Word*, did not seem to have a notion of provincial or local boundaries (such as the practice of Local Autonomy in CPBC). The “inspired” authors, every time they admonish, counsel, rebuke and the like, the believers, always claim the authority of Jesus through the

Holy Spirit. The leaders of the local congregations functioned as servants of the people as they exercised the gift (charisma) of the Holy Spirit.

Having said the account of NT use of the term *church* only as one of the many terms; having cited passages that give other terms more frequently used than *church*, other NT accounts can be cited that are more descriptive of how the early congregations (Jewish and later, Gentiles) worked out their life together, transcending their geopolitical borders.

There are NT passages that have specific issues raised. They can be used as guide for modern church polity if one truthfully minds the Baptist principle of “authority of the Scripture over faith and practice.”

1. **Conflict Management.** Matthew 18: 15-20 is a straightforward and detailed imperative utterance from Jesus himself about how the church or **οἱ ἀδελφοί** (the brothers) should conduct themselves towards a brother who sinned (**ἁμαρτωλός**). This is an excellent pattern to base conflict management process. Paul in 1 Cor 6:1-8 strongly dissuade the bringing of conflict among believers to pagan and civil courts; Christians should take their disputes to the *saints* (a frequently used synonym of *church*). In a segment of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:23-26), Jesus taught that reconciliation is a prerequisite of true worship. He further explains the practicability of settling a disagreement “while you are still with him on the way to the court” (v. 25). Doing so spares one from serious consequences (vv. 25-26).
2. **Elections.** Acts 1: 12-26, a candid account of how the disciples (sisters and brothers) chose Matthias in place of Judas to again complete the twelve; and Acts 6: 1-7, records the situation that gave birth to, and how the first seven deacons were chosen. These passages are precise models of election in the early life of the believers. In both instances prayer for the working of the Holy Spirit played a significant role. In the first instance, the disciples (with Peter as the spokesperson) used their reason by setting a qualification¹ for the one to be nominated. Then they cast lots with faith that it was the working of the Holy Spirit on whom the lot would fall. This event simply echoes how individuals are chosen for a particular post in the olden times. It is Yahweh that chooses not the people. This is evident in the anointment of kings and prophets.
3. **Ministry.** The choosing of the Seven Deacons was a wise and spontaneous response of the disciples to believers’ growing number and needs. Take note that the seven were “known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (v 3). The believers appointed the seven and the disciples ordained them. Both the proposal and its outcome pleased the whole group (v 5). The first century believers’ way of selecting their leaders shows the following: (1) it was a response to the need; (2) it was a consensus of the whole community. In other words, there were no majority and minority votes; neither was there administration nor opposition blocks lobbying for position and control. Servants were appointed and ordained for service (which the term *deacon* means) of the least (widows, in this instance) and not to rule over the others. Thus, the modern slogan “leadership is servanthood” is declared void by this

¹ Acts 1:21-22. “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us²beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

event. It is the reverse that Jesus lived and taught. Public posts in the context of the early Church were always about service as modeled from Jesus lifestyle and pedagogy: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45; Mat 20:28); “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

It also shows how closely knitted is the choosing of leaders to the ministry and mission of the believers as followers of Christ. Leaders are appointed and ordained to participate in the work or mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. **Property Management.** The passages in Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36 show how the early believers responded to the calling of the Gospel by sharing their possessions so that nobody among the believers was in need. Acts 5: 1-11 demonstrate the consequence of lying against the Holy Spirit exhibited by Ananias and Sapphira. This echoes the divine judgment of God on Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:2), on Achan (Jos 7:25), and on Uzzah (2 Sa 6:7). These are foundational passages on the issue of property management. The common use of possessions to satisfy everyone’s need and the use of individual gifts (charisma) to serve the whole body/community clearly show the egalitarian system lived by the believers. In other words there was sharing of goods and gifts among them. The act of providing for the need of the “least” did not necessarily mean giving alms, but doing justice. Equal access to a common possession means there was no “differentiating wealth¹” among community members. The tragic death of Achan (OT) and Ananias and Sapphira (NT) makes plain that private property and deceit is strongly reprobated in the communion of the people of God. This is evidently supported in the collective life² exhibited by Jesus and the disciples (Mat 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8: 3). Another account (found in the four gospels) openly supports this is: the “Feeding of the Multitude” (Mat 14:13-21; 15:29-39; Mk 7:31-37; 8:1-10; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13). This, for Gabriel Dietrich, is the economy of sharing³. Here the idea of sharing things in common is prevalent. Further, it implies that the resources of the

¹ See Jose Porfirio Miranda, *Communism in the Bible*, (Translated from Spanish by Robert R. Barr) Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, USA, 1981, p. 21-48.

² Some authors, especially Miranda, used the term “communist” to describe this NT event. For him, “In fact the definition Karl Marx borrowed from Louis Blanc, ‘from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs’, is inspired by, if not directly copied from, Luke’s formulation in Acts 2:44-45; 4: 32-35.” (J. P. Miranda, *Communism in the Bible*, 1981, p. 1-2, 18) One cannot, however, lay aside the political-ideological aspect of this issue. For extensive and reconciliatory or dialogical discussion on the Church and Communism, see W. Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, St. Paul Publications: Makati, Metro Manila, Phil., 1974. p. 122-128. Portion of which reads: “We could share with the Communists the idea that social injustices are not to be taken for granted, that charity hand-outs are no substitute for justice, that in view of the equal dignity of men privileged classes have lost their right to exist, that the accumulation of riches in a world of poverty is criminal. We need to learn from them simplicity in standards of living, the hard work needed to transform the world, solidarity with the poor, ‘hunger and thirst after justice’ not simply in an introverted and individualistic sense but also taking account of ‘justice in the world’ . . .”

³ Quoted by Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, *Solidarity and Spirituality: A Theology of Life*, in N. D. Bunda, et. al. eds., *Journeys in Faith and Ministry*, IATS, Inc.: Iloilo City, Philippines, 2003, vo.1, 2003, p. 271-272. “The feeding of the multitude by Jesus as recorded in the Gospels informs this idea of interrelatedness. This story has been referred to as the Great meal of Sharing. Gabriel Dietrich, a German theologian claims that the miracle in the story was not the multiplication of the five loaves and two fishes such that thousands were able to eat, plus having twelve baskets of leftovers. The miracle was how everyone shared food with another such that all were fed... Only when people live in solidarity with one another, concretized in sharing, can the whole inhabited earth be sustained.

community are not exchanged or sold for profit such as in an entrepreneurial scheme.¹

5. The Gospel of John is quite different compared with the first three (synoptic gospels). John the apostle presents Jesus who refers to himself as "I am"² in many accounts; unlike in the synoptic gospels when Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone of his true identity (Mat 16:20; Mk 8:30; Lk 9:21). There are many explicit Johannine passages that deal with the relationship of Jesus with the believers, such as "The Vine and the Branches (15:5)", and "The Good Shepherd and the Sheep (10:11, 14)". But the researcher prefers to underline chapter 17:1-26, the often-quoted intercessory prayer of Jesus, for himself (vv 1-5), his disciples (vv 6-19), and all believers (vv 20-26). This is one Johannine description of the ecumenicity and unity of the "Believers of Christ" as fervently prayed for by Jesus himself before his arrest. This is a substantial basis for the ecumenical³ movement, which people who claim to be part of the church should join; a movement that struggles to create an egalitarian community where "unity in diversity" is a working paradox, again, as prayed for by Jesus and illustrated by Paul using the human body (I Cor 12:12-30; Eph 1:22-23).

The next segment will delve into the theological perspective, and from time to time, refer to NT passages cited above and others.

2. Theological Perspective

I believe therefore I seek to understand.

St. Anselm

The problem of Local Autonomy is a challenge of faith – an issue of ecclesiology to be specific. By ecclesiology we mean the understanding of the nature, being and mission of the church. What we believe about the church (People of God/Body of Christ) determines our perception, attitude and action towards it. Thus, the past, present and future of the church should be understood adequately, if not fully, if one seeks to be faithful as part of the worldwide (or maybe cosmic) **Communion (κοινωνία)**⁴ of the people of God, living as **Herald (κρηγμα)** of the Good News of the Reign (kingdom) of God, struggling as **Servant (διακονία)** of the world (humanity and creation) by ushering in justice, righteousness and peace.

While one should invest his intellectual prowess in in-depth historical and theological research to look for answers, it should be admitted that, in due time,

¹ The earth's bounty should be shared to satisfy the needs of the consuming creatures without the manipulation of capitalist or monopolist. Sadly, there seem to be a "profit driven" atmosphere sweeping among CPBC members and institutions. It seems to show that the style of leadership being perpetuated is profit driven instead of mission and service (*diakonia*). This is without prejudice to honest Christian-business people and small-scale entrepreneurs who should "eat from the sweat of their brow".

² The Bread of Life (6:35, 51), The Good Shepherd (10:14), The Resurrection and the life (11:25), The Way and the Truth and the Life (14:6), The Vine (15:5). The definite claims of Jesus to himself are one of the distinct features of John's gospel.

³ *Ecumenics* is derived from the Gk word *oikoumene*. Its root word is *oikos* which means "one inhabited world", and "one household" (as in economics). Thus, one can reflect that ecumenical movement is an endeavor that seeks to live in a world that people can call home, where sharing of goods and gifts is motivated by the love (peace and justice and righteousness) of One Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁴ Cf. W. Bühlmann, 1974. p. 383.

our discoveries, beliefs, and practices will be weighed in and judged by God who alone has the penultimate claim to all the truth there is. This, however, should not make us idle in studying and “leave everything to God’s hand alone”. Our being called is both a privilege and responsibility. The latter includes earnest attempt to know that which we believe, as the quote from a Bishop of Canterbury, in the outset explicates.

The term *church* is probably one among the distorted and misused words in the modern world. When one says church, most likely he means that building in the corner across the street, a sect, a denomination, and the like. In the Philippine setting, a plaza for instance situates different “churches”. Taking Jaro, Iloilo City, as an example, we can enumerate churches located in the vicinity: Jaro Cathedral, Jaro Evangelical Church, Iglesia ni Kristo, Seventh Day Adventists, Full Gospel Church, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Iloilo Baptist Church, Legacy Baptist Church, and many others. On Sundays (except SDA that gather on Saturdays) we can see the parade of families, lovers and people going to their respective churches. Early in the morning parents would say, “Children, wake up, we will go to church.” In the church people would look at you indifferently if you were not dressed properly in well-pressed “church attire”. One has to behave properly (lots of don’ts) because you are “in the church”. This is a mocking picture of religiosity. There seem to be a boundary or separation between one’s personal life and church life. In other words, most people inadequately understand religion or church, to stay on tract, that these odd realities happen.

To avoid confusion, it is important to underline that the term *church* as used here is “never a building”¹, but the *People of God*, *Body of Christ*, and other NT terms, as laid in the preceding section. Also, it should not be equated to the *Hiligaynon* word *simbahan*², as a typical Philippine Baptist often does. The author prefers to use *church* interchangeably with *iglesia*³, as the latter denotes a similar sense. The CPBC context is the focus of the following discussion.

The Philippine Baptist mission is more than a hundred years old now. Like other denominations, it has strengths and weaknesses, problems and solutions, assets and liabilities. More than all these CPBC faces a challenge of ecclesiology. Before going further, a paragraph from Avery Dulles would be of great help.

In the course of history, there had been many Christian communities known as “churches,” not all of them equally faithful to Christ and to the Spirit. This evident fact has made it necessary to distinguish between the Church as a sociological and as theological entity. From the point of view of sociology, the term “church” would designate any group of men who consider themselves to be, and are considered to be, followers of Christ. Theologically the term “church” refers to the mystery of Christ as realized in the community of those who believe in him and are assembled in his name. To the Christian believer, the church is not purely a human thing; it is not simply of this creation or of this world; rather, it is the work of God, who is present and operative in the Church through the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ continues his saving presence. Sociologically, the Church is a fact of observation, accessible to persons

¹ See J. D. Douglas et. al. eds., 1962, p. 228.

² The word *Simbahan* – a place of worship and of sacrificial rites for nature spirits. See N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 40. It appears that it is a misnomer to use *simbahan* to mean *church* in the NT sense; *iglesia* is nearer for the reason that resounds the etymology of the church (ekkleisia).

³ *Iglesia* is a *Hiligaynon* word transliterated from Spanish.

who do not have faith. Theologically, the Church is a mystery of grace, not knowable independently of faith.¹

Empirically, most Baptists figure out the Church both sociologically and theologically, but the former is more emphasized than the latter. Though sociological knowledge is important, Avery Dulles states that theological understanding is more vital. The latter would lead one to understand the true essence of the subject at hand.

The task of this paper is to rediscover the Baptist understanding of the Church within the historical development of this faith and its relationship to the New Testament idea of the same. While this attempt is ecclesiological, it is given that it will also seek to find Christological relationship in the process. This is due to the fact that the Church in its strictest sense is understood as a people of God or the Body of Christ. This will be underscored in the light of Philippine Baptist history and New Testament exegesis.

Further, this study also attempts to find a Baptists polity that is faithful to the biblical mandate for the church. To guide us on the meaning of polity, the author adheres to William Roy McNutt's definition:

Polity... that body of the more basic, habitual ways and procedures – all of which are under the guidance of a given creative principle – by means of and in accordance with which a living church (*community of God's people*) manifest its life and projects its ministry.²

In a broader sense, polity is to be understood as organization. It is the way we order our resources to enable the church to be and do what God commands. It involves a pattern of relationships: ways of believing and acting, ways of marshalling our forces to fulfill God's mission. It answers the question: How can we best accomplish God's purpose for the church, for CPBC as composed of "churches"? Maring & Hudson candidly explains this:

Many feel that organizational structures conflict with the work of the Holy Spirit, but they need not do so. Organization is essential to the viability of the church and its ministry. God's grace is not bound by human forms; rather, God has condescended to use human instruments to work out divine purposes. The Christian gospel must be incarnated both in individual lives and in corporate forms.

To develop forms consistent with the church's nature and mission, we must have a vision of its purpose. Although it is a social institution, it is more than that by virtue of its divine calling and unique purpose. Created by the Holy Spirit, it is a fellowship which exists for the formation of a people who live by faith in God under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Through its message of reconciliation individuals are transformed and drawn into a nurturing community that witnesses to God's redeeming love and concern for justice, righteousness and peace. The church thus exists as a constant reminder that all human lives are accountable to the sovereign God whose kingdom Jesus came to announce.³

¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All Its Aspects*, Gill and McMillan Ltd, Ireland, 1988, p. 123.

² William Roy McNutt, *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches*, Judson Press: Philadelphia, 1935 p. 2. Italics in parenthesis mine.

³ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 1.

The truth that this passage gives should also be manifest in the life of CPBC as a church. Meaning, CPBC should live what it believes and preaches; its faith should permeate its polity or organizational structure. Thus, it is imperative for CPBC, if it claims to be a church that its structure or communion provides life for the heralding of the Good News and the serving of the world's needs in the name of Jesus as its Savior and Lord. This polity need not be a verbatim copy of American or European polity, as it should respect the Philippine context. Problems arise from a polity that locates authority from the congregation, as the experience of CPBC and other Baptist bodies in the world proved. But this is not enough reason that we should go back to a hierarchical or monolithic structure that this polity was developed against. The Roman church polity had its deleterious outcome in the past that one who knows history should not desire to repeat. "Congregational polity may be more vulnerable to fragmentation, as Baptists history shows, than some others, and it is sometimes less efficient in making decisions and acting of them. On the other hand, it provides a large measure of freedom and flexibility, which allows for adopting new forms to meet changing needs."¹ In other words, cultural considerations should be given importance in formulating a polity for a church to best serve the purpose it is called for. "Particular forms may vary, but basic principles persist"². Thus, the challenge for CPBC is how to reconstruct a polity that is culturally fitting and would best serve the being and mission of the church, while faithful to the imperative of the Gospel. This may sound difficult but not impossible. In this quest, the researcher shares St. Paul's faith when he wrote: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). Because Baptists are congregational, we could state this in the collective: "We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength."

In the newly built fountain in the front yard of the CPBC headquarters, an inscription is written: *Preaching, Teaching, and Healing*. Sometime in the first quarter of the year 2006, the researcher inquired about this from a CPBC staff, who requested anonymity. The person said that CPBC-related institutions (CPU, IMH, CEH) initiated the project for CPBC. It is intended to improve the area. Why fountain? It is because moving water is a symbol of dynamism, beauty, hope, power and life. No doubt about that. The inscription, however, caught the researcher's attention.

Preaching, Teaching and Healing is a traditional Baptist's conception of the ministry of Jesus.³ According to the staff inquired from, the proponents of the project see the three terms specialized in the services of the Baptist churches and institutions. Preaching is in the church, Teaching in schools and Healing in the hospitals. This is the very idea behind the existence of three-dimensional ministries located particularly in Iloilo and Capiz. In Iloilo, churches (Jaro Evangelical Church, Baptist Center Church, University Church, and others), schools (Central Philippine University and Learning Centers) and hospital (Iloilo Mission Hospital) are founded. Similarly, Church (Capiz Evangelical Church and others), School (Filamer Christian College and church-based Learning Centers) and hospital (Capiz Emmanuel Hospital) are established in Capiz.

This phenomenon is an offshoot of the schism in America (and also reached the Philippines) that divided the Baptists into two factions. This is the "pure

¹ N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 3.

² N. H. Maring, W. S. Hudson, 1991, p. 3.

³ Cf. D. J. Diel, Jr., 1975, p. 12, in, N. D. Bunda, 1999, p. 103.

gospel” and “social gospel” controversy.¹ The proponents of the former assert that mission should only save the soul by preaching the “pure gospel” alone; social actions were considered secular. While the latter adheres to the proclamation of the Word, social justice and services are also tasks that true Christians should undertake. This gave birth to “holistic ministry”, as the Gospel is both for the salvation of the soul and the liberation or well being of the body.²

Through time, however, the three-dimensional approach seems to have gone away from the idea of “holistic ministry”. This is due to the fact that both the local churches and institutions assert local autonomy at the expense of the whole. The CPBC situation seems to have been fragmented, as if preaching is solely in the local church, teaching exclusively in school and healing only in hospital. This is evident because most of the institutions and “big” churches operate on their legal identity, which is to understand the Church only sociologically and not theologically; the latter is often secondary, worse, forgotten at times. Ideally, the reverse should be the case. The Church must be theologically understood so that its sociological and legal aspects would be fundamentally founded. In other words, preaching, teaching and healing, as conception of the ministry of Jesus is inadequately bearing the nature of the Church as the body of Christ. Added to the error may be varied interpretations of some local leaders whose perspectives are motivated not by biblical imperatives but by personal interests.

There seems to be an overload of discussions about ecclesiology among Protestants and Catholic writers. But the researcher opted to pick three Greek terms for the church, which are deemed needed by CPBC for the time being. This is to understand the Church as a **κοινωνία** (communion), **κηρυγμα** (herald/proclamation), **διακονία** (service). The nuances of these Greek terms may not be fully represented by their English equivalents. But we will try our best to explain them in the process. Unlike “preaching, teaching, healing” which are seemingly interpreted independent from each other, the former will be discussed how they relate to each other as the whole of the act of God in Jesus Christ. They are only terms for the sake of naming them; in essence they are one because Jesus Christ is one. Wherever he went, communion, proclamation and service were one with him and in his community of followers.

Before discussing these three attributes of the church, it is deemed fitting to devote a segment on the organic relationship between the Church and Jesus Christ. Because “the Reign³ (kingdom) of God” is the central theme of Jesus’ message, this will also be discussed. Because the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the formation of this community, she would also be given due importance.

2. 1. Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Reign Of God And The Church

Much has been written about Jesus Christ and the Church. In fact, there is an overload of literature about this subject both by Catholic and Protestant authors. One cannot set aside cultic and sectarian writers who also have scholarly attempts on the subject. But the researcher finds substance and precision in the work of Hans Küng. In preceding segments few quotes have

¹ As noted in chapter I, it was on this issue that CPBC and Doane Baptist had schism and parted ways.

² See N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 102-103.

³ “The *basileia* (meaning ‘kingdom’ or better, because of the misleading associations, ‘reign’) of God...” See H. Küng, 1967, p. 71. To accommodate the “feminist” readers, the author also prefers “reign” than “kingdom” due to the mannish connotation of the latter.

been taken from his book, *The Church*¹. On the relationship of Christ and the Church, from the same, he eloquently wrote:

Christ is present in the church. The crucified Jesus is present in the Church as the risen Lord. Christ does not exist without the Church; the Church does not exist without the Christ. Christ is for the Church not only an event in a constantly receding past, nor only an event in the future, whether near or distant. He who is the *Kyrios* (Lord) over all humankind, whether they know it or not, is present in his Church. The Church does not derive its life only from the work which Christ did and finished in the past, nor only from the expected future consummation of his work, but from the living and efficacious presence of Christ in the present. The preaching of the Gospel is not merely an account of the historical saving act of God in Christ; Christ himself is at work in the word which is preached. Where two or three are gathered in his name, there he is in the midst of them (Mat 18:20); he is with us all until the end of the world (28:20). It is not the fruits of his life on earth, not the significance of his historical existence which is at work in the Church; he himself in person works in and through the church, and all its existence is based upon and directed towards him.²

This is very disturbing, one must admit. Most of the time, we hear some Baptist preachers say, "The church continues the work of Jesus Christ" or "We should continue what Jesus and the early believers started". For Küng, that is not the case; instead, "Christ is present in the entire life of the Church".³ This means there is continuity between then and now. There is no break or gap between the experiences of the first century and the modern day believers. Apparently, the two Matthean accounts in the quote above are made lucid in the verse, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and forever" (Heb 13:8). A Swedish Baptist minister, in a sermon deduces:

He is no longer only the innocent suffering Lamb... He is not anymore the vulnerable baby laying in a manger in the stable of sheep. He is the Lion of Judah. He is the King, He is the Lord of Lords. He is still a servant but also the King of Kings. This is our Jesus in the future and of tomorrow. He will be the one who already for our daily life promised us: "I will be with you always to the end of the ages".⁴

Again, this is disturbing. Imagine Christ is really present in the church! This is breathtaking! Whatever that means must be reckoned with by those who claim being part of the church. Now, the question of the organic relationship between local communities that are scattered in terms of geopolitical location is an inevitable puzzle. About this, Dr. Küng jots down a clear-cut explanation:

Since Christ is entirely present in every congregation of worship, every congregation of worship held by the community is in the fullest sense God's ecclesia, Christ's body. The individual local community is of course not simply *the ecclesia*, *the* body of Christ, since there are other communities which are just as much God's ecclesia and Christ body.

¹ This is Küng's doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth.

² H. Küng, 1967, p. 305.

³ H. Küng, 1967, p. 305.

⁴ Olof Lindström, *Jesus is the Same Yesterday, Today and Forever*, in, Rudy Bernal, Olof Lindström eds., *FROM MY PULPIT: Messages For Our Time by Filipino and Swedish Preachers*, Iloilo People's Forum: Iloilo City, Philippines, 2003. p. 56.

But each is truly God's *ecclesia* and Christ body because the Lord is present in each, truly, wholly and undivided. And because it is the same Lord present in each community, these communities do not exist side by side in isolation, nor even in a loose federation, but they are all together in the same Spirit the one *ecclesia* of God, the one body of Christ, and through *koinonia*, *communio*, fellowship with him they are *koinonia*, *communio* and fellowship with one another.¹

It is surprising how accurate this paragraph is to the CPBC situation. Seemingly, we have inadequately understood the encompassing scope of God's *ecclesia* and body of Christ. Yes, we are a Convention, but after almost seventy years, this is still a loose federation of churches, which, in some extreme cases, have isolationist tendency. Further, CPBC insufficiently grasped the inseparable link between union with Christ and communion with one another² that transcends geopolitical limits.

While the Christ, for Küng is entirely present in the church, also Christ is not wholly contained in the church.³ This seems contradictory, but Küng's justification is convincing.

The New Testament statements about the body of Christ which refer to body *and* head are concerned not so much with the Church as the body, but with Christ as the head of the Church. In Colossians and Ephesians the accent falls not only on the church as the body which represent Christ, but on Christ as the living and active head of the church; any reflection on the Church as the body is made only to stress the unity of the body, given by the head through the Spirit.

True, there is an inner unity between Christ and the Church, but the relationship can never be reconstructed to make the Church the head of the body, its own head. In this sense there can never be autocephalous or autonomous Churches. Christ gives himself to the Church, but he is never wholly contained in it. Christ is the head. The concept of the head always carries overtones of the ruler. The body can only exist total dependence on him. It is of vital importance for the Church that it allows Christ to be its head; otherwise it cannot be his body.

Despite his continuing presence in the Church Christ is and remains the Lord of the Church. To develop the idea simply from organic images (head – body; vine – branches, etc.) will give a one-sided view and overlooks the fact that any biblical image, if taken in isolation and made autonomous, becomes false. The organic images of the relationship between Christ and the Church must always be complemented and corrected by the personal images (bridegroom – bride; man – wife) for the living relationship involved includes a personal encounter. The Church receives from Christ its life and at the same time his promises and his direction, and *therefore* its life. The Church is and remains bound to Christ as its norm. Its whole autonomy consists in this heteronomy.⁴

What is given utmost importance here is the headship or Lordship of Christ over the Church. Rev. Elmo D. Familiaran affirms this in his essay cited in chapter 2. His view of consensus is to seek the "mind of Christ", in so doing the Church

¹ H. Küng, 1967, p. 306.

² Cf. 1 John 4:7-12. This passage plainly sees the organic connection between the love for God and brother (neighbor in Gospels). Separating the two or emphasizing one over the other corrupts the whole.

³ H. Küng, 1967, p. 306.

⁴ H. Küng, 1967, p. 306-307.

and Churches find a common ground. This is also implicit in the quote from Dr. Diel in the beginning of this section. The NT, being the inspired record of the concrete event should be the foundation and substance to which the Church must be faithful. The affirmation “Christ is the Lord of the Church” means the latter should submit thoroughly to the will of the former. The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians admonishes:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. Eph. 5:21-30

Here, the organic relationship is illustrated in personal manner (wife-husband). The idea of personal encounter and fidelity of both parties to each other is symbiotic. The wife should submit to a loving husband, not to a battering and philandering one. Thus, the idea of submission should not be seen as subordination or inferiority (as some women openly oppose) but unity. This notion of symbiosis, for Fray Carlos Mesters echoes the sixth commandment (Ex 20:14) of Moses in the OT: “Thou shalt not commit adultery”.

This commandment wants that the liberating relationship of the egalitarian society penetrate the most intimate nucleus of human relationships: marriage. Discrimination in all forms ought to be eliminated from marriage. For as long as relationship of equality is not established in the man-woman relationship, God’s design will have a long way before being achieved on earth.¹

This is leading us to put in focus the reign of God in relation to Jesus and the Church. Again, for Alfred Loisy: “Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, and what came was the church.”² It is also interesting to note that Jesus the preacher, after Easter, became Jesus the preached, the bearer of the message becomes the central substance of the message.³ This may look complicated, so it will be discussed systematically.

The central theme in the proclamation of Jesus is the reign of God. His parables, individual and crowd encounter and others were all geared towards one thing – the reign of God. As to what this is, Dr. Küng elaborates in a detailed explanation:

The “reign of God” means (a) the eschatological, that is the fully realized, *final and absolute reign of God at the end of time, which as an even is now “at hand”* (Mk 1:15): it “has come upon you” (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20), it

¹ Fray Carlos Mesters, *God’s Design: God’s Presence Amidst an oppressed People*, St. Paul Publications: Makati, Philippines, 1989. p. 43.

² A. Loisy, *L’Evangile et l’Eglise*, Paris 1902, p. 111, in, H. Küng, 1967, p. 69.

³ H. Küng, 1967, p. 115.

will “come” (Lk 22:18; cf. Mk 14:25, Mt. 26:29), “come with power” (Mk 9:1). The concept is nowhere defined by Jesus; he assumes a knowledge and understanding of it and interprets it in his own way. ... (b) it could not be brought about or achieved by faithful adherence to the law; it appears as a powerful *sovereign act of God himself*. There is no one who can invite himself to the eschatological banquet. The Father issues the invitation. It is he who makes the seed grow, by his power and his grace. It is *his reign*. “Thy kingdom come”: in these words man may pray (Mt. 6:10; Lk 11:2). He may cry to God day and night (Lk 18:7); he may seek God’s kingdom (Mt 6:33; Lk 12:31), he may seek to enter it (Lk 13:24; cf. Mt. 7:13); she may prepare herself in readiness like the wise virgins (Mt 25:1-13) and the wakeful servants (Lk 12:35-37; cf. Mt 24:44). But it is not man, it is God who gives the kingdom (Lk 12:31). He “appoints” it (Lk 22:29 f.) and decides whose it shall be (Mt. 5:3, 10; cf. Lk 6:20; Mk 10:14). He is unshakable and unfathomable, sovereign and free, the God who acts like a king, acting in fulfilment of his unconditional free will. It is not man but God himself who administers his rule in this way. Man cannot storm himself into the kingdom of God, he can only receive it like a child (cf. Mk 10:15). ... (d) ... is a *saving event for sinners*. Jesus’ call to repentance does not invoke, as John the Baptist did, God’s anger, but God’s mercy. The message of the reign of God is not one of threats and coming disaster, but of salvation, peace, joy. It is positive, not a negative message, an εὐ-αγγέλιον (**good news**) (Mk 1:15), not a δὺς-αγγέλιον (**bad news**).¹

Another NT scholar illustrates the continuity of the theme of the reign of God from the OT to the NT, from Israel to the Church. R. Schnackenburg writes:

The purely religious character of the reign of God is not in dispute. It is based on the most firmly authenticated sources of Old Testament belief: “These texts show us that Israel experienced Yahweh’s kingship in the historical action of its God. This is no ‘kingdom’ and no ‘sphere of dominion’ but a kingly leadership which develop from Yahweh as King actively “rules”, must be kept in mind through the whole growth in the *basileia* theme. God’s kingship in the Bible is characterized not by latent authority but by the exercise of power, not by an office but a function.”²

Having ventured on the meaning of the reign of God, we can now go back on track: what is the relationship of the reign of God to the Church? Definitely, the Church is not the reign of God. For Dr. Küng, “The identification of God’s reign with the Church can very easily lead to *dissociation*.”³ For Küng, “*Ecclesia* is the work of man; but *basileia* is the work of God.”⁴ Here, the writer begs to disagree with him. Of course, the role of man in the formation of the Church is indispensable, but that is only secondary to the work of the Holy Spirit which enabled women and men since time to respond and do the will of God. Thus, both the Church (*ecclesia*) and the reign of God (*basileia*) are work of God through the Holy Spirit, while making use of people for God’s purpose. This bridges us to the role of the Holy Spirit as the manifest presence of Jesus Christ in and through the Church as it seeks to serve or herald God’s reign.

¹ H. Küng, 1967, p. 75-79. Bold in parenthesis mine.

² R. Schnackenburg, in, H. Küng, 1967, p. 78.

³ See H. Küng, 1967, p. 131 ff.

⁴ H. Küng, 1967, p. 92. Cf. A. Dulles, 1988, p. 103.

The theology of the Holy Spirit, or *pneumatology* is not so much one specific chapter of Christian theology as an essential dimension of every theological view of the church.¹ The researcher shares the opinion of Rev. Samuel Fabila: "Writing about the Holy Spirit is not an easy task. It may drive you to fall into the trap of being too doctrinal or highly experiential".² Though pneumatology is not given specific attention in theological literatures, it is interesting to note that it is inseparably linked with almost all topics in theology. Thus, the Holy Spirit "blows where it pleases" independent of writers' rational and systematic focus.

In the figures of the OT, the link between *dabhar* (word) and *ruach* (wind, breath, spirit);³ this is *pneuma* in Greek. Both terms could mean *wind, breath, spirit*. It was the "Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). In Gen 2:7 "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." The same wind that blew and made a vast army out of the valley of dry bones in the vision of prophet Ezekiel (37); David prays "take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). Israel "vexed God's Holy Spirit," though He had "put His Holy Spirit within" Moses, Israel's leader, and "the Spirit of Jehovah" had "caused Israel to rest" in the promised land after his wilderness wanderings (Isa 63:11-12,14); is the same ever-present Spirit that the prophet Joel prophesied to be poured out on all people, making sons and daughters prophesy, old men dream dreams, and young men see visions (2:28ff).⁴

In the NT it is the same *pneuma* that made Mary conceive (Lk 1:35); the same Spirit that Jesus claimed to be upon him as he read Isaiah's scroll (Lk 4:18-19; cf. Isa 61:1-2); the same wind that "blows where it pleases" (Jn 3: 8a); the same wind that rushed and rested on the heads of the believers like tongues of fire during the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4); the same wind that gave gifts to the Church (1Cor 12, Rom 12:3-7); the same wind that sweeps through sharing community the Jerusalem believers had (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36); the same eternal breath, wind and Spirit that sweeps through the life and service of the church then, now and in the future. Thus the Church is the work of the Spirit of God. Everything we have happens and is taking place because of the Spirit of God. On the relationship of the Holy Spirit and the Church, Boris Bobrinsky wrote:

Christian worship is worship in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23-24), both through the strength of the Spirit, who works in the church, and through the purpose of this worship, which is to make us bearers of the Spirit (*pneumatophoro*), transformed by and in the Spirit into new people till we attain "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), who both humbled himself in the form he took and was exalted (Phil 2:6-11).⁵

Stated simply, the Holy Spirit takes a central role in the works of God: creation, redemption, sanctification, and finally the consummation of the reign of God. Viewed as negative, this too, is very alarming. Using the "Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26)" as basis for judgment, many of the churches and individuals would

¹ Nicholas Lossky, et. al. eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications: Geneva, Switzerland, 1991, p. 470.

² Samuel Fabila, *The Holy Spirit in the Church and the World*, N. D. Bunda, et. al. Eds., *Journeys in Faith and Ministry*, IATS, Inc.: Iloilo City, Philippines, 2003, vo.1, 2003, p. 212

³ N. Lossky, et. al. eds., 1991, p. 470.

⁴ The use of Spirit in the OT is abundant, but the researcher preferred to highlight brief accounts that would serve the desired purpose.

⁵ Boris Bobrinsky, *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, in, N. Lossky, et. al. eds., 1991, p. 472.

be found wanting. Jesus himself taught, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Mat 7:20). Apparently, it is not enough that an individual calls oneself Christian or a group calls themselves church. But “their spirit should be tested to see whether they are from God (1Jn 4:1-3)”. For the true Spirit this is vindication; for the true Church, a fountain of joy and hope despite the turmoil that Church and the world are in.

Time now to highlight respectively these three and their relationship with each other as they describe the nature of Jesus Christ as a people of God or Body of Christ. The researcher also attempts to find “contextual expressions”¹ that a “*conscientized* Christian”² could utilize in communicating a truly liberating message, deeply rooted in the NT while adaptive to the Philippine situation.

As explained in the outset of these segment, the problem of Local Autonomy is a challenge of ecclesiology. The notion of the *church* has been reconstructed. The relationship between the Church and Jesus Christ (reign of God, Holy Spirit) was also discussed. The discussions, however, are too broad to meet the desired end – a Baptist ecclesiology that would resolve the issue of Local Autonomy. Unless a specific ecclesiology that is rooted in the Word of God is found and fitting to the context it is intended, this endeavor becomes meaningless. In the following lines the writer attempts to glean ecclesiological models or paradigms that are deemed fitting to CPBC’s situation as it seeks to be faithful to be a church of Jesus Christ: celebrating a communion, heralding the Gospel of the reign of God, and serving the needs of the least.

As laid out earlier, *preaching, teaching, healing*, are quite inadequate in expressing the ministry of Jesus. Historically, this theory has proven itself wanting and unfit in the Philippine Baptist context. It is so because CPBC as *churches* has somehow become fragmented when in the first place it should have been united. Looking into CPBC, one cannot miss this discrepancy given the “fruit” of its ministry. It is an alarming fact and scandalous scenario that many of the “big churches”, for instance in the provinces of Iloilo, Negros, Capiz, Aklan and Romblon, have undergone splits.³ Some of these churches, against the counsel of some CPBC officers, brought their cases to civil courts. Few of them were divided not only once but several times. Somehow this has become a chronic problem and a vicious cycle – a scandal on the true nature and purpose of the Church as People of God and Body of Christ.

Upon careful research and analysis of the CPBC situation, given the symptoms that its deep-seated problem manifest, the researcher came up with an alternative ecclesiology. As stated earlier, this ecclesiology is defined using three Greek terms: **κοινωνια** (Communion), **κηρυγμα** (Herald), **διακονια** (Servant). Again, their English equivalent might not fully express their original nuance, but

¹ See Genaro D. Diesto, Jr., *Contextualization: An Agenda for the Churches*, in N. D. Bunda, et. al. Eds., 2003, vo.1, 2003, p. 84-149.

² See Jose M. de Mesa, Lode L. Wostyn, *Doing Christology: The Re-Appropriation of a Tradition*, Claretian Publications: Quezon City, Philippines, 1990. p. 60-62

³ In a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted in December 13, 2005, with the CPBC Executive Staff, the following came up. Local churches that have been into conflict and ended up splitting are the following. 1. Negros. (Bacolod Evangelical Church, Bacolod Baptist Church, Bacolod Christian Church); (Cosmopolitan Evangelical Church, Bacolod Christian Center); Cadiz, Bethany, Canlaon, (Dangkalan First Baptist Church, Dangkalan, Inc.) Escalante, Sagay, La Carlota, Hinigaran, Bago); 2. Iloilo. (Carles, Estancia, Batad, Ajuy, Banate, Btc. Viejo, Potolatan (Rizal Baptist Church, Rizal Fundasyon), Calinog, Lambunao (RGMBC, Rocky Hill), Cabatuan (Ito), Leon, (San Miguel Baptist Church, Langka Baptist Church), (Highway Evangelical Church, Koinonia Baptist Church, (Baptist Center Church, New Testament Baptist Church); 3. Capiz. (Capiz Evangelical Church, Capiz Christian Church), (Pontevedra Baptist Church, Soblangon Baptist Church, Rock Baptist Church-Maprangala group); 4. Aklan. Laserna Baptist Church; 5. Romblon. Odiongan Baptist Church, Inc., Odiongan Baptist Convention, Inc.; 6. Antique. Sibalom Children’s Center, Belison Children’s Center.

that should not discourage us from looking to the Scriptures for justification. Hence, the Word (Heb. *dabhar*, Gk. *logos*) as recorded in the Scripture and witnessed to by the Spirit (Heb. *ruach*, Gk. *pneuma*) is our authority over faith and practice. Like the early Baptist who wrote down *Confessions of Faith*, this attempt also seeks to be a guide to understand the Scripture, not to replace it. The time is ripe to discuss this ecclesiology.

2.2. COMMUNION (κοινωνία)

Communion is frequently used to mean the Eucharist, or to be loyal to protestant terminology, the Lord's Supper. Interestingly, Jesus shared meals with his disciples, tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, and people from different walks of life. Jesus loves to be with the people, regardless of their earthly condition, which to the religious (especially Pharisees) during his time is a ground for discrimination. Jesus was an irresistible guest. At times he didn't need to be invited, he invited himself, like in the case of Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk 19:5). It is also astounding to note that Jesus the guest became, in most occasions, the host. He would usually lead the "breaking of bread". So for a fact, Jesus, in many occasions, shared meal with different people. Interestingly, the meal shared by Jesus, was not an end in itself (just how the gluttons practiced) but a beginning of a new life. The meal shared with Zacchaeus resulted into the salvation of his whole household as Jesus proclaimed, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (19:9-10). This account clearly convey that the meal Jesus and Zacchaeus partook was more than food and wine, though they are important for physical nourishment. Jesus did not only feed the body but the whole being. In the process the squat publican stood tall because he became Jesus' recipient of recreation; making the sinner, by God's grace, part of the New Creation (2Cor 5:17). Thus, the Lord Supper is not just a meal, as most people erroneously interpret. This does not mean that the importance of the meal is set aside, but to underline the danger of missing that which is elemental. To see this clearly let us move into Gospel accounts when Jesus instituted the Supper.

The four Evangelists have their respective accounts of the Meal (Matt 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26; Luke 22:14-22; John 13:21-30). A close reading of these accounts reveals that Jesus was not at all taking about the bread and the fruit of the vine. These elements were only referred to as metaphors of what Jesus intended to convey: the cup – new covenant in his blood, the bread – his body. The notion of *Incarnation* is given substance here. The phrase "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19b) exemplifies this. This means Jesus is now entrusting the work, he pioneered with his body for people to come into a new covenant relationship with God, to his disciples. Thus "do this in remembrance of me" is not only about dining with each other, but an imperative for the disciples to pursue that which Jesus taught, practiced and about to die for – the reign of the God offered to all people to come. The parable of the banquet (Mat 22:1-14; Lk 14:16-23) is a picturesque description of how this communion is offered freely to all. Those who were on the list did not wish to come because they had other matters to attend. So the Master extended the invitation to anybody: "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Lk14:21b) to share the feast of the Master. Consequently, the Meal instituted by Jesus is the consummation of all other meals he shared with various people, a feast freely inviting anybody to be friends

of Risen Lord (Jn 15:13-15; 21:5). Thus, the Church is a communion openly offered to anybody to share the new covenant relationship with the Lord.

At the outset of this segment was stated the frequency of equating Communion with the Lord's Supper. It is true as long as the latter is understood as a metaphor of Jesus command to do the task he taught, lived and died for. To take the Lord's Supper as a mere meal is to miss the essence of the form. Further, it becomes clear that the Lord's Supper is more of a pre-Easter Commissioning encounter that later Jesus announced explicitly in the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20) after the resurrection.

This *communion* is made manifest in the life together of the Jerusalem believers. For clarity let us state in verbatim the two Lukan parallel accounts.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:32-37

The writer finds it disturbing how Commentaries have done injustice¹ to this passage. Adam Clarke's Commentary, for instance interprets:

[And had all things common] Perhaps this has not been well understood. At all the public religious feasts in Jerusalem, there was a sort of community of goods. No man at such times hired houses or beds in Jerusalem; all were lent gratis by the owners: Yoma, fol. 12. Megill. fol. 26. The same may be well supposed of their ovens, cauldrons, tables, spits, and other utensils. Also, provisions of water were made for them at the public expense. Shekalim, cap. 9. See Lightfoot here. Therefore a sort of community of goods was no strange thing at Jerusalem, at such times as these. It appears, however, that this community of goods was carried further; for we are informed, Acts 2:45, that they sold their possessions and their goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need. But this probably means that, as in consequence of this remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God; and their conversion, they were detained longer at Jerusalem than they had originally intended, they formed a kind of community for the time being, that none might suffer want on the present occasion; as no doubt the unbelieving Jews,

¹ See H. C. Vedder, 1891, p. 14-15.

who were mockers, Acts 2:13, would treat these new converts with the most marked disapprobation.

That an absolute community of goods never obtained in the church at Jerusalem unless for a very short time, is evident from the apostolical precept, 1 Cor 16:1, etc., by which collections were ordered to be made for the poor; but, if there had been a community of goods in the church there could have been no ground for such recommendations as these, as there could have been no such distinction as rich and poor, if everyone, on entering the church, gave up all his goods to a common stock. Besides, while this sort of community lasted at Jerusalem, it does not appear to have been imperious upon any; persons might or might not thus dispose of their goods, as we learn from the case of Ananias, Acts 5:4. Nor does it appear that what was done at Jerusalem at this time obtained in any other branch of the Christian church; and in this, and in Acts 5, where it is mentioned, it is neither praised nor blamed. We may therefore safely infer, it was something that was done at this time, on this occasion, through some local necessity, which the circumstances of the infant church at Jerusalem might render expedient for that place and on that occasion only.¹

It seems to appear that this interpretation is telling us that community life of Jerusalem believers was interim and was not sustained. Implied, it should not be followed. I beg to disagree with the above-mentioned comment that "where it is mentioned, such community of goods is neither praised nor blamed". First, it was a spontaneous response of the faithful converts. Second, it is absurd to make as basis latter developments of Christianity. It is noteworthy that as Christianity became institutionalized in the latter period, the church became more corrupt. Those who wanted to reform or purify the church would always go back to early NT events especially Acts for guidance and authority. "If we look at such event as mere coincidence, it is as if we told ourselves we are eliminating the Ten Commandments because they failed in history. The Sermon on the Mount failed too, but this does not deprive both of their normative character"² over our life together as Body of Christ and/or People of God. "So that none of them would be in need", J. P. Miranda justifies:

Of course, the first Christians were also influenced by Jesus' example and personal conduct... As can be seen in John 12:6, 13:29, and Luke 8:1-3, Judas "carried the purse," so they had everything in common and each received according to his need.³

The notion of the communion however is not only limited in the economic life of the Church, it is very important aspect of peoples' lives. This communion is not an isolationist community like how the Jewish sect of Essenes and medieval Monastics lived. The Church, let us take note, is "called out" in order to be "sent out". Stated simply, this communion is not an end but a means of something, of a mission that the Church is called for. This design is deeply rooted in the OT tradition when Yahweh called the children of Israel out of Egypt to be a light among the nations. Therefore, the Church as a communion should live not for

¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft.com

² Cf. J. P. Miranda, 1981, p. 8-9.

³ J. P. Miranda, 1981, p. 18.

itself, but for Jesus Christ who has the message to proclaim, a mission to fulfill. What could this mean to CPBC as churches?

This mission is a mandate of God who had become incarnate in Jesus Christ. As laid earlier, Jesus Christ is present in the Church “whenever there are two or three gathered in His name” “until the end of the world. This mission is imperative for the Church that “even the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Mat 16:18b). Thus, in the light of God’s mission, the Church is mandated to properly address its conflict so that it would not be “a house divided against itself” (Lk 11:17) that could not stand. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, teaches to settle matters quickly (Mat 5:23-26); and Paul strongly admonishes “for believers to bring their disputes among the saints for judgment and never to the ‘ungodly judges’” (1 Cor 6:1-8). If we are to draw the connecting line among these NT imperatives, we will see that they all go back to the ultimate purpose of the Church – God’s mission. While the Church is a human entity, it lives because of the mission of God. This is the basis of our judgment. A group that confesses to be a Church but does not endeavor to do God’s mission is not a Church at all, but guilty of what Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mat 7:21).” These are biblical facts that CPBC has to reckon with if it truly seeks to be faithful Churches.

This is bringing us to the second aspect of this proposed ecclesiology – to see the Church as messenger of the Gospel, to employ a preferred term, a Herald.

2.3. HERALD (κηρυγμα)

The Church as we have discussed, is the community of the people of God, the body in which Jesus Christ dwells by the Holy Spirit. The church is not the reign of God, but the latter it seeks to proclaim. This for H. Küng,

The Church is not a preliminary stage, but an *anticipatory sign* of the definitive reign of God: a sign of the reality of the reign of God already present in Jesus Christ, a sign of the coming completion of the reign of God. The meaning of the Church does not reside in itself, in what it is, but in what it is moving towards. It is the reign of God which the Church hopes for, bears witness to, proclaims. It is the not bringer or bearer of the reign of God which is to come and is at the same time already present, but its voice, its announcer, its *herald*...¹

This notion is witnessed to both in the OT and NT. The idea of the “missionary people” was already evident in Israel, and to this the great prophets; especially Isaiah directed their appeal.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you. (Isa 60:1-2)

¹ H. Küng, 1967, p. 135.

So, later on Jesus commandingly proclaimed:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matt 5:14-16

Both these passages are addressed to the people of God or to the disciples and believers of Jesus. These denote enormous responsibility for the Church. Again, the Church as a communion is not an end unto itself, but commanded by the Lord to be light to illuminate the darkened world. *Light* is a very meaningful and relevant analogy for the purpose of the Church as a Herald.

Numerous theologians have a great deal of expositions about this. Avery Dulles has a notable research of several positions. As introduction, the Cardinal declares:

The Church as a Herald – The mission of the Church is to proclaim that which it has heard, believed, and been commissioned to proclaim... This model is *kerygmatic*, for it looks upon the Church as a herald – one who receives an official message with the commission to pass it on. The basic image is that of the herald of a king who comes to proclaim a royal decree in a public square.¹

This type of ecclesiology is radically centered upon Jesus Christ and on the Bible as the primary witness to him. It sees the task of the Church primarily in terms of proclamation. In the words of Richard McBrien, who splendidly summarizes the outlook of this ecclesiology:

The mission of the Church is one of proclamation of the Word of God to the whole world. The Church cannot hold itself responsible for the failure of men to accept God's Word; it has only to proclaim it with integrity and persistence. All else is secondary. The Church is essentially a kerygmatic community which holds aloft, through the preached Word, the wonderful deeds of God in past history, particularly his mighty act in Jesus Christ. The community itself happens wherever the Spirit breathes, wherever the Word is proclaimed and accepted in faith. The Church is event, a point of encounter with God.²

The chief proponent of this type of ecclesiology in the twentieth century is Karl Barth, who draws abundantly on Paul, Luther, and others. In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth has a long discussion of the word of God and its relationship to the Church. He warns the Church against the domesticating of the Bible that it would cease to be ruled by the Bible. The relative distance between the Bible and the Church, he says, makes it possible for the Bible to testify against the Church. For the Church to be a place in which the word of God is truly heard, it is necessary that the word should never be imprisoned or bracketed by the Church. The word of God is not a substance immanent in the Church, but rather an event that takes place as often as God addresses his people and is believed. The Church therefore is actually constituted by the word being proclaimed and

¹ A. Dulles, 1988, p. 76.

² R. P. McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest*, Newman: New York, 1970, p. 11.

faithfully heard. The Church is the congregation that is gathered together by the word – a word that ceaselessly summons it to repentance and reform.¹

In Barth's address to the first assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948, he powerfully combined the notions of witness and event:

In the final period the congregation is the event which consist in gathering together (*congregatio*) of those men and women (*fidelium*) whom the living Lord Jesus Christ chooses and calls to be witnesses of the victory He has already won, and heralds of its future manifestation.²

Similarly, R. Bultmann, a distinguished protestant theologian and NT scholar, insists that the word of God is not a set of timeless ideas but a concrete event, an encounter. Further, the word is eschatological occurrence – that is to say, it makes God present here and now, giving life to those who accept it and death to those who refuse. Human propositions can become the word of God, he says only in proclamation. In the preaching of the kerygma, the word is authoritative, it becomes event, and the event is Jesus Christ.

The Word of God and the Church are inseparable. The Church is constituted by the Word of God as the congregation of the elect, and the proclamation of the Word is not a statement of abstract truths, but a proclamation that is duly authorized and therefore needs bearers with proper credentials (2 Cor 5:18 f.). Just as the Word of God becomes His Word only in event, so the Church is really the church when it too becomes an event...³

The common denominator, despite the slight differences in nuances of these quotations from famous theologians and scholars, is that the Church is completely local, Jesus Christ is totally present in the Church, and the Church is commanded to proclaim the Gospel of the reign of God.

True, the Church itself is only an instrument, and behind and within the Church is the living presence of Christ. "But the point here is that we find it almost impossible to distinguish in our lives the influence of the Church and the influence of Christ. The two, in fact, are one; the Church is the Body that needs Christ for its divine life, Christ the divine life that needs the Church for His medium of manifestation."⁴

Having said the biblical and theological foundations of this model, we can now infer on how could this mean into the life of CPBC claiming as Churches. First, "Church in the NT renders Gk. *ekklēsia*, which mostly means a local congregation of Christians and never a building".⁵ So the widespread notion among CPBC constituents of Church as building should be reconstructed. The modern connotation of Church as a mere edifice (people is secondary) completely betrays the NT provisions. Second, because Church is never a building, our local members extravagant focus on constructions and maintenance of a "comfortable structure"⁶ and procurement of appliances must be challenged

¹ See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, T. and T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1936, p. 298-300.

² K. Barth's Amsterdam Address, in, *The Universal Church in God's Design*, Vol. 1 of *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, Harper & Brothers: New York, 1949, p. 68.

³ R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Methodology*, SCM: London, 1958, p. 82-83.

⁴ H. Cook, 1958, p. 42-43.

⁵ J. D. Douglas et. al. eds., 1962, p. 228.

⁶ "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Mat 8:20; Lk 9:58). As a reflection, this saying as uttered by Jesus could mean two things: (1) Kenosis – he totally emptied himself of any

and reconsidered in the light of the NT as authority. Third, in the light of what has been laid that the Church is a herald, there should be a shift from “playing safe” and “escapist” tendencies to active involvement in the proclamation of the reign of God, characterized by active love: justice, peace and righteousness.

This ecclesiology, like others, however, cannot stand alone. Its emphasis on proclaiming the word of God is extremely important, but it runs the risk of substituting words for action.¹ To help this model stand, let us proceed with the third ecclesiology – the Church as Servant.

2.4. SERVANT (διακονία)

The third aspect of this proposed ecclesiology is to venture on the vocation of the Church as a servant. The Greek term *διακονία*, as used in Acts 6:1-5 originally refers to the task of waiting on the table. This was a sensible and spontaneous response of the apostles to the growing need of the communion. The disciples heed the call of the gentile widows to be given just treatment in the distribution of goods, especially food. Basically, the essential point here is not only the goods but also justice. This event echoes the call of the prophet Isaiah to “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (1:17). Thus the Church since taking the image of the people of God in the OT, and Body of Christ in the NT, was always a servant. This is so because Yahweh in the OT and Jesus Christ in the NT were both servants of the people.

Per-Axel Sverker wrote an interesting exegesis entitled “Woman and the Bible.” In one segment he stated: “The Hebrew word for *helper* is *ezer*. In Genesis alone, the word is used three hundred plus times. More than two hundred of these usages referred to Yahweh as the helper (*ezer*) of Israel. Later on Yahweh commissioned Israel. In the lyrical pronouncement of Isaiah, it says:

This is what God the LORD says – he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Isa 42:5-7

In the NT Jesus was very explicit about this when his disciples were pushing each other aside, selfishly wanting to be great in the kingdom. For clarity an account by Mark is needed.

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whomever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of

form of attachment; (2) Urgency and Priority – The proclamation of God’s reign is far more important than staying at home comfortably away from the strains and toils mission might entail. It seems to appear, that for one who earnestly seek to follow Jesus, a house is “a prison” cell that would hinder mobility in going and heralding the Gospel. Lest we forget, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Mat 6:33).”

¹ Cf. Anthony Marinelli, *The Word Made Flesh: An Overview of the Catholic Faith*, St. Pauls Phil.: Makati, Philippines, 1999, p. 146.

Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mk 10:41-45

This teaching must have stunned the power-hungry disciples. This is a complete reversal of the standard of the world.¹ In an interview, Rev. Jerson Narciso said, "The measure of greatness for the world is the number of persons that serve you. The measure of greatness for the Church is the number of persons that you serve."² Being a servant here is not a mere option, but an imperative. A true follower of Jesus, or a true Church (to be collective) "cannot not serve"! And service here is genuinely offered to the least or the poor³; unlike the attitude of the *"sipsip"*⁴ who would tail the rich and powerful like dogs for their selfish ends.

Service for the poor should not be confused with alms or dole-out giving, as usually thought of and practiced by, perhaps, many. It should also be distinguished from "humanitarian activities" such as cooperative, livelihood project, philanthropic endeavor, and the like. Efforts like these are reactionary but not developmental. On the fundamental meaning of service, J. P. Miranda wrote a radical exegesis. After giving ample evidences through word study that *rich* (*resha'im*), in Hebrew, basically means "wicked" or "unjust", he proceeds to draw the chasm between the common notion of service as almsgiving from justice – which was the authentic meaning of the word.

To confirm this, very briefly and in passing, we might take note of a literary fact which theology is at pains to pass over... As can be seen from Tobit 12:9 ("Turn not your gaze from anyone poor"), Tobit 4:10 ("Alms indeed preserve one from death,... late Judaism arrived at the notion that giving money to the poor preserves a person from death. But the brutal fact that theology refuses to look at is that the original Hebrew Bible calls that act of giving money to the poor not "almsgiving," but "justice" (*sedaqah*).

Proverbs 10:2: "Justice delivers from death." Psalm 112:9: "With generosity he gives to the poor, his justice abides forever." Tobit 14:11: "Behold what almsgiving does, and what is it that justice preserves from." This is a fundamental datum, and is taken up in Matthew 6:1-4: "Be careful not to practice your justice before men, in order to be seen by them. ... Therefore when you give alms. ..." Clearly, the acts which we think of as an act of almsgiving is, according to the Bible, an act of justice – restitution of what has been stolen. This is why Jesus calls money the money of injustice or iniquity.⁵

¹ See Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, OMF Literature, Inc.: Manila, Phil. 1995. For journalistic presentation of the revolutionary teaching of Jesus on "The Sermon on the Mount" see p. 103-145.

² Jerson Narciso, 2006, February 01, Interview.

³ A collective term that means the marginalized, deprived, discriminated against, and the like.

⁴ Ms. Excelyn Landero's daughter made an interesting meaning for this. SIPSIP – Severely Insecure Person Seeking Instant Position.

⁵ J. P. Miranda, 1981, p. 50-51. To augment this position, Miranda further quoted some church fathers. [And hence it is that Augustine says, "To succor the needy is justice" (PL 52:1046). And Ambrose, "You are not giving the poor person the gift of a part of what is yours; you are returning to him something of what is his" (PL 14:747). Chrysostom: "Do not say, 'I am spending what is mine, I am enjoying what is mine.' It is not actually yours, it is someone else's" (PG 61:86). Basil: "It is the hungry one's bread you keep, the naked one's covering you have locked in your closet, the barefoot one's footwear putrifying in your power, the needy one's money that you have buried" (PG 31:277). Jerome: "All riches derive from injustice." The fathers understood very well what the Bible tells: All differentiating wealth is acquired by exploiting and despoiling the rest of the population. Hence they see almsgiving as restitution in strict justice.]

So, service is basically an issue of justice (or in popular Bible translations, righteousness). Going back to the first type of ecclesiology, communion is defined by justice. This is what this egalitarian community is all about. So when we serve, we herald to people and the world the beauty and lasting benefit of living justly in a communion. It appears that “humanitarian endeavors” are not enough definition of service because they do not address the fundamental justice issues of the poor. These endeavors only ask, “Where are the poor?” and they help them. This is good but not developmental neither sustainable. True service is to ask, “Why are the poor?” and address the systemic issues so that their being poor is not perpetuated but ended when justice is served.¹

This means that a servant Church must be a prophetic Church. In the light of the Gospel of the reign of God the servant Church analyzes the modern situation, enlighten its people, and provide alternative to the world by reminding them of the covenant of God. This had always been the theme of all the prophets. “I will be your God and you will be my people” is a covenant of egalitarian relationship. Whatever and whoever comes between that that disrupts the loving relationship of the Father (*Abba*) and his children, is confronted and denounced by the prophets; thus, by a servant Church.

Jesus seems to have this in mind when he taught: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt 5:13). This is a parabolic statement, but some literal interpretation of salt, as vital compound will help. The use of salt in cooking is very important. More than the common notion that it only makes the food saline, it subtly works by blending flavors of different ingredients. And that only happens when salt melts, losing its identity in the process. But it manifest itself in a way that it makes the cuisine tastes good.

This is a good picture of a servant Church. Integration is of prime importance; selflessness or self-denial comes next. Meaning the Church offers a sacrificial service, like Jesus did, even to the point of death. It is in dying that a new life or “new taste” comes to those whom the Church serves. Refusing to be a servant (salt of the earth) is not without deleterious consequence for the Church. As the pedagogy of Jesus concludes, if the salt loses its saltiness it becomes useless as rubbish “thrown out and trampled”. Thus, the Church to be true to its nature and vocation is to become a servant community.

Moreover, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a remarkable theologian, developed the notion of the Church as an interpersonal community. In his first major theological work, *The Communion of Saints*, he wrote: “The community is constituted by the complete self-forgetfulness of love. The relationship between I and thou is no longer essentially a demanding but a giving one.”² He places a heavy emphasis on the nature of the church as communion of persons drawn together by Christ. Subsequently, in his *Ethics*, he moved toward a more kerygmatic position corresponding to the Church as herald. He writes: “The intention of the preacher is not to improve the world but to summon it to belief in Jesus Christ and to bear witness to the reconciliation which has been accomplished through him and in his dominion.”³ Finally, in his posthumously published *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer, calls for a humble and servant Church:

¹ Cf. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz Duremdes, 2005, November 11, Interview.

² D. Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints*, Harper & Row: New York, 1963, p. 123.

³ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Macmillan Paperbacks: New York, 1965, p. 350. Personally, I think the theologian needed not to contrast “the summoning of the world” to “improvement of the world”. The latter should be the spontaneous effect of the

The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregation, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The Church must share in the secular problems of the ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving.¹

Finally, for Bonhoeffer, Christ was the “beyond in the midst,” and in his universal Lordship, Lord even of those who had no religion. In his humanity, for Bonhoeffer, Christ appears as the man without selfishness and without defenses, the man for others. In order to be a credible witness to him, the church must adopt his style of life.

Since the early sixties, nearly all the ecclesialogists who have emerged into prominence have been representative of this new style of “secular-dialogic theology²”. In the English-speaking Protestantism and Anglicanism, the best-known representative of this ecclesiology are Gibson Winter, Harvey Cox, and John A. T. Robinson. Gibson Winter, in his *The New Creation as Metropolis*, calls for a “servant Church”:

One that is “no longer an institutional structure of salvation along side with the worldly structure of restraint” but one that is “that community within the worldly structures of historical responsibility which recognizes and acknowledges God’s gracious work for all mankind. The servant Church is the community who confirm mankind in its freedom to fashion its future, protesting the ultimacy in any human structures and suffering with men in the struggle against the powers of evil.³

Winter proposes that the apostolate of the servant Church should not be primarily one of the confessional proclamation or of cultic celebration, but rather discerning reflection on God’s promise and presence in the midst of our own history.⁴

Building on the work of Gibson Winter and others, Harvey Cox, included in his *The Secular City* a characteristic chapter, “The Church as God’s Avant-garde.” A segment reads: “The church’s task in the secular city is to be the *diakonos* of the city, the servant who bends himself to struggle for its wholeness and healing.”⁵

Following up on Harvey Cox and upon his own previous work on the notion of the Kingdom of God, the Anglican bishop John A. T. Robinson, in *The New Reformation?* argued that

The Church is in drastic need of a stripping down of its structure, which can be obstacle to its mission. To be of service the Church must work within the structure of the world rather than build parallel structures. The house of God is not the Church but the world. The Church is the servant and the first characteristic of a servant is that he lives in someone else’s house, not his own.⁶

former, which the metaphor of the salt implies, and the disciples’ prayer “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” expresses sharply.

¹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rev. ed. Macmillan: New York, 1967, p. 203-204

² Cf. A. Dulles, 1988, p. 95.

³ G. Winter, *The New Creation as Metropolis*, Macmillan: New York, 1963, p. 55.

⁴ G. Winter, 1963, p. 72.

⁵ H. Cox, *The Secular City*, Macmillan: New York, 1965, p. 134.

⁶ J. A. T. Robinson, *The New Reformation?* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1965, p. 92.

A parallel development, not influenced by the authors just mentioned, is Robert Adolfs. In *The Grave of God*, he uses as key concept the Pauline notion of kenosis. Jesus “emptied himself (*heauton ekenosen*),” writes Paul in (Phil 2:7), “taking the form of a servant.” For Adolfs this means:

Jesus divested himself of all craving for power and dignity. The Church if it is to be like Christ, must similarly renounce all claims to power, honors and the like; it must not rule by power but love.¹

Eugene Bianchi, in his *Reconciliation: The Function of the Church*, maintains that the most fundamental mission of the Church is that of reconciliation, the overcoming of various alienations that vex humanity today. This calls for “a humble and servant approach to the world already touched by redemption.”²

Richard P. McBrien, another ecclesialogist, has strongly developed the theme of the servant Church. He wrote:

The Church must not look upon itself as “a humanitarian social agency, or a group of like-minded individuals sharing a common perspective and moving here and there, wherever ‘the action is’.” If the theological reality of the Church goes no deeper than that, there seems little reason to perpetuate this community in history or to continue one’s personal affiliation with it. ... The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation and the Body of Christ; but just because it is all this, it has a mandate to serve.³

The Church must offer itself as one of the principal agents whereby the human community is made to stand under the judgment of the enduring values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: freedom, justice, peace, charity, compassion, reconciliation.⁴

All these are poetically summarized in the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi; one of the most lyrical and dramatic prayers one has ever read:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace;
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Where there is injury pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;
O Divine Master, grant that we may not seek
to be consoled as to console;
To be loved as to love; to be understood as to understand.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.⁵

Let us end this section with a brief exposition on a parable of Jesus that he uttered as reply to the question of “Who is my neighbor?” – the Good Samaritan

¹ R. Adolfs, *The Grave of God: Has the Church a Future?*, Burns & Oates: London, 1967, p. 109-117.

² E. Bianchi, *Reconciliation: The Function of the Church*, Sheed & Ward: New York, 1969, p. x, 168.

³ R. P. McBrien, *Do We Need the Church?*, Harper & Row: New York, 1969, p. 98-99.

⁴ R. P. McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest*, Harper & Row: New York, 1969, p. 85.

⁵ Prudencio Bañas et. al. eds., *Minister's Manual*, CBMA-CPBC: Iloilo City, 1997, p. 73. Paraphrased.

(Lk 10:30-37). The use of a Samaritan as a “good guy” in the story was revolutionary in the time of Jesus.¹ Against the common notion that a neighbor is someone who is in need (regardless of his race, gender, or class), it seems to appear that Jesus refers to the neighbor as someone who heeds and acts voluntarily and wholeheartedly to help and serve the needy (wounded). He doesn't have to be traditionally religious (as the role of the priest and the Levite represented). It shows that the Good Samaritan was the neighbor, who walked the extra mile by giving first aid, ensuring the safety, and finally seeking professional care to restore the well being of the victim. Like the priest and the Levite, he could have been bound to some important task, yet he willingly forgoes his personal affair, seeing the urgency of the need. Apparently, this was also evident in *diakonia* of Jesus, even making a crippled man stand and walk on Sabbath day.

Thus, servant Church means the Church should be a Good Samaritan (a good neighbor) unconditionally helping the world. The Church must be a light of the world on the stand, so that it gives light to everyone in the house. The Church must be a salt of the earth that blends all life's flavor into a sumptuous dish. The perfect Church is a ministering Church², a Church that in all its members is the Incarnation of Christ.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research paper has revisited the history of Local Autonomy, as one of Baptist emphases, locating itself along the course of Baptist development. Traced from sixteenth century onwards, the Baptist birth was inextricably linked with the Reformation, highlighted by Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Anglican Church, Anabaptists, and others. But it has historically originated in England. Though John Smyth and his congregation fled to Holland (1610) to avoid persecution and sought religious freedom, it is a fact that they were all English people. It is in Holland that they had association with the Mennonites, a latter branch of Anabaptists. Later, the group with their new leader, Thomas Helwys, came back to London to form the first Baptist Church (1612). There are other complimentary accounts about the development of Baptist faith and the varying theological positions undergirding them.³

In Europe, during the early stage of Baptist life as a church, local congregations were autonomous. They had their own leaders, which served as pastor and teacher. When Baptist churches grew in number they spontaneously formed regional and national associations. These associations were created for purposes of collaboration in ministry and mission, without trying to infringe on the autonomy of the local church. Baptists in the old world crafted numerous Confessions of faith. Autonomy and Associations are evident on many of those. Confessions, however, were not used as binding authority for churches and individuals, but as guide in searching the Scripture, peculiarly the New Testament, for it alone was considered sole authority for faith and practice. Ample

¹ Samaritans were half-breed Jews who returned from Babylonian exile. They were the children of those who married non-Israelites in their stay at Babylon. They were ostracized by making them dwell in a secluded village, Samaria. They were among the second-class citizens in the temple, being equal with women and gentiles, limited to the court of gentiles for worship. Jews considered them impure both physically and spiritually.

² Cf. H. Cook, 1958, p. 94.

³ See Chapter I, number 1. Sixteenth Century Reformation.

historical evidences vivify the fact that Baptist churches, in its early stage, were interdependent than totally independent. It seems paradoxical how they maintained associational authority without being hierarchical in their relationship towards the local congregations.¹

Seeking religious freedom and having missionary aims in mind, continental Baptists sought haven in the New World (USA)². The hand of the English monarchs still reached them. But they, along with other later Protestant groups, pioneered and relentlessly pursued the struggle for religious freedom, which, later they painstakingly won.³ Thus, the age of Great Awakening or Revivalism began and flourished, freely allowing to religious expression. It also became the naissance of the notion and practice of "Separation of Church and State".

In America, the interdependent spirit continued to live. The first Association founded was the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA) (1707). Other associations were organized later on. This association helped the local churches in dealing with doctrinal problems, ministry and missions. In its early years, the Association played its role by ear, so to speak, but some feared it might assume some church prerogatives. In 1749, the Association adopted a formal *Essay*⁴, written by Benjamin Griffith, which defined the powers of the association as compared to the rights reserved to the churches. It is in America that Baptist grew enormously as one of the world's largest Protestant groups up to the present. It was in the new world that Baptists, along with other Protestant groups, started international mission work, which, in the nineteenth century, reached a third world country, the Philippines.

1898 is the exact year of the outset of Philippine Baptist mission. The baptism of Braulio Manikan and his uttered interest to do mission work in his homeland, which his mentor Eric Lund heeded and later worked with, marked this significant instance. By 1900, the American Baptist mission started in Iloilo, Philippines with Manikan and Lund as their first missionaries. The American Baptist supported them. The coming of the Protestant missions to the Philippines including the Baptist missionaries was consequence of the victory of the United States over Spain. The efforts of these two pioneers paved the way for the spreading of the Baptist faith and organization of Baptist churches, beginning in Jaro, Iloilo, in nearby provinces, and in many areas of the country. Baptist "Distinctives", which include Local Autonomy or Independence of the Local church, was significant part of message or teaching of the American missionaries, to which the Filipino converts adhered.⁵

However, it is evident that early Filipino Baptists lived out their faith interdependently as individuals and as churches. The adversities accompanying World War II were withstood by spontaneous collaborative struggle of the early Baptist converts. They even helped the revolutionary movement in many ways. In the height of the war, Philippine Baptist ministry reached even other religious groups such as Aglipayans, and even Roman Catholic.⁶ Baptist women played

¹ See Chapter I, number 2. In the Old World (Europe)

² See Chapter I, number 3. In the New World (USA)

³ See Chapter I, number 3. The Struggle for Religious Liberty

⁴ A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Association from A. D. 1707 to A. D. 1807*, American Baptist Publication Society, 1851. p. 60-63, in, H. L. McBeth, 1990, p. 145-147.

⁵ See Chapter I, number 4. In the Philippines (CPBC)

⁶ For detailed discussion, see N. D. Bunda, 1999. p. 200.

an indispensable role in the propagation of the faith in these perilous times.¹ Somehow, the native culture of *Bayanihan (Pagbinuligay)* made its way through their collective endeavor. Apparently, this is essential in the teaching of the New Testament that the Baptists uphold as exclusive “authority over faith and practice”.

In 1935, the *Kasapulanang sang Bautista nga Pilipinhon* (Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches Incorporated – CPBC) was organized. This led to the national organization of Philippine Baptist churches and the *Filipinization* of leadership, which the American missionaries used to dominate. Despite the lack of confidence of some missionaries on the Filipinos, the “struggle for self-hood”, after much lobbying and debate, succeeded. Later on, after many intricacies and technicalities, the Filipinization of CPBC became complete. This means the complete turnover not only of leadership but also of properties that the Philippine Baptist has acquired through the years. This came to the “cutting of the umbilical cord” point.²

The growing Philippine Baptist churches since the formation of CPBC in 1935 are facing problems in leadership, finance, mission, education, political as well as *Associational* problems. However, Philippine Baptist leaders are optimistic about these setbacks, citing principles and planning to resolve the substantial issues.

The present, being fraction of history, is considered. So, Chapter II is allotted to gather information and perception from some Baptist clergy and lay leaders on the issue of local autonomy.³ The interview showed that problem of Local Autonomy is just a “trick issue”; a tip of the iceberg, so to speak, when the condition of CPBC is examined closely. The problem is not what it seems; it is something else. Symptoms are manifest, but the main problem is covert. It takes focus and serious examination to diagnose correctly. After thorough investigation and analysis, it becomes obvious that the problem of local autonomy in CPBC boils down to the challenge of faith, particularly of ecclesiology.⁴

The perceptions of many CPBC constituents are clouded with different shades of many things. They believe in the Church and other faith substances, but they have become obscure to what they are, in the light of history, tradition and, ultimately, of Scriptures. Thus, this study attempts to trace in history and tradition the background of the issue. And finally, it takes an honest appeal to the Scriptures for substantial and foundational imperatives, which should be deemed as authority over faith and practice.

We seem to have become so engrossed with different ideologies, poetics, and other secular dynamics. The overload of imported stuff, music, thoughts, interpretations, lifestyle and the like, calls us to find a counter action that we might prevent uncoupling from the basic. The Bible is the Baptists historic foundation of faith. This is what this study seeks to recover. The Scripture is the rock where our faith should be anchored. We may sail wherever we want assured that, when storms of uncertainties come, we can always go back.

Chapter III is both an appeal to the Scriptures and to different interpreters whose historical, theological and biblical insights are useful to the task at hand.

¹ Missionaries, men and pastors, were seized, captured, imprisoned, in some cases murdered during this time. Church buildings burned. This left the women the initiative to go from house to house, teaching the *Eskuela Dominical* (Sunday School) to people. This is instrumental in the preservation and propagation of Baptist faith even in wartime.

² See chapter I, number 4.1. 1935-1971 and number 4.2. 1972-1998

³ See chapter II, number 1. Views.

⁴ See chapter II. Local Autonomy In The CPBC Context.

The first segment is a reconstruction of the *church*.¹ It showed the infrequency of use of the term *church* (ecclesia) in the New Testament. However, it is interchangeably used with terms such as *brethren*, *disciples*, *believers*, *followers of the Way*, *saints*, *holy*, and the like. Paul used the anthropomorphic imagery – body of Christ, which typifies the notion of the people of God in the Old Testament. It is interesting that these other terms are much more frequently used than *church*. Whatever ulterior motive behind the standardization of the use of the term, the researcher does not know. One can only surmise.² The thing is, out of the numerous nuances of *church* and its synonymous terms, neither one of them meant a building. So church, in the firmest sense, is the body of Christ or people God; it is never to be confused with edifice or any structure. Doing so entirely destroys its authentic meaning. This segment ventured on reconstructing the meaning of the church. The process does not end only in proving what the Church is not; it should go on searching for what the Church is. This endeavor is incomplete unless we make an attempt to explain the nature of the Church in the light of history and Scriptures.

The traditional Baptist idea of the ministry of Jesus, as embodied in the Church, includes preaching, teaching and healing. Careful investigation and reflection led the author to conclude that these are deficient ecclesiologies. This is so, because such notion has the dangerous tendency to render the Church as a fragmented entity instead of one body, where “unity in diversity” is paradoxically operating.

A segment in Chapter III is given to discuss the relationship of the Church to Jesus Christ, reign of God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus instituted the Church.³ But the Church does not derive its life only from the work which Christ did and finished in the past, nor only from the expected future consummation of his work, but from the living and efficacious presence of Christ in the present. As Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, so the Church also should. It is important to note that the Church is not the reign of God, but its herald. Like the prophets of the olden times, the Church should serve as the mouthpiece of God to proclaim the future consummation of this glorious reign.

The Church as a community of the Spirit is not bound within geopolitical boundaries. It is preposterous to equate this egalitarian community with some “institutions” or sects, which find their being on their legal identity. The Church is communion where relation is no longer demanding but a giving one. It is a communion that is inclusive and decisive: inclusive because it is open to everyone, decisive because anybody who desires to be part of this communion has to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Finally, chapter III commenced with a proposed ecclesiology. Since the author diagnosed the issue of local autonomy to be a challenge of faith, this ecclesiological attempt is to reconstruct the meaning of the Church. The author admits that the Church is a mystical reality that cannot be fully boxed and explained; but at least one can extract gems of truth from the Scriptures and from some scholarly works to capture aspects of this mystery for the desired end, which is to reconstruct an understanding for CPBC of the Church. Like the intention of early Baptists in writing Confessions of Faith, this attempt wishes to be a guide for deeper study of the Scriptures, not to replace them.

¹ See chapter III. Number 1. New Testament Perspective.

² Perhaps, the notion of equating *church* with a building was during medieval age, particularly in the Constantinian era, when Christianity became the “imperial religion”.

³ See chapter III, number 2.1. Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Reign of God And The Church.

This attempt understands the Church as a *Communion* (koinonia)¹, Herald (kerygma)², Servant (diakonia)³. As a Communion, the Church is a spiritual community that transcends geopolitical boundaries. Meaning, it is not confined within its locality because, while the Church is locally manifest, its spiritual identity is outstretching to others who also claim and obey the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As a Communion, the Church becomes an egalitarian community, serving one another with gifts from the Spirit, and providing one another with their temporal needs. As a communion, the Church becomes a community of gifts and goods. But the Church is not an isolationist or an exclusivist community. This communion is only a means towards a greater end – Mission of God. This communal experience ought to be extended to others, to the world, because the Church is a Herald of the Gospel of the reign of God.

As a Herald, the Church, like Jesus, proclaims the Good News of salvation; the Gospel of the reign of God. This proclamation is not a threatening one, but an invitation of hope, joy and liberation. This is an invitation to receive God's favor, an invitation to join a feast or a banquet. As a Herald, the Church is commissioned to become "light of the world", that through her the world in darkness might be illumined with the light of Christ and share in the glory of the future consummation of the reign of God.

As a Servant, the Church is not only a messenger but also a worker of God for the world. Like the Good Samaritan, the Church is commanded to become a good neighbor to the world. The Church performs this task with no ulterior motive other than to fulfill its mission as agent of God's healing for the world. As a servant, the Church becomes "the salt of the earth", reconciling differences and "blending various tastes". In doing service, the Church integrates with the world even to point of death or losing its manifest identity in the process. It is in denying itself that the Church becomes faithful to the death sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world.

Recommendations

After rigorous research and analysis, it is found out that faith or theology and governance should be intimately connected. Theology should be the basis or the foundation and substance of governance. This study found out the historic Baptist emphasis on the supremacy of the Scripture over faith and practice; all other principles are derivatives of such. It is on this background that this study recommends the following:

1. Name. The term *convention* is a secular term that has meager, if not totally devoid of biblical-theological significance. Since name is very important to the image of the organization, it is recommended that the term *convention* be reconsidered. Further, **Communion of Philippine Baptist Churches** or **Philippine Baptist Communion** is suggested. Given the NT nature of the Church as *koinonia*, the term is deemed appropriate; if Philippine Baptist wishes to be true to her claim as a Church whose historic identity accents the Scripture as authority over faith and practice.

¹ See chapter III, 2.2. Communion (κοινωνία).

² See chapter III, 2.3. Herald (κηρυγμα)

³ See chapter III, 2.4. Servant (διακονία)

2. Constitution and By-Laws. This term and its content also bear secular meaning. Like convention, it should also be reevaluated. Neither early Baptist history nor biblical account supports the use of the term to mean a document of Church polity. After careful brainstorming of terms, *Confession of Faith or Covenant* came to mind, thus, suggested. A change of label does not guarantee anything, except it is a sign of realization of the essential; therefore, a step towards progress.

3. Elections. At present, CPBC both in local and national elections employs popular voting in electing its officers. This method has proven to be more divisive than unifying. CPBC history shows how susceptible this system is to abuse and corruption. Apparently, this electoral format finds no equivalent in the Scripture¹, particularly New Testament. What is explicit in the New Testament especially in Acts 1:21-26 is consensus building. It will be recalled that the disciples see to it that the man who would take the place of Judas, was he who was with them since John's baptism until the ascension of Jesus. He should also be a witness of the resurrection. After this, they prayed asking for the guidance of the Lord. Then they cast lots, believing that it will reveal the will of God. It is recommended that CPBC extract an election system from this event. In so doing CPBC may become faithful to the historic Baptist principle of the Authority of the Bible over faith and practice.

4. Calling of Pastors. Since pastors are holding vital position in the local churches, it is recommended that CPBC construct a guideline or covenant for Churches and pastors to observe. This is not to control but to guide our people to a dignified ministry (Phil 4:8), one that is marked by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

5. Property Management. The economic issue is one major contention in the life of CPBC. The common notion is "CPBC is poor". But looking at the organization intently tells otherwise. CPBC is not poor, however its resources are not equally or justly shared. Its situation resembles the state of the country, where fundamental problems are not overpopulation, poverty and unemployment, but injustice or unequal distribution of wealth and property. Again, highlighting the Bible as authority over faith and practice, this study recommends the in-depth study of Acts 2:42-45; 4:32-35 as substantial accounts on how the early believers celebrated their life together in a sharing community. The Jerusalem believers did not originate such lifestyle. It was Jesus Himself who lived out such, as these verses (Mat 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8: 3) signify.

6. Conflict Management. Conflict or disagreement is a normal phenomenon of life. It should not be avoided but managed. In lieu of Authority of the Bible, this study recommends that CPBC extracts a Conflict Management guideline or covenant in the light of Mat 5:23-26, 1 Cor 6:1-8 and similar accounts that gives explicit or implicit ideas in handling discords.

¹ Cf. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, *On Electing People to Office: A Theological Reflection*, in, Voter's Guide Election 2004, (Pamphlet) NCCP: Quezon City, Philippines, 2004.

7. Ministry. “Leadership as servanthood” seems to be only a slogan in the present ministry of CPBC. Many of CPBC constituents who aspire to become leaders seem to seek greatness over service. This study poses a challenge for CPBC to go back to the NT passages, especially, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45; Mat 20:28), “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Also, Acts 6:1-7; Rom 12:1-21; 1 Cor 12:4-31; these Lukan and Pauline accounts are descriptive of the organized life of the early church. Humble service is what is manifest and admonished in these passages. Greatness is the least that a true Christian should aspire. CPBC is challenged to pattern its faith and practice on these.

8. Ecclesiology. Since Local Autonomy is an issue of the church, it is recommended that CPBC have an official ecclesiology. In so doing, CPBC constituents will have an institutional guide to understand important matters such as the church. The output of this study is recommended as reference.

9. Others. Further and in-depth study may be done on related topics, which this paper failed to present or has inadequately discussed.