Introduction

It is not easy to “do” Baptist theology. Baptists do not rally around a singular theological figure or source (aside from the Bible) and Baptist historically and currently is a grass-roots movement. The theology of such a group of people is found in the pews rather than in the academy which is why it is not easy to offer a singular Baptist theology. Yet there are shared values, ideals, and stories among Baptists. It is out of these values, ideals, and stories that a theology can be found. Baptist theology occurs among the people. Thus, in order to discern a theology of ordination for American Baptists we must turn to the people in the pews.¹

In doing so we must turn to the social sciences to gather the data necessary to make theological claims.² Such a turn in methodology arrives partly from the Baptist distinctive of soul freedom/church autonomy and partly from the way in which Baptist theology tends to be practiced; by individuals and ecclesial communities loosely connected to a denomination. American Baptists do not have a catechism, major theologian, or hierarchal institution dictating theological norms. Thus we will use the

¹ While I am focusing on the American Baptist denomination, much of what I am offering can be applied to other Baptist groups and denominations. Because Baptists do not have a hierarchy and lack a historical centrality, it is difficult to point to one “tradition” from which the Baptists emerge. Instead, the Baptists are a conglomeration of “traditions” which share commonalities. McClendon refers to the Baptists with a lower case “b” in making this same point that there is not a single institution gathering known as Baptists, but a shared vision. In order to hold the institutional elements in tension with the movement itself, and because I am staying within the American Baptist denomination and not looking out to the Free Church movement as McClendon does, I will use an upper case “B,” with the understanding that much of what I offering could be applied to the Free Church movement as McClendon understands it. Further in this work, I will discuss the shared characteristics of the American Baptist denomination. For McClendon’s argument see, James Wm. McClendon Jr., Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 26-34.

² One scholar who would make a strong argument against the use of the social sciences in theology is John Milbank. Milbank’s work, Theology and Social Theory capsulcate his argument against the use of social theory in theology. While the entire book should be read for the depth of Milbank’s argument, he sums up his approach and conclusion in the Introduction. John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (Boston: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), 1-6. A similar argument can be found in the Vatican document from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Instructions on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,” specifically section 8 which directly criticizes the Marxist analysis used in Liberation Theology.
social sciences to discern what theological claims are being made by Baptists in the pews.³

A deductive methodology influenced by the writings of Geertz, Lindbeck, and McClendon would discern a lived theology from the practitioners of the American Baptist denomination itself.⁴ This methodology takes seriously the actions and speech-acts of the people within the Baptist community as indicators of this lived theology. Such considerations do not conclusively point to a well articulated theology of ordination; further analysis calls for a next step.

What I will offer is a potential understanding of a practiced theology of ordination in the Baptist context based on the idea of sacramental consciousness as it is primarily articulated in Catholic contexts. It is my contention that an analysis of the data leads one to consider an ontology of the relationality between the pastor and the congregation and the way this relationality may change through ordination. My hypothesis in connection with this part of my study is that many Baptists, especially but not exclusively those in the American Baptist denomination, participate in a “sacramental consciousness” when it comes to a theology of ordination. They are aware that the pastor’s relationship with the congregation is changed through ordination, symbolically representing the presence and activity of God within the congregation, and yet at the same time American Baptists are aware that God is greater than and beyond any understanding and awareness derived

³ As we will note, the lack of uniformity is largely due to the diversity of Baptists. As soon as one “Baptist” claim is made on behalf of the entire denomination, five counter claims can be made with the cry of “soul freedom” as the reason for the reaction. The lack of a hierarchy leads to the diversity. Yet, as I will claim, one can find core ideals and practices within the denomination and within the diversity.
through the presence and relationship with the pastor. This awareness comes out of the call (internal and external) as it is experienced in the community and the relationality between the pastor and the congregation. Employing the ideas of sacramental consciousness takes the findings derived from the methodology and provides a more comprehensive analysis.

We will need to start with a particular context; the story of the pastors and the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA (FBCS). In studying FBCS, I compared their actions with contemporary actions and writings of the Northern Baptist denomination, what would become the American Baptist denomination. By looking closely and particularly at the story of FBCS and the Northern/American Baptists, we can assemble the materials needed for our constructive theology. In order to do this I looked for historical consistencies as well as for consistencies between the practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition. From those consistencies we have detected symbolic acts and speech acts pointing towards a shared theology of ordination.

From these symbolic acts and speech acts we can derive convictions of theology based on symbols and speech acts of the community that speak of a theology of ordination. The convictions that I will offer will support my argument that a comprehensive analytical view of the symbolic acts, speech acts, and convictions revealed in American Baptist practices uncover a type of sacramental consciousness that can move us constructively toward an American Baptist theology of ordination.

_The Thick Description_

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5 For this work, the practices of the people refers to actions, speech, and anything else done or said by members of FBCS, pastors of FBCS, or anyone else connected to FBCS. The teachings of the tradition are manuals, books, or other publications representing a broader, national or denominational view.
The social-historical study of the American Baptist denomination, locally (via the First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts) and nationally (via manuals and other texts) offers a “thick description” of the pastor in the Baptist context. In this study I considered the purpose of ordination, the underlying meanings and the symbolic references pertaining to the pastor, the pastor’s role, and the pastor’s relationship with members of the congregation as well as individuals and institutions outside of the congregation. A “thin description” of the pastor would claim that a pastor is to “teach and preach.” Such a description does not consider the nuances of preaching, the content of teaching, and perhaps most importantly, the relationships between the pastor and the congregation. A “thin description” is inadequate in providing a theology of ordination. I pursued a “thick description” with the understanding that systems of meaning are embodied in the symbols of a community and that reality as it is understood by the community is defined by the symbols shared by the community. Thus the boundaries of the shared reality of the community as well as the content of this reality are found within the symbols of the community. This being the case, the parameters of the role of the pastor as well as the community’s understandings of a theology of ordination are found within symbols shared and embraced by the American Baptist denomination.

From a study of FBCS, we can name some of the symbols, or symbolic acts that pertain to a theology of ordination. Symbolic acts in this case are those actions which point to a deeper understanding or belief shared by the community concerning the

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6 This paper will only offer an overview of the historical work focusing on those examples directly pertaining to the topic at hand. A more comprehensive history can be found in my dissertation. Jonathan A. Malone, “Changed, Set Apart, and Equal: A Study of Ordination in the Baptist Context” (Ph.D. diss., University of Dayton, 2011), chs. 4-5.

7 Let us remember that a symbol, in Geertzian understanding, is more than a specific thing, but can be an action, a set of actions, or speech.
theology of ordination. We must remember that such a list of symbolic acts will neither be exhaustive nor completely immune from the author’s biases in selectivity. However, the symbolic acts offered here have emerged from a serious study of the confluence of the practices of the people and the teachings of the tradition which are documented as having occurred again and again in the American Baptist denomination, and which have been reasonably demonstrated to take a central place in Baptist beliefs and actions relevant to ordination.

The Call

Within the local church and the national denomination the call plays a prominent role in ordination. Both the internal and the external call are major symbolic acts that are consistently a part of an individual’s process towards ordination. The internal call is understood as a moment when an individual experienced a desire or spiritual longing to be a pastor that is attributed to God. The external call is the action of the congregation affirming the individual as someone who has gifts and abilities to serve as a pastor. Both the internal call and the external call are expressed publicly and could happen in any order; one does not necessarily happen before the other.

In August 1921, Frederick Dark, then pastor at the time, presented to the congregation Arthur H. Wilde for ordination. Wilde had joined the church earlier that month and shared his desire to become a pastor with Dark and the congregation, expressing his sense of an internal call. After the members of FBCS heard Dark’s words of confidence in Wilde’s character and Wilde’s testimony concerning his desire to
become a pastor, the church voted to recommend him to the “permanent” council for ordination to the Christian Ministry expressing an external call.\(^8\)

**The Ordination Council**

Along with the call, the role of the Ordination Council constituted another symbolic act that is prominent throughout the Baptist story. In the Ordination Council the external call expressed by the congregation was affirmed by other Baptist pastors from nearby churches, representing the local Baptist denomination, and was seen as a necessary step towards gaining a status of ordination. Again, we will recall how Arthur Wilde was expected to go before the Council after receiving the support of the congregation.\(^9\) The Ordination Council also demonstrated and encouraged the relationship between the church, the pastor, and the local American Baptist denomination.

The pastor’s involvement with the denomination was capsulated in the Ordination Council. On many occasions the pastor was expected to be engaged on the congregation’s behalf with the denomination via meetings, ordination councils, and with other churches. The pastor’s involvement was a primary way in which the church maintained a connection with the denomination, this connection beginning with the Ordination Council.

**Relationality**

Finally, the pastor’s functionality and relationality are important as they influence and inform the authority of the pastor within the congregation. Functionally, some of the

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\(^8\) We will note that there are a number of different terms for the Ordination Council, including the “permanent council.” *Records of the First Baptist Church of Swansea, MA: 1847-1956* (Records vol. II), Collection of the First Baptist Church, John Hay Library, Brown University, (Oct. 2, 1921), 251.

\(^9\) Ibid.
expectations that the congregation has of the pastor include leading worship, preaching weekly, presiding over the Lord’s Supper, and performing baptisms. In the case of Samuel Maxwell, pastor from 1734-1739, the congregation of FBCS expressed displeasure with Samuel Maxwell was because he did not lead a Lord’s Supper service for several months.\(^\text{10}\) In some cases, as in the late 1900s, when Linda Spoolstra was scheduling vacations, the congregation decided that the presence of an ordained pastor was essential to observe the Lord’s Supper.\(^\text{11}\) Other 20\(^{th}\) century pastors, Charles Hartman and Charles Haines, expressed a sense of control and authority they felt they had over worship and spirituality given by the congregation.\(^\text{12}\) This authority and control that the pastor had in worship was a way in which he or she could express his or her theological leanings through sermons and prayers. This was seen when a pastor from the Christian Connexion (Unitarian), Benjamin Taylor, served or when the Calvinist pastor Oliver Fisk.\(^\text{13}\) Both influenced the congregation toward their particular theological camps.

Yet the congregation has the power to decide who to hire to be their pastor and when to end their relationship with the pastor. The pastorates of Abner Lewis, Abial Fisher, Fredrick Dark, and Kenneth Damstrom all ended by the bequest of the congregation demonstrating the congregation’s involvement and role in ending the relationship between the pastor and the church. Up until the late 1800s the pastor’s


contract was renewed on a yearly basis, giving the congregation a tremendous amount of power over the pastor’s tenure at the church. While this power diminished to a degree with the end of this yearly practice, examples of the congregation having influence over its relationship with the pastor continued. On the other hand, the pastor has the freedom to end his or her relationship with the congregation if he or she felt it was necessary to do so. While the pastor has spiritual and liturgical authority, the degree of authority is limited to the satisfaction of the congregation. Finally, the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation influences the functionality of the pastor. If the relationship was positive then the pastor has greater latitude in assuming spiritual authority occurred with Benjamin Taylor. Yet if the relationship was negative as occurred with Samuel Maxwell, the pastor had less ability to claim spirituality authority. The relationship between the pastor and the congregation is influenced by the functionality of the pastor and the functionality of the pastor is influenced by the relationship with the congregation.

The functionality and relationality of the pastor, the liturgical significance of the ordination service, and the call are all symbolic acts pointing towards a theology of ordination. They are symbolic acts that have occurred not only on the local level but are also referred to on the national level through the teachings of the tradition in various resources. For a survey of the teachings of tradition which speak to these symbolic acts, see: Jonathan Malone, Set Apart, Changed, and Equal, PhD diss., (University of Dayton, 2011). From these symbolic acts we can discern speech-acts pointing towards a theology of ordination.

Convictions
Convictions are “centrally held statements out of which the theology of the community emerges.”\textsuperscript{15} In other words, convictions are those things that the community holds as important. The official speech acts that we have named correspond to the convictions of the community, which correspond to a theology in which the community participates. When those speech acts occur in a felicitous manner, then they are corresponding to a conviction and thus to a theology of ordination. From the speech acts discussed above we can articulate at least four convictional statements regarding ordination emerging from the call, relationality, authority, functionality, and extra-church relationship. Because these statements are based on official and operative speech acts, they are not equal. Instead, the first two convictions can be considered primary and the later two secondary. Those which are primary are what Lindbeck would describe as doctrines pointing toward an ontological truth, a truth that corresponds to a reality for the community. Those which are secondary point to what Lindbeck would describe as an intrasystematic truth, a truth of coherence. In this context, I am approaching ontological truth from a pragmatic approach, favoring the actions and speech acts of the community as corresponding to a truth of that community rather than trying to define an ontological truth from a realist perspective.\textsuperscript{16} The convictions come from and correspond to the American Baptist denomination. Some truths articulate the core identity of this Baptist denomination; other truths presuppose that identity and function intrasystemically. We will start with the primary convictions.

\textbf{Call}


\textsuperscript{16} This refers to a debate between the realists and the pragmatists evoked by Lindbeck’s writings that we cannot get into in this context. For a summary of this debate see, Malone, \textit{Set Apart}, Chapter 2.
The call is an essential part of ordination. It is comprised of the individual’s internal call expressing a sense of God’s desire for the individual to enter into the vocation of pastoral ministry, as well as an external call expressing an affirmation of an individual’s skills, abilities, and God’s desire for the individual to enter into the vocation of pastoral ministry by a church community.¹⁷

The call is an essential part of a theology of ordination. If one desires to be ordained and has a sense of God’s presence in that desire, then he or she expresses that desire as a “call” to a community. As stated earlier, the very act of sharing, articulating and expressing one’s internal call must be a felicitous act within the community in order for an affirmation of that call (the external call) to be embraced. If the language is not shared, or the expressivity not understood, or the reference not understood, or the social context is not shared, then the uptake, the understanding of the act, will likely be confused. Thus the individual must be able to speak in a way that the community will understand. The individual must express a compelling belief that God is involved in the call, and the community must understand what the individual means when he or she speaks about God and a call to pastoral ministry. Such an expression occurs within the context of a Baptist community and is understood as an expression that will lead to further action: ordination.

The same holds for the community’s expression, embrace, and affirmation of the individual’s potential for ordination: the external call. All of the criteria making the speech act felicitous which applied to the internal call also applies to the external call,

¹⁷ I recognize that I have not addressed a myriad of theological issues concerning the nature of God including eminence, transcendence, divine will, or many other theological complexities. The point of this work is not to debate if and how God is active in the lives of humanity, but to consider how the Baptist community understands the role of God in ordination.
except that in this case, the individual is the recipient of the act. The individual must understand the community’s sense and expression of his or her external call. The congregation may initiate the process with an expression of an external call or the individual may with an expression of an internal call; one need not precede the other. In all cases, both the internal call and the external call must be felicitous for the call to occur as an official speech act.

The speech act of the call, internal and external, expresses the belief that there is a divine or spiritual presence involved in the call. Thus one does not simply desire to obtain ordination; there is an essential belief that God is an active part of the call. We see an expression of God’s activity in an individual’s call in a number of manuals and texts, for example, in Isaac Backus’ 1754 document “A Discourse Showing the Nature and Necessity of an Internal Call to Preach the Everlasting Gospel.” In the history of FBCS, in the moments when an individual embraced the call, he or she named the presence and activity of God in that call. On the other hand when we encountered ambiguity and uncertainty around the call (internal and external), such doubt expressed a degree of uncertainty concerning the desire and presence of God in the call leading some to deny the expressed external call, others to question their own internal call, and in one case a community to question an expressed internal call. The challenge to the community is to discern the claim of divine inspiration in one’s vocational desires and for an individual to clearly express a sense of a divine presence in such a call. Showing and affirming that

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19 We primarily saw this in the 1700s with pastors Jabez Wood, Samuel Maxwell, and John Devotion.
God is involved in one’s decision to pursue ordination is essential for conviction of the call.

A part of discerning and affirming God’s presence and desire for the individual to enter into ordained ministry is to test the gifts and abilities that an individual would need to function as a pastor. For example, in order to be a pastor one needed to be able to preach and have knowledge of scripture and an understanding of theology. These areas of focus do not directly pertain to a sense of a divine presence but by affirming such gifts affirms at the very least an unspoken assumption that God would only call someone who would have the necessary gifts and aptitudes to be a pastor. In the 1700s, although understanding of scripture was seen as important and to a degree necessary, formal training was not required. The greater emphasis was placed on the activity of God in calling the individual to pastoral ministry. As time went on, the internal call continued to be important, but the emphasis of the external shifted from affirming the sense of presence and activity of the divine to the training and knowledge received in preparation for ministry so that the individual could be seen as an “expert.” It was still important for the individual to express a call from God, but in order to display an ability to be a pastor one had to gain formal education. Regardless of the shift in emphases of the external call, the underlying truth that this conviction points towards remains: the core Baptist belief that God is active in the person’s call and that the community is affirming the divine participation. In other words, one cannot just decide to be a pastor on his or her own whim; God must be involved in such a decision and a community must affirm God’s involvement.

20 For example, the time Jabez Wood was pastor before gaining ordination, and the Benjamin Taylor led the congregation for some time before receiving permission to officiate over the Lord’s Supper.
Relationality

Ordination cannot occur or exist outside of a relationship between the individual and a community.

The pastor is in a number of relationships, with the congregation, with the denomination, and with other pastors to name a few. While the nature of these relationships shape and form the functionality and the identity of the pastor in different ways, the primary visible relationship upon which ordination is based is the one between the pastor and the local congregation which is affirming the call of the pastor, a call that speaks to the congregation and the pastor as being in relation also with God. As with the call, the relationality experienced between the pastor and the congregation must be felicitous. Language between the pastor and the congregation must be shared, and the speech must be understood within a Christian and a Baptist context. There must be an understood expressivity. All the parties must agree on the reference of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. As we saw in the call, the congregation understands that the pastor has been called by God to have a specific relationship with the congregation. The social context is within an ecclesial community, and the uptake is an understanding that the pastor has certain responsibilities within the community.

The function of preaching demonstrates a felicitous act affirming the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. When the pastor preaches, there is an understood language, a shared language around the topic, an understanding of the role preaching has in the church, and an understanding that the pastor is the one who preaches. The expressivity of relationality is that through ordination the pastor recognizes his or her responsibility to preach and the congregation affirms that responsibility. The
pastor and the congregation must understand that the responsibility to preach is due to a role or presence of God in the individual’s calling. The social context is the local church, and the uptake is that the congregation recognizes the pastor’s sermon has importance in the worship service as well as for the lives of the members. As we will discuss further, the nature of the relationality between the congregation and the pastor recognizes that there is a change in the being or ontology of the relationship due to the activity of God. That change corresponds with the pastor having a specific presence and function within the congregation.

Ordination could not occur without a relationship between an individual expressing a call and a congregation affirming the call, pointing towards a truth that the relationship between the congregation and the pastor is an essential part of ordination. Such a truth suggests not only that one must have an initial relationship with a congregation to be ordained but that one must have a continuing relationship with a congregation in order for one’s ordination to continue to be recognized. We can observe other speech acts as intrasystemically connected to this conviction. For example, the nature of the authority the pastor has in spiritual areas such as worship, teaching, biblical study, etc., is connected with the corresponding relationality between the pastor and the community.

While convictions addressing the call and the relationality share an equal level of primacy concerning ordination and can be considered official convictions reflecting the identity and beliefs constitutive of the American Baptist denomination, convictions about

\footnote{Again, this work is focusing on the parish based pastor within the American Baptist denomination. I recognize that there are a variety of ministries for which one is ordained, and thus a variety of “congregations.”}
authority and the ordination council, operative conditions, can be considered on the secondary level. This level is regulative rather than ontological.

Authority

_A pastor’s authority is informed by the nature of his or her relationality with the congregation. Such authority is not over the church, but is an authority within the church._

We briefly discussed the way in which functionality is connected to relationality and we can say the same about authority. Yet the conviction of authority is different enough from functionality and relationality to merit its own discussion. Whereas both functionality and authority are operative convictions linked with the official conviction of relationality and to a slightly lesser extent the call, authority precedes functionality. In the history of FBCS there were a number of ways that pastoral authority was displayed. In some cases, the role of the pastor was to preach and to preside over the ordinances as occurred with supply or temporary pastors.\(^{22}\) In other cases, as with Charles Haines for example, the pastor had freedom and authority in spiritual matters such as worship, but very little input and authority concerning financial and programmatic matters. Haines was the pastor right after Damstrom who did not have a harmonious pastorate, a situation that affected the relationship between Haines and the congregation. Linda Spoolstra, who immediately followed Haines and had a very positive relationship with the congregation; Spoolstra was very involved in the financial and programmatic aspects of FBCS.

The inconsistencies in practice regarding authority demonstrate the manner in which the relationship the pastor has with the congregation affects the pastor’s authority within the church. The way in which relationality affects authority is a didactic process; it

\(^{22}\) For example, with supply pastors Morse, and Buffum.
is a relationally informed process between the pastor and the congregation. As stated above, this authority is practiced in such a way that is within the congregation and not above the congregation. Whereas the pastor can make theological and doctrinal claims which may guide and shape the ethos of the congregation, the members of the congregation can decide to affirm the pastor by continuing to have a relationship with him or her or by ending their relationship with the pastor. This egalitarian nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation is essential for the above stated conviction of authority to hold.

As explained earlier, the speech acts which point toward the above stated conviction of authority can be considered operative and intrasystematic. They are operative because the way in which the pastor operates and acts within and among the congregation informs the identity of that community but are not necessary for the identity of that community. These speech acts correspond with the truth of the relational nature of the office of the pastor with the congregation. We can say that all pastors have a relationship with a community/congregation, and because authority is based on that relationship, we cannot say that all pastors at all times have a specific kind or type of authority. The authority of the pastor varies based on the actual relationship between the pastor and the congregation.

Ordination Council

The Ordination Council is a way in which the call (internal and external) is affirmed and embraced by the American Baptist denomination.

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23 This notion of a didactic authority (relationally based) is influenced by Foucault. For more on Foucault’s notion of power and authority see: Joseph Rouse, “Power/Knowledge,” in The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Gary Gutting, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92-114.
For the pastors of FBCS, a Council was consistently a part of an individual’s ordination (or installation in the first two centuries). This was a consistency that was also demonstrated in the *teachings of the tradition*. The Council consisted of pastors and lay people from local Baptist churches with similar theological persuasions. While there are a number of examples in the *teachings of the tradition* emphasizing the primacy of the local church as the locus of ordination, the activity of the Council was described as an important step in ordination. The Council plays an important part in the process towards ordination.

While the Council is important for ordination, it is not essential. The presence and activity of the council is predicated on the previously articulated internal call as well as an external call. If an individual does not articulate a sense of a divine calling to pastoral ministry and if a congregation does not affirm the divine presence of the individual’s call, then the Ordination Council cannot occur. The individual and the local community must be in agreement concerning the call previous to a Council. On the other hand the internal and external call can be expressed and affirmed and the individual can be ordained in the local church without an Ordination Council occurring. The Ordination Council is the way in which other Baptist churches take part in affirming the call of the individual and the endorsement of the congregation. Out of such a conviction comes the denominational connection with the pastor and the church. This denominational connection was seen in a

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24 While this is no longer seen as a necessity, in the 1700s if one was a Regular Baptist or a Separatist Baptist made a difference. Likewise, in the 1800s, the theological leanings of the church affected the company of the Ordination Council. Hence FBCS’ lack of invitation to join the Warren Association when the Association was formed. At the time FBCS was served by a pastor with Arminian leanings and the Warren Association was strictly Calvinist.

number of ways. On a regular basis the pastor would attend meetings with other Baptists from nearby churches. We have seen a number of times when the pastor attended Ordination Councils, and we have seen examples when the pastor would go to another church to help in a difficult time. The denominational connection found in the Ordination Council continues through the action of the pastor on behalf of the church.\(^{26}\) The Ordination Council insures that the pastor has been approved by a Council which shares the theological and ecclesiological convictions of those other churches in the same association. The Council acts as a stamp of approval for the denomination giving the pastor the permission to interact with other churches as one ordained. Thus, through the affirmation of the Ordination Council, the call of the individual and the affirmation of the call by the congregation are recognized and endorsed by other Baptist churches.

The conviction of the Ordination Council cannot occur without a call; it is a conviction that is derived from the conviction of the call.\(^{27}\) Thus the conviction of the Ordination Council is operative and intrasystematic. As with authority, the Ordination Council is important in shaping and informing the identity of the community, but not essential. Because other pastors from nearby Baptist churches are involved, the ordination service, specifically the laying of hands, is a completion of the act of the Ordination Council. It is a liturgical moment showing the affirmation of the Baptist community beyond a single congregation of the individual’s call.

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\(^{26}\) I am not suggesting that Ordination Council is the source of denominational connections, but instead is a part of it. The ways in which Baptist churches are connected to each other merits its own attention. Time and space is not available in this study.

\(^{27}\) Just as authority was related to both relationality and the call, so is the Ordination Council related to both. Yet, as authority was more closely related to relationality, the Ordination Council is more closely related to the call as that is what the council is determined to ascertain.
Thus far we have named a number of the speech acts practiced by the community (local and national) pertaining to ordination. From those speech acts we have discerned primary convictions (convictions which are official and correspond to a truth) and secondary convictions (convictions which operative and intrasystematic). We have concluded that the convictions of the call and relationality represent primary convictions and the role and nature of authority as well as the Ordination Council represents secondary convictions. Within and connected to these convictions are other speech acts corresponding to a truth of the community. While the list of speech acts or the list of convictions is not exhausted, we can say that the speech acts and the convictions offered, specifically the primary convictions are conclusive. In the next section we will note how the awareness of the action of God in the call as well as the change in the relationality between the pastor and the congregation point to an understanding that something greater that what can be seen is happening with ordination. Yet at the same time, there is an understanding that God remains beyond the call and the relationality of ordination. The primary convictions point to a sacred awareness in the American Baptist denomination.

_The Sacramental Consciousness of Ordination_

The call and the relationality of the pastor with the congregation points to an awareness of the pastor’s unique presence in the community. 28 This awareness is sensitive to the idea that the pastor is someone who functions in a very specific way within the community; the pastor is someone who preaches, teaches, and leads in specific areas, who is set apart but who is not placed above the members of the congregation. Not only does the pastor have specific functions, but the pastor represents to a degree the presence and activity of God within the community. We saw this in the affirmation of the

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28 I would describe this as a cataphatic awareness.
call (internal and external). Through the pastor’s functionality and relationality the presence of God is experienced by the congregation.

This awareness that the congregation and pastor share is that ordination represents something greater than the individual and that the relational change which occurs through ordination points to that greater awareness. The relationships between the pastor and the congregation are different from those between lay members of the congregation. In the call the pastor has expressed that God has been active in calling him or her to pastoral ministry. In the call the congregation has affirmed the presence and activity of the divine. For members of the congregation, the presence of the pastor draws people to be aware of the presence of God. Secondly, in the American Baptist denomination the pastor represents the church he or she serves. The pastor is participating in a relationship that is greater than a secular relationship between institutions, and is a part of something that is not seen; the relationships of believers as churches.  

On the other hand, there is a deeper awareness stresses that the pastor is a member of the congregation, no different from any other members of the congregation, and that God is beyond the presence and actions of an individual. This deeper, mystical awareness reminds the people that the pastor is only human, limited and finite, and the presence of God is beyond and greater than any one human. The relationality and functionality of the pastor alone cannot point to the presence of God, or be the only way in which one can be aware of God’s presence. The pastor’s call must be affirmed by the

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29 Earlier in this paper I suggested that the ordination service could be considered an operative doctrine when it involves representatives from the American Baptist denomination. In this instance, I am referring to a liturgical moment that could happen within the context of the local church, or within the context of the denomination. While the majority of examples of ordination services we encountered involved the American Baptist denomination, as I suggested earlier, a local church ceremony is not inconceivable.

30 This is what I would describe as an apophatic awareness.
congregation. The pastor must have a relationship with the congregation. These convictions point to the way in which the relational change rests just as much in the hands of the congregation as it does in the hands of the pastor. The deeper response to the initial awareness of the pastor’s presence would be that the functionality and authority of the pastor is created and shaped by the congregation; God remains beyond what can really be known through a relationship with a pastor.

The move between the initial awareness of the presence of the divine in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, including function, tasks, and responsibilities, and the deeper awareness that God is greater than that which can be seen and experienced in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, is the foundation of a sacramental consciousness of ordination within the American Baptist denomination.

Sacramental consciousness is derived from thoughts and writings found in Catholic circles of thought. Bernard Cooke suggests that symbols in the human experience mediate our awareness of the extraordinary and offer meaning to the human experience. Dennis Doyle writes about narrative, ritual, and presence as the context within which an awareness of the divine occurs. A participant’s perspective within this context leads to an awareness of the possibility and the reality (as it is construed) of a divine presence. Sacramental consciousness, in essence, is an initial awareness of the divine through symbol and context in tension with the deeper corrective reminding us that God’s presence cannot be mediated through symbol or ritual.  

What I am offering as

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31 Sacramental consciousness does not have one universal, agreed upon meaning, hence the variety of scholars offering slightly different understandings. It is my hope that the synthesis of these three scholar’s works can be offered in a way that can be applied in the Baptist context. Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments & Sacramentality*, rev. ed. (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999), 11, 18-19,
sacramental consciousness for a Baptist context is a synthesis of sacramental consciousness as offered by these Catholic scholars as it can be understood in a Baptist context.  

As I have already suggested, in the primary convictions of relationality and the call we can find that it is a sacramental consciousness of the congregation and the pastor which allows all involved to recognize that something changes in ordination and yet at the same time, the pastor is not placed above the congregation. Through baptism all are brought into a new relationship with Christ and with those in the church community. In this new relationship with Christ all are called in one form or another to the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is a basic, grounding idea of relationality within the church, that through baptism all are brought into a new relationship with each other through their commitment to Jesus Christ. Relationality is a key component of the church, one that is grounded in baptism and reaffirmed through the regular practice of the Lord’s Supper. It is a part of the church that is shared and experienced by all.

Through ordination this relationship changes. The call articulates a way in which this relationship changes between the pastor and the congregation. The individual’s

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32 I am very much aware that the term “sacramental consciousness” may have a low level of receptivity in Baptist churches. Yet for this work I will maintain the term because so much understanding of sacramental consciousness applied to a Baptist context comes from Catholic circles. Changing the term will change the meaning of the term. Yet if one wanted to concretely offer the findings of this work to a Baptist community one would have to consider a change in terminology and potentially a nuanced change in one’s understanding of sacramental consciousness. In such a work one does need to be aware that Baptists on the whole lack a concrete sacramental theology and thus we cannot assume that the Baptist community would embrace all of the nuanced understandings that come along with such a term as “sacramental consciousness.” For example, the word “sacrament” comes from the Latin suggesting not only a mystery (which is more from the Greek) but also an oath. We cannot assume that such a nuanced sacramental awareness exists in the American Baptist denomination. From the data collected, we can say that there is an awareness of the presence of the divine within the community, and particularly how that presence is understood in the context of ordination.
relationship with Christ compels one to function in a specific way within the community based on that individual’s call. The relationship with the people changes as the one who has been called to serve as a pastor is affirmed by the congregation. It is through the call, the expression of the internal call and the affirmation of the external call that the individual pastor’s relationship with the congregation changes. Ordination is more than acknowledging gifts and abilities, but acknowledging that the essence of the relationship between the individual and the congregation has changed; an ontological change of relati

A sacramental consciousness of the pastor is an awareness of a relational change that occurs through ordination due to a perceived presence of the divine (the call) that at
the same time maintains that the one being ordained is not changed as an individual. Even as the pastor is set apart from congregational relationships, representing in one way the activity of God, a sacramental consciousness is also aware that God still utterly transcends the presence and relational capacity of the individual. The operative or secondary convictions and speech acts, such as the title of the pastor and the functionality of the pastor within the congregation point to this awareness. When an individual is ordained he or she does experience an ontological change of relationality with the community; it is a change that is perceived and expressed through a sacramental awareness within the community.

Conclusion

Many American Baptists, especially though not exclusively those in the American Baptist denomination, have a theology of ordination. It is not a theology that has been written by past scholars, but one that has been and continues to be practiced within the churches; it is a theology that is done rather than told. Attempting to articulate such a theology calls for a thick study of the community, considering the symbolic actions, grammar, and speech acts of the community. Through studying the actions and practices of a local Baptist community and comparing those practices with the trends and teachings of the American Baptist denomination on a national level, we can see this theology as it has been practiced. The practices of the community and the denomination point towards the necessary symbolic role that the call of the individual and the affirmation of that call by the community plays in ordination. We also see the necessary symbolic role that the relationship between the community and the pastor plays in a theology of ordination. Ordination is not understood without the presence of these two convictions. From these
two convictions emerges an awareness of an ontological relational change that occurs through ordination. This is a relationality within the congregation, setting the pastor apart from the congregation, but not above. The sacramental consciousness of the congregation is the awareness of the change that takes place based on these two primary convictions of the community. The sacramental consciousness is aware of what the pastor’s relationship with the congregation represents, the presence of God, and at the same time aware that the pastor is not above anyone in the congregation.

It is not an easy thing to offer a Baptist theology. The grassroots nature of the denomination along with its diversity as well as the lack of creeds or a hierarchy of any kind makes it difficult to recommend a theology that might speak to the denomination. It is my hope that this study can offer a theology that does indeed speak to a significant segment of the American Baptist denomination. My hope is that Baptists can acknowledge in an ecumenically fruitful way the sacramentality of some of their practices, in this case especially ordination, in a manner that preserves the critical independence of the denomination as well as the traditional focus on the transcendence of God relative to all earthly matters.