

[The bolded text is my emphasis]

Eureka, Tribes of Israel's Sons, volume 2, p. 306-307 (excerpt)

Scarcely any two things can be more dissimilar than this new order of things, and the order instituted by the Apostles nearly 300 years before. Mosheim speaking of the episcopal presbyters, or overseeing elders, of the apostolic ecclesias and those of the second century, says: "Let none confound the bishops of this primitive and golden period of the ecclesia with those of whom we read in the following ages. For though they were both designated by the same name, yet they differed extremely in many respects. A bishop during the first and second centuries was a person who had the care of one christian assembly, which at that time was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted not so much with the authority of a master, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful servant. **The ecclesias, also in those early times, were entirely independent; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each of them governed by its own rulers and its own laws. Nothing is more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive ecclesias; nor does there ever appear in the first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial ecclesias from which councils and metropolitans derive their origin.**"

[Note: All caps in JT's words *are JT's emphasis of his own judgment*. "HUMAN POLICY", not Apostolic, not Scriptural, with excommunication practiced. They are "Anti-Christian Assemblies".]

Associations—John Kerr—The Dunkards—Trine Immersion (excerpt)

by John Thomas, *The Apostolic Advocate*, 1835, p. 121-123

"Associations" are unscriptural. The congregations of Christ in early times, were entirely independent, none of them being subject to any foreign or extraneous jurisdiction, but each governed by its own Rulers, and the Apostolic laws. No peculiar set of men, associated under any exclusive title, had any juridical authority, or any sort of supremacy, or the least right to enact laws under any pretence whatever. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive churches; nor does there even appear, in the first century, that association of provincial churches from which councils and metropolitans derive their origin. It was only in the second century, that the custom of holding councils commenced in Greece whence it soon spread through the other provinces of the Roman world.

The meeting of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv.) is commonly considered as the first Christian council or association. But this notion arises from a manifest abuse of the word council. That meeting was only of one church, and, if such a meeting be called a council,

it will follow that there were innumerable councils in the primitive times. But every one knows that a council is an assembly of delegates, deputies or commissioners, sent from several churches associated by certain bonds in a general body, and thus the said supposition falls to the ground.

Although the Christian assemblies in the first century were unassociated in any other bonds than those of love, in process of time, as HUMAN POLICY gained the ascendant, all the churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate States, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent States, and the regular assemblies which met, in consequence thereof, at fixed times, and were composed of the deputies of each respective State. But these ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks; their great utility in subserving the ambitious views of a rising priesthood was no sooner perceived by the clergy, than they became universal, and were formed in all places where the Christian religion had been planted. To these assemblies, in which the deputies or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the names of SYNOD was appropriated by the Greeks, and that of councils by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted in these general meetings, were called canons, i. e. rules.

"These councils," says Mosheim, "of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of the second century, changed the whole face of the church and gave it a new form; for, **by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented.**" Prudence indeed prevented the clergy assuming all at once the power with which they were afterwards invested. At their first appearance in these general councils they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of the people. But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority, turned their influence into dominion, and their counsels into laws; and openly asserted, at length, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people authoritative rules of faith and manners. Another effect of these councils was, the gradual abolition of that perfect equality which reigned among all bishops in the primitive times. For the order and decency of these assemblies required, that some one of the provincial bishops, meeting in council, should be invested with a superior degree of power and authority, and hence the rights of metropolitan bishops derive their origin. In the mean time the bounds of the church were enlarged; the custom of holding councils was followed where ever the sound of a corrupted gospel had reached; and the universal church had now the appearance of one vast republic, formed by a combination of a great number of little States. This occasioned a new order of ecclesiastics, who were appointed in different parts of the world, as heads of the church, **and whose office it was to preserve the consistence and union of that immense body, whose members were so widely dispersed throughout the nations. Such were the nature and office of the patriarchs, among whom at length, ambition, having reached its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing the Bishop of Rome, and his successors, with the title and authority of Prince of the Patriarchs.** (Mosheim, vol. i. p. 60.)

Such is the testimony afforded us by history of the origin and usurpation of associations. History is the experience of past ages, and is able to make us wise in the conduct of the future. The embryo assemblies out of which arose the councils of Nice, Nicomedia and Trent, claimed to be nothing more than "advisory," which is the main plea by which it is attempted to sustain them among the Baptists at this time! Advisory! **yes, indeed, even to the excommunication of churches from Christian fellowship. The designs of ambition are generally masked under a show of moderation and humility.** These have been well played off among the Baptists **until the people are cajoled into the belief of their scriptural and apostolic character.** We rejoice, however, that in Lunenburg the knell has been sounded and the requiem of these **antichristian assemblies** chaunted [old spelling of chant] perhaps forever.

Note: I have subsequently located references to this article, endorsing brother Thomas' comments. One from *Logos* follows:

“‘Associations’ are unscriptural. The congregations of Christ in early times, were entirely independent, none of them being subject to any foreign or extraneous jurisdiction, but each governed by its own Rulers, and the Apostolic laws. No peculiar set of men, associated under any exclusive title, had any judicial authority, or any sort of supremacy, or the least right to enact laws under any pretence whatever. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive churches; nor does there even appear, in the first century, the association of provincial churches from which ‘councils’ and ‘metropolitans’ derive their origin. It was only in the second century, that the custom of holding councils commenced in Greece whence it soon spread through the provinces of the Roman world.”

Thus Brother Thomas laid down the principle of what we today know as Ecclesial autonomy: a basic principle of Ecclesial organisation today. He was extremely clear-thinking and direct in his approach to things; and was obviously God-guided in his search for truth. [SG: See John 6:45]

Logos, 1972, Pioneer Supplement, p. 106

§ 2. During a great part of this century, all the churches continued to be, as at first, *independent* of each other, or were connected by no consociations or confederations.(1) Each church was a kind of small independent republic, governing itself by its own laws, enacted or at least sanctioned by the people. But in process of time, it became customary for all the Christian churches within the same province, to unite and form a sort of larger society or commonwealth; and in the manner of confederated republics, to hold their conventions at stated times, and there deliberate for the common advantage of the whole confederation. This custom first arose among the Greeks, with whom a [political] confederation of cities, and the consequent conventions of their several delegates, had been long known; but afterwards the utility of the thing being seen, the custom extended through all countries where there were Christian churches.(2) Such

Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, p. 116