Assignment 6.

Choose one of the denominations to arise following Luther. Investigate its roots, the key characters in its formation, and its contribution to the Body of Christ.

Baptist Church and its origins.

The Baptists first appeared in England and the Netherlands in the 17th century, as a result of the Reformation of Europe, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin.

Congregations were made up of people who wanted the Church to be seperate from the state. Wanted a ‘purer’ form of worship, and to try and live a lifestyle similar to the New Testament Christians. [[1]](#footnote-0)

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

A German Roman Catholic priest, a one time lawyer who became a doctor of theology. By 1520 he had made Wittenberg a centre for his new theology of ‘Justification by faith alone’. He was against the Catholic Church teaching of Pencances and the way funds were raised through this. Luther published his objections by nailing his 95 points to the Cathedral door.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

Was appointed a priest at Glarus, and became the ‘people's priest’ of Zurich in 1519.

He banned images, pictures and music during worship. In 1525 he introduced a new form of the Lord’s supper. The congregation took the wine and bread first and the minister last.[[2]](#footnote-1)

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Was a trained lawyer and great classical scholar who studied Luther and other theologians. After a spiritual encounter in 1532 he was forced into hiding. Calvin passed through Geneva and became a reader in Holy Scripture. He refused to be controlled by the Geneva city authorities and fled to Strasbourg in 1538. He learnt to apply Scripture to doctrine of the Church and this included pastors, elders and deacons. He eventually returned to Geneva where he held weekly Euchorist, quarterly observance and dropped the laying on of hands from ordination. He proposed a church court that had the right to discipline and excommunicate unrepentant believers.[[3]](#footnote-2)

Anabaptists.

A movement which started in the early 1500’s. Two friends Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz were keen for reformation. In 1523 they met in a private home for bible study where they confessed their faith in Christ, received baptism and used ordinary bread for the Lord’s supper. Members received baptism on account of their faith. Grebel believed that baptism signified the cleansing of sin and should only be for adults. The Lord’s supper he believed should be given in the home of the believer, when only the words of the institution were read. This is the earliest example of what was going to be referred to as ‘the gathered fellowship of believers’. Zwingli at the time was in defence of infant baptisms. In 1525 the idea of confessing, separated church, linked with believers' baptism was first established in Zurich. In 1527 Manz was arrested, tied to a bedstead and drowned in Zurich by the authorities, who were against their teachings on adult baptism and the new seperated church. George Blaurock, an associate of Manz who had been one of 39 baptised by Grebel and an evangelist for the new separated church, was burned to death at Kalusen in September 1529.

It has been a matter of discussion between historians just how far baptist church roots are in the Anabaptist movement. [[4]](#footnote-3)

The Reformation in England.

This began when King Henry VIII wanted his marriage to Katherine of Aragon annulled and the Pope refused. This resulted in the English Church and state separation from the Catholic Church. This resulted in the Bible being translated into English, authority of the Scriptures, justification of repentance and faith and charity. Liturgical practice, transubstantiation rejected, celibacy abolished and communion offered in both kinds. All this was reversed when Mary came to power. Many fled to Geneva and Strasbourg and were then influenced by Calvinistic Puritanism and the Protestant principles. [[5]](#footnote-4)

The Puritans and Separatism.

When Queen Elizabeth l came to power in 1558 the Puritans who had left England returned and wanted to create a church that was in accordance with the Scriptures. They tried to get rid of the bishops but failed. They wanted a church on the lines of Calvinistic Presbyterians to take over the state church. Elizabeth tried to silence them but couldn't, but succeeded in Scotland. Robert Browne from Cambridge formed a church in Norwich and then fled to the continent. He believed that the doctrine of the Church was a covenanted community, members being bound to God and each other in obedience to Christ, whose will was known through Scripture.

During the 1590s another Separatist church was formed by John Perry in London. He wanted a covenanted church membership and based his teaching on Matthew 18:17, “Tell it to the church.’ Some of this movement emigrated to Holland and then eventually to America in 1620 and became known as the ‘Pilgrim Fathers’. John Smyth at the time was in Amsterdam leading a group that came from Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. He described his journey from ‘the profession of Puritanism to Brownism, and from Brownism to true Christian baptism. General Baptists origins are found here.[[6]](#footnote-5)

General Baptists.

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys are two key characters in the formation of the Baptist movement.

John Smyth was born around 1570. Studied at Cambridge. He was ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln. However he became in trouble with the church authorities when he objected to the burial services, the churching of women and the wearing of the surplice. He was a Puritan member of the Church of England. He upset some people by his teachings and was dismissed from his appointment as City lecturer at Lincoln. Smyth’s preaching licence was revoked due to his ‘factious doctrine’. [[7]](#footnote-6)

Thomas Helwys trained for 3 years in London in legal training. He then moved to his family estate, Broxtowe Hall, Nottinghamshire. Broxtowe Hall was known for being connected to Puritan sympathisers, John Smyth being one of them. In 1604 a new set of Canons and disciplines for the government of the Church of England were approved and this dashed any hopes of the Puritans. In Gainsborough a new covenanted church had been formed. This church believed ‘the visible Church of the New Testament with all the ordinances thereof, is the chief and principal part of the Gospel’. As a result of the Church of England’s changes the congregation of this new church in Gainsborough decided to move to Holland.[[8]](#footnote-7)

The Church

The congregation was seen as an independent gathering of adult believers, who pledged personal loyalty first to Christ then to each other as members of the body of Christ. Adult, believers baptism. This was completely foreign to the Church of England. These churches were independent from Rome and from the Church of England, the latter being controlled by the state. The members of these independent churches provided for their own physical and spiritual resources for their own ministers. Their mission was to bring Christ to an unbelieving world.[[9]](#footnote-8)

General Baptists believed in religious freedom, all people had the possibility of repentance and to believe in the Gospel. That no one should be killed for mistaken beliefs, since this might defeat God’s purposes in salvation. People should be free to hear spiritual truth and receive it without coercion of any kind.[[10]](#footnote-9)

Helwys returned to England in 1612 and wanted to plead with king James I to stop persecuting the faithful. He signed a copy of *The Mistery of Iniquity,* which was given to the King, who promptly put Helwys into Newgate Prison where he died just before 1616. John Murton and Leonard Basher who were members of Helwys’ congregation continued to appeal to the King, they made clear their beliefs based on Arminian theology and their concerns for religious liberty. All three were founders of the General Baptists. Several churches started to appear around 1620 in Lincoln, Coventry, Salisbury and Tiverton. [[11]](#footnote-10)

Particular Baptists.

The roots of the particular baptists are similar to general baptists. The congregation is independent, only having officers described in the New Testament, (Elders, Deacons etc) the seat of power is the whole congregation, submitted together for the guidance of Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit. Those covenanted together in Christ had authority to accept or reject members, discipline both pastors and people. These churches were Calvanist in their theology.[[12]](#footnote-11)

In 1644 the Particular Baptist ‘*confession of faith’* declared that believers' baptism would be full immersion, in the name of the Triune God and upon personal confession of repentance of sin and a vowed trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord. This is to be the only valid form of baptism within the baptist churches and still is today.[[13]](#footnote-12)

Baptist persecution

In 1660 King Charles ll returned from exile to England to regain the throne. He came under great pressure from the restored Church of England to enforce religious conformity based on the *Thirty-nine Articles* and *Book of Common Prayer*.

The Corporation Act of 1661 was created to exclude Catholics from holding municipal offices as they had to swear an oath of non-resistance to the established government in both church and state. This also excluded Presbyterians as well. Several more Acts followed and ministers found themselves being fined or even imprisoned. These ministers became known as nonconformists or dissenters. [[14]](#footnote-13)

Thomas Hardcastle, a pastor at Broadmead, Bristol and his congregation received a great deal of persecution from 1672 to 1689. Hardcastle himself was imprisoned and wrote 22 letters to his congregation encouraging them. These letters were read out every Sunday instead of a sermon. Hardcastle believed that the persecution would deepen their faith and patience and would bring many to conversion. In his letters he discussed the deep nature of the Christian faith, and recognised the gift of faith in God as a shield to danger. When Christains are obedient to Christ, despite outside factors they enter the very presence of God. This sustained his church especially after 1680 when the persecution got more severe.

Baptist Associations

From the Mid 17th century Baptists met in regional Associations to share common life of the churches. Queries from churches were discussed. West country churches were the first to meet up. By 1650’s the Midlands, the North, Ireland, and Wales. There was a common theology and shared concern for church planting. The Associations provided advice on controversial issues that individual congregations were unable to resolve, gave financial support and practical care among the needy congregations.

Baptist Union

By the nineteenth century it was important for a national agreement between the Baptist churches whether Calvinist or Arminian in their views. So in 1873 the Union of Great Britain and Ireland was formed. One of the reasons this was formed was because of the Baptist Missionary Society. The union was the fund raising section of this and wanted to unite the Baptist churches as a collection of Baptist churches together. One of the purposes of the union was to encourage growing denominational awareness and mutual help between ministers and churches. [[15]](#footnote-14)

In 1865 Charles Haddon Spurgeon along with 2 others set up the London Baptist Association. He became a preacher at a young age. He opened an orphanage in Stockwell, and in 1856 founded a ‘Pastor’s College’, which helped to grow the denomination greatly.

In 1924 Violet Hedger was the first woman trained for ministry. After 2 years training she was posted to Littleover, Derby.

I currently run a Baptist Church with my husband and I have found doing the research for this essay really interesting. I can see how our church structure came about, the fact that we have a minister, elders and deacons. We have adult baptism, and dedicate children rather than full immersion. The congregation have the power as a whole, and no major decisions are made unless put to them. This creates a ‘belonging’ attitude, that their opinions are valid and needed. This could also work in the opposite way as well!! In that at times decisions can be frustrated and not always what we want as leaders.

I can also appreciate the measures and risks that were taken so that we do have freedom of worship and teaching. The people who have lost their lives for the cause. That we can read and learn scripture freely. Every Baptist church is stand alone, but we have the added bonus of being part of East Midlands Baptist Association, of which I am a director! They are there for support and help both financially and for advice.

1. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.xiii [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.5-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.13-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.17 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.19 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.21 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.24 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.25 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.71 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.72 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.87-90 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Roger Hayden, English Baptist History and Heritage, Baptist Union of Great Britain. p.144-145 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)