Baptist Confession Making 1644 And 1689

A Paper read to the Strict Baptist Historical Society 17th March 1989 - Revised

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Three hundred years ago in 1689 there met, here in London, a General Assembly of Particular Baptist churches. For the first time a representative meeting of such churches nation-wide was possible. After recounting the many items of business transacted, the report of the proceedings states, almost as a postscript,

> *for the satisfaction of all other Christians that differ from us, in the point of baptism, to recommend to their perusal the confession of our faith, which we do own, as containing the doctrine of our faith and practice; and do desire that the members of our churches respectively do furnish themselves therewith.*[1]

Since the Assembly, the *Second London Baptist Confession* has been popularly known as the *1689 Confession,* although it was in fact first published in 1677. This statement of faith has played a significant role in Baptist life since its first appearance. It is therefore fitting that we should commemorate its anniversary and particularly appropriate that we should do this in London. This evening we are concerned with the subject of confession making, and need to concern ourselves with the events which led to the publication of the Confession in 1677. It seems appropriate that we should refer to it as *The Second London Confession,* and since confession making does not occur in a vacuum, to pursue the further questions, 'Why a *second* confession?' and 'What about the first, that of 1644?'

I. The Political and Religious Background

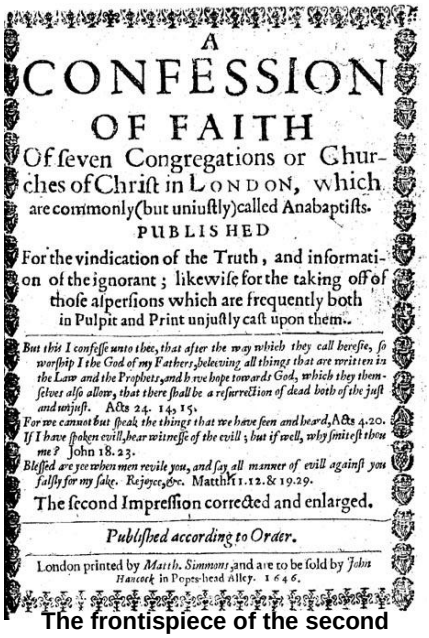
***Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* painted in 1847 by John Rogers Herbert (1810–1890)**

Particular Baptist churches began to appear in England in that period of Charles I's reign which historians have called the 'Eleven Years Tyranny'. After repeated failures to work with a Parliament, Charles managed to govern without one for eleven years from 1629. He was supported by his chief religious advisor, William Laud, who from 1633 was archbishop of Canterbury. Laud's ambition was to purge the Church of England of Puritanism. An extension of this policy to Scotland provoked rebellion which put impossible strains on the King's finances and forced him to turn again to Parliament. The eventual consequence was the famous Long Parliament, which not only tried to regulate the King's government, but also abolished episcopacy in the Church of England. Parliament soon found itself at war with the King.

[1] Quoted, J. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists,* London, 4 vols, 1811-1830, vol. 1, p.500

In 1643, Parliament summoned the Westminster Assembly of Divines to settle the affairs of the Church of England. In the following year, the London Particular Baptists issued their first confession of faith, partly to explain their teachings to a general public whose understanding of Baptists beliefs was at best confused and at worst jaundiced. It was also intended to be an instrument of instruction for the Baptist congregations themselves. In the ensuing years civil war culminated in the rule of Oliver Cromwell, during which period independent religious groups enjoyed a liberty unprecedented in England, and churches multiplied. These halcyon days ended in 1660 with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in the person of Charles II. Nonconformists then faced over a quarter of a century of persecution which varied in intensity from time to time and from place to place. It was during this period of persecution that the Particular Baptists issued their second confession in 1677. The overthrow of James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 made possible the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689, which granted a restricted freedom of worship for orthodox dissenters.

II. The First London Confession



A
CONFESSION
OF FAITH
Of seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in LONDON, which are commonly (but uniustly) called Anabaptists.
PUBLISHED
For the vindication of the Truth, and information of the ignorant; likewise for the taking off of those aspersions which are frequently both in Pulpit and Print unjustly cast upon them.

But this I confesse unto thee, that after the way which they call heresie, so worship I the God of my Fathers, beleeving all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets, and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of dead both of the just and unjust. Acts 24. 14, 15.
For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard, Acts 4.20.
If I have spoken evill, bear witnesse of the evill; but if well, why smitest thou me? John 18.23.
Blessed are ye when men revile you, and say all manner of evill against you falsly for my sake. Rejoyce, &c. Matth 11.12. & 19.29.

The second Impression corrected and enlarged.

Published according to Order.

London printed by *Matth. Simmons*, and are to be sold by *John Hancock* in Popes-head Alley. 1646.

The frontispiece of the second edition of the first *Confession*, from 1646

By 1644, there were at least seven Particular Baptist churches in London. Strictly speaking, their existence was illegal, but the confusion of the times afforded them a fair degree of liberty. They were, however, the objects of considerable suspicion. Incorrectly they were accused of 'holding Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne, disclaiming of Magistracy, denying to assist them either in persons or in purse in any of their lawfull Commands, doing acts unseemly in the dispensing of the Ordinance of Baptism not to be named among Christians'.[2] The need to refute charges of Arminianism arose from confusion with the General Baptists, an Arminian group which had existed in England since the second decade of the century. Suspicions of a subversive attitude towards civil government arose because of fears which went back much earlier to memories of Anabaptist involvement in revolution in Munster in Germany in the 1530s. Memories of those events continued to haunt orthodox Baptists for over a century.

1. The Content of the Confession

The *Confession* consists of 53 articles and is a full statement of the Particular Baptists position, although it is not so detailed as the *Second Confession.* Its compilers were careful to distance themselves from the Anabaptists. The title page reads, 'The Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly [sic]) called Anabaptists'. Articles 48 to 51 deal with the civil government and state, 'that a civill Magistracie is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evill doers and for the praise of them that doe well'. Later editions stated that it was lawful for a Christian to hold civil office and also to take oaths, both of which had been questioned among the continental Anabaptists.

The First London Confession was unequivocal in its Calvinism. The five points all have a place in its statements. For example, article 21 declares 'That Jesus Christ by his death did

[2] 'London Confession, 1644' - Introduction, W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptists Confessions of Faith,* Valley Forge, USA, 1980 [1969], p. 155. All quotations from the *First London Confession 1644* are from Lumpkin op.cit., pp. 154 -171.

bring forth salvation and reconciliation onely for the elect, which were those which God the Father gave him'.

Belief in Particular Redemption did not inhibit the preaching of the gospel. Article 25 states,

> *That the tenders of the Gospel to the conversion of sinners is absolutely free, no way requiring, as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, terrors of the Law, but onely and alone the naked soule, as a sinner and ungodly to receive Christ as crucified, dead and buried, and risen again, being made a Prince and a Saviouyr for such sinners*.

Of course the *First London Confession* teaches believers' baptism. It was also the first of the Baptist confessions to insist on immersion as the correct mode and so reflected a recent innovation in English Baptist practice. Baptisms before 1640 appear to have been administered by effusion. The 1646 edition of the *Confession* limited participation in the Lord's Supper to those who had been baptized as believers. This statement of strict communion was strengthened in a separately issued *Appendix to the Confession* written by Benjamin Cox.

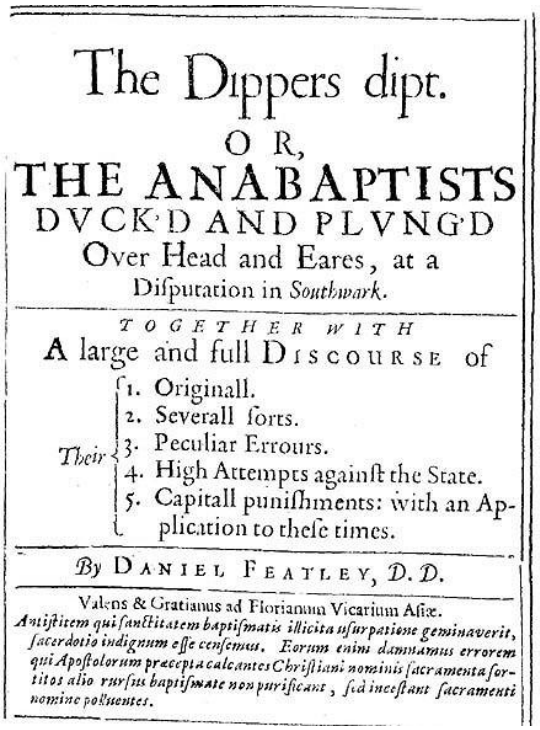
2. Antecedents of the First London Confession

Dr Barrie White has demonstrated that the *First London Confession* was heavily dependent on the English *Separatist Confession* of 1596. Twenty six of its fifty three articles clearly derive from this earlier statement. There are obvious points of difference. The Separatists were paedobaptists, and, as has already been shown, the Baptists were careful to affirm their distinctives at this point. The Separatists accorded a more significant position to the ministry. In the words of Dr White, 'the ministry was firmly subordinated to the immediate authority of the covenanted community' among the Baptists.[3] A further difference was that the Separatists expected the state to suppress false religion, whereas the Baptists did not. Since the first London Particular Baptist Church, located in Wapping, emerged from Separatist Independency, it is not surprising to find the doctrinal roots of the *Confession* in Separatism. A major section of the *Confession* for which no direct source has been discovered is that of the twelve articles 21 to 32, which describe God's experimental dealings with his people, and probably reflect the developed Puritan pastoral understanding of the outworkings of God's grace as taught in the 1640s.[4]

3. Confessional Revision

The *Confession* appeared at a time of great theological debate. Many critics were agreeably surprised to discover how close the Particular Baptists were to Puritan orthodoxy. A vigorous opponent of the Baptists was Dr Daniel Featley, who had been involved in public debate with a group of Baptists in Southwark in 1642. He expressed his opinions in a book entitled, *The Dippers Dipt or The Anabaptists duck't and plunged Over Head and Eares at a Disputation in Suthwark.* Dedicating his book to Parliament he warned that the Baptists would soon bring all the evils of continental Anabaptism to England.

[3] B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1963, p.63.
[4] Recent research by Dr Jim Renihan has indicated other Puritan sources that underlie these statements, important among them is William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology,* James M. Renihan, ed., *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family, RBAP,* Owensboro, Ky, USA, 2004, pp.3,4.



The Dippers dipt.
OR,
THE ANABAPTISTS
DVCK'D AND PLVNG'D
Over Head and Eares, at a
Disputation in *Southwark*.

TOGETHER WITH
A large and full DISCOURSE of
Their
1. Originall.
2. Severall sorts.
3. Peculiar Errours.
4. High Attempts against the State.
5. Capitall punishments: with an Application to these times.

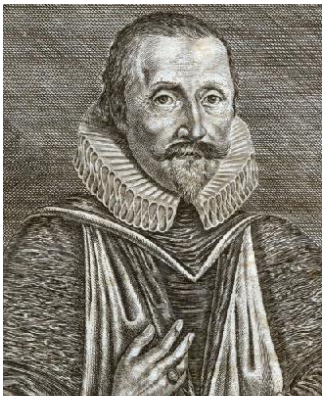
By DANIEL FEATLEY, *D. D.*

Valens & Gratianus ad Florianum Vicarium Asiæ.
Antistitem qui sanctitatem baptismatis illicita usurpatione geminaverit, sacerdotio indignum esse censemus. Eorum enim damnamus errorem qui Apostolorum præcepta calcantes Christiani nominis sacramenta sortitos alio rursus baptismate non purificant, sed incestant sacramenti nomine polluentes.

In recent years there have been suggestions that the *First London Confession* differs from the *Second Confession* in its teaching on the Law of God. Certainly its teaching is not so developed as that of the later *Confession* which devotes a whole chapter to the Law. Had the *First Confession* been antinomian, critics like Featley would have been quick to detect any movement away from the mainline Reformed teaching. The *Confession's* treatment of man's obedience has to been gleaned from various articles but it is certainly broad in its scope. Article 1 refers to 'one Rule of holinesse and obedience for all Saints, at all times, in all places to be observed'. There is no hint of different laws for the Old Testament saints and the New. Article 7 elaborates,

> *The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties is not man's inventions, opinions, devices, lawes, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but only the word of God contained in the Canonicall Scriptures.*

Both of these statements are taken from the *Separatist Confession of 1596* with minor verbal differences. Interestingly the Baptists added the words, 'at all times', in article 1. The exception to total obedience to the Law is found in article 17 where Christ is said to have 'finished and removed all those Rites, Shadowes, and Ceremonies' that formed 'the partition wall'.[5] Once again this is a modification of the 1596 document. The statements of 1644 are surely the embryonic points which were to be developed and elaborated in the *Second London Confession.*



Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691) *left* and Daniel Featley (1578-1645) *right*

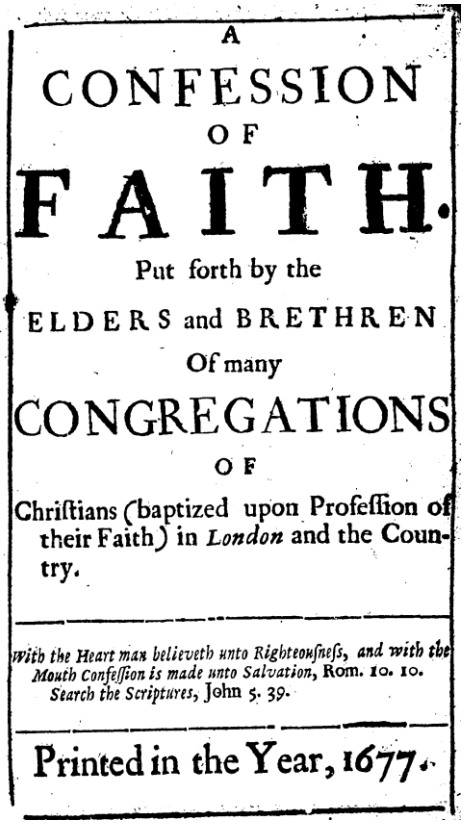
Daniel Featley's critique may have influenced the Baptists who brought out a second edition of the *First Confession* in 1646. This was submitted to the House of Commons. Featley had objected to the fact that there was no reference to a Christian magistrate and so the omission was rectified. In the light of threats of religious uniformity which were being pressed by Presbyterians, a stronger statement on religious liberty was included. The Calvinism of the *Confession* was strengthened. Lumpkin suggests that this was the result of the efforts of two former clergymen, Benjamin Cox and Hanserd Knollys, both of whom had become Baptists.

[5] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 156, 158, 160.

On the other hand both W.L. Lumpkin and W.J. McGlothlin insist that in the revision 'much of the distinctively Baptist emphasis was removed'.[6] The 1644 edition contained the statement that baptism is 'to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith', article 39. In the 1646 and subsequent editions the word 'onely' was removed. In 1644 the compilers wrote of the mode of baptism, 'the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under the water'. In 1646 and after the words, 'the Scripture holds out to be' were omitted.

Third and fourth editions of the *Confession* appeared in 1651 and 1652, by which time the Particular Baptists had won for themselves a place in the life of the nation and could be seen to be orthodox believers. Their churches were appearing throughout the land as they, with other Christian groups, benefited from Oliver Cromwell's policy of toleration. For the time being their *Confession* sufficed to explain their beliefs.

III. The Second London Confession


A
CONFESSION
OF
FAITH.
Put forth by the
ELDERS and BRETHREN
Of many
CONGREGATIONS
OF
Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in *London* and the Country.
With the Heart man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation, Rom. 10. 10.
Search the Scriptures, John 5. 39.
Printed in the Year, 1677.

In 1677 there appeared from the press a modest pamphlet entitled *Confession of Faith put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country*. [7] No names were attached and the printer is unknown. This anonymity is not surprising as Baptists and other Nonconformists were suffering persecution in the reign of Charles II. It was however this *Confession* which was to be recommended to the Particular Baptist Churches by the General Assembly of 1689.

1. The Antecedents of the Second London Confession

The 1677 edition of the *Confession* was preceded by an important Introduction which explained that the *London Confession of 1643* [1644] was out of print and that few copies were to be obtained. Many more had now embraced the truths it expressed and 'it was judged necessary by us to joyn together in giving a testimony to the world'. The compilers were anxious not only to explain where they differed from other Christians, but to help their own congregations 'in their instruction and establishment in the great truths of the gospel'. They went on to explain that they had studied the confessions of 'the Assembly', (the *Westminster Confession*) and of 'those of the Congregational Way', (the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*). They decided,

> *it best to follow their example, in making use of the very same words with them both, in those articles (which are very many) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs. And this we did, the more abundantly to manifest our consent with them both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, also with many others whose orthodox confessions have been published to the World, on behalf of the protestants in diverse nations and cities; and also to*

[6] *Ibid*, p.147.
[7] W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions* prints the 1677 edition in facsimile, pp. 241-295.

> *convince all that we have no itch to clog religion with new words, but to readily acquiesce in that form of sound words which hath been, in consent with the holy scriptures, used by others before us.*

The Second London Confession was thus intended to be a contribution to Reformed Christian unity. It was also intended to heal a serious rift within Calvinistic Baptist ranks. Before the latter issue is considered it is needful to consider the documents from which it drew. *The Westminster Confession* was produced by the Westminster Assembly, which had been summoned by Parliament to 'confer and treat among themselves of such matters and things, touching and concerning the Liturgy, Discipline and Government of the Church of England'.[8] For this purpose 121 divines, 10 peers and 20 MPs were ordered to convene in the chapel of Henry VII at Westminster Abbey on 1st July 1643. In fact 69 turned up and the average daily attendance was between 60 and 80. Later eight commissioners from Scotland were appointed. These could debate but not vote.

The early debates were concerned largely with matters of church government and in this area the Presbyterians won the day. Their system was proposed to Parliament. It was however never fully implemented in England, although the Westminster pattern was accepted in Scotland.

Archbishop John Whitgift (1530-1604)

More important for our study was the *Confession of Faith.* The original proposals of Parliament had suggested merely a revision of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of the Church of England. However, a proposed ecclesiastical unity between the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland demanded something more. Both the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and the old *Scots Confession* had been drawn up in the heat of the Reformation struggle and neither had been scrutinised by a body such as the Assembly of Divines. In 1595 Archbishop Whitgift had compiled the *Lambeth Articles* to strengthen the teaching of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* on predestination and to check incipient Arminianism. The *Lambeth Articles* were never accorded official status in England, although Archbishop Ussher made use of them in the *Irish Articles* of 1615. These *Irish Articles* appear to have been consulted in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly. Preliminary work on the Confession was entrusted to a committee of the Assembly in the Midsummer of 1644. That committee's submissions began to reach the Assembly itself in the Spring of 1645. Full-scale debates on the details began in July and about a year later the Confession was substantially finished in its first draft. Clearly this was no hasty composition. On 25th September 1646 the first 19 chapters reached the House of Commons and the rest was handed over on 4th December. Parliament demanded that proof texts be affixed and sent it back. It returned to Parliament with the necessary proofs in April 1647. It was approved in its entirety in Scotland. In England, Parliament removed the chapters on Church censures and Synods and Councils and modified the statements on Christian Liberty, the Magistrate and Divorce. The earlier statements about the Bible, God and the accomplishment and application of salvation were left untouched.

The Westminster divines included a small group of Amyraldians: Calamy, Seaman, Marshall and Vine, but they were not able to modify the statement on the decree. The proculator or

[8] Quoted, B.B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and its Work,* Grand Rapids, USA, 1961, pp.6,7.

chairman, William Twisse, was a supralapsarian, as was Samuel Rutherford. The majority of the divines, however, were infralapsarians. The final edition of the *Confession* concentrated on those areas of common agreement and did not attempt to legislate on the finer points of difference in this area.[9]

The members of the Assembly undoubtedly consulted earlier Confessions and especially noted the *Irish Articles.* B.B. Warfield, however, considered that the final shape of the *Confession* was forged in the experience of these men as preachers and pastors.

> *In the prosecution of their work as practical pastors protecting and indoctrinating their flocks, the Divines had acquired an intimate acquaintance with the prevailing errors and a remarkable facility in the formulation of Reformed doctrine in opposition to them, which bore fruit in their Confessional labours. The main source of their Confessional statements was, thus, just the Reformed theology as it had framed itself in their minds during their long experience in teaching it, and had worked itself out into expression in the prosecution of their task as teachers of religion in an age of almost unexampled religious unrest and controversy.*[10]

Not surprisingly he went on to assert, 'that it is the ripest fruit of Reformed creed-making, the simple transcript of Reformed thought as it was everywhere expounded by its best representatives in the middle of the seventeenth century'.[11]

In the autumn of 1658 a meeting of representatives of 120 Congregational Churches assembled in the Savoy Palace in London. The proceedings opened with a discussion as to whether to amend the *Westminster Confession* or to produce a new one. The former course was agreed and the work handed to a committee consisting of Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl and William Greenhill. With the exception of John Owen all of these men had been members of the Westminster Assembly. The revised confession or *Declaration of Faith and Order* as it was to be called was unanimously approved by the whole Synod which adjourned on 12th October after 12 working days. Thomas Goodwin was commissioned to present a copy to Richard Cromwell, the Lord Protector.[12]

Thomas Goodwin (1600-80)

Most of the material in the *Savoy Declaration* follows the *Westminster Confession.* There are however a few differences. In chapters 8 and 11 the vicarious nature of Christ's sacrifice is stated more strongly in *Savoy*; the 15th chapter on repentance is rewritten entirely. A completely new chapter on the Gospel and its gracious extent is added and becomes chapter 20 - it is a mistake to suppose that this chapter was added by the Baptists in 1677. Toleration in matters non-essential is taught in chapter 24. The chapter on the Church looked forward to the latter days, when 'antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of his dear Son broken, the churches of

[9] For details see R.S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord,* Edinburgh, 1985.
[10] Warfield, op. cit., pp. 57, 58.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] For details see Williston Walker, T*he Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism,* Boston 1960 [1893].

Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed'.

After chapter 32 there is a long section of 30 paragraphs on the congregational order of churches. This teaches the independence of local churches, arguing that under Christ all church power is invested in the local church which is able to carry out all acts of church authority including the discipline of members and the calling and ordination of ministers. It recognised the calling of synods to deal with differences between churches and to consider matters of common concern. Such synods have no church power or authority over the separate churches. It was the *Westminster Confession* as modified by the *Savoy Declaration* which was to underlie the *Second London Confession* of the English Baptists.

2. The Need for a New Baptist Confession

By the 1670s the *First London Confession* was out of print and few copies were available. Particular Baptists considered that it was again needful 'to give a full account of ourselves to those Christians that differ from us about the subject of baptism'. The compilers also wanted to help their own congregations 'in their instruction and establishment in the great truths of the gospel'.[13] There were, however, both doctrinal and practical reasons why something other than a reissue of the *1644 Confession* was needed.

a. Doctrinal Controversy.

William Kiffin (1616-1701)

In the 1670s the Particular Baptists felt an urgent need to consolidate their position. They had been involved in fierce debates with the Quakers who were threatening the stability of some of the churches. There was reason to fear. Earlier in the mid-1650s the Broadmead Church, Bristol lost a quarter of its members to the Quakers. Further contentions with the Quakers in the 1670s demanded a much fuller statement on the authority of Scripture than there had been in the *First Confession.* Another problem was an expression of Hyper-Calvinism in the West of England. This was resisted by Andrew Gifford of Bristol, but he felt the need of the help of his brethren in London. Thirteen London ministers led by William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys supported him with a letter in January 1675/6.[14]

Potentially more dangerous than these differences was the challenge presented by the changes in the teachings of Thomas Collier. Thomas Collier was a native of Somerset born in the second or third decade of the century. In the 1640s and 50s he had been one of the most active of the Particular Baptist evangelists. In the 1640s he was preaching in the south-east but in 1651 returned to the West where he continued to itinerate with tremendous zeal. In 1645 the Western Association recognised him as an evangelist although he had been involved in such work for years. His work, *Three Great Queries* published in 1645 makes it clear that at that time he was an orthodox Calvinist. It has been suggested that he played a major part in the compilation of the *Somerset Confession* of 1656. In these decades he wrote a number of tracts and then for years published nothing, although he continued to preach. In 1674 this

[13] See Introduction to the *Confession.*
[14] Ivimey, HEB, vol.1, pp. 417 - 420.

literary hiatus ended when he published *A Body of Divinity* which shocked and dismayed many of his old colleagues. Collier openly admitted that his views had changed. Now he taught that both natures of Christ were eternal. He rejected the Calvinist view of original sin. He taught that Christ died for all men and used the terms 'election' and 'calling' in a non-Calvinist way.

The prestige of Thomas Collier made it essential to deal with the situation immediately. To consider the situation a group of Western ministers assembled at Warminster in Wiltshire. They decided to call for help from London. As a result five London ministers including William Kiffin and Nehemiah Coxe travelled to meet Collier at Southwick near Trowbridge where he was then living. The meeting was a failure, possibly complicated by the fact that Kiffin claimed that Collier was still a member of his church in London and therefore subject to its discipline. Collier was charged with heresy. Later Kiffin invited him to London for further discussions, again insisting that Collier was a member of his church. Collier refused to go. Nehemiah Coxe produced a refutation of Collier's views entitled *Vindicia Veritatis.* Collier replied with a published account of the proceedings and a reply to Coxe. He was later to write a reply to John Owen's *Death of Death.*

The situation was grievous. Collier was a significant leader in the West and had earlier been known and loved over a much wider area. The Particular Baptists could be embroiled in a very damaging controversy. These developments took place at a time when the Particular Baptists, having established their Calvinistic orthodoxy, were drawing closer to the Presbyterians and Independents under their common experience of persecution. That wider unity was threatened by any spread of Collier's new teachings. Any suggestion that the Particular Baptists were faltering in their Calvinism needed to be resisted.[15]

b. Practical Measures

The demands of the situation in the 1670s were made more difficult by the lack of suitably equipped ministers. Dr Barrie White commented, 'By this time a large number of those who had given leadership to the Calvinistic Baptists in the 1650s were dead. Thomas Patient, Kiffin's co-pastor, had died in 1666, Thomas Glasse in the same year, John Wigan in 1665, John Vernon in 1657, Abraham Cheare and possibly John Spilsbury in 1668 and Edward Harrison by March 1674. This meant that Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys were by that time the chief links with the age of the 1640's which had seen their denomination's first foundation'.[16]

It was against this background that in October 1675 a group of London ministers led by William Kiffin, Daniel Dyke and William Collins addressed a circular letter to their brethren throughout the country asking them to meet in London in the following May 'to form a plan for the providing of an orderly standing ministry in the church who might give themselves to reading and study and so become able ministers of the New Testament'.[17] It is generally supposed that because of persecution this meeting never took place. However the title page of the first edition of the *Second Confession* suggests that there may have been some meeting in 1677 because it was published in the name 'of many Congregations of Christians baptized upon Profession of their faith) in *London* and the Country'.

There is no other evidence for a meeting in 1677, but there is more information about its compilation. On the authority of the Minute Book of the Petty France Church in the City of London, Ivimey ascribed authorship to the pastors of that church, William Collins and

[15] R.D. Land, 'Doctrinal Controversies of the English Particular Baptists (1644-91) as illustrated by the Career and Writings of Thomas Collier', D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1979.
[16] B.R. White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century,* London 1983, p.128.
[17] Ivimey, HEB, vol.1, p.416.

Nehemiah Coxe. The relevant entry for 26th August 1677 reads, 'It was agreed that a Confession of Faith, with the Appendix thereunto, having been read and considered by the brethren, should be published'.[18] It is of course possible that there had been no general meeting of churches, but that the Petty France Church promoted the Confession and gained wider approval before taking it upon itself to publish. Whatever the mechanics of approval, both Collins and Coxe were men of considerable scholarship and Petty France was a church well adapted to take the lead in a move of this sort.

William Collins had lived and studied in both France and Italy before returning to England to study theology privately. Because of his obvious abilities he came under considerable pressure to conform to the Church of England, but he remained a convinced dissenter Later he took a prominent part in the Particular Baptist Assembly of 1698 and was asked to compile a Baptist catechism.

Nehemiah Coxe was the son of Benjamin Coxe who had been a prominent Baptist in the middle years of the century. Earlier, Benjamin had been an Anglican clergyman, but after his secession he was a signatory of the 1646 edition of the *First London Confession.* A vigorous promoter of strict communion he compiled the appendix to the 1646 edition, stating that its adherents 'do not admit any to the use of the supper, nor communicate with any in the use of this ordinance, but disciples baptised, lest we should have fellowship with them in their doing contrary to order'.[19] In the light of Benjamin's convictions it is interesting to note that his son, Nehemiah was received into membership by the open communion church at Bedford on 14th June 1669 and was called to the ministry of the gospel on 21st January 1672 at the church meeting which also called John Bunyan to the pastoral office.

Nehemiah Coxe and William Collins began a joint pastorate at Petty France in September 1675. In a recent article on the Petty France church T.E. Dowley has drawn attention to the large numbers of transfers to that church, suggesting that it was well-known outside London and that many Baptists who moved to the capital gravitated there.[20] Perhaps more significant is the fact that this church accepted transfers from such open membership churches as Broadmead, Bristol. Such co-operation may help to explain a measure of mutual acceptance not found in the *First London Confession.* The *Second London Confession* is silent on the question of open or closed communion. In the Appendix the compilers stated, 'we…are not at a full accord among ourselves'. They went on,

> *we have purposely omitted the mention of things of that nature, that we might concurre* [sic] *in giving evidence of our agreement, both among ourselves, and with other good Christians, in those important articles of the Christian religion, mainly insisted on by us.*

They went on to admit,

> *the known Principle and state of diverse* [sic] *of us, that have agreed to this Confession is such that we cannot hold Church-communion with any other than Baptized-believers, and churches constituted of such; yet some others of us have a greater liberty and freedom in our spirits that way.*[21]

[18] 'Church Minute Book of the Petty France Church' deposited in the Guildhall Library London.
[19] Quoted B.R. White, op. cit., p.73.
[20] T.E. Dowley, 'A London Congregation During the Great Persscution', *Baptist Quarterly,* 27, pp233-39
[21] *Second London Confession, 1677 edition,* pp. 138, 139.

Such a measure of co-operation between open and closed communion churches would not have been possible before 1660. The bitter years of persecution had taught the churches some lessons. *The First London Confession* had been the creed of a group of closed communion churches. In the Commonwealth period, a number of Baptist associations had emerged, each of closed communion churches. Any leaning towards the practice of open communion received little sympathy among the associations. In 1654 the church at Abergavenny was rebuked by the Welsh Association for tolerating such opinions. In 1651 the church at Ilston, South Wales, excommunicated Thomas Proud one of its founding members for 'having grievously sinned against God by broaching the destructive opinion maintaining ye mixed communion of ye baptized and unbaptized in church fellowship'. The same church received a letter from London stating that 'though lawful it was not expedient to listen to preachers not sharing their "closed communion" convictions'. By the late 1650s a group of churches encouraged by Benjamin Coxe, John Miles, Thomas Patient, Thomas Collier, Daniel King and Nathaniel Strange were pursuing a nation-wide programme of church planting. According to Dr Barrie White, 'the programme itself was based upon the local congregations commissioning the chosen members to organise new Particular Baptist churches all holding to the principle of closed communion.[22]

There were, of course, a number of open membership and open communion churches such as those of Henry Jessey in London and the Broadmead church in Bristol, but these were excluded from the mainstream of Baptist life. In the north of England the Hexham church wrote to Jessey's church in April 1654 complaining of the local churches that 'a spirit of rigidness doth so far sway among them, that they cannot own us, because we can own unbaptized churches and ministers for churches and ministers of Christ; though we also judge in those churches and ministers something as to order wanting, which God in his own time may reveal unto them'. This division has led to Dr White's conclusion that there were, until at least 1660, three groups of Baptists in England and Wales.

Henry Jessey (1603-1663)

1. *General Baptists,* who were Arminian, closed communion and closed membership.
2. *Closed Communion Particular Baptists,* who were the largest group of Calvinistic Baptists.
3. *Open-Membership Particular Baptists,* who included such prominent men as Henry Jessey, John Tombes, Vavasour Powell and later John Bunyan.[23]

On the divided Baptist community the storm of persecution broke in 1660. By 1677, seventeen years of persecution including imprisonment and crippling fines, had taught them that disunity was a luxury they could ill afford. The two groups of Particular Baptists had so much in common and, as they were careful to explain in the Introduction to the *Confession,* they agreed with their Reformed paedobaptist brethren on so many matters as well.

3. The Compilation of the Confession

The Second London Confession tends to follow the *Savoy Declaration* where that differs from *Westminster.* As would be expected, its distinctives include its treatment of the

[22] B.R. White, 'The Organisation of the Particular Baptists 1644-1660', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 17, 1966.
[23] B.R. White, 'Open and Closed Membership among the English and Welsh Baptists', *Baptist Quarterly,* July 1972.

sacraments and church and civil government. Dealing with church government it incorporates much of the *Savoy* appendix into the body of the confession itself. It also modifies the treatment of reprobation and the covenants. The two earlier confessions speak of the reprobate being 'foreordained to eternal death'. The *Second London Confession* describes 'others being left to act in sin to their just condemnation'. Later in the same chapter a complete paragraph on reprobation found in the *Westminster* and *Savoy* documents is missing altogether from this later confession.

The *Baptist Confession* shows a modification in the area of covenant theology. Like *Westminster* and *Savoy* it teaches a covenant of grace made between God and the elect sinner in Christ. However it completely removes all references to a covenant of works between God and Adam in the chapters on the Covenant and the Law. In the chapter on Creation there is a paragraph not found in the earlier confessions which refers to Adam and Eve receiving 'a commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil', but any suggestion of a covenant of works is carefully avoided. Surprisingly, in view of these omissions there is a reference to the covenant of works in that chapter on the Gospel taken from *Savoy* but not found in the *Westminster.* This could be a piece of careless editing, but in the light of the careful modifications of earlier statements this seems unlikely. Perhaps it is significant that there is no reference to Adam in the context. It would be interesting to know whether these changes represent a general adjustment in Reformed thinking in the 1670s or whether they are peculiar to the compilers of this *Confession.*

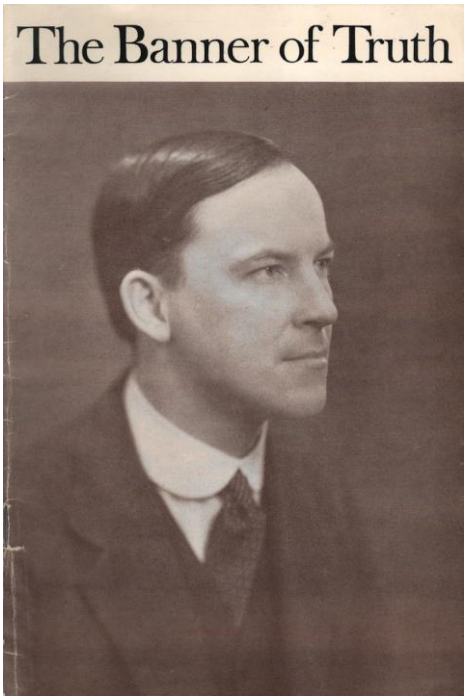
The *Second London Confession* avoided the term sacrament, substituting the expression 'ordinances of positive and sovereign institution' and thereby parted company from *Westminster* and *Savoy.* The term 'seal' used in the earlier confessions is also avoided. Baptism is described simply in terms of a sign of spiritual blessings. However when the *Baptist Confession* describes the Lord's Supper it suggests that there is more than a sign. Apart from the use of the term ordinance instead of sacrament the wording is identical with that of the *Westminster Confession* indicating a strongly reformed view of the Supper.

The caption reads "William III giving his royal assent to the Toleration Act, 1689"

These differences must not be allowed to obscure the overwhelming agreement between the *Second London Confession* and those of *Westminster* and *Savoy. The Baptist Confession* can be seen to stand clearly in the stream of Evangelical Reformed theology which flows from the Westminster Assembly.

It is necessary to explain how the pamphlet published anonymously in 1677 came to be known as the *1689 Confession*. In 1688 James II, Britain's last Roman Catholic king fled the country in the face of a rising which crystallised around his Dutch and Protestant son in law, William of Orange. In the following year, Parliament passed a Toleration Act, which lifted the penalties which had oppressed Protestant nonconformity for so long. In July 1689 a group of London Baptists sent out an invitation to their brethren to attend a General Assembly to be held in the capital from 3rd to 12th September. It was this representative body which gave general approval to the *Confession of Faith* first published twelve years earlier, stating 'we own [it] as

containing the doctrine of our faith and practice, and do desire that the members of our churches respectively do furnish themselves therewith'.[24]



Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) on the cover of the *Banner of Truth* magazine from May 1981

In the early years of the twentieth century, there was little desire for the system of doctrine taught in the *Confession* or indeed for that experiential Calvinism expressed in Puritan theology. Evangelicalism generally was dominated by Arminianism and even such Calvinism as survived in England was largely Hyper-Calvinist and forgot the existence of the *Confession*. By the 1950s there were, however, signs of a change. The powerful ministry of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in the nation's capital made Christians aware of a heritage long forgotten. His preaching owed much to an older and stronger evangelicalism than was in vogue. Gradually others were drawn to the same sources. The Evangelical Library had riches untold ready to be tapped. The *Banner of Truth* magazine began to appear in 1955 and a few years later began its significant republishing programme. Baptists responded to these developments. Active among them was Mr J.C. Doggett, editor of *The Free Grace Record,* a quarterly which sought to prod Strict Baptists out of their Hyper-Calvinist slumbers. It was this magazine which called attention to the existence of the *Second London Confession* once again. It re-appeared in 1959 under the title, *Things Most Surely Believed Among Us.* The foreword explained that 'this new edition of the Confession is sent out as a private venture by a small group of Baptists who are convinced that it has a message for this generation and believe that its publication is long overdue'. Within three months John Doggett could write, 'hundreds have already sold in a most encouraging manner and it has been welcomed not only by strict Baptist ministers but also by many others'.[25] It has, of course, remained in print ever since and has been translated into many languages. In 1975 it was joined by another edition in modern English, published by Carey publications. More recently another edition has been published by the Metropolitan Tabernacle. This retains the original text but includes explanatory notes designed to help the understanding of the older language.

As we commemorate the period of over 300 years that this great statement of faith has served the churches, let us remember the words of C.H. Spurgeon as he published his edition in 1855.

> *Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is the truth of God, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in Him, giving credence to no teaching but that which is manifestly approved of Him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the Word of God which is here mapped out for you.*

[24] 'Narrative of the Proceedings of the Assembly', quoted Ivimey, HEB, vol. 1, p. 500.
[25] *Free Grace Record,* Summer 1959.