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BAPTISTS, PURITANS, & PREACHING

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Tom Nettles

Introduction:
Baptists, Puritans, and Preaching

This issue of the *Founders Journal* explores the impact of Puritanism on Baptist origins. Reagan Marsh does this in light of the ministry of Hercules Collins. Reagan's article is entitled **Revised, Because it's Regulated: Hercules Collins and *An Orthodox Catechism* on Credobaptism.** He looks at Collins' views of believers baptism in light of the Westminster documents and the *Heidelberg Catechism.* He argues that Collins employed the Regulative Principle as it relates both to baptism and covenants in a more consistent way than either Westminster or Heidelberg. If one understands, like Paul, that circumcision is fulfilled in regeneration (Galatians 5:6; 6:15; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11-15), then the New Testament commands and examples concerning baptism and belief make perfect sense in a covenantal framework. Marsh demonstrates that Collins did not have to maneuver out of a coherent Reformed, covenantal position to defend believers baptism but saw it at the center both of covenantal theology and correct application of the Regulative Principle.

Daniel Scheiderer dives deeply into the Puritan method preaching and thoughts about preaching. As his article's title indicates, **The Art of Listening to the Best Method of Preaching,** he also gives counsel to Christians who sit under this preaching today about their stewardship of hearing—"Take care then how you hear." Using William Perkins's *The Art of Prophesying* as a starting point, Scheiderer sees the simple structure of *text*, *doctrine*, and *uses* as a way to plumb any text of Scripture for its intended impact on the listener or reader. After some personal illustration of this method, he gives a rich variety of Puritan-style preachers and how each of these categories

makes its way into the proclamation. Even as he emphasizes the sober responsibility on the preacher to preach as one under authority, so he argues for a deep and accountable responsibility for those listening, to hear sermons, not as the word of men, but as it truly is when faithfully executed, the word of God. Listeners will give account, not only for themselves but for those within their sphere of responsible connections. Baptists were within this strain of Puritan preaching and will benefit in pulpit and pew in embracing the strengths of this profound heritage in heralding.

John Carpenter, pastor of Covenant Reformed Baptist Church in Danville, Virginia, has contributed an article entitled **Why Baptists Don't Know They're Puritans.** He discusses seven reasons, i.e. "The Narrative," "Confusion about the definition of Puritanism, "The Demise of Congregationalism," "The Persecution Obsession," "The Lack of a 'Great Man,'" "Lack of Pre-History," and "Anti-Calvinism." The writer engages a breadth of secondary sources in his description of options concerning Baptist origins and shows a deft synthesis of primary sources in pursuit of his argument for Baptists as a part of the family of Puritans.

There are three basic approaches to Baptist origins: one, an unbroken line of pure churches from the apostolic age to the present, a view mainly characteristic of the Landmark movement; two, the Anabaptist Kinship theory that posits formative and organic connections between continental Anabaptists and the emergence of English Baptists; three, the English Separatist Descent theory, that sees the dynamic from Puritanism to Separatism to Baptists as uninfluenced by Anabaptist provocation. Carpenter presents a case for this third option giving strong emphasis to a Puritan identity for Baptists. He calls on Baptists to "make a deep dive into Puritanism," for they will clear our confusion and will serve as "spiritual fathers eager to guide us back home."

The article on **John Smyth** is a slightly edited version of my chapter on John Smyth in volume 1 of *The Baptists*.

[1] It traces his profoundly Puritan roots and ministerial operation within that movement, his shift to Separatism, his pilgrimage to Amsterdam, his adoption of believers baptism and formation of a church on that basis, his initial resistance to joining the Mennonites based on doctrinal differences, and his eventual efforts to lead his church to unite with them. The doctrinal shifts this involved for Smyth are identified concisely as well as some elements of conflict with contemporaries.

Although I do not argue the case in this article, I differ in some details from Carpenter in seeing a material connection between these events and the rise of Baptists. The vigorous literary engagement that Smyth had with former Separatist associates showed that his views and his

action of initiating baptism were well-known and discussed in the Separatist communities. He and John Robinson (1575-1625) were part of the same covenanting community at Gainsborough in England ca. 1606. Robinson's departure from Amsterdam to Leyden in 1609 was prompted by Smyth's movement away from infant baptism. Robinson stayed in touch with events in this congregation and wrote about the theological dynamics.

For example, the writings of Thomas Helwys in 1612, which landed him in prison in England, and John Murton in 1620, "close prisoner of Newgate," former sympathetic associates of Smyth and promulgaters of his view on baptism and liberty of conscience, were known and engendered response. John Robinson from Leyden published against Helwys's view of baptism in 1614 and against Murton in 1624, disputing his rejection of the canons of Dort and his defense of believers baptism.[2] Murton's arguments made their way into New England by the late 1630's where John Cotton wrote against him. Roger Williams's *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* printed in 1644 in England was a refutation of Cotton and an extended defense of Murton's treatise decrying persecution for cause of conscience.

The Puritan/Separatist congregation begun in 1616 by Henry Jacob under the influence of Robinson's kind of separatism eventually gave rise to the Particular Baptist movement. Under subsequent pastors, John Lathrop and Henry Jessey, they discussed baptism freely. Several persons in waves adopted the practice of baptizing only believers. It would assume a high degree of isolation from stirring events within their own small fraternity of ecclesial reformation to think this congregation of open discussion knew nothing of Smyth's changes and arguments, especially given the influence of John Robinson in both of these camps.

Denial of Anabaptism does not mean absence of influence. Though clearly indebted to Anabaptist influence in the adoption of baptism of believers, Murton closed the title page with this assignation, "your Majesty's loyal subjects unjustly called Anabaptists."[3] The 1644 confession, the so-called *First London Confession,* was based largely on *A True Confession* written by Henry Ainsworth of the congregation of Francis Johnson, issues a similar caveat identifying its signatories as pastors of "those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists." This denial probably is two-fold. First, it is a claim that "We do not baptize again: we baptize." Second, because their ordinance of initiation into a Christian congregation was like that of the Anabaptists, and could very well have been influenced by knowledge of their views, that did not mean that they adopted the Anabaptists' idiosyncratic views of government, oaths of loyalty, holding the office of magistrate, the nature of Christ's flesh, and other issues. The Calvinistic and consistently Reformed wing of the Baptists also explicitly repudiated the anti-Augustinianism of the Anabaptists.

In short, to recognize—through Smyth, Helwys, Murton, and others—an Anabaptist component in their adoption of believers baptism does not diminish the influence of Puritanism on the seventeenth-century development of Baptists.

Nor does my opting for a different view of Anabaptist influence on Baptists diminish the importance of John Carpenter's reminder of the heavily Puritan context of Baptist origins. He has made the point well and given a healthy call for Baptists to recapture the doctrinal synthesis, moral rigor, plain preaching, and holy living of their fellow Puritans.

On the basis of the content of this *Founders Journal,* I want to express a short defense of the legitimacy of using the theological category of "Reformed" to describe Baptists who are conscious and conscientious heirs of the Particular Baptist doctrinal convictions. To avoid prolixity, I will make four basic points, one negative and three positive.

First, the term "Reformed" should not be isolated to the practice of baptizing the infants of church members. Reducing the sinewy theological propositions of Reformed Christianity to that one thing based on a particular understanding of the covenant makes the broader, and more central, theological consensus irrelevant, or at most minimalistic.

Second, Reformed Baptists take seriously the covenantal framework of the Bible. They see circumcision as fulfilled, not in the baptism of infants, but in the circumcision of the heart, regeneration. The continuity of the covenant, therefore, is now based on the promise to Abraham that elicited his faith—the covenant is for "the one who shares the faith of Abraham" (Romans 4:16). Those in continuity with the sign of circumcision are those "who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

Third, Reformed Baptists reach this conclusion through close adherence to the Regulative Principle, a hermeneutical commitment uniquely operative in the Reformed, Puritan, confessional stream of Protestant theologizing. Reformed Baptists, having seen the continuity of covenants in the Spirit's work of giving faith through regeneration, find no example or command for baptizing any person who does not give a personal confession that Jesus is Lord believing, at least ostensibly, from the heart that God raised him from the dead for our justification.

Fourth, Reformed Baptists believe the exegetically-justified doctrines that were given great clarity at the Synod of Dort and were embedded in the framework of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Savoy Declaration. Reformed Baptists followed the example of those confessions "in making use of the very same words with them both, in those articles (which are many) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs." In fact we declare "before God, angels, and men, our hearty agreement with them, in that wholesome protestant doctrine, which with

so clear evidence of scriptures they have asserted." (From the preface to the *Second London Confession*).

If this be not enough to be included within the "Reformed" witness to the saving truth of Christian doctrine and faith, then the term is meaningless.

NOTES:

[1] Tom J. Nettles, The Baptists, 3 vols (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publlications, 2005-2007), 1:53-69.

[2] The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys, ed. Joe Early, Jr. (Macon" Mercer university Press, 2009), 19; The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, 7 vols. (Paris, AK; The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005) 3:v. Part of the title of Robinson's work against Helwys reads, "Silencing of the Clamours Raysed by Mr. Thomas Helvvisse against Our Reteyning the Baptism Receaved in Engl: & Administering of Bapt: unto Infants."

[3] The Complete Works of Roger Williams, 7 vols., 3:iv.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom Nettles has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory; Baptists and the Bible, James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman,* and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon.*

Reagan Marsh

Revised, Because it's Regulated: Hercules Collins and An Orthodox Catechism on Credobaptism

The Particular Baptist movement of the seventeenth century was rooted in and driven by theology – in particular, the regulative principle of worship. As consistent Puritan exegetes, these oft–suffering shepherds sought to order their worship and witness by the express command of the Scriptures. Their ecclesiological convictions were demonstrated in careful pastoral practice, especially in symbolics and catechesis.

Meet Hercules Collins

Hercules Collins (ca. 1647–1702) was a prominent English Particular Baptist minister. Behind Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), he was the second most prolific Calvinistic credobaptist writer. His corpus ranges in focus from credobaptism to casuistry, from training pastors to life under God's providential decree. Collins is perhaps best known as the man who in 1680 edited the continental Reformed tradition's venerable *Heidelberg Catechism* (hereafter HC) of 1563 to reflect Baptist convictions. As his first published work, *An Orthodox Catechism* (hereafter OC) reflects a young pastor's zeal for sound doctrine and his earnest desire that regenerate souls be well–

established on the firm foundation of Scripture. Consistent with his confessional commitments – he signed the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (hereafter 2LC) in 1689 – he also repeatedly anchors his arguments for credobaptistic faith and practice in the Puritan regulative principle of worship (hereafter RPW).

Though providentially hindered from university training as a nonconformist, his writing demonstrates articulate, experiential faithfulness: concerned practically, but displaying an admirable scope of thought and grasp of theology. Hercules's work at times may lack some of the polish and precision of his university–trained contemporaries (as Crosby noted, he "had not a learned education"), but it runs along the same paths, exhibiting nearly identical pastoral and doctrinal instincts as theirs. His twenty–five years at Wapping were marked by careful attention to the whole counsel of God, especially in ecclesiology and sacramentology, for the sake of right doxology. For Hercules, it was always a point of "Thus saith the Lord."

Collins's Confessional–Catechetical Context

Similar to his predecessors John Spilsbury (1593–ca. 1668) and John Norcott (d. 1676), Hercules dealt in both symbolics and apologetics–oriented, pastorally–minded theological exposition. Norcott was known for his 1672 work *Baptisme Discover'd Plainly & Faithfully According to the Word of God,* a capable and frequently–reprinted exposition of credobaptism. Spilsbury, toward the end of his 1643 *Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Svbject of Baptisme,* produced a ten–point statement of doctrine. Its publication constitutes the first known Particular Baptist confession of faith and likely influenced Spilsbury's significant role in drafting the First London Baptist Confession (1644/1646). In producing *An Orthodox Catechism* (hereafter OC) Hercules issued one of the first full–pedigreed Particular Baptist catechisms.

The HC was a document birthed out of the sixteenth–century German Reformation. Generally enjoying a hearty reception by the Reformed for its guilt–grace–gratitude structure, its appeal (though not universal) was wide and its influence strong, particularly for the Puritans. The beloved *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (hereafter WSC) of 1646/47, that most Puritan of all symbols, was modeled in part after the HC's organizing principles, such that echoes of its warm, pastoral tone may be observed in WSC at several points. In editing the HC into the OC, Hercules established something of a catechetical precedent for the English Particular Baptists: some thirteen years later, the better–known 1693/95 *Baptist Catechism* was issued as an edited baptistic version of the WSC.

Dependence, Development, and Diversity in Reformed Symbols

A broad theological center marked the Reformed family tree. Calvinistic confessional and

catechetical standards frequently overlapped in shared content and conviction, reflecting the Puritan instinct of "hav[ing] no itch to clogg Religion with new words." Viewed some 400 years later, it is only natural to realize that certain points of diversity or debate – though vigorously (sometimes violently) asserted, defended, and suffered for at the time – possessed more commonality than was perhaps realized in their day. To that end, their consistent reaching across denominational lines to retain and redeploy faithful verbiage, as well as their conscientious citation and appropriation of each other's arguments, demonstrates a high level of exegetical, if not always relational, harmony amongst these post–Reformation theologues.

These practices also helped form and further their own distinctives in that tumultuous, treacherous Early Modern era. Offhand, one recalls the infralapsarian versus supralapsarian question; the distinctive positions staked out on marriage in the Savoy–2LC stream versus the *Westminster Confession* (hereafter WCF); the OC's strengthened position on the Christian Sabbath as compared to HC's; the definitive polity and ecclesiological differences between the Presbyterian, the Congregationalist, and the Baptist; or the original WCF's establishment principle (23.3) versus the Savoy–2LC (and later western Westminsterian) deletion of that language. These points of robust disagreement must be engaged on their own terms in order to grasp theological commonalities properly in studying historical theology faithfully. For our purposes, these few instances will suffice – perhaps most obvious of which were their respective formulations of covenant theology, leading to Christian baptism.

Approaching Collins's Covenantal Credobaptism

It is useful to trace the basic covenantal argument of the Westminster Standards and the HC in order to understand Hercules's own distinctive credobaptist formulations in the OC. WSC's covenant theology is straightforward, affirming classical pedobaptist formulations within the one–covenant, two–administration schema, echoing that of the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5–6 (hereafter WCF). So too for the HC (see HC #69–74), though not presenting quite so precise a formulation as that of WSC.

While the HC preceded Westminster historically by some eighty years, since Collins uses the HC as his base text, we shall engage it second.

The Westminster Standards

WSC asks the following questions relevant to our consideration:

> 94. What is baptism?

95. To whom is baptism to be administered?

In expanded form, WLC similarly asks:

33. Was the covenant of grace always administered after one and the same manner?

165. What is baptism?

166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

WSC concisely affirms a covenant of life, also called the covenant of works (*foedus operum;* cp. WLC #20–22 and #30) made with man, upon the condition of perfect obedience (WSC #12). It was made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity, such that all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression (WSC #16). God did not leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery, but entered into a covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*), to bring his elect into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer (WSC #20; WLC #31) through the person and work of Jesus.

WCF 7.5 describes this covenant as singular, yet "differently *administered* in the time of the law, and of the gospel" (commonly expressed as one covenant, two administrations). So too WCF 7.6: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various *dispensations*" (cf. WLC #33–35).

Note here a fundamental hermeneutical distinction between Westminsterian and 2LC covenant theology made plain – namely, administration versus revelation – and their divergent ecclesiological and sacramental outworkings quickly become evident. WSC #95 asserts that "the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized" (cf. WLC #166 and #177). Westminster defines baptism in WSC #94, WLC #165, and WCF 28.1.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The HC identifies baptism as a sacrament in #68, but does not define it.

68. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the NT?

69. How does holy baptism remind and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?

71. Where does Christ promise that we are washed with his blood and Spirit as surely as we are

washed with the water of baptism?

72. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

73. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the water of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

74. Should infants also be baptized?

HC presents Adamic federal headship in the fall and disobedience of our first parents in paradise (HC #7). The result is that man is altogether lost and corrupt, in need of the holy gospel first revealed to Adam and Eve in the covenant of grace (HC #19). HC's formulation is more pastoral than Westminster, but the shared covenantal framework is plain.

The sacraments, particularly baptism, come into view in the HC #68–74. While HC #69 speaks of baptism's function in comforting the believer, #71–73 focus on baptism as a means of presenting Christ's promise to wash believers of their sins, assuring them of his efficacious work in them by his Spirit. HC #69–73 are virtually identical with Collins's OC. HC #74 (modified in OC as #70) asserts that infants and adults alike are "included in God's covenant and people." HC #74 anchors infant baptism by maintaining they "no less than adults" will receive "deliverance from sin" by virtue of the promises of the covenant. It holds baptism as a mark "distinguishing" them from the unbelievers' children, and avers it as replacing circumcision. While Westminster employs different verbiage, it presents an identical hermeneutical view: one covenant under two administrations, with its sacramental continuity functioning by the replacement of circumcision with baptism. The two "sign[s] of the covenant," however, are operationally nearly interchangeable in both their respective subjects and efficacy.

Hercules Collins's Baptistic Revisions in *An Orthodox Catechism*

Hercules greatly admired the HC, a reality demonstrated in his utilizing it as the basis of his first published work, *An Orthodox Catechism.* He edited it for his church, a young pastor's labor of love attempting to meet a pressing need in the congregation (his introduction to the OC respectfully notes that catechesis had largely been set aside). In the work, Collins aims to help establish them in the truth, particularly as it concerns baptism and the nature of a believing church. He would maintain this distinctive focus on a confessor's baptism in at least 6 more of his 12 extant works. Of importance here: Collins saw credobaptism, not pedobaptism, as the only proper biblical

application of the Reformed regulative principle. His sacramental and ecclesiological concern was ultimately doxological in nature.

OC #1–64 are very close in form, theological method, and biblical reasoning to their HC counterparts; while he regularly modifies the Scripture proofs, the doctrine is retained in toto and remains that of the HC. OC #65 begins Hercules's treatment of the sacraments. Rooted in the RPW, Collins inserts six of his own questions introducing credobaptism between HC questions #68–69; these are OC questions #68–73:

- What is Baptism?
- Who are the proper Subjects of this Ordinance?
- Are no Infants to be baptized?
- Doth the Scripture any where expressly forbid the Baptizing of Infants?
- May not the Infant Seed of Believers under the Gospel be baptized as well as the Infant Seed of Abraham under the Law was circumcised?
- Seeing the Infants of Believers are in the Covenant of Grace with their Parents, as some Say, why may not they be baptized under the Gospel, as well as Abraham's Infant Seed was circumcised under the Law?

The language used in the answers to OC #68–73 is largely of Collins's own composition, though #69 is drawn almost directly from 2LC 29.2. It presents a noteworthy contrast with the HC: Heidelberg features no question formally defining baptism, though its answer to #69 includes a basic description. The WCF defines baptism in 28.1; some of its language is retained in 2LC 29, thereby shaping Collins's verbiage in the OC. Collins follows 2LC 29.1–2 closely in composing his OC #68–69 and works portions of 2LC 29.3–4 (contra WCF 28.2–3) into his answers as well. OC #70–73 then function in clarifying and distinguishing his affirmations and denials of lawful sacramental practice under the RPW.

Defining Baptism's Substance and Subjects

Throughout his treatment of baptism (OC #68–73), Hercules repeatedly and demonstrably anchors his arguments in the RPW. What is the result? Didactically, theologically, and pastorally, the OC presents a more satisfying treatment of the doctrine than does the HC.

He begins his exposition of baptism (OC #68) defining it as immersion of a believer in the triune

name of God by "such who are duly qualified by Christ." OC #69 addresses baptism's "proper subjects" – professors who have repented, believed, and obey Jesus. Collins handles a clarifying question (OC #70) by reasoning from the regulative principle – no infants should be baptized, because Scripture lacks any positive command for it: "we have neither Precept nor Example for that Practice in all the Book of God."

Addressing objections follows (OC #71–73). Scripture's silence does not constitute Scripture's smile; just because the Bible nowhere "expressly forbid[s] the Baptizing of Infants" (OC #71) does not mean it approves it. Again, he appeals to the regulative principle: "It is sufficient that the Divine Oracle commands the baptizing of Believers, unless we will make ourselves wiser than what is written." Aaron's sons had no prohibition of strange fire, but had a positive command of "tak[ing] Fire from the Altar," and their proud innovation rightly "incurred God's Wrath." OC #72 anticipates an interlocutor shifting his objection to the continuity of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, as seen in their respective signs: if "Yes" to OT infant circumcision, why "No" to NT infant baptism? His reply is concise, appealing once more to the RPW: "Abraham had a Command then from God to circumcise his Infant Seed, but Believers have no command to baptize their Infants Seed under the Gospel."

A Five-fold Apologetical Exposition of Confessor's Baptism

OC #73 is the longest question in Collins's catechism, presenting as a concise exercise in pastoral apologetics and theological exposition. The question begins with the hypothetical objector's assumption that "the Infants of Believers are in the Covenant of Grace with their parents," and asks concerning their baptism: if so, then "why may not they be baptized under the Gospel, as well as Abraham's Infant–Seed was circumcised under the Law?" Hercules answers in five basic movements.

First, meeting the question's assumption *prima facie:* if the infants of believing parents are members of the covenant as "absolutely considered" – meaning, if by virtue of their having been born into a believing family, it should be presumed that they will come to faith, because the covenant of grace is unconditional and unbreakable – then apostasy is actually impossible. In such a consideration, none will or can be lost; all infants of believers are necessarily elect and infallibly will be regenerated.

Second, meeting the question's hermeneutic: if infant membership in the covenant is meant "conditionally, on consideration that when they come to years of Maturity" they believe,

then:

1. What "real Spiritual priviledg [sic.]" do these infants of believing parents gain, versus infants of unbelievers who also eventually trust Christ?

2. Would the covenant seal not also be the right of children of unbelievers as much as children of unbelievers? Would it not "belong as much" to them as well?

3. What about when children of unbelievers trust God, but children of believers do not? It happens often and is painful to both the parents and the pastor. Further implicit in Collins's framing of this point: it begs the question of the covenant's nature and efficacy.

Third, Collins raises a hypothetical case: what if one assumes that all the children of Christians are members of the covenant of grace "absolutely"? The church still lacks the express command to baptize them, just as Lot had no express command to circumcise his family – only Abraham received that command and sign for his family. Applying Abraham's command to circumcise his infant males as though it constituted a NT command for baptizing all infants of Christians would result in a command to bring those infants to the Lord's Table as well.

Fourth, he turns his attention to the question's root – the Abrahamic Covenant. Collins notes it has "two parts": spiritual, and temporal or physical. Spiritually considered, it involved God's promise to be Abraham's God, and to "all his Spiritual–Seed in a peculiar manner…which believed as Abraham the Father of the Faithful did." The promise stood irrespective of their circumcision, and was received by faith alone. Temporally, it assured Israel of God's good intent toward them: Abraham's offspring would "enjoy the Land of Canaan, and have plenty of outward blessings…[God] sealed this Promise by Circumcision." They would be distinguished by this rite as "being God's People from all the Nations of the Gentiles," though the Gentiles were not yet members of the believing "Seed of Abraham." At that time, "then Circumcision, that distinguishing Mark, ceased"; now God's children have believing, circumcised hearts.

Fifth, Collins concludes summarizing and underscoring his arguments by a close application of the RPW. Whatever "pretense" one employs to defend pedobaptism – asserting infants as the "Seed of Believers," assuming their membership in an external administration of the covenant of grace, or arguing "that the Infant–Seed of Abraham a Believer" received circumcision – "all this," he emphasized, "avails nothing." It still lacks biblical warrant because it lacks express biblical command. Circumcision was limited to a single family, such that "all Others, though Believers, were Excluded." The rite was strictly limited to the eighth day, and "what ever Pretence might be made, it was not to be Done before or after." Finally, circumcision was limited to males; thus if baptism fulfills circumcision's type, "none but the Males must be Baptized, because none but the Males were Circumcised."

Conclusion

The issue in theology, worship, sacraments, and all of life is always what God requires in Scripture: "it depends purely upon the will of the Lawgiver" as to "season[s], persons, and terms" of baptismal administration. Hercules Collins revised the Heidelberg Catechism because Scripture's regulating of ecclesiology and sacramentology – issuing in doxology – required it. Christ's positive and explicit commandment in Scripture always holds the authority, informing the conscience and directing the one who would draw near. Christian worshipers must "hearken" to him in his word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Reagan Marsh is husband to Kara, daddy to RG and AG, and founding pastor–teacher to Reformation Baptist Church of Dalton, GA. He contributed to The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia (Eerdmans), provided biographical introduction to James Petigru Boyce's A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine (forthcoming, PBHB), coedited in The Works of John Flavel(forthcoming, The Banner of Truth), and writes regularly for The Founders Journal. Reagan authored What to Do After a Breakup: Responding to Pain and Loss Biblically and Authority and Application: An Introduction to Pastoral Biblical Counseling (both with The Greater Heritage), Analytical Outlines of the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession, and is writing Guided Tours in the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession. His work has been featured on Monergism.com. He is coediting The Works of Hercules Collins (forthcoming, H&E) and writing a biographical introduction for Hercules Collins's An Orthodox Catechism (forthcoming, PBHB). A certified biblical counselor, Reagan took MATS and MDiv studies at NOBTS and SBTS, and is a ThM candidate at CBTS researching Hercules Collins's pastoral theology under Tom Nettles. He has served in gospel ministry since 1998.

Daniel Scheiderer

The Art of Listening to the Best Method of Preaching

The title of this article may be unsettling at first. Not only does it imply that the listener to preaching has their own part to play, but it also communicates that there is a "best method" of preaching. Put together, it implies that it is the *listener's* duty in some sense to become better listeners. But there is a reason for the title. In the age of the English Puritans (ca. 1600s), one of the most influential works produced, particularly on the topic of preaching, was the short treatise called "The Art of Prophesying."[1] The work was written by a man named William Perkins, who has been called the "father of the Puritans." Perkins ministered in Cambridge, England, a town recognized as the seedbed of the Puritan movement throughout the seventeenth century. Though the word 'prophesying' in the title of his book is a little surprising, Perkins simply meant 'preaching.'[2]

Anyone who looks at the writings of those who pastored at that time will see common features in all the sermons and commentaries. The method was generally codified in the Westminster Assembly's "Directory for Public Worship." These features do not go away when the Puritan movement goes away.[3] In fact, the features seem to have only gone away during the revivalistic preaching of the nineteenth century and then in the twentieth century when new methods of preaching were developed. So influential was Perkins' book that when a pastor-theologian in the Netherlands, Petrus Van Mastricht, wanted to provide instruction for people in his country on how to preach, he simply adapted Perkins' work and called it "The Best Method of Preaching."[4]

He had seen the fruit of such preaching in Britain and wanted to see the same fruit in his homeland.

This article seeks to provide an introduction for listeners to the Puritan method of preaching. Puritan preaching is used here as shorthand for what might be called "doctrinal-expository preaching" since the preaching advocated by the Puritans, their predecessors, and their successors viewed exposition as the work of exposing the teaching (i.e., doctrine) of the text. Since one key means of providing such an introduction is by explaining the method itself, the beginning of the article could also serve as a guide for those seeking to engage in the doctrinal-expository (Puritan) method. Indeed, this will help anyone who sits under other forms of preaching as well because Christian preaching, when it is at its best, maintains the same basic components as it seeks to serve and worship God by making known the law and the gospel (cf. Rom 1:1; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:15–4:5).[5] What set Puritan preaching apart was not the content *per se*, but the purposefulness with which they considered the various components. Let's consider three other forms of sermons that are prevalent today.

First, there is the "three-point sermon." The three-point sermon is one in which there is an introduction, followed by three points from the text, and a conclusion. The three-point sermon can certainly be done in the doctrinal-expositional (Puritan) manner. However, it can also tend to be nothing more than three things the preacher sees in the text or three things for the listener to do. It is not always *explicitly* concerned with doctrine. In fact, this may be one of the easiest methods to adapt to the doctrinal-expositional method since the three points can simply be three doctrines, and it is often easiest to do just that when preaching some passages, such as narratives. Similarly, the three points could be three aspects of the doctrine or three "building blocks" of the doctrine.

Second, there is what I call "exegetical preaching." Many who strive for faithful "expository preaching" today are actually only doing what might be called "exegetical preaching." Exegetical preaching is where the preacher works through the text by explaining all the grammar and syntax of the text, the historical and cultural setting, and so forth. Again, this can end up being close to the Puritan manner, but often what goes under the label of expository preaching would only be a particular part of a Puritan sermon (the "text," as you will see below) and ground and impact what is said in the other parts (integration into what are called the "doctrine" and the "uses").[6]

Third, there is "narrative preaching." This is further from the doctrinal-expositional method than the previous two because it seeks to make a story out of preaching instead of systematically working through the ideas. Doctrinal-expository preaching may certainly utilize narratival elements, taking the history of redemption as the unifying narrative in which we encounter all

divine truth. Such narrative can be used to explain the text, give sense to the points of doctrine, or provide biblical examples of the uses. What is often meant by "narrative preaching" today, though, is not simply explaining the narrative or explaining truth by means of narrative but storytelling as a means of communication on its own. Doctrinal-expositional preaching must attend to the narrative of Scripture as it explains what is being taught in Scripture by the Lord about himself and all things in relation to him.

With these three types of preaching in our background, we will now consider, first, the components of doctrinal-expositional preaching, second, the manner of doctrinal-expositional preaching, and finally, how to listen to doctrinal-expositional preaching. Again, since all true Christian preaching includes these items, you can apply the things contained here to other types of preaching you sit under.

Components

The Puritan method of preaching contained three basic components, though these parts vary in their lengths according to the unique traits of the preacher, the text, or the occasion. Again, you will find these components present in most forms of Christian preaching today, though some preaching styles are more likely to look like only one of these parts. Nevertheless, if there is something lacking, it is likely to be one or more of the components that were purposely considered in the Puritan preparation of sermons. The three components in their older language were: text, doctrine, and uses. These three parts follow the basic assumption that the preaching task is carried out in obedience to the Lord's commission. You may remember that when he sent out the disciples to preach, he told them to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 10:7).[7] In this simple command, we have a doctrinal statement (the kingdom of heaven is at hand) and an application or use (repent).[8] Tied to the conviction that all of Scripture has Christ as its scope, or focal point, this means that even this simple statement is the basic content of the proclaimed Word.[9] Peter preaching on Pentecost, Stephen to his accusers, and Paul to the synagogues and philosophers all make the same declaration. If Hebrews was a sermon, as some have suggested, it says the same. But what about faith? This, too, would be another use/application of the teaching about the kingdom. In fact, faith is necessary for repentance to be true. These parts—text, doctrine, and uses—are outlined below.

Text. In the text portion of the sermon, the preacher explains the basic meaning of the text. The point of this section of the sermon is to give something of a summary of the meaning and an explanation of the manner in which the text appears. The text may be a large or a short portion of Scripture, a whole chapter, or even a portion of a verse. The sorts of things that may be included in the explanation of the text might be a statement of the genre or setting in which the text appears. One key item that appears in this part, though, is a clear breakdown of the text, noting

the contours of the way the writer presents his teaching.

In Action

> For instance, if a sermon is about Peter's denial of Jesus in the courtyard (e.g., Matt 26:69-75), the introduction of the text might say something like, "In this narrative [genre], Jesus has just been arrested and taken into the presence of the council and Caiaphas, the high priest [background/setting]." The explanation might then go on to speak of the order (servant girl [69], another servant girl [71], and bystanders [73]) and Peter's responses (denial [70], denial with an oath [72], denial with invocation of a curse [74], and departure in weeping [75]). An entire chapter, and perhaps several chapters, may be done this way. An explanation of an historical narrative or the key breaks in a more doctrinal book might have a more cursory explanation of the structure. There may be some explanation of the historical background of the text or something along those lines, or perhaps the clarification of some key language that is being used and the way it is being used.
>
> Since the other example was a lengthier passage, another example could be something like John 3:16. The verse has a clear succession of points that may be explained briefly after the background. Perhaps one would begin by saying, "Before this verse, John tells us that Jesus is in dialogue at night with a Pharisee named Nicodemus (3:1), to whom Jesus explains that salvation is only possible by the moving of God (3:8). Jesus then explains that all who look on the Son will have eternal life." To explain the structure of the verse, the preacher might then say, "Next, either Jesus continues, or the evangelist John expounds on this by uttering this bedrock statement. If we look closely at it, we see that there are essentially four parts. First, he speaks of God's love [3:16a], then God's gift [3:16b], followed by our response [3:16c], and the effect [3:16d]. The fourth part is offered by means of a contrast between what we deserve and what we receive by grace."

Even with these very brief statements, a Puritan would have largely been comfortable with the depth at which they engaged the text. There are probably three reasons for the brevity of their handling of the text. First, the congregations would have been quite familiar with Scripture. Worship services included the public reading of the Word, and often, families would read the Bible together in their homes. Second, the Puritans believed in what was called the perspicuity, that is, the clarity of Scripture. They did not believe that everything was plain/clear to the same extent, but they did believe that Scripture was largely capable of being understood without belaboring the explanation. Third, they believed that the sermon was really to be taken up in the next two components.

Doctrine. Doctrine comes from the Latin word meaning "teaching." When we speak of biblical doctrine, we are referring to the Bible's teaching about some particular point or at some particular point. What is the Bible's doctrine of God or man or sin? That is, what does the Bible teach about God or man or sin? That is one way to approach doctrine, and it is the approach of creeds, confessions, topical books, systematic theologies, and a host of other resources. The other way, and the way that appears in preaching, is by asking, "What is the doctrine of this text?" It may be that God is teaching a number of key truths in a text that could be drawn out in separate sermons, or it could be that there is one main teaching of a text. While some today who teach how to preach will use the language of "main idea," that does not always get someone to the same point. To take our two example texts, "What is the 'main idea' of the account of Peter's denials?" or "What is the 'main idea' of John 3:16?" That question is difficult to answer because it is the wrong question. If we ask, "What doctrine is taught in the account of Peter's denials?" or, "What doctrine is taught by John 3:16?" we quickly recognize that we could look at a few different "ideas," and all of them would be fitting and appropriate.

In Action

> For example, we might take the account of Peter's denials and say something like, "Believers 'may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins.'" This is taken from the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith 17.3, but it is a helpful example of what sort of thing is "taught" in the text of Matthew 26:69-75. Doctrine, or the teaching of a text, does not need to be this complex, or it may be a little more complex, but the idea is that there should be a clear teaching that is found in the text. Whatever this particular teaching is, it must be orthodox, it must be seen with some fair amount of ease within the text itself, and it must be insisted upon.
>
> To take our other text (John 3:16), we can see even more clearly the reality that the 'main idea' is a little more difficult to ascertain. A particular teaching, or doctrine, could be, "God displays his love in the salvation of man." Perhaps the text can be said to teach, "Man must exercise faith if he is to have eternal life." Are either of these wrong? Are either of these not the "main idea" of the text? Without a doubt, we can recognize that there is a certain priority to the work of God in the text, but a sermon that simply affirmed the fact that man must believe in order to have eternal life would still be a sermon that was grounded in the text.
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> In both texts, the doctrine could be developed in several ways. Each text might develop the doctrine by showing the inner coherence/consistency of the doctrine. This might be done through basic illustration, the development of a reasonable argument, or the

quotation of a few other passages. One might point to David as an example of another believer falling into grievous sin. A preacher might point to the fact that God is said to be love in 1 John 4. Doctrines may also address challenges. Perhaps there are some who say that believers cannot fall into grievous sins. Others might claim that faith in Christ is not necessary for eternal life.

While doctrinal preaching has largely fallen away as an explicit goal in recent generations, the Puritans considered doctrine to be right at the heart of the sermon. In fact, one can see that even the sermons of those in the early church aimed at teaching some particular truth or number of truths. Current preaching still has doctrine because all true Christian preaching is inherently doctrinal, but it is rarely at the core of the sermon, at least on purpose.[10] Or, if it is a main part of the sermon, it is only as an occasional item because the theological debates surrounding a particular text seem to demand it. One might think of preachers who go through Romans 9 or Ephesians 1 and address the issues of Calvinism and Arminianism.

There are two items to mention before moving to uses. To give examples of the two items, we will use the statement from Romans 8:1 that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." First, because of the unity of the truth, it is possible to force a doctrinal discussion into a text. For instance, from Romans 8:1, we can draw the conclusion that since those who are in Christ Jesus do not have condemnation now, they should also not expect condemnation later. Later, of course, would mean at the end of time, after the millennium. But does the millennium exist now (amillennialism) or later (post- or pre-millennialism)? We might draw a whole sermon out on the issue of millennialism at that point. Clearly, as humorous as the example might be and as appropriate as it may be to make mention of the fact that later condemnation does not threaten those who are believers now, we can see how a sermon on millennialism would move far beyond the purpose of the text.[11]

Second, and this will occupy a little less space, the text may itself be doctrinal. Paul's statement that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" is a doctrinal statement. Perkins calls this "notation," which is contrasted with "collection." In collection, "the doctrine [is] not expressed [but] is soundly gathered out of the text. This is done by the help of the nine arguments, that is, of the causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts, [differences], comparatives, names, distribution, and definition."[12] Comparing it again to other forms of preaching, some might preach a doctrinal sermon from Rom 8:1 because it is a text with a doctrinal "notation," but they might be hesitant to do "collection" in their handling of other texts.

Uses. If doctrine is the heart of the doctrinal-expositional sermon, uses are the hands. In uses, the sermon reaches out to touch the hearer. This term "use" refers to what we often just call "application." Having thought about how God spoke (text) and about the sense of what he has

said (doctrine/teaching; cf. Neh 8:8), the sermon must now call on the believer to respond. When we looked at "doctrine," we noted that it is not quite the same thing as the "main idea." Likewise, application should be carefully understood. The term "application" too often answers the question, "What do we do?" In the older forms of preaching, however, uses or applications were much broader. One could certainly preach about what is to be done now that a particular doctrine has been taught, but that was not the only thing that would be considered a valid application. In fact, largely following 2 Tim 3:16, the first two types of uses listed in the "Directory for Public Worship" are not items we typically think of as "application."[13]

The first two types of uses the Assembly lists are "information" and "confutation," which correspond to "teaching" and "reproof" (2 Tim 3:16). In the first—information—the preacher might simply give a fuller explanation of the doctrine that is taught in that particular text. Its "use" is to shape the thinking of the listener. In the second, the preacher might give a fuller treatment of a particular error that must be confronted. Regarding the errors, there is always (Perkins, the Directory, and Van Mastricht) a warning against "raising dead heresies." However, if there has been a rise in the presence of Jehovah's Witnesses in the area, a preacher may spend his sermon giving an argument against Arianism.

The next two types of uses/applications refer to "duties," both an exhortation to some and a rebuke/correction to the practice of others, corresponding to "correction" and "training/paideia in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). This is typically what is thought of as "application" today. A preacher might exhort people to attend church, love their spouses and children, and do their work "as unto the Lord." On the other side, they may rebuke non-attendance, coldness in marriage and parenting, or obstinacy in work. He might even suggest ways to perform these duties better, exhorting the people to plan their schedules better, dedicate time to their families, and seek tangible ways to work faithfully. Following the Lord's example in the Sermon on the Mount (esp. Matt 5:21–6:18), these actions are expected to be united to hearts that love good and shun evil.

Finally, the preacher's use may be one of comfort. Having thought of the truth of God, the Christians sitting in front of the preacher—who are his primary hearers—should be pointed to their comfort in Christ. Like "information" and "confutation," "comfort" does not seem to match current definitions of application, but it is a central part of doctrinal-expositional preaching. In fact, one might say that to aim at always preaching Christ means that other items, and especially duties, might be given more quickly or skipped altogether in a sermon. Comfort is a particular form of the instructive use, but its aim is to help people see that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, calling people to faith in him (receiving and resting upon him alone, 2LCF 14.2).

In Action

Taking our two texts and doctrines, a preacher might give an extended treatment of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (Matt 26) or the saving work of God (John 3:16). These would be information uses. A preacher might give a confutation of final apostasy, or of perfectionism (Matt 26), or of synergism or Hyper-Calvinism (John 3:16). Duties might be to be diligent in prayer and attendance to the means of grace (Matt 26), or to believe in Christ (John 3:16). The preacher might rebuke the prevalence of compromise (Matt 26) or unbelief (John 3:16), both in the heart and in actions. Finally, he would certainly hold out the comfort of Christ to those who repent of their grievous sins (Matt 26) and those who face death (John 3:16). Whatever the uses, the goal must be to point hearers to Christ.

Some Puritan Examples

To add to our mock examples from Matthew 26 and John 3, I want to provide several "real" examples of each item (text, doctrine/teaching, and uses/application). My examples are minimal, but drawing on some actual examples will demonstrate how this looks even more. As you look through these, remember that the text section was usually a brief part of the sermon at the beginning, the doctrine section took up the bulk of the sermon, and the uses were a smaller section at the end. This means that the examples below are not perfectly proportioned. You can look at the page numbers in the footnotes to get a sense of how much space was given to each component.

Richard Sibbes on 2 Chron. 34:28

Text "The words contain a promise of a reward, and great favour unto good king Josiah, that he should die and be gathered unto his fathers; and that which is more, the manner considered, that he should 'die in peace'; the ground whereof is showed unto him: 'Because thine eyes shall not see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same.' God's promises are of three sorts."[14]

Doctrine "Doct. 1. First, We may observe God's gracious dealing with his children, that he takes notice of every good thing they do, and doth reward them for it, yea, in this life. . . Doct. 2. Mark here the language of Canaan, how the Spirit of God in common matters doth raise up the soul to think highly of them. . . Doct. 3. Only observe, it is a very sweet word, and imports unto us, that death is nothing but a gathering, and presupposeth that God's children are all scattered in this world amongst wicked men, in a forlorn place, where they are used untowardly, as pilgrims use to be in a strange land. . . Doct. 4. The changes of God's children are for the better. . . Doct. 5. That

burial is a comely and honourable thing, and that we ought to have respect unto it, partly because the body of a dead Christian is a precious thing. . . Doct. 8. Here we learn again that it is the sight of misery which works the deepest impression."[15]

Uses After Doct. 1: "This is a matter of comfort, that God will not only reward us with heaven, but will also recompense every good thing we do, even in this word; yea, such is his bounty, he rewards hypocrites." After Doct. 4: "This serves, first of all, to comfort us in departure of friends, to render their souls up with comfort into the hands of God." After Doct. 8: "Use 1. How wretched, then, is the estate of them that shall see themselves, with their own wicked eyes, sent to hell, with the creature they delighted in. . . Use 2. This should teach us also how to understand the promise of long life. It is a promise and a favour of God to be desired. It is a prayer with condition, if God see it good; else God may give us long life, to see and feel a world of misery. Therefore such promises are to be desired conditionally: if God see it good for us."[16]

Thomas Manton on Col. 1:14

Text "The apostle, in the former verse, had spoken of our slavery and bondage to Satan, from which Christ came to deliver us; now, because sin is the cause of it, he comes to speak of our redemption from sin: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.' Here is— I. The author. II. The benefit. III. The price."[17]

Doctrine "Doct. That one principal part of our redemption by Christ is remission of sins. Here I shall show you:—

1. What remission of sins is.

2. The nature of redemption.

3. That remission of sins is a part, and a principal part of it."[18]

Uses "Use, of exhortation: To persuade you to seek after this benefit. All of us once needed it, and the best of us, till we are wholly freed from sin, still need it."[19]

John Owen on Ezek. 47:11

Text "This prophecy contains a vision of the glorious, holy, gospel state of the church, under the representation of a most glorious temple, incomparably excelling that built of old by Solomon; an exposition whereof we have, 2 Cor. 3:6-8, etc.

"The beginning of this chapter sets out the way and means of the calling and gathering of gospel

churches, whose worship is to be so glorious; and this is under a vision of 'waters issuing out of the sanctuary,' to heal and quicken all places to which they come.

"By the waters here mentioned is the preaching of the gospel intended. And we may observe of them, first, Their rise, which was from the sanctuary; second, Their progress, —they increased until they became a river that none could pass over; thirdly, Their effects or efficacy,—they healed all waters where they came, and quickened, or caused to live, the fishes that were in them."[20]

Doctrine "Observation [i.e., Doctrine] I. God is pleased oftentimes to send the waters of the sanctuary to 'miry and marshy places,' that 'shall never be healed' by them, nor made fruitful;—or, God, in his infinite wisdom, is pleased to send the preaching of the word unto some places where it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue upon the souls of them that hear it. . . . IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord to salt or barrenness forever;—or, where the word of the gospel is, by the infinitely wise disposal of God, preached unto a place or persons, and they receive it not so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are usually, after a season, given up, by the righteous judgment of God, unto barrenness and everlasting ruin."[21]

Uses "Use [to the first Observation]. Let not men boast themselves in the outward enjoyment of the word, nor rest themselves in it. It were well, indeed, if all were believers to whom the word is preached,—if all lands were healed where the waters of the sanctuary come; but the Holy Ghost tells us they are not so, Heb. 4:2, 'The word preached did not profit them.' Capernaum was 'exalted unto heaven,' in the use of means; but 'brought down to hell' for the neglect of them. Let men look to themselves; God hath various ends in sending the gospel. . ."[22]

John Bunyan on Jn. 1:13 (1688)

Text "FIRST, I will show you what he means by blood. They that believe are born to it, as an heir is to an inheritance—they are born of God, . . . SECOND, 'Nor of the will of the flesh.' What must we understand by that?. . . It must be understood here in the best sense: there is not only in carnal men a will to be vile, but there is in them a will to be saved also; a will to go to heaven also."[23]

Doctrine "Now I come to the doctrine. Men that believe in Jesus Christ, to the effectual receiving of Jesus Christ, they are born to it. . . Believing is the consequence of the new birth; 'not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.'"[24]

Uses "The first use is this, To make a strict inquiry whether you be born of God or not; examine by those things I laid down before, of a child of nature and a child of grace. . . Lastly, If you be

the children of God, learn that lesson—Gird up the loins of your mind, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to your former conversation; but be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Consider that the holy God is your Father, and let this oblige you to live like the children of God, that you may look your Father in the face, with comfort, another day."[25]

Jonathan Edwards on Matt. 12:7 (1740)

Text "Christ says this on occasion of the Pharisees' charging the disciples for plucking the ears of corn and eating when they were going through the corn fields on the sabbath day. And in the words two things are to be observed: 1. The passage that Christ cites out of the Old Testament; and, How Christ applies it."[26]

Doctrine "Moral duties towards men are a more important and essential part of religion than external acts of worship of God."[27]

Uses "*Use* I may be of *Instruction* in several inferences"[28] this is followed by three inferences) "*Use* II may be of *Exhortation* in two branches: *First*. If this be so, as we have heard, let us form our notions of religion and not place the external part of religion mainly in acts {of external worship}, but chiefly in an holy and Christian conversation amongst men. . . *Second*. Let us in this town, where there is so much of the profession of religion, be exhorted to abound in Christian duties towards men, doing to others in all things as we would that they should do to us . . ."[29]

Christ and the Doctrinal-Exegetical (Puritan) Sermon

Of course, with Paul, every true preacher will determine to "know nothing among [the saints] except Christ and him crucified." Before moving to our next section, on the manner of preaching, it is good to consider how doctrinal-expositional (Puritan) preaching seeks to display Christ. One way would be to demonstrate the particular biblical-theological relationship between a prophetic statement and Christ as the fulfillment, such as demonstrating that Isa 53 is about Christ in the form of a servant, or 2 Sam 7 ultimately has Christ as the son of David in view. This could be done in the treatment of the text, drawing the promise related to that text out as the doctrine of the text. Another way, though, is to situate Christ as the sum of the doctrine derived from a text that has a less immediate connection. A particular help on this point is a later Puritan on another continent: Cotton Mather. Mather is sadly known most today because of his involvement in the debates and concerns surrounding the Salem Witch Trials in the American Colonies.[30] While there may be disagreements over his part in the trials, what ought not to be disagreed about is his concern for the lost, his love for the Word, and his influence on Christianity in America.

In a book titled *Student and Teacher,* he gives instructions for those who are going into ministry,

and at about ninety-six pages in, he discusses preaching. He says that Christian ministers are to "prepare none but well-studied sermons" for the people of God and give themselves to think diligently about how to develop sermons and series. Then, as a third point, he says, "Among all the subjects, with which you feed the people of God, I beseech you, let not the true bread of life be forgotten; but exhibit as much as you can of a glorious Christ unto them: yea, let the motto upon your whole ministry be, Christ is all."[31] Near the end of this point, he provides several helps to instruct in the way of Christ.

Doctrines and uses tend to speak of promises, duties, and statuses, and those who listen to preaching, whether believers or unbelievers, are to be led to Christ. The Christian preacher should consider the glory and work of Christ as present in the doctrines and the glory and work of Christ in their uses. Preachers may find that their doctrine points hard at sin, or their uses point the hearer clearly to their sins. In such a case, he is taught to "carry your hearers to their mighty and only Saviour."[32] But what about the duties? Two things can appear in the sermon. He may use Christ as the example of godliness since Christ is the perfect man who obeyed the law perfectly. Obedience looks like Jesus. But there is more. The preacher ought to "still carry your hearers to their Saviour, as not only affording a pattern for all those things, but also as offering to live, and act, and work in them, as a principle of life, by which alone they can live unto God."[33] Christ obeyed for us, but he also sends forth power into us so that we might be conformed to him.

The Christian preacher remains a *Christian* preacher because he continues as a herald to point people to Christ. This appears in the text, of course, but also in the doctrine and in the uses. The doctrine finds its unity in the Christ of God. The uses, whether comfort, which is found in Christ; rebuke, which points to the need for Christ; or exhortations, which find both their exemplar and strength from Christ, are intimately united to Christ. He is the God of all and the Savior of the saints in their justification, their sanctification, and their glorification. Every hearer is responsible to the Judge of all, and all hearers have need of the Savior of all who come to him.

Perkins famously closes his treatise, "The Art of Prophesying," saying,

> *The order and sum of the sacred and only method of preaching:*
>
> 1. To read the text distinctly out of the canonical Scriptures.
>
> 2. To give the sense and understanding of it, being read, by the Scripture itself.
>
> 3. To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the natural sense.

4. To apply (if he has the gift) the doctrines rightly collected to the life and manners of men in a simple and plain speech.

The sum of the sum:

Preach one Christ

by Christ

to the praise of Christ.[34]

Manner

Now that we have considered the components of a doctrinal-expositional (Puritan) sermon, we can consider the *manner* in which they preached these sermons. By *manner*, I intend to point out particular ways the preachers structured their sermons as well as the vigor they applied to each part.

Structure. Most importantly, the preachers tended to simply follow the structure of *text*, *doctrine*, and *uses*. The length of each section might vary, but this structure was the most basic building block for whatever else they did with their sermons. Further, it is important, as can easily be seen in examples of their sermons, to note that the explanation of the doctrine was complex and sought to develop a major thought. This means that the doctrine itself usually had many subpoints and sub-subpoints. Again, doctrine was the heart of the sermon. That said, some variations are worth noting.

The first major variation worth noting is that many of the preachers incorporated several doctrines in their sermons. An example of this was seen both in Richard Sibbes' fourteen doctrines in his sermon on 2 Chron. 34:28 and in John Owen's inclusion of four "observations." For many preachers, such as Jonathan Edwards, the consistent inclusion of only a single doctrine was very dominant, but others were comfortable incorporating more.

The next major variation to identify is the fact that preachers often preached a series on a particular text. One can find several sermons in succession working through a verse. These series might include the text in the first sermon, the doctrine in that first sermon as well as the next, and then uses at the very end, either concluding the final sermon or as a single sermon itself. In John Owen's sermon on Ezek. 47:11, we see him mostly include his uses in his second sermon. But this brings us to our next point.

Like doctrine, uses may appear at various points of a sermon. If the preacher felt his text had a

very immediate application, or if he had just developed a particular doctrine, the preacher might include a use (or several) before continuing in his sermon. In other words, they are flexible in their practice of this structure.

Finally, it has sometimes been suggested that *uses* (application) take up half of a Puritan sermon. It is hard to justify that. Reading the Puritans, it is clear that they *sometimes* took up that much of a sermon, and they were even sometimes the whole sermon, but proportionally, the uses usually made up much less of the sermon than the doctrine.

Vigor. While we cannot go back in time to figure out how a particular preacher preached a particular sermon since all we have is their text, we can assume that Van Mastricht's explanation is reflective of what was common.[35] He says that the introduction should stir the affections in some way. However, perhaps counterintuitively to us today, he says that in the exegesis, "the affections should not be so vigorous, nor in general should they be stirred, unless they are the sort that arise from conviction, for example, the love of the divine truth, and then the hatred of falsity, distortion, and any misinterpretations."[36] The aim of the exegetical (or "text") portion of the sermon is to inform the mind. For the doctrinal portion, Van Mastricht says, "Since the goal of the whole doctrine is nothing but the conviction of the mind and the knowledge of the truth that is according to godliness, no other affections can be roused here, except those that derive their origin from here, that is, a love of truth and a despising of falsehood, for the rest are revealed in the application."[37]When he speaks of uses, he says that the stirring of affections for informatory uses should be similar to doctrine, but for comfort,

> The affections that predominate in a consolation are, at least with respect to the one speaking, love toward the afflicted and sadness concerning his affliction, that is, compassion. Those affections to be awakened with respect to the afflicted, and in him, are hope and patience. . .[38]

For "rebuking" uses, "The affections to be roused here are especially: (1) shame arising from the indecency of the reprehended evil; (2) fear, from the communication of penalties and (3) a hatred and detestation of both, emerging from both the threats and the contemplation of divine judgments."[39] In the "exploratory" use, in which a person considers their spiritual state, "The affections that must be moved in the examination are: first, a fear of deceit and deception. . . Second, the love and desire to be sure of the healthiness of our spiritual state. . . [and,] Third, boldness and effort in applying ourselves to all devotions and exertions, so that we may achieve certainty of our good state."[40] Finally, when there is an exhortation to good works, there should be a stirring up of the affections. "The principal affections that must be stirred in the exhortation are a love and a desire for the virtue or good work, which the magnified excellence, sweetness, and usefulness of the duty are able to stir up; hope and courage, which the certainty

and facility of accomplishment are able to stir up; and fear, which the usefulness and necessity of the duty, considered together with its lack, are able to stir up."[41] Clearly, the Puritans believed that the affections should be suited to the matter preached, neither neglecting them when the content called for it nor stirring them up irrationally.

Listening

Jesus commands his disciples in Luke 8:18, "Take care then how you hear" (ESV). This command means that the responsibility for the effects of the sermon is not merely dependent on the preacher and his skill. Certainly, unless one is given ears to hear, he will not hear (Lk 8:8), but we can also say that those who hear the sermon ought to give themselves to understanding the teaching as well (cf. Baptist Catechism Question 95/Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 90). How are we to receive preaching that seeks to follow the doctrinal-expositional method? Since there are three main components of a Puritan-styled sermon, we can apply the work of listening to each of those parts distinctly.

Understand the Text. Since the doctrinal-expositional preacher seeks to help you understand the text in itself (i.e., the meaning of the parts and the whole in its immediate and canonical context), look at your Bible and consider the various parts that he refers to. If he takes you to another text of Scripture, be sure to turn your Bible to that text with him. If he makes a point of certain words in the text, look at those words and consider their place in the text, and if he labors to give a good understanding of what those words mean, consider whether you could have misunderstood the meaning of those words yourself.

It is possible that he will have several parts to a sermon with multiple doctrines drawn from successive parts of the text (i.e., he might say, "in v. 1, Paul says [text]… this teaches us that [doctrine]…We should consider whether we are living in these ways [uses]. . .. Now, in v. 3, Paul then says [text]…this teaches that [doctrine] . . . which challenges us in these ways [uses]…."). If this is the case, as he moves from one "text" portion to the next, even if he does not explain the connection (i.e., v. 3's connection to v. 1), try to think about that connection for yourself. The text portion of the sermon is often the largest (and sometimes exclusive) part of sermons today. In Puritan preaching, it was much shorter because the meaning of the text is often quite clear. If your pastor gives much time to the text, it may be because the interpretation of the text is controversial (e.g., Revelation 20) or because there is a lot of content to cover (e.g., large narrative portions or whole Psalms or prophetic sections). If this is the case, seek to understand the flow of the text with him and the reasons he is making his particular interpretive decisions.

Think through the Doctrine. Again, since the doctrine is the heartbeat of the sermon because in it the preacher presents the particular truth present in the text, it will be necessary to apply your

mind to what he is claiming. When he moves from the text to the doctrine, he is moving from something that was particularly true in one instance to some (fairly) universal truth. He might describe Ananias and Saphira falling down dead but then move to the universal truth that God will judge those who lie to him, or who take his name in vain, or who conspire to acquire wealth, or who seek to deceive the church (or her leaders). There is some particular *principle* that is true in the text and in a particular event that remains true even today.

As the preacher seeks to develop this principle, he may go in a number of different directions. First, though, consider the particular truth he seeks to establish and expound. If he wants to teach you that God judges those who lie to him, consider whether this is true. If it is true, why is it true? Would it not be because of the goodness of God? Would it not be because of the omnipotence of God? Would it not be because of the right of the Potter over the clay? As the preacher seeks to establish the truths, consider whether you have connected some of the items he is seeking to connect. If he seeks to confront misunderstandings or challenges to what he is arguing, consider whether you have heard those arguments before or even held to them yourself. Consider the coherence of the argument being made in that moment.

Do not be surprised if your pastor does not say something that comes to your mind. If you are mentally engaged in the preaching and in the Christian life, you will certainly be able to think through several points that he may not have been able to fit into the time of the sermon. If you can think of other texts that he did not use as supporting texts for the doctrine, that is good because it means that you are seeing the regularity with which Scripture speaks of the same sorts of things.

Consider your Own Life and Thinking. Finally, as the preacher seeks to apply the text to your life and thinking, correcting bad actions and thoughts, consider yourself. Is there some particular error in your thinking that you had not considered before? Is there some besetting or occasional sin in your life that this doctrine directly addresses? Consider how you will remove the sin. Listen for helps, but also consider other ways that may not be explicitly stated. The preacher may give one idea, but you may think of another that would fit better in your own life and circumstances. Consider also the virtues that ought to be cultivated in order to obey the Lord in thankfulness. Have you grown slothful in a particular area of holiness? Have you begun to grow dull in your view of the majesty of God? Consider Christ and the work that he has done to secure your justification. Though besetting and occasional sins may be present, consider what that means about Jesus' work on your behalf. Consider also Christ's work to secure your sanctification. Not only did Christ die for the justification of his people, but he also secured their growth in holiness and sent forth his Spirit to purify us and conform us to himself.[42] This should give you confidence as you pursue the holiness by which the gospel is adorned.

Not just yourself. While it is necessary that you give your attention and mind to understanding the text, doctrine, and uses for yourself, you should remember that you are responsible for others in your life as well. Here, I would like to give just a few examples. Remember that Lois and Eunice held to the faith known by Timothy (2 Tim 1:5), and King Lemuel's mother passed on the oracles to him (Prov 31:1). From church history, perhaps the most famous mother is Monica, the mother of the great Western theologian Augustine. Though his father was not a believer, his mother's faith is praised by her son in quite exalted ways. As mothers listen to the preached Word, they should give themselves to thinking through how they can explain it to their children, making particular applications of the law and gospel in the days ahead.

Further, though, fathers are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). They ought to think about how to teach these things both at regular times (e.g., morning and evening in family worship) and in the regular course of life (Deut 6:7–9). As heads of household, they are particularly responsible for giving instruction in the Word. Consider, a wife is expected to seek instruction in spiritual truth from her husband (1 Cor 14:35). These expectations entail a certain focused attention by the man of the home so that he may instruct, exhort, and rebuke in his home in ways consistent with the truth he is learning from the pulpit. Heads of household are particularly responsible for "reinforcing and (quite literally) bringing home the preacher's message."[43]

The Word should go beyond the private life into the life of the church. Paul exhorts Christians to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). Applied to the preaching of the Word, take what was preached and make it the topic of conversation after the sermon as you interact with your brothers and sisters in the faith among the congregation. Use it as a conversation topic throughout the week. In doing so, you will reinforce the teaching in your own thinking and join others as you "grow up into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4:15).

Finally, consider the fact that the law and gospel are spoken in the course of life to family, friends, coworkers, strangers in the grocery store, and wherever else Christians find themselves. As you consider the Word of God being preached, the condemning work of God's law and the saving work of God's gospel, consider how you might likewise share those things in your own words in the various relationships in which you find yourself.

Some Final Advice. For some final pieces of advice, be sure to prepare your mind going into the sermon and coming out of it, giving yourself to prayer that the Lord would open your eyes to behold wondrous things from his Word (Ps 119:18), and especially the Wondrous One. Take notes during the sermon, especially on what the text is, what doctrine(s) is/are taken from it,

and how you might apply it in your thinking and living. Strive to avoid distractions or being a distraction. In our day, you can often go back and listen to the sermons again, reminding yourself of the truth delivered on the Lord's Day. As the previous point emphasized, make the content of the sermon a matter of conversation in the various relationships you have in life.

Conclusion

Preaching is the primary means by which God makes his gospel known. He has spoken his infallible Word in the Scriptures, and the sense of these words has been explained and applied to listeners ever since. As listeners, we are responsible to receive the Word with joy, not as the words of men, but as it is, as the Word of God. We are to hear its teaching, reproof, correction, and training with believing and repentant hearts. In the preaching of the Word of God, God meets us in Christ, shows us Christ, and conforms us to Christ. As listeners, then, we are to give our attention to the preached Word. It has been the goal of this article to give you aid as you listen and help you to get the most out of what is laid out before you. To God alone be the glory!

Appendix 1

The Method Officially Stated: The Directory for Public Worship[44]

Preaching of the Word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the Ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him.

It is presupposed, (according to the rules for ordination,) that the Minister of Christ is in some good measure gifted for so weighty a service, by his skill in the original languages, and in such arts and sciences as are handmaids unto divinity; by his knowledge in the whole body of theology, but most of all in the holy Scriptures, having his senses and heart exercised in them above the common sort of believers; and by the illumination of God's Spirit, and other gifts of edification, which (together with reading and studying of the Word) he ought still to seek by prayer, and an humble heart, resolving to admit and receive any truth not yet attained, whenever God shall make it known unto him. All which he is to make use of, and improve, in his private preparations, before he deliver in public what he hath provided.

Ordinarily, the subject of his Sermon is to be some Text of Scripture, holding forth some principle or head of religion, or suitable to some special occasion emergent; or he may go on in some chapter, psalm, or book of the holy Scripture, as he shall see fit.

Let the Introduction to his Text be brief and perspicuous, drawn from the Text itself, or context, or some parallel place, or general sentence of Scripture.

If the Text be long, (as in histories and parables it sometimes must be,) let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to the scope of the Text, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of Doctrine which he is to raise from it.

In analyzing and dividing his Text, he is to regard more the order of matter than of words; and neither to burden the memory of the hearers in the beginning with too many members of division, nor to trouble their minds with obscure terms of art.

In raising Doctrines from the Text, his care ought to be, First, That the matter be the truth of God. Secondly, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that Text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence. Thirdly, That he chiefly insist upon those Doctrines which are principally intended; and make most for the edification of the hearers.

The Doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms; or, if any thing in it need explication, it is to be opened, and the consequence also from the Text cleared. The parallel places of Scripture, confirming the Doctrine, are rather to be plain and pertinent, than many, and (if need be) somewhat insisted upon, and applied to the purpose in hand.

The Arguments or Reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, convincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and such as may convey the truth into the hearer's heart with spiritual delight.

If any doubt obvious from Scripture, reason, or prejudice of the hearers, seem to arise, it is very requisite to remove it, by reconciling the seeming differences, answering the reasons, and discovering and taking away the causes of prejudice and mistake. Otherwise it is not fit to detain the hearers with propounding or answering vain or wicked cavils, which, as they are endless, so the propounding and answering of them doth more hinder than promote edification.

He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special Use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the Word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.

In the Use of Instruction or information in the knowledge of some truth, which is a consequence

from his Doctrine, he may (when convenient) confirm it by a few firm arguments from the text in hand, and other places of Scripture, or from the nature of that commonplace in divinity, whereof that truth is a branch.

In Confutation of false Doctrines, he is neither to raise an old heresy from the grave, nor to mention a blasphemous opinion unnecessarily: but, if the people be in danger of an error, he is to confute it soundly, and endeavour to satisfy their judgments and consciences against all objections.

In Exhorting to Duties, he is, as he seeth cause, to teach also the means that help to the performance of them.

In Dehortation, Reprehension, and public Admonition (which require special wisdom,) let him, as there shall be cause, not only discover the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also shew the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprized by it, together with the remedies and best way to avoid it.

In applying Comfort, whether general against all temptations, or particular against some special troubles or terrors, he is carefully to answer such objections as a troubled heart and afflicted spirit may suggest to the contrary.

It is also sometimes requisite to give some notes of trial, (which is very profitable, especially when performed by able and experienced Ministers, with circumspection and prudence, and the signs clearly grounded on the holy Scripture,) whereby the hearers may be able to examine themselves whether they have attained those graces, and performed those duties, to which he exhorteth, or be guilty of the sin reprehended, and in danger of the judgments threatened, or are such to whom the consolations propounded do belong; that accordingly they may be quickened and excited to duty, humbled for their wants and sins, affected with their danger, and strengthened with comfort, as their condition, upon examination, shall require.

And, as he needeth not always to prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text, so is he wisely to make choice of such uses, as, by his residence and conversing with his flock, he findeth most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort.

This method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every text; but only recommended, as being found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpful for the people's understandings and memories.

But the Servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole Ministry:

1. Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.

2. Plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.

3. Faithfully, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory; keeping nothing back which may promote those holy ends, giving to every one his own portion, and bearing indifferent respect unto all, without neglecting the meanest, or sparing the greatest, in their sins.

4. Wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; shewing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness.

5. Gravely, as becometh the Word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his Ministry.

6. With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good. And,

7. As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them in it; earnestly, both in private and public, recommending his labours to the blessing of God, and watchfully looking to himself, and the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer: So shall the doctrine of truth be preserved uncorrupt, many souls converted and built up, and himself receive manifold comforts of his labours even in this life, and afterward the Crown of Glory laid up for him in the world to come.

Where there are more Ministers in a congregation than one, and they of different gifts, each may more especially apply himself to doctrine or exhortation, according to the gift wherein he most excelleth, and as they shall agree between themselves.

Appendix 2

Outline: The Best Method of Preaching

The following is an outline of Petrus Van Mastricht's The Best Method of Preaching.

1. Introduction

2. Summary of Text Content: Thesis + Hypothesis

3. Exposition

- Analysis: Divide it into parts
- Exegesis: Give clear explanations of the parts (helps: analogy of faith, analogy of context, extrinsic items [philology, philosophy, history], commentaries)

4. Doctrine

- Investigation and proposition (should be clearly in the text)
- Proof: Other texts
- Confirmation: Reasons (not the same as motives) drawn from nature of subject in relation to predicate (or vice versa), immediate coherenceVindication (if our subject faces obvious scruples)
- Explanation: of either subject or predicate (don't be overly lengthy)

5. Application: Dogmatic and Practical;

- From dogma=informatory use (should be rarest)

6. Refutation: Only what is a real and present controversy

7. Practical: Evil (external->comfort; internal->rebuke/reproof/admonition) or Good (exploration or exhortation)

- Evil->comfort/consolation: Evils our dogma heals, comforting arguments applied to it, anticipation of anxious thoughts

8. Rebuke (admonition, dissuasion, accusation)

- Particular evils to be rebuked
- Rebuking arguments
- Remedies

9. Exploration: Seek out a virtue, vice, good or evil work, state of grace or sin

- Move the conscience
- Signs to look for in self-examination
- Goal of examination

10. Exhortation ("hortatory" use): Doctrine's use for zeal for virtue and good works

- Duty Recommended
- Arguments for the Duty
- Means of Performing the Duty
- Manner of Performing the Duty
- Could be a habit (disposition) rather than particular action

NOTES:

[1] William Perkins, "The Art of Prophesying," in The Works of William Perkins, ed. Joseph A. Pipa et al., (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 10:281–356

[2] The idea is taken from 1 Cor 14. There is an entire argument for why "prophecy" and "preaching" are largely interchangeable, but that is not necessary for our purposes here.

[3] The end date of the Puritan movement is debated among historians, but whether you choose the "Great Ejection" (1662), the "Glorious Revolution" (1688-89), or some other date, the point that this form of preaching

extends beyond the Puritans stands.

[4] Petrus Van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," in Theoretical-Practical Theology, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester, vol. 1, Prolegomena (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 1–31.

[5] Hughes Oliphant Old points out that the very act of preaching is intended to be doxological (rendering glory to God). The Age of the Reformation, vol. 4 of The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 329.

[6] If doctrinal-expository preaching is reflective of various premodern concerns in biblical interpretation, as I believe it is, what I call "exegetical" preaching is reflective of the historical-grammatical exegesis that has come to dominate interpretation since the nineteenth century. The convergence of these two is, perhaps, most evident in dispensationalism. However, dispensationalism has also had a major impact on broader evangelicalism, so such preaching is evident beyond dispensational churches as well.

[7] Matthew does not include the term "repent" in the Lord's commission, but Mark records that "they went out and proclaimed that people should repent" (Mk 6:12).

[8] I am getting this from Matthew Henry, who makes these points when commenting on Matthew 10:7.

[9] On the "scope of Scripture," see Richard C. Barcellos, "'Scopus Scripturae:' John Owen, Nehemiah Coxe, Our Lord Jesus Christ, And A Few Early Disciples On Christ As The Scope Of Scripture," JIRBS 2 (2015): 5–24.

[10] For an historical survey of the shift—at least in American evangelical life—from a doctrinal emphasis in preaching, see Thomas J. Nettles, The Privilege, Promise, Power & Peril of Doctrinal Preaching (Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2018).

[11] I admit to sometimes falling into the preacher's trap of addressing doctrines or uses that are overly tangential to the text. In another direction, the Baptist preacher, John Broadus, advised that instead of preaching a whole doctrine, to "choose some one aspect of a great subject is usually far better, as there is thus much better opportunity for the speaker to work out something fresh, and much better prospect of making the hearers take a lively interest in the subject as a whole." The preacher should look for the particular thing that his text says about Scripture or about Christ's Person or the consummation rather than attempt to expound that whole doctrine in one sermon. A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan, New (23d) ed. (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898), 79.

[12] William Perkins, "The Art of Prophesying," 329–330.

[13] See "Appendix 1" for the full presentation of the Directory's instructions on preaching.

[14] Richard Sibbes, "The Saint's Refreshing," in Josiah's Reformation: Cultivating and Maintaining a Tender Heart, Puritan Paperbacks 46 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 102. Sibbes had an introduction preceding this and follows with an explanation of the three sorts of promises, namely, legal promises ("do this and live"), gospel promises ("believe on Christ"), and promises of encouragement ("as a father's promise to make his son an heir").

[15] Richard Sibbes, "The Saint's Refreshing," 103, 105, 106, 109, 114. Sibbes actually has 14 doctrines in this particular sermon. This is not usual, as even his earlier sermons in the same book have much fewer doctrines.

[16] Richard Sibbes, "The Saint's Refreshing," 103, 107, 115.

[17] Thomas Manton, "Redemption by Christ," in The Works of Manton, vol. 1 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 417.

[18] Thomas Manton, "Redemption by Christ," 417.

[19] Thomas Manton, "Redemption by Christ," 425. The use is broken down to include both the fact that 1) we all once needed it and 2) we still need it.

[20] John Owen, "The Sin and Judgment of Spiritual Barrenness," in The Works of John Owen, vol. 9 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 179. He continues with another full page explaining what the temple is, what the progress of the water represents, the effects of the water progressing, and the effects of the progress of the water.

[21] John Owen, "The Sin and Judgment of Spiritual Barrenness," 180-81.

[22] John Owen, "The Sin and Judgment of Spiritual Barrenness," 182.

[23] John Bunyan, Bunyan's Last Sermon, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 755–756.

[24] John Bunyan, Bunyan's Last Sermon, 756.

[25] John Bunyan, Bunyan's Last Sermon, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 757–58.

[26] Jonathan Edwards, "Mercy and Not Sacrifice," in Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742, ed. by Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 22 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 114.

[27] Jonathan Edwards, "Mercy and Not Sacrifice," 115.

[28] Jonathan Edwards, "Mercy and Not Sacrifice," 130.

[29] Jonathan Edwards, "Mercy and Not Sacrifice," 133, 134.

[30] For a more sympathetic reading than he often receives, see Dustin Benge and Nate Picowicz, The American Puritans (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 181–204.

[31] Cotton Mather, Student and Preacher, Intituled, Manducatio ad Ministerium; or Directions for a Candidate of the Ministry(Northampton: Republished by John Ryland, 1781), 100.

[32] Mather, Student and Preacher, 102.

[33] Mather, Student and Preacher, 102–03.

[34] William Perkins, "The Art of Prophesying," 356.

[35] Besides a few statements on the composure of the minister and some suggestions regarding manner and gesture, he says it is best to "let the example of the gravest ministers in this kind be in [the] stead of a rule." William Perkins, "The Art of Prophesying," 354. On the other hand, Arnold Hunt has provided some examples of the more emotionally charged preaching that happened sometimes in his work, The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–94.

[36] Petrus Van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 10.

[37] Petrus Van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 13.

[38] Petrus Van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 18–19.

[39] Petrus van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 20–21.

[40] Petrus van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 24.

[41] Petrus van Mastricht, "The Best Method of Preaching," 26.

[42] This is typically called the "duplex gratia," or "double grace." We sing about it when we that Christ's work saves from sin's guilt and power (Toplady, "Rock of Ages").

[43] Arnold Hunt, The Art of Hearing, 65.

[44] This was prepared alongside the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, so it reflects something of the official Puritan teaching on the matter of preaching.

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John Carpenter

Why Baptists Don't Know They're Puritans

I set out to study the New England Puritans and was surprised to learn about the origins of the Baptist movement in America. Again and again, I saw how the Congregationalists of New England were similar to the Baptists among whom I had grown up. Finally, it dawned on me that my Baptists were Puritans. The question is, why don't Baptists know they're Puritans?

On some level, many Baptists do, indeed, understand that they are Puritans. T. E. Watson matter-of-factly, while writing for D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, mentioned "Puritan Baptists."[1] Nathan Finn in a podcast interview, said, "The Baptist movement literally arose out of radical Puritanism. They were radical Puritans who embraced believer's baptism."[2] This is accurate, although I am not sure what a "radical Puritan" is, as distinct from a mainstream Puritan. Yet, as we will see, Finn's co-authored book on Baptist origins suggests that Baptists were distinct from Puritans. The narrative of Baptist history, as we will see, suppresses or, at best, obfuscates such claims.

There are seven major reasons creating the fog around the origins of the Baptist movement.

I. The Narrative

The fact that Baptists arose from Puritanism – in particular, Congregationalism, or "Independency," or separatism or "semi-separatism" – has been obscured by the traditional narrative of Baptist origins.[3] The story of Baptist beginnings often commences with John Smyth (1554-1612) baptizing himself and others, including Thomas Helwys (c. 1575-c. 1616)

and John Murton (1585 – c. 1626). Bill Leonard says "Baptists beginnings are relatively easy to discern" and then launches into this narrative.[4] They had earlier fled to Holland around 1608 for religious freedom. There, either by independent Bible study or with the persuasion of Mennonites, they embraced believer's baptism.[5] Thus, so the story goes, they were either essentially English Anabaptists or simple Biblicists, encouraged by Anabaptists to adopt the Biblical pattern of baptism. Having become Arminians also in Holland, they began a General Baptist church in London (1611/12). Thus, some Baptists claim, beginning the chain of events that led to the Baptist movement, including its flourishing in America.

There are several problems with the Anabaptist origins narrative. Winthrop S. Hudson (1911-2001) notes, "The single most confusing element in the attempt to understand the Baptist heritage . . . has been the identification of the Baptists with the Continental Anabaptists."[6] First, Smyth, while being persuaded of believer's baptism, converted to be a Mennonite and never returned to England before dying in 1612. Second, Helwys, Murton, and others, while following Smyth into believer's baptism, remained unconvinced of other essential features of Anabaptism like foreswearing oaths, war, and political vocations.[7] Indeed, church covenanting (a type of oath) became an essential feature of Baptist polity, just as it was in Congregationalism. Helwys, in particular, separated from Smyth on four points, two of which are typical of Reformed rejection of Anabaptism: about the Christian Sabbath and the appropriateness of Christians to serve the government.[8] Helwys confession of 1611 specifically stated "magistracy is a Holy ordinance of God," that magistrates "may be members of the church of Christ," and that they "bear the sword of God," thus implying endorsing of capital punishment, contrary to most Anabaptists.[9] Helwys and his followers were so opposed to Anabaptism, when Smyth converted to it in Holland, Helwys declared that Smyth had "denied the Lord's truth and is fallen from grace." Helwys' church excommunicated Smyth for embracing Anabaptism. This is not how one talks of moves to sisterly Christian churches.

Further, there are the unsubtle statements on the covers of prominent Baptist confessions denying any connection to Anabaptism. The First London Baptist Confession (1644) declared that the confessing church, we now call Baptists, were "commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists."[10] In 1660, the General Baptists likewise complained about being "falsely" called Anabaptists.[11] In 1681, in Boston, Massachusetts, John Russell, Baptist pastor, said, "Don't call us Anabaptists and we won't call you murderers for the massacres committed by infant baptizers through Christian history."[12] Nikolausvon Zinzendorf (1700-1760), in about 1741-42, while seeking to form a union of churches, including the Mennonites, reported, "The Baptist Church . . . has sufficiently shown that they have nothing in common with the Anabaptists."[13] Hence, Hudson concludes, "If the early Baptists were clear on any one point, they were clear on their insistence that they were not to be confused with the Anabaptists."[14] One of the ironies

of Baptist history is that early Baptists were intent to disavow being Anabaptists and some twentieth century Baptist historians were intent on claiming they were.

Second, even if Helwys had been influenced by Anabaptism, it is unclear whether the Helwys church really began the chain-of-events that touched off the Baptist movement. By about the turn of the twenty-first century, historians were beginning to have doubts about the Helwys church. Douglas Weaver reported that "revisionist" Baptist historians had argued "no direct linkage between the General Baptists of the 1640s back to Smyth and Helwys has been documented."[15] Mark Bell is one of these "revisionist" historians. In his important 2000 book, Apocalypse How?, he challenged the claim that there were multiple churches derived from Helwys which endured through the 1630s and lay at the root of the General Baptist churches.[16] He states, "there is no evidence in the affirmative" of either churches deriving from the Helwys church persisting or their having an influence on the subsequent Baptist movement.[17] Bell made his claim in 2000 and stands by it in 2024. Like Bell, B. R. White had noted "there is no certain evidence that the London church of General Baptists [i.e. the Helwys church] persisted through the difficult years of the 1630s.[18] Stephen Wright, in 2006, likewise questioned the standard narrative of continuity between the Helwys church and Lambe's Bell's Alley church, probably General Baptist mother church.[19] Hence, the traditional narrative, focused on Smyth and Helwys is tenuous. Historians have not been able to show an unbroken chain of believers or churches from the Helwys church to Baptist churches.

This is an historiographical problem because for a church or leader to be at the root of the current Baptist movement, we have to show how it led to the later spread of Baptist churches. There must be documented causation. The history of the Baptists is not simply the retelling of any group that practiced believer's baptism but of tracing the lineage of Baptists from their origins to the present-day movement. That is, just as a history of a particular family tree only rightly consists of the family members who were part of that particular family, so too a legitimate history of Baptists should show a causal connection between one leader or group to another, down to our day. As it is, there's no conclusive evidence that the Helwys church began the chain of events leading to Baptist churches today, especially in America.

Third, is a testimony against interests. Even those most ardent in their support of the Anabaptist origins theory admit, at least implicitly, that they have no evidence. Frank H. Littell (1917-2009), who vigorously championed the cause of the Anabaptists as the source of the "free church" ideal "like a latter-day circuit rider," admitted frankly that direct evidence of a relationship between "continental Anabaptism and radical sectaries of the English commonwealth" "broke down."[20] Baptists hold to the "free church" ideal and are among "the radical sectaries of the English commonwealth." Thus, Littell, promoter of the Anabaptist source theory, confesses to a lack of evidence for its influence on Baptists and similar movements. Likewise, William Estep (1920-

2000), perhaps the chief purveyor of the Anabaptist origins theory among Southern Baptists, claims that the Particular Baptists, arising out of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Independent Church in 1641/42, reflects the impact of Puritanism "under Anabaptist influence." He gives no evidence for this but, rather, claims "this influence may have been mediated more by books and tracts than by personal contact."[21] In other words, he has no examples of personal contacts of Particular Baptists with Anabaptists. Instead, he conjectures that some "Anabaptist influence" might have been conveyed by literature. His "may have" reveals he does not have concrete evidence of this either. His testimony to the absence of the evidence for the claim he is advocating is, itself, weighty evidence against his theory.

Fourth, as Winthrop S. Hudson argues, there is not even need to credit Anabaptists as the source of believer's baptism among the Reformed English.

> *The insistence upon believers' baptism was a logical corollary drawn from the Reformation emphasis upon the necessity for an explicit faith and from the Congregational concept of a gathered church, as well as from the common storehouse of Biblical precept and example, rather than being the result of any supposed Anabaptist influence.*[22]

That is, the narrative of Baptist origins is confused because it seeks unique men or a movement outside the larger Reformed movement to ascribe its genesis. This is unnecessary because Reformed theology and Congregational polity sufficiently account for Baptist origins. Bell believes it is more reasonable that "General Baptists theological beliefs were pretty easy to drive from first principles." [23] That is, the common-sense theology (my term) of the General Baptists could easily have been ascertained by other earnest English believers without any needed connection to Helwys or the Anabaptists.

Fifth, the narrative does not account for the flourishing of the Particular Baptist movement and the existence of mixed Congregational-Baptist churches in England. "Some of their churches embraced both Baptist and Congregational members indiscriminately."[24] Seventh-century England saw the phenomena of mixed churches consisting of both Baptists and paedobaptist Congregationalists united in one membership, such as the Jessey church (London), Vavasor Powell's Welsch Baptist church, New Road Church, Oxford, England, and John Bunyan's in Bedford, England.[25] The difficulty in ascertaining whether Bunyan was a Baptist or not further demonstrates that there was no red-line separating Baptists from other Congregationalists in England.[26] This is at exactly the time when Baptist historians often fixate on persecution meted out to Baptists on the western shore of the Atlantic.

If Baptists were either English Mennonites or a unique, de novo movement arising simply by Bible study – "solo Scriptura" – they would not share so much of the theology of other Puritans,

especially Congregationalists, and sometimes even share church membership with them. Not only is this so for the Particular Baptists, who issued a "slightly altered Westminster Confession" in 1677, it was also true for the General Baptists who issued an "Orthodox Creed" in 1679 which affirmed original sin, contrary to the Anabaptists, and reflected the polity of Congregationalism, itself a Reformed movement.

Finally, the explosion of Baptist growth in America after the Great Awakening originally from the seed-bed of New England Congregationalism suggests it is an off-shoot of Congregationalism. The history of American Baptists is not simply that of English Baptists transplanted across the Atlantic. Even if it could be proved that English Baptists – either General or Particular – were significantly shaped by Anabaptism, which we have seen cannot be proven, that still would not prove that such an influence persisted in America. Indeed, that by the 1790s about 93% of Baptist churches in New England were Calvinist suggests that there was little, if any, Anabaptist influence.[27] Hence Winthrop S. Hudson stated flatly that "the Baptists were not Anabaptist, but rather were Puritan."[28]

II. Confusion About the Definition of Puritanism

Part of the confusion about the Puritan roots of Baptists stems from confusion of what, exactly, Puritanism was. Chute, Finn, and Haykin, for example, claim "separatists" (largely Congregationalists) were people who "came out of the Puritan movement."[29] Douglas Weaver ironically claims that John Smyth, by seeking a "pure church," left "Puritanism" (the movement committed to a Biblically pure church.)[30] A blind reviewer for a Baptist journal commented, "Modern Baptists arose from Congregational Separatists (not Puritans). Puritans persecuted Baptists."[31] These historians assume that separatists were not Puritans. Each of them implies an overly narrow definition of "Puritan." Thus (mis)understood, even if Baptists identify themselves with separatists, as they should, separatists have been detached, in this history, from Puritanism.

In reality, "Puritan" is the umbrella term for "hot Protestants" in England and colonial America, after the Elizabethan settlement, who sought to reform the church according to a Reformed interpretation of scripture.[32] They include those who were willing to stay in the Church of England, Presbyterians who settled on the Westminster Confession (1647), and Congregationalists, often also called "Independents." Congregationalists were a type of Puritan. If Baptists are a type of Congregationalist, then, they too are a type of Puritan. Thomas Edwards (1599–1647) said Baptists were "the highest form of Independency."[33] Baptists began as "baptistic congregationalists," a subset of Congregationalists, themselves a subset of Puritans.[34]

Darrett Rutman describes Puritanism as "the intense and evangelical advocacy of the Christian

obligation to know and serve God."[35] John Coffey and Paul Lim describe Puritanism as an "intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism" that began in the Church of England "but spilled out beyond it."[36] Patrick Collinson defined Puritans as "the hotter sort of Protestants."[37] That definition extends to separatists or "semi-separatists."[38] Likewise, Peter Lake's description of Puritanism includes separatists.[39] In 2021, Michael Winship, in Hot Protestants, elaborated on Lake's definition and, by including John Bunyan as a model Puritan, extended it to Baptists (assuming he was Baptist).[40] David Hall's definition of Puritanism includes separatists, Congregationalists and Trans-Atlantic Particular Baptists.[41] Bill Leonard is exceptional among Baptist historians for recognizing this, attaching both the origins of the General Baptists and Particular Baptists to "Puritan Separatists."[42]

III. Demise of Congregationalism

Baptists are not aware of their relationship to Congregationalism because Congregationalism, as an orthodox, evangelical movement, has almost vanished. This results in Congregationalism having few orthodox, evangelical representatives to speak up for them. They have no major seminary championing their tradition; they have no lively denomination faithfully preserving their theology and practices today; they have no major leaders reminding us Baptists that we came from them. The result is that we have few latter-day Congregational scholars reminding Baptists where they came from. Westminster Seminary, J. Gresham Machen, and R. C. Sproul reminded Presbyterians of their heritage. Few have done so for orthodox Congregationalists and made the connection to modern Baptists. When Baptists say they pioneered separation of the magistrate's authority from the church, church autonomy, local church authority in selecting its elders and deacons, etc, there are few Congregationalists clearing their throat, politely raising their hands and saying, "Actually, we believed in all of that. You got it from us." When Baptist boast of being willing to suffer for their convictions of the free church, regenerate church membership, local church autonomy, few Congregationalists remain to interject, with a wry smile, "Well, actually, our fathers ventured themselves and their little ones upon the rude waves of the vast ocean that so they might follow the Lord into his land."[43]

As Stanley Grenz wrote, "One crucial and lasting product of the Puritan movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the existence of a worldwide Baptist denomination …".[44] The question is why many Baptists, unlike Grenz, do not readily recognize that fact. Likely, a major factor is that most Baptists, unlike Grenz, are not knowledgeable of Congregationalism. Lacking that exposure to Congregationalism, Baptists are not aware that they inherited all the major – and many of the minor – features of their polity from Congregationalism, such as commitment to regenerate church membership with a testimony of regeneration required for admission, letters of dismission, church covenanting, priesthood of all believers, local church autonomy, associationalism (or "consociations"),[45] and philosophies

and practices of ordination.[46] With few orthodox Congregationalists remaining to compare themselves with, Baptists cannot see their family resemblance.

IV. The Persecution Obsession

Puritanism in Baptist history is often caricatured as an oppressive political-theological movement bent on persecuting all who deviated from it. Baptists encountering it are nearly always pictured as victims of its lash. For example, Bart Barber, recent president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a church historian, quoted Increase Mather's support for persecution of Baptists as evidence that Baptists ought not heed the Mathers.[47] About one-third of William McLaughlin's important essay on Baptist origins in America consists ofaccounts of persecution meted out to Baptists by the "Standing Order."[48] Thomas Kidd's and Barry Hankins' Baptists in America offers virtually no definition of Puritanism while launching the story of Baptist origins, both in the preface and in chapter one, with tales of persecution from it.[49]

The persecution narrative obscures the reality that Baptists often fellowshipped harmoniously with other Puritans. In England, Baptists were part of the Puritan mix. English Baptists were persecuted by the established church, the Church of England, along-side other Puritans. They were not persecuted, so far as we know, during the English commonwealth (1649-1660). We have already noted the important fact that the English Puritan scene saw mixed Congregational-Baptist churches at the same time in history when Baptists focus on the persecution they endured at the hands of Puritans in New England. This demonstrated that the larger Puritan theology and Congregational polity was the unifying principle and deemed large enough to include Baptists.[50]

Even Congregational churches that were exclusively paedobaptist or Baptist recognized one another across the baptism divide as spiritual siblings. In England, there was an "extensive and harmonious cooperation between Baptists and Congregationalists."[51] William Kiffin (1616-1701), though exclusively Baptist after 1644, never mentions his Baptist identity in his autobiography. In his memoirs, Kiffin mentions the "Independents" (i.e. Congregationalists) he joined and the "dissenters" but never the Baptists. Remarkably, "Mr. Kiffin gives no account of his becoming Baptist."[52] This is because being a Baptist was a kind of Independent or "dissenter," that is Puritan. Kiffin lived simultaneously with the persecution in New England Baptist historians now focus on. English Baptist hagiographer, Thomas Crosby (1683–1751), described Puritans as "the most sober and gracious Christians," obviously not the embittered victim of persecution.[53]

Even in the Puritan "City Upon a Hill," Baptist individuals were tolerated. What Puritans found objectionable was Baptists separating and forming their own churches. After all, New England

had been envisioned to be a Congregational training ground "to muster up the first of [God's] forces in."[54] The Puritans had sought the charter, recruited the colonists, and had the vision for it. They can be excused for some possessiveness. If, hypothetically, conservative Baptists bought a remote island, free of any national sovereignty, moved there to be what they envisioned to be a perfect Baptist homeland and, then, Presbyterians or Methodists or even Jehovah's Witnesses showed up, how would they respond?

Increase Mather, second generation New England leader, like his contemporary Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), called for suppressing Baptists churches, when they had the power. After the Toleration Act of 1689 relations changed. When John Farnum sought to transfer membership from the local Baptist church to Mather's North Church, Mather asked the Baptists if they had any objection. Thus, he acknowledged, in practice, the Baptists were Congregational brothers, not "heretics."[55] In 1718, Increase Mather and his son Cotton helped lead a Baptist pastor's ordination service. The younger Mather preached the sermon. Cotton Mather, far from anathematizing Baptists as "heretical," claimed in New England "the names Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Antipaedobaptist, are swallowed up in that of Christian."[56] He claimed that Baptists were "among the planters of New England from the beginning, and have been welcome to the communion of our churches, which they have enjoyed, reserving their particular opinion unto themselves." He asked his church members who held to believer's baptism to stay in his church. He described the Baptists he knew as "most worthy Christians, and as holy, watchful, fruitful, and heavenly people as perhaps any in the world."[57]

While persecution is an important chapter of Baptist origins, it is merely a chapter. An excessive focus on persecution obscures how Baptists were "baptistic congregationalists," with close theological affinities and friendly relationships with other Puritans.[58]

V. The Lack of a "Great Man"

Baptist origins, unlike Lutheran or Anabaptist or Presbyterian, lacks a single, dominating "great man" who founded the movement and who can be looked to as definitional. "Baptists have no recognizable founder like Martin Luther or John Calvin or John Wesley."[59] John Smyth (1554-1612) was not the founder. He was drawn to become Mennonite and earned a reputation for instability. Thomas Helwys (c. 1575-c. 1616) was not the founder. His church, as we noted, may not have survived the 1630s. In America, Roger Williams (1603-1683) was not the founder. He only attended a Baptist church for four months in 1639. Williams remained a "seeker," never a committed Baptist. Thus, there is no single person Baptists esteem as the "father of the Baptists" to whom they could agree to look to as a model, whose life or theology created a norm. There is, instead, a team of great men, each doing their part to launch the Baptist movement. Every one of them was, first, a Congregationalist, thus a Puritan.

VI. Lack of Pre-History

Much of the confusion about Baptist origins stems from Baptist histories beginning with Baptists. Two recent Baptist overview histories take this approach: Baptists in America: A History (2015) and The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement (2015). It is akin to beginning an American history on July 4th, 1776 and then picturing, even if just by implication, the British as foreign oppressors. The uneducated reader would assume that Americans were distinct from the British from their inception; that the British were foreign invaders. Just as no history of the United States is adequate without a pre-history of European colonization and the century and a half of colonial America, so no history of the Baptists is adequate without telling the story of the Reformation, especially the English Reformation, Puritanism, Congregationalism, "the City Upon a Hill," and the Great Awakening.

Developing the pre-history of Baptists will show that "Baptists were children of the Reformation and stood clearly within the Calvinist tradition."[60] Failure to explore the history of Congregationalism is the immediate cause of Baptists' seeing themselves as severed from church history. When Congregationalism is not sufficiently explored, we do not see what it means that "practically all" early Baptists – "whether John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Samuel Richardson, [Hanserd Knollys,] William Kiffin, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, . . . Henry Dunster [and Isaac Backus] – had been Congregationalists before they became Baptists."[61]

Hence, Charles Deweese, while admitting that "Baptist churches often inherited the church covenant directly from their Congregational roots," in his superb book on church covenants, is not able to discern what that fact means. He classifies Congregationalists as "another religious tradition," as if Baptists were distinct from it at their outset.[62] Likewise, the two recent general Baptist histories, noted above, fail to adequately explore Baptists' pre-history leading to serious misclassification of Baptists vis-à-vis other movements. Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins imply that the Puritans' gospel was essentially different than "the gospel of the Baptists."[63] Chute, Finn, and Haykin claim, without any citation, that Puritans and Baptists were divided by a presuppositional difference that forced Puritans to regard Baptists as "heretical."[64] Their radical differentiation of Baptists from Congregationalists reflects the narrative rather than the actual history.

VII. Anti-Calvinism

Finally, some of the oversight of Baptists connections to Puritanism is likely due to resistance to Calvinism. For example, probably the pre-eminent purveyor of the narrative that Baptists are descended from Anabaptists, William Estep, was also anti-Calvinist. Estep predicted if

"the Calvinizing of Southern Baptists continues unabated, we are in danger of becoming 'a perfect dunghill,' to borrow a phrase from Andrew Fuller," ironically citing the early 19th century Particular Baptist. He also claimed that "logically, Calvinism is anti-missionary," despite the fact that as a church historian he would have to be aware that William Carey, "the father of modern missions," was a Calvinist.[65] He served as a professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for forty years, writing numerous works on Baptist and Anabaptist history. The question is whether his opinion of Calvinism caused him to him to gravitate toward the slight connection of Anabaptists with Baptists and repulse him from the abundance of documentation showing Baptists relationship with Congregationalism. Or is it just a coincidence? That he was both anti-Calvinist and championed the Anabaptist origins narrative is probably not just correlation but causation. Certainly, historians are free to personally reject or even despise Calvinism. However, they are not free to allow that animus to color their historiography, to move them to classify the Baptists as belonging to a tradition Baptists really do not belong to simply to avoid identifying them with a tradition they, personally, disdain.

Result

With Puritanism misunderstood, Baptist origins dominated by the Anabaptist or spontaneous Biblicist narrative, the persecution obsession and no Congregationalists or "Great Man" reminding us of our true origins, new Baptist theological students are unlikely to look to the Puritans for their spiritual birthright. Like Bart Barber, they'll push them to the side.[66] These distortions, perhaps even more than the anti-intellectualism in some strands of Baptist life, are responsible for the Baptist sense of rootlessness, of being ahistorical, of the myths either that Baptists transcended church history from the days of the Apostles or that they appeared on the scene detached, uncaused in history, "de novo."[67] These distortions leave some Baptists starved for historical roots.

Because Baptists do not understand their identity as Puritans, we have the phenomena of Baptist academics calling for "theological retrieval" while celebrating the liturgical calendar, apparently unaware that their own tradition rejected that calendar. Original Baptists (or their Congregational progenitors) rejected the liturgical calendar not because they were intellectually benighted hicks who had never heard of it and suspicious of everything different but because they were Cambridge educated, exposed to high church liturgy, Latin and Greek reading scholars who came to the considered conclusion that it undermined the gospel.[68] They may have been wrong but they were not ignorant.

The conclusion of finding that Baptists are Puritans is that when a Baptist wants to retrieve his or her theology or tradition, he or she needs to make a deep dive into Puritanism. What Increase Mather declared about his own Puritans, so also can we Baptists say about ourselves,

"We are the children of the good old non-conformists."[69] It is in our Puritan heritage that we find that we are not anti-intellectual, other-worldly, disconnected; we find why we are congregational, promote a learned ministry but are not chained to it; why we are evangelistic and missions-minded. In Puritanism we find why we believe salvation is by grace but God works through means; why we celebrate the priesthood of all believers but are not anti-clerical; why we believe in autonomous churches but most of us still associate; why we hold to regenerate church membership and, even, why the immediate impetus for the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention (1845) to protect slave-holding was a tragic failure of Southern Baptists to nurture the seeds Puritans had planted and which bloomed in abolitionism;[70] why "traditional Southern Baptist soteriology" is articulated by William Perkins, William Ames, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield; and we find many more of the reasons we are as we are. We find, in many instances, what we have strayed from and we find, in the Puritans, spiritual fathers eager to guide us back home.

NOTES:

[1] T. E. Watson, "Andrew Fuller's Conflict With Hypercalvinism," Puritan Papers, Vol. 1 1956-1959 (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000.)

[2] Nathan A. Finn, "History of The Baptist Church," Remnant Radio, August 2, 2021, 13:09; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QPWGEAkXbE.

[3] The term "semi-separatist" refers to those who were "independent but not against the Church of England," who retained a "brotherly communion" with the established church. Mark R. Bell, Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements During the English Revolution (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 55-56.

[4] Bill J. Leonard, Baptists in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 7.

[5] For example, Carol Crawford Holcomb, in "Doing Church Baptist Style: Congregationalism" (Baptist History and Heritage, 2001), tells the story of Baptist origins and polity without any reference to Congregationalism (the movement). http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/pamphlets/style/congregationalism.htm, accessed July 18, 2023.

[6] Winthrop S. Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," The Chronicle, XVI (October, 1953), 171.

[7] The Schleitheim confession (1527) stated "Christ . . . prohibits all swearing, whether true or false. . . ". (Donald F. Durnbaugh, The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism [New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968], 74.

[8] Willaim Estep, "A Believing People: Historical Background," The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 196 Louisville Conference, Edited by James Leo Garrett, Jr (Scottsdale, PN: Herald Press, 1969), 49.

[9] Thomas Helwys, "Helwys' Declaration of Faith–The First Baptist Confession," Society of Evangelical Arminians, paragraph 24; http://evangelicalarminians.org/helwys-declaration-of-faith-the-first-baptist-confession/, accessed September 15, 2023.

[10] London Baptist Confession of 1644, https://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/h.htm, accessed August 11, 2023.

[11] "A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith," (London, 1660); https://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/tsc.htm.

[12] C. Douglas Weaver, In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 47.

[13] Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 172.

[14] Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 171.

[15] Weaver, In Search of the New Testament Church, 20.

[16] Bell, Apocalypse How?, 42.

[17] Bell, personal correspondence with Mark Bell, April 16, 2024.

[18] White, The English Baptists of the 17th Century, 29.

[19] Wright, The Early English Baptists, 1603-49.

[20] On Littell's promoting the importance of Anabaptism for the "free church" movement, Donald F. Durnbaugh, The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), x, 18. Franklin H. Littell, "The Concept of the Believer's Church," The Concept of the Believers' Church, 21.

[21] Estep, "A Believing People: Historical Background," The Concept of the Believers' Church, 53.

[22] Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 176.

[23] Bell, personal correspondence with Mark Bell, February 13, 2024.

[24] Hudon, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 176.

[25] Dennis C. Bustin, Paradox and Perseverance: Hanserd Knollys, Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 164-165. The New Road Church (Oxford) reported, "Some of us do verily believe that the sprinkling of the infant children of believing parents is true Christian baptism. . ." (Charles W. Deweese, Baptist Church Covenants [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990], 34.)

[26] Joseph D. Barn, "Was John Bunyan a Baptist? A Case Study in Historiography," Baptist Quarterly 30.8 (October 1984), 367-376; https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/30-8_367.pdf, accessed October 19, 2023. Timothy Haupt, "Why John Was Not a Baptist: The 7 Irreconcilable Differences Between John Bunyan and the Baptists," The Gospel Coalition, April 27, 2022; https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/why-john-was-not-a-baptist-the-7-irreconcilable-differences-between-john-bunyan-and-the-baptists/ , accessed October 19, 2023.

[27] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankin, Baptists in America: A History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 78.

[28] Donal F. Durbaugh, The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 16.

[29] Contra Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, Michael A. G. Haykin, The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2015), 14.

[30] C. Douglas Weaver, In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 9.

[31] Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, August 20, 2023.

[32] Michael P. Winship, Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.)

[33] Michael Watts, The Dissenters (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), 97-98; according to James M. Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 13.

[34] Matthew C. Bingham, Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4, 18, 23.

[35] Darrett B. Rutman, American Puritanism: Faith and Practice (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970) 13.

[36] John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism (Cambridge University Press,

2008), 1-2.

[37] Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 467.

[38] The term "semi-separatist" refers to those who were "independent but not against the Church of England," who retained a "brotherly communion" with the established church. Mark R. Bell, Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements During the English Revolution (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 55-56.

[39] "A style of piety, an emotional and ideological style, producing distinctive structures of meaning whereby both the world and the self could be construed, interpreted, and acted upon." Lake, "Defining Puritanism—again?," Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Seventeenth Century Anglo-American Faith (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 4.

[40] Michael P. Winship, Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.)

[41] David D. Hall, The Puritans: A Transatlantic History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1-2.

[42] Leonard, Baptists in America, 8.

[43] Paraphrased from Increase Mather for the 1679 Boston Synod, The Necessity of Reformation (Boston, MA: John Foster, 1679), i.

[44] Stanley Grenz, Isaac Backus — Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought, and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology(Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 1.

[45] Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 59.

[46] See John B. Carpenter, "Baptist Polity Inherited from Congregationalism," Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry 20.2 (Fall 2023), 153-172.

[47] Bart Barber, Twitter, November 29, 2022. "Also Increase Mather: "The Council ordered the doors of the meeting house which the [Baptists] have built in Boston to be shut up…So perverse were they that they would not meet in a private house, but met this Sabbath out of doors." Yeah. Let's listen to the Mathers." In context, this is meant sarcastically.

[48] McLaughlin, "The Rise of Antipedobaptists in New England, 1630-1655," Baptists in the Balance: The Tension Between Freedom and Responsibility, edited by Everett C. Goodwin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 84-92.

[49] Kidd and Hankin, Baptists in America, ix, 1.

[50] Matthew C. Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 4, 18, 23.

[51] Hudon, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 176.

[52] William Orme, Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin (London: Burton and Smith, 1823), 110.

[53] Thomas Crosby, The History of the English Baptists, Vol. 1 (London: The Editor, 1738), 334.

[54] E. Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England (1654) (Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974), 1.

[55] Stephen Foster, The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700 (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1991), 199.

[56] Cotton Mather, The Wonders of the Invisible World (London: John Dunton, 1693), 5. By "Antipaedobaptist" he means Baptists.

[57] Cotton Mather, The Great Works of Christ in America, 2 (Edinburg: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 532-533.

[58] Matthew C. Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 4.

[59] Weaver, In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story, 9.

[60] Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 172.

[61] Hudson, "Baptists Were Not Anabaptists," 173.

[62] Deweese, Baptist Church Covenants, 36.

[63] Kidd and Hankin, Baptists in America, ix, 1.

[64] Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, Michael A. G. Haykin, The Baptist Story, 35.

[65] Keith Hinson, "Prof's attack on Calvinism renews debate among Baptists," Baptist Press, April 18, 1997. https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/profs-attack-on-calvinism-renews-debate-among-baptists/

[66] Barber, Twitter, November 29, 2022. See fn 47 for full quote.

[67] Kidd and Hankins, Baptists in America, 29. Kidd and Hankins described the rise of the "Separate Baptists" after the Great Awakening as "de novo," despite the fact that the term referred to Congregational separatists from the standing order who adopted believer's baptism.

[68] Separate Baptists condemned "holy day observances." (Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997], 11.) Also noted by Chute, Finn & Haykin, as "following in the train of the Puritans" (p. 67.)

[69] original emphasis, An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New England (Boston: John Foster, 1676), 21.

[70] John B. Carpenter, "A secular Jew makes a surprising discovery about Christians and American slavery," Acton Commentary, April 17, 2019.

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Tom Nettles

John Smyth

"For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

Galatians 6:15

Difficulties immediately arise in seeking to call John Smyth the first modern Baptist. One is that he was not baptized by immersion nor did he give any defense of that mode. Another difficulty is that Smyth repudiated his own baptism and dissolved the church he established. Then, he sought to be united with the Mennonites in Amsterdam. A very good reason, however, may be stated for arguing that he is the fountainhead of the modern Baptist movement.

From his influence and teaching arose the first church to which the continuous history of the Baptists may be traced. This group of Baptists, the General Baptists, eventually merged into the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1891. Also, from their influence a number of Baptist churches freckled the southern colonies in North America and struggled toward a viable presence at the close of the twentieth century. Though the Particular Baptists had an independent origin and presented a more formidable presence in both England and America, the distinctive beliefs of believers baptism, liberty of conscience, and separation of church and state first made their unwelcome intrusion into the intellectual history of England through these unpromising dissenters.

Early Life and Education

No certain information is known of Smyth prior to his matriculation at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1586. That he came from a poor and relatively uninfluential family is certain from

his position as sizar, that is, a student who gains access to education through working as a servant to other students. His mean background did not hinder his zeal in learning, however, and Smyth soon achieved recognition for his tenacity in scholarship.

After graduating bachelor of arts in 1590, Smyth stayed and served as fellow. During these years he would be aware of the ideas of Francis Johnson in his advocacy of Puritan Presbyterianism, his adoption of separatism, and his assignment to the Clink prison for joining a separatist congregation in London. He would learn that the proto-separatist, Robert Browne, had given up his ideals and had received an appointment in the established church.

Just as prophetic for Smyth's development was an internal challenge to the orthodox Calvinism of the university. William Perkins, a seminal thinker within the emerging Puritanism, lectured on the Apostles' Creed, resulting in the publication in 1595 of his *Exposition of the Creed*. A student named Barrett took exception to its content in a public exercise for the degree of B.D. and eventually was brought to make a public recantation of his remarks. A Trinity professor, Baro, supported the student and eventually criticised the Lambeth articles written by Archbishop Whitigift. The Lambeth articles gave a strongly Calvinistic interpretation to the article on election in the *Thirty-nine Articles*. These events apparently did not change Smyth's Calvinistic theology at the time; they possibly served as a seed-bed for future changes.

Graduation and Early Ministry

By 1598 Smyth had finished his formal education, probably with M. A., had married (Mary was her name), and was seeking a livelihood. According to W. T. Whitley, "we may imagine Smyth supporting himself and bride, either by tutoring at Cambridge, or as chaplain, or curate, or more probably as master of a school."[1]

In 1600, Smyth was elected to a coveted and relatively lucrative position of lecturer in the city of Lincoln. He functioned there as a Puritan, strongly Reformed in theology, and not opposed to some magisterial role in the protection and establishment of pure religion.

His discussions on the nature and completeness of Christ's sufferings in his exposition of Christ's prayer, "Let this cup pass from me," expresses a fullness of theological and exegetical understanding favorably comparable to the best of Puritan preaching. As Smyth explains, Christ already was tasting the cup of God's wrath and prayed under the cloud of the mystery of its continuance and severity. He prayed that he might not so remain under that cup as to render him unable to be a mediator and thus incapable of saving his people. This constituted a "reverent fear" and submission to the Father's wisdom and was fully answered in the resurrection and ascension. This same note would be emphasized in the sermon *A Paterne of True Prayer.* His explanation of

why we must pray only in the name of the Son points out that only the Son has taken our nature, suffered in our stead, and merited for us an audience with the Father. "Seeing then of all the three persons in Trinitie the Sonne onely is our intercessor, therefore in the name of Christ alone wee must pray."[2] The person that is to be our intercessor, Smyth continues "must also be our sacrifice of propitiation: and contrarily our propitiator is our intercessor." Our assurance of the effectuality of his intercession, and, therefore, of the certainty of forgiveness depends completely on Christ's person and work as having perfectly fulfilled the law, sustaining such punishment as to make satisfaction for our sins.

Smyth also unveiled a rather salty spirit and vocabulary toward Roman Catholicism. Some of their views he called "blasphemous" and others, "foolish." Their distinctions in the vocabulary of worship that allowed them to pray to the Saints and the Virgin he called "threadbare and motheaten."[3] His forceful language showed his sincere opposition to the dangers inherent in that system.

He preached an exposition of Psalm 22 in four sermons in Lincoln that was printed in 1603 as *The Bright Morning Starre*. His closing words express a doctrinal urgency deceivingly unprophetic of the theological changes he eventually sustained. Smyth made the issue of imputed righteousness central to the stewardship of the church. The church of the Gentiles had "one principall office" according to Smyth. Since they had "come home into the bosome of Christ, by effectual vocation and true faith" they were to declare "the righteousnes of Christ God-man;" that is, the "righteousnesse which he hath wrought for us, in suffering and obeying the lawe." Turks and papists deny "imputative righteousnesse, and mocke at a crucified Christ." It is highly important, therefore, "that we faile not in defence of Gods righteousnesse." It is a special duty "to teach our children and posterity especially the article of justification by faith onely." Should we fail in this, the "subtill and crafty Jesuites" who labor "to perswade the meritt of good workes and so to shoulder the Lord Jesus Christ his righteousnes out of dores" might "wrest it from us."[4]

Smyth's use of the doctrine of election and limited atonement as missionary imperative also contrast starkly with his final doctrinal stance. He was sure by virtue of the covenant we [Gentiles] "shall be a meanes to bring them [Jews] unto the fellowship of the gospell." He urged that Christians labor by all possible means to bring home those not yet born by spiritual regeneration and as yet unbaptized. Turks and Jews and all nations "where we traffique" must be brought to the knowledge and love of the truth. It is certain that they may "partake in this righteousnesse which Christ hath wrought for as many of them as appertaine to his election."[5]

Smyth also assumed an establishmentarian position in advocating magisterial responsibility "by law [to] establish the worship of God according to the word"[6] This concept also would be rejected as erroneous when Smyth reframed his doctrine of the church.

Smyth's position as lecturer proved to be the pawn of political rivalries in the city, and Smyth found himself without a position at the end of 1602. He was accused of having been too personal in his preaching–a charge he denied.

The Logic of Separatism

Smyth's activities, except for the publishing of the two sermons quoted above, are undocumented until 1606. In those eventful years, however, James I from Scotland became king and the Puritans failed to make any substantial progress in reform as they presented to him the "Millenary Petition" and met with him at Hampton Court. The Puritans asked for changes in the church service, the organization of the ministry, church livings and maintenance, and church discipline. Slight explanations were allowed for tender consciences, but few concessions were made and conformity was urged in clear terms.

This lack of progress in purifying the church prompted Smyth into a series of discussions with friends on the nature of the church. By 1607 he had reached a clearly separatist position and confirmed it in a book, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church*. Separatists concluded that the Church of England was irreformable. It had a false worship, a false ministry, and a false constitution. True believers had no alternative but to separate from it.

Among several interesting ideas in *Principles* is Smyth's assertion that the true matter of a visible church are "Saints," that is, those who are "separated from all knowne syn, practising the whol will of God knowne unto them, growing in grace and knowledg continuing to the end." Appropriate Scripture proofs accompanied each part of the definition. In addition, the manner of forming the church Smyth held to be by covenant. This covenant consisted of two parts: that between God and the saints and that between the saints mutually. He had led a group in forming a church through covenant just recently, an event recorded by William Bradford.

> *They shooke of this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as ye Lords free people, joyned them selves (by covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.*

On to Amsterdam

It soon cost them their country. The time of winking at non-conformists was over, and action against separatism increased. Smyth, therefore led his congregation to Amsterdam where his former Cambridge tutor, Francis Johnson, had led an older separatist congregation some years before (1592).

Instead of joining them as he planned, Smyth found too many differences in perspective and appended a supplement to his recent publication on the church. This one was entitled *The Differences of the Churches of the Seperation* [sic] (1608). Smyth noted that differences in concept of worship, "Concerning the Leitourgie of the Church," and of officers, "Concerning the Ministerie of the Church," created differences severe enough to keep the two bodies separate.

An intriguing element of this argument concerns Smyth's view of the use of books in worship. Changing from his former defense of using books and even set forms of prayer, Smyth now argued that books should not be used for singing or for preaching. This included the use of Scripture, not because he denigrated Scripture. The originals that are inspired and without error cannot be read in worship for it would be an unknown tongue to the congregation. A translation cannot fully express all that is in the original in nuance and thus must be rejected for pure spiritual worship as a work of human composure. While we should read and study Scripture both in the original languages and in translation for personal edification and may read Scripture publicly for corporate edification, it cannot be proved, according to Smyth, that a book was ever made use of for prophesying in true Spiritual Worship.

A Change in Baptism

Smyth was not through changing. By 1609 he concluded that the church should dissolve and reconstitute on the basis of believers baptism. His arguments for this he put in a book entitled *The Character of the Beast*. His argument proceeded from two leading ideas. The first, "That infants are not to be baptized," he defended with three arguments. One, there is neither precept nor example in the New Testament of any infants that were baptized; baptism was placed only on those who confessed their sins. Two, Christ commands to make disciples by teaching, then to baptize them; but infants cannot by doctrine become Christ's disciples. Three, "If infants be baptized, the carnal seed is baptized; and so the seal of the covenant is administered to them unto whom the covenant aperteyneth not."[7] He called infant baptism "the most unreasonable heresy of al Antichristianisme" and said that "it is folly & nothing."[8]

Smyth shows in this third point that his view of believers baptism did not draw him entirely away from covenant theology. His understanding of the relationship between the old covenant and new covenant changed and may be summarized in this statement:

> *As in the Old Testament carnal infants were carnally begotten & borne by the mortal seed of generation by their carnal parents, & then were carnally circumcised, & receaved into the carnal covenant. So in the new Testament Spiritual infants new borne babes in Christ, must be Spiritually begotten & borne by the immortal seed of regeneration, by the Spiritual parents, & then being*

Spiritually circumcised they shal by baptisme with water be receaved into the New Testament."[9]

His second thesis reflects the vocabulary emerging from the ecclesiological tensions of the day: "That Antichristians converted are to bee admitted into the true Church by Baptisme." That is, a person baptized in infancy (an antichristian), when converted should be truly baptized before admission into the church. "That baptisme of theirs," says Smyth, "was never apointed by God: but it is the devise of Antichrist."[10] Again he offers three discreet discussions in defense of the point. One, churches are to be constituted as they had been constituted by the apostles. We have no record of the apostles creating churches by any other way than baptism of believers. Two, if believers baptism is true baptism, then infant baptism is not. True Baptism is but one and all members of Christ must have true baptism. It is clear from Scripture that the baptism of those who have become disciples by believing the doctrine of Christ is true baptism. The other, therefore, is not. Three, because as the false church is rejected and the true erected and false ministry is rejected and true ministry erected, so false baptism must be renounced and true assumed.

When Smyth constituted this church, he still considered the Mennonites doctrinally suspect and thus incapable of administering true baptism. A former friend but antagonist in this change, Richard Bernard, revealed, "He could find no whither to goe for Baptisme; in some Churches it was false, as he imagined; in some true, but not lawfully to be received because of some heresies."[11] A footnote indicates that he meant Anabaptists by this latter characterization. Even in the preface to *Character of the Beast,* Smyth had pointed out specific doctrinal cautions concerning Mennonite theology. Though he had come to their view of baptism, other errors interrupted the possibility of a proper confession of faith. Severe pressure from accusations evoked a disclaimer: "For we disclayme the errors commonly, but most slaunderously imputed unto us: we are indeed traduced by the world as Atheists by denying the old Testament & the Lords day: as Trayters to Magistrates in denying Magistracy: & as Heretiques in denying the humanity of Christ." These unflattering rumors guided Smyth in clarifying his position regarding the Old Testament in which he showed greater affinity for the Mennonite understanding of discontinuity between the covenants but wanted to remove himself from the caricatures of that position. He affirmed both the Sabbath and the necessity of magistrates.

He was particularly insistent in distancing himself from the Mennonite history of arguing for celestial flesh, a concept of Christ's incarnation which appeared to be docetic. Christ is the "seed of Abrah. Isaac, & Jacob, & of David" and also is the "Sonne of Mary his Mother, Made of her substance." Because other children have "ther bodyly substance from their parents" so must Christ. Smyth identified his position clearly with historic orthodoxy in confessing that "Chr. is one person in two distinct natures, the Godhead & manhood, & we detest the contrary

errors."[12]

Unable to find a true church to administer true baptism, Smyth baptized himself, then his good friend and follower Thomas Helwys. He defended this action in the face of Separatist criticism. The Separatists made themselves a church, when they were no church, by covenanting together. Smyth and Helwys made themselves a church, when they were no church, by taking the ordinance of baptism on themselves.[13]

When Smyth was accused of inconstancy because of so many and such rapid changes, he answered that though inconstancy in general is not admirable and is worthy of reproof, a change from the false to the true is good. For a man to change from a Turk to a Jew, from a Jew to a Papist, from Papist to Protestant are all commendable changes though it be done in the space of a month. Also the change from Puritanism to Brownism, and from Brownism to "true Christian baptisme, is not simply evil or reprovable in it self, except it be proved that we have fallen from true Religion."[14]

As the controversy continued, however, one antagonist offered an objection that Smyth could not overcome. John Hetherington, in conference with some of Smyth's followers, suggested that they had violated their own principles in accepting a self-baptism as legitimate. If infant baptism is rejected because there is neither example nor command for it, where does command or example exist for a person's baptizing himself? He also accused Smyth of spiritual pride, posturing himself as "holyer then all."[15]

More Changes

Though he had rejected the legitimacy of Mennonite Baptism previously, Hetherington's observation that Smyth had neither precept nor example for a self-baptism plus his accusation of disorder and spiritual pride made him reconsider. This renewed visit to Mennonite theology led to a theological shift in Smyth and resulted in his desire to seek admission to their church. He presented a twenty article Latin confession for the examination of the Mennonites. Not only is it antipaedobaptist, the doctrine now clearly takes the anti-Augustinian viewpoint of the Mennonites on predestination, original sin, and the will, as well as the anti-Lutheran view of justification by faith. Its wording on Christology is careful neither to offend the Mennonite history nor clearly to affirm celestial flesh.

This confession was followed by a full theological interchange between the Mennonites and the church of Smyth. His final theological position was stated in *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion*. The extent and intensity of Smyth's theological shift, given the clarity of previous Calvinistic Puritanism, is quite startling. Original sin is an idle term

and infants are conceived and born in innocency. Election, instead of being personal and unconditional, is God's having chosen to establish the way of salvation through faith in Christ. Christ's atonement is for all without exception and removes our enmity against God–not God's against us–for he never hated nor was ever our enemy. The whole system of imputation so central to Smyth's earlier preaching was now defunct. Justification consists of regeneration and renewal. A Christian cannot possibly perform the duties of a magistrate. Smyth still maintained his high view of Scripture but argues a strange assertion that "the new creature although he be above the law and scriptures, yet he can doe nothing against the law or scriptures." He also continued to maintain that "outward baptisme of water, is to be administred onely uppon" penitent and faithful persons and not infants or wicked persons.

Smyth changed not only his theology but began to express lament over past attitudes. He had been too harsh, too judgmental, too censorious, too punctilious on external matters, and too quick to rule people out of Christ and into antichrist. He chose to retract much of his writing not because it was wholly false "but for that it is wholy censorious and criticall."

Though his writings indicated strong confidence in his positions, he had always been willing to change when convinced by superior arguments. Now he refused to enter into controversy with his critics. Some said he was unable to answer their arguments. He had become convinced in conscience, however, that he should not strive about external matters and breed controversy among brethren. "I had rather be accounted unable to answere" Smyth wrote, "then to be found in synne against my conscience."[16] Though some might find glory in being "peremptorie and immutable" in their doctrine, they may enjoy that glory without the envy of Smyth though not without the grief of his heart for them. Smyth based his salvation on a faith that did not include any articles concerning the external nature of the church. In this confession he claimed to "differ from no Good Christian."

> *That Jesus Christ the Sonne of God, and the Sonne of Marie, is the Anointed king, Priest, and Prophett of the church, the onlie mediator of the new Testament, and that through true repentance and faith in him who alone is our saviour, wee receive remission of sinnes, and the holie ghost in this lyfe, and there-with all the redemption of our bodies: and whosoever walketh accordinge to this rule, I must needs acknowledge him my brother: yea, although he differ from me in divers other particulars.[17]*

His friend Thomas Helwys, who broke with him when he began overtures to join the Mennonites, had issued several censures of Smyth concerning succession in the institution of baptism and Smyth's views on the flesh of Christ. Smyth responded with carefully worded explanations. In accusing Smyth of sinning against the Holy Spirit by rejecting the truth,

specifically the legitimacy of his self-baptism, Helwys, in Smyth's words, "erreth not a little, and breaketh the bonde of charitie above all men that I ever read or heard in uttering so sharp a Censure uppon so weake a ground."

On the flesh of Christ, Smyth personally believed that Christ obtained his flesh from his mother Mary. Yet the issue was not so important as an article of faith "that if anie man will not consent unto it I should therfore refuse brotherhood with him." Even better, according to Smyth, than a correctly worded knowledge of Christ's natural flesh is a conformity to his spiritual flesh. The purpose of the incarnation after all was that sinners might be remade in the likeness of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in mortification of sin and the new birth. They are to be made "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, spiritually in the fellowship of one holy anointing."

One who moved so rapidly from one doctrinal rubric to another necessarily carries baggage with him and runs the strong possibility of picking up contradictions along the way. So it was with Smyth. As mentioned above, he introduced ambivalence between the final authority of Scripture in all things and the present working of the Spirit in the life of the "new Creature." The doctrine of original sin became muddled also. He attempted to reject it entirely in strong forthright language of his *Short Confession:* "That there is no original sin, but all sin is actual and voluntary, viz., a word, a deed. or a design against the law of God; and therefore infants are without sin."[18] In *Propositions and Conclusions,* however, the reader will find that original sin has not been so neatly excised from Smyth's thinking and feeling. "When we have done all that we can" Smyth admits, we find that we only can "suppress and lop off the branches of sin, but the root of sin we cannot pluck up out of our hearts." Original sin has hung around the theological premises and appears as "root of sin."

His shift on justification involved the same imprecision and residual uneasiness. The *Short Confession* makes justification consist partly of Christ's righteousness imputed and "partly of inherent righteousness, in the holy themselves." This assertion makes all the more sobering the idea retained in the *Propositions and Conclusions* that "when we have done all we can we are unprofitable servants, and all our righteousness is as a stained cloth."[19] By combining these two confessions we must conclude that God accepts our unrighteousness, our stained cloths, as constituting sufficient righteousness to complement Christ's righteousness.

Before he could be received into membership of the Mennonite church, Smyth died in late August 1612 and was buried in the Niewe Kerke on September 1. His followers continued their overtures for union with the Dutch, and eventually were received in January, 1615. When the church listed its teachers, John Smyth headed the list of those that were "English."

Conclusion

The complexity of Smyth defies any neat arrangement of his contributions to a single denomination. He must be evaluated on his own terms and in light of the provocation he provided for the creative energies of others. He was a hurricane that spawned tornadoes over the land though his own energy was spent over the ocean before landfall. Smyth's defense of believers baptism found many sympathizers and established a credible defense for a practice that many considered a divisive innovation. His view of the church led naturally into an affirmation of liberty of conscience and separation of church and state. This idea also found many advocates and gradually cut its way through the forest of persecution into the future of western civilization.

Finally, precisely at the points in which he departed from historic Calvinism, Smyth opened the door to the descending stairway of theological decline. The tendency of Arminianism to liberalism does not in each instance become incarnate, but the frequency of such decline in Baptist history is enough to serve as a warning. Under the influence of the Mennonites, Smyth embraced an anti-Augustinianism in his view of sin, depravity, election, and justification that many future evangelicals would find more compatible with their view of a kinder, gentler God.

NOTES:

[1] W. T. Whitley. The Works of John Smyth, 2 vols.(Cambridge: University Press, 1915), 1: xxxviii.

[2] Smyth, Works, 1:116

[3] Smyth, Works, 1:120.

[4] Smyth, "The Bright Morning Starre," Works, 1:65, 66.

[5] Smyth, Works 1:65.

[6] Smyth, Works, 1: 159.

[7] Smyth, Works, 2: 574.

[8] Smyth, Works, 2:567.

[9] Smyth, Works,2:582-583.

[10] Smyth, Works,2:468.

[11] Richard Bernard, Plaine Evidences: The Church of England is Apostolicall, the Seperation Schismaticall (London: T. Snodham), p. 17.

[12] Smyth, Works, 2:572.

[13] Smyth, Works, 2:660.

[14] Smyth, Works, 2:564.

[15] John Hetherington, A Description of the Church of Christ (London: Nathaniel Fosbrooke, 1610), 23.

[16] Smyth, Works, 2:756.

[17] Smyth, Works, 2:753.

[18] William L. Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions of Faith (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959), 100.

[19] Lumpkin, 136.

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