BAPTISTS ROOTS IN AMERICA

The Historical Background of Reformed Baptists in America

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Contents

Preface

OVER THE LAST 30 years churches calling themselves "Reformed Baptist" have begun to dot the American evangelical landscape. Though in basic matters, these churches and their members are evangelical, they differ in many important doctrinal and practical concerns from their neighbors. These differences have not been hid under a bushel. Indeed, Christians in these churches did not desire to keep their distinctives hidden, because critical and vital biblical perspectives were at stake. Furthermore, it was just these perspectives, it seemed to them, that evangelical Christians and churches needed to hear. Otherwise the name of God and the witness of the gospel would increasingly be in jeopardy.

The efforts of Reformed Baptists to spread the truth were not appreciated by some. Their efforts brought reproach upon them, their churches, and the things they believed. They were called novel, extremist, and even cultic.

This is a book for Reformed Baptists and their friends. Reformed Baptist Christians are "strangers in a strange land."

This book is intended to show that their "strangeness" is not their own fault, but is due to the deviations of modern Baptist churches from historic, Baptist thought and practice. It is intended to reassure them that it is not they, but modern Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism which are the novelty in the broad stream of historic Christianity. It is also intended to forewarn them (as Paul did for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:4) that the truths of God they hold precious will be offensive to our American neighbors and will bring affliction on ourselves. My hope is that "being forewarned we will be forearmed." My desire is that these perspectives will not lessen our zeal, but rather charge us with a sense of the corporate mission which is before us. The very offensiveness of what we believe is, perhaps, the best index of how desperately our generation needs it.

What do I mean by "Reformed Baptists?" Any attempt to define such terms may be subjective. This term, however, is in itself extraordinarily clear. By "Reformed Baptists" I intend those churches and individuals who hold a Baptist view of the church and baptism and who also hold to the central truths associated with the stream of Reformed Protestantism flowing out of the Reformation of the 16th Century. These truths include the doctrines of grace (the five points of Calvinism), but also encompass the many other vital truths which are entailed in an understanding of the comprehensive sovereignty of God in His grace and His law.

The unique doctrinal and practical outlook of Reformed Baptists was summarized historically in the London Confession of Faith published in 1689. For almost 300 years this has

been the standard doctrinal statement of such Baptists. Most Reformed Baptists today hold to this Confession as comprehensively summarizing their understanding of the Word of God. As will become evident, this Confession plays a key role in guiding Reformed Baptists to their roots and exposing the novelties of modern Baptists.

Before the story begins, a word must be said as to why this book is limited to Reformed Baptists in America. Reformed Baptists have also emerged in a number of other countries and most prominently in Great Britain. Further, it is impossible to sever American and British church history. This will be repeatedly evident as we proceed. We are, however, Americans and American religious history is distinct. Major factors operated in America that did not operate, at least not to the same extent, in other parts of the world. Thus, it is appropriate to single out the origins or historical background of Reformed Baptists in America.

The significance of this book is, however, not as limited as its subject might suggest. This is so for two reasons. The following pages will provide evidence that the story of Baptists in America and the historical background of Reformed Baptists in America are intimately related. Secondly, the missionary movement, for better or for worse, has exported American Christianity throughout the world. For Baptists in other parts of the world who trace their origins to Baptist missionaries from America, the roots of Baptists in America cannot be without interest.

I
The Rise of Particular Baptists In America

THOUGH THE term "Reformed Baptist" was used by Calvinistic Baptists in the 19th Century,[1] the common phrase used to describe such Baptists in England and America from the 17th to the 19th Centuries was "Particular Baptist." This phrase described them as holding to the doctrine of particular redemption, the distinctively Calvinistic view of the atonement. Frequently such Baptists formally embraced the London Confession of 1689, the standard confession of Particular Baptists in both England and America.

Their Roots in America

The British Immigration. The roots of Particular Baptists in America are to be traced first to the immigration of English

[1]W. J. Berry, comp., *The Kehukee Declaration and Black Rock Address with other writings relative to The Baptists Separation between 1825-1840 Gilbert Beebe a biographical sketch* (Elon College, North Carolina: Primitive Publications, n. d.), 13.

and Welsh Baptists. One striking incident which illustrates the arrival of Particular Baptists in America concerns Elias Keach, the son of Benjamin Keach, prolific Baptist author and signer of the London Confession of 1689. The nineteenth century historian Thomas Armitage relates the incident:

> Elias Keach came to this country in 1686, a year before this Church was formed. He was the son of Benjamin Keach of noble memory, for endurance of the pillory, and for the authorship of a key to Scripture metaphors and an exposition of all the parables. When Elias arrived in Pennsylvania, he was a wild scamp of nineteen, and for sport dressed like a clergyman. His name and appearance soon obtained invitations for him to preach, as a young divine from London. A crowd of people came to hear him, and concluding to brave the thing out he began to preach, but suddenly stopped short in his sermon. There was a stronger fluttering than he had counted on in the heart which had caught its life from its honored father and mother, despite the black coat and white bands under which it beat. He was alarmed at his own boldness, stopped short, and the little flock at Lower Dublin thought him seized with sudden illness. When asked for the cause of his fear he burst into tears, confessed his imposture and threw himself upon the mercy of God for the pardon of all his sins. Immediately he made for Cold Spring to ask the counsel of Thomas Dungan, who took him lovingly by the hand, led him to Christ, and when they were both satisfied of his thorough conversion he baptized him; and his Church sent the young evangelist forth to preach Jesus and the resurrection. . . . Keach made his way back to Pennepek, where he began to preach with great power. The four already named were baptized as the first-fruits of his ministry, then he organized the Church and threw himself into his Gospel work with consuming zeal. He traveled at large, preaching at Trenton, Philadelphia, Middletown, Cohansey, Salem and many other places, and baptized his converts into the fellowship of the Church at Pennepek, so that all the Baptists of New Jersey and Pennsylvania were connected with that body, except the little band at Cold Spring.[2]

Eventually in 1707 the church planted in Pennepek with several others formed the Philadelphia Baptist Association. In 1742 this Association adopted with only two very minor additions the London Confession of 1689. It therefore became known as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. This Association and its Confession exercised enormous influence. Testimonies might be multiplied in this matter. Armitage asserts,

> This confession became the basis on which almost all the Associations of this country were established, until what is called the New Hampshire Confession was drawn up by the late Dr. John Newton Brown.[3]

David Benedict, a Baptist historian from the mid-nineteenth century, remarks,

> The Baptist Philadelphia Confession of Faith, so-called, because it went out from this city, was a document of high authority among all the old Baptist churches in this part of

[2]Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, & Co., 1887), 707-8.

[3]Armitage, *A History of the Baptists,* 716.

> the country, and generally throughout the South and West, when I traveled in those regions. . . .[4]

The well-known historian of American Christianity, William W. Sweet, elaborates,

> In 1742 this body met at Philadelphia with five churches represented. In 1742 this body adopted a strong Calvinistic confession of faith which is considered a turning point in the history of American Baptists. Up to this time the Arminian Baptists had been more numerous, especially in New England, but from this time forward the majority of American Baptists have been Calvinistic in their theology, and the Philadelphia Association became and remained the strongest and most influential Baptist body.[5]

Baptist churches connected with this Association became known as "regular Baptists."[6]

The Great Awakening. The Awakening in America beginning in the 1730's and 1740's was Calvinistic. It was opposed by those associated with Arminianism.[7] This revival with its injection of spiritual life into the religious scene in the American colonies gave tremendous impetus to evangelism

[4]Berry, *The Kehukee Declaration*, 52.

[5]William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 76.

[6]This designation is not to be confused with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC) organized during the Fundamentalist Controversy almost two centuries later. It is probably true, however, that it was this usage that lay behind the adoption of the term by the GARBC. Ironically, the Calvinistic identification contained in this term has been forgotten by the GARBC which refuses to take a definitively Calvinistic doctrinal stand.

[7]Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 6-10, 132-5, 153-4, 170-9, 187-8.

and church growth in America. The preaching which spearheaded this thrust was the Reformed and Calvinistic preaching of Whitefield, Edwards, and the Tennents.

In New England this new life led to the formation of many separatist churches. During the previous century Massachusetts and Connecticut had practiced a kind of established or state church system. The Congregational churches of "the standing order" composed that state church. These churches established by the Puritans a century before in a quest for Reformed purity had fallen on evil days. They were increasingly lifeless and formalistic, giving increasingly important status to the practice of infant baptism.

The spiritual life generated by the Great Awakening caused a reaction against such churches. Whitefield's and others' emphasis on the all-importance of the new birth created a desire for churches where spiritual life, rather than formal religion, was the controlling reality. Naturally enough, many of the separating churches spawned or actually became Baptist churches. Important Particular Baptist leaders like Isaac Backus came out of this scene. Baptists from this background were known as "separate Baptists."

Their Predominance in America

Though from early colonial times General (Arminian) Baptists and Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists had existed in about equal strength in America, in the 50 years following 1740 Particular Baptists surpassed General Baptists in a surge of evangelism and growth. General Baptist churches

sometimes even became Particular Baptist. Ahlstrom in his massive and valuable study of religion in America remarks,

> The response of the Philadelphia Association to two separate pleas for ministerial aid brought the first signs of rejuvenation. Two men were dispatched in 1752 to survey the field in Virginia, and in the next four years missionaries from the association effected reorganizations in nearly all the old General Baptist churches in Virginia and North Carolina, while agents of the Charleston Association came northward for the same purpose. The result was that between 1752 and 1756 all but two or three churches were transformed into the Particular Baptist pattern. They dismissed many unconverted members (in some cases reducing the membership from over a hundred to fewer than a dozen), tightened discipline, adopted a Westminster-oriented confession, and fostered a spirit of unity. These reorganized churches in eastern North Carolina and Virginia joined to form the Kehukee Association in 1769. These Particular Philadelphia-oriented churches styled themselves "Regular" to distinguish themselves from the "irregular" Separate Baptists who began to flood the southern colonies after 1755.[8]

Though, as Ahlstrom intimates, there was initial conflict between the "regulars" and the "separates," both were Reformed in their roots and Calvinistic in their theology. Thus, reconciliation and union between the two groups was increasingly common. The strength of the "regulars" was their doctrinal stability and strict church order, while that of the "separates" was their fiery, evangelistic zeal.

[8]Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 318.

Their Growth in America

When the strengths of these two groups of Calvinistic Baptists were combined, it furthered and solidified the tremendous growth of Baptists in America which began in about 1740. The chart below illustrates this growth.[9]

Year	Churches
1660	4
1700	33
1740	96
1780	457

As noted previously, the vast majority of this growth consisted of the planting of Particular Baptist Churches.

Also contributing to this growth was the tremendous freedom and flexibility of Baptist church polity. It was peculiarly suited to church-planting on the frontier as it moved constantly westward. Ahlstrom illustrates this in the emphasis he lays on the "farmer-preacher."

> The proliferation of Baptist churches depended above all upon their spiritual vitality and their individualistic emphasis on conversion. Yet they were remarkably well adapted to the social structures (or lack of them) on the frontier. Baptists did not exceed Presbyterians in zeal, but they were unhindered by the bottlenecks to evangelistic work created by strict educational requirements and a rigid presbyterial polity. The genius of Baptist evangelism was also at the opposite pole from the Methodist insistence on order and authority. Its frontier hero was not the circuit rider but the

[9]Mark A. Noll, *Eerdman's Handbook to Christianity in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1983), 97.

> farmer-preacher, who moved with the people into new areas. Unpaid, self-supporting, and hence financially independent, the farmer-preacher was usually a man who had heard the "call" to the ministry and got himself licensed to preach. In due course he would be ordained by a church, sometimes one which he had gathered himself. From such churches sprang other candidates for the ministry, and by this process the Baptists advanced into the wilderness, or moved back in among the unchurched multitudes of the older areas, without direction from bishops or synods, and without financial support from denominational agencies or special societies. On many occasions an entire church would move on to a new location, just as Lewis Craig's congregation moved from Virginia to become Gilbert's Creek Church in Kentucky in 1783. Baptist work was not as disorganized as all this may imply, however, for their regional associations fostered a spirit of unity, as well as a concern for discipline and doctrinal harmony."[10]

Before the great influx of Catholic immigrants beginning around 1850, the Baptists had become the largest religious group in America. They remain the largest Protestant grouping to this day.

[10]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History,* 443.

II
The Decline of Particular Baptists In America

WITH THIS historical background before us, a very natural question arises. What happened? How did Calvinism and the Particular Baptist heritage almost totally disappear by the mid-twentieth century in America? The answer to this question is not simple. Accuracy requires that various factors involved in the decline of the Particular Baptist heritage be specified.

It is true, of course, that there is an innate tendency in every depraved human heart to compromise or reject the truth of God. This tendency operates even in Christian hearts through the principle of remaining sin. The workings of this tendency may, however, be much more specifically traced as it undermined, diluted, and polluted the heritage of truth once possessed by Baptists.

Seven major factors contributed to the decline and debasement of the Particular Baptist heritage in America. Other factors might, of course, be mentioned. It is not being

claimed that in this matter seven is the perfect number. Yet, the seven factors to be mentioned were clearly responsible for most of the deviation by Baptists in America from their heritage.

The American, Democratic Ethos

In naming "The American, Democratic Ethos" as public enemy number one of the Particular Baptist heritage, it is certainly not my intention to say that nothing good or positive was contained in the American, political scene. American democracy was associated almost from the beginning with a Constitution that took into account the depravity of human nature and therefore limited the power of government. Particular Baptists were in no small degree responsible for the Bill of Rights which safeguarded much of American life from the tyranny of the civil authorities. In America a social environment was produced which prized and protected human liberty. Baptist church polity with its biblical emphasis on the independence of the local church prospered in this environment. More importantly Baptists were not repressed or persecuted in America as in other lands. Baptists have much to be thankful for politically and socially in America.

But if the Particular Baptists' independent polity thrived in America, their Calvinistic theology did not. There was something in the political philosophy associated with the American Revolution which was profoundly antithetical to Calvinism. There was something also in the Baptist alliance with the likes of Thomas Jefferson which did not bode well for the future.

This should not surprise us. The ringleaders of the American revolution generally were not Christians at all. The actual authors of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, were clearly not evangelical Christians. They were, in fact, among the most radically anti-Christian thinkers in America. Though the Declaration of Independence is often read and interpreted as if it were a Christian document, it really has much more in common with radical Deism than biblical Christianity.[11] With such principles dominating the public mind, it is interesting to notice that after the American Revolution a period of spiritual decline settled on the American churches.[12]

The pervasively Christian environment in which the radical political views of Jefferson and company took root gave a much better appearance to them in America. In France where no such mitigating factor existed the French Revolution and its Reign of Terror revealed their true character and tendency. The genuinely anti-Christian character of this aspect of the American, democratic ethos became evident very shortly in the reaction it produced against the sovereign God of the Bible and Calvinism. *Eerdmans Handbook to Christianity in America* contains these penetrating remarks,

> In the years after the American Revolution the new republic witnessed a revolt of substantial proportions against Calvinism. "This is an age of freedom," declared one Presbyterian minister, "and men will be free." Abner Jones, a New

[11]C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981), 1-90.

[12]*Eerdman's Handbook*, 162ff.; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 364ff.; Sweet, *The Story of Religion*, 223-5.

England itinerant preacher who refused denominational affiliation, made plain the unsettling effect that popular notions of equality could have upon Calvinist orthodoxy. In his memoir, written in 1807, he began: "In giving the reader an account of my birth and parentage I shall not (like the celebrated Franklin and others) strive to prove that I arose from a family of eminence; believing that all men are born equal, and that every man shall die for his own inequity." Equality for Jones exploded the notion of original sin, that people were not morally free to choose for themselves.

In this period one finds evidence of a similar revolt against each of the so-called five points of Calvinism. Just as notions of "total depravity" did not stand up well to the belief that individuals were capable of shaping their own destiny, so "unconditional election" seemed to deny that people were fully capable of determining the course of their own lives. The antidemocratic tendency of the doctrine of election emerged even more clearly in the idea of a "limited atonement"—that the design of Christ's death was restricted to those whom God elected to salvation. Similarly, the concept of "irresistible grace" seemed to make God a tyrant of uncontrollable power, just that from which Americans had fought to free themselves. Finally, the focus on volitional commitment as the primary human obligation made the idea of the "perseverance of the saints"—that Christians are sustained by the choice of another and preserved in grace to the end of their days—irrelevant, if not contradictory. Given this potential for a revolt against Calvinism premised on certain self-evident principles of democracy, what is striking is the number of Calvinists in this period undergoing a certain crisis of conscience, a deconversion from Calvinism. Barton

W. Stone, the founder of the "Christians" in Kentucky and Illinois in the wake of the Second Great Awakening, began as a Presbyterian but after great intellectual turmoil came to harmonize his theology with social experience. Stone confessed that as a Calvinist he had been "embarrassed with many obtrusive doctrines. . . . Scores of objections would continually roll across my mind." What he called the "Labyrinth of Calvinism" left him "distressed," "perplexed," and "bewildered." He concluded that "Calvinism is amongst the most discouraging hindrances to sinners seeking the Kingdom of God." He was relieved from this dissonance of values only when he jettisoned Presbyterianism for what he called "the rich pastures of gospel liberty."

The Freewill Baptist minister William Smyth Babcock, similarly, found Calvinism antithetical to common sense. He spoke of its "senseless jargon of election and reprobation" and concluded that it had covered salvation "with a mist of absurdities." "Its doctrine is denied in the practice of every converted soul in the first exercises of the mind after receiving liberty." Babcock, an itinerant preacher in rural New England, included in his diary the poem of a nine-year-old girl from one of his congregations. The sentiments of this child capture Babcock's conception of the gospel revolving around the issues of liberty and bondage:

> Know then that every soul is free
> To choose his life and what he'll be
> For this eternal truth is given
> That God will force no man to heaven
>
> He'll draw, persuade, direct him right
> Bless him with wisdom, love, and light

In nameless ways be good and kind
But never force the human mind[13]

Clearly, there was an ungodly and anti-Christian spirit at work in America. Though it would be long-resisted in Particular Baptist circles, even there it would erode cherished conviction. In all that was good about the United States, there was an unholy emphasis on inalienable rights, human freedom, and hatred of authority which emerged as a reaction against Calvinism. The full revelation of this anti-God spirit and its ugly fruits would be later manifested in the "Abortion-Rights'" and "Gay-Rights'" movements of the later 20th Century.

Revivalism

The revivalism associated with Whitefield and Edwards in the Great Awakening and Asahel Nettleton in the Second Great Awakening was thoroughly Calvinistic. Two influences, however, early became part of revivalism as it developed which gave it a negative and anti-Calvinistic influence in Baptist churches.

Early opponents of the Great Awakening and its revivals tended to use an emphasis on church order and confessional orthodoxy in their battles against these revivals. Edwards himself and other friends of revival cautioned against the imbalance and extremism epitomized in Davenport and certain other revivalists. The total effect of this debate in many converted or awakened through the Great Awakening,

[13]*Eerdmans Handbook*, pp. 166, 167.

however, was to make them quite suspicious of and even react against formal confessions. The "separate" Baptists manifested this trait. Though very Calvinistic, they tended to be anti-creedal in their attitudes. Even after "regulars" and "separates" began to merge, this injected a doctrinal looseness into Particular Baptist churches. This anti-creedal attitude would be exploited by Arminianism and later yet by Modernism. Ahlstrom aptly summarizes the resulting situation.

> The older Baptists and the newcomers naturally regarded each other with suspicion at first, the Separates objecting to the creedal rigor of the Regulars, the latter chary of the unrestrained enthusiasm of the Separates. The Regulars proved able to appreciate evangelistic success, however, while the Separates did tend to agree with the doctrinal substance of the Philadelphia Confession. Led by their common Baptist convictions, they broached merger in Virginia as early as 1767, although it was not consummated until two decades later, when both parties felt it urgent to unite in order to press for disestablishment of Anglicanism and complete religious liberty. With the proviso that the Confession of Faith be received only "as containing the great essential doctrines of the gospel, yet, not in so strict a sense, that all are obliged to believe everything therein contained," the Virginia Separates and Regulars agreed in 1787 that these party names should be "buried in oblivion". . . .
>
> The general doctrinal position of the resulting Baptist tradition was distinctly Reformed, a modified version of the Westminster; yet the prevailing distrust of rigid creedal definitions allowed considerable latitude for doctrinal differences.[14]

[14]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 320-1.

This latitude would over the next century and a half lead to a massive defection from Calvinism in churches that were once Particular Baptist. This defection would occur more rapidly in the North than it would in the South, but it would occur in no small measure as a result of Baptist anti-creedalism.

The door which was cracked open to Arminianism in the early 19th Century by Baptist anti-creedalism, a century later—because of the same anti-creedalism—could not be closed to Modernism. Ahlstrom draws the correlation.

> In the Northern Baptist Convention the Fundamentalist controversy involved wider extremes than among the Presbyterians. On the one hand, the Baptists' anticreedal congregationalism left the way more open to theological departures. An unusually large number of leading liberal theologians were Baptists—Clarke, Rauschenbusch, Fosdick, Matthews, and Macintosh, to name only the more prominent.[15]

At the height of the Fundamentalist Controversy in the Northern Baptist Convention, conservatives had moved that the Convention adopt the New Hampshire Confession. If even this Confession, brief as it was, had been adopted, it would have been an effective basis on which to introduce disciplinary proceedings against Modernists, but Baptist anti-creedalism enabled the Modernists to fend off the conservatives. Furniss relates the tragic story of the 1922 convention.

[15]Ahlstrom, *A Religous History*, 912.

> On the most important test of strength, the adoption of a declaration of faith, the Fundamentalists suffered another defeat. When Riley moved that the convention pledge itself to the New Hampshire Confession, Woelfkin's substitute proposal, "That the New Testament is the all-sufficient ground of our faith and practice, and we need no other statement," was approved by a large majority, 1,264 to 637.[16]

This incident strikingly illustrates the truth of a remark of Marcus Dods. In support of holding a clearly defined confession, he said:

> A man may accept as the rule of his faith the same inspired books as yourself, while he rejects every important article of the faith you find in these books. If, therefore, we are to know who believe as we do, and who dissent from our faith, we must state our creed in language explicitly rejecting such interpretations of Scripture as we deem to be false. Papists, Unitarians, Arminians, all profess to find their doctrines in Scripture; but they do not find them in the Westminster Confession. . . .[17]

Even so Modernists could profess to hold in some sense the New Testament, but they could not profess to hold the New Hampshire Confession.

A second way in which revivalism tended to dilute and distort the Particular Baptist heritage also became evident in the 19th Century. Revivalism in the period called by Ahlstrom "The Golden Day of Democratic Evangelicalism"

[16]Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archen Books, 1963).

[17]James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* vol. 1, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 298.

was increasingly dominated by those who were semi-Pelagian (the Wesleyan Methodists) or worse (Charles Finney) in theology. The free offer of the gospel, so central to revivalism, was viewed as demanding an Arminian theology. A minimizing mentality also emerged in these revivalists which streamlined the gospel and viewed Calvinism as confusing the simple gospel of human freedom to accept or reject Christ.

> Another element which became almost symbiotic with revivalism was Arminianism, a doctrinal tendency whose name stemmed from an intramural dispute of the Netherlands Reformed church but whose propagation in America owed most to Wesley and the Methodists. Because an emphasis on man's free will was intrinsic to revivalism, the doctrines of unconditional election and limited atonement lost their vitality. Practice of the "new measures" led to "New School" theology. By the end of the century double predestination was the doctrine of only the Hard-shell Baptists, a declining number of Old School Presbyterians, and a few smaller groups. In 1906, upon receiving back the Cumberland Presbyterians after a century of separation on this issue, the Presbyterian Church (North) formally revised the Westminster Confession to an Arminian reading; and by 1911 most of the Freewill Baptists, after an even longer separation, found the offending doctrine too weak to prevent reunion. As God's predestinating decrees passed from favor, the floodgates of emotionalism and sentimentality in religion were opened, with the result that the doctrine of human depravity was also threatened with inundation. Because revivalists so often addressed interdenominational audiences, moreover, nearly all doctrinal emphases tended to be suppressed, not only by the famous spellbinders, but by the thousands upon thousands of local ministers and now-forgotten regional itinerants. Gradually a kind of unwritten consensus emerged, its cardinal articles being the infallibility of the Scriptures, the divinity of Christ, and man's duty to be converted from the ways of sin to a life guided by a pietistic code of morals. Revivalism, in other words, was a mighty engine of doctrinal destruction."[18]

Methodism

Both Baptists and Methodists were most active on the frontier. This meant that a great deal of contact, conflict, and ultimately blending occurred between the two major, frontier religious groups. The experience of one close friend is not unusual. He comes from a Baptist church in Iowa that was originally Methodist until calling a Baptist pastor. Often, even when people joined Baptist churches, they had been profoundly influenced by Wesleyan preachers. A story told by Ahlstrom humorously illustrates the interaction between Baptists and Methodists on the frontier. Peter Cartwright, a Methodist circuit-rider, stopped to preach in a crumbling old Baptist church. There he preached with the help of the Holy Spirit to a large congregation and a number were converted. Ahlstrom continues:

> But Cartwright moved on, and the Baptists, having heard of his twenty-three conquests, sent three preachers to the place. The few scattered Methodists in the neighborhood then took alarm, he said, "for fear these preachers would run my converts into the water before I could come round." They persuaded Cartwright to return, and he was able to

[18]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 844-5.

save his spiritual children only at the very brink of the creek, by a most desperate stratagem. Cartwright presented himself for Baptist membership, recounted his own Christian experience, and was received gleefully by the Baptist preacher. At the last moment, however, in the hearing of all, he declared that he still believed in infant sprinkling, thus forcing the Baptist to reject him publicly. At the sight of his rejection, his twenty-three converts returned to the Methodist fold."[19]

Inclusivism

Almost from the beginning the fight for religious freedom and a biblical separation of church and state in America was a unifying force among Baptist churches. This served to accentuate the commonality possessed by all Baptists whether strictly Calvinistic or not. When this inclusivistic tendency was reinforced by the anti-creedalism of the "separate" Baptists, actual compromise with Arminianism in doctrinal matters began to occur. An important compromise in Kentucky in 1801 was one of the first evidences of this tendency. While basically Calvinistic, it contained this provision, "And that the preaching [that] Christ tasted death for every man shall be no bar to communion."[20] Ahlstrom properly comments, "that is, deviation from strict Reformed teaching on 'limited atonement' is allowed."[21] As noted previously, this compromise would in a little over a century become so complete among Baptists in the North that the Freewill Baptists would be welcomed into the

[19]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 444.
[20]Ahlstrom, *A Religous History*, 442.
[21]Ahlstrom, *A Religous History*, 442.

Northern Baptist Convention, the successor of the old Philadelphia Baptist Association.

In between these two events there appeared the New Hampshire Confession of Faith written or, at least, popularized by John Newton Brown in 1833. It arose in the context of the Freewill Baptist's increasing popularity in New England. Although the Confession emphasized the Particular Baptist commitment to human responsibility, duty-faith, and the general call of the gospel against Freewill Baptist caricatures of Particular Baptist beliefs, it was more brief and also less definitive regarding the doctrines of grace than the Philadelphia Confession. Tom Nettles in his fine treatment of Baptists' historic commitment to the doctrines of grace defends the New Hampshire Confession against being interpreted as a retreat from Calvinism.[22] Though Nettles may well be correct, the growing popularity of the New Hampshire Confession and the tendency for it to displace the Philadelphia Confession certainly did nothing to stem the anti-Calvinistic tide among Baptists later in the 19th Century. In both its brevity and vagueness it seems characteristic of the inclusivism which we are considering.

Whether or not we consider the brevity and comparative vagueness of the New Hampshire Confession as indicative of an Arminian drift in Particular Baptist thought, it clearly evinces the Calvinism which dominated earlier Baptist thought in America. For even if we interpret it as a toned down Calvinistic confession, it is clearly a confession that

[22]Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 47.

only those with a Calvinistic tradition would write or adopt. That observation brings us to our next point. For not a little part of the blame for the debasing of the Particular Baptist heritage must be ascribed to hyper-Calvinism.

Hyper-Calvinism

So dominant was Calvinism in the 18th and 19th Centuries among Baptists that at that period hyper-Calvinism rather than Arminianism was probably the greater danger. Defining hyper-Calvinism is not easy.[23] So rare is it in our day that some attempt at defining must be made. This attempt is especially necessary since in our day historic, mainstream and biblical Calvinism is often called hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism cannot be, however, believing in all of the five points of Calvinism. That is simply Calvinism, not hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism, as it will be used here, is the denial of the idea that the gospel call addresses those who are not elect. In other words, it is the denial of the idea that faith is the duty of everyone who hears the gospel. Such denials generally carried with them a defective understanding of human responsibility as a whole. This resulted in passivism in the Christian life and the rejection of evangelistic effort. This was hyper-Calvinism as it had emerged among the Particular Baptists of England in the Strict Baptist movement.[24] This was the hyper-Calvinism encountered in England by such great Particular Baptists as Andrew Fuller and William Carey.

[23]Nettles, *By His Grace*, 385-391. In this portion of his book Nettles cites several modern attempts at such definition and then provides his own.

[24]Erroll Hulse, *An Introduction to the Baptists* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1973), 21-6, 32-6.

In America such hyper-Calvinism reared its ugly head especially in the South. In reaction to Arminianism and the methods of the modern missions movement, some Baptists hardened into hyper-Calvinistic perspectives.[25] This reaction compensated for Arminianism (both real and perceived) by becoming anti-evangelistic, passive, and even heretical. Ahlstrom provides this account.

> Since early colonial days Baptists had been seriously divided in one way or another, but the emergence of the missionary movement and the founding of the General Missionary Convention in 1814 had raised new divisive forces: a widespread, popularly based opposition to organized evangelism, the practice of founding "unbiblical" societies, and a related concern for education. When Alexander Campbell's advocacy added strength to dissenting views during his Baptist years (1813-1830), antimissionism became a powerful new force, usually among the poorest and least educated elements of the constituency, who felt threatened by eastern money-raising organizations and their relatively well-educated emissaries. In backward sections of the South, therefore, the condemnatory exclusivism of this "Hard-Shell" movement gained very effective grassroots leadership, notably that of Daniel Parker (1781-1844). Though born in Virginia, Parker was a product of the Georgia frontier who later worked in Tennessee, Kentucky, southern Illinois, and Texas. With great skill and power he expounded the chief convictions of the "anti-effort Baptists," above all, their extreme predestinarian "antinomianism," their belief that God needed neither "new-fangled" societies nor the corrupting influences

[25]For an account of this from the perspective of the hyper-Calvinists see *The Kehukee Declaration* cited above.

of higher learning to advance the gospel in the world. Parker himself also developed certain doctrinal innovations that made him the chief prophet of the "Two Seed" predestinarian Baptist sect.

This type of extremist advocacy led to the organization in state after state of separate congregations and associations of "Primitive" Baptists. They made great headway in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia, and very significant inroads in western states. By 1846 antimission Baptists numbered at least sixty-eight thousand, or about 10 percent of the country's total Baptist population. Throughout the century their preaching hindered the organized work of Baptists, North and South, and won acceptance for Hard-Shell doctrines among countless persons and churches who never became affiliated with Primitive Baptist Associations. Their outspoken witness undoubtedly more than compensated for the Arminian tendencies advanced by the Freewill Baptists, but the "compensations" were sectional, since Freewill Baptists flourished chiefly in the North, predestinarians in the South.[26]

The special extremism of Parker is explained by Ahlstrom on the same pages. His peculiar doctrines—not characteristic of all hyper-Calvinists—can be called nothing less than heretical.

In 1820 Parker began his attack on Baptist missionary efforts with the publication of a pamphlet, A Public Address to the Baptist Society. In 1826 he stated his "Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit" doctrine in another pamphlet. This Two Seed theology was an exaggerated and eccentric form of predestinarianism: two seeds were planted in Eve, one by God (good seed), the other by Satan (bad seed). The election of individuals is determined by their "seed," and neither missionary societies nor anything else can do anything about it.

[26]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 721-2.

During his two-year stay in Illinois (1829-31), Parker published the Church Advocate, a monthly paper. His lifelong efforts led to the founding of churches in several states—chiefly in the south and in the middle region. In 1890 the "Old Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists" numbered 12,881; but by 1945 the membership had declined to 201 and the number of churches to sixteen.[27]

Such reactions tended to petrify Calvinistic churches, bring genuine Calvinism into reproach, and give the appearance of legitimacy to Arminian accusations. In no small measure they may be responsible for the popular misconceptions of and hostility toward Calvinism among evangelicals today.

Modernism

Modernism or Liberalism began to creep into the Baptist churches after the Civil War. By the dawn of the 20th Century it was a flood of heresy among Baptists. Such Modernism was simply the emphasis of Arminianism on human rights, freedom, and ability taken to its logical extreme of the denial of biblical authority itself. Naturally enough, it saw in Calvinism its deadly enemy. Thus, its most vehement assaults were directed against it.[28]

[27]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 721-2.
[28]Singer, *A Theological Interpretation*, 108, 148, 183, 300, 331-5.

It was mainly in denominations that retained something of their Calvinistic heritage that Liberalism was fought and sometimes defeated. In the more strongly predestinarian churches like the Southern Baptist, the Christian Reformed, and the Missouri Synod Lutheran it was defeated. Among the Northern Baptists and Northern Presbyterians who retained something of their Reformed doctrinal heritage, there was all-out war. Many churches split from these denominations when the battle against Liberalism was lost within them. Also supporting the correlation between Arminianism and Liberalism is the fact that denominations that were predominantly Arminian accepted Modernism with little fuss. Among these were the Northern Methodists, the Congregationalists, and the Episcopalians. Wherever Modernism was accepted among Baptists, of course, it meant the end of the Particular Baptist tradition.

The Fundamentalist Movement

The tendency to Modernism was countered by the Fundamentalist Movement. This trans-denominational movement emerged out of the Modernist Controversy, described by Sydney Ahlstrom as "the most fundamental controversy to wrack the churches since the Reformation."[29]

The main tenets of Fundamentalism, those regarding the Scriptures, were held, of course, by Calvinists. (The Hodges and Warfield at Princeton are, in fact, the most well-known defenders of inerrancy.) There were, however, three tendencies generally characteristic of Fundamentalism which

[29]Noll, *Eerdman's Handbook*, 321.

departed from Reformed Christianity and undermined it. Such tendencies, thus, debased the Particular Baptist heritage among Baptist churches influenced by Fundamentalism.

There was first, an understandable, but still dangerous focus on a few "fundamentals" of the faith. This led to the idea that any other doctrines, including the doctrines of grace, were unimportant. Though many Fundamentalists held these doctrines, they tended to produce division in the inter-denominational Fundamentalist coalition. Fundamentalists trying to close ranks against Modernism thought such doctrines could safely be minimized.

Secondly, Fundamentalism came to be dominated by Dispensational Premillenialism. This prophetic system came into existence and gained favor among conservative evangelicals in the 19th Century just as the Modernist Controversy was erupting. While taught by professed Calvinists in the beginning (J. N. Darby, for example), this system has manifested the consistent tendency to deviate from Reformed Christianity in soteriology, as well as in its view of redemptive history. Baptist churches influenced by Dispensationalism, and most are today, are therefore prone to deviate similarly from the Particular Baptist tradition.

Thirdly, Fundamentalism was characterized by the Keswick teaching on the "higher" or "victorious life." This was a modified form of Wesleyan Perfectionism and, thus, a departure from the Reformed doctrines of sin and sanctification. Perfectionism is always rooted in a Pelagianizing view of sin. Pelagian views of sin emphasize that man always retains the complete moral ability to choose what is good

and right. They, therefore, minimize or deny the idea that sin is rooted in a sinful nature viewing sin exlusively as an outward act. When sin is viewed merely as an act which does not adversely affect man's moral nature, it is very easy to think that men may lead sinless or practically sinless lives. (Pelagius the archenemy of Augustine's doctrine of irresistible grace taught that men could and had lived sinlessly in this life. Arminianism, the half-daughter of Pelagius, has also been sympathetic to such teaching beginning with Arminius himself.) As such the Keswick teaching tended to undermine the foundation of the whole Calvinistic system, its view of sin.

The rampant error of "Easy-believism" and the "Carnal Christian Theory" is due to the twin influences of Dispensationalism and Keswick. Dispensationalism theoretically and systematically divorces law and grace. This has meant practically that the demands of the gospel, faith and repentance, have been viewed increasingly as mental assent. The personal and covenantal character of commitment to Christ (with its inevitable fruit of new obedience to the laws of God) has been neglected. Some Dispensational teachers have concluded that requiring an embrace of Christ as Lord as integral to a saving response to the gospel is a denial of grace.

The Keswick teaching of a "higher life" tended to produce "Easy-believism" by giving the impression that there were two distinct classes of Christians. In emphasizing this distinction the further impression was left that the lower

class of Christians were little different from the unsaved in the practical tenor of their lives.

The only remaining remnant of Calvinism in most Baptist churches, "eternal security" as it is now known, only helps to complete the cheapening of grace. As popularly taught, this doctrine is thought to mean that men, after making their "decision for Christ," will be saved regardless and irrespective of the pursuit of holiness. This imbalanced understanding of the "Preservation of the Saints" serves only to further the "Easy Christianity" mentality prevalent in many Baptist churches.

III
The Rise of Reformed Baptists In America

IT IS LARGELY through the seven influences just considered that evangelical churches as a whole and Baptist churches especially have been brought to their present condition. An understanding of these influences and the original Baptist heritage which over the last 100 to 200 years they have obscured, enables us to answer the pressing question which this small book has set out to answer. Are Reformed Baptists new on the American scene? This whole sketch of American Baptist history demonstrates that the answer is a resounding No! Their faith is not new. Their confession is not new. Even their name is not entirely new, though we grant that it is used more commonly today. They are the direct doctrinal and practical descendants of the most central and important stream of Baptist life in America.

Quite contrary to popular opinion, it is the "average" Fundamental Baptist Church that is novel. Such churches are novel in their Arminian sympathies and methodologies.

They are novel in their "Easy-believism." They are novel in their antinomian approach to the law of God. They are novel in their "higher" or "victorious life" view of sanctification. They are novel in their Dispensational view of prophecy and redemptive history. Simple historical accuracy requires Reformed Baptists to deny the label of historical novelty and attach it instead to the typical Baptist church of the late 20th Century. It is not Reformed Baptists who are odd. It is the debased Baptist tradition surrounding them.

Candor requires, however, that we admit that there may be a certain sense in which Reformed Baptists are new. Speaking genealogically, they do not claim to trace their churches in a direct line to specific Particular Baptists churches of the first half of the 19th century. Speaking practically, Reformed Baptists cannot, do not, and may not simply go back to being 17th, 18th, or 19th Century Particular Baptists, much as we may admire them. History moves on. New challenges arise. The Spirit of the reigning Christ continues to lead the church into all truth. The fact is that Reformed Baptists in the 20th Century have arisen in response to many of the influences which succeeded in almost completely overthrowing the Particular Baptist tradition in America. We have, it is to be hoped, learned something through this historical experience.

If our doctrine and practice has not changed, our emphasis has and should. Baptists led the fight for religious freedom and the separation of church and state during the founding of our country. The reader will probably agree, however, that the separation of church and state does not

need emphasis in today's America. Indeed, religious freedom is now under attack from a radical and unbiblical view of the separation of church and state, a view descended from that political philosophy espoused by Jefferson and which once found its best allies in colonial Baptists.[30] Believers' baptism was the battle cry of earlier American Baptists. It is still a crucial truth. Most Americans today, however, are not molded by a culture built on infant baptism and are not unusually hostile to the idea.

Different emphases are needed today. The necessity of true conversion and the nature of saving faith must vigorously be proclaimed to the third (!) of Americans who claim to be born again. Believers' baptism will mean little where men no longer know the meaning of biblical believing. The moral law and the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments must be emphasized against the doctrinal antinomianism of Dispensationalism and the practical lawlessness of the American culture. The purity of God's worship, as instituted and regulated by God Himself, must be declared and jealously guarded against a plethora of human inventions which the worldly-wise would impose. The authority of God, His inerrant Word, and His appointed representatives in the family, the church, and the state must be thundered out against the howling individualism of the American, social wilderness. Such emphases must not, of course, replace the everlasting gospel of salvation by grace alone, Christ alone, and faith alone. But an unbiblical idea of what it means to

[30]William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), 104-20.

preach only Christ and him crucified must not hinder us in proclaiming these biblical truths so crucial in our day.

Are Reformed Baptists new? No! But, hopefully, we have learned something from the last two centuries. Hopefully, we are speaking to the specific needs of our own generation so that like David we will serve the purpose of God in our own generation (Acts 13:36).

So where did these old-new Reformed Baptists come from when they re-emerged around the middle of the 20th Century? In briefly answering this question, we must consider, first, the larger context and, then, specific influences.

The Larger Context

As Modernism consolidated its hold on the mainline denominations in America, those denominations—not surprisingly—began a long decline in numbers and influence. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals fleeing these denominations started new churches and affiliations. These began to grow and prosper till after World War II and certainly by the 1970's the religious supremacy of Liberalism and the mainline denominations in America was challenged.

It was out of this general context of outward, evangelical prosperity that Reformed Baptists in America re-emerged. It seems probable that as the high tide of Modernistic unbelief began to recede sensitive Christians began seriously to question the doctrines and practices which had come commonly to dominate conservative Christianity. For reasons already discussed, conservative Christianity had become predominantly Arminian and Dispensational. Reformed Baptists arose out of and in reaction to this context.

The Specific Influences

Nothing like a detailed analysis of the emergence of modern, Reformed Baptists is possible here. Nor is it necessary for our purposes. A brief account is, however, desirable.

It is likely that a small minority of Baptists, especially in the southern United States retained Calvinistic convictions in a more-or-less direct line from the 19th Century. The name of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, his writings, and continuing influence did much to project Particular Baptist influence into the 20th Century. Even among Baptist circles increasingly hostile to Calvinism, Spurgeon's name was honored and the Particular Baptist theology he preached, sometimes almost unconsciously, imbibed. Also, deserving mention as preserving Particular Baptist theology during the dark years of the early 20th Century is A. W. Pink and his writings.

Other important influences were from circles not specifically Baptist. Westminster Seminary, the re-incarnation of old Princeton, took up the biblical and Reformed heritage of its fallen predecessor. Under the leadership of J. G. Machen and its deservedly famous early faculty (Murray, Van Til, Young, Stonehouse, Kuiper, and others) many Baptist students who attended that Seminary came into contact with their Reformed heritage. The Banner of Truth Trust, a publishing house dedicated to making available experimental,

Puritan, and Reformed literature, has produced a flood of Puritan and Reformed books over the last 30 years. Since this work was determined to maintain sympathies with all those who identified with the heritage of Reformed Christianity, it was the means of bringing many Baptists to Reformed convictions over the years.

As a result of such influences several Reformed Baptist churches and pastors surfaced in the northeastern U. S. in the 1960's. These gave leadership to the emerging Reformed Baptist movement in America. Through the books written by their pastors and their cassette tape ministries, they have had (and continue to have) a national and even world-wide influence.

IV
Concluding Observations

EVERY GOOD, Reformed Baptist sermon ends with application! The reader will, therefore, excuse the writer (a Reformed Baptist preacher himself) if he cannot bear to bring this history to a close without underscoring certain, vital lessons. The lessons must, of course, be selective. Naturally, their selection has been partly governed by the writer's subjective sense as to what his "congregation" most needs to hear.

The Reformed Origin of the Particular Baptists and The Propriety of the Title, "Reformed Baptist"

Reformed Baptists have been challenged from all sides by those who dislike their chosen name. Reformed paedobaptists have claimed and do claim that one cannot be both Reformed and Baptist. Upon mentioning that he was a pastor of a Reformed Baptist church, one of the writer's fellow pastors was met by this rejoinder from a Dutch Reformed minister, "You can't be Reformed and Baptist!"

Baptists have also reacted against the name, Reformed Baptist. One, a believer in the doctrines of grace himself, has even written a book designed to answer negatively the question raised in its title, *Are Baptists Reformed?*[31]

Now if this were merely a question of words and names, it would not be worth quarrelling over. That would be what the Bible condemns as logomachy (fighting about words).[32] But it is not a matter of mere words. It is a matter of truth. More specifically, it is a matter of historical accuracy and Baptist self-identity. Briefly stated, Particular Baptists in America are Reformed because: (1) They have a Reformed confession; (2) they have a Reformed origin; and (3) because long before the rise of the modern, Reformed Baptist movement, they often identified themselves with the Reformed tradition. A brief elaboration of these points is appropriate.

Particular Baptists have a Reformed confession. The Particular Baptist movement is historically inseparable from the London Confession of 1689 adopted in America as the Philadelphia Confession of 1742. Even where this confession was not formally subscribed, it shaped the Particular Baptist movement.

Let anyone who wishes explore this document and its historical background. He will find, as the writer has, that it is simply a minor revision (in terms of its over-all content) of the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration, both

[31]Kenneth H. Good, *Are Baptists Reformed?* (Lorain, Ohio: Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, 1986).

[32]2 Timothy 2:14 and 1 Timothy 6:4

of which were written by Reformed and Puritan theologians. The differences, in fact, could easily be placed in footnotes. The similarities and identical material are that extensive.[33]

It is a strange fascination with paedobaptism and/or believers' baptism which can deny to Baptists a Reformed heritage with such historical evidence. We cheerfully grant that Particular Baptists may owe something to European Anabaptists. We heartily believe in the crucial importance of believers' baptism. What is inexplicable to this observer, however, is how some can lay such stress on the Anabaptist connection and yet deny the vastly greater evidence for a Reformed heritage.

But Baptists also possess clearly marked Reformed origins. Both the "regular" and "separate" parts of the American Particular Baptist mainstream originated from Reformed and Puritan Congregational churches. Those who became known as "regulars" in America came out of a Puritan Congregational church in the vicinity of London.[34] The "separates"

[33]Some Baptists have appealed to the London Confession of 1644 as more distinctively Baptist in character. This appeal ignores the fact that the Confession of 1644 was itself based on a Puritan Separatist confession and also the fact that its theology does not differ from the 1689 Confession. Compare *A Discussion of Seventeenth Century Baptist Confessions of Faith* by Richard Belcher and Tony Mattia (Columbia, South Carolina: Richbarry Press, 1983).

[34]It is not improbable that Dutch immigrants with Anabaptist leanings and the writings of Menno Simons were to some degree responsible for the emergence of the Congregational wing of Puritanism in England and through that movement for Particular Baptists. Such influence, however, presupposes some measure of sympathy and open-ness in English Puritanism for Anabaptist ecclesiology. It certainly does not negate the obvious fact that in every area besides certain aspects of their ecclesiology Particular Baptists were clearly Reformed.

split from New England Puritan Congregational churches about 150 years later as a result of the influence of Whitefield, himself an Anglican, and other non-Baptist Reformed preachers. By any fair, historical reasoning, this makes Particular Baptists Reformed in their origins.

Finally, Particular Baptists did not mind admitting they were Reformed. Occasionally, they called themselves "Reformed Baptists."[35] Frequently, they identified themselves with the Reformed tradition. The London Confession of 1689 is sufficient to prove this. Witness also the use made by Hercules Collins of the Heidelberg Catechism when he adapted it for Baptist use.[36] Furthermore, this identification occurred in America. Elias Keach spoke of himself as in the Puritan tradition.[37]

Why, then, the hullabaloo in our day? Could it be that some have embraced a Calvinistic view of salvation who have not yet jettisoned baggage picked up from some of the very influences which debased the Particular Baptist heritage in America? Certain Baptists want a Calvinistic Baptist heritage without a Reformed view of the law. Speaking broadly, such a heritage does not exist. The London Confession of 1689, its American twin, the Philadelphia Confession, and the New Hampshire Confession each contain a clear doctrine of the Christian Sabbath, the sign of Puritan ethics. Even the

[35]Berry, *The Kehukee Declaration*, 13.

[36]Hercules Collins, *Orthodox Catechism: Being the Sum of Christian Religion, Contained in the Law and Gospel Published for Preventing the Canker and Poison of Heresy and Error* (London, 1680).

[37]Elias Keach, *The Article of Faith of the Church of Christ or Congrgational Meeting at Tallow-Chandeler's-Hall, as Asserted this 2nd of the 7th Month, 1697* (London, 1697), 1-4.

Freewill Baptist Confession supports it! The 1644 Confession does not demonstrably support a different view of the law.

It is time to say clearly that Particular Baptists were Reformed, biblically Reformed, in the length and breadth of their faith. They are Reformed even in their view of baptism! For Reformed and Calvinistic views of salvation have as their necessary consequence believers' baptism. If certain, Calvinistic Baptists today are not Reformed, it may well be because they themselves have rejected key aspects of the Particular Baptist heritage.

We call ourselves Reformed Baptists, because that very well describes what we are: Reformed in our theology and Baptistic in our ecclesiology. At the point of comprehensiveness and accuracy such a name is far better than one which isolates our view of salvation. It is to be preferred to the name, Particular Baptist, because that name concentrates attention on only one (albeit pivotal) doctrine. The term, Reformed, however, has a breadth and comprehensiveness when understood accurately and historically which far more adequately defines the doctrinal and practical basis of a Reformed Baptist church.

The Counter-Cultural Character of The Reformed Baptist Movement in America

In the preceding pages a fundamental tension between the spirit of American Democracy and the spirit of biblical Calvinism was exposed. Together with much that was good, sound, and even biblical, there was mixed the little "leaven"

of a political philosophy fundamentally the same as that which spawned the French Revolution. Though long restrained and moderated by the vigorously Christian environment into which it was planted, it blossomed in an increasingly general hostility to biblical Calvinism. Now its fruit is ripening in an America largely dominated by secular humanism and its radical separation of church and state.

Reformed Baptists in such a context must now squarely face the fact that they are a counter-culture. Any insistence on the electing grace and authoritative law of an absolutely sovereign God must seem un-American to their neighbors. In a certain sense it will be! A God who "has mercy on whom He wills and whom He wills He hardens," a God of "Thou shalts" and "Thou shalt nots" will not prove popular to the 20th Century American mind. Only sovereign grace can make a 20th Century American a Christian.

Any church, therefore, determined to preach and practice the whole counsel of God in America today must be ready for war. It must be ready to be called many things by those who believe in autonomous freedom and worship at the shrine of individual liberty! Even those who should know better may be alienated by the spirit of the age. Yet the war is not unwinnable. We sing the truth when we say:

> A glory gilds the sacred page
> Majestic, like the sun:
> It gives a light to every age,
> It gives, but borrows none.

> The hand that gave it still supplies
> The gracious light and heat:
> His truths upon the nations rise:
> They rise, but never set.[38]

The secret of winning the war is, however, not compromise with the spirit of the age. It is uncompromising obedience to God which holds the promise of his blessing. The temptations and pressures to compromise swarm about us in a hundred subtle, and not so subtle, ways. May the God of truth grant us grace and victory!

The Danger of Anti-Creedalism in the Battle for Truth

The historical evidence examined within this book has clearly illustrated the fact, the origins, and the sad consequences of negative attitudes towards confessions, creeds, and catechisms among Baptists. This anti-creedalism opened the door to Arminianism and made it impossible to shut the door against Modernism.

The writer is, of course, not advocating attributing infallibility to any man-made confession. He does not believe that confessional orthodoxy is the panacea for church problems. Nor does he think that holding the best confession can make up for a lack of spiritual vitality or fidelity. He is convinced, however, that the holding of a biblical confession by a church and the regular instruction of its members in that confession

[38]This is the second verse of William Cowper's great hymn as found in *The Trinity Hymnal*, (Philadelphia, Great Commission Publications, 1962) # 258.

is a tremendous help in strengthening the spiritual vitality and preserving the spiritual fidelity of any church.

This brief treatise cannot go into all the biblical reasons for these convictions. The historical evidence cited ought to be sufficient reason for any biblical Baptist to re-examine his negativism toward "creeds." When such re-examination has taken place, it will lead to the conclusion that such a statement of faith is required by simple integrity. When that conclusion is reached, the comprehensiveness, the balance, and the unsurpassed value of the London Confession of 1689 will commend its adoption.

The Danger of Hyper-Calvinistic Over-Reaction To the Promotion of Truth

Reformed Baptists today face a situation similar to that which drove the Primitive Baptists into reaction and hyper-Calvinism in the first half of the 19th Century. Arminianism is rampant and is accompanied by various evangelistic and mission methodologies highly suspect from a biblical point of view. It would not be difficult for those re-discovering the absolute sovereignty of God in our day to over-react to the whole disgusting scene and draw their robes around them in self-righteous, hyper-Calvinistic horror.

Thankfully, the leaders of the Reformed resurgence of the last 30 years have for the most part manifested a keen sensitivity to this very danger. "The free offer of the gospel" is as much a conviction in most Reformed Baptist churches as, for instance, the doctrine of particular redemption. This

wholesome balance must continue. The cult of "five-pointism" must be avoided. The whole counsel of God, the glories of the faith, must be comprehensively expounded. Without forsaking our burning concern for biblical methods, we must manifest burning zeal for Christ in implementing such methods for the advance of the gospel. This concern introduces us to the last, practical observation which must be underscored.

The Awesome Responsibility of Our Glorious Heritage of Truth

If we are right, (and the Bible convinces us that we are) then Reformed Baptists have in their possession a glorious deposit of truth. The distinctive faith of Reformed Baptists is the product of the age-long leading of the Holy Spirit in Christ's church. Through 20 centuries the Holy Spirit has gradually been teaching the Church the doctrinal and practical meaning of the Bible. Athanasius and the Trinity, Chalcedon and the Person of Christ, Augustine and Irresistible Grace were the first milestones on this highway of truth. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli marked the new heights this highway attained by the time of the Reformation. Salvation by Grace Alone, Christ Alone, and Faith Alone, were the milestones of the Reformation. The Five Points of the Canons of Dort in the early 17th Century safeguarded these great truths, while the Puritans across the English Channel turned their attention to a pure and biblically ordered church. Then were born the first Reformed Baptist churches owing something to the persecuted Anabaptist,

owing more to Reformed Protestantism and the Puritan movement; combining in their spiritual bloodstream the purified essence of two great Christian traditions.

Such Baptist churches since that time have been tested. At first persecuted, they multiplied in the atmosphere of freedom in America. Then they were debased by the forces of political liberalism, theological Arminianism, and heretical modernism. Reformed Baptist churches are re-emerging in the later 20th century wiser, hopefully, through all this experience. What promise, what potential for good there exists in the heritage of truth such churches possess!

Such a perspective may appear arrogant. We do not believe that it is. It is simply the inevitable corollary of the conviction that the things we believe are the truth of God. Such a conviction cannot itself be arrogant, unless faith itself be arrogant.

Such an attitude may also appear messianic. It is certainly not so intended. No one ought to be more conscious of their weakness and need than Reformed Baptists themselves.

Such convictions are neither arrogant, nor messianic, but they are most humbling, most revealing of our own unworthiness and weakness and also most inspiring and encouraging! The truths we believe must not be permitted to remain in a corner. They must be shouted from the rooftops. They must not be buried for another century by our pride, indifference, and worldliness.

We may wonder how such as we can hope to impact the broad stream of American Christianity, let alone America herself. Those committed to this heritage of truth may now be few, weak, and despised, but if these things be the truth of God, they cannot and will not perish. The future, historical progress of the church shall only further clarify and vindicate them. For there is this encouragement. The re-appearance of these truths in America in our generation is inexplicable apart from the mighty power of God. We may hope, then, that “the cloud the size of a man’s hand” will yet “fill the heavens and there will be the sound of abundance of rain!” (2 Kings 18:44-46).

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The righteous are bold as a lion-Proverbs 28:1