

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Origins of the Particular Baptists

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INTRODUCTION

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls, (Jeremiah 6:16).

The English Particular Baptists first appeared as a distinct group in the early seventeenth century. They combined the believers' church practice of baptism with contemporary Calvinist soteriology. The origins of this movement are somewhat puzzling at first glance, as they combine what would appear on the surface to be contradictory theologies. Their soteriology was similar to that of the bulk of the Church of England at the time, particularly the Puritan stream; yet their practice of baptism and elements of their form of church government paralleled those of the Anabaptists, whom they universally disavowed. It is common today for Baptists to identify themselves with these continental radical reformers. Is this justified?

This paper will seek to establish the identity and origins of the Particular Baptists and delineate their characteristic beliefs, especially where these differed from other believers of their time. I will seek to show that the Particular Baptists find their roots in English Puritan Nonconformity, almost completely to the exclusion of any Anabaptist influence. Theirs were churches whose origins lay in the magisterial Reformation; differences between them and their Puritan contemporaries are primarily a function of their understanding and application of the Scriptures in not so much a different manner, as in one more consistent and complete.

THE FIRST PARTICULAR BAPTISTS

Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel, (Isaiah 8:18).

The earliest documented Baptist church in England dates from the return to Spitalfields of Thomas Helwys (d. 1616) and a group of English exiles from Holland in 1611, where they had been involved with the English separatist, John Smyth (c. 1570 to 1612).¹

¹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 38.

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However, while the General Baptists, of whom Helwys and his church were part, were in many ways similar to the Particular Baptists, they represent a different movement with separate roots.²

The story of the Particular Baptist movement in England begins, interestingly enough, not with the General Baptists, or even with other believers' churches across the Channel, but with a church of the English Separatist movement. A clergyman of the Church of England, Henry Jacob (1563 to 1624), was one of the signatories of the 1603 'Millenary Petition' calling for reforms in the Church.³ While he saw the need for reform, he rejected the more extreme calls of some such as Browne, Barrow and Johnson to separate completely from the state Church. His views on non-separating reforms are stated in his 1605 *Reasons taken out of Gods Word and the best humane Testimonies proving a necessitie of reforming ovr Chorches in England*, which got him a stay in the Clink for his trouble. He followed many Separatists into exile in Holland, though he never appears to have aligned his views with theirs. However, he did come to realize over time that a distinction had to be made between those 'true churches' with which he kept fellowship, and the 'false Church of England', from which he must come apart.

His desire to establish a different type of church is expressed in the 1605, *A third humble Supplication*. This church would:

Assemble together somewhere publickly to the Service & worship of God, to vse & enjoye peaceable among our selves alone the wholl exercise of Gods worship and of Church government viz. by a Pastor, Elder & Deacons in our severall Assemblies without any tradicion of men whatsoeuer, according to the specification of Gods written word and no otherwise ... And [we] shall also afterwards keepe brotherly communion with the rest of our English Churches as they are now established.⁴

Jacob's view remained far more moderate than that of Smyth and Helwys regarding the legitimacy of the Church of England and the permissibility of continued relations with it, though he would, in effect, advocate separatism.

The JLJ Church, Southwark

On his return to England in 1616, Jacob's vision found expression in the church that he gathered in Southwark. Though independent, this church was neither rigid nor hostile in

² James M Renihan, 'An Examination of the Possible Influence of Menno Simons' *Foundation Book* upon the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644', *American Baptist Quarterly*, 15, No. 3 (September, 1996), 191.

³ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 41.

⁴ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*.

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its separation from the Church of England. It would come to be known as the 'JLJ' church, after its first three pastors, Henry Jacob, John Lathrop, and Henry Jessey. The JLJ Church was not, at its inception, a Baptist church, being perhaps best described as an Independent Congregational Church with semi-separatist leanings⁵, though others have described it plainly as 'Separatist'.⁶ It is from this gathering that the first Particular Baptist church would soon arise.

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The situation of the JLJ church was anything but stable. Its first pastor, Jacob, was hounded out of England, and died in Virginia;⁷ he was replaced by John Lathrop (1584 to 1653). Mr Lathrop came into a situation that was as unstable theologically as it was dangerous physically. The JLJ church wrestled with matters which were bound to arise from their efforts to maintain an independent, yet still friendly stance toward the established Church. During Lathrop's ministry, several people of more extreme separatist views came into the church. This theological difference, combined with the danger inherent in the growing size of the church which made common worship increasingly risky, led to a number of splits in the church in the 1630s.⁸ These divisions were generally amicable.

The records preclude one from concluding that at this point the reason for separation from the established Church had anything to do with the preferred mode of baptism. There is reference to a certain Mr Eaton and others, who having received a 'further baptism', left The JLJ Church to form their own fellowship in 1633. Whether this re-baptism was motivated by a rejection of infant baptism itself, or merely of that baptism as administered (unworthily) by the Church of England, is not clear. Barrington White holds their departure to be attributable to the latter.⁹

It is thus possible that a Calvinist church of Baptist practice existed as early as 1633. At the very least, there was a gathering of Calvinistic separatists who had experienced 're-baptism'. Some who shared Mr Eaton's views on baptism, whatever these may have been, are noted as having seceded from The JLJ Church by 1638 to join a group led by John Spilsbury (1593 to c. 1668). Spilsbury was a signatory to the landmark *First London Confession of Faith* (1644), and is held by some to have been its principal author.¹⁰ The so-

⁵ Renihan, 'An Examination of the Possible Influence of Menno Simons', 191.

⁶ A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1956), 57.

⁷ M. A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1996), 27.

⁸ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 43.

⁹ Barrington White, *The English Baptist Separatists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 59.

¹⁰ James Renihan, 'John Spilsbury', in *The British Particular Baptists, 1638–1910, Vol. I*, ed. M. A. G. Haykin, (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 24.

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called *Kiffin Manuscript*, which gives church minutes from The JLJ Church and others, observed that:

Mr Tho: Wilson, Mr Pen & H. Pen, & 3 more being convinced that Baptism was not for Infants, but professed Believers joined with Mr lo: Spilsbury the Church's favour being desired therein.¹¹

By now (1637), the JLJ church had her third pastor, Henry Jessey (1601–63),¹² Lathrop having followed Jacob's path in fleeing Laudian persecution in England for the New World. Jessey continued in the irenic stance of his predecessors concerning the Church of England.¹³ The Spilsbury church, which is the first that can be categorically identified as Calvinist Baptist, maintained an amicable relationship with the JLJ church despite their differences.¹⁴

Baptism

It becomes evident that at this point infant baptism had come to the fore as a matter of concern among the semi-Separatists, who were associated with the Particular Baptists, both within and outside of the JLJ church. While for those who followed Eaton out of the JLJ church the mode and subject of baptism may, or may not have been as salient a concern as was the matter of who administered the rite, before long the theology proper of the ordinance came under scrutiny.

In May 1640, the JLJ church divided between Jessey and Praise-God Barebone (c. 1596 to 1679) due to space restrictions. Richard Blunt, one of those who had earlier left with Eaton, returned to the Jessey church at this time, and began to raise questions about the mode of baptism, 'being convinced of Baptism yt also it ought to be by dipping ye Body into ye Water, resembling burial & riseing again. 2 Col 2:12 (sic). Rom 6:4'.¹⁵ After conferring about this, the church sought further instruction. However, as they knew no one else in England who practised immersion baptism,¹⁶ they sent the Dutch-speaking Mr Blunt to Holland to discuss the matter with the small Arminian sect in Rhynsburg. This was a group who had departed from the usual Anabaptist practice of baptism by

¹¹ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 28.

¹² Slayden A. Yarborough, 'The Origin of Baptist Associations Among the English Particular Baptists', *Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol 23, No 2, (April, 1988), 17.

¹³ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 28.

¹⁴ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 29.

¹⁵ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 45.

¹⁶ Interestingly enough, the Calvinists appeared to be unaware of the existence of the General Baptists. Whether this only reflects ignorance, or that the latter did not yet practise believer's baptism at this point, is unknown.

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affusion or sprinkling and had adopted immersion as the mode of administration.¹⁷ Upon his return, Blunt baptized Mr Blacklock, a teacher, and he in turn baptized 'the rest of their friends that were so minded', forty-one in all. It is not clear whether Blunt was baptized in Holland, or baptized himself, or whether he and Blacklock baptized each other. The matter of succession and its importance in recovering the practice of baptism by immersion would come to present as thorny an issue among the Calvinistic independents as it had earlier for Smyth and Helwys. While he would later become a Baptist, Praise-God Barebone, the leader of the other church to form from the JLJ division, adamantly opposed the practice of believer's baptism by the churches, on the basis that there was no proper succession.¹⁸

These concerns notwithstanding, the 're-baptized' group from the Jessey church then formed two churches, one under Richard Blunt, the other under Thomas Kilcop. Shortly after Blunt's return from Holland, the Spilsbury church then also adopted immersion as the proper form of baptism.¹⁹ However, unlike the Jessey church, they recovered its practice not by succession (which had presented a considerable concern both to the General Baptists while in Holland and to Blunt, evidently), but simply on biblical authority.²⁰ Together with the Calvinistic Baptist congregation planted in Crutched Fryers by Green and Spencer, there were now four Particular Baptist churches in London.²¹ By the time that the *First London Confession* of 1644, representing the views of the Particular Baptist churches, was issued, there were seven such gatherings. In this confession is laid down for the first time by any Baptists that immersion was an essential element of proper baptism.

Particular Baptists, Particular Beliefs

Many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, (Luke 1:1).

Though the movement was, strictly speaking, now only a few years old its basic beliefs were more or less fixed by this point and are well reflected by the 1644 confession. The goal of the 1644 *Confession* was not so much to establish a statement of Baptist orthodoxy, to which all must subscribe, as to defend the burgeoning movement against its detractors. It was hoped that once the reasonableness of the Baptists' beliefs was seen and the orthodoxy of their views on soteriology and the place of the magistrate made plain, they

¹⁷ Glen H. Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 6, No 4, (Oct 1962), 327.

¹⁸ Renihan, 'An Examination of the Possible Influence of Menno Simons', 193.

¹⁹ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 30.

²⁰ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 47.

²¹ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 30.

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would be left alone. W. L. Lumpkin points out that as the movement grew so did opposition to it. This would often take the form of accusations that the Particular Baptists were simply Anabaptists who would bring in anarchy similar to that seen at Münster in the previous century. Such treatises as *A Short History of the Anabaptists of High and Low Germany*, *A Warning for England especially for London*, and *A Confutation of the Anabaptists and of All others who affect no Civill Government*, called for a response on the part of the Particular Baptists to distance themselves from both the Anabaptists and the General Baptists, with whom they differed on matters of soteriology and disdain for the established Church.²² Indeed, the title page identifies the *Confession* as being that ‘of those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists’, and its express intent is ‘for the taking off those aspersions which are frequently both in Pulpit and Print, (although unjustly) cast upon them’.²³

The *First Confession* indeed bears considerable resemblance to the 1596 *True Confession* of the Congregational church of Francis Johnson, upon which it is most evidently based. As Glen Stassen points out, the Particular Baptists ‘do not depart from the basic Calvinist position of that pioneer Congregational statement’.²⁴ The views the *Confession* expresses concerning God (Art. I–II); the eternal decrees (Art. III); the depravity of man (Art. V); the person of Christ (Art. IX); the three-fold offices of Christ (Art. X); the extent of the atonement (Art. XXI); and the nature of saving faith, are unremarkable from a Calvinist point of view and consistent with those expressed by the Congregationalists. Ecclesiology does not leap to the fore either, less time being spent on it than in the *True Confession*.

What does, of course, distinguish the *First Confession* from the *True Confession* and other Calvinist confessions is the view of baptism it espouses. Though it is only described in two articles, XXXIX and XL, baptism has a distinct significance for the Particular Baptists. The position of the statement on baptism and the space allotted to it is instructive. While seen as a crucial element of biblical church practice, it is evident that it is subordinate to the proper understanding of God and his works in Christ, and to a general Calvinistic understanding of soteriology and even, to some extent, of church government. This is consistent with the way in which the Particular Baptists arrived at their convictions on baptism, and shows them to esteem it as important as a logical outworking of proper faith and practice, not the driving force behind them.

Baptism was to be dispensed only to those professing faith, and to be administered by immersion. It was a sign, ‘answering the thing signified’, which is three-fold:

²² William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 145.

²³ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 153.

²⁴ Stassen, ‘Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists’, 328.

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1. the washing of the whole soul in the blood of Christ;
2. the interest of the saints in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ;
3. the raising again of the saints by the power of Christ in the general resurrection.

Baptism was to be administered by ‘a preaching disciple’ (later amended to ‘men able to preach the Gospel’), and not limited to any particular church-officer—although evidently not to be administered by just any Christian. The view of baptism as a washing of the soul (Titus 3:5) the Calvinists shared with their General Baptist brethren.

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What is singular in the Particular Baptists’ understanding of this sacrament is the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ; the two passages regarding baptism that were most dear to the Calvinist Baptists, Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, clearly establish this foundation. This understanding of the significance of baptism reflects a particular Christology: God’s power to save was not seen so much in the obedience and sacrifice of Christ *extra nos* as it were, but in the mercy and power by which Christ died, was buried, and was raised again. The Christian’s union with Christ in this death and resurrection was of great significance. This certainly is consistent with Calvin’s view of justification, which reflected less the rigid forensic declaration of innocence of Melancthon than the believer’s mystic union with Christ which then justifies him.²⁵ In this, they may well have been closer to the original Calvin than their fellow English Calvinists were.

Other elements of interest in the *First London Confession* regard the Baptists’ view of the function of the magistrate. The King and those appointed under him for the maintenance of the civil order are seen as being an ordinance of God (Art. XLVIII). The antipathy that one finds in the Anabaptists, or even in Smyth (absent in Helwys), is not seen here. The involvement of the Baptists in the Model Army during the Civil War reflects their comfort in supporting the structures and even the military of the appointed civil power. Indeed, it appears that many churches were formed *in* the Army during the War. However, the State is not accorded any role in regulating worship (Art. LI). The Particular Baptists make it clear that they will worship God according to conscience, their allegiance to the State notwithstanding.

Thus the picture of the Particular Baptists that begins to form, is of a group of independent Calvinistic believers who had much in common with their Presbyterian and Congregational co-dissenters. There are, of course, significant differences in the understanding of baptism. These appear to be consonant with a somewhat more nuanced expression of the Calvinistic understanding of God’s work of salvation in Christ. But the

²⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology—An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 443.

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Particular Baptists appear to be rather more Congregationalist semi-Separatists, with a different understanding of baptism, than either General Baptists or Anabaptists who happen to have a Calvinistic soteriology. Both the *First London Confession* and our brief examination of their development over the first decades of the 17th century reflect this.

Origins

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning nor ending of days, (Hebrews 7:3).

Having described the early years of the Particular Baptists and examined some of their beliefs, we are now in a position to move on to examine the question of the origins of this group. As there are three schools of thought as to the origins of the Free Church movement as a whole,²⁶ so are there basically three schools of thought as to the origins of the English Baptists in general, and of the Calvinistic Baptists in particular. The first of these, the Successionist school, reflects a belief that there is an 'organic succession of Baptist churches going all the way back to either the ministry of John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan river or the day of Pentecost.'²⁷ While this view has its adherents at the popular level, it is effectively devoid of genuine evidential support.

Anabaptist Origins

The bulk of historians have attempted to situate the origins of the Particular Baptists at a point rather closer to the period of the Reformation. This second school of thought on Baptist origins sees very real ties between the English Baptists and the Anabaptist movement. It does not pronounce on the particular point at which the Anabaptists may have separated from the state Church (although there is certainly some kinship here with the Successionist or Sectarian view). It does, however, situate the Baptists' origins in Reformation or pre-Reformation times, in the separation of the Anabaptists from both the Catholic and magisterial Protestant churches. It is held that the Anabaptists directly or indirectly influenced Baptist thought, especially in the areas of baptism and relations with the State. It is between the adherents to this school and those that hold that the Particular Baptists have roots exclusively in the Puritan secession from the Church of England that the dispute about origins lies primarily.

The case for Anabaptist origins for the Baptists found favour in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This was concurrent with a rise in serious scholarly interest in the history of the Anabaptist movement. It is certainly the harder to establish

²⁶ Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1968), 8ff.

²⁷ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 15.

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of the two primary competing views, simply because there is no solid evidence for any link existing between them and the English Particular Baptists.

THE GENERAL BAPTISTS

In its first form, this theory envisages direct contact between the first Baptists and the continental Anabaptists, out of which emerged the Baptists' distinctive views on baptism and church government. The founders of what were to become the General Baptists, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, had fled to Holland by 1607.²⁸ Smyth was a Puritan clergyman of the Church of England, and a Calvinist. He had struggled with the ministerial order of the state Church, being as it was at variance with the classical Calvinist conception of a four-fold ministry (pastor, elder, deacon, doctor). During his time at Cambridge he had contact with Separatists such as Francis Johnson (d. 1617), who was his tutor.²⁹ In 1606, some time after being reprimanded for preaching in a parish church without a licence, Smyth broke with the Church and founded the separatist church at Gainsborough. It was over the next two years that the bulk of his church made its way to Holland where there was greater religious liberty. There was great turmoil among the English separatist churches in Holland, of which Smyth's was only one. Disputes over church government, valid orders of ministry, and prayer book worship abounded. Smyth's congregation had united on the basis of a covenant (quite usual for Congregational churches), but by 1608, Smyth questioned the validity of such an approach. Subsequently he disbanded his church, reforming it on the basis of confession of faith in Christ and believer's baptism,³⁰ which he inaugurated by baptising himself, and then the others.

From this point on Smyth's beliefs on the organization of the church changed rapidly. By 1610, his church began to seek union with the Waterlander Mennonites. He had by now rejected his se-baptism and sought baptism by the Mennonites, whose church he considered a true church and capable of giving him valid baptism. Helwys had broken with Smyth by this time. He would return to England in 1611, with a portion of the church, to face imprisonment and subsequent death in Newgate. This was because of a treatise he would write on religious liberty, a personally endorsed copy of which he was ill-advised enough to send directly to James the First.

It is thus certain that the Smyth-Helwys church had contact with the Mennonites in Holland. Estep would argue that there 'seems little doubt that Mennonite influence

²⁸ W. R. Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and the Free Church Movement', *Criswell Theological Journal* 6 (Spr 1993): 307.

²⁹ Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and the Free Church Movement', 304.

³⁰ Leon McBeth, 'Baptist Beginnings', *Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol 15, No 4, (Oct 1960), 38.

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played a role in Smyth's rethinking the biblical teachings on baptism and the church.³¹ However, it does not follow that any of this influence made it back to England. Smyth apparently accepted the Melchiorite³² Christology common among the Anabaptists. There is, however, no evidence that Helwys did so. As well, on the matter of the role of the magistracy, Smyth sided with the Anabaptists, stating that no Christian could serve as such. Helwys was far more moderate, insisting solely that 'men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the king shall not answer for it, neither may the king be judge between God and man' (*The Mystery of Iniquity*).³³ This is a radical enough statement for its time, but it still allows for a more conventional role for the magistrate. As concerns the rejection of Calvinism, this appeared to have been developing in the theology of both these men before any contact with the Dutch Mennonites, Smyth having already expressed his dissatisfaction with the Calvinistic notes that informed the reader of the Geneva Bible.³⁴

Thus, it is far from certain that any influence that the Anabaptists, through the Mennonites, had on the English separatists who were to become the General Baptists, ever made it back across the Channel. Those who fell under their sway, with Smyth, became Mennonites, while those who left Smyth did so early, before this involvement. While theology no doubt played a role in the split, the superheated environment of the exile community in Holland, combined with the very dynamic personalities involved, (strong men such as Smyth, Helwys, Johnson, and Robinson, to name a few), were the primary reasons for the split in the Separatists. Those who went back under Helwys did so as Baptists, but most likely with no more than collateral influence on the part of the Mennonites and their theology, combined with whatever they may have imbibed of the religious atmosphere in Holland in the early years of the seventeenth century.

It must also be stated that even if one should see a solid connection between the Anabaptists and the General Baptists, this ultimately proves to be of little relevance to our question, that of the origin of the Particular Baptists. Both groups may share the name Baptist, but their origins are completely separate. The General Baptists in England, known as such primarily because of their view of the atonement as being universal to all yet effective only for those who believe. This group traces their roots to the party that returned from Holland with Helwys. They continued at Spitalfields after Helwys'

³¹ Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and the Free Church Movement', 312.

³² After the Anabaptist Melchior Hoffmann, whose view of the Incarnation precluded Christ taking on actual human nature through Mary. This was seen to ensure that Jesus was not contaminated by inherent human sinfulness.

³³ Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 47.

³⁴ Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and the Free Church Movement', 310.

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imprisonment, surviving under intense persecution. By 1624, there were at least five General Baptist churches in England.³⁵

On the other hand, the Particular Baptists, as we have seen, came out of the semi-Separatist JLJ church. From the beginning, the theology and outlook of the Particular Baptists differed from that of the General Baptists. They were far less hostile toward the Church of England. Their soteriology had a different basis as well, being far more conventionally Calvinistic (hence the label 'Particular', in reference to their belief that the application of Christ's atonement is limited to the elect alone). The two groups also differed in their understanding of the significance of baptism. The General Baptists saw it as signifying not the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, as it did for the Calvinists, but the inward washing of the heart by prior repentance.³⁶ As Stassen points out, the General Baptists 'placed their emphasis on concepts which do not even appear in the Particular Baptists'.³⁷ The point on which one naturally connects the two groups, baptism, seems to have had a markedly different significance for each. It therefore seems safe to assert that the Particular Baptists were not influenced by the General Baptists. Indeed, as has been pointed out, the former appear unaware that there were others in England who practised believer's baptism at the time.

THE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS—DIRECT CONTACTS

The Particular Baptists were not without their own contacts with the Dutch. As previously noted, Mr Richard Blunt was sent, with letters of commendation, to Holland in 1640 and returned with similar letters. Dealings between the two groups were amicable, despite their theological differences, and it was after Blunt's return that the Jacob church began the immersion/baptism of believers in earnest. It is not clear whether Blunt was actually baptized while in Holland, nor is it evident that he brought back with him any of the Mennonite theology of baptism. If he only sought believer's baptism by a true church in order to maintain some form of baptismal succession, it is not necessary to infer that he accepted the theology that went with it. If, on the other hand, his trip was a fact-finding mission, it is probable that he brought back information about the theological underpinnings of Anabaptist baptism. If actual baptism had not been sought, it would seem less risky and expensive to have exchanged information by correspondence. One could, therefore, infer that Blunt did indeed seek baptism, for which personal contact would be required. In any case, one can assert at the least, as does Stassen, that Blunt must have come into contact with Mennonite ideas while in Holland. This does not, however, imply that they had any definite influence. As K. R. Manley points out, the

³⁵ McBeth, 'Baptist Beginnings', 39.

³⁶ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 340.

³⁷ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 341.

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Kiffin Manuscript gives adequate evidence that Blunt's group had been convinced of the truth of believer's baptism prior to his foray to Holland.³⁸

THE POSSIBILITY OF ENGLISH ANABAPTIST ROOTS

There is another possible avenue of influence on the Particular Baptists by the Anabaptists. If, as seems to be the case, there was no transmission across the Channel in the early seventeenth century, is it possible that the influence arrived earlier? Could there have been a native English Anabaptist influence on the Particular Baptists, which did not need to rely on a direct Dutch connection? It has been speculated that Anabaptist activity in England during the sixteenth century, under the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I, generated and/or merged with local English dissenting groups to result in movements that provided the seedbed for the Particular Baptist churches. The Puritans and dissenters were motivated not only by continental Calvinist influence, as has always been accepted, but also by continental Anabaptist thought. Thus, even if one argues for a solely Puritan lump as the origin of the Particular Baptists, this must include some Anabaptist leavening.

This hypothesis has some evidence to support it. There certainly appears to have been considerable Anabaptist activity in England during the sixteenth century. Fourteen Dutch Anabaptists were executed under Henry VIII. Estep cites sources maintaining that eighty per cent of those executed under Mary were Anabaptists.³⁹ In 1575, under Elizabeth, two Anabaptists were burnt at the stake at Smithfields. However, there does not seem to have emerged a real leader for the movement, thus A. C. Underwood can dismiss the presence of Anabaptists in England, stating that it 'cannot be regarded as the seed-plot of the English Baptist movement'.⁴⁰

M. A. G. Haykin certainly agrees that there is no established link between the two movements.⁴¹ However, Lumpkin holds that English Anabaptism did have an effect. He goes into greater detail in establishing the Anabaptist presence during the sixteenth century. He points out that there were some 30,000 Dutchmen in England by 1562, and that between fifty to a hundred-thousand left Holland during the religious persecution of that century. They even came to form the majority of the population of Norwich by 1587! Again, however, he can only claim at most that 'it seems reasonable to suppose that, unconsciously or otherwise, principles of Anabaptism became a part of the thinking of

³⁸ Kenneth Ross Manley, 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism-Separatism', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 22 Oct 1987, 43.

³⁹ William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 209.

⁴⁰ Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 27.

⁴¹ Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 17.

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zealous Englishmen who were seeking a more thorough reformation of the Church'.⁴² He quotes Gregory to the effect that 'the Anabaptists were Puritans before Puritanism had sprung into recognized existence, and held substantially all that Puritans afterwards contended for'.⁴³ Estep effectively echoes this sentiment.⁴⁴

However, for all their perceived similarities, and despite any ostensible influences, there were significant differences between the Puritans and the Anabaptists. Soteriology, ecclesiology, and their attitude toward the State were completely at odds. Concern for purity of religion was hardly confined to the Anabaptists, thus those who showed similar regard for the pursuit of holiness are not, by default, radicals. A. G. Dickens points out that there were several foreign exiles in London, during the Edwardian years at least, who worshipped in churches gathered along Puritan lines. These were churches that held to Reformed theology with a distinctive congregational organization, and exercised a freedom that caused Church officials, such as Bishop Ridley, considerable unease.⁴⁵ However, it would seem unlikely that those of Anabaptist leanings would, or could have participated in these churches.

It must be pointed out as well that however difficult it might be to establish links between the Anabaptists, the Puritans, and later the Separatists, it is interesting to note that where the Anabaptists appeared to be the most active, their disappearance corresponded with the rise of Separatism. Early General Baptists appeared in precisely the same areas in which early Lollardism had been strong.⁴⁶ It may well be more than coincidence that the hotbeds of Anabaptism became hotbeds of Separatism.

However, Barrington White dismisses any connection between the 'radical sectaries' (an even broader group than the Anabaptists) and individual Separatists. He thinks the common elements found among the latter, such as church discipline and congregational autonomy, are more likely to originate in: a. Bucer's teachings mediated through Calvin, and in b. the particular situation of the Presbyterian Puritans and their insistence on the parity of ministers and the right of congregations to elect their own ministers. He also points out, from G. Williams, that English Anabaptist Christology was exclusively Melchiorite. This would place it at odds with the orthodox Puritan understanding of the Incarnation.⁴⁷

⁴² Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 14.

⁴³ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*.

⁴⁴ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 215.

⁴⁵ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1964), 328–29.

⁴⁶ Manley, 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism-Separatism', 38.

⁴⁷ Barrington R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 162.

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White highlights a factor that will arise again: the relationship of the English Separatists and the European radicals ‘seems to have been that of men who came to similar conclusions because they viewed the Bible in a similar way and because they came to study it in the context of a similar situation’.⁴⁸ He also rightly observes that it is ‘next to impossible to measure the impact of Anabaptist ideas in a situation where their impact is bound to be denied or ignored even if it were considerable’.⁴⁹ One sees this explicit denial on the frontispiece of the 1644 First London Confession, exchanged letters of commendation between the Separatists and the Dutch Mennonites notwithstanding.

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This is certainly an area that would benefit from additional research. There has been an ongoing debate about the origins of the Reformation in England, whether it was imposed from above (top-down), or the result of a popular uprising against a corrupt Church (bottom-up), or a mixture of the two. More details about the nature of popular dissent, beyond those emerging from isolated local investigation such as that undertaken by Dickens,⁵⁰ would help to discern the degree to which Anabaptism was playing a role. But at present, there appears to be no concrete evidence of Anabaptist influence from native sources as a tributary from which flowed the Baptist movement in England.

THE 1644 CONFESSIO AND ANABAPTIST INFLUENCE

In his oft-cited work, ‘Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists’, Glen Stassen has claimed to discern, by a rather different approach, the influence of the Anabaptists on the development of the Particular Baptists. Instead of seeking to establish some sort of direct lineage, or relying upon an existing English Anabaptist presence exerting an influence, he has examined the *First London Confession*, comparing it with the Congregationalist 1596 *True Confession*, on which it is most certainly modelled. He has found, in the differences between the two, what he has determined to be evidence of the influence of Menno Simons’ thought on the Particular Baptist Confession. He finds that the structure and content of the Particular Baptists’ statements on baptism have a marked similarity to parts of Menno’s *Foundation-Book*. This doctrine of baptism, he maintains, is foundational to other differences between the Baptists and the Congregationalists in the area of ecclesiology. It shows itself primarily in the substitution of baptism for covenant as the basis for the identity of the local church.⁵¹ He also points out statements that are

⁴⁸ White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 163.

⁴⁹ White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 164.

⁵⁰ In *The English Reformation*, Dickens draws on contemporary local documents to attempt to assess the degree of popular dissatisfaction with the religious status quo, and the extent of the permeation of religious change of all strata of society. In this way, he hoped to determine how great a role popular dissent played in the Reformation, and how much was imposed from higher authority.

⁵¹ Stassen, ‘Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists’, 329.

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different in degree in the Baptist Confession concerning the work of Christ. There is an emphasis on obedience to the commands of Christ, and reliance on his strength, who knew suffering and struggle.⁵² Reconciliation through Christ, and not just remission of sins, is a prominent theme. In all these things, Stassen sees the Particular Baptist thrust as being more Christocentric than that of the Congregationalists, which he attributes in part to Anabaptist influence.

These changes in emphasis may certainly be seen as being consistent with the Anabaptist doctrine of *Nachfolge*, that a disciple must not simply be declared righteous (as they understood the Reformers to teach), but must conform his behaviour to Christ, not in the least in his suffering. The Anabaptists struggled with Luther's forensic view of justification, seeing salvation as being far more transformational than (it is maintained) Luther stressed. However, the modifications that Stassen has noted may simply be a retuning of the Calvinism that underlies both confessions, as he himself points out, though in the area of baptism he finds it impossible that the views expressed in the *London Confession* could ever have had Congregationalist thought as a source.⁵³ He excludes, as have many others, the General Baptists as a source of the Particular Baptists' theology of baptism.

Stassen admits that the Calvinists may well have arrived at their conclusions about believer's baptism from the exegesis of their favourite texts in this regard, Romans 6:3–5 and Colossians 2:12. However, he observes that not all of the motifs in these two Scriptures are drawn out, only those relating to the Particular Baptist understanding of baptism.⁵⁴ He asserts that there must have been another source or tradition that caused them to interpret these particular texts in a manner that supported believer's baptism: in other words, the cart drove the horse in this area. This cart would be Mennonite influence from the baptismal teaching of the *Foundation-Book*.⁵⁵

The *Foundation-Book*, which had widespread circulation, was important in establishing uniform Mennonite belief and practice in the wake of the abuses and excesses of the early sixteenth century.⁵⁶ Stassen finds the emphases of the *Foundation-Book* quite consistent with the innovations introduced by the Particular Baptists. The similarity seems especially marked in the area of baptism. He sees the statements on baptism to be comparable in the *Foundation-Book* and the *First London Confession*. In particular, the emphasis of the Particular Baptists on baptism as signifying the death, burial, and

⁵² Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 331.

⁵³ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 337.

⁵⁴ Stassen 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 338.

⁵⁵ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 341.

⁵⁶ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 342.

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resurrection of Christ echoes Menno's understanding. The uses of the Romans and Colossians passages are likewise similar.

Stassen does not argue that the Particular Baptists appropriated Menno's theology of baptism in its entirety. Such a claim would be indefensible, given the many differences in overall soteriology. He does, however, hold that the Baptists, while remaining firmly Calvinistic, incorporated many aspects of Menno's conception of baptism into their theology. He finds no other plausible source for the change in baptismal theology from either the position originally held by the Congregationalists (from whence came the Particular Baptists), or for their divergence from the views of the other independent group of baptising churches, the General Baptists.

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Stassen feels that this manner of selective influence on the Baptists by Mennonite theology explains how some could claim them to have Anabaptist roots or sympathies even though they explicitly rejected much of what the Anabaptists stood for. What they agreed with, the Baptists incorporated into their teaching and practice, suitably modified to be conformable to Calvinistic thought. That with which they disagreed, such as the Mennonites' pacifism, separatism, anthropocentrism and Christology (where this was at variance with the orthodox understanding), they rejected.⁵⁷

This is perhaps the strongest case that can be made for any discernible influence of the Anabaptists upon the Particular Baptists. Not surprisingly, Stassen's assertions have not gone unchallenged, though it appears that for more than thirty years little was written disputing his approach. In his 1996 paper, J. M. Renihan challenges Stassen's findings. He points out that Menno's teaching on baptism differs significantly from that of the Particular Baptists. This is to the extent that he finds it unlikely for the Baptists to have taken any of what remained into their own faith and practice. For instance, Menno did not insist on baptism being by immersion, but 'of a handful of water'.⁵⁸ This may seem a quibble, except that the Baptists strongly believed that the central motif of baptism, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, must be signed by the physical dipping under the water, if baptism was to 'answer the thing signified'.⁵⁹ The Baptist understanding of baptism as in a real way a sacrament meant that the physical action must represent what was being signified. A baptism without immersion could not, however one dressed it up, portray the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the Particular Baptists understood it to do. This linkage of sign to significance, Renihan asserts, was foreign to Menno. It is unlikely that the Particular Baptists drew their understanding of baptism as reflective of

⁵⁷ Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', 347-48.

⁵⁸ Renihan, 'An Examination', 198.

⁵⁹ Renihan, 'An Examination'.

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Christ's death, burial, and resurrection from Menno if the form was seen to be so incompatible to such an interpretation.

Of somewhat less importance, but significant nonetheless, is Stassen's discernment of a similarity to Menno's teachings in the limited emphasis of the Particular Baptists on baptism as the washing of the soul in the blood of Christ. Renihan points out, however, that this aspect of the significance of baptism has a marked importance in the *First London Confession* that Stassen overlooks.⁶⁰ As well, the third aspect of the Particular Baptists' view of baptism, the eschatological understanding of the sacrament as a looking forward to the general resurrection at the return of Christ, was completely absent from Menno's *Foundation-Book*. Therefore if theological borrowing has occurred, it seems to have been extremely selective.

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Renihan finds the argument that the *Foundation-Book* is a possible source of Particular Baptist theology, and as a result, a vector for Anabaptist influence in the origin of the Particular Baptists, to be forced and inconsistent. He goes on to situate the developments in Particular Baptist baptismal theology, which is indeed incompatible with the 1596 Congregationalist position, in the debate within the semi-Separatist community.

The JLJ church had divided amicably between Jacob and Praise-God Barebone. The split was not due to size alone but also to theological differences, baptism being one of them. Barebone argued the case against the re-institution of believer's baptism (he was subsequently to see the light and become a Baptist!) in his 1642 book *A Discourse Tending to Prove the Baptisme in, or under The Defection of Antichrist to be the Ordinance of Jesus Christ*. He objected to introducing the novelty of believer's baptism without Scriptural warrant or historical continuity. He was hardly the only exponent of this opinion, and he was answered by Spilsbury and Thomas Killcop.⁶¹ His concerns, as Renihan points out, are reflected in Articles XXXIX and XL of the *First London Confession*, which his book predates. Renihan goes on to argue that these articles are not an adaptation of Menno's baptismal theology, but rather a response to Barebone's assertions.⁶²

This is certainly a plausible explanation for the Particular Baptists' statements on baptism, and Barebone is more likely than the Mennonites to have been a participant in such a debate. What may weaken Renihan's hypothesis is the degree to which the articles of the *London Confession* focus on the theology of baptism while effectively excluding any comment on the authority of the church to baptize. If a central concern of Barebone was the propriety of a church conducting believer's baptism, this would seem to miss the

⁶⁰ Renihan, 'An Examination', 199.

⁶¹ White, *The English Baptist Separatists of the 17th Century*, 60.

⁶² Renihan, 'An Examination', 202.

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point of the objection. However, the similarity between their concerns and agreement on many of the vital aspects of baptism may well be reflected in Barebone's subsequent conversion to the Baptist way. The agreement had been closer than would be found with Menno and thus a more likely source or inspiration for the Baptists' theology of baptism.

Puritan Roots

The third major view of the origin of the Particular Baptists places their roots exclusively in the Puritan tradition. The Baptists are in essence Calvinist independents who left the Church of England. With their understanding of the authority of Scripture and consequent view of the church and her ministers, they were also led to assume that believer's baptism was the most consistent with the teaching of the Bible and was the logical outworking of decades of distancing themselves from the established Church. Certainly the documented history of events clearly shows the Particular Baptists to have emerged from Puritan semi-Separatism.

Once one leaves the similarity between the Particular Baptists and the Anabaptists on the matter of baptism, there is disagreement on most other matters. On Christology, soteriology, the church's relationship with the state, the Christian's position on warfare, the two groups were far apart. Had the Anabaptist understanding of baptism carried any weight with the Particular Baptists, it is most unlikely that nothing else would have accompanied it into the body of Baptist orthodoxy. It seems improbable that such an integral element of Christian faith and practice as baptism would have been the object of such selective application, in the way Stassen portrays it.

The source of the Particular Baptists' doctrine of baptism is every bit as likely to have been Puritanism itself. The notion of the gathered church, separated from those not in covenant with God and one another, was found to be antithetical to a universally applied baptism of insensate infants. The emphasis of the Reformers on a return *ad fontes*, which brought every belief and practice under the examination of the lens of Scripture, would certainly be bound to reveal that there is no record of infants being baptized in the New Testament. The Calvinist doctrine of election can also support baptism as a mark of the elect as readily as it does the mass sprinkling of infants.

It is far more likely that the Particular Baptists arrived at similar conclusions to the Anabaptists on the matter of believer's baptism by examining the Scriptures as good and consistent Calvinists. Their subsequent departure from the ranks of the Separatists and semi-Separatists in recovering believer's baptism by immersion would not represent as stark a departure as did the Anabaptists' break with the Catholic and Protestant churches of the sixteenth century. The Separatists were already practising a form of church

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government that was close to the believers' church ideal⁶³ and very consistent with the practice of believer's baptism.

The early Baptists certainly wanted it understood that theirs was a movement based not on Anabaptism. Instead it was to be the perfecting and completion of the application of Reformed Protestant doctrine to the worship and service of God. In the negative, we have the unambiguous statement on the frontispiece of the 1644 *First London Confession*, which was identified as representing the views 'of those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists'.⁶⁴ In the introduction to that document we find an explicit denial of charges levied against them of 'holding Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne, disclaiming of Magistracy'.⁶⁵ These were hallmarks of the Anabaptists. In the positive, the irenic nature with which the Baptists viewed others, particularly those Protestants from whom they differed, shows a willingness to be identified with them. The conclusion of the 1644 *Confession*, states 'if any shall doe us that friendly part to shew us from the word of God that we see not, we shall have cause to be thankfull to God and to them.'⁶⁶ As T. George points out,⁶⁷ in the preface to the *Second London Confession* (1677) the Baptists express 'our hearty agreement with them (*Presbyterians and Congregationalists*) in that wholesome protestant doctrine, which, with so clear evidence of Scriptures they have asserted'.⁶⁸

Thus the Particular Baptists explicitly own their allegiance to their fellow Puritan Protestants while, at the same time, categorically rejecting any links to the Anabaptists. If there are roots of the Particular Baptists to be found in Anabaptism, these Baptists will not hear of it. They see themselves to be as the historical evidence and the theological weight has shown them: they are direct descendants of English Puritanism, related to both the Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Abstain from every appearance of evil, (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Mechanisms

⁶³ Manley, 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism-Separatism', 41.

⁶⁴ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 153.

⁶⁵ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 155.

⁶⁶ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 149.

⁶⁷ Timothy George, 'The Reformation Roots of the Baptist Tradition', (<http://www.nbseminary.com/Documents/BapConf02/T%20George.htm>), 3.

⁶⁸ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 236.

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For all intents and purposes, our examination of the origin of the Particular Baptists should end here. The evidence is clearly against any connection to the Anabaptists, or any yet uncovered 'Trail of Blood' of properly-ordered Baptist churches stretching back to John the Baptist. One should be able safely to say that, based on the evidence, the origin of the Particular Baptist churches lies in English Puritanism as it expressed itself outside of the Church of England. The same trajectory that took the Puritans out of the Church continued to draw many, first from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism, and then to a rigorously biblical application of the Lord's teachings on baptism and the church in a Baptist format.

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This conclusion, which agrees with that reached by scholars such as White, W. Hudson, and Haykin (but which, it must be conceded, disagrees with the views of a similar number of competent men and women), depends on a demonstrable transmission of either ideas or structure, or the lack of the same. The references that were consulted all seek to establish or disprove such a linkage. As even Estep would quote, 'History, to be above evasion or dispute, must stand on documents, not on opinion.'⁶⁹

However, M. J. Whittock explains that there are other means by which influence may have been communicated that are not readily exposed by simple examination of historical data. The organic model of studying the origins of the concepts held by the Particular Baptists requires, that for any continuity to exist there must be either direct propagation or a transmission that is reflected in official doctrine. By and large, the material does not show any such linkage, though Stassen tried to make the case for the partial transmission of doctrine as regards baptism. The historical accounts and confessions that we have examined are prime tools in trying to show or disprove an organic model of transmission.⁷⁰

Whittock holds that, in contrast to the organic model, a dynamic model may be a preferable way to understand the connection between movements. In this analysis, it is held that ideas may jump systematic gaps, without any explicit trail by which to trace them. This is accomplished either by: 'small packages' being transferred without overall theology being affected to the extent that would be represented confessionally, a variant of what Stassen attempted to demonstrate; or by variance between laity and clergy that, of course, is not likely to be represented in historical documents. This would allow for the exertion by an existing Anabaptist presence in England of an undocumented

⁶⁹ William R. Estep, 'A Believing People: Historical Background', s.v. *The Concept of the Believers' Church*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967), 38.

⁷⁰ Martyn J. Whittock, 'Baptist Roots: The Use of Models in Tracing Baptist Origins', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 57 (Oct, 1985), 319.

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influence on the development of Particular Baptist doctrine, as maintained by Estep and Gregory, for example.

As an example of this possibility, Whittock points to the later emergence in large numbers of Quakers from the Baptists. He would identify the presence of Anabaptist ideas as a likely catalyst for this departure.⁷¹ He also thinks the strong presence of Fifth Monarchy thought among the Particular Baptists had a possible origin in continental Anabaptist thought.⁷² We may see evidence of these 'small packages' of ideas, while not being able to observe the wrapping, as it were, reflected in the available documentation. One could also, by this analysis, bring the Successionist model back to the table, as it could be rendered plausible in a similar manner.

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The problem with this is Whittock is still left to admit that concrete evidence of such ideas is difficult to prove. There is also the criticism that the organic model relies on formal confessions which will not betray any departures from group orthodoxy (the winners write the history). This criticism seems to miss the point that in the case of the Baptists such documents as the *Kiffin Manuscript* make quite available to us the inner debate as it was conducted at the time. There appears to be little tendency on the part of church clerks to paper over differences—they were made very open. On top of this, the many disputations that were held with antipaedobaptist Calvinists would have given ample opportunity for dissenting voices among the Baptists to be heard. There was no formal council extant to determine orthodoxy. Certainly at some point, Anabaptist sympathies, were they present, would have made themselves evident.

Another problem with the dynamic model's identification of doctrinal 'packets' that seem to have jumped between tracks, without leaving any formal confessional evidence, is that we cannot, having found them, then proceed to attribute them to a particular source. There may be a third party involved that is common to the two. The Fifth Monarchist views, for example, may have had either another origin, or an intermediary one by which they were passed. The presence of evidence does not show how it got there, and therefore it remains rather circumstantial—there is little limit to where the dynamic approach might take us.

While Whittock's nuancing of the approach to analyzing Baptist history supplies a worthwhile caveat, it does not seem likely that it should materially affect our conclusions

⁷¹ Whittock, 'Baptist Roots: The Use of Models in Tracing Baptist Origins', 322.

⁷² Whittock, 'Baptist Roots: The Use of Models in Tracing Baptist Origins', 323. Martyn J. Whittock, 'Baptist Roots: The Use of Models in Tracing Baptist Origins', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 57 (Oct, 1985), 319.

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in this case. However, it might incline us to be less dogmatic than we would naturally wish to be.

Motivations

The entire debate, and the vehemence with which it at times has been conducted, should make us pause before categorically pronouncing the matter resolved. The evidence seems to reflect fairly unambiguously that the Baptists are of English Puritan origin. Why, then, has the debate persisted? It would appear that even the search for a dynamic model of transmission has been motivated not by clear evidence that is unaccounted for by other theories (there is little: that is much the point of the dynamic model). Rather, it has been motivated by a desire to see things from a different perspective. Such caution and investigation of the alternatives is laudable, but it also invites us to pursue further the matter of why one should not be content with the existing interpretation.

Why should a group as suspicious of ecclesiastical tradition as the Baptists seek to argue for what many might uncharitably deem to be simply a variation of the ‘apostolic succession’? Why is it so vital to establish where we have come from, if we are confident that we now practise and believe as did the Apostles? D. F. Durnbaugh finds some connection between the emergence of the Successionist view of Baptist origins and the denominational competition in the nineteenth century that moved many to seek to certify the antiquity of their particular beliefs.⁷³ The present-day urge in most circles, not only Baptist, to return to the primitive practice of the Church (certainly very much a factor in Baptist origins) makes the establishment of this succession attractive.

The Anabaptist connection has its own ways of tugging at one’s heartstrings. A similar objection to the state church and the post-Constantinian history of Christianity as reflected by Successionism provides motivation for the Anabaptist theory of origins. To see Baptists as magisterial Reformers who just happened to get it right risks for many tarring them with the same triumphalistic, imperialistic brush as the state churches that persecuted dissent. The accounts of the persecutions of the Anabaptists inflicted by Protestants and Catholics alike made them objects of sympathy in many Baptists’ eyes, especially those at the end of the nineteenth century. The Anabaptists were certainly perceived as those who stood apart from the worldly church, and with better historical research, were being seen in a more favourable light than previously.⁷⁴ Thus the presence of any tenable link between the Baptists and the Anabaptists was encouraged.

⁷³ Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church*, 9.

⁷⁴ Ian Sellers, ‘Edwardians, Anabaptists and the Problem of Baptist Origins’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 29, (1981), 98.

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There is also an on-going struggle in Baptist circles over the degree to which an individualism, derived not from Scripture but from Enlightenment thought, has permeated and come to dominate Baptist ecclesiology. The view of many would be that Baptists no longer practise the faith of the Apostles, at least insofar as the place of the individual is concerned. The response to this concern has coalesced in the document entitled, 'A Baptist Manifesto'⁷⁵. Those who drafted and signed this document are drawing on sources which, both theologically and attitudinally, are very sympathetic to Mennonite thought, especially as it is expressed in the writing of John Howard Yoder and, derivatively, Stanley Hauerwas. Their vision for the Baptist identity charts a more 'baptistic' than particularly 'Baptist' course. The view that the Baptists' roots lie with the Anabaptists rather than with the Puritan separatists is far more compatible to such a sentiment, and may also lie behind the popularity of this view. It is noteworthy that even those who would support this understanding do not seem to find the roots of the current individualism to be in the thought of the earliest Particular Baptists.

The foregoing notwithstanding, the most straightforward answer to the theory of origins is the one supported in this paper: one of Puritan semi-Separatist roots. It is perhaps less romantic (though the history is riveting) and renders the Baptists perhaps all too similar to those from whose history and power they would like to see themselves separate. However, it honestly portrays who the Baptists were and who they are today. It is said that one can choose one's friends, but not one's family. The Baptists have some ancestors that many would rather not have—but they are there, and have been instrumental, for better or for worse, for making Baptists who they are today.

CONCLUSION

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (1 Corinthians 14:10).

Both for reasons concerning historical method and historiographical motivation, the ongoing debate about Baptist origins must be approached with humility and caution. This should be reflected in modern day investigations into Baptist roots. No one approaches this subject without certain pre-conceptions, or without wishing the matter to go a certain way—the author of this paper is not himself immune to this temptation. But the matter needs to be dealt with, for with the changing situation in Northern and Western Christianity, the crucial question is fast becoming not which denomination one belongs to, but whether or not one holds to the authentic Christian faith at all, whatever form its practice may take (and these cannot be separated). Approaches to other

⁷⁵ Curtis W. Freeman, 'Can Baptist Theology Be Re-visioned?', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 24.3 (Fall, 1997), 303–310.

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denominations and traditions will have to be made, and unless Baptists are clear on the decisions and motivations their forefathers made, they risk either being submerged by mainline Christianity or standing aloof as valid Christian bodies go under one by one. In Canada particularly, Baptists are a small minority. Any approaches they tender to other bodies must be done so with a firm idea of where they came from and why.

Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses reminded them that it was God who had taken them through the desert. Only then were they ready to receive the Law again, and enter in. So, in facing a radically-changed landscape, we must be sure of where the Lord has brought us from and where he has brought us to, that we might know where he is leading and what role we as Baptists are to play. The question of Baptist origins, how we ask the question and what we do with the answer, is far from academic. If Baptists have an important role to play in proclaiming the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus, and our forefathers certainly seemed to think they did, much turns on how we deal with this question.⁷⁶

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⁷⁶ Belyea, G. L. (2007). "Origins of the Particular Baptists." *Themelios*, 32(3), 40–67.