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## A Suggested Source of Some Expressions in the Baptist Confession of Faith, London 1644.

THE purpose of this paper is to draw attention to a probable source of some of the doctrinal expressions in the Confession of the Seven Churches issued in London in 1644. This is a well-known and justly prized document of the Baptist churches who accepted the Calvinistic tradition and has often been described so that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon the conditions of its appearance. It may be sufficient to remark that the Baptists were not allowed any place in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly of Divines who had been summoned by the English Parliament to adjust the religious affairs to the nation in view of the changed conditions of the period. The Royal favour was neither sought nor given, but the purpose of the Assembly had the hearty approbation of the Scottish Presbyterians. The latter were represented by Commissioners of weighty learning and controversial ability whose animus against all that smacked of Anabaptism is notorious, and it may be taken for granted that while they had any influence upon the deliberations in the Jerusalem Chamber all pleas that the Baptists should be given an opportunity to declare their mind would be rejected with a perfect scorn.<sup>1</sup>

This exclusion only stimulated the productive activity of the Baptist apologists, and the great debate of those stirring times was given an impetus which is astonishing in its magnitude. For the next decade and more, pamphlet after pamphlet poured from the printing presses. Everyone who could wield a pen seems to have seized it with avidity and let all who cared to read the resulting document know what the writer thought of infant baptism. The shocking typography and blurred lettering of many of these paper projectiles bear ample testimony to the urgent persuasions with which the printers were impelled to carry out their part in the vigorous campaign. Among the more important productions was the "Confession of Faith of the Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though

<sup>1</sup>The 1644 Confession was presented to the House of Commons, Journal of the House of Commons, 29 Jan., 1645/6.

unjustly) called Anabaptists." It was prefaced by the explanation that such a statement was made necessary by the misrepresentations and abuse which were being circulated against the churches represented by the signatories.

The person or persons who actually drew up this Confession are unknown. It may be presumed that someone was responsible for the initial drafting of the document which would then be submitted to the other interested parties for approval. Whatever happened in the process of its formation the need was so urgent that it is scarcely to be expected that existing Confessions of the Calvinistic order would be ignored. I wish to suggest that one existing document in particular seems to have been consulted and used.

My attention was drawn to this possibility when reading through the Confession of Faith authorised for the Church of Scotland by the Episcopal Assembly at Aberdeen in 1616. I could not help wondering where I had read some of its doctrinal formulations before, and after a little investigation discovered that my memory had served me well and that the resemblances were contained in the Baptist Confession of 1644. This was naturally a source of some astonishment to me for it seemed absurd that these two documents could have any connection.

Before proceeding further, something may be said about this Scottish Confession. Its matrix was an Assembly which has long since been repudiated by the Scottish National Church. The Assembly which authorised it was a convention of the First Episcopacy which had been introduced into Scottish ecclesiastical affairs by Royal propensity and in the face of stout opposition from the defenders of Presbytery. The acceptance of the new Confession was enacted in the following terms:

"Item, It is statute, that the simple Confessioun of Faith underwrytin be universallie receivit throughout this whole kingdome, to the quhilk all heirafter salbe bound to sweare and sett thair hands; and in speciall all persons that beare office in the Church, at thair acceptatioun of any of the saids offices; and lykewayes Students and Schollers in Colledges."<sup>2</sup>

This statement is generally known as the Aberdeen Confession.<sup>3</sup> Its features are:

1. It consists of about 3,250 words set out in short unnumbered paragraphs.
2. The doctrine is thoroughly Calvinistic.

<sup>2</sup>*The Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland*, Bannatyne Club, Vol. III, p. 1127.

<sup>3</sup>The Confession is printed in *The Booke of the Universall Kirk*, pp. 1132-1139.

3. There are many expressions obviously directed against the Roman Church, but the Confession is not marred by the virulent abuse which was a feature of earlier Scottish symbolics.

4. The format does not follow that of any known Reformed symbol.

5. It does not specifically mention infant baptism though this would be implied, and it is the only Scottish Confession to mention dipping as an acceptable mode of baptising.

The production seems to have been a dead letter from the day it was issued, a consequence which is not surprising to readers of Scottish history. The Presbyterian section of the Church would have nothing to do with the progeny of Episcopacy, and if the Confession had any life at all it can only have been in strongly Episcopal quarters. It is certain that it was largely ignored and soon forgotten. The only adequate notice of its existence is in Dr. C. G. M'Crie's survey of the Confessions of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1907, and there it is evaluated by this historian in these terms:

"In point of calmness and fairness of judgment, historical balance, and moderation of language, the northern Confession of 1616 is entitled to rank alongside of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England and the thirty-three chapters of the Westminster symbol."<sup>4</sup>

The actual composition of the document has to be dated a few years prior to 1616. The draft was the result of the combined labours of Mr. John Hall and Mr. John Adamson, and the revision at the time of the Assembly was committed to a group of five divines among whom the principal reviser seems to have been Mr. Robert Howie of St. Andrew's, the successor to Andrew Melville.<sup>5</sup> The Confession as presented in 1616 may be taken to be chiefly the work of Howie.

Hitherto it has been commonplace to notice that the Baptist Confession of 1644 had a feature paralleled only by the Scots Confession of 1560, namely, that at the beginning of the latter and the end of the former, the composers declare that they are open to correction should their tenets be shown to be unscriptural. The Scots reformers said:

"gif any man will note in this oure Confessioun any article or sentence repugning to Godis holie word, that it wald pleis him of his gentilnes, and for Christiane cherities saik, to admoneise us of the samyn in writt; and We of our honour and fidelitie do

<sup>4</sup> p. 27f.

<sup>5</sup> Scot's *Apologetical Narration*, Wodrow Society, p. 243; Calderwood, *History of the Church of Scotland*, Vol. VII, pp. 233-242.

promeis unto him satisfioun fra the mouth of God, (that is, fra his holy Scriptures)."<sup>6</sup>

The English Baptists expressed the same sentiment thus :

"Also we confess that we know but in part, and that we are ignorant of many things which we desire and seek to know; and if any shall do us that friendly part to show us from the word of God that we see not, we shall have cause to be thankful to God and them."

This similarity is singular enough, but I do not think anyone has observed the further evidence which I now set down to support the contention that the Baptist Confession has other links with Scotland. I submit, then, some extracts for perusal and comparison. Part of their relevance to the present purpose, it should be noted, is in the fact that they are entire sections set down here in the sequence in which they occur in the two Confessions except where I have noted omissions.

1644

Article III (end)

God hath in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the good pleasure of his will, foreordained some men to eternall life through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of his grace, leaving the rest in their sinne to their just condemnation to the praise of his Justice.

Article IV.

In the beginning God made all things very good, created man after his own Image and likeness, filling him with all perfection of all naturall excellency and uprightnesse, free from all sinne. But long he abode not in this honour, but by the subtiltie of the Serpent which Satan used as his instrument, himself with

1616

This God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to the good pleasure of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace, did predestinat and elect in Christ some men and angels unto eternal felicity; and others he did appoint for eternal condemnation, according to the counsel of his most free, most just and holy will, and that to the praise and glory of his justice.

In the beginning of time, when God created of nothing all things in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, he made them very good; and above all things he made man and angels, conform to his own image, in righteousness and true holiness; but some of the angels of their own free motive sinned against God, left

<sup>6</sup> *Knox's Works*, edited by Laing, Vol. II, p. 96.

his Angels having sinned before, and not kept their first estate, but left their owne habitation; first Eve, then Adam being seduced did wittingly and willingly fall into disobedience and transgression of the Commandment of their great Creator, for the which death came upon all, and reigned over all, so that all since the Fall are conceived in sinne, and brought forth in iniquite, and so by nature children of wrath, and servants of sinne, subjects of death, and all other calamities due to sinne in this world and for ever, being considered in the state of nature without relation to Christ.

#### Article V.

All mankind being thus fallen, and become altogether dead in sinnes and trespasses, and subject to the eternall wrath of the great God by transgression, yet the elect, which God hath loved with an everlasting love, are redeemed, quickened, and saved, not by themselves, neither by their own workes, leste any man should boast himselfe, but wholly, and onely by God of his free grace and mercie through Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousnesse, sanctification, and redemption, that as it is written, Hee that rejoyceth, let him rejoyce in the Lord.

their original, forsook their habitation, and abode not in the truth, and thereby became damned devils.

Then Satan abused the craftie serpent for his instrument, seducing our mother Eva; she tempted her husband Adam; so both disobeyed the commandment of God, and thereby made themselves and their whole posterite the bondmen of Satan, slaves of sin, and heirs of eternal damnation.

By this fall of Adam all his posterity are so corrupted, from their conception and nativity, that not one of them can do, or will anything truly acceptable to God, till they be renewed by the will and Spirit of God, and by faith ingrafted in Christ Jesus.

(One brief paragraph omitted.)

Albeit all mankind being fallen in Adam; yet only these who are elected before all time, are in time redeemed, restored, raised, and quickened again, not of themselves, or of their works, lest any man should glory: but only of the mercy of God through faith in Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

## Article VI.

This therefore is life eternal, to know the onely true God, and whom he hath sent Jesus Christ. And on the contrary, the Lord will render vengeance in flaming fire to them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Article VII.

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

## Article VIII.

In this written word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know, beleeve, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.

## Article IX.

Touching the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom Moses and

This then is life eternal to know the true God, and whom he hath sent Jesus Christ: whereas vengeance shall be taken on all them that know not God, and do not subject themselves to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by the obedience of faith.

We believe, that the rule of this knowledge, faith, and obedience, yea and the whole worship of God, and of all Christian conversation, is not the wit or will of man, nor unwritten traditions whatsoever; but the wisdom and will of God, which is sufficiently revealed in the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

(Three paragraphs on the authority of Scripture. The second and third is as follows.)

We believe that all points of faith and worship are so set down in the Word of God, that what is obscurely proponed in one place, is most clearly exponed in other places; neither receive we any interpretation of any Scriptures in these matters, which is not warranted be other Scriptures. . . . Jesus Christ, whose person, office, and benefits they most clearly and fully sett furth unto us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is declared in Scripture to be the

the Prophets wrote, and whom the Apostles preached, he is the Sonne of God the Father, the brightnesse of his glory, the ingraven forme of his being, God with him and with his only Spirit by whom he made the world, by whom he upholds and governes all the workes hee hath made, who also when the fulnesse of time was come, was made man of a woman, of the Tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David, to wit, of Mary that blessed Virgin, by the Holy Spirit comming upon her, and the power of the most High overshadowing her, and was also in all things like unto us, sinne onely excepted.

eternal Son of God begotten from all eternity of the Father, by whom also he does sustain and govern all things that he has made: And this Eternal Son of God, when the fulness of time came, was made man of a woman, of the tribe of Judah, and of the seed of David and Abraham, even of the blessed virgin Mary, by the holy Ghost coming down upon her, and the power of the most High overshadowing her, by whose marvellous and divine operation, the Son of God was made man of a human body and soul, and in all things like unto us, sin only excepted.

It becomes obvious by this comparison that these identities, similarities, and general agreements, both of expressions and order of treatment call for an adequate explanation. Before this is attempted I should like to make it quite clear that I have selected the above sections because they are the most suitable to the purpose of demonstrating a connection, and that the remainder of both Confessions contains very great dissimilarities, particularly in the sections dealing with the sacraments. This means that the greater part of both Confessions is not being dealt with in this examination. It would be true to say, however, that if it were granted that the above extracts do establish the fact of borrowing there are many topics in the 1644 Confession other than those quoted which are suggestively similar in treatment to their exposition in the 1616 Confession. They could easily be explained of course, as simply Calvinistic in phrase and tone if direct association were denied. Such, for example, would be an adequate explanation of the sections in both dealing with the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. It might also serve to explain the section on the attitude to the civil magistrate which was such a sensitive point in seventeenth century thought. The earlier symbol affirmed, that "All their subjects are bound in duty to obey them in all things they command lawfully, not repugnant to the will of God; and that they are obliged to pray for them daily, that under them they may lead a godly and peaceable life."

The 1644 form read :

" . . . that in all lawful things commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord : and that we are to make supplication and prayer for kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Again, if the indebtedness is granted, it might be held that the Baptist Confession improved some of the statements of the Episcopal Confession by the insertion of more vigorous and picturesque language as, for example, in the affirmation on perseverance. In 1616 it was phrased :

" We believe, that the elect being renewed, are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, in such sort, that albeit they bear about in their flesh the remnants of that original corruption, and albeit they offend through infirmity, and through the intisements thereof sin grievously to the great offence of God : yet they cannot altogether fall from grace, but are raised again through the mercy of God, and kepted to salvation."

The later Confession stated :

" Those that have this precious faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away ; and though many storms and floods do arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon, but shall be kept by the power of God to salvation where they shall enjoy their purchased possession."

I turn now to consider what can be said on general historical grounds on the problem set by the presumed relationship existing between the two Confessions. Those who have read some of the early literature of the Genevan tradition will have no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that many of the expressions cited were stock phrases culled from the Institutes, and in so far as this is so, the Confessions have a common source. The Baptist document furnishes the reader with Scripture references (none were given in the Aberdeen Confession) and the composer could easily have increased the appearance of doctrinal orthodoxy thus acquired by also noting the appropriate pages of the Institutes. I think it would be a fair judgment, however, to say that the acceptance of a vocabulary of terms and ideas does not go very far to account for the particular combination of terms and ideas as are found to be common to these two expositions. This judgment is strengthened by my failure to discover any other Confession in the Genevan tradition before 1644 which offers a parallel worthy of mention. The same themes are dealt with but there is no trace of the similarities existing between the two Confessions in question. So far as I can discover the relation-

ship is unique in so far as these doctrinal statements are concerned. There is an interesting parallel to the method employed, for it is well-known that the Westminster Confession of 1647 was indebted to the Irish Articles of Ussher.<sup>7</sup> The latter were incorporated almost verbatim in a most remarkable piece of unacknowledged borrowing—probably the most notable in all the history of symbolics.

The position would be considerably simplified and the main source of scepticism removed if it could be shown that it was in some degree possible for the Calvinistic Baptists of London to be connected with Scotland. Indeed, more than this would require to be shown, for in contemporary Scotland the Aberdeen Confession was probably unknown to all but a few who cherished memories of Episcopacy. It is this latter factor which makes the problem so puzzling. Even though it was proved that a Scotsman was associated with the London Baptists, could the improbable be accepted that he knew about the Aberdeen Confession and further possessed a copy of it? Nothing less than this is the measure of the major difficulty.

I have two suggestions to offer neither of which is conclusive. The first is that there can be no doubt that, that there was a Scotsman among the Calvinistic Baptists of London at the time of the publication of the Confession and that, moreover, he occupied a leading position among them. The evidence for this is in Dr. Featley's account of a debate between himself and four "Anabaptists" at Southwark on October 17th, 1642.<sup>8</sup> The debate was opened for the Baptists by "a Scotchman" who took quite a considerable part in the later discussion. He was accompanied by another Baptist whom Featley calls "Cufin" and who is easily identified as William Kiffin, one of the signatories to the 1644 Confession. That places the anonymous Scotsman right in the centre of the group who issued the manifesto and incidentally brings to notice the first Scotsman (so far as is known) who became a Baptist. No more is known of him than Featley records, and an examination of the names that have survived from the period has not produced one with an obviously Scottish flavour. If as a matter of fact his name is not on the lists of known Baptists in London about 1644 and there is no further reference to him, this is in itself a singular matter which might well appear strange if he was as prominent among the Baptists in 1642 as Featley suggests. One possible reason for his disappearance, if he did disappear from the London circle, would be that he had removed from the area. This leads to the second

<sup>7</sup> Fully discussed and illustrated in *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Mitchell and Struthers, 1874, Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> *The Dippers dipt*, Seventh edition, 1660, p. If.

suggestion I have to make. It is just a conjecture, but it seems to fit into the puzzle. About the year 1643 a Gilbert Gardin of Tilliefruskie, Aberdeenshire, caused some perturbation in Presbyterian circles by his advocacy of what was called "Brownism" and is stated to have been excommunicated for his opinions. Shortly afterward he appears to have removed to Edinburgh and Robert Pittilok says he suffered close imprisonment there for more than a year and a half on account of his beliefs.<sup>9</sup> Pittilok who seems to have known him, has no hesitation in naming him as a Baptist. He was a man of some standing "known to be pious and of a blameless conversation." The question will be asked: How did such a person come to be in the vicinity of Aberdeen in the year 1643 or thereabouts? At that time the district did not contain anything approaching to Anabaptism, though "sectaries" had appeared shortly after the Second Reformation of 1638 and caused the General Assembly to pass an "Act for searching Books tending to Separation" in 1643. It has been generally held that these were exiles of the Episcopal period returning from Ireland to enjoy what they thought would be the more favourable conditions of their homeland. Where Gilbert Gardin came from is unknown. Like Melchizedek he just arrived. His family name was a common one in Aberdeenshire and it is fairly certain that that was his native place.<sup>10</sup> Can it be that he came north from London? If he did, and the dates coincide, then this would both explain how a Baptist arrived in the alien atmosphere of Aberdeenshire, and how the Aberdeen Confession travelled to London. It would also settle the question of why the theological Scotsman of the Southwark debate vanishes from Baptist records in the South.

The story does not finish at this point. How the Aberdeen Confession travelled South may be conjectural, but how it travelled North again in its new dress is beyond dispute. The 1644 edition of the Baptist Confession was revised in 1646. Considerable alterations were made, but in the main the passages borrowed from or similar to the Aberdeen Confession were left intact. This revision was reprinted in England and again, in 1653, at Leith—the first Baptist Confession of Faith to be published in Scotland. The Scottish reprint is supplied with a preface and dated "Leith, the 10 of the first moneth, vulgarly called March, 1652/3," and it is "Signed in the name and by the appointment of the Church of Christ usually meeting at Leith and Edinburgh,

<sup>9</sup> Tracts Legal and Historical, 1. *The Hammer of Persecution*, London, 1659, reprinted Edinburgh, 1827, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ample illustrations occurs in *Selections from the Ecclesiastical Records of Aberdeen*, Spalding Club, 1846.

Tho. Spenser, Abra. Holmes, Tho. Powell, John Brady."<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the publication is stated in the address "To the Impartial Reader," which affirms that the Confession contains "the principles and substance" of "our Faith and Order," a phrase which has a modern touch in it.

Not a single comment betrays any recognition of its likeness to a previous Scottish symbol, nor might any have been expected considering the short span of life enjoyed by the Episcopal document. Men like Robert Baillie, for example, conscientiously studied both the 1644 and the 1646 versions and never suspected that the application of a little higher criticism would yield something of interest to them for their armoury of anti-Anabaptist missiles. Baillie's opinions were set down in his "Anabaptisme the True Fountaine of Independency, Brownism, Antinomy, Familisme, etc.," published in 1647. He was frankly puzzled about the Baptist Confession. He resented its orthodoxy according to Calvinian standards of doctrine.<sup>12</sup> "The London Anabaptists' Confession," he wrote, "is such an one as I believe thousands of our new anabaptists will be far from owning, as any man may be able to say without a spirit of divination, knowing that their usual and received doctrines do much more agree with the anabaptists in Germany than with that handful who made this Confession."<sup>13</sup> The future Principal of Glasgow University just turned a Nelsonian eye on the publicly declared evidence lying before him and let his prejudice rule the day. What is more to the present purpose is that one of the most telling points he could have made for his Presbyterian readers had completely escaped his notice, namely, that the Confession was based, in its doctrinal sections, on a production of the hated Scottish prelacy, for had such a connection been known no further argument would have been required to cry down the London Confession. His judgment about the extent to which the Baptists of his day would subscribe to the contents of the Confession must have shaken the reliability of his prophetic gifts when he learnt that reprints were not only called for in England, but that the offending document had been reprinted at Leith.

ROBERT B. HANNEN.

<sup>11</sup> Copy in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Daniel Featley also refused to believe that it represented the truth. He wrote, "if we give credit to this Confession and the Preface thereof, those who among us are branded with that Title, are neither Hereticks, nor Schismaticks, but tender-hearted Christians". A Censure of a Book, in *The Dippers dip't*, Seventh edition, 1660, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> pp. 18, 28. Baillie had probably never known the Aberdeen Confession. He would only be 18 years of age when it was published.