Congregational Priesthood and the *Inventio* or Invention of Authority

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Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(Revelation 1:4b-6; NASB)

This essay is composed of two parts. First, a paradigm is offered for understanding the problem of doctrinal development. This paradigm differentiates between true and false developments, *inventio* and invention. Second, this paradigm is applied to the location of authority in various doctrines of priesthood, and argues for congregational priesthood as the preferred doctrine of royal priesthood.

Defining *Inventio* and Invention

In his provocative book, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, Phillip Cary argues that Augustine garnered his concept of the inner man more from his reading of Neo-Platonism than from his reading of Scripture. Although Cary demonstrated Augustine's appropriation of Plotinus, he did not adequately deal with Augustine's dependence on Scripture. Cary did, however, introduce a paradigm that is fruitful for research into Baptist ecclesiology, or any number of doctrines. He notes that new ideas appear in human history when intellectual

traditions encounter problems in the transition between generations. In addressing what we would consider to be eternal truth in a new temporal context, Cary says a "finding" must be made. "Originally, the Latin word *inventio* meant finding the right word or thought for an occasion, hence also finding the solution to a problem." *Inventio* does not convey the sense of novelty but of discovery, a temporal discovery of a pre-existing truth. In modernity, however, the Latin *inventio* became the English "invention" and underwent a profound but important shift in meaning. "Ancient *inventio* eventually became modern 'invention'—the making up of something new rather than the finding of something already there." With this distinction between *inventio* as discovery of an established truth versus invention as making up something new, we encounter the Christian impulse to separate truth and falsehood. Many evangelicals believe truth is eternally established by God and revealed to mankind while fallen and limited humanity's efforts to structure reality are ultimately frivolous and misleading.[1]

Developing a workable model of *inventio* is important, especially in our context, for discerning between the various political statements which so often claim the mantle of Baptist authority. How do we know which polity is closest to the will of God? How do we know which doctrine is true when competing claims are made to the same biblical and historical heritage? The struggles inherent in the Church necessitate an investigation into *inventio*.

The Necessity and Principles of Inventio

While evangelical Christians recognize the eternal nature of truth, we also recognize that we do not have an entirely adequate or total grasp of the eternal truth. We must grow in grace, both individually and communally. This entails the development of doctrine. Alister McGrath, in

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[1]Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii-viii.

The Genesis of Doctrine, finds three reasons for the inevitability of doctrinal development: "the transmission of conflict through the biblical source material," "the narrative nature of the scriptural material," and "the need to interact with the specific needs of a Christian theology in mind." Most Southern Baptists, rightly so, would be uncomfortable both with McGrath's assumption that there is conflicting doctrinal material in the Bible and with his easy embrace of narrative theology. We have a strong sense of the integrity of Scripture based on its inspiration by the one God, and a wariness concerning the claims of narrative theology without a concomitant affirmation of the biblical propositions which give cognitive meaning to the biblical narratives. Although we must disagree with, or at least severely qualify, two of McGrath's reasons for doctrinal development, it is with the third reason that we concur. The doing of theology by Christians necessitates doctrinal development or *inventio*.[2]

Since John Henry Newman published *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* in 1845, historical theologians have readily agreed that the Trinitarian definitions of the early Church are a premier example of doctrinal development. Even those who disagree with Newman's contentious interpretation do not disagree that some type of doctrinal development is needed for the retention of orthodox thought.[3] Newman was reacting to a simplistic view of doctrinal history as understood through the celebrated dictum of Vincent of Lerins. Christian truth is what has been believed *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, "always, everywhere, and by all," said Vincent. As Newman explained, "The remoteness or the nearness of the times, the scantiness or the abundance of materials, the multitude of details, the depth and

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[2]Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 4.

[3]John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845; reprint, Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1974), 77-82; Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy & Tradition*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 2-6, 248-51; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 120-41.

intricacy of the system, the subtle intermixture of received teaching and personal opinion, and the disorder which is inevitable in any mass of historical facts" might be construed so as to find a common substance of faith across the centuries, but this does not dismiss the fact that we have had a growing understanding of the faith. Many doctrines established in the later Church were not necessarily affirmed by earlier theologians.[4]

Newman wrote in an effort to defend doctrinal development in the Roman Church, and his arguments are thus skewed to that purpose. John Courtney Murray remarked that "the parting of the way between the two Christian communities [Roman Catholicism and Protestantism] takes place on the issue of development of doctrine."[5] The tests Cardinal Newman advocated are therefore inadequate for Baptist use, but the historical argument he mustered in advocating a "theory of developments" is generally sound. The distinction Newman made between "true development" and "corruption" is also worthy of affirmation. Peter Toon summarized the major evangelical responses to Newman's theory of doctrinal development. English and Scottish Protestants leveled valid criticisms at Newman without, however, challenging his primary thesis. James Bowling Mozley accused Newman of naivety in that he did not allow for corruption by exaggeration, an activity characteristic of medieval Roman theology. Mozley said the difference between Protestant development and Catholic development was that for Protestants, development is mere explanation, while for Catholics, development is new growth. William Cunningham allowed for "objective" development of doctrine, in the sense of Mozley's new growth, within

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[4]Newman, *Essay on Development*, 69-92.

[5]John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God: Yesterday and Today* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 53, as cited in Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1.

the Bible, but only for "subjective" development, in the sense of Mozley's mere explanation, by the Church.

Robert Rainy, in the Gifford Lectures for 1873, found a diversity and development within the Bible, akin to what we would call progressive revelation. Rainy believed that truth may be defined as it is in God's mind, as it is recorded in the Bible, and as it is understood by Christians. Only in the last category is it possible to speak of continuing doctrinal development. Doctrine is a human response to the divine gift of revelation; it is an activity of the Church which is neither perfect nor infallible; and, no matter how sublime doctrinal creeds and confessions may be, they are lifeless when read without Scripture. Rainy also identified several factors which compel doctrinal formulation: the collision when faith meets worldly philosophies, the challenges posed by heresies, and the need to systematize the dynamic truths within Scripture.[6] He agreed that the Spirit guides the Church in doctrinal *inventio*, but "it is a development *up to the Scriptures*; and the Scriptures always are above it, as the perfect standard never reached" (emphasis mine).[7] The doctrines contained in our confessions and creeds are thus always subject to correction. Protestants agreed with Newman that doctrinal development is necessary, but were very concerned to distinguish truth from error. The critical Protestant test was whether the Church's theological reflection stayed true to Scripture, in which case it is development or *inventio*, or whether it contradicted Scripture, in which case it is corruption or invention. Baptists need not dispute this basic Protestant position on the *inventio* of doctrine.

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[6]Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 17-51.

[7]Robert Rainy, *The Delivery and Development of Christian Doctrine* (1874), cited in Toon, *Development of Doctrine*, 50.

Newman put forward seven tests of true development: the preservation of the idea or

type; the continuity of principles; the power of assimilation; early anticipation; logical sequence;

preservative additions; and chronic continuance. Constructing an evangelical alternative, Toon

offered six criteria for the valid development of doctrine: positive coherence; avoidance of

contradiction with previous dogmas; inclusion of the prayer, doxology, witness, and teaching

aspects of biblical teaching; avoidance of the elevation of a minor tradition, such as

dispensationalism; clarifying the meaning and implication of Scripture; and, the unity of

revelation.[8] These tests are illuminating but ill-conceived if taken alone. As Karl Rahner wrote,

> The *perfected* law of dogmatic development may only be laid down when the whole, unique
> process has reached its term. And because it is a genuinely historical process, under the
> impulse of the Spirit of God, who never makes himself accessible without remainder to laws
> which can be grasped by human minds, it is never just the working out of a formula and an
> all-embracing law.[9]

Taking Rahner's caveat seriously, rather than employing a mere rational test for

development, either Roman or evangelical, we need a holistic test for distinguishing *inventio*

from invention. A Baptist definition of *inventio* might simply state that *the Spirit leads the*

Church in a dynamic historical process to a better understanding of both the explicit and

implicit doctrines revealed in the Word of God. This definition deserves unpacking. First, note

that it is the Spirit of truth who is guiding the Church to a better understanding of the truth.

Although "the Paraclete sayings" of John 14 and 16, when describing His work to "bring to your

remembrance all that I said to you" and to "guide you into all the truth," refer primarily to the

Apostles, it is not

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[8]Newman, *Essay on Development*, 116-48; Toon, *Development of Doctrine*, 116-19.

[9]Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 41.

inappropriate to infer a secondary application to the post-apostolic Church.[10] Jesus Christ did not

leave us without a Comforter and Teacher, the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, Whose

task is to illumine the doctrines He inspired the Apostles to record in Scripture.[11] Second, note

that we speak communally of the Church, for the doctrines of individual theologians, though

often brilliant, genuinely creative, and instrumental in *inventio*, are not to be confused with the

dogmas of the Church. The Church as a community may and often does provide a corrective to

the limitations of the individual. Third, note that this is an historical process. The eternal Word

of God was revealed in history and man responds to revealed truth from a dynamic historical

context, a context shaped by cultural philosophies, by the challenge of heresy, and by the need to

methodically explicate the Bible.

Fourth, note that the Spirit leads us to a better understanding, but perfect understanding

will not be reached this side of the Second Coming. For Roman Catholics to proclaim the

infallibility of the Church presumptively imposes on divine sovereignty. For Baptists to even

imply the infallibility of a favored interpretation is similarly misguided. *Inventio* is a messy

business and must remain provisional. The assured convictions of one period and region might

be overturned by the Spirit giving the Church a clearer understanding in another time and place.

For example, consider the divergent majority views of Southern Baptists in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries on slavery and civil rights. As Toon wrote, "Theology has often been

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[10]D.A. Carson treats the sayings of John 14:26 and 16:13 as devoted exclusively to the apostles, while George R. Beasley-Murray applies them to the Church "in every generation." Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 505, 539-41; Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987), 264,290; idem, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 78. Gerald L. Borchert believes this ministry of the Spirit was "primarily" for the disciples, had "continuing implication" for John's audience, and is meant "derivatively for us today." Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 132-33, 168-71.

[11]Malcolm Yarnell, "Whose Jesus? Which Revelation," Midwestern Journal of Theology, 1 (Spring 2003): 33-53.

diverted into a wrong path along which it traveled for centuries and therefore needs either radical restatement or major adjustments."[12] Fifth, note that, next to personal statements,[13] the Scripture itself contains explicit doctrinal propositions and it is these doctrines which we declare to be entirely trustworthy. Doctrinal propositions which are implied in the Scripture and only later clearly understood should also be embraced, but with the understanding that further light shed on God's Word by the Spirit may lead us to a yet clearer understanding. Finally, note that we must constantly return to the Scripture as both the source and the standard of any and all doctrinal propositions. Baptists must define *inventio* as mere temporal extension of the eternal truths recorded in the Scripture.

Baptist Affirmations of Inventio

A summary review of three important theological affirmations, from a Baptist position, may help us regain a sense of the propriety of doctrinal development or *inventio*. First, concerning the two natures of Christ and the three Persons of the one God, Baptists have often confessed the conclusions reached by the early Church. The early Church and its councils, especially Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, and Chalcedon in 451, amidst intense theological and political struggle, came to doctrinal positions that were not necessarily explicitly understood by earlier Christians. Terms such as *homoousios* and *Trinitas* were adopted to express previously unnamed doctrinal truths which were endangered by the spread of heretical teachings. Baptists have agreed with Christological and Trinitarian *inventio*. For instance, *The Orthodox Creed*, a confession published by General Baptists in 1679, restated the Apostles

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[12]Toon, *Development of Doctrine*, 83.

[13]Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, 50-53, 63-70.

Creed, the Nicene Creed (as revised by Constantinople and Rome), and the so-called Athanasian

Creed, along with the admonition that these three ancient creeds "ought thoroughly to be

received and believed." These creeds were considered true because "they may be proved by most

undoubted authority of Scripture."[14]

Second, consider the Reformation rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. In

spite of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* made between modern Lutherans

and Roman Catholics, this doctrine was seen as entirely new, even reprehensible, to the medieval

ear.[15] The difference between Luther's forensic doctrine of the alien imputation of righteousness

and the Augustinian doctrine of impartation has yet to be adequately surmounted. Most Baptists

have not departed from Luther's development of this central soteriological doctrine. *The Baptist*

Faith & Message sounds authentically Lutheran when it proclaims, "Justification is God's

gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and

believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with

God."[16] That which was before unstated, or at the least unclearly stated, by the Church, is now

declared with clarity and force. "The Reformation was a great doctrinal development. . . . It

involved a positive hold on truth doctrinally, especially on some truths, such as constituted a

positive advance and progress in insight into the Scriptures, as compared with anything that had

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[14]*The Orthodox Creed (1679)*, art. 38, in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms: John A. Broadus*, ed. Timothy and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman, 1996), 120-24.

[15]The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[16]The Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith & Message* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), art. IV, sec. B. One Baptist theologian alludes to the importance of this doctrinal development, when he says, "One need only look to the Roman Catholic system in the year 1517 to see what happens when the gospel itself, as expressed in Paul's clear and unambiguous doctrine of justification by faith, is smothered under layer after layer of tradition and error." James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 15.

been attained before in the history of the Church."[17] Again, Baptists embraced justification by

faith as a development rather than a corruption, *inventio* rather than invention. Moreover, again,

their conviction was driven by their fidelity to Scripture. The doctrine of justification by faith

had always been available in Scripture but the Spirit made that truth much clearer to the Church

during the sixteenth century.

Third, consider the seminal re-institution of believers' baptism in 1609 by the English

Separatist congregation located in the Netherlands and shepherded by John Smyth. Whatever

your theory of Baptist origins, Smyth may be considered "the first definitive nexus" and "a

microcosm of the Baptist tradition as a whole."[18] Smyth was a creative theologian, so creative

that his contemporaries considered him scandalous. Bishop Joseph Hall criticized Smyth and

another leading Separatist, John Robinson, for a "zeal of truth" which overruled their zeal for

"peace."[19] Although Smyth started in the Church of England, his Puritan and Separatist

tendencies brought about the revocation of his preaching license by John Whitgift, the

Archbishop of Canterbury, and his eventual removal as a Separatist to Amsterdam. There, Smyth

rediscovered the doctrine of believers' baptism as the only constitutional form of entrance to the

covenanted Separatist churches. He led his congregation to embrace the practice of believers'

baptism soon afterwards. Much has been made about Smyth's baptism of himself and then the

rest of the congregation, but Smyth said he did not baptize himself on his own authority but on

the Church's authority. "Therefore it is Lawfull for a man to baptize himself together with others

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[17]Rainy, *Delivery and Development*, 222, cited in Toon, *Development of Doctrine*, 48-49.

[18]Jason Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), ix, 20.

[19]*The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Joseph Hall*, ed. Josiah Pratt (London: Whittingham, 1808), vol. 7, 171, cited in Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 51-52.

in communion."[20] He was a Church-Baptist rather than a Se-Baptist. Smyth rediscovered the

truth of believers' baptism and his church readily authorized him to re-institute the practice.

Smyth established the first English Baptist church, Helwys took it back to England, and the

Baptist witness has been consistently advocated ever since.

Towards the end of his life, Smyth reflected on the fact that he had "oftenn tymes beene

accused of inconstancie." His response was, "[W]ell, let them thinke of mee as they please, I

professe I haue changed, and shall be readie still to change, for the better." Smyth was more than

ready to alter his doctrine if his conscience could be convinced that Scripture demanded a new

position. He believed that all Christians were ignorant to some degree. The Spirit of God led him

to become a Baptist by teaching him "the true meaninge of the scriptures." As is well-known,

Smyth eventually forsook his English congregation's institution of believers' baptism in favor of

the ecclesiastical succession available through the Mennonites. He concluded that an interrupted

succession, such as that available through the Churches of Rome and England, could necessitate

the extraordinary reclamation of the true Church by the baptsimal gathering together of two or

three in the name of Christ. Unfortunately, according to Smyth, English Baptists in Amsterdam

had been wrong because there was an ordinary reclamation of baptism available through the

existing succession of the Mennonite Anabaptists. Baptists should be thankful for Smyth's

creativity although we might fault him for having gone one step too far.[21] Smyth reflected a very

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[20]*The Character of the Beast*, in *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594-1598*, ed. William Thomas Whitley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), vol. 2, 660.

[21]*The Last Booke of Iohn Smith: Called the Retraction of His Errours, and the Confirmation of the Truth*, in *Works of John Smyth*, vol. 2, 752-57.

Baptist position when he embraced *invention*, even if we find his fluidity disconcerting. The important thing is to affirm truth even if one's reputation for constancy suffers thereby.[22]

Discerning Between *Inventio* and Invention

Baptists have affirmed and even, in our third case, led in the *inventio* of theology. We might cite other instances, such as the doctrine of inerrancy, a doctrine implied by earlier Baptist theologians, but only systematically developed in the twentieth century as a response to the acidities of modern historical critical methods of Bible study.[23] As Charles Hodge said, "All Protestants admit that there has been, in one sense, an uninterrupted development of theology in the Church, from the apostolic age to the present time."[24] Smyth's compatriot, John Robinson, said it best when he told the Pilgrims of the Mayflower in his farewell address that they should constantly look to the Word of God, "For the Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth out of his holy Word."[25] This expectation of "more light" was incorporated within the foundational covenant of Smyth's congregation at Gainsborough. These proto-Baptists covenanted in 1606 "to walk in all His wayes made known or *to be made known* unto them."[26] Timothy George, who wrote his dissertation on Robinson, has often cited this dictum positively.[27] However, those who

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[22]Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 289-91.

[23]L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, revised ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

[24]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1873; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), vol. 1, 116-17.

[25]John Robinson, "Parting Advice," in "Memoir of Rev. John Robinson," in *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers*, ed. Robert Ashton (London: Snow, 1851), vol. 1, xliv, lxxi.

[26]*Works of John Smyth*, vol. 1, lxii, as cited in William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 24.

[27]Timothy George, "The Future of Baptist Theology", in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 10; idem, "What God Knows," *First Things*, 134 (June/July 2003), 7-9.

have referred to the Separatist dictum of "more light" have not always had the fidelity to the

Bible they possessed.

Consider the Quakers of the seventeenth century. Quakerism emphasized the "inner

light" at the expense of the Word and many General Baptist Churches were devastated by such

teaching. The Bible's authority was replaced with enthusiastic experience. Consider also the

"More Light" Movement in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Their mission statement begins,

"More Light Presbyterians believe that God continues to reveal liberating truth in scripture for

living faithfully in the modern day as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and minds. We are

convinced that God has 'yet more light' to break forth on our church's understanding of

committed covenantal relationships between two people brought together in God's gracious

mystery of love." By two people, they mean "gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of

faith."[28] Most Baptists would see this as invention rather than *inventio*. *Spiritus cum verbo*, "the

Spirit with the Word": We are interested in how the Spirit illumines the written Word, not in

how we might foist our own views on the Spirit without reference to the Word.

The problem still remains: we must discern *inventio* from invention. There have been

both true developments and corruptions of doctrine in Christian and Baptist history. In the wider

Church, consider the doctrines of Mary, purgatory and the sacraments which evolved over

centuries without serious opposition. Only in the Reformation did these doctrines come under

review. In the Baptist fold, Orchard's creation of Baptist successionism was sacrosanct to

Landmarkists in the nineteenth century, as it proved quite useful in debates with other

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[28]"More Light on Same-Sex Unions," http://www.mlp.org/resources/MLonSSU.html, accessed 22 January 2004. Paul Chaney of the American Family Association has challenged the More Light Presbyterians for "the lack of hard scriptural evidence to support their claims." "Shedding More Light on the 'More Light' Movement in the Presbyterian Church (USA)," http://www.afa.net/church/pc062601.asp, accessed 22 January 2004.

denominations. It was almost universally repudiated as an invention by modern Baptist scholars

in the twentieth century, but not without a seminary president paying the ultimate institutional

price for challenging the old belief. More recently, following the trail reconnoitered by James

Leo Garrett, Jr., and blazed by Timothy George, Baptist theologians have begun to reexamine

and refute the atomistic understanding of the priesthood of believers as created by E.Y. Mullins,

furthered by Herschel Hobbs, and taken to extremes by their disciples. The liberal doctrine of the

"priesthood of the believer," widely affirmed during the twentieth century, is being challenged in

this generation.[29] *Inventio* necessarily entails the identification and repudiation of invention, but

this is a laborious, extended, and potentially painful process. It is a process which brings us again

and again back to a dependence on the Spirit's illumination of the Word which He inspired. It is

difficult to speak of doctrinal "infallibility" in light of the Church's continuing struggles over

inventio and invention.

The Problems of Priesthood and Authority

To this point, we have defined doctrinal *inventio* or development, defended the necessity

of its practice, offered a few positive examples from the Baptist perspective, and issued a

warning against doctrinal invention or corruption. The paradigm of *inventio* and invention is now

applied to the problems of authority and priesthood. One of the perennial crises faced in the

Church concerns religious authorization. For Roman Catholics and for Baptists, this problem is

especially acute in their divergent doctrines of priesthood. These doctrines of priesthood attempt

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[29]Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, ed. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991); Malcolm Yarnell, "Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood: John Smyth and Edgar Young Mullins," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck Lovegrove (London: Routledge, 2002), 236-52. Cf. John Hammett's paper in this conference.

to define, confine, or image the presence of Jesus in a particular human or human institution. The assumption is that if one can confine the presence of Jesus, one can access the power of Jesus. This confined power, more often than not, whatever the original intent, has been used in an inappropriate manner, in spite of the fact that true spiritual power was lost at the moment the agenda of Jesus was forgotten. "There is, it seems, an unavoidable untidiness in Christian talk about authority and authorization." It would be beneficial to the Church to become more adept at political theology.[30]

Many Baptists somehow conceive of politics in the Church as a scandal, perhaps because some of us engage in it with a Machiavellian relish. In reaction, ecclesiastical politics has become identified, with a Manichean echo, as inherently evil. However, if we define polity as the way in which the *polis*, the city or community, relates to itself and comes to decisions regarding its authorization, structures and functions, politics becomes an instrument of either good or evil rather than inherently evil. Indeed, when we realize that *pasa exousia*, all power, has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28.18), we must feel a sense of shame for treating the word "power" as unmentionable in the religious context. If we do not deal properly with the issue of power, authority, or freedom—the Greek word *exousia* can be translated in any of these three senses—we only allow abuses of power or excuses against righteously exercising power to continue. An abuse of power is a sin of commission; an excuse to refrain from righteously exercising power is a sin of omission. Whether by omission or commission, refusal to responsibly exercise the power granted to us by God as a stewardship is unacceptable.[31]

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[30]Rowan Williams, "Between the Cherubim: The Empty Tomb and the Empty Throne," in *On Christian Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 183-96.

[31]A word study on authority in the Gospel of Matthew and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians yields the following: all power originates with God, various powers are given to humanity to exercise responsibly as a stewardship, and the stewards of power will be held accountable for their exercise.

Inventions of Priesthood

There are two major examples of the invention of a doctrine of priesthood in Christian history. Both inventions of priesthood have focused authority in that respective priesthood. On the one hand, there is the Roman Catholic doctrine of a priesthood with a particularist, sacerdotal essence and a sacramental, soteriological function, which developed in the early medieval period and reached its zenith in the late Middle Ages. On the other hand, there is the Baptist doctrine of a priesthood with an individualist, anthropological essence and a functional self-sufficiency, which developed at the turn of the twentieth century. These two inventions show how religious authority may be improperly focused in a doctrine of priesthood.

In the early church, the priesthood of all believers was diminished as the special priesthood of the clergy rose to prominence. The administration of the life-giving sacraments was eventually confined to the clerical priesthood. Lay attempts at separation from the clerical priesthood were believed to invite divine disapproval.[32] Over the centuries, the priesthood in the Western Church was attached to the rising authority of the papacy. Popes and papal apologists claimed ever greater powers for the Roman bishop. The Roman emperor's office of *pontifex maximus* was granted to the pope; the pope claimed Italian territories on the basis of a spurious donation from Constantine; the pope, not satisfied with the title of "vicar of Peter," eventually claimed the title of "vicar of Christ," and when that was not sufficient, he claimed the title, "vicar of God." By the time of Innocent III, the pope had become the royal priest *par excellence*.[33] At the local level, the priest dispensed the presence of Christ in the host which he had made through

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[32]Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers: Developments from the General to the Special Priesthood in the Christian Literature of the First Three Centuries* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2000).

[33]Jane Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe 1198-1216* (New York: Longman, 1994), 54-55.

the miracle of transubstantiation with his apotropaic powers. The host, which embodied the presence of Christ, brought with it soteriological power for the living and the dead, and various mundane powers for the needs of the living, from the quelling of riots to the putting out of fires. Besides having the power to confect God's body, the priest was seen as actually becoming Christ in the Mass and its sacrificial service. Of course, one could not become a priest except through ordination by a bishop, and one could not become a bishop except with papal approval. The power over spiritual life was confined to the priesthood and their life-giving sacraments, and the episcopate held the power over the priesthood, and the papacy held power over the episcopate. The ecclesiastical hierarchy had defined and confined Jesus for its own purposes.

Martin Luther was the first major theologian to proclaim that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the priesthood had diverged from the witness of Scripture. He believed that the Roman priesthood had become the powerful tool of the Antichrist to keep German Christians in ignorance and subjection. In response, he asserted that all Christians were priests and the clergy was substantially indistinct from the laity. The Lord's Supper was not a re-presenting of the sacrifice of Christ, and salvation was dependent on faith in Christ alone. Clergy were simply authorized to act on behalf of the Church and could be disciplined by it. The Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was a political catastrophe for the Roman system. With the loss of soteriological power and its attendant financial and political authority, it is no wonder people were put to death by the Romanists for questioning the received definition of priesthood. The powerful presence of Jesus in the priesthood was relocated to other parts of the Christian community by the Reformers, most often to the magistrate or the presbyterate.

In his 1994 essay on "The Priesthood of All Believers," Reggie McNeal came to the conclusion that Baptists in America had significantly diverted from the biblical and Reformation

witness to the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. He describes this change in terms of an

alluvial shift. "Downstream from the Reformation rapids, a huge formation diverts part of our

river. The formation is called *individualism*, and it significantly alters the river's course."

Portions of McNeal's discussion are particularly revealing. McNeal finds the diversion into

individualism to have occurred as soon as Baptists crossed the Atlantic; however, he cites only

secondary sources, sources that blindly repeat an historiographical tradition that does not

adequately deal with the primary materials. Among academics, this should have been declared

inappropriate, but for too long, this historiography has been unwittingly repeated by successive

generations of graduate students. Various historians are marshalled as witnesses by McNeal to

the early individualism of early American Baptists. However, the most profound statements,

made by the Cambridge-trained Winthrop S. Hudson, are relegated to a footnote and are not

entirely understood by McNeal. Hudson decried the "theological erosion" in Francis Wayland's

individualism, but McNeal cited Hudson to prove the continuity of Wayland's atomistic view of

the Church. When it comes to Southern Baptists in the nineteenth century, McNeal is hard-

pressed to find the priesthood of believers defined in an individualist manner, but he employs

John L. Dagg, J.P. Boyce, and E.C. Dargan in that effort anyways.[34]

A number of writers have identified Edgar Young Mullins as the creator of the novel

understanding of the priesthood of believers as individual self-sufficiency.[35] Mullins

intentionally created this doctrine in order to focus religious authority, not in the Church or the

clergy, but in the individual Christian. Access to the presence of God was said to inhere within

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[34]Reggie McNeal, "The Priesthood of All Believers," in *Has Our Theology Changed? Southern Baptist Thought Since 1845*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 209-14. Cf. Winthrop S. Hudson, "By Way of Perspective," in *Baptist Concepts of the Church*, ed. Winthrop S. Hudson (Philadelphia: Judson, 1959), 27. Norman Maring pointed out Hudson's preferences to me before his own death.

[35]R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 49-63; Yarnell, "Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood," 243-49.

every individual. Unfortunately, this relocation of power to the inner man was often done without reference to the Church or to Jesus Christ. McNeal gently points us back toward a corporate understanding of the priesthood of believers. What McNeal will not do, although he identifies a shift in Southern Baptist theology, is describe the newer understanding as an invention or corruption of doctrine. However, when we compare the biblical doctrine of royal priesthood with its corporate, Christological essence and function of spiritual sacrifice, to Mullins's doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, with its individualist, anthropological essence and functional self-sufficiency, we cannot but come to the conclusion that Mullins has given Baptists an invention.

In the Middle Ages, Christ and the community receded into the background with the prominence of a few individuals, the hierarchical priesthood. In the early twentieth century, Christ and the community receded into the background with the prominence of every individual, the atomistic priesthood. Is there a Christian doctrine of priesthood which does justice to the textual witness of Exodus, Isaiah, 1 Peter, and Revelation? Is there a Christian doctrine of priesthood, especially a Baptist one, which gives due recognition to the prominence of Jesus Christ and holds the communal and the personal in balance?

<center>A Baptist *Inventio* of Priesthood</center>

We have elsewhere shown that, drawing from the English Separatist tradition, John Smyth developed a doctrine of royal priesthood that was formative for the early General Baptist understanding of the Church.[36] The General Baptist doctrine of royal priesthood has a parallel in the Particular Baptist tradition. What separated Baptists from other English Protestants was not their general theology but their ecclesiology. What separated General Baptists from Particular

Baptists was not their ecclesiology but their view of election. When it comes to ecclesiology,

both of the foundational Baptist traditions developed a doctrine of priesthood which is supremely

biblical and serenely Reformed. Because of its biblical fidelity, the seventeenth-century Baptist

understanding of priesthood must be seen as *inventio*, and therefore, worthy of our consideration.

John Smyth, who stands at the headwaters of the General Baptist movement, was

associated with Separatist leaders of the early seventeenth century such as Francis Johnson and

John Robinson. Another creative churchman, who stands just before the headwaters of the

Particular Baptist movement, Henry Jacob, was associated with the same leaders.[37] Jacob was

the founding pastor of the church from which Particular Baptists in a few years issued forth.

Samuel Eaton was the pastor of a Particular Baptist congregation which emerged from Jacob's

church around 1633 and was affiliated with William Kiffin. John Spilsbury pastored another

Particular Baptist congregation which emerged around 1638.[38] Kiffin and Spilsbury were two of

the fifteen signatories for the first confession of faith constructed by an association of Baptists,

the Particular Baptist statement known as the *First London Confession* of 1644.[39]

Henry Jacob's theology, recorded in nearly a dozen books, provided the context from

which emerged the ecclesiology of the Particular Baptists. Jacob was convinced that "Christ

Iesus (as true Lord and King of his Visible Church) hath instituted in his New Testament a

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[36]Yarnell, "Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood," 237-40.

[37]Stephen J. Brachlow, "Jacob, Henry," in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), vol. 2, 137-38.

[38]Jacob departed his church in 1622, but only after building a strong foundation, having authored some ten works on various aspects of ecclesiology. The first references to Particular Baptists in the Jacob church records may be found in the 1620s and more definitely in 1633 and 1638. John Lathrop served as pastor from 1624 to 1632. Henry Jessey became the pastor in 1637 and was baptized by Hanserd Knollys as a Baptist in 1645. Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 7-19; B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 59; William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 6.

[39]*The Confession of Faith, of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists*, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 156.

certain perpetual form of the said Church & Government."[40] Jacob's discussion of the "true

visible politicall church" did not begin with immediate power struggles, as do so many of

today's ecclesiological discussions, but with Jesus Christ. In his *Institutes of the Christian*

Religion, John Calvin broached the biblical doctrine of the threefold office of Christ, *triplex*

munus Christi, which is through Christ partially conferred upon Christians.[41] Robert Browne, the

theological forefather of the Separatists, adapted this Christology for his radical ecclesiology,

and from thence it passed into common Separatist usage. The Separatists and the General

Baptists were utterly convinced that the true church could only exist where Christ was allowed to

reign as King.[42] In his confessional "Articles," Jacob began with Christ's threefold office. He

found in the *triplex munus Christi*, ""the foundation to the whole building even of his visible and

politicall Church now under the Gospell."[43] Although he recognized the existence of the

invisible Church, he believed it must have a visible expression which fulfills the ordinances of

Christ in Scripture. This visible expression is located in "a spirituall bodie politike; and so it is a

free congregation independent. That is, It hath from God the right and power of spirituall

Administration, and Government in it selfe, and over it selfe by the common and free consent of

the people independently, and immediately under Christ, always in the best order they can."[44]

    Although Jacob believed power was conveyed by Christ directly to the congregation, he

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[40]Henry Jacob, *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christs True or Visible Ministeriall Church* (Leiden, 1610), sig. *4ʳ.

[41]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), ii.xiv,

[42]B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 53-54.

[43]Jacob, *A Confession and Protestation of the Faith of Certaine Christians in England, holding it necessary to observe & keepe all Christes true substantiall Ordinances for his Church visible and Politicall* (Middleburg, 1616), sig. A4ʳ, A6ʳ.

[44]Ibid., sig. B2ʳ⁻ᵛ.

was not an advocate of unlimited democracy. Rather, as with most English political theologians,

he considered a mixed Aristotelean polity of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy the best

form of government. The Oxford theologian, Peter Martyr Vermigli, had taught that the Church

was governed by Christ as king, the clergy as an aristocracy, and the people as a democracy. The

Separatists agreed.[45] This meant, for Jacob, that although a congregation had *possession* of

ecclesiastical power, duly-elected clergy normally had *use* of that power.[46] Jacob argued against

the location of ecclesiastical power anywhere other than in the congregation, or, more properly,

the minister in concert with the congregation. This meant that the congregation's power could

never be assumed by an association or extra-congregational cleric. He agreed with a

"consociation" of congregations for various purposes, "but not a subordination, or surely not a

subjection of the congregations under any authoritie absolute, save onely Christs, and the holy

Scriptures."[47] Jacob's political solution for the Church entailed a direct gift of power from Christ

as king to the congregation as a royal priesthood. This power was retained by the congregation

and granted to its pastor to be used for the welfare of the congregation. Supra-congregational

structures were allowed but power was never to be lodged in those structures, for Christ alone is

king, and he shares his power only with the visible congregation.[48]

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[45]Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci Communes* (London, 1583), iv.v.ix, cited in Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160, 175. Cf. Jacob, *Divine Beginning*, sig. A2^v-A3^r.

[46]Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, 185-93.

[47]Jacob, *Confession and Protestation*, sig. B2^v. Cf. Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, 220-25.

[48]The English Baptistic congregation at Amsterdam wrote, "That Jesus Christ . . . is become the mediator of the New Testament (to wit) the King, Priest, and Prophet of the Church, and that the faithful through Him are thus made spiritual Kings, Priests, and Prophets." *Propositions and Conclusions*, art. 30, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 128-29.

When we analyze the *First London Confession*, we find that the Particular Baptist apple

has not fallen far from the Separatist tree of Browne, Smyth, Helwys, Robinson, and Jacob. This

formative Baptist confession used the English Separatist document known as *A True Confession*

of 1596 as a model for its construction.[49] *A True Confession* was written to publish the political

views advocated by Separatists and it employed Christ's *triplex munus* to organize the

discussion. Christ "only is made the Mediator of the new Testament" and His mediating office of

"Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church of God, is so proper to him, as neither in the whol, nor

in anie part therof, it can be transferred from him to anie other." As prophet, Christ reveals the

Word of God; as priest, "hee hath appeered once to put away sinne, by offring & sacrificing of

himsell" and makes eternal intercession; as king, all power is given to Him and He

communicates the benefits of salvation to the elect. Christ, in turn, enables the Church to share in

His offices: While His Kingdom is fully revealed at His second coming, He "hath here in earth a

spirituall Kingdome and a canonicall regiment in his Church ouer his servants." Christ "maketh

his people a spirituall howse, and holy Priesthood, to offer up spirituall sacrifices, acceptable to

God through him." From this Christological foundation, *A True Confession* developed a full

congregational

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[49]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 79. Jay Travis Collier examined nine possible influences on the First London Confession. Formally, the greatest influence was provided by *A True Confession*. Theologically, the greatest influence was that of Henry Jacob. Collier, "The Sources Behind the First London Confession," *American Baptist Quarterly*, 21 (June 2002), 2:197-214.

ecclesiology.[50] This Christological foundation for an ecclesiastical structure was adopted by the

Particular Baptists.[51]

For the Particular Baptists, the Church is Christ's "spirituall Kingdom" on earth. The

essence of the Church is defined in the following terms: the "Church, as it is visible to us, is a

company of visible saints, called and separated from the world, by the Word and the Spirit of

God, to visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into the faith, and joined to

the Lord, and each other by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the ordinances,

commanded by Christ their head and King." Every true Christian acknowledges Christ's work as

a threefold mediator and is called into the Church, "being fitly compact and knit together."[52]

Baptists were interested in knowing where authority resides. The word "power" unashamedly

interposed itself in three of the four major sections of this confession, the Christological,

soteriological, and ecclesiastical sections: "all power" is given to Christ; "He does spiritually

govern His Church, exercising His power;" "ruling in the world . . . by His mighty power;" "to

preserve them by His power."[53] Perhaps the most important references to power occur in the

ecclesiastical articles on ministers and excommunication: "every Church has power given them

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[50]*A True Confession*, arts. 10-17, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 82-97. A later continental Anabaptist confession had a structure organized around *triplex munus Christi*, but it argued for significant alterations in the priesthood and kingship of Christ which were not amenable to Separatists, General Baptists, and Particular Baptists. Moreover, the transition between Christ's offices and the Church's office was not explicit. *The Waterland Confession*, arts. IX-XIV, XVII-XVIII, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 44-66. This was the basis of Smyth's post-Baptist Mennonite confession. *A Short Confession*, arts. 9-14, 17-18, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 102-13. Smyth's earlier Baptist confession and Helwys's later Baptist confession paralleled the Separatist concerns. *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth*, art. 7, and *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland*, art. 9, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 100-01, 116-23.

[51]*First London Confession*, arts. XIII-XX, XXXIII, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 153-71. Many of the changes between *A True Confession* and *First London Confession* were cosmetic in nature. However, a major structural change was introduced by the inclusion of one additional article on limited atonement (art. XXI) and elevation additional articles (arts. XXII-XXXII) on the Spirit's role in salvation. The confession now reflected the fourfold structure of Calvin's *Institutes*: God and creation (arts. I-VII); Christ and the atonement (arts. VIII-XXI); the Holy Spirit and faith (arts. XXII-XXXII); and, the Church and the means of grace (arts. XXXIII-Conclusion).

[52]*First London Confession*, arts. XXXIII-XXXV.

from Christ for their better well-being;" "none other have power to impose;" and, "Christ has

likewise given power to His whole church to receive in and cast out."[54] The Particular Baptists

emphasized the authority of the local congregation against every other claimant. They embraced

associations of churches, but an association exists for the convenience of its congregations. In a

later confession, they said associations "are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so

called." They recognized the divinely given authority of the magistrate, but separated the

magistrate's jurisdiction over "civil laws" from congregational jurisdiction over "ecclesiastical

laws."[55] The earliest Baptists believed in the "Christonomy," literally, "rule by Christ," of the

local church, the direct rule of Christ in the kingdom of His Church. Mullins's invention of the

"autonomy," literally "self-rule" of the local church in 1912 pales in comparison.[56]

Later seventeenth-century Baptists, both Particular and General, continued this

Christonomous foundation for church polity. When the Particular Baptists adopted the

Westminster Confession as the basis for the *Second London Confession*, they were careful to add

the *triplex munus Christi* and significantly alter the articles on the Church.[57] The General Baptist

confessions known as *The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations* (1651), *The True Gospel-*

Faith Declared According to the Scriptures (1654), and *The Orthodox Creed* (1678), and the

Particular Baptist confessions known as *The Midland Association Confession* (1655) and *The*

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[53]*First London Confession*, arts. XIX, XXXII.

[54]*First London Confession*, arts. XXXVI, XLII.

[55]*First London Confession*, arts. XLVII, XLIX. *Second London Confession*, originally, *Confession of Faith Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations Of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (1677), ch. XXVI, art. 15, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 241-95.

[56]"Christonomy" has been coined by this writer to describe the essence of early Baptist ecclesiology. Brackney, *The Baptists*, 42.

[57]The Baptists demonstrated some dependence on the *Savoy Declaration* in their version of the *Westminster Confession*. *Second London Confession*, chs. VIII, XXVI-XXX.

Somerset Confession (1656) contained similar language to greater and lesser degrees.[58] The

Christonomous basis of congregational power became scarce during later centuries. The 1853

revision of the 1833 *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* contained a reference to the *triplex*

munus Christi, but this was limited to soteriology.[59] The *New Hampshire Confession* was the

basis of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, and 2000),

but one cannot find a reference to the *triplex munus Christi* in the Christological, soteriological,

or ecclesiological articles. Moreover, the intimate connection between the Kingdom of Christ

and the Church was severed between articles VI and IX. An important *inventio*, the

Christological basis of the Church's power in priesthood and kingship, the Christonomy of the

local church, was thus sadly lost.

In order to rid ourselves of the atomistic priesthood promoted by some disciples of

Mullins, perhaps we should reclaim this early Baptist *inventio*, until a more biblical and Christ-

honoring doctrine of authority is found. Whatever polity we embrace, it would be helpful to

affirm the conclusion of the 1644 *First London Confession*:

> Also we confesse 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 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 them. But if any
> man shall impose upon us anything that we see not to be commanded by our Lord Jesus
> Christ, we should in his strength, rather embrace all reproaches and tortures of men, to be
> stript of all outward comforts, and if it were possible, to die a thousand deaths, rather than to
> doe any thing against the least tittle of the truth of God, or against the light of our own
> consciences.[60]

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[58]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 178-79, 193, 199, 207, 310, 322.

[59]*The New Hampshire Confession*, art. viii, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 361-67.

[60]This statement was not included in the 1596 *A True Confession* and was dropped from later editions of the *First London Confession*. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 149.