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Early English Baptists' View of the Lord's Supper

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The year 1609 for many students of Baptist history marks the beginning of the ecclesial movement. It was in this year that John Smyth and his congregation were baptized in Amsterdam thus distinguishing themselves from other English Separatists in the region. Over four hundred years have passed since this inaugural event, and it is obvious even to the casual observer that much has changed. The multi-million, multi-national conglomeration of Baptist people today is a far cry from those few former English-separatists who fled their homeland in order to express their freedom of conscience and right to religious liberty. The changes in society and in Baptist churches are stark when the two times are compared, but have only these externals changed? Has Baptist theology changed during this time period, and if so, to what extent?

A variety of topics could be addressed which relate to this question, but our interest concerns the Baptist theology and practice of the Lord's Supper. In particular, our aim is to discern what was the earliest understanding of the Lord's Supper for English Baptists in the seventeenth century. Such an inquiry allows us to see the commonalities and differences of the Lord's Supper between the differing factions of Baptists in the 1600s. Though it may be difficult to say there is a view of the Lord's Supper for Baptists of anytime, through the examination of Baptist thought found in confessions, catechisms, and treatises we should be able to see what different Baptist groups believed about the Lord's Supper. An analysis of this data will then be presented to show what it is that the earliest English Baptists believed about the Lord's Supper.

Baptist Sources of Thought on the Lord's Supper

From the beginnings of Baptist history Baptist congregations have been independent, autonomous, congregations that at best were moderately connectional. Hundreds of years after their inception this independence is hailed as a hallmark, but important as this factor may be ecclesiologically, it creates an ambiguity that makes codifying Baptist theology difficult. This is especially true for the seventeenth century as Baptists were originating, developing, and coming into their own. Therefore, in order to gain an understanding of the Lord's Supper for early Baptists a variety of sources must

be examined including confessions, catechisms, tracts, and treatises. These sources will be examined from early to late in the traditional English Baptist categories of General and Particular Baptists.¹

General Baptists

The tradition of the general Baptists begins with John Smyth and company in Amsterdam in 1609. This previously-Separatist congregation from Gainsborough had journeyed to Holland for the sake of religious liberty, but along the way journeyed into a Baptist theology wherein the congregation, led by Smyth, was baptized and the Baptist tradition begun.

One of the main works for which Smyth is known is a presentation of a debate he had with Richard Clyfton published under the title *The Character of the Beast*. This work clearly presents Smyth's new views on the church and particularly baptism. The ideas of baptism discussed have close connections to the other sacrament: the Lord's Supper. Throughout the work the Supper periodically shows up in relation to the functions of the church in order to buttress Smyth's position on believers' baptism. Here is an example:

Thirdly if baptism doth appertain to infants because Christ blesseth some particular infants, and because Christ saith the Kingdom of God doth appertain to such, then the Lord's supper also: for if you say, they are not capable of the Lord's supper in two respects: 1. for that they cannot eat it, 2. for that they cannot examine themselves: I answer they must have it as soon as they can eat it: and they cannot confess their sins and faith, and so cannot be baptized.²

However, shortly after this seminal event Smyth doubted that his se-baptism (self baptism) was adequate since he and his church did not seek baptism from a legitimately baptized congregation. With the existence of the Waterlander Mennonites in Amsterdam, a group that he believed had appropriate baptism, Smyth thought his congregation should seek membership with them. In the same year of his baptism Smyth writes a confession of faith, *Corde Credimus*, most likely to accompany his application to the Waterlander Mennonites.³ The document is a short statement of faith and

¹Separate treatment of these groups is a general practice of historians of this era. For example cf. B.R. White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. and exp. ed., A History of the English Baptists 1 (Carlisle: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996). However, recent studies have shown that these lines are not as definite as has been suggested. Cf. Stephen I. Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006).

²John Smyth, *The Character of the Beast or the False Constitution of the Church*, in William Thomas Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594-1598*, Vol. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press), 591.

³The original confession was written by Smyth in Latin: "Coenam Domini esse symbolum externum communionis Christi et fidelium ad invicem per fidem et charitatem." Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, Vol. 2, 683. The English translation reprinted in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson, 1959), 99, is taken from

simply mentions the Lord's Supper: "15. That the Lord's Supper is the external sign of the communion of Christ, and of the faithful amongst themselves by faith and love."⁴

Not everyone in Smyth's congregation believed that the baptism that they received was suspect nor did they wish to seek membership with the Mennonites. Thomas Helwys and a few other members of the church separated from Smyth and his congregation and formed their own church. This group would eventually move back to England and establish the General Baptist tradition. As Smyth's congregation was applying for membership with the Waterlanders, Helwys was working against their application for membership. This tension resulted in Smyth's congregation agreeing to a work composed by Hans de Ries, *A Short Confession of Faith*, which was signed by Smyth along with forty-three others in 1610 and according to Lumpkin is "practically a reproduction of . . . Gerrits and de Ries of 1580."⁵

28. There are two sacraments appointed by Christ, in his holy church, the administration whereof he hath assigned to the ministry of teaching, namely, the Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper. These are outward visible handlings and tokens, setting before our eyes, on God's side, the inward spiritual handling which God, through Christ, by the cooperation of the Holy Ghost, setteth forth the justification in the penitent faithful soul; and which, on our behalf, witnesseth our religion, experience, faith, and obedience, through the obtaining of a good conscience to the service of God.

31. The Holy Supper, according to the institution of Christ, is to be administered to the baptized; as the Lord Jesus hath commanded that whatsoever he hath appointed should be taught to be observed.

32. The whole dealing in the outward visible supper, setteth before the eye, witnesseth and signifyeth, that Christ's body was broken upon the cross and his holy blood spilt for the remission of our sins. That the being glorified in his heavenly Being, is the alive-making bread, meat, and drink of our souls: it setteth before our eyes Christ's office and ministry in glory and majesty, by holding his spiritual supper, which the believing soul, feeding and . . . the soul with spiritual food: it teacheth us by the outward handling to mount upwards with the heart in holy prayer, to beg

Benjamin Evans, *The Early English Baptists*, vol. 1 (London: n.p., 1862), 253-54.

⁴Ibid., 101.

⁵Ibid., 102. This confession is quite similar to a 1580 confession by Gerrits and de Ries that became the *Waterlander Mennonite Confession*. See Lumpkin, "The Waterlander Confession," 41-66.

at Christ's hands the true signified food; and it admonisheth us of thankfulness to God, and of verity and love one with another.⁶

As alluded to above, tensions existed between the newly formed Smyth and Helwys congregations. In 1611, the Helwys congregation sought to distinguish themselves from the Mennonites in Amsterdam and wrote *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland* as their confession. Of its importance Lumpkin says, "The confession shows considerable independence of thought and is rightly judged the first English Baptist Confession of Faith."⁷ Joe Early concurs with Lumpkin and adds that it "reveals the maturation of Helwys's stance in the wake of his definitive break from Smyth."⁸ On the Lord's Supper it simply states,

15. That the LORDS Supper is the outward manifestacion off the Spiritual communion betwene CHRIST and the faithful mutuallie. I. Cor. 10.16, 17. to declare his death vntil he come. I Cor. II.26.⁹

John Smyth was never able to see his congregation received into the Mennonite fellowship, though eventually they would officially be admitted. One final confession from Smyth's church helps highlight their position on the Supper. *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion*, 1612-1614 was written in the hope of gaining entrance into the Waterlander fellowship as well as separating Smyth and company from Helwys or even the Reformed tradition.¹⁰ It is an elaboration of the *Waterlander Confession* by Gerrit and de Ries and presents the most robust treatment of the Supper yet.

72. That in the outward supper which only baptized persons must partake, there is presented and figured before the eyes of the penitent and faithful, that spiritual supper, which Christ maketh of His flesh and blood: which is crucified and shed for the remission of sins (as the bread is broken and the wine poured forth), and which is eaten and drunken (as is the bread and wine bodily) only by those which are flesh, of His flesh, and bone of His bone:

⁶Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 109-10. The text above comes from Lumpkin's volume and can also be found in Evans, *Early English Baptists*, vol. 1, 245-52. The original confession's origins have been debated and perhaps the first few editions are lost, however, a larger 1618 version of the confession exists and has been translated into English in Cornelius J. Dyck, "A Short Confession of Faith by Hans de Ries," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 38 (1964): 5-19.

⁷Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 115.

⁸Joe Early, Jr., *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, English Baptist Texts (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 29.

⁹Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 120-21. See also, Early, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 71.

¹⁰See Lee, *John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2003), 91. Also, Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 123-24.

in the communion of the same spirit (I Cor. xii. 13; Rev. iii. 20, compared with I Cor. xi. 23, 26; John vi. 53, 58).

73. That the outward baptism and supper do not confer, and convey grace and regeneration to the participants or communicants: but as the word preached, they serve only to support and stir up the repentance and faith of the communicants till Christ come, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts (I Cor. xi. 26; 2 Peter i. 19; I Cor. I. 5-8).

74. That the sacraments have the same use that the word hath; that they are a visible word, and that they teach to the eye of them that understand as the word teacheth the ears of them that have ears to hear (Prov. x. 12), and therefore as the word pertaineth not to infants, no more do the sacraments.

75. That the preaching of the word, and the ministry of the sacraments, representeth the ministry of Christ in the spirit; who teacheth, baptiseth, and feedeth the regenerate, by the Holy Spirit inwardly and invisibly.¹¹

In the following years Helwys would lead his congregation back to London to establish the first Baptist churches on English soil and begin the General Baptist tradition. By the 1640s quite a few General Baptist churches were in London and from these churches many defenses of beliefs were printed, often pertaining to baptism or religious liberty. One such treatise was written by Edward Barber in 1642 that is an early argument for believers' baptism as immersion entitled *A Small Treatise of Baptisme or Dipping*. The main topic of concern in the treatise is baptism, but we do find the Lord's Supper mentioned in the argument. At one point Barber lists out a few reasons why "the Lord aimeth at [giving] this ordinance of dipping to the Apostles, and so to the Church."¹² Two of those reasons mention the Supper, and thus depict the idea of the connection of the Supper to baptism and to the church.

Sixly, if at any time any should aske us, who requireth us to walke in such a holy fellowship, and communion, wee are inabled to it by Christ, and so assured of Countenance in it, by the Lords Supper, for hee that saith he is in Christ, and hath fellowship with him, ought himself so to walke, even as he hath walked. John I.2.6.

Seventhly, That the person thus dipped, is first visibly sealed, to

¹¹Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 137-38.

¹²Edward Barber, *A Small Treatise of Baptisme, or, Dipping*. (n.p., 1642), 11. For a summary of his argument see White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 29.

the day of Redemption, Secondly, he hath truly a right to Communion, as being dipped into one body, whereof Christ is head, I Cor. 12.13. Thirdly, that hee is mortified, Rom. 6.4. crucified, dead and buried, and risen againe with Christ, Gal. 3.2.3,4,5.

In 1651 the first General Baptist confession of more than one church is written at an associational meeting in the Midlands. Lumpkin claims that the "Confession drew the churches closer together, giving them a greater sense of unity and strength."¹³ The confession is entitled *Thirty Congregations*, and on the Lord's Supper it states,

53. That Jesus Christ took Bread, and the juice of the Vine, and brake, and gave to his Disciples, to eat and drink with thanksgiving; which practise is left upon record as a memorial of his suffering, to continue in the Church until he come again; I Cor. II. 32, 24, 25, 26.¹⁴

The General Baptists were also aware of George Fox's movement throughout England and the effect it was having on their churches. In 1654 the General Baptist churches in London presented together a confession in the face of the Quaker movement entitled *The True Gospel-Faith Declared According to the Scriptures, 1654*. Its short articles give very little detail other than providing the fundamentals of the faith, the practice of the Lord's Supper being one of those. Article 16 states, "That they ought to meet together to break bread, Acts 20.7; Lk. 2.19."¹⁵

Throughout the seventeenth century suspicion was attached to the Baptists for fear that these "Anabaptists" would repeat the rebellious Münster episode on the continent one-hundred years previous. In order to quell these fears the General Baptists of London and beyond hurriedly put out a confession in 1660 entitled, *A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith*, but better known as *The Standard Confession*. It was later adopted by the Assembly of General Baptists and "serv[ed] as a basis of union for over forty years and as a specific body of doctrine to which its people could hold in the dark years of persecution, . . ."¹⁶ On the Lord's Supper it simply confessed, "That it is the duty of such who are constituted aforesaid, to *continue steadfastly in Christs and the Apostles Doctrine, and assembling together, in fellowship, in breaking of Bread, and Prayer, Acts 2.42.*"¹⁷

Only a few years later a controversy arose for General Baptists in the Midlands. Two of the probable signers of *The Standard Confession*, Matthew Caffyn and Thomas Monck, had a disagreement over Christology. Caffyn

¹³Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 173.

¹⁴Ibid., 183.

¹⁵Ibid., 194.

¹⁶Ibid., 223.

¹⁷Ibid., 229. Italics original.

was teaching a melchiorite Christology in the churches that was not well received. In response to this issue, among others, *An Orthodox Creed* was written. Not only did it follow the form of the *Westminster Confession*, the *Savoy Confession*, and the *Second London Confession*, but it also included three ecumenical creeds, all of which showed the desire of its signers to align themselves with orthodox-Christian thought.¹⁸ Its discussion on the Lord's Supper is one of the strongest for the General Baptists.

XXVII. Article.

Of Baptism, and the Lord's-supper

Those two sacraments, viz. Baptism, and the Lord's-supper, are ordinances of positive, sovereign, and holy institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church, to the end of the world; and to be administered by those only who are rightly qualified, and thereunto called, according to the command of Christ, in *Mat. 28.19*.¹⁹

XXXIII. Article.

Of the end and right Administration of the Lord's Supper.

The Supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him the same Night wherein he was betrayed; To be observed in his Church, to the end of the World, for the perpetual Remembrance, and shewing forth the Sacrifice of himself in his Death; and for the Confirmation of the Faithful Believers in all the Benefits of his Death and Resurrection, and Spiritual Nourishment and growth in him; sealing unto them their continuance in the Covenant of Grace, and to be a Band and Pledg of Communion with him, and an Obligation of Obedience to Christ, both passively and actively, as also of our Communion and Union each with other, in the participation of this holy Sacrament. And the outward Elements of Bread and Wine, after they are set apart by the Hand of the Minister, from common Use, and Blessed, or Consecrated, by the Word of God and Prayer, the Bread being broken, and Wine poured forth, signifie to the Faithful, the Body and Blood of Christ, or holdeth forth Christ and him Crucified; and the Minister distributing the Bread and Wine to the Communicants, who are to take, or receive, both the Bread and Wine at the Hands of the Minister, applying it by Faith, with Thanksgiving to God the Father, for so great a Benefit; and no Unbaptized, Unbelieving, or open Prophane, or wicked Heretical Persons, ought

¹⁸W. Madison Grace II, "Transcriber's Preface to An Orthodox Creed: An Unabridged 17th Century General Baptist Confession," *Southwestern Journal of Theology [SWJT]* 48 (2006): 127-32.

¹⁹Thomas Monck, et al., "An Orthodox Creed: or, a Protestant Confession of Faith," *SWJT* 48 (2006): 161.

to be admitted to this Ordinance to prophane it.

Neither is that Popish Doctrine of Transubstantiation to be admitted of, nor Adoration of the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass, as they call it, together with their denying of the Cup to the Laity, and many more Idolatrous, and Superstitious Practices, decreed in the Popish Councils of *Lateran*, and *Trent*; In opposition to which, and such like Idolatry of *Rome*, many of our worthy and famous Ancients and renowned Protestants, lost their lives by Fire and Faggot in *England*, whose Spirits (we hope) are now in Heaven, as worthy Martyrs and Witnesses of Christ, in bearing a faithful Testimony to this holy Ordinance of their Lord and Master. Neither may we admit of Consubstantiation, it being not consonant to God's Word. Nor are little Infants, that cannot examine themselves, nor give Account of their Faith, nor understand what is signified by the outward signs of Bread and Wine, to be admitted to this Sacrament. Though St. *Austin* taught so from *John* 6.63. and many of the *Greek* Churches so believe and practise to this Day. And this holy Ordinance ought to be often celebrated among the Faithful, with Examination of themselves, (*viz.*) of their Faith, and Love, and Knowledg, of these holy and divine Mysteries, lest they eat and drink their own Damnation, for prophaning of God's holy Ordinance, as many (we fear) have done, and (yet) do at this Day; whose hard and blind Hearts the Lord in Mercy open, if it be his blessed Will.²⁰

Around the same time of the publication of *An Orthodox Creed* another General Baptist published what Garrett claims as "the first treatise written by a Baptist which can be reckoned as a systematic theology."²¹ The title of the work is *Christianismus Primitivius. or, The Ancient Christian Religion in Its Nature, Certainty, Excellency, and Beauty, (Internal and External) particularly Considered, Adderted, and Vindicated*. It is ordered into four books with the second consisting in two parts. Part II of Book II addresses the doctrine of the church where we will find his theological discussion on the Lord's Supper. The title of the chapter on the Supper is telling to how Grantham conceived of the nature of the Supper, "Of the Holy Table of the Lord, or the Lords Supper celebrated in Bread and Wine, for a perpetual Commemoration of the Death of Jesus Christ, till his second coming."²² From this we can deduce that the Supper entails the ideas of memorial and future hope. In the following nine sections Grantham outlines the major defenses for the Supper that

²⁰Ibid., 165-66.

²¹James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2009), 42.

²²Thomas Grantham, *Christianisumus Primitivius* Book II, part II (London: n.p., 1678), 81.

he felt were needed at the time wherein he addresses beliefs on the Supper ranging from Catholics to enthusiasts.

In general Grantham understands the Supper to be an act of remembering, a “solemn Memorial” as he calls it.²³ The nature of the Supper is “to commemorate the great work of our Redemption by his death. . . .”²⁴ In fact Grantham desires to have Christ exalted in the Supper and remembered as the one crucified and coming again. In understanding the Supper in this way Grantham claims it does a few things:

1. It provides against all future offerings *FOR SIN* . . .
2. This Ordinance representeth Christ as having really dyed for us, . . . not as our late *Enthusiasts* do speak, . . .
3. This Ordinance sheweth, that the Blood of Christ shed for remission of sins, was really seen with moral eyes, contrary to that dangerous saying of the Quakers, . . .²⁵

Grantham also sees that the Supper itself teaches Christians about humility and love in relation to how they should consider and respond to the gospel. “Sure in this Ordinance we have as real an offer made of the Flesh and Blood of Christ for us to feed upon by faith, as in any other part of the Gospel of God.”²⁶ He also sees that the Supper teaches and is concerned with Christian unity.

And it is that Table, to which all Saints are to approach with such preparation as may render them fit for communion in that Mystical Body, the Church; which is also called Christ, because of that unity they have with him, and one another in him. . . . Doubtless when our Saviour enjoyed all that sat with him, *to eat that bread and to drink All of that cup*, his design was therein to engage them in the Unity of himself and one another.²⁷

Grantham also saw the Lord’s Supper as being central to the idea of the church and the Christian faith. He claimed that it “establish[ed] Christians in the faith,” it provides assurance, and finds the fullness of Christ represented in his three-fold office of king (wherein a new law is made), priest (wherein the church commemorates His sacrifice), and prophet (wherein the Supper “foretells of the second coming”).²⁸ Such high a view Grantham has of the Supper in relation to establishing Christians in their faith that he claims,

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 83.

²⁵Ibid., 85-86.

²⁶Ibid., 88.

²⁷Ibid., 89.

²⁸Ibid., 89-90.

No Ordinance (no not preaching of the Word) is of greater use to establish Gods People in the Faith than this, for here we see with the eye, and by it the Judgment is informed, as we hear with the ear, and so receive instruction.²⁹

As his argument continues, Grantham addresses how an individual is to participate in the ritual. "The worthy Receiver of the Lords Supper, does not only put away sin by the power of Christ, but he must approach nigh to God with the whole heart *in this* service."³⁰ In participating in the Supper this would require the correct discernment of what Christ accomplished, which would necessarily lead one to an acknowledgment that Christ was truly human, that the ritual was commemorative of Jesus' death and not another "Sacrifice propitiatory," and that in the Supper "the Body of Christ mystical is here to be discerned, as this is the evidence of that unity between the *Head* and the *Members*."³¹

The practice of celebrating the Supper is then taken up wherein Grantham argues that it be administered by a pastor. He provides a few reasons for this. First, the pastor is tasked with feeding the flock, the Supper is a church ordinance and therefore requires a church minister to administer it,³² and, finally, the Supper "is as Solemn an Service as any, and requires as great abilities to do it to edification, as other services pertaining to the work of the Ministry, and is ordained to feed and nourish the Faith of the Church of God."³³

Next he addresses the posture one should take before the Supper—sitting or kneeling. He sees the model in the Bible of the Last Supper as sitting and argues the church should do the same. He follows this with the question of frequency of practicing this ritual. He claims there is liberty in Scripture about the occurrence of the Supper but suggests a greater frequency akin to preaching and prayers. His concluding thoughts on this subject are helpful and highlight his greater theology of the Supper:

Nevertheless as the natural man will not long abstain from his bodily food if he can obtain it, so neither will the spiritual man neglect his Fathers Table, but delight to feed there, with those that call on the Name of the Lord out of a pure heart in that Solemnity.³⁴

He concludes the section on the Supper addressing the means of sepa-

²⁹Ibid., 90.

³⁰Ibid., 92. Italics Original.

³¹Ibid., 92-93. Italics Original.

³²Grantham so stresses this point that asserts any congregation that finds someone to administer the ordinance who is not the pastor should "first elect him their Pastor, . . . that he may be their lawful Minister." Ibid., 93.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 95.

rating the bread—breaking or cutting—discussing if one should fast before the ordinance, and addresses the issues of the practices of the Lord’s Supper in Roman Catholicism, especially critiquing transubstantiation.

Grantham’s work, especially coming toward the end of the century, provides a good theological presentation on a General Baptist theology of the Supper. However, Grantham also writes on the specific order of the Lord’s Supper in his church. In his 1687 treatise *Hear the Church*, a piece “exhorting” Baptists in England to remain “steadfast,” Thomas Grantham presents the practice of the General Baptists’ observance of the Lord’s Supper.³⁵

THE Congregation being met together, and having spent part of the day Preaching, and Prayer, commonly towards the Evening, and ordinarily upon the Lords Day, the Table is decently prepared, and the Bread and Wine set upon it also in decent manner.

The Messenger³⁶ or Elder does excite the People to due Humility, and Reverence in their approaching to the Holy Table of the Lord, shewing the occasion and Authority by, and upon which it was Instituted for a perpetual Ministry in the Church of God. The great Use and Mystical signification of it, as Christ is evidently set forth in his Crucifixion, or bitter Death upon the Cross, as the alone Sacrifice, once offered for the Sins of Men, and that there is no more Offering for Sin, but the Offering up of Christ once for all.

Then he putteth them in mind of the qualifications, necessary on their part to the due Reception of that Divine Ordinance, without which they will come together for the worse, and not for the better.

Then *taking the Bread unto his hands*, he calleth upon God in the Mediation of Jesus Christ, for a Blessing upon the Bread, that it may be Sanctified for that holy use for which it was ordained by Christ, and that by Faith, all that are to partake of that Bread, thereby may feed upon the Body of Christ, *which is the true Bread, and by him live for ever.*

³⁵Thomas Grantham, *Hear the Church: or, an Appeal to the Mother of us All* (London: n.p., 1687).

³⁶A messenger was a third office for the General Baptists alongside the offices of pastor/elder and deacon. B.R. White states, “the word ‘messenger’ had a certain ambiguity about it when used in both the General and Particular Baptist writings and records. Often it quite clearly just means an elder or other church member sent to deliver a message or represent the congregation at some wider gathering. At other times . . . [it] clearly meant an evangelist sent to win converts and form a new congregation . . . it seems probable that the first generation of ‘messengers’ of this kind were those whose ministry had developed from their original work as evangelists.” *The English Baptists of the 17th Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 31.

Then he breaketh the Bread, pronouncing the words of Christ, *This is my Body, &c.* willeth the People *to receive it in remembrance of Christ*, and as shewing forth the Death of Christ till he come the second time without sin to Salvation.

In like manner *he taketh the Cup*, after the People have received the Bread, and with Prayer suitable to that great Mystery, it being sanctified, he poureth out of the Wine, remembering the words of Christ, *This Cup is the New Testament in my Blood, &c.* partakes of it himself (as he did also of the Bread) and gives it to the Deacons to Communicate to all the Congregation, and they all drink of it.

Then some word of *Exhortation is given to the People* under the consideration of the unspeakable Mercy of God in the gift of his Son to dye for us, that we might live Eternally with him: all is concluded *with Prayers to the Lord* for all his blessings, in the most joyful manner that the Minister is able to express them, and then usually something is given to the Poor, as every mans heart maketh him willing, being no constrained thereunto, but as the love of Christ constraineth him.³⁷

Particular Baptists

The rise of the Particular Baptists came later than the General Baptists, beginning somewhere between 1633 and 1638, but by 1644 several Particular Baptist congregations existed in London. In that year leaders from these churches gathered to write out a confession of faith that is commonly called the *First London Confession*. It is an effort to present what this new ecclesial body believed against charges of heresy, which is especially seen in the confession's full title: *The Confession of Faith, of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists*. It is interesting that in this important first confession, and other works to follow, not much is mentioned of the Lord's Supper. Mentioning this absence E. P. Winter claims, "The earliest Confession of Faith of the Particular Baptists, . . . makes but the barest mention of the Lord's Supper. It was not a matter of discussion among the earlier Baptists."³⁸ The 1644 confession makes no mention at all of the Supper, a fact James Leo Garrett calls "strange silence,"³⁹ however in 1646 the confession is reprinted and a small amendment is added to the baptism article merely

³⁷Ibid., 28-30. Italics original. Such a presentation of the service of the Lord's Supper is absent in other works. E. P. Winter states, "Thomas Grantham appears to be the only General Baptist who gave his people teaching regarding their approach to and use of the Lord's Supper." E. P. Winter, "The Lord's Supper: Admission and Exclusion among Baptists of the Seventeenth Century," *The Baptist Quarterly [BaptistQ]* XVII, no. 6 (1958): 198.

³⁸Winter, "The Lord's Supper," 325.

³⁹Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 56.

stating, “and afterwards to partake of the Lord’s Supper.”⁴⁰

Although one does not find much on the Lord’s Supper in the 1646 edition, the appendix to the confession by Benjamin Cox speaks to the issue of admittance to the Supper in his twentieth article.

Though a beleevers right to the use of the Lords Supper doth immediatly flow from Jesus Christ apprehended and received by faith; yet in as much as all things ought to be done not onely decently, but also in order; I *Cor.* 14:40; and the Word holds forth this order, that disciples should be baptized, *Matth.* 28.19, *Acts* 2.38—and then be taught to observe all things (that is to say, all other things) that Christ commanded the Apostles, *Matth.* 28.20. and accordingly the Apostles first baptized disciples, and then admitted them to the use of the Supper; *Acts* 2.41.42. we therefore doe not admit any in the use of the Supper, nor communicate with any in the use of this ordinance, but disciples having once been Scripturally baptized, less we should have fellowship with them in their doing contrary to order.⁴¹

For Particular Baptists outside of London not much is mentioned of the Lord’s Supper until the adoption of the *Second London Confession* in 1689. That is not to say the Supper was not mentioned in their articles, but that it was not central to the arguments they were making. For instance, in the *Midland Confession* the Supper is mentioned in a list of items in which those baptized will partake: “fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers.”⁴² Likewise, in the *Somerset Confession* the Supper is listed as one of the “commandments” believers are to follow.⁴³

In an attempt to show moderate doctrinal uniformity the Particular Baptists decided to draw up a declaration of faith in 1677. This confession, known as the *Second London Confession*, was largely based upon the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Confession*. Its treatment of the Lord’s Supper was far more elaborate than the 1644 confession as it was also broadened due possibly to its effort to express unity with Presbyterians and Independents. On the Supper it states,

⁴⁰Thomas Gunne, et al., *A Confession of Faith of Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists*, the second impression corrected and enlarged (London: n.p., 1646), article 39.

⁴¹Benjamin Cox, *An Appendix to a Confession of Faith, or a More Full Declaration of the Faith and Judgment of Baptized Believers* (London: n.p., 1646), 11.

⁴²Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 199.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 210.

CHAP. XXVIII.

Of Baptism and the Lords Supper.

- I. Baptism and the Lords Supper are ordinances of positive, and sovereign institution; appointed by the Lord Jesus the only Law-giver, to be continued in his Church to the end of the World.
2. These holy appointments are to be administered by those only, who are qualified and thereunto called according to the commission of Christ.

CHAP. XXX.

Of the Lords Supper.

- I. THE Supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him, the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his Churches unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice in his death confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further ingagement in, and to, all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.
2. In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all, for remission of sin of the quick or dead; but only a memorial of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the crosse, once for all; and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same; so that the Popish sacrifice of the Mass (as they call it) is most abominable, injurious to Christs own only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the Elect.
3. The Lord Jesus hath in this Ordinance, appointed his Ministers to Pray, and bless the Elements of Bread and Wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common an holy use, and to take and break the Bread; to take the Cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the Communicants.
4. The denyal of the Cup to the people, worshiping the Elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this Ordinance, and to the institution of Christ.
5. The outward Elements in this Ordinance, duely set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, although in terms used figuratively, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit body and Blood of Christ; albeit in substance and nature, they still remain

truly, and only Bread, and Wine, as they were before.

6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of Bread and Wine, into the substance of Christs body and blood (commonly called Transubstantiation) by consecration of a Priest, or by any other way, is repugnant not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the ordinance, and hath been and is the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross Idolatries.

7. Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally, and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified & all the benefits of his death: the Body and Blood of *Christ*, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of Believers, in that Ordinance, as the Elements themselves are to their outward senses.

8. All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with *Christ*; so are they unworthy of the Lords Table; and cannot without great sin against him, whole they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto: yea whatsoever hall receive unworthily are guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment to themselves.⁴⁴

In the West of England Thomas Collier was a strong voice among the Particular Baptists, though his views on Calvinism would become more moderate over time. In 1691 he helped pen *A Short Confession or a Brief Narrative of Faith* that appears to be independent of previous confessional traditions and followed Collier's pattern of attempting "to speak for both Particular and General Baptists."⁴⁵ The article on the Lord's Supper states,

Chapter 13.—Of the Lord's Supper.

Concerning the supper of the Lord, we believe, 1. That it was instituted by him, the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of his dying love, in offering up himself upon the cross once for all. (Matthew 26:26, &c. Luke 22:19, 20.)

2. The materials to be made use of in this holy ordinance, are bread and wine, which figuratively do represent the body and blood of *Christ*. (Matthew 26:26, &c.)

⁴⁴Ibid., 290-93.

⁴⁵Ibid., 335.

3. That none ought to communicate in this holy ordinance but such as are orderly members of the church of *Christ*, made so by repentance, faith, and baptism, and then they have a lawful sight unto it; which holy ordinance ought to be duly observed and kept up in the orderly church of Christ, only for the ends for which it was appointed. (Acts 2:41, 42. 1 Corinthians 11:23, &c.)⁴⁶

Although confessions are a good source for a consensus of thought another source that proves helpful is a catechism commonly called *Keach's Catechism* later known as the *Baptist Catechism*. Around 1693 the Particular Baptist Assembly resolved that a catechism be prepared.⁴⁷ Its substance became the catechism for Baptists for the next two centuries. It was based upon a catechism published in 1689 after the *Second London Confession* and that version is here presented. Its teaching on the Supper is contained in six parts and is as follows:

Q. 95. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are His ordinances, especially the Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation. (Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Cor. 3:5; Acts 14:1; 2:41,42)

Q. 98. How do Baptism and the Lord's Supper become effectual means of salvation?

A. Baptism and the Lord's Supper become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them or in him that administers them, but only by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them. (1 Peter 3:21; 1 Cor. 3:6,7; 1 Cor. 12:13)

Q. 99. Wherein do Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ from the other ordinances of God?

A. Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ from the other ordinances of God in that they were specially instituted by Christ to represent and apply to believers the benefits of the new covenant by visible and outward signs. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 22:16; Matt. 26:26-28; Rom. 6:4)

Q. 105. What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is the organized society of professing believ-

⁴⁶Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005), 225-26.

⁴⁷Tom J. Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life*, Calvary Press Baptist Heritage Series (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 1998), 49.

ers, in all ages and places, wherein the Gospel is truly preached and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper rightly administered. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Acts 7:38; Eph. 4:11,12)

Q. 107. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is a holy ordinance, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, His death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. (1 Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16)

Q. 108. What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?

A. It is required of them that would worthily (that is, suitably) partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves, of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body; of their faith to feed upon Him; of their repentance, love, and new obedience: lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves. (1 Cor. 11:27-31; 1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 13:5).⁴⁸

One final discussion on the Lord's Supper needs to be presented. As Coxe's appendix to the *First London Confession* stated in 1646, who is admitted to the Lord's Supper was a concern for the Particular Baptists. For many only those who were rightly baptized were permitted to partake of the Supper, though there were some dissenting voices. Although the *Second London Confession* does not reiterate Coxe's sentiment towards closed communion it remained an issue for Particular Baptists. This subject particularly became a matter of debate amongst the Baptists after John Bunyan published *A Confession of my Faith* whereby he argues that baptism should not keep one from communicating (partaking in the observance of the Supper) with true believers.⁴⁹ In response to this confession another pastor named Thomas Paul soon published a response with a foreward by William Kiffin entitled *Some Serious Reflections on that Part of Mr. Bunion's Confession of Faith*.⁵⁰ Bunyan quickly retorted with *Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism, No Bar to Communion*, thus settling his position in the debate.⁵¹

The heart of the issue was an understanding of the concepts of com-

⁴⁸Paul King Jewett, *The Baptist Catechism commonly called Keach's Catechism or A Brief Instructio in the Principles of the Christian Religion, newly rev. ed.* (Beverly Farms, MA: Gordon Divinity School, 1952).

⁴⁹See John Bunyan, *A Confession of My Faith, and a Reason of my Practice: or, With who, and who not, I can hold church-fellowship, or the communion of Saints* (London: n.p., 1672).

⁵⁰See Thomas Paul, *Some Serious Reflections on that Part of Mr. Bunion's Confession of Faith Touching Communion with Unbaptized Persons* (London: n.p., 1673).

⁵¹See John Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism, No Bar to Communion: or, To Communicate with Saints, as Saints, Proved Lawful* (London: n.p., 1673).

munion and to what extent the church was involved in it. Bunyan's largest charges against his opponents were that they were "unchristianing" believers by adding believers' baptism by immersion as a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper. He further argued, "I am bold to hold communion with visible Saints as afore; because God hath communion with them; whose example in the case, we are streightly commanded to follow."⁵²

Years after Bunyan's death William Kiffin added his thoughts on the debate with *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church Communion* wherein he biblically and historically defended the cause of closed communion.⁵³ His approach to the subject was different than Bunyan's in that he based it upon a reading of Scripture rather than an appeal to unity in God. In his preface he claimed, "That no part of God's law, or worship, whether we respect the manner or form, or the matter and substance thereof, is to be altered without the express order and direction of GOD Himself; . . ."⁵⁴

The Early English Baptists' View of the Lord's Supper

Now that the sources on the Supper have been presented from both the General and Particular Baptists an analysis of them will help provide a common theology of the Lord's Supper of the English Baptists in their beginnings. Although quite a few documents discussing the Lord's Supper have been presented, though more could be produced, it is interesting that the discussion on the Lord's Supper was small, especially at the beginning of the century. Before synthesizing these sources it should be queried as to why many of the sources are limited in the discussion on the Supper.

First, perhaps there was not significant disagreement about the Supper within and without Baptist life.⁵⁵ Since the English Separatists were so close to the genesis of both sets of Baptists they no doubt had an influence on the view and practice of the Supper. It is conceivable that the Separatist practices of the Supper continued into Baptist life. Second, there could have been strong disagreement amongst the Baptists (as with the Bunyan/Kiffin debate) that led to little consensus on some aspects of the Supper. Third, the confessional works themselves were often apologetic in nature and a discussion on the Supper either detracted from the argument or was not a concern. For most of the century baptism is the main theological concern for the Baptists and it rightly took center stage in the debates. In fact, some of the discussions about the Supper presented were in relation to discussions on baptism. Finally, it might be that the Supper was not regularly observed, and therefore was not a distinguishing feature of Baptist worship. Although this is the least likely option given, at least an appearance of the Supper is in

⁵²Bunyan, *A Confession of My Faith*, 89.

⁵³See William Kiffin, *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church Communion*, The Baptist Distinctives Series 31 (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵Cf. Winter, *The Lord's Supper*, 325.

the confessions.

All four of these reasons are plausible and perhaps, depending on circumstances, at least the first three are true to a limited degree. The fact remains, however, that there is not much data on the worship practices of the early Baptists as exist in Grantham's work *Hear the Church*, nor a theological understanding of the Supper beyond the *Second London Confession*, *An Orthodox Creed*, or *Christianismus Primitivius*. Like all growing religious groups the early Baptists were in progress.

In the second half of the century the Supper was treated more extensively. Externally we see that a theology of the Supper argued against other religious groups like Catholics or Enthusiasts especially in relation to broader ecclesiological ideas such as baptism. Internally, given the debate with Bunyan, the discussion on the Supper was concerned more with appropriate communicants in relation to baptism than with a theology of the Lord's Supper. It is clear from this evidence that believers' baptism is central to the theology of these early Baptists. From Smyth's confession in 1610 to Coxe's *Appendix* in 1646 to Kiffin's *Sober Discourse* in 1681, baptism was connected to and often operated as the fence set around the Supper.

In order to understand the view(s) of the Supper the commonalities of the sources need to be synthesized. One more confession will be provided and used as a guide for this process. In 1697 Benjamin Keach wrote *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation meeting at Horsley-down*.⁵⁶ This confession will serve a summary model for two reasons. First, it encompasses much of the thinking of the Supper throughout the century. Second, it is very late in the century allowing it to summarize any development of the Supper.⁵⁷ On the Supper in article 24 it says:

We believe that the Holy Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which he instituted the Night before he was betrayed, ought to be observed to the end of the World; and that it consisteth only in breaking of Bread, and drinking of Wine, in remembrance of Christ's Death; it being for our spiritual Nourishment, and Growth in Grace, and as farther Engagement in, and to all Duties we owe to Jesus Christ, and as a Pledg of his eternal Love to us, and as a Token of our Communion with him, and one with another. And that due Preparation and Examination is required of all that ought to partake thereof; and that it cannot be neglected by any approved and orderly Member without Sin.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Benjamin Keach, *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation Meeting at Horsley-down* (London: n.p., 1697).

⁵⁷Since it is from a particular Baptist it is highly dependent on the *Second London Confession*.

⁵⁸Keach, *The Articles of the Faith*, 24-25.

First, there is the use of the word "ordinance" in distinction to the word "sacrament." Although much is made of the differences in the terms today there may not have been as much a difference in usage between the two in the seventeenth century. For instance, Smyth and his church use "sacrament" instead of "ordinance," but clearly do not have an *ex opere operato* connotation within the term. Also, in *Propositions and Conclusions* "the outward baptism and supper do not confer, and convey grace and regeneration to the participants or communicants." It is likely when "sacrament" is used it is in its sense of a "sign."

As development occurs the terminology changes from "sacrament" to "ordinance." This is seen in Keach above as well as in the *Second London Confession* and *An Orthodox Creed*. In comparison with the *Westminster Confession*, of which both of the previous confessions are based, the language changes to clarify the symbolic understanding of the Supper.⁵⁹ Other terminology that corresponds to the symbolic nature are "token" and "pledge," as found here in Keach as well as in *A Short Confession of Faith* and *An Orthodox Creed*.

As a symbol it is to be *observed*, that is it is an outward act. The language of outward and inward was not something new to begin with the seventeenth-century Baptists. The discussion of the ordinances in the reformation utilized this language as well. What is meant by the term is a further denial of any means of grace appropriated by the act itself. Smyth calls it an "external" act and defines it as an outward proclamation of what Christ did by setting it "before the eye." In the *Second London Confession* the elements are "outward" and are used "figuratively" and any benefit from them is inward. *An Orthodox Creed* says the elements "signifie to the Faithful the Body and Blood of Christ." *Keach's Catechism* in questions 95 and 99 state that this ordinance is "outward" and question 107 highlights that the act shows forth Christ's death. The elements serve as an outward proclamation of the gospel and, to some extent, are separated from the inward effects. This language is more in line with a Zwinglian understanding of the Supper, especially over against any view of real presence.

By taking the elements outwardly the participants do so in *remembrance* of Christ's death. The remembrance of Christ in the Supper is a central theme for the Baptists since they do not perceive of a corporeal communion with Christ. In fact in both *An Orthodox Creed* and the *Second London Confession* as well as in *Christianismus Primitivius* it is clearly presented that the Supper in no way is to be considered a real presence of Christ. For both General and Particular Baptists the Lord's Supper was not understood in terms of transubstantiation nor consubstantiation. This begs the question of whether these Baptists held only to a Zwinglian memorial view of the Supper, or if they were closer to the Reformed spiritual presence view. This question has been asked by E. P. Winter to which he concludes, "while it is

⁵⁹Winter notes "However, §1 was emended by the Baptists to exclude the words "sacrament," "seal," "pledge" and "sacrifice of himself," and in §5 "figuratively" was substituted for "sacramentally." Winter, "The Lord's Supper," 325.

well-nigh impossible to find any but 'Zwinglian' views among the General Baptists, both 'Calvinist' and 'Zwinglian' approaches are found amongst the Particular Baptists."⁶⁰

Interestingly, a common theme in these sources is the allusion to the inward benefit of these outward acts of remembrance. Here in Keach's confession the terminology is "spiritual Nourishment," a phrase seen in other sources above. It is commonly used in most of the sources alongside the terms "feed," "spiritual food," and "spiritual supper." This imagery of a meal is quite appropriate given that it is called a Supper and utilizes food. These imageries of feeding and nourishment, however, are not necessarily to be understood as a move of the Baptists to a view that is more than a memorial. Often this language is compared to the preaching of the Word or prayer, which also provides spiritual nourishment. The overall idea is that the Supper is a special ritual for Christians in the churches to come together and commemorate Christ in a special way that provides a spiritual benefit.

Keach's *Articles* above speak of the communion that the Supper creates. This also is a common theme in the sources presented. The Supper exists as a ritual of worship that not only creates a bond of communion between Christ and the one partaking but also a bond with the entirety of the congregation also partaking. This communion is an ecclesial communion that presents the unity of the body.

In practice, the Supper is to be administered by a Pastor, taken often, and not administered to any who are not of faith, and for many of these churches that means those that practice believers' baptism by immersion.

Conclusion

The Early English Baptists may not have had as much to say about the Lord's Supper in comparison to their work on the topic of baptism, but, as has been shown, they did have some significant things to say about it. Their understanding of the Supper showed some development, but that development was not so much a change of theology and practice as it was a codification or greater expression of what they believed about all of church life, inclusive of the Supper. In fact, we can see that the Lord's Supper was an important part of their worship and theology. Though it may be stated that a majority of these Baptists held to a memorial view of the Supper, a few were open to the spiritual presence view. However, we do not find them dividing over this issue as they would on who was to be invited to the table. Whatever they believed about the Supper they understood that it had significant meaning and value for any congregation of believers and should be practiced often for the sake of the church for it is the continual outward ritual that commemorates and proclaims Christ's death until He comes.

⁶⁰E. P. Winter, "Calvinist and Zwinglian Views of the Lord's Supper among the Baptists of the Seventeenth Century" *BaptistQ* XV (1954): 329.