

The BAPTIST STORY

From English Sect to Global Movement



Anthony L. Chute
Nathan A. Finn
Michael A. G. Haykin

“This is the Baptist history textbook I have been waiting for since I studied the subject in seminary. It actually makes the subject interesting! This work has been long overdue.”

Daniel L. Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Respected church historians Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael Haykin have served the church well with their book *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*. Though intended as a textbook, their fine work is accessible to most every reader, including those in nonacademic settings. For all interested in Baptist history, I heartily recommend *The Baptist Story*.”

Jason K. Allen, president, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“The Baptists have grown from a small and mainly marginal body in seventeenth-century England into a strong and sometimes influential set of denominations across the world. While the core of this account of their development concentrates on the history of the two-thirds of the world’s Baptists who live in the United States, there is also coverage of England, Canada, Germany, and the rest of the world. So this volume provides a concise but comprehensive summary of the course of Baptist life over the last four centuries.”

David Bebbington, professor of history, University of Stirling

“The Baptist story is long and often convoluted. Numerous histories have been written over the course of their 400 years. Each new volume proffers its own interpretation of the data and furthers the cause and concern of the author. While honest, this has not always been helpful, and often fails to provide today’s Baptists with a modern account of their tale that informs the mind and encourages the soul.

“*The Baptist Story*, as told by Haykin, Chute, and Finn, changes all that. The authors give us an irenic yet thorough reading of our collective past. They admit the nuances of a faith that boldly defends and exemplifies liberty of conscience while explaining the facts. While the authors concede that their goal was not to provide *the* definitive telling of the Baptist story, they may have done just that. Haykin, Chute, and Finn are to be commended for their effort, thanked for their grace, and congratulated for their contribution to the cause of Christ and the history of the Baptist people. *The Baptist Story* always encourages, sometimes challenges, and never disappoints.”

Peter Beck, associate professor of Christian studies, Charleston Southern University

“*The Baptist Story* is a masterful work by three superb Baptist historians. Tony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael Haykin are to be commended for providing us with an even-handed, incisive, well-organized, and accessible survey of the larger Baptist family. Readers will be introduced to both general and particular Baptists, as well as revivalists and Landmarkists, fundamentalists and liberals. In doing so, they will gain a fresh appreciation for the contributions of thoughtful theologians

and practical pastors, along with faithful missionaries and martyrs. This full-orbed, carefully researched, and well-written look at the expansion and development of Baptists over the past four hundred years will certainly become a standard resource for the study of Baptist history for years to come. It is with much enthusiasm that I gladly recommend this work.”

David S. Dockery, president, Trinity International University

“Being a Baptist is about more than bearing a denominational label. It’s about affirming a doctrinal distinctive and embracing an identity based on historical precedent. This superb volume will help you appreciate what it means to be a Baptist and celebrate the unique contributions we have made to global Christianity. Read it with holy awe at how God has used Baptists to make a difference in his world!”

Jeff Iorg, president, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

“This textbook originates from within but expands beyond the Southern Baptist tradition to narrate the Baptist story in a way readers will understand and appreciate. Images, primary source quotations, and review questions make the book especially useful for the undergraduate or graduate classroom.”

Melody Maxwell, assistant professor of Christian studies, Howard Payne University

“*The Baptist Story* reflects well on the gifts and expertise of three distinguished Baptist historians and professors. They have written an eminently readable, thorough, and well-balanced account of the Baptist past from its roots in English Separatism to the modern context where the Baptist movement has become truly global. The authors respect the diversity and complexity of Baptist history, and they judiciously avoid any partisan agendas. In addition to providing vital factual information about Baptist history, they suggest some important interpretive and analytical perspectives that enrich their narrative. This textbook should be widely adopted for use in relevant college and seminary courses, as well as in church study groups.”

Jim Patterson, university professor and acting dean, School of Theology and Missions, Union University

“*The Baptist Story* is meticulously researched, well written, and full of insight into the history of the people called Baptists. This will be the textbook in Baptist history for the next generation of conservative Baptist students and scholars.”

Andrew C. Smith, assistant professor of religion and director of the Center for Baptist Studies, Carson-Newman University

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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Bang

*To David Bebbington, Raymond Brown, Keith
Harper, Timothy George, Tom Nettles, George
Rawlyk, Doug Weaver, Barrie White, and Greg Wills*

*These Baptist historians are Doctores Ecclesiae
who have modeled for us a commitment to
historical scholarship, Baptist identity,
and the ministry of the Word.*

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grateful to God for their ministries of teaching and scholarship. We dedicate this book to our mentors in Baptist history in the hope that it embodies the best of all that they have taught us about the Baptist story.

Anthony L. Chute
Nathan A. Finn
Michael A. G. Haykin

INTRODUCTION

When Jesse Mercer purchased *The Christian Index*, a Georgia-based Baptist newspaper, his first editorial contained the following observations:

We now enter immediately on our duties as Editor of a religious journal, and begin to feel them of mountain weight. In the first, chief place, how to please God, the Judge of All, otherwise than by the presentment of truth, frankly and candidly expressed, according to his conscientious views of the most holy Word; he knows not: but in doing this, in the second place; how to please his Patrons (whom to please would be a high gratification to him) in their various and conflicting sentiments, in different sections are clothed, is a herculean task indeed.

Mercer's wordiness aside, of his two main concerns—pleasing God and pleasing Baptists—the latter gave him most pause. The year was 1833, and Mercer had in mind a recent separation of Baptists over the need for missions and the role of theological education. Mercer realized that Primitive Baptists had already discounted his views and those of his allies, the so-called Missionary Baptists, which were positive on the aforementioned topics. Yet he understood all too well that even Baptists who sided with him on missions and theological education might find cause to nitpick his articles in one way or another. Where two or three Baptists are gathered, it seems, three or four opinions are sometimes in the midst of them. Walter Shurden, Baptist historian and professor at Mercer University from 1983 to 2007, captured this feisty Baptist spirit across the centuries in his aptly titled book *Not a Silent People* (Smyth & Helwys, 1995).

Our attempt to produce a history of Baptists has caused us to feel a mountain of weight as well, and we are sympathetic to Mercer's depiction of it as being a herculean task. Indeed, writing such a history some 200 years after American Baptists first organized an international mission agency (the Triennial Convention) has placed us in the context of writing about more, not fewer, Baptist groups. Consequently our audience includes, but is not limited

to, independent Baptists and Cooperative Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists and Southern Baptists, Free Will Baptists and Reformed Baptists, regulative principle Baptists and seeker-sensitive Baptists. Among these groups are differing views of biblical inspiration, age of baptismal recipients, elder-led churches, women pastors, sovereign decrees, and the propriety of vacation Bible school—to name only a few!

This disparity leads to a dilemma: what does it mean to be Baptist? Is it enough to call oneself a Baptist, or must one meet specific criteria to qualify as such? One may consider two titles of previous works to note how authors differ in their views of Baptist relatedness: Bill Leonard's *Baptist Ways: A History* (Judson Press, 2003) and R. Stanton Norman's *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (B&H Academic, 2005). The former depicted Baptists as a multifaceted movement using believer's baptism and congregational polity as unifying factors, whereas the latter brought attention to biblical authority as a leading Baptist distinctive from which other matters—such as regenerate church membership and religious freedom—derive. Although Leonard wrote a historical narrative and Norman provided a theological analysis, their differing approaches to “Baptist Ways” versus “The Baptist Way” are not merely methodological. They reflect a genuine disagreement on what it means to be Baptist; and, by voicing their beliefs, they prove that Baptists are indeed not a silent people.

We realize that even the title of our book, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*, raises questions regarding our understanding of Baptist history. Although our headline, *The Baptist Story*, begins with the definite article, we do not intend this to be *the* final history that replaces previous Baptist histories. To the contrary, works on Baptist history, large and small, have helped us immensely by collectively contributing to our knowledge of and appreciation for this movement.

Ours is both an individual and a collaborative effort. We divided this project according to our specialties: Michael Haykin wrote the chapters on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists, Anthony Chute authored the section on nineteenth-century Baptists, and Nathan Finn concluded with the twentieth century and beyond. However, we have each provided substantive input and editorial oversight regarding the book as a whole. This textbook is a collaborative effort at every level.

Not only have we been helped by one another's contributions, but we have also developed a greater appreciation for those who have tackled this topic on their own. Leon McBeth's *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Broadman, 1987) remains a magisterial reference work for Baptist historians. Leonard's *Baptist Ways* and Tom Nettles's three-volume work on *The Baptists* (Mentor, 2005–2007) will each undoubtedly be used for

decades to come. The broader perspective embodied in Robert Johnson's *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and David Bebbington's *Baptists through the Centuries* (Baylor University Press, 2010) have informed our own narrative of Baptist history. Moreover, we are indebted to many scholars who have written more specialized monographs and essays, knowing that they have helped us nuance certain aspects of the Baptist story.

Our decision to write in true textbook form (incorporating a received body of knowledge using our particular perspectives) led us to conclude that widespread use of footnotes would restrict an already limited word count and could prove to be less user-friendly for students. However, we have included a bibliography at the end of each chapter in order to reflect our dependence on previous works and to direct the reader toward further research. Within our bibliographies students will encounter differing approaches to the Baptist story, such as William Brackney's *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Mercer University Press, 2004) and James Leo Garrett's *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), two fine historical-theological surveys that represent masterful scholarship. This book, therefore, is not meant to replace previous histories; instead, it is a collation and updating of many stories, one that itself will need to be updated in the future.

Moreover, this is not the complete story. Through our collaborative efforts, we have offered suggestions to one another regarding the inclusion and exclusion of Baptist events, personalities, issues, and controversies. Historians who read this book may wince at the lack of space given to their favorite, perhaps nearly forgotten, Baptist heroine or hero. We too shudder to think of what we have either understated or left unsaid. Our main goal, however, has not been to write for other historians but rather to produce a work primarily for students that recognizes the global sweep of Baptists, with all of their historic and doctrinal variety. In short, we omitted some details so students who read this book will not be lost in the particulars.

We believe we have accomplished the substantive purpose of this project in presenting the reader with a historical survey of Baptists that includes not only the major organizations but the minor players and minority members as well, whose work for and among Baptists is no less important even though it may be less visible. We also believe we have stayed true to our task of presenting the Baptist story "warts and all." Baptists—or any people for that matter—are in desperate need of divine grace, and our history reflects that. Therefore, we have included elements in our narrative that make us rather uncomfortable yet are faithful to the historical record and point the reader to the faithfulness of God.

This is not the final story, and it is not the complete story, but it is a story nonetheless. We have striven to present the narrative in a way teachers can use and students can appreciate. Each of us has taught dozens of courses on Baptist history to college, seminary, and doctoral students, and we feel we have acquired an appreciation for bringing together what is important with what is interesting. We have structured several sections of this book based on questions students commonly ask, and we have included areas of personal interest we have not found in other textbooks. Moreover, we have attempted to weave as seamlessly as possible institutional and individual histories as well as integrating the global narrative with local issues. At times our focus on the width of the Baptist movement has restricted us from carefully exploring its depth. Therefore, the reader will notice, particularly in the chapters dealing with the twentieth century, the pace of the narrative becomes more brisk as the Baptist movement becomes more global.

The inclusion of pictures and information boxes within the text reflects our desire to communicate. We appreciate the fact that many students are visual learners but, even more, we want to remind readers that this narrative is not mere history. The Baptists of earlier eras who thought the ideas, made the decisions, and founded the institutions recounted in this book were as alive in previous centuries as the reader of these pages is today. Baptists do not canonize saints, but they can reflect on those whose earthly lives made a difference for generations to come. Thus, we hope our readers will be motivated to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. Furthermore, we have included elements of personal and corporate piety as a way of reminding our readers that the Baptists who made history did so because they loved the Lord who purchased them with his own blood. Such people are to be considered as children of God first and then, as necessitated by this book, viewed as Baptists. Whether they wrote hymns, debated fine points of theology, built meetinghouses, or organized for missions, Baptists have viewed their denominational contributions within the larger context of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our subtitle also deserves explanation. The informed historian will note that we begin the Baptist story when Baptists were an “English Sect.” This notation represents our understanding that the Baptist movement does not reach back to John the Baptist in the first century, but its historical roots are in the Separatist movement that emerged from the Church of England in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Baptists have not always agreed on their own origins (again, we are not a silent people!); but the historical record, as it presently stands, confirms that the Baptist movement, as we now know it, began with John Smyth and was continued through the work of Thomas Helwys. Both were Englishmen who left the Anglican Church,

convinced that it was too politicized by the Crown and too Catholic for their comfort. They later disagreed with their Separatist brethren over the issue of infant baptism and completed their search for the New Testament church by founding a congregation based on regenerate church membership and committed to believer's baptism. We concur with this history, tracing Baptist beginnings to 1609.

Yet even this assertion does not conclude the matter. John Smyth departed the Baptist movement upon discovering that Anabaptists had formed churches on exactly the same principles nearly a century earlier. His decision to apply for membership with the Waterlander Mennonites, a branch of the Anabaptist movement, has led Baptist historians to question what relationship Anabaptists have with Baptists. We join with other scholars in recognizing the spiritual kinship Baptists have with many Anabaptists, noting the common thread of a regenerate church, believer's baptism, congregational polity, and a form of church-state separation. Indeed, we recommend that our students pursue this connection further by reading William Estep's classic work, *The Anabaptist Story* (Eerdmans, 1995; 3rd ed.), and a recent work edited by Malcolm Yarnell III, *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity* (B&H Academic, 2013). In so doing, students will find that modern-day Baptists can appreciate Anabaptists of old for many of their core beliefs. Students will also discover a long list of largely forgotten Christian heroes and heroines who chose to die for their beliefs rather than surrender conscience for the sake of convenience.

However, while we concur there were some theological similarities between some early Baptists and Anabaptists, we find the movements separated by a host of other issues including the Anabaptist tendency to withdraw from society, their emphasis on pacifism, their tendency toward communalism, and their weakened position on the effects of the fall. Though Baptists are a diverse people, some of whom even share these beliefs with Anabaptists, we also note the lack of a historical thread that formally ties the Anabaptist and Baptist movements together. We distinguish, therefore, between indebtedness and connectedness. Baptists are indebted to many Christian groups throughout the history of the church, from the early church fathers with their emphasis on the full deity and humanity of Christ to the Reformation leaders with their clarion call to trust in Christ alone for salvation. However, differences in life and practice have led Baptists to distinguish themselves from other Christian groups, even those with similar names. We have therefore highlighted the primacy of history when writing this story.

The decision to follow the historical evidence in this regard underscores our conviction that Baptists should use history in a ministerial rather than a magisterial manner. In other words, history can help us see what Baptists

have believed, but it should not be used to tell us what Baptists must believe. Baptists are a “people of the book,” and even though they read that book differently from time to time, they understand that nothing else carries the same authority over their lives as the Bible. Whereas Baptists have sometimes used history to pressure others into conforming to a particular position, we have attempted instead to provide a history that informs the reader of how Baptists have reached their conclusions. To give one example, we believe the question of whether the first Baptists were Calvinists is a moot point because the answer is both no and yes. The successors to the Smyth-Helwys tradition were not Calvinists, but the English Baptists who emerged from the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church certainly were Calvinists. History teaches us that some Baptist groups have held on to these beliefs and gone separate ways, while others have found ways to hold on to a portion of those beliefs and join together, and still others have agreed to split the difference by working together while not making the finer points of Calvinism or Arminianism an issue. The same could be said for other theological issues that tend to divide Baptists. As historians, then, we do not claim any theological superiority stemming from our assessment of Baptist beginnings.

And yet we do not want to leave the impression that we are indifferent to what Baptists believe. The three of us have similar theological convictions that shape our lives and inform our denominational and local church identity. Our concluding chapter, titled “Identity and Distinctives,” is therefore more prescriptive than descriptive as we attempt to define what it means to be Baptist from our particular perspective. It is broad and inclusive, but readers will find that we have offered more of our own leanings in that section than we have earlier in the book. Since we are more prescriptive in that section, we have placed it at the end of our book instead of the beginning, placing primacy on history. We trust this placement will help our readers draw their own conclusions inductively as they reflect on the history of Baptists.

Perhaps the one aspect of our title everyone can agree on is that Baptists are a “Global Movement.” On any given Sunday (or Saturday, for our Seventh Day Baptist friends and many Baptist “megachurches”), Baptists around the world voluntarily gather to worship the Triune God, offering prayer and praise to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether they meet in a storefront in Tokyo or a tent in Turkmenistan, publicly outside in Newport Beach or secretly in a house church in China, with dancing in a tribal village in Africa or with reserved solemnity in London, Baptists around the world share at least two common characteristics. They have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, repenting of their sins and trusting in his meritorious work, and they have followed through with his command to be baptized, a visible display of death to sin and resurrection

to new life. If Baptist controversies can be described with the phrase “not a silent people,” the same can be said about Baptist missions. Baptists are global because their message is viral. Our prayer is that Baptists, and other Christians, will continue to share the story and not be silent so that when future histories are written, someone may rightfully say that the gospel has gone into all the world and disciples have been made of all nations, baptized, and taught to obey all of Christ’s commands (Matt 28:18–20).

Section One

**BAPTISTS IN THE SEVENTEENTH
AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES**

Chapter 1

BAPTIST BEGINNINGS

Beginnings are important. They set directions and give shape to journeys. The beginnings of the Baptist story in England, Holland, and America are no exception. These early years of the Baptist story highlight one of the most vital aspects of this narrative: it is a history of the intertwined lives of men and women, some of whom still loom large in this fifth century since Baptists began as a small sect in the English-speaking world—figures like John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Henry Jessey, and Roger Williams. Baptists are now a worldwide movement, and the thoughts and achievements of these early leaders and others are still helping orient Baptist history in the twenty-first century.

Anabaptist Similarities

Many historians judge the Reformation to be the most important event in the history of Christianity since the ancient church. Protestants believe it was a time of both remarkable spiritual awakening and a rediscovery of biblical teaching on such fundamental issues as salvation, worship, and marriage. The Reformation also witnessed the division of the Church in Western Europe into Roman Catholic and Protestant. While the majority of Protestants disagreed strongly with the Roman Catholic Church over issues like the nature of salvation and the question of religious authority, both groups agreed that the state had a vital role to play in the life of the church. Most sixteenth-century Protestants could not envision a world where state and church were not working together for the cause of Christ. However, a small number of individuals refused to identify themselves with this way of thinking. These men and women by and large rejected the idea of a national

church, to which every individual in the state belonged, along with its support of infant baptism. Instead they advocated churches composed solely of believers who were admitted on the basis of a personal confession of faith and believer's baptism. In the early days of the Reformation, this small group of Protestants would have been baptized as infants. When they were baptized as believers, their opponents, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, dubbed them "rebaptizers," or Anabaptists.

These Anabaptists generally baptized by pouring or sprinkling. The first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zürich on January 21, 1525, when Conrad Grebel baptized Jörg [George] Blaurock by pouring water over his head, that is, by affusion. Even though a month later Grebel did baptize Wolfgang Ulimann by immersion, this was exceptional; the usual mode of baptism among the Swiss Anabaptists was affusion. The early German Anabaptists, of whom Hans Hut is a good example, also baptized by affusion. On occasion Hut simply baptized believers by dipping his thumb in a dish of water and making a cross on the forehead of the person to be baptized, in accordance with his view that the seal mentioned in Revelation 7:3 was baptism.

For these early Anabaptists believer's baptism was the doorway to a life of ongoing transformation as they sought to live as disciples of Christ in community with like-minded believers. By and large these Anabaptists shared the conviction with Martin Luther and the French Reformer John Calvin that "faith alone makes us righteous before God," to quote the words of the German Anabaptist leader Balthasar Hubmaier. But the Anabaptists insisted this faith was an active faith, full of "all sorts of works of brotherly love toward others," to again quote Hubmaier. For Hubmaier, these fruits of faith were central to the essence of genuine faith. Sadly, because these early Anabaptists rejected the union of church and state assumed by the majority of



Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528)

professing Christians in Western Europe, their communities were regarded as a dire threat to the stability and security of the state. Thus, many of the Anabaptists perished at the hands of both Roman Catholics and Protestants. Hubmaier was burned at the stake in 1528 in Roman Catholic Vienna, for

example, while Felix Manz, in whose house Blaurock had been baptized, was drowned in the Limmat River in Zürich by fellow Protestants.

Exacerbating the negative image of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century was the seizure of the town of Münster in Germany by a fanatical group of Anabaptists who believed the kingdom of God could be set up by force of arms. From 1534 to 1535 the inhabitants of the town were ruled by Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson (also known as John of Leyden). They established a theocracy with all property held in common, legalized polygamy, and punished adultery with death. Although this Anabaptist experiment was short-lived—the town fell to a Catholic army in June 1535—and was hardly representative of the main thrust of Anabaptism, the scandalous horror of Münster made the name Anabaptist a byword for fanaticism and violent anarchy well into the seventeenth century.

There are “remarkable similarities,” as Paige Patterson has put it, between these European Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and the English Baptists of the following century. Moreover, Anabaptists were active in England prior to the clear emergence of the Baptists. But this does not mean there was a direct organic influence by these Anabaptists on the Baptists who emerged in the seventeenth century. First, it was possible for both groups to reach independently similar conclusions since both groups appealed to the Scriptures as the standard for church life and order. Second, if the Baptists were deeply indebted to the Anabaptists, they would have been reluctant to admit it, due to the popular image



John of Leyden (ca. 1509–1536)

of Anabaptists as violent, social revolutionaries that had developed during the sixteenth century, owing in part to the Münster incident. For example, when the first Particular Baptist churches issued a confession of faith in 1644 that outlined their theological beliefs, they stated on the title page of the confession that they were “commonly (though falsely [*sic*]) called Anabaptists.” They clearly wanted to dissociate themselves totally from the specter of Anabaptism. Determining the impact of the Anabaptists in a context where any links with them is denied is virtually impossible. Third, the best explanation for the development of Baptist convictions and ideas exists in the

development of the English Separatists, who came out of the Puritan movement of the late sixteenth century and who are briefly examined below. As English Baptist historian Barrie R. White has maintained, when an explanation for the emergence of Baptist convictions from the English context of the Puritan-Separatist movement is readily available, the onus of proof lies on those who argue for continental Anabaptism as having a decisive role in the emergence of the Baptists.

Puritan Soil

Baptists are children of the Puritans, a movement with roots stretching back to the European Reformation in the sixteenth century. In England the initial stages of the Reformation had taken place during the reign of Henry VIII, though not until the reign of his son Edward VI and then his daughter Elizabeth I did it find a firm footing. Following the reign of the Catholic monarch Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, permanently securing England's place in the Protestant orbit.

The Elizabethan Church of England faced an important question: to what extent would the Scripture be its guide in theology, worship, and church governance? Elizabeth seemed content with a church that was Protestant in theology but largely medieval in its pattern of worship and liturgy and in which the monarch held the reins of power. The Puritans arose in response to this situation, seeking to pattern the Elizabethan church after the model of Reformed churches on the European continent, which included in their worship only forms and practices they believed the Bible explicitly commanded. For instance, John Calvin, whose name has become synonymous with the Reformation in Geneva, declared with regard to the worship of the church that "nothing pleases God but what he himself has commanded us in his Word."

Separatist Roots

In the 1580s and 1590s, some of the more radical-minded Puritans, despairing of reformation within the Church of England, began to separate from the state church and organize what historians call Separatist congregations. Two books marked the "clarion call" of the Separatist movement: *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarrying for Anie* and *A Booke Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of All True Christians*. Both works were published in 1582 by Robert Browne—"Troublechurch" Browne, as one of his opponents nicknamed him. Browne came from a family of substance and was related to Robert Cecil, Elizabeth I's lord treasurer and chief minister. During his

undergraduate years at Cambridge University, Browne became a thoroughgoing Presbyterian. Within a few years, however, he came to the conviction that each local congregation had the right and responsibility to elect its own elders. By 1581, he was convinced of the necessity of planting congregations apart from the state church and its parish system.

That same year Browne established a Separatist congregation at Norwich in Norfolk. After being persecuted, the entire congregation left England the following year for the freedom of the Netherlands. What attracted Separatists like Browne to the Netherlands was its geographical proximity to England, its policy of religious toleration, its phenomenal commercial prosperity—the early seventeenth century witnessed such a flowering of Dutch literary, scientific, and artistic achievement that this period has often been called “the golden age of the Netherlands”—and the Reformed nature of its churches. From his new home Browne published his two influential Separatist treatises. In these tracts Browne set forth his views which, over the course of the next century, became common property of all the theological children of the English Separatists, including Baptists.

Browne willingly conceded the right of civil authorities to rule and to govern. However, he drew a line between their powers in society at large and their power with regard to local churches. As citizens of the state, the individual members of churches were to be subject to civil authorities, but, he emphasized, these authorities had no right “to compel religion, to plant Churches by power, and to force a submission to ecclesiastical government by laws and penalties.” Browne conceived of the local church as a “gathered” church, that is, a company of Christians who had covenanted together to live under the rule of Christ, whose will was made known through his Word and his Spirit. The pastors and elders of the church, though they ultimately received their authority and offices from God, were to be appointed to office by “due consent and agreement of the church” according to “the number of the most which agree.” For Browne, Christianity was ultimately a matter of personal conviction rather than public order, and the church a fellowship of believers rather than an army of conscripts.

Although Browne later recanted his views, he started a movement that could not be held in check. Browne’s mantle fell to three men—John Greenwood, Henry Barrow, and John Penry—all of whom were hanged in 1593 for secession from the established church, an act the state regarded as civil disobedience. Before their respective deaths, however, their preaching and writings led a significant number of Christians in London to adopt Separatist principles. As the English Baptist historian Barrie White has noted, “For many it was but a short step from impatient Puritanism within the established Church to convinced Separatism outside it.”

In an effort to curb the growth of Separatists, a law was passed in April 1593 requiring everyone over the age of sixteen to attend the church of their local parish, which comprised all who lived within a certain geographic boundary. Failure to do so for an entire month meant imprisonment. If, three months following an individual's release from prison, he still refused to conform, the person was to be given a choice of exile or death. In other words, the established church and the state were hoping to be rid of the Separatist problem by sending those who were recalcitrant into exile. Understandably, when faced with a choice of death or exile, most Separatists chose the latter. About forty of them ended up in Amsterdam, where they were later joined by their pastor, Francis Johnson.

Francis Johnson was arrested at the same time as Greenwood and Barrow. Though they were executed, he was kept in prison until 1597, when he was released on the condition that he go into exile to Canada. Johnson did not end up in Canada but rather relocated to Amsterdam, where his Separatist congregation was residing. Though the Separatists now enjoyed freedom of worship, their troubles were not over. Francis's brother George Johnson began to cause problems for the congregation by voicing complaints about certain habits of Francis's wife Thomasine: her taste for expensive clothing; her use of whalebones in her petticoats so that, according to George, her figure was accentuated and she was hindered in bearing children; the fact that she stayed in bed till nine o'clock on Sunday mornings. The latter was an issue since these Separatists met for worship in the Johnsons' house. To such criticisms George added one considerably more substantial: that his brother Francis was power hungry and was the center of power rather than the congregation. The church ultimately sided with Francis and his wife, and George Johnson, when he refused to withdraw his charges, was excommunicated around 1600.

In 1608, a second Separatist congregation arrived in Amsterdam. John Smyth was the leader of this church. Initially the two congregations held considerable similarity; both were Separatist in theology and both were composed of expatriate English men and women. Nevertheless, within a year significant differences between the two groups were evident. These differences eventually led the Smyth congregation to become the first English-speaking Baptists.

General Baptist Origins

John Smyth's exact origins are unknown, though he may have grown up at Sturton-le-Steeple in Nottinghamshire. Our first definite sight of Smyth is when he was at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he obtained a BA in

1590 and an MA in 1597. During this period Cambridge University was a nursery of Puritanism; Francis Johnson was among Smyth's tutors. Unsurprisingly, Smyth's Puritan views led to trouble a few years after his departure from Cambridge. He had been ordained as a minister in the Church of England in 1594, but within three years he was voicing strong disagreement with aspects of the Church's liturgy that he believed were unscriptural. Appointed to give Sunday afternoon lectures in the town of Lincoln by its Puritan-leaning town council in 1600, he stayed in this position till 1602. Some sermons he gave during that time—later published as *The Bright Morning Starre* (1603) and *A Paterne of True Prayer* (1605)—show a man who was Puritan in theology but still considered himself to be a loyal member of the Church of England.

By the autumn of 1607, Smyth became convinced of the Separatist position and gathered a Separatist congregation in the town of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire. The critical factor in convincing Smyth that he should leave the Church of England appears to be a series of church decrees by King James I in late 1604. King James required complete conformity of all Church of England ministers to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the doctrinal foundation of the established church, and the *Book of Common Prayer*, which set forth the worship and liturgy of the Church of England. The decrees also demanded support for episcopal polity. Smyth apparently met with a number of other Puritans to discuss what course of action they should take. Most Puritans decided to remain within the established church. However, Smyth and John Robinson were convinced that they had to leave; in their view the Church of England was beyond hope of reform.

During 1607 and 1608, the Smyth congregation was harassed by the state and made the difficult decision to leave England for the free winds of Amsterdam, Holland. Upon their arrival they lived and worshiped in what had been the bakery of the East India Company and sought fellowship with the other English Separatist congregation in the city pastored by Francis Johnson. Differences soon began to appear between the two congregations. In a book Smyth published the year of his arrival in the Netherlands, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation* (1608), he outlined areas of disagreement between his congregation and Johnson's. The most significant of these differences had to do with church leadership. The Johnson congregation had a single pastor who was responsible for preaching, discipline, and leading the congregation in the observance of the sacraments as well as serving as a teacher, who simply taught the Bible. Two ruling elders helped the pastor with the exercise of discipline. Smyth, however, believed that pastors, teachers, and elders were indistinguishable and that every congregation should have a plurality of these officers.

The net result of these differences was a rupture of fellowship between the two congregations as well as a split in the Smyth congregation. John Robinson and about 100 members could not agree with the direction Smyth was moving, and they separated from Smyth and relocated to Leiden. From Leiden, Robinson's congregation, who became known as the Pilgrims, eventually sailed to America on board the *Mayflower* and landed at Plymouth in southeastern Massachusetts in 1620. Robinson was to follow later, but he died in Holland in 1625. Following the split, Smyth's congregation numbered about fifty members, which was about a third of its original size.

In 1609, Smyth's thinking took another significant step as he came to accept believer's baptism. The issue of baptism was something of an embarrassment to the Separatists. According to their thinking, the Church of England was a false church. Yet all of them had been baptized as infants by this church. Was not the efficacy of their baptism in doubt, therefore? Most Separatists shrank from asking, let alone answering, this question. For many European Christians in the early seventeenth century, the baptism of believers seemed to lead to social and political disorder, as we have already noted.

Where others feared to tread, however, Smyth, ever the independent thinker, forged ahead. If, he reasoned, the Church of England is not a true church, then neither is her baptism a true baptism. Moreover, as he studied the Scriptures, he became convinced the New Testament knew only of believer's baptism and nothing of infant baptism. He outlined his new position in a treatise entitled *The Character of the Beast* (1609), which drew on a series of biblical texts like Acts 8:37 and Matthew 28:19. Baptism, Smyth argued, typifies the baptism with the Spirit and follows upon one's verbal confession of Christ; but infants cannot receive the baptism of the Spirit, nor can they confess Christ with their mouths. Nor are infants capable of repentance, which also must precede baptism. Smyth thus believed that he and his church were surrounded by a sea of apostasy. He recognized that he needed to be baptized, but in such a situation of total apostasy, he felt he had no one to whom he could turn for a proper baptism. He thus took the radical—and to his contemporaries, shocking—step of baptizing himself by pouring and then baptizing his congregation in the same manner.

In the controversy that followed the baptisms, Smyth was asked by his Separatist contemporaries how he could do such a thing; if self-baptism were permissible, then churches could be established of solitary men and women, which was ridiculous. Smyth's response was that he knew of no church that practiced baptism in accord with the New Testament. But, as Smyth's critics pointed out, he could have received believer's baptism from a Mennonite group in the Netherlands known as the Waterlanders. Smyth decided to approach the Waterlanders to investigate where they stood theologically.

By this point in time, Smyth had abandoned his earlier Calvinism and had adopted the views of the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, including the beliefs that election was conditioned on foreseen faith, saving grace could be resisted, and Christ died to save all men and women. Arminius's theological position was being heavily debated at the time in the Netherlands, and it is therefore understandable how Smyth came under the influence of this position. From the vantage point of his newly adopted Arminianism, the Waterlanders were orthodox, and Smyth came to regard his self-baptism as a premature and hasty step. Thus, together with forty-two other members of his congregation, he applied to join the Waterlander Mennonite church. This meant another baptism at the hands of the Waterlanders and consequently an admission on the part of the Smyth congregation that their baptism by Smyth was invalid. But some in Smyth's congregation refused to admit that their baptism was not valid. Led by Thomas Helwys, who came from landed gentry near Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, a handful of members refused to be absorbed into the Waterlander church. Instead they decided in 1612 to return to England. Smyth died the same year, and his congregation, eventually received into the Waterlander church, was ultimately assimilated into Dutch Mennonite culture.

The Helwys congregation, now based in Spitalfields, north London, retained the views they had adopted under Smyth's leadership and thus became known as General Baptists, so called because they believed Christ died to save all people (a general atonement). Helwys deserves to be remembered alongside Smyth as a Baptist pioneer. His treatise *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612) contains a vigorous plea for religious liberty for all men and women: "Men's religion to God is between God and

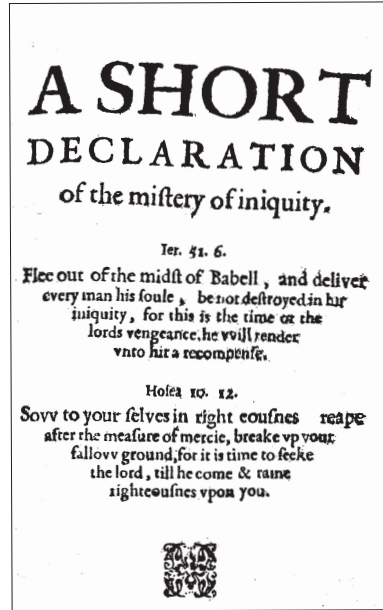
Helwys's Inscription in *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*

Thomas Helwys penned the following inscription in the front of the copy of *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* that was sent to King James I. The inscription can be found in the copy of this book housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The following excerpt has been modernized.

"Hear, O king, and despise not the counsel of the poor, and let their complaints come before thee. The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them. If the king has authority to make spiritual lords and laws, then he is an immortal God and not a mortal man. O king, be not seduced by deceivers to sin against God whom you ought to obey, nor against your poor subjects who ought and will obey you in all things with body, life, and goods, or else let their lives be taken from the earth. God save the king."

themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretic, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.” Helwys’s book was the first of its kind in the English language. He addressed what he saw as the errors of not only the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England but also the Puritans and the Separatists. For example, he accused the Separatist leader John Robinson of being “a malicious adversary of God’s truth.” Helwys was thrown into Newgate Prison almost as soon as the congregation returned to England; there he died before or in 1616. Helwys had sent a copy of *A Short Declaration* to King James I, which may have led to his arrest.

Helwys’s small congregation, which must have consisted of no more than ten or so members when they first returned to England, survived their leader’s imprisonment and death, eventually becoming the mother church of the General Baptist denomination. By 1626, they had established congregations in London, Coventry, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Tiverton, with a total of roughly 150 members. The General Baptists thus clearly emerged from the womb of Puritanism and the Separatist movement. Nevertheless, although the General Baptists were the first English-speaking Baptists, the Particular Baptists became the leading Baptist denomination in the centuries that followed.



Helwys's book.

Particular Baptist Origins

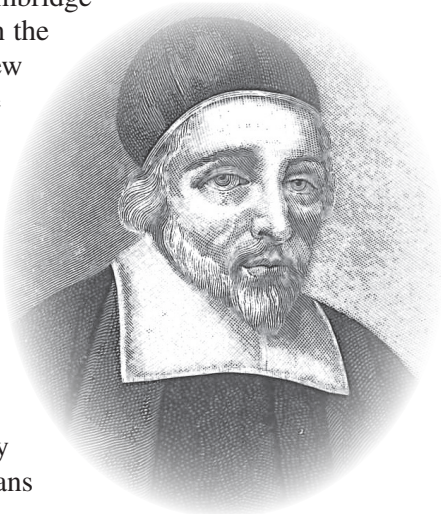
Notable Early Churches

The London-based congregation known to historians as the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church or JLJ Church, so called because of the names of its first three pastors, lies at the fountainhead of the Particular Baptist movement. Henry Jacob and a group of like-minded believers in London established the congregation in 1616. To what extent Jacob and his church were influenced by Separatists like Francis Johnson and John Robinson remains an

open question. Jacob met both of these men during his life, Johnson in 1599 and Robinson in 1610. What is clear, however, is that Jacob's congregation was determined not to cut itself off from all fellowship with Puritans in the Church of England. Unlike the Separatists, Jacob and his congregation believed true congregations existed within the Church of England; thus, it was not wrong to continue fellowshiping with them where this did not involve countenancing what Jacob's congregation regarded as definite error. It is not surprising that authorities in the Church of England harassed the congregation as a Separatist body, and Separatists in turn dubbed them "idolaters" since Separatists viewed the state church as a false church.

Due to this harassment and persecution, Jacob decided to leave England for Virginia in 1622, where he died two years later. His successor was John Lathrop. During Lathrop's pastorate at least two groups amicably withdrew from the Church to found Separatist congregations, one of which came to be pastored by Samuel Eaton. Eaton questioned the legitimacy of the baptism of infants by ministers in the Church of England, though it does not appear that he embraced believer's baptism as the only basis for membership in the Church. When William Laud, the Arminian archbishop of Canterbury, was seeking to rid England of Puritanism, Lathrop also decided to emigrate to the New World in 1634.

Henry Jessey became the new pastor of the JIJ Church in 1637. Jessey had become a Puritan while studying at Cambridge in the early 1620s. Ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1626, he grew increasingly uneasy with aspects of the liturgy and worship of the Established Church not directly supported by the Bible. In 1635 he came into contact with the Jacob-Lathrop Church, presumably began to worship with the congregation, and two years later was called to be the church's pastor. An irenic individual, Jessey continued to uphold the "Jacobite" tradition, that is, the policy established by Henry Jacob of fellowshiping with Puritans within the Church of England.



Henry Jessey (1603–1663)

A year or so after Jessey became the pastor of this church, the question of the validity of infant baptism arose. In a document drawn up at this time, the so-called "Kiffen Manuscript," we read that in 1638 "Mr. Thomas Wilson,

Mr. Pen, & H. Pen, & 3 more being convinced that baptism was not for infants, but professed believers joined with Mr. John Spilsbury the churches [*sic*] favour being desired therein." John Spilsbury was probably a cobbler by trade and may have been a member of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church at one point. His church is the first that can be definitely designated as Particular Baptist. The Particular Baptists were Calvinists noted for their belief that Christ died to save a particular elect people. Spilsbury wrote a number of small works that reveal his Calvinistic convictions. For example, in *God's Ordinance, the Saints' Privilege*, Spilsbury argued that "Christ hath not presented to his Father's justice a satisfaction for the sins of all men; but only for the sins of that do or shall believe in him; which are his elect only."

For many years Spilsbury's church met in an area of London called Wapping, which was on the north shore of the Thames River just east of the Tower of London. In the seventeenth century the district was a rough working-class community, largely populated by sailors or those engaged in maritime-related professions like mast making and ship repair. By 1670, around 300 regularly attended the services of this church. The Spilsbury congregation, which was probably little larger than a small house church when it began, maintained a good relationship with its mother church. There is evidence of joint gatherings for prayer, and members of the Spilsbury congregation continued to attend meetings at the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church. Barrie R. White has observed that "there were no high walls of bitterness" between the mother church and groups that left, and "even the withdrawals are recorded as brotherly."

The Recovery of Baptism by Immersion

By May 1640, the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church had grown to the point that it was too large to meet in one place. The decision was made to split the congregation in two, one half to continue under the pastoral leadership of Jessey and the other half under that of Praise-God Barebone, whose first name recalls the Puritan penchant for curious names. Around this time the question of baptism once again surfaced. A man named Richard Blunt, who had left the JLJ Church in 1633 with Samuel Eaton, began to fellowship with the church once again in 1640. Blunt soon aired the question of whether the baptism of believers by immersion was the only type of baptism to correspond to that practiced in New Testament times. The "Kiffen Manuscript" accordingly states that "Mr. Richard Blunt . . . being convinced of baptism that also it ought to be by dipping the body into the water, resembling burial and rising again . . . had sober conference about in the Church." The two texts that especially convinced Blunt the baptism of believers should be by

immersion were Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:4, both of which relate baptism to the believer's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ.

Blunt and those who were like-minded knew of no congregation in England that baptized believers by immersion and thus had no one close at hand to whom they could turn for instruction. Inquiries were made, and they discovered a group of believers in the Netherlands who baptized by immersion, a Mennonite body known as the Collegiants. Blunt, who spoke Dutch, went to Holland to discuss the issue with them and presumably to see a baptism firsthand. The "Kiffen Manuscript" tells us that upon his return Blunt baptized a certain "Mr. Blacklock that was a Teacher amongst them, & Mr. Blunt being Baptized, he & Mr. Blacklock Baptized the rest of their friends that were so minded"; forty-one were baptized in all. This is the first evidence of believers being baptized by immersion in England.

The Kiffen Manuscript

1633 Sundry of the Church whereof Mr. Jacob and Mr. John Lathorp [*sic*] had been Pastors, being dissatisfied with the Churches owning of English Parishes to be true Churches desired dismission & joined together among themselves, and Mr. Henry Parker, Mr. Thomas Shepard, Mr. Samuel Eaton, Mark Lukar, & others with whom joined Mr. William Kiffen.

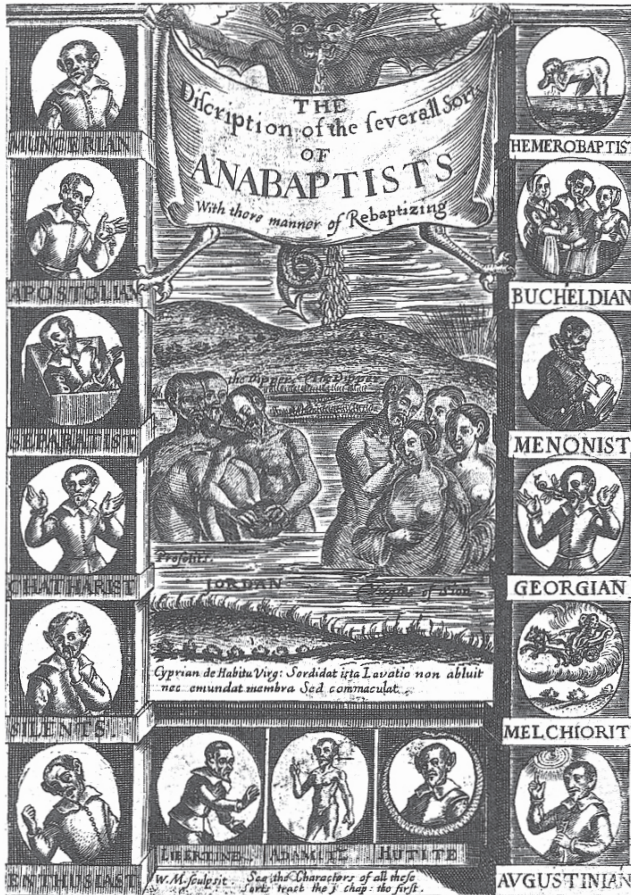
1638 Mr. Thomas Wilson, Mr. Pen, & H. Pen, & 3 more being convinced that Baptism was not for Infants, but professed Believers joined with Mr. John Spilsbury the Churches favour being desired therein.

1640 3rd Month [i.e. May]: The Church became two by mutual consent just half being with Mr. P. Barebone, & the other half with Mr. H. Jessey Mr. Richard Blunt with him being convinced of Baptism that also it ought to be by dipping the Body into the Water, resembling Burial and rising again. 2 Col. 2.12 [*sic*]. Rom. 6.4. had sober conference about in the Church, & then with some of the forenamed who also were so convinced. And after Prayer & conference about their so enjoying it, none having then so so [*sic*] practised in England to professed Believers, & hearing that some in the Netherlands had so practised they agreed & sent over Mr. Richard Blunt (who understood Dutch). . . .

1641 They proceed on therein, viz., Those Persons that were persuaded Baptism should be by dipping the Body had met in two Companies, & did intend so to meet after this, all these agreed to proceed alike together. . . . Those two Companies did set apart one to Baptize the rest; So it was solemnly performed by them.

Mr Blunt Baptized Mr. Blacklock that was a Teacher amongst them, & Mr. Blunt being Baptized, he & Mr. Blacklock Baptized the rest of their friends that were so minded, & many being added to them they increased much.

The newly immersed Particular Baptists formed two churches pastored by Richard Blunt and Thomas Kilcop, respectively. Mark Lucar numbered among those baptized after Blunt’s return from Holland; Lucar later played a significant role in the spread of Particular Baptist principles in America. Soon after Blunt’s return Spilsbury and his congregation also adopted immersion as the proper mode of baptism. Until this point Spilsbury’s congregation baptized believers by either sprinkling or pouring. Spilsbury later authored a treatise defending immersion as the biblical mode of baptism, though Stephen Wright has demonstrated that the General Baptist pastor Edward Barber was the first to publish a defense of immersion in his *A Small Treatise of Baptisme. Or, Dipping* (1641). Believer’s baptism by immersion



The frontispiece of Daniel Featley, *The Dippers dipt. Or, The Anabaptists duck'd and plunged Over Head and Eares* (London, 1645).

proved controversial. Critics such as the Anglican cleric Daniel Featley accused Baptists of scurrilous practices such as stripping “stark naked, . . . men and women together, to their Jordans to be dipt.”

The First London Confession of Faith

By the mid-1640s there were at least seven Particular Baptist congregations, all of them coming out of a Puritan background and all of them located in the metropolis of London. Due to their commitment to the baptism of believers, many in London confused them with the Anabaptists of the previous century. In order to dispel this confusion, refute other charges that had been leveled against them, and demonstrate their fundamental solidarity

The First London Confession of Faith (1644, modernized)

XXXIII

That Christ hath here on earth a spiritual Kingdom, which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed to himself, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that 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.

XXXIX

That Baptism is an Ordinance of the new Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized.

XL

The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a sign, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ: secondly, that interest the Saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection; thirdly, together with a confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and riseth again, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reign with Christ.

XLVII

And although the particular Congregations be distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit City in it self; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.

with Calvinists throughout Western Europe, these Particular Baptists issued the First London Confession of Faith in 1644. The confession went through at least two printings in its first year of existence and was then reissued in a slightly amended second edition on November 30, 1646 (four days after the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith was completed). Two subsequent editions appeared in the early 1650s. As the exemplary historical research of Barrie R. White has shown, this confession gave these early Calvinistic Baptists a clear and self-conscious sense of who they were, what they were seeking to achieve, and how they differed from other groups at this time.

Fifteen articles in the confession contain a substantial overview of the nature of the church and its life, an overview that is indebted to the ecclesiology of the Separatists in some respects. It is no exaggeration to say these articles set forth the basic channel in which Particular Baptist thought about the church would run well into the nineteenth century. Over against the Anglican and Presbyterian understandings of the parish church, Baptists maintained that a local church “is a company of visible saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and the Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement.” In other words, the local church should consist only of those who have experienced conversion and who have borne visible witness to that experience by being baptized.

This vision of the church as a body of converted individuals who were subsequently baptized ran counter to a major aspect of the thinking of seventeenth-century Anglicans and Presbyterians. These two Christian communities conceived of the church as an established state entity, where the arm of the government maintained religious uniformity and infant baptism was all but required for citizenship. Baptists, on the other hand, were convinced that the church is ultimately a fellowship of those who have personally embraced the salvation freely offered in Christ, not an army of conscripted men and women who have no choice in the matter. This conviction is underscored by the phrase “being baptized into that faith” in the passage cited above from the First London Confession of Faith being placed after the words “profession of the faith of the Gospel.” Only those who have knowingly professed faith should be baptized.

While this confessional document recognized the autonomy of each local congregation as a biblical given, it also highlighted that each congregation ultimately belongs to only one body and each shares the same head, the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of this conviction, a number of associations of churches in geographic proximity were created in the 1640s and 1650s in regions such as the Midlands, the West Country, South Wales, and Ireland.

Associations especially facilitated church planting and were a sign of spiritual vitality. They also enabled the various Baptists around the British Isles to stay in touch with one another.

The First London Confession served the Particular Baptists well during the 1640s and 1650s when the rule of Parliament and then that of Oliver Cromwell, victorious in the British Civil Wars (1642–51) against King Charles I, afforded them an unprecedented degree of freedom to evangelize and plant new churches. By 1660, there were some 130 Particular Baptist congregations in England, Wales, and Ireland. General Baptist congregations, on the other hand, numbered around 115, with most of their strength concentrated in the south of England and the Midlands. An important evangelist responsible for some of this growth among the General Baptists was Thomas Lambe, a soap-boiler who pastored a congregation in London. Lambe was a General Baptist in that he held to general redemption, but he also repudiated “denying original sin, holding free will and falling away,” views that aligned more with Particular Baptist sentiments. He well illustrates the argument of Stephen Wright that the division between General and Particular Baptists in this early period of Baptist history is not as clear-cut as some later historians of the Baptist movement have imagined. By the late 1650s a third group of Baptists, the Seventh Day Baptists, had also emerged. Never a large group, they were Calvinistic in theology but worshipped on Saturday rather than Sunday. Among their leading apologists was Edward Stennett, whose descendants played significant roles in the English Baptist community in the following century.

Baptist Origins in North America

Roger Williams and the First Baptist Church in America

Baptist growth in colonial America during the seventeenth century was not nearly as dramatic as what transpired in the British Isles during the same period of time. There were transatlantic links with the British Baptists, but by 1700 the American colonies had only twenty-four

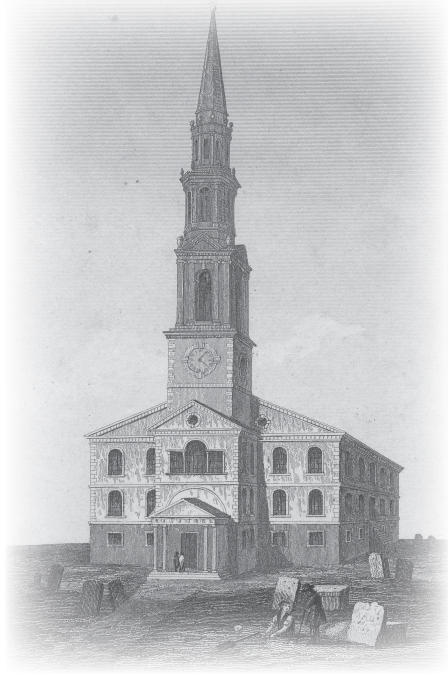


*Statue of Roger Williams
(ca. 1603–1683) located in Geneva
at the Reformation Wall.*

Baptist churches. From then until the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s, they all but ceased to grow. On the eve of this remarkable revival, Baptists in America were, as Winthrop S. Hudson has noted, “a small, undistinguished and little-noted religious group.” Their meteoric rise to become eventually the largest religious body in the United States did not take place until after the American Revolution.

When the first Baptists emerged in New England, they found themselves ostracized by the Congregationalist hegemony. This is indeed ironic since in England the Baptists and the Congregationalists saw themselves as close cobelligerents against Anglican intolerance and persecution. For instance, the Baptist John Bunyan so highly regarded the Congregationalist John Owen that he modeled one of the captains in his allegory *The Holy War* on Owen. But early New England Baptists experienced no more toleration of their religious practice than their coreligionists received from the Anglican state church in the mother country. Massachusetts authorities strictly forbade Baptist gatherings for worship. When they persisted in gathering, Baptists (along with Quakers) suffered persecution. The stage was set for two critical events in American Baptist history. The first involved a name famous in colonial New England, Roger Williams.

Born in London in either 1603 or 1604, Roger Williams became a Puritan during his studies for the Anglican ministry at Cambridge (BA, 1627). In 1630 he and his wife Mary Barnard, the daughter of a Puritan minister, sailed from Bristol, England, to Massachusetts, landing there on February 5, 1631. During the voyage Williams had time to conduct an intensive study of New Testament church polity, and he came to the conviction that the Puritans ought to separate entirely from the established church in England. As he argued over forty years later in a book written against the Quaker leader George Fox, God has delivered “the garden of his Church



*The First Baptist Church in America,
Providence, Rhode Island (est. 1638/39).*

and saints” from “the howling desert of the whole world” that she might be “enclosed and separate.”

When Williams arrived in New England, he was almost immediately invited to preach. But when he found that the church in Boston was what he called “an unseparated church,” he said he could not lead worship there. He was convinced that the presence of the unregenerate in church meetings polluted their worship. In Williams’s thinking the unregenerate had no more right to hear sermons than to receive the Lord’s Supper. He was also deeply persuaded that the magistrate may not punish any breach of the first four of the Ten Commandments, namely, false worship, idolatry, blasphemy, and Sabbath breaking. He was certain every individual should be free to follow his own convictions in religious matters, for, in his words, “forced worship stinks in the nostrils of God.”

Not surprisingly Williams clashed with Massachusetts authorities over these matters. In October 1635, the magistrates ordered him to be deported back to England. This decree of banishment was grounded on his aggressive and uncompromising hostility to the theocratic nature of the Massachusetts colony. His radical tenets, including complete separation of church and state and absolute voluntarism in matters of religion, and his refusal to have communion with any who gave countenance or support to the existing order, made his banishment seem necessary to the leaders of Massachusetts.

**Roger Williams, Propositions Argued in
*The Bloody Tenent of Persecution (1644)***

First, that the blood of so many hundred thousand souls of Protestants and Papists, split in the wars of present and former ages, for their respective consciences, is not required nor accepted by Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace. . . .

Fourthly, the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience is proved guilty of all the blood of the souls crying for vengeance under the altar.

Fifthly, all civil states with their officers of justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are proved essentially civil, and therefore not judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual or Christian state and worship.

Sixthly, it is the will and command of God that (since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus) a permission of the most paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or antichristian consciences and worships, be granted to all men in all nations and countries; and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, to wit, the sword of God’s Spirit, the Word of God. . . .

Eighthly, God requireth not a uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls.

Before the order could be carried out though, Williams, his wife, and some friends had fled south to the area that we now call Rhode Island. There he founded a settlement at Providence in the summer of 1636.

As the leader of the new colony he adopted the principle “God requireth not an uniformity of Religion” as the undergirding social infrastructure for the colony, thus guaranteeing religious liberty. On a trip back to London in 1644, in the middle of the British Civil Wars, Williams obtained a charter for the new colony, wherein complete religious liberty was guaranteed for all inhabitants. Also on this trip Williams published *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (1644), his famous biblical argument for religious liberty or “soul freedom.” On a later stay in London from 1651 to 1654, Williams became good friends with Oliver Cromwell, then ruling over England. Williams was delighted when he heard Cromwell once maintain in a public discussion “with much Christian zeal and affection . . . that he had rather that Mahumetanism [Islam] were permitted amongst us, than that one of God’s children should be persecuted.” Upon his return Williams served as president (governor) of the fledgling colony, and during his tenure in this capacity from 1654 to 1657, Jews and Quakers were admitted to the colony. Although Williams disagreed with the religious views of both groups, he sincerely believed they could all live together.

After arriving in Providence, Williams helped found a Baptist church in 1638 or 1639; that congregation is now called the First Baptist Church in America. Williams’s conflict with the Massachusetts authorities while living in that colony did not involve the issue of baptism, and baptism is not mentioned in his opponents’ charges against him. In 1638, though, some new settlers arrived in Rhode Island who had adopted antipedobaptist views in Massachusetts and been subjected to persecution. Williams may have influenced some of these religious dissenters while he was in Massachusetts, while some of them may have imbibed the views of English antipedobaptists before they left England.

Williams himself may have known something of the English Particular Baptists, whose origins we have already traced. John Winthrop, the Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, attributed Williams’s adoption of Baptist principles—he called them Anabaptist views—to the influence of Katherine Scott, the youngest sister of Anne Hutchinson, who, like Williams, was driven out of the colony because of convictions at odds with the Puritan leadership of Massachusetts. Williams’s thinking was also influenced by discussions about believer’s baptism with Ezekiel Holliman. In the fall of 1638 or the spring of 1639—the date is disputed—Williams was baptized by Holliman and immediately proceeded to baptize Holliman

and some ten other men and women. Thus was constituted the first Baptist church in America.

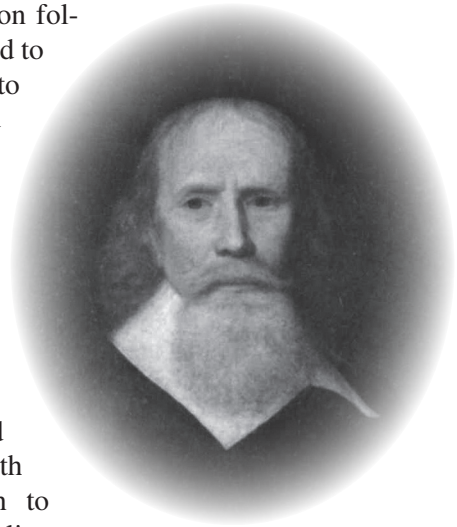
Williams remained with the little church only a few months. He became convinced that the ordinances had been lost in an apostasy that resulted from the fourth-century union of church and state when the Roman emperor Constantine befriended the church. At that point, he believed, “Christianity was eclipsed and the professors of it fell asleep.” The rites and ministries of the church since that time were therefore mere “inventions of men,” and they could not be validly restored without a special, divine commission. The latter would only come about when God raised up a new apostleship. Richard Scott, the husband of Katherine Scott, said of Williams at this time: “I walked with him in the Baptist way about three or four months, in which time he broke with the society and declared at large the grounds and reason for it—that their baptism could not be right because it was not administered by an apostle.” This is indeed ironic. Williams was so radical at the time in his views regarding church and state, but he retained a belief in visible apostolic succession that was a central part of the platform of Anglicanism. He assumed the attitude of a “Seeker”—a common religious perspective in England prior to the rise of the Quakers. Williams was not satisfied that any group of Christians had all of the marks of the true Church. He outlived all of his contemporaries and died in 1683.

Williams’s commitment to religious liberty has made him a revered figure among Baptists down through the years. In the eighteenth century Isaac Backus regarded him as playing an essential role in the creation of the Baptist cause. Sadly, in 1652, the church Williams founded split over Arminianism and the necessity of the “laying on of hands” for all believers after their baptism. The latter was considered the “sixth principle” taught in Hebrews 6—the other five being repentance, faith, baptism, resurrection of the dead, and final judgment. Advocates of the laying on of hands became known as Six-Principle Baptists. Around the same time the English General Baptists also experienced controversy over the imposition of hands. In the case of the Baptists of Providence, the Arminians and the Six-Principle Baptists won out. The adoption of these theological views, coupled with the lack of strong leadership among the Providence Baptists, prevented them from playing a significant role in the spread of Baptist ideas; New England Baptists outside of Rhode Island were Calvinistic. The Providence church would revert to Calvinism in the 1770s.

John Clarke and the Newport Baptists

The leading influence behind Baptist growth in New England during the seventeenth century proved to be the second Baptist congregation formed in

the region, located in Newport, Rhode Island. The pastor was John Clarke, who had been trained as a physician at Leiden in Holland before arriving in Boston in the fall of 1637. Conflict with the authorities over religious matters soon followed his arrival, and Clarke relocated to Rhode Island, where he helped to found the church at Newport and then served as its minister for over thirty years. Historians debate the date of the church's founding. Though the present congregation maintains that it was founded in 1638, we probably could not consider it a Baptist church until 1644. That year a Particular Baptist from London named Mark Lucar joined the group, became a co-elder with Clarke, and persuaded the church to embrace immersion as the mode of believer's baptism. Lucar's involvement with this church, as well as letters Clarke wrote to English Particular Baptists, is an excellent reminder of the links between Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic. From 1644 onward the Newport Church was explicitly Baptist.



John Clarke (1609–1676)

The only Baptist ministry solidly active in New England by 1650 was that of John Clarke and his co-elders Mark Lucar and Obadiah Holmes. One individual who joined this church in 1652 was simply denominated as “Jack, a colored man,” the earliest known African-American Baptist believer. The church lost a good number of members in a schism over the laying on of

John Clarke, Letter to Richard Bennett, December 25, 1658

I am fully satisfied that there are two special designs which the Lord of Hosts hath very much on his heart to prosecute and to appear glorious in, in and about the days and times in which we live. The one is to bring in and set up that great and glorious kingdom of Christ. The other is to cast out and throw down the kingdom of Antichrist. And how well will it become the servants of the Lord to make it their business to wait upon him for wisdom and light whereby they may be directed to know their work, even that which doth most suit with the designs of their Lord, that so they may be at it, yea abounding therein, and that continually.

Original in the Archives of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

hands in 1656. In 1671, about fifty others left due to Sabbatarian convictions and formed the first Seventh Day Baptist Church in America. The earliest recorded Native American Baptist, a man who gave his name as Japheth, belonged to this Seventh Day congregation in Newport.

In 1651, a Baptist by the name of William Witter was excommunicated by the Congregationalist church in Salem, Massachusetts, for being baptized as a believer and for saying that infant baptism was “sinful” and “a badge of the whore.” At his trial Witter refused to repent of his views. Two years later he was taken before the county court again for saying “that they who stayed while a child was baptized do worship the devil.” He was again ordered to make a public recantation. Again he refused. Further harassment did not take place, probably because of his advanced age.



Whipping of Obadiah Holmes.

That summer Witter asked John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and another member of the Newport Church, John Crandall, to visit him. Witter had joined the Newport Church though he lived in Massachusetts. A service was held in Witter’s home on Sunday, July 20, 1651. Authorities were informed of the service, but nothing was done until the following Tuesday, when the Rhode Islanders were arrested and imprisoned. Eventually they were found guilty of holding a private meeting on the Lord’s Day and undermining infant baptism. Holmes was sentenced to pay a fine of £30, while Clarke and Crandall had to pay £20 and £5 respectively. If they failed to pay, they

were to be whipped. All three Baptists refused to pay the fines, but some of Clarke's friends posted bail for him, and Crandall was released after he changed his mind and paid his bail. They returned to Rhode Island. Holmes remained adamant that if his friends posted bail for him, he would be deeply offended. He languished in prison until September of the same year when it was decided that he would receive thirty lashes with a three-corded whip. He was accordingly whipped on the Boston Common. As Holmes later wrote in a letter to the English Baptists John Spilsbury and William Kiffen, he had "such a spiritual manifestation of God's presence" that it was as if he had been whipped "with roses."

One possible result of Holmes's public whipping was the subsequent embrace of antipedobaptist convictions by Henry Dunster, the first president of Harvard College. As Dunster affirmed at a private conference organized to convince him of the error of his ways, "All instituted Gospel Worship hath some express word of Scripture. But pedobaptism hath none." For Dunster the heart of the matter was that "only" visible believers were to be baptized, but infants were not visible believers. Dunster spoke his mind at the baptism

Henry Dunster on Infant Baptism

Dunster spoke his mind about pedobaptism during a baptismal service on July 30, 1654. He made five points. They were, according to the court records:

1. That the subjects of Baptism were visible penitent believers, and they only by virtue of any rule, example, or any other light in the new testament.
2. That there was an action now to be done, which was not according to the institution of Christ.
3. That the exposition as it had been held forth was not the mind of Christ.
4. That the covenant of Abraham is not a ground for Baptism no not after the institution thereof.
5. That there were such corruptions stealing into the Church, which every faithful Christian ought to bear witness against."

From Jeremiah Chaplin, *Life of Henry Dunster: First President of Harvard* (Boston, 1872).

of an infant in the meetinghouse in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which led to his resignation as Harvard president in April 1655. But Dunster was not baptized as a believer, nor did he advocate his beliefs in print, thus diminishing the impact of his views. A second result of Holmes's whipping was that Rhode Island Baptists were careful not to venture into Massachusetts territory for many years. Baptist witness in Massachusetts was thus left without organization and leadership.

“Incendiaries . . . and . . . Infectors”: Baptists Under the Cross in New England

Puritan fears about the Baptists were revealed in a piece of Massachusetts legislation passed in November 1644, which stated that because Baptists were “incendiaries of the commonwealths and the infectors of persons in main matters of religion,” they were to be banished from the colony. To the Congregationalists, Baptists were not merely theological opponents but potential social and political subversives, threats to law and order, and liable to bring God’s wrath down upon their communities. They were accordingly shunned in New England. Now some New England Baptists were ornery characters and all but brought persecution upon themselves! On one occasion when a baby was being baptized in Charlestown, just across the river from Boston, a Baptist who was in the congregation stomped up to the front of the meetinghouse, grabbed the baptismal basin, and dashed it to the floor. Not surprisingly, such publicly disruptive acts convinced Puritan authorities that the Baptists were revolutionary “incendiaries.”

Apart from efforts of the two congregations in Rhode Island that have been discussed, any attempt at Baptist witness within Massachusetts or Connecticut was silenced or exiled. Baptists built a meetinghouse in the heart of Boston in 1679, for example, but it was boarded up when they tried to use it for worship. The length of time the New England Puritans were able to maintain their policy of intolerance is surprising. In 1669, thirteen Congregationalist ministers of England, including Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, and Philip Nye, wrote to their fellow Congregationalists in New England urging them to “trust God with his truths and ways so far, as to suspend all vigorous proceedings in corporal restraints and punishments, on persons that dissent” from them. But as late as 1681, Baptists in Massachusetts were still being attacked as “dangerous” and “arrogant.”

A major reason for this persecution lasting so long lay in the key difference between Puritans and Baptists in America: New England Puritans were committed to the medieval model of a corporate Christian state while Baptists argued for a voluntaristic, individualistic social order. No matter how otherwise orthodox and Calvinistic the Baptists were in their theology, the Puritan order in New England could not help but regard them as heretical in their ideas of the relationship between church and state. As William McLoughlin put it: “What was ultimately at stake in this debate [between Puritans and Baptists] . . . was the breakdown of the corporate Christian state and the substitution for it of a state of free individuals relying on their own judgment to create the city of God.” In the wooden meetinghouses on the outskirts of the transatlantic British world, a clash was being enacted between two worldviews: that of the medieval era and that of modernity.

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Questions for Discussion

1. Who were the Anabaptists, and what did they believe? Why were they persecuted?
2. Outline the political and religious situation surrounding the origins of the Baptists.
3. Who were the two leading pioneers of the General Baptists? How did they contribute to the development of Baptist identity? Are their contributions still important today? Why or why not?
4. Sketch the development of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church.
5. What was the “Kiffen Manuscript”? Why are documents like this important for the study of Baptist history?
6. Identify three components of essential Baptist life in the First London Confession. Would you consider these essential to church life today? Why or why not?

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7. What did Roger Williams contribute to the development of Baptist life in North America?
 8. How was the first Baptist church formed in America?
 9. Describe John Clarke's life and contributions to Baptists in America.
 10. What were the differences between Baptists and the wider Puritan movement during the seventeenth century? Is it appropriate to describe Baptists as Puritans? Why or why not?