

# Pastor: Remember the Spiritual Disciplines

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The most common interpretative grid for understanding early Baptist life and theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is an ecclesial one. Due to the fact that Baptists differed from other Puritan bodies like the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the realm of ecclesiology it is often assumed that the best way to understand them is by focusing on issues of church polity. While ecclesiological distinctives did set them apart from other Christian communities during this era, the heart of Baptist life is not really reducible to such distinctives. As B.B. Warfield and others have argued, the Puritans and their various heirs, among whom the Baptists loom large, were primarily men and women intensely passionate about the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit, and, as such, it was pneumatological concerns and spirituality that lay at the very core of the English Baptist movement during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B.B. Warfield, "Introductory Note" to Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1900 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1956) xxxv, xxviii. See also the discussion by Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality* (London: Epworth Press, 1973), 53-65; Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans. An*

Baptists in this era were adamant that keeping in step with the Spirit was the vital matter when it came to the nourishment of the soul of the believer or the sustenance of the inner life of a congregation. As the late eighteenth-century English Baptist John Sutcliff (1752-1814) of Olney, Buckinghamshire, typically observed in this regard:

*...the outpouring of the divine Spirit...is the grand promise of the new testament... His influences are the soul, the great animating soul of all religion. These withheld, divine ordinances are empty cisterns, and spiritual graces are withering flowers. These suspended, the greatest human abilities labour in vain, and the noblest efforts fail of success.<sup>2</sup>*

*Anthology* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), xi-xiv; Garth B. Wilson, "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Reformed Tradition: A Critical Overview," in George Vandervelde, ed., *The Holy Spirit: Renewing and Empowering Presence* (Winfield, British Columbia: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 57-62; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990), 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts illustrated* (London: W. Butten, 1791), 12.

On another occasion Sutcliff made the same point thus:

*Be earnest with God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, in an abundant measure. Seek his divine influences, to furnish you with spiritual ability, in order that you may be found in the discharge of that which is your indispensable [sic] duty. Highly prize his sacred operations. These are the real excellency of all religious duties.*<sup>3</sup>

Yet, these Baptists were also certain that to seek the Spirit's strength apart from the various means through which the Spirit normally worked was both unbiblical and foolish. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), the most significant Baptist theologian of the late seventeenth century, put it this way in 1681 when, in a direct allusion to the Quakers, who dispensed with the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, he declared:

*Many are confident they have the Spirit, Light, and Power, when 'tis all meer [sic] Delusion. ...Some Men boast of the Spirit, and conclude they have the Spirit, and none but they, and yet at the same time cry down and villify his blessed Ordinances and Institutions, which he hath left in his Word, carefully to be observed and kept, till he comes the second time without Sin unto Salvation. ...The Spirit hath its proper Bounds, and always runs in its spiritual Chanel [sic], viz. The Word and Or-*

*dinances, God's publick [sic] and private Worship...*<sup>4</sup>

Keach here mentions three central spiritual disciplines or means of piety: the Word and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the following century, Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795), the pastor of the Baptist cause in Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire for fifty-five years, discerned in the phrase "Draw nigh unto my soul" (Psalm 69:18) five ways in which God draws near to his people, three of which are identical to the means of grace listed by Keach. God draws near to us and we to him in prayer, Beddome says, in "hearing the Word," in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and also, he added, in "the time of affliction" and death.<sup>5</sup> While these Baptists knew of other means of grace—for example, Christian friendship and the making of personal and corporate covenants—the Word and prayer, baptism and the Lord's Supper were undoubtedly central.

### **"Prize God's holy word"**

Shaped by their Reformation and Puritan roots, Baptists have historically been characterized by a spirituality of the Word. To use a description coined by Alister McGrath, Baptists have been "Word-centred evangelicals."<sup>6</sup> This spirituality was based on the affirmation of the infallibility of the Scriptures. As a 1651 Baptist tract against the Quakers has it, the Bible is "the infallible word of God...declaring his mind, making known his counsel, being able to make

<sup>3</sup> *The Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's-Day, Explained and Enforced* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1786), 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture-Metaphors* (London: Enoch Prosser, 1681), II, 312, 314.

<sup>5</sup> *Communion with God our Security and Bliss* in his *Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome, A.M.* (London: William Ball, 1835), 399-401.

<sup>6</sup> *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 66.

the people of God wise unto salvation.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, because this was the nature of the Scriptures, they were to be central to the piety of the believer. A statement by the prominent London Baptist William Kiffin (1616-1701) well captures this fact when he states about a fellow Baptist, John Norcott (1621-1676):

*He steered his whole course by the compass of the word, making Scripture precept or example his constant rule in matters of religion. Other men’s opinions or interpretations were not the standard by which he went; but, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he laboured to find out what the Lord himself had said in his word.*<sup>8</sup>

A similar Word-centredness can be seen in an exhortation of the Baptist evangelist Thomas Patient (d.1666), when, in April, 1650, he urged Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) to “[b]e sure to prize God’s holy word, and all the rest of God’s holy ordinances.”<sup>9</sup>

Given this prominence of the Scriptures in the life of Baptists, it is not surprising that hearing the Word preached was regarded by them as a vital spiritual discipline and the pre-eminent aspect of worship. For instance, in the association records of the Northern Baptist Association, which was composed of Baptist churches in the old English counties of Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmore-

<sup>7</sup> *Heart Bleedings for Professor Abominations [Confessions of Faith, and Other Public Documents, Illustrative of the History of the Baptist Churches of England in the seventeenth Century]*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854), 304].

<sup>8</sup> Cited Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), III, 300.

<sup>9</sup> In Edward Bean Underhill, ed., *Public Documents, Illustrative of the History of the Baptist Churches of England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Haddon, Brothers, and Co., 1854), 311. I am grateful to my former research and administrative assistant, Allen R. Mickle, Jr., currently of St. George, Ontario, for drawing my attention to this text.

land, and Durham, we read the following answer to a question raised in 1701 as to who may administer the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism: “Those Persons that the Church approves of to Preach the Gospel we think it safe to Approve likewise for ye Administering other Ordinances Preaching being the greater work.” In 1703, when a similar question was asked, it was stated that “those whom the Church Approves to preach the Gospel may also Administer the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lords Supper Preaching being the main and principall [sic] Work of the Gospel.”<sup>10</sup> English Baptist scholar Christopher J. Ellis thus rightly speaks of the “dominance of preaching in Baptist worship.”<sup>11</sup>

The architecture of early English Baptist churches also bespoke this emphasis on the preached word in worship: the central feature of these simple structures was the pulpit. In the words of D. Mervyn Himbury, early Baptist chapels were “meeting houses designed for preaching.”<sup>12</sup> These meeting-houses were generally square or rectangular structures, some of them from the outside even resembling barns.<sup>13</sup> Inside the meeting-house the pulpit was made prominent and was well within the sight and sound of the entire congregation. Sometimes a sounding board was placed

<sup>10</sup> S. L. Copson, *Association Life of the Particular Baptists of Northern England 1699-1732* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), 89, 95.

<sup>11</sup> *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 134. See also Ellis’ whole chapter on the role of preaching in Baptist worship: *Gathering*, 124-149.

<sup>12</sup> *British Baptists. A Short History* (London: The Carrey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1962), 141.

<sup>13</sup> One critic of the Baptists and their fellow Dissenters in the early nineteenth century could actually describe their faith as “the religion of barns”! See John Greene, *Reminiscences of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: Frederick Westley/A. H. Davis, 1834), 25.

behind the pulpit so as to help project the preacher's voice throughout the building. There was a noticeable lack of adornment in Baptist meeting-houses, with nothing to distract the attention of the worshippers. During the eighteenth century, large clear windows were provided so that light was available to all to read the Scriptures as the Word of God was expounded.<sup>14</sup>

Given the prominence attached to preaching by verbal and architectural statement, it should occasion no surprise to find leading English Baptist preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasizing that good preaching required hard work and preparation. Hercules

Collins (d.1702), the pastor of Wapping Baptist Church, London, from 1676 till his death, could state in his *The Temple Repair'd* (1702) that "he doth the best Work and the most Work, that labours most in

his Study, with a dependance upon God for a Blessing."<sup>15</sup> While Collins was well aware that ultimately it was the Spirit that made men preachers of the gospel—"tho it be granted," he wrote in the same work, "that human Literature is very useful for a Minister, yet it is not essentially necessary; but to have the Spirit of Christ to open the Word of Christ is essentially necessary"<sup>16</sup>—yet study was still vital. There were some, he noted, that "think it

<sup>14</sup> Helpful in this discussion of early Baptist architecture has been John Davison, "The Architecture of the Local Church" in *Local Church Practice* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1978), 179-190.

<sup>15</sup> *The Temple Repair'd* (London: William and Joseph Marshal, 1702), 22. Also see the extract from this work in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990), 111-115.

<sup>16</sup> *Temple Repair'd*, 19.

unlawful to study to declare God's Mind, and will contemptuously speak against it, as if we were to preach by Inspiration, as the Prophets and Apostles of old did." In response to such reasoning, Collins cited 2 Timothy 2:15 and asked "What can be a better Confutation of those Men than [this] Text? which commands Ministers to study to shew themselves good Workmen."<sup>17</sup>

Many of the better preachers of that day were, of course, able to preach with little preparation, if the need arose. Benjamin Beddome was once asked to preach at Fairford in the Cotswolds, where a Thomas Davis was the pastor. Beddome,

who was a very powerful preacher but naturally quite timid, completely forgot his sermon as it came time to preach. Having no notes, he understandably became somewhat agitated. Leaning over Davis on the way to the pulpit from where he had

been sitting, he asked anxiously, "Brother Davis, what must I preach from?" Davis, thinking that Beddome was not in earnest and actually joking, curtly replied, "Ask no foolish questions." Davis' reply gave Beddome great relief. When he came to the pulpit he turned the congregation to Titus 3:9, and proceeded to preach upon the clause found there, "Avoid foolish questions." It was a sermon that hearers said was "remarkably methodical, correct, and useful!"<sup>18</sup>

In *The Temple Repair'd* Collins also gave instructions regarding the best way in which to shape the sermon. Attention first had to be given to the context of the

<sup>17</sup> *Temple Repair'd*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton, 1830), IV, 462.

verse or verses being preached upon and difficult terms in the passage explained. Then what the passage taught in terms of doctrine had to be made fully clear and established by reference to parallel texts of Scripture. Finally how the doctrinal teaching applied to the hearers' lives was to be set forth.<sup>19</sup>

Among the various additional directions that the London pastor gave regarding preaching, Collins emphasized that the preacher's speech must be

*plain, as Paul's was. Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power [1 Corinthians 2:4]. Use sound words that cannot be condemned. Rhetorical flashes are like painted glass in a window, that makes a great show, but darkens the light;... The Prophets and Apostles generally spoke in the vulgar and common languages which the ordinary people understood: They did not only speak to the understanding of a king upon the throne, but to the understanding of the meanest subject.*<sup>20</sup>

This emphasis on plainness and simplicity in preaching continued throughout the century. Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), the renowned Baptist theologian and pastor of the Baptist cause in Kettering, insisted in his *Thoughts on Preaching*, written towards the end of the eighteenth century, that while "sound speech" and "good sense" ought to characterize preaching, the preacher should never aspire after "fine composition" and "great elegance of expression." The latter might "amuse and please the ears of a few," but it will not "profit the many." And here Fuller has in

<sup>19</sup> *Temple Repair'd*, 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> *Temple Repair'd*, 28. The remark about "painted Glass in a Window, that makes a great show, but darkens the Light" says much about Baptist thoughts about the ornamentation found in many Anglican churches.

mind those from the poorer classes who did not have the benefit of a literary education and who made up the bulk of Baptist congregations throughout the era we are considering.<sup>21</sup>

Coxe Feary (1759-1822), who pastored a Baptist work in an obscure little village called Bluntisham, then in Huntingdonshire, held similar convictions. Writing in the autumn of 1802 to a friend who was studying at the Bristol Baptist Academy, the sole Baptist seminary in England at the time for training men for pastoral ministry, Feary counselled him: "I hope you make a point of studying two sermons every week, that you disuse your notes as much as possible in the pulpit, and that you constantly aim to be the useful, more than the refined, preacher." Feary went on to explain that in giving this advice, he certainly did not want his friend to stoop to using "vulgar" speech in his sermons, that is, common slang. Rather, he wanted him "to commend [himself] to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and to the understanding of [his] hearers." In other words, his sermons should be easily understood by all of his hearers. In this way, he would be a "useful" preacher and "an able minister of the New Testament."<sup>22</sup>

This type of preaching was not only advocated because it was in line with that of the Apostolic era, but also because the English Baptists generally believed that it was through the mind that God appealed to the hearts and wills of human beings. Benjamin Beddome brings this out most clearly in a sermon that he preached on 2 Corinthians 5:11a ["Knowing therefore

<sup>21</sup> *Thoughts on Preaching [The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller]*, revised Joseph Belcher (3<sup>rd</sup> London ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I, 717].

<sup>22</sup> Cited R. W. Dixon, *A Century of Village Nonconformity at Bluntisham, Hunts. 1787 to 1887* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 195.

the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”]. Beddome was convinced that the word “persuade” lay at the heart of preaching. Since men and women are “endowed with reason and understanding,” they are “capable of being persuaded” and reasoned with. Thus, we find the Apostle Paul reasoning “with the Jews out of the Scriptures,” that is, laying before them “the evidences of truth” and endeavouring to “remove their prejudices against it by solid argument.” Consequently, a “minister is not to address himself to the passions, but to the understanding of his hearers.” Beddome, of course, did not disapprove of the presence of emotions. Sermons must be delivered, he argued, with “warmth of affection, earnestness of expression, and unwearied assiduity.” As such, they will undoubtedly kindle the affections of the hearers. But, it must be recognized that emotion is also quite fickle, and can “quickly vanish away, and leave no permanent effect.”<sup>23</sup> It simply cannot form the foundation of a Christian lifestyle, let alone serve as the basis for believers’ “life together.”

Finally, it should be noted that the English Baptists of this era never lost sight of the fact that, just as it is the Spirit alone who makes preachers, so it is the Spirit who alone can empower the words of the preacher and make them efficacious to the winning of the lost and the building up of God’s people. In the words of Benjamin Beddome:

*...As it is the Spirit alone who makes preachers, so it is the Spirit who alone can empower the words of the preacher and make them efficacious to the winning of the lost and the building up of God’s people.*

*Ministers lift up their voice, and God makes bare his arm; ministers persuade, and God enables, nay, constrains, men to comply. ...Ministers stand at the door and knock; the Spirit comes with his key, and opens the door.*<sup>24</sup>

### **“Putting on the military dress”: The spirituality of baptism**

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century the various types of Baptists—Calvinistic, General (that is, Arminian), and Seventh-day—were the only major denominations in Great Britain that insisted upon believer’s baptism. The Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the Methodists all upheld infant baptism, while the Quakers dispensed with the rite altogether. Moreover, since few Baptist churches prior to 1800 possessed an indoor baptistery, baptism was usually done outdoors in a pond, stream, or river where all and sundry could come and watch.<sup>25</sup> The Baptists were thus provided with excellent opportunities to bear witness to their distinct convictions and their commitment to

<sup>24</sup> “The Heavenly Calling” in *Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome*, 111, 116. The final sentence of this quotation is taken directly from the Puritan author Thomas Watson (d. c.1686). See his *A Body of Divinity* (1890 ed.; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 221.

<sup>25</sup> In London there were two specially constructed buildings which served during this era as baptisteries for the numerous Baptist congregations in the capital. According to one account, they were “splendid structures, with handsome marble fronts, elaborate suites of rooms, and well equipped” [John Stanley, *The Church in the Hop Garden. A Chatty Account of the Longworth-Coate Baptist Meeting: Berks and Oxfordshire (Ante 1481-1935) and its Ministers* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1935), 138-139].

<sup>23</sup> “Sermon V” [*Short Discourses adapted to Village Worship, or The Devotions of the Family* (London: Burton, Smith and Co., 1820), VIII, 49-50].

Christ. For example, at the formation of a small Calvinistic Baptist congregation in Redruth, Cornwall, in August 1802, four individuals were publicly baptized. According to an account written in the church records by the first pastor, F. H. Rowe, the day

*was one of those enchanting days when the sun clears the atmosphere of every cloud, not a leaf appeared to vibrate on the trees, or the smallest undulations be formed on the pool. We had selected a spot well suited for the purpose. It was the vale that lies between the bridge known by the name of 'Blowing House Bridge' and the celebrated Carn Brea Hill. Owing to the excavations occasioned by the searching for ore, a large amphitheatre was formed. On this spot stood an immense concourse of people. The general impression was their number consisted of 15,000. No one but an eye-witness can conceive the pleasure derived from the sight of four believers in Christ taking up the easy yoke of their Master in the presence of so many.*<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly Andrew Fuller observed that public baptisms had often been a vehicle for impressing upon many individuals "their first convictions of the reality of religion."<sup>27</sup>

However, the public nature of the rite also exposed Baptists to ridicule and censure. James Butterworth, who pastored at

<sup>26</sup> "The Harvest of 100 Years. Ebenezer Baptist Chapel 1877-1977" (Typescript, 1977), 1. I am indebted to Chris Curry, formerly of St. Catherine's, Ontario, for this reference. For a more well-known account of a public baptism, see that recorded by Robert Robinson, *The History of Baptism* (London: Thomas Knott, 1790), 541-543. Detailed accounts of outdoor baptisms like this one by Robinson are rare. See also Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990), 98-99.

<sup>27</sup> *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism (Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 343).*

Bromsgrove near Birmingham from 1755 to 1794, could state at a baptismal service in 1774: "Baptism is a thing so universally despised, that few can submit to it, without apparent danger to their temporal interest; either from relations, friends, masters, or others with whom they have worldly connections."<sup>28</sup> A couple of days after Andrew Fuller had been baptized in the spring of 1770 he met a group of young men while he was riding through the fields near his home in Soham. "One of them," he later recorded, "called after me, in very abusive language, and cursed me for having been 'dipped'."<sup>29</sup>

In 1778 Joseph Jenkins (1743-1819), who served as the pastor of Baptist causes in Wrexham, Wales, and in London, refuted a series of unfounded charges against the Baptists, including the assertions that they conducted baptisms in the nude, that they baptized "women apparelled in a single garment," and that they even immersed women in the final stages of pregnancy.<sup>30</sup> This accusation that the Baptist practice of immersion involved immodesty was one that had been common since the emergence of the English Baptists in the mid-seventeenth century. For instance, their first doctrinal standard, the *First London Confession of Faith* (1644), was issued in part to rebut the charge that the Baptists of that time were involved in "doing acts unseemly in the dispensing the Ordinance of Baptism, not to be named amongst Christians."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Repentance and Baptism considered* (Coventry, 1774), 36. I owe this reference to Olin C. Robison, "The Particular Baptists in England 1760-1820" (Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, 1963), 287.

<sup>29</sup> John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Button & Son, 1818), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Robison, "Particular Baptists in England", 288. On Jenkins, see R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival 1760-1820* (Wheaton, Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1989), 115-116.

Baptist works responding to these attacks on believer's baptism invariably devoted large sections to proving that believers, never infants, are the proper subjects of baptism and that they should be baptized by immersion, and not by any other mode. The equally important subject of the meaning of baptism was consequently often overlooked.<sup>32</sup> A notable exception in this regard was a circular letter written by Andrew Fuller for the Northamptonshire Association in 1802. Entitled *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, it took for granted the standard Baptist position on the right subjects of baptism and the proper mode in which it is to be administered, and concentrated on outlining the meaning and significance of the rite. In Fuller's words, he desired to focus his readers' attention on "the influence of this ordinance, where it produces its proper effects, in promoting piety in individuals, and purity in the church."<sup>33</sup>

At the time when Fuller wrote this tract he was the pastor of the Baptist cause in Kettering, Northamptonshire, where he had been since 1782. Raised in a household of farmers, he was a big, broad-shouldered man who had little formal education and looked, to William Wil-

berforce (1759-1833) at least, as "the very picture of a village blacksmith."<sup>34</sup> Yet, in the words of Benjamin Davies (1814-1875), the Welsh Old Testament scholar who served as the first principal of Canada Baptist College in Montreal, though Fuller "began to preach when very unlearned," he "was so sensible of his disadvantages that he used great diligence to acquire that knowledge, without which he could never be, what he at length became, one of the most valuable men of his time, and decidedly the most useful minister in our religious community."<sup>35</sup> Not without reason did another Welsh Baptist call him "the Elephant of Kettering."<sup>36</sup>

Fuller began *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism* by maintaining that the principal reason why God instituted this ordinance is that it might serve as a "solemn and practical profession of the Christian religion." As an "open profession" of the name of Christ, baptism is nothing less than an "oath of allegiance to the King of Zion." Baptism is a "sign" to

<sup>34</sup> Cited Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 505. For a brief statement by Fuller himself about his upbringing and lack of formal education, see "Discipline of the English and Scottish Baptist Churches" (*Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 481). For the life of Fuller, the classic study is that of John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816). A second edition of this biography appeared in 1818.

For more recent studies, see Phil Roberts, "Andrew Fuller" in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 121-139, and Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003).

On his thought, see also Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> "Ministerial Education", *The Canada Baptist Magazine*, 3, No.9 (March, 1840), 194-195.

<sup>36</sup> David Philips, *Memoir of the Life, Labors, and Extensive Usefulness of the Rev. Christmas Evans* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1843), 74.

<sup>31</sup> William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Rev. ed.; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 154-155. Typical of those who attacked the Baptists in this regard was Daniel Featley (1582-1645), an influential, outspoken minister devoted to the Church of England and critical of Puritanism. Featley penned a scurrilous attack on the Baptists entitled *The Dippers dipt. Or, The Anabaptists duck'd and plunged Over Head and Eares* (1645). In it he maintained that the Baptists were in the habit of stripping "stark naked, not onely [sic] when they flocke [sic] in great multitudes, men and women together, to their Jordans to be dipt; but also upon other occasions, when the season permits" [cited Gordon Kingsley, "Opposition to Early Baptists (1638-1645)", *Baptist History and Heritage*, 4, No.1 (January, 1969), 29].

<sup>32</sup> J. M. Ross, "The Theology of Baptism in Baptist History", *The Baptist Quarterly*, 15 (1953-1954), 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 339.



believers that they have “solemnly surrendered [themselves] up to Christ, taking him to be [their] Prophet, Priest, and King; engaging to receive his doctrine, to rely on his atonement, and to obey his laws.”<sup>37</sup> In a letter that he had written a couple of years earlier to William Ward (1769-1823), the Serampore missionary, Fuller developed this idea of baptism as the place of openly professing submission to Christ.

*The importance of this ordinance [of baptism]...arises from its being the distinguishing sign of Christianity—that by which they [i.e. Christians] were to be known, acknowledged, and treated as members of Christ’s visible kingdom: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” Gal. iii.27.*

*It is analogous to a soldier on his enlisting into his Majesty’s service putting on the military dress. The Scriptures lay great stress upon “confessing Christ’s name before men” (Matt. x.32); and baptism is one of the most distinguished ways of doing this. When a man becomes a believer in Christ, he confesses it usually in words to other believers: but the appointed way of confessing it openly to the world is by being baptized in his name.<sup>38</sup>*

Christianity, Fuller went on to observe in the circular letter, contains both “truths to be believed” and “precepts to be obeyed.” And in a marvellous way, the rite of baptism provides encouragement for believers to be faithful in adhering to

<sup>37</sup> Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 339-340.

<sup>38</sup> “Thoughts on Open Communion” (Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 504-505). See also “Thoughts on Open Communion” (Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 512).

both. First, since baptism is to be carried out, according to Matthew 28:19, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” submission to the ordinance entails an avowal of the fact that God is a triune Being. Well acquainted with the history of the early Church, Fuller rightly stated that this baptismal formula was widely used in that era to argue for the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup> As Fuller noted, to relinquish the doctrine of the Trinity is tantamount to the virtual renunciation of one’s baptism.<sup>40</sup>

Baptism into the Triune name also entails a commitment to the belief that salvation is the joint work of all three members of the Godhead: the Father’s sovereign election, the Son’s “all-sufficient atonement,” and the sanctifying work wrought by the Spirit. In particular, though, it points to Christ’s saving work. In Fuller’s words:

*“as many of you as have been baptized into Christ put on Christ.”*

*-Galatians 3:27*

*The immersion of the body in water, which is a purifying*

*element contains a profession of our faith in Christ, through the shedding of whose blood we are cleansed from all sin. Hence, baptism in the name of Christ is said to be for the remission of sins. Not that there is any virtue in the element, whatever be the quantity; nor in the ceremony, though of Divine appointment: but it contains a sign of the way in which we must be saved. Sin is washed away in baptism in the same sense as Christ’s flesh is eaten, and his blood drunk, in the Lord’s supper: the sign, when rightly used leads to the thing signified. Remission of sins is ascribed by Peter not properly to baptism, but to the*

<sup>39</sup> Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 340.

<sup>40</sup> Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, III, 340.

*name in which the parties were to be baptized. Thus also Saul was directed to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* <sup>41</sup>

Fuller here points out that in itself the act of immersion possesses no salvific value. But it “contains a sign” or illustration of the way of salvation and “the sign, when rightly used” — that is, when accompanied by sincere faith—“leads to the thing signified.” The statement “leads to the thing signified” must then mean that when the person being baptized has such a faith, then baptism in some way confirms this faith and the individual’s share in the benefits of the gospel. Fuller does not develop this thought. But if he had, he might well have developed it along the lines of his earlier statement to William Ward which has been cited above: “When a man becomes a believer in Christ, he confesses it usually in words to other believers: but the appointed way of confessing it openly to the world is by being baptized in his name.” In other words, baptism is the place where conversion to Christ is ratified and, to borrow a phrase from another great English Baptist theologian of the eighteenth century, John Gill (1697-1771), “faith discovers itself.”<sup>42</sup>

Fuller proceeded to explain that Christ experienced “the deluge of [God’s] wrath” due the sins of fallen men and women, but rose “triumphantly from the dead.” Fallen men and women are saved solely on the basis of his death and resurrection. Baptism, which involves both immersion and emersion, is thus an extremely apt “sign” or “outward and for-

mal expression of genuine personal faith” in Christ’s saving work.<sup>43</sup>

Not only does baptism speak of cardinal “truths to be believed,” but it also teaches disciples of Christ how to live in a God-honouring way. On the basis of Romans 6:3-4 Fuller argued that baptism is a sign to the baptized disciple that he or she has been baptized into Christ’s death and thus united with him in his death. There is, of course, a difference between the death of Christ and that of the disciple: Christ died for sin, the disciple is to die to sin. When he or she is baptized, therefore, there is a commitment made to die to sin and to the world.<sup>44</sup> Baptism thus serves as a “hedge” that God sets around his people, which “tends more than a little to preserve [them] from temptation.”<sup>45</sup> For Fuller, believer’s baptism thus spoke of a fundamental break with the forces that sought to press the heart and mind into the mould of this present age.

Fuller was careful to stress in his circular letter, though, that the “religion of Jesus does not consist in mere negatives.” Baptism signifies not only death, but also resurrection. The “emersion of the body from the waters of baptism is a sign” of entrance into “a new state of being” where the baptized believer should now be “alive to God.” Consequently, baptism is never to be regarded as “merely a sign” and nothing more or simply “an unmeaning ceremony.” It is a meaning-laden ordinance, which bears witness to the most radical transformation a human being can undergo in this world.<sup>46</sup>

As Fuller concluded the letter, he wisely reminded his readers that obedience to this ordinance is never to be regarded as “a substitute for a life of holiness and universal righteousness.” He referred them

<sup>41</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 341.

<sup>42</sup> *An Exposition of the New Testament* (1809 ed.; repr. Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1989), I, 495, commentary on Mark 16:16. On Gill’s theology of baptism, see Stanley K. Fowler, “John Gill’s Doctrine of Believer Baptism” in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill* (1697-1771). *A Tercentennial Appreciation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 69-91.

<sup>43</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 341.

<sup>44</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 341.

<sup>45</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 342.

<sup>46</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 343.

to the pointed reminder that the Apostle Paul gave to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians. When “they trifled with idolatry and worldly lusts,” they could not look to their participation in the privileges of baptism and the Lord’s Supper to secure them from God’s anger. Thus, to hope that believer’s baptism can guarantee a life of spiritual fruitfulness is to deceive oneself. “It is the presence of Christ only that can keep us alive, either as individuals or as churches.”<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the disciple is called to cling to Christ, not to a set of rites or even doctrines.

### The “sweet repast” of the Lord’s Table

Another place that Baptists have historically regarded as being rich in spiritual nourishment is the ordinance of the Lord’s Table. This may come as a surprise to many Baptists, who in recent times do not appear to have seen participation at the Table as an important spiritual discipline. Any talk about the Lord’s Supper nourishing the soul they have tended to write off as Roman Catholic. But it was not always so.

Ernest A. Payne, the doyen of English Baptist historical studies for much of the twentieth century, has maintained that from the beginning of Baptist testimony in the seventeenth century there has never been unanimity with respect to the nature of the Lord’s Supper and that no one perspective can justly claim to have been the dominant tradition.<sup>48</sup> If Payne’s statement has in view the entire history of Baptist witness in all of its breadth and depth, it may be regarded as roughly accurate. However, as soon as specific periods and

eras are examined, the evidence demands that this statement be seriously qualified.

The late Michael J. Walker has shown, for instance, that when it comes to nineteenth century English Baptist history, “Zwinglianism emerges as the chief contender for a blanket description of Baptist attitudes to the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>49</sup> The Swiss Reformer Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) regarded the bread and the wine as mainly signs of what God has accomplished through the death of Christ and the Supper therefore as chiefly a memorial. In recent discussions of Zwingli’s perspective on the Lord’s Supper it is often maintained that Zwingli was not really a Zwinglian, that is, he saw more in the Lord’s Supper than simply a memorial.<sup>50</sup> Be this as it may, a tradition did take its start from those aspects of his thought that stressed primarily the memorial nature of the Lord’s Supper. It was this tradition that would dominate Baptist thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A most striking advocacy of the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord’s Supper is found in a tract written by John Sutcliff. Entitled *The Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper considered* and drawn up in 1803 as a circular letter for the Baptist churches belonging to the Northamptonshire Association, this text abounds in memorialist language. Sutcliff took for his guiding verse throughout this letter the statement of Christ in Luke 22:19: “This do in remembrance of me.” Seen through the lens of this text, the Lord’s Supper

*is a standing memorial of Christ.  
When you see the table spread and are*

<sup>49</sup> *Baptists at the Table. The Theology of the Lord’s Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, Oxfordshire: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), 3.

<sup>50</sup> See Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “The Real Absence’: Ulrich Zwingli’s View of the Lord’s Supper” in *Union and Communion, 1529-1979* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1979), 22-34.

<sup>47</sup> *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, III, 344-345.

<sup>48</sup> *The Fellowship of Believers. Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1952), 61.

about to partake of the bread and wine, think you hear Christ saying, "Remember me." Remember who he is... Again: Remember what he has done... Once more: Remember where he is, and what he is doing.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that Christ instructed us to remember him, Sutcliff continued, clearly "implies his absence." Moreover, if a friend, who has gone away, left us with a small present prior to his departure and asked us to "keep it as a memorial of his friendship," then, even if the present has "little intrinsic worth, we set a high value on it, for his sake." Gazing upon this present aids in the "recollection of our absent friend." So it is with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is designed "to draw our attention to, and assist our meditations upon an unseen Jesus."<sup>52</sup>

In the first two centuries of Baptist witness, however, there had prevailed quite a different view, namely, that associated with the name of John Calvin (1509-1564). In Calvin's perspective on the nature of the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine are signs and guarantees of a present reality. To the one who eats the bread and drinks the wine with faith there is conveyed what they symbolize, namely Christ. The channel, as it were, through which Christ is conveyed to the believer is none other than the Holy Spirit. The Spirit acts as a kind of link or bridge between believers and the ascended Christ. Christ is received by believers in the Supper, "not because Christ inheres the elements, but because the Holy Spirit binds believers" to him. But without faith, only the bare elements are received.<sup>53</sup> Like Cal-

vin, Baptists up until the time of Sutcliff regarded the Supper as a vehicle that the Spirit employed as an efficacious means of grace for the believer, and thus they opposed the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord's Supper.<sup>54</sup>

A random sampling of seventeenth and eighteenth century Baptist reflections on the Lord's Supper bears out this point. Consider, for instance, William Mitchel (1662-1705), an indefatigable Baptist evangelist in east Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, who could declare that, in the Lord's Supper, Christ's "Death and Blood is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by the Spirit and Faith, made Partakers of his Body and Blood, with all his Benefits, to their spiritual Nourishment and Growth in Grace."<sup>55</sup> Mitchel explicitly repudiates the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass, and avers, in words drawn from the doctrinal standard of the Baptists of this era, the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677/1689), that the Supper is "only a Memorial of that one Offering up of himself, by himself, upon the Cross, once for all."<sup>56</sup> Mitch-

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Calvin's theology of the Lord's Supper include B. A. Gerrish, "The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions",

*Theology Today*, 13 (1966-1967), 224-43; John D. Nicholls, "Union with Christ: John Calvin on the Lord's Supper" in *Union and Communion*, 35-54; John Yates, "Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper", *Churchman*, 105 (1991), 355-356; B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theol-*

<sup>54</sup> For a good overview of the high regard in which the Lord's Supper was viewed by late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Dissenters, see Margaret Spufford, "The importance of the Lord's Supper to dissenters" in her ed., *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86-102, and Karen Smith, "The Covenant Life of Some Eighteenth-Century Calvinistic Baptists in Hampshire and Wiltshire" in William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes with John H.Y. Briggs, eds., *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 178-82. Ellis, *Gathering*, 176-199, *passim*, is also helpful in this regard.

<sup>55</sup> "William Mitchill's 'Jachin & Boaz'-1707", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 3 (1912-1913), 161.

<sup>56</sup> "William Mitchill's 'Jachin & Boaz' ", 161.

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<sup>51</sup> *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association; Dunstable, 1803), 2, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ordinance of the Lord's Supper*, 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Victor A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 220. Other helpful studies on

el was thus quite happy to talk about the celebration of the Lord's Supper in memorialist terms, but his earlier statement shows that he was unwilling to regard it solely as an act of remembrance. Following Calvin and his Baptist forebears, he asserts that the Lord's Supper is definitely a means of spiritual nourishment and that at the Table believers, by the Spirit, do meet with Christ.

Another Calvinistic perspective on the Supper is found in *Thoughts on the*

*Lord's Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (1748)

by Anne Dutton (1692-1765). A prolific author, Dutton corresponded with many of the leading evangelical figures of the eighteenth

century—among others, Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), Howel Harris (1714-1773), George Whitefield (1714-1770), and John Wesley (1703-1791)—encouraging them, giving them advice, and sometimes chiding them. On one occasion Whitefield confessed that 'her conversation is as weighty as her letters.' And Harris once wrote to her that he was convinced that "our Lord has entrusted you with a Talent of writing for him."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Cited Stephen J. Stein, "A Note on Anne Dutton, Eighteenth-Century Evangelical", *Church History*, 44 (1975), 488, 489. Stein's article is an excellent, concise study of Dutton. See also *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton. Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian*. Volume 1: *Letters*, compiled JoAnn Ford Watson (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2003) and *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton. Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian*. Volume 2: *Discourses, Poetry, Hymns, Memoir*, compiled JoAnn Ford Watson (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2004).

For two other, earlier studies which fail to do her justice, see J. C. Whitebrook, "The Life and Works of Mrs. Ann Dutton", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 7

Dutton devotes the first section of her sixty-page treatise on the Lord's Supper to outlining its nature. In this section Dutton argues that the Supper is, among other things, a "communication." "As our Lord is spiritually present in his own ordinance," she writes, "so he therein and thereby doth actually communicate, or give himself, his body broken, and his blood shed, with all the benefits of his death, to the worthy receivers."<sup>58</sup> Here Dutton is affirming that Christ is indeed

*"O that every sacrifice I offer were consumed with the fire of ardent love to Jesus. Reading, praying, studying and preaching are to me very cold exercises, if not warmed with the love of Christ."*

-Benjamin Francis

present at the celebration of his supper and makes it a means of grace for those who partake of it with faith. As she states later on in this treatise: in the Lord's Supper "the King is pleas'd to sit with us, at his Table."<sup>59</sup> In fact, so highly does she prize this means of grace that she can state,

with what other Baptists of her era might describe as some exaggeration, that the celebration of the Lord's Supper "admits" believers "into the nearest Approach to his glorious Self, that we can make in an Ordinance-Way on the Earth, on this Side the Presence of his Glory in Heaven."<sup>60</sup>

Eighteenth-century Baptist hymnology is also a good guide to Baptist eucharistic piety. Some of the richest texts that display this piety can be found in *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos'd For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* by Joseph Stennett I (1663-1713),

(1921), 129-46; H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1946), 50-56

<sup>58</sup> *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (London, 1748), 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper*, 25.

the pastor of a Seventh-Day Baptist Church that met in Pinners' Hall, London. Stennett can describe the Church's celebration at the Table as a "perpetual memorial" of Christ's death, a death that is to be commemorated.<sup>61</sup> And the bread and wine he calls "proper Symbols" and "Figures."<sup>62</sup> Yet, Stennett can also say of these symbols:

Thy Flesh is Meat indeed,  
Thy Blood the richest wine;  
How blest are they who often feed  
On this Repast of thine!<sup>63</sup>

And he can urge his fellow believers:

Sing Hallelujah to our King,  
Who nobly entertains  
His Friends with Bread of Life, and Wine  
That flow'd from all his Veins.

His Body pierc'd with numerous Wounds,  
Did as a Victim bleed;  
That we might drink his sacred Blood,  
And on his Flesh might feed.<sup>64</sup>

Stennett does make it clear that the feeding involved at the Table is one of faith,<sup>65</sup> but this is realistic language utterly foreign to the later Zwinglian perspective.

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<sup>61</sup> *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos'd For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* (London: N. Cliff and D. Jackson, 1713), iii, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Hymns In Commemoration*, 29, 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Hymns In Commemoration*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> *Hymns In Commemoration*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Thus, in one of his hymns Stennett can state (*Hymns In Commemoration*, 19):

"Here may our Faith still on Thee feed  
The only Food Divine;  
To Faith thy Flesh is Meat indeed,  
Thy Blood the Noblest wine."

Finally, two hymns of Benjamin Beddome can be cited as evidence for what is clearly the most prevalent belief about the nature of the Lord's Supper among eighteenth-century Baptists. Beddome was a prolific hymn-writer and many of his hymns were still in use at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although Beddome wrote only a few hymns that dealt specifically with the subject of the Lord's Supper, they are fairly explicit as to his view of its nature. In one he prays,

Oh for a glimmering sight  
Of my expiring Lord!  
Sure pledge of what yon worlds of light  
Will to the saints afford.

. . . May I behold him in the wine,  
And see him in the bread.<sup>66</sup>

In another, the invitation is given:

Come then, my soul, partake,  
The banquet is divine:  
His body is the choicest food,  
His blood the richest wine.

Ye hungry starving poor  
Join in the sweet repast;  
View Jesus in these symbols given,  
And his salvation taste.<sup>67</sup>

Beddome did not hold to a Roman Catholic or Lutheran view of the "real presence." The bread and the wine, he asserted, are "symbols." Nevertheless, he did expect the Lord's Supper to be a place where the "sweet repast" of salvation is savoured and Christ himself seen.

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<sup>66</sup> *Hymns adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), Hymn no. 672.

<sup>67</sup> *Hymns adapted to Public Worship*, Hymn no. 669.

## “A constant duty”: the means of prayer

Baptist piety has also never doubted the centrality of prayer in the Christian life.<sup>68</sup> For example, in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 14:15 [“I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also”] Benjamin Beddome declared:

*[Prayer] is...a constant duty; never out of season, never to be neglected, till faith is turned into vision, and prayer into praise. There is no duty we are more apt to omit, no duty which it is more our interest to perform, no duty which Satan more opposes, or with which God is better pleased. As a man cannot live without breathing, so it is certain that the Christian cannot thrive without praying.*<sup>69</sup>

An excellent window on the Baptist at prayer can be found in an unpublished manuscript in the archives of Bristol Baptist College, Bristol. Entitled “Queries and solutions,” the manuscript records a precious friendship, that of Benjamin Francis (1734-1799), an indefatigable Welsh pastor and evangelist whose ministry centred on Horlsey, Gloucestershire, in the southwest Cotswolds, and a fellow Welshman Joshua Thomas (1719-1797), who for forty-three years was the pastor of the Baptist cause in Leominster.<sup>70</sup> The manuscript

<sup>68</sup> See the helpful overview by Ellis, *Gathering*, 103-124.

<sup>69</sup> *The Nature and Importance of Prayer (Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome, 366).*

<sup>70</sup> For the life and ministry of Francis, see Thomas Flint, “A Brief Narrative of the Life and Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A.M.,” annexed to John Ryland, Jr., *The Presence of Christ the Source of eternal Bliss. A Funeral Discourse... occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A. M. (Bristol, 1800)*, 33-76; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “Letters by Benjamin Francis”, *Trafodion* (1983), 4-8; Michael A.G. Haykin, “Benjamin Francis (1734-1799)” in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910* (Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 2000), II,

is actually a transcript, drawn up by Thomas, of letters that passed between him and Francis from 1758 to 1770.<sup>71</sup>

The practice of Francis and Thomas appears to have been for one of them to mail two or three queries periodically to the other. Then, some months later the recipient mailed back his answers, together with fresh questions of his own. These answers were commented on, the new questions answered and both the comments and answers mailed back along with new queries, and so forth. All in all, there are sixty-eight questions and answers in two volumes—fifty-eight in the first volume, the remaining ten in the second volume. On only one occasion during these years from 1758 to 1770 was there a noticeable gap in correspondence. That was in 1765 when Francis lost his wife and his three youngest children.

It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the correspondence the two friends sign their letters simply with their names or initials. However, as time passes, their mutual confidence and intimacy deepens, and they begin to write “yours endearingly” or “yours unfeignedly” and even “yours indefatigably” or “yours inexpressibly.” It was in October, 1762, Thomas first signed himself “your cordial Brother Jonathan,” and in the following February Francis replied with “your most affection- ate David.” From this point on this is the way the two friends refer to each other.

The questions and their answers are extremely instructive as to the areas of

16-29. For Joshua Thomas, see Eric W. Hayden, *Joshua Thomas: a biography* in *The American Baptist Heritage in Wales*, eds. Carroll C. and Willard A. Ramsey (Lafayette, Tennessee: Church History Research and Archives Affiliation, 1976), Part Two.

<sup>71</sup> “Queries and solutions” (MS G.98.5; Bristol Baptist College Library, Bristol, England). On this correspondence, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “Questions and Answers: An Eighteenth-Century Correspondence”, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 27 (1977-1978), 83-90.

personal theological interest among mid-eighteenth century Calvinists. For instance, the question is asked, “When may a Minister conclude that he is influenced and assisted by the Spirit of God in studying and ministring [sic] the word?”<sup>72</sup> Queries are raised about the eternal state of dead infants,<sup>73</sup> how best to understand the remarks in Revelation 20 about the millennium,<sup>74</sup> and about whether or not inoculation against that dreaded killer of the eighteenth century, smallpox, was right or wrong.<sup>75</sup> Let’s look closer at those questions and answers that relate to prayer.

“How often should a Christian pray?”, Francis asked his friend on one occasion.<sup>76</sup> To this very vital question posed by Francis, Thomas has an extensive answer. He deals first with what he calls the “ejaculatory kind” of prayer—prayers that arise spontaneously during the course of a day’s activities—and then the prayers offered during times set apart specifically for prayer, what a later generation of Evangelicals would call “the quiet time.”

In response to Thomas’ answer, Francis confesses to his friend:

*I wish all our brethren of the tribe of Levi were so free from lukewarmness, on the one hand, and enthusiasm, formality & superstition on the other, as my Jonathan appears to be. I am too barren in all my prayers, but I think mostly so in closet prayer (except at some seasons) which tempts me in some measure to prefer a more constant ejaculatory prayer above a more stately closet prayer, tho’ I am persuaded neither should be neglected. Ejaculatory prayer is generally warm,*

*free, and pure, tho’ short: but I find closet prayer to be often cold, stiff or artificial, as it were, and mixt with strange impertinences & wanderings of heart. Lord teach me to pray! O that I could perform the duty always, as a duty and a privilege & not as a task and a burden!*

In another of Francis’ comments we find the same honesty and humility: “How languid my faith, my hope, my love! how cold and formal am I in secret Devotions!”<sup>77</sup> These remarks surely stem from deep-seated convictions about the vital importance of prayer.

Francis’ frank remarks about his own struggles with prayer also have their root in Francis’ belief that because the Lord had led him to seek Christ at a very young age—and, in his words, “overwhelmed me with Joy by a sense of his Love”—he should be more eager to pray out of a sense of gratitude. Instead, he confessed, “A stupid, indolent, sensual or legal temper sadly clog the wings of my prayers.”<sup>78</sup> He well knew the “opposition, or at least disinclination I find in my wicked heart too often unto prayer, as if it were to perform some very painful service.”<sup>79</sup>

Thomas sought to encourage Francis by reminding him that

*closet prayer [is like] the smoke on a windy day. When it is very calm the smoke will ascend and resemble an erect pillar, but when windy, as soon as it is out it is scattered to and fro, sometimes ‘tis beaten down the chimney again and fills the house. Shall I not thus give over? Satan would have*

<sup>72</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Query 5.

<sup>73</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Queries 17 and 22.

<sup>74</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Query 18

<sup>75</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Query 45.

<sup>76</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Query 44.

<sup>77</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Remarks on [Thomas’] answer to Query 48.

<sup>78</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. II, Remarks on Queries 7-8.

<sup>79</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. II, Remarks on Queries 7-8.



*it so, and flesh would have it so, but I should be more earnest in it.*

Francis told his friend that he sought to pray to God twice daily, but he confessed that his difficulties with following a discipline of a set time for prayer stemmed from his being away from his home a lot of the time. He also admitted that he had taken up “an unhappy habit of sleeping in the morning much longer” than he should have. And this cut into valuable time for prayer. But he did not try to excuse such failings.<sup>80</sup>

Though much has changed since Francis’ day, yet this struggle with sin and poor habits that hinder prayer and devotion remains the same. And yet, there must have been times when Francis knew the joys of experientially fellowship with God in prayer. For instance, answering a question by Thomas—“Wherein doth communion and fellowship with God consist?”—Francis replies in part:

*In a nearness to God that is inexpressible, thro the Mediator, and in the enjoyment of God’s favour and perfections, yielding nourishing satisfactions in God, as the souls full, everlasting portion and felicity. This enjoyment overwhelms the soul with wonder, glory, joy and triumph: it enflames it with vehement love to God and ardent wishes after his blissful [sic] presence in the heavenly world.<sup>81</sup>*

<sup>80</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. II, Remarks on Queries 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> “Queries and solutions”, Vol. I, Query 55.

Yet, as Francis well knew, these foretastes of glory given to the believer in prayer are not a resting place in this world. Christ, not the believer’s experience of communing with him in prayer, is ever to be the focus of prayer. Thus, only a year before his death Francis could pray:

*O that every sacrifice I offer were consumed with the fire of ardent love to Jesus. Reading, praying, studying and preaching are to me very cold exercises, if not warmed with the love of Christ. This, this is the quintessence of holiness, of happiness, of heaven. While many professors desire to know that Christ loves them, may it ever be my desire to know that I love him, by feeling his love mortifying in me the love of self, animating my whole soul to serve him, and, if called by his providence, to suffer even death for his sake.<sup>82</sup>*

This text is an excellent summation of this paper for it emphasizes that the spiritual disciplines—notice the mention of “[r]eading, . . . studying and preaching” as well as prayer—are never to be regarded as ends in themselves. They lead on to that great goal, fully realized in the life to come, but yet to be enjoyed to some degree in the now, namely, being filled “with the fire of ardent love to Jesus.”

<sup>82</sup> Letter to a friend, November 6, 1798 (Flint, “Brief Narrative of the Life and Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A.M.”, 58-59).

# Questions:

1. What would I consider to be spiritual disciplines by which God helps me walk the Christian pilgrimage? Which are most vital?
2. Am I convinced that without the Spirit none of these disciplines can avail me? How do I ensure that I engage in these disciplines with the Spirit's help?
3. Am I Word-centered in the way the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists were? Where can I learn from them in this regard?
4. If the Baptists of the era covered by the paper heard my preaching would they regard me as a "useful" preacher and "an able minister of the New Testament?"
5. What part does my baptism play in my ongoing Christian life?
6. How do I view the Lord's Supper with regard to my Christian walk? Is it vital to my walk or a non-essential? Why or why not?
7. Having read the section on prayer, how can I improve my prayer-life?