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“A GARDEN INCLOSED”:
WORSHIP AND REVIVAL AMONG THE ENGLISH
PARTICULAR BAPTISTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

We are a garden wall'd around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot inclos'd by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness.
*Isaac Watts*¹

Introduction

- The use of the imagery of the garden for the church: its derivation from Scripture—Song of Solomon 4:12: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (KJV)—and seventeenth-century English horticulture.
- Benjamin Keach (1640-1704):

“God hath out of the people of this world, taken his churches and walled them about, that none of the evil beasts can hurt them: all mankind naturally were alike dry and barren, as a wilderness, and brought forth no good fruit. But God hath separated some of this barren ground, to make lovely gardens for himself to walk and delight in. ...the church of Christ, is a garden inclosed, or a community of Christians distinct from the world: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.” Cant. iv.12.”²
- Covenant of Bourton-on-the-Water Baptist Church, Gloucestershire (1719/1720). Members of the church must “promise to keep the Secrets of our Church entire without divulging them to any that are not Members of this particular Body, tho’ they may be otherwise dear & near to us; for we believe the Church ought to be as a Garden enclosed & a fountain sealed.”³
- Problems with this imagery in the 18th century—the horticultural revolution an image of what happens to the Particular Baptist community: revival.

I. “*Encumbered*” with difficulties

- Statistics: 1715 there were around 220 Particular Baptist churches in England and Wales. By 1750 that number had declined to about 150. Why the decline?
- Traditionalism in worship: e.g. William Steadman (1764-1837) and his comment about baptism in an area of Yorkshire:

“[Certain ministers] from a foolish scrupulosity,...objected to baptistries in their places of worship, and administer the ordinance in rivers, to whatever disadvantage it might subject them. At Bradford they have baptised in a small stream, the only one near them, scarcely deep enough, muddy at the bottom, and from which the minister and the persons baptised have at least a quarter of a mile to walk along a dirty lane in their wet clothes before they can change. The place

¹ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Book I, Hymn 74 in *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D.*, comp. George Burder (London: John Barfield, 1810), IV, 274.

² *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled* (1701 ed.; repr. London: L. I. Higham, 1815), II, 332, 339.

³ Cited Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990), p.124.

likewise, is quite unfavourable for seeing or hearing, and by that means the benefit of the ordinance are lost to the congregation, few of whom ever attend it.”⁴

- Hyper-Calvinism and its impact on preaching
- Standing aloof from the Evangelical Awakening because of issues of church polity and worship. In the words of Horton Davies, it had become “a point of honour” with the Baptists of the eighteenth century “to refuse all compromise with the Anglican way of worship.”⁵ Examples:
 - Benjamin Keach, in his commentary on the parables of Jesus, unequivocally stated vis-à-vis Ezekiel 34:14 that this text implies that Christ will lead his people “out of all idolatry and superstition, out of Babylon and all false worship; they shall no more be defiled with women, that is, by the pollution of false churches, or with harlot worship; the church of Rome is called the mother of harlots. Are there no false churches but the Romish church? Yea, there are, no doubt; she hath whorish daughters, though not such vile and beastly harlots as the mother is; all churches that sprang from her, or all of the like nature, in respect of their constitution, and that retain many of her superstitious names, garbs, rites, and ceremonies, no doubt they are her daughters. Were the gospel churches national, or did they receive into those churches profane persons? No, no, they were a separate people, and a congregational and a holy community, being not conformable to this world; and into such a church Jesus Christ brings his sheep.”⁶
 - John Gill (1697-1771): “The Church of England has neither the form nor matter of a true church, nor is the Word of God purely preached in it.”⁷
 - William Herbert (1697-1745), Letter to Howel Harris: the Church of England is like a pub “which is open to all comers,” and a “common field where every noisome beast may come.” Surely Harris realized, Herbert continued, that the Scriptures—and he has in mind the Song of Solomon 4:12—describe God’s Church as “a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed,” in other words, a body of believers “separate from the profane world”?⁸

II. *Evangelistic preaching, “the duty of every minister of Christ”*

- Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785).
- Andrew Fuller, *Confession of Faith* (1783):

“I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; ...and that it is their [i.e. the hearers’] duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him for salvation... I therefore believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them to be not only *consistent*, but directly *adapted*, as means, in the hand of the Spirit

⁴ “Thomas Steadman, *Memoir of the Rev. William Steadman, D.D.* (London, 1838), pp.234-5.

⁵ *Worship and Theology in England. III. From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1850* (1961 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1996), p.23.

⁶ *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled*, II, 383.

⁷ Cited Dafydd Densil James Morgan, “The Development of the Baptist Movement in Wales between 1714 and 1815 with particular reference to the Evangelical Revival” (Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, 1986), p.39.

⁸ Morgan, “Development of the Baptist Movement in Wales”, pp.39-40.

of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.”⁹

III. *Baptism, “the distinguishing sign of Christianity”*

- Andrew Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism* (1802)
- Baptism, as an “open profession” of the name of Christ, is nothing less than an “oath of allegiance to the King of Zion.” Baptism is a “sign” to 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.”¹⁰
- Andrew Fuller, Letter to William Ward (1769-1823):

“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.”¹¹
- Romans 6:3-4: baptism is a commitment made to die to sin and to the world.¹²
- Baptism thus serves as a “hedge” that God sets around his people, which “tends more than a little to preserve [them] from temptation.”¹³ Believer’s baptism was originally designed to be “the boundary of visible Christianity,” the line of distinction between “the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan.” Where the original design of this distinguishing ordinance is ignored, and “persons admitted to baptism without any profession of personal religion, or upon the profession of others on their behalf,” then “the church will be no longer a garden enclosed, but an open wilderness, where every beast of prey can range at large.”¹⁴
- Believer’s baptism spoke of a fundamental break with the forces that sought to press the heart and mind into the mould of this present age.
- Wrong 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.”¹⁵

⁹ Cited A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1956), pp.163-4.

¹⁰ *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), III, 339-40.

¹¹ “Thoughts on Open Communion” (*Works*, III, 504-5). See also “Thoughts on Open Communion” (*Works*, III, 512).

¹² *Works*, III, 341.

¹³ *Works*, III, 342.

¹⁴ *Works*, III, 342-3.

¹⁵ *Works*, III, 344-5.

IV. *John Sutcliff and the Concert of Prayer*

- John Sutcliff (1752-1814) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time* (1748).
- Prayer Call of 1784 [Attached to John Ryland, Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), 12].

- Radical dependence upon the Spirit; John Sutcliff:

“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 noblest efforts fall success.”¹⁶

- Catholicity in prayer
- Missionary emphasis
- Rooted in Scripture

- John Sutcliff, “Preface” to Jonathan Edwards, *Humble Attempt* (1789):

“The advocates of error are indefatigable in their endeavors to overthrow the distinguishing and interesting doctrines of Christianity; those doctrines which are the grounds of our hope, and sources of our joy. Surely, it becomes the followers of Christ, to use every effort, in order to strengthen the things which remain... In the present imperfect state, we may reasonably expect a diversity of sentiments upon religious matters. Each ought to think for himself; and every one has a right, on proper occasions, to shew his opinion. Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in some respects entertain different views of worship, surely they may unite in the above business. O for thousands upon thousands, divided into small bands in their united prayers, like so many ascending clouds of incense before the Most High! — May He shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion!”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts Illustrated* (London: W. Button, 1791), 12.

¹⁷ “Preface,” pp. iv-vi.

V. *Revival: the return of prayers*

- In 1794, John Rippon (1750-1836), pastor of Carter Lane Baptist Church in Southwark, London, published a list of Particular Baptist congregations. Rippon estimated that there were at that time 326 churches in England and 56 in Wales, more than double the number which had existed in 1750.¹⁸ He printed another list of churches four years later, according to which the numbers had grown to 361 churches in England and 84 in Wales.¹⁹ Reflecting on these numbers, Rippon wrote, “It is said, that more of our meeting houses have been enlarged, within the last five years, and built within the last fifteen, than had been built and enlarged for thirty years before.”²⁰
- Isaac Watts’ hymn “The Church the Garden of Christ” with which we began:

We are a garden wall’d around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot inclos’d by grace
Out of the world’s wide wilderness. ...

Awake, O heavenly wind, and come,
Blow on this garden of perfume;
Spirit divine, descend and breathe
A gracious gale on plants beneath.

Make our best spices flow abroad
To entertain our Saviour God:
And faith, and love, and joy appear,
And every grace be active here.²¹

¹⁸ *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1797). 2:16,23.

¹⁹ *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1801), 3:40,42.

²⁰ *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1801), 3:40.

²¹ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Book I, Hymn 74 (*Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts*, IV, 274).

Addendum 1: John Sutcliff, “The Prayer Call of 1784”²²

Upon a motion being made to the ministers and messengers of the associate Baptist churches assembled at Nottingham, respecting meetings for prayer, to bewail the low estate of religion, and earnestly implore a revival of our churches, and of the general cause of our Redeemer, and for that end to wrestle with God for the effusion of his Holy Spirit, which alone can produce the blessed effect, it was unanimously RESOLVED, to recommend to all our churches and congregations, the spending of one hour in this important exercise, on the first Monday in every calendar month.

We hereby solemnly exhort all the churches in our connection, to engage heartily and perseveringly in the prosecution of this plan. And as it may be well to endeavour to keep the same hour, as a token of our unity herein, it is supposed the following scheme may suit many congregations, viz. to meet on the first Monday evening in May, June, and July, from 8 to 9. In Aug. from 7 to 8. Sept. and Oct. from 6 to 7. Nov. Dec. Jan. and Feb. from 5 to 6. March, from 6 to 7; and April, from 7 to 8. Nevertheless if this hour, or even the particular evening, should not suit in particular places, we wish our brethren to fix on one more convenient to themselves.

We hope also, that as many of our brethren who live at a distance from our places of worship may not be able to attend there, that as many as are conveniently situated in a village or neighbourhood, will unite in small societies at the same time. And if any single individual should be so situated as not to be able to attend to this duty in society with others, let him retire at the appointed hour, to unite the breath of prayer in private with those who are thus engaged in a more public manner.

The grand object of prayer is to be that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified. At the same time, remember, we trust you will not confine your requests to your own societies [i.e. churches]; or to your own immediate connection [i.e. denomination]; let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe be the object of your most fervent requests. We shall rejoice if *any other Christian societies* of our own or other denominations will unite with us, and do now *invite them* most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt.

Who can tell what the consequences of such an united effort in prayer may be! Let us plead with God the many gracious promises of His Word, which relate to the future success of His gospel. He has said, “I will yet for this be enquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them, I will increase them with men like a flock.” Ezek. xxxvi.37. Surely we have love enough for Zion to set apart *one hour* at a time, twelve times in a year, to seek her welfare.

²² Attached to John Ryland, Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), 12.

Addendum 2: Baptist order of service for a typical Sunday morning

[From Christopher Ellis, "Baptists in Britain" in Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 565-6]

Psalm	A metrical psalm sung by the congregation
Short prayer	Prayer of invocation asking for God's presence in the worship to follow
Exposition of Scripture	This would be a running commentary on Scripture from week to week; it might be up to half an hour
Pastoral prayer	This would be a lengthy extemporaneous prayer for the needs and concerns of the whole congregation and for the nation at large (on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:1-4).
Sermon	The sermon would be about an hour; though we have cases of much longer (e.g. Benjamin Beddome preaching for two hours)
Psalm/hymn	By the mid-eighteenth century, hymn-singing was uniform, so this sung item would probably be a hymn from that point on; sometimes this psalm/hymn would come before the sermon
Short prayer & benediction	