

“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*<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of a world being turned upside down by the horrors of the British Civil Wars, seven congregations in the metropolis of London made the momentous decision in mid-October 1644 to publish a confession of faith that would set them apart from other Puritan bodies of the day yet also declare to the world their fundamental solidarity with the Calvinist community throughout Europe. This confession, known as *The First London Confession of Faith* (1644/1646), had an apologetic edge, for it sought to rebut charges that had been leveled against its signators, specifically that they were heterodox and akin to the Anabaptists of the previous century.<sup>2</sup> They were committed to congregational church government and believer's baptism, but in no way did they consider themselves linked to the continental Anabaptist movement that, to many in the British Isles, rightly or wrongly, smacked of theological folly and revolutionary fervor. As the exemplary historical research of British historian Barrie R. White has shown, this confession gave the Particular Baptist congregations that affirmed it an extremely clear sense of who they were and what they were seeking to achieve.<sup>3</sup>

Congregationalist in its ecclesial polity, this confession used a number of biblical images to designate the individual congregations: each of them was “a compact and knit Citie,”<sup>4</sup> “a company of visible Saints,”<sup>5</sup> Christ's “walled sheep-fold, and watered garden.”<sup>6</sup> The first of

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<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> For a readily accessible copy of the *Confession*, see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Rev. ed.; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), pp.153-71.

<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, his “The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644-1660”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 17 (1966), 209-26; “The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644”, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., 19 (1968), 570-90; “Thomas Patient in Ireland”, *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal*, 2 (1969-1970), 36-48, especially pp.40-1; “The Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists”, *Baptist History and Heritage*, 25, No.4 (October, 1990), 39-47; *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (Rev. ed.; London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), pp.59-94.

<sup>4</sup> *First London Confession of Faith* 47 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp.168-9).

<sup>5</sup> *First London Confession of Faith* 33 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p.165).

these images, that of the city, speaks of the autonomy of the local church, while the second recalls the Congregationalist heritage of these Baptists, namely, that a true church consists of those who have joined themselves intentionally to a specific group of believers so as to serve Christ the King. The third and fourth images, the sheepfold and garden, speak of the separation of the church from the world and implicitly reject the Constantinian model of the union of church and state that prevailed in the minds of so many in the British Isles of this era.

*“A garden inclosed”*

The description of the local church as a “watered garden” is particularly noteworthy for it would become a key image that Baptists used to express their identity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The phrase is taken from the Song of Solomon 4:12: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (KJV). Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), for example, whose thinking about worship was looked at in the previous lecture, used this Old Testament text to assert the distinction of world and Church:

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.<sup>7</sup>

Or consider the covenant of Bourton-on-the-Water Baptist Church, Gloucestershire, that was drawn up in 1719/1720. There it was stated that 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.”<sup>8</sup> Due to the fact that the local church is like “a Garden enclosed,” that is, walled off from the gaze of the outside world to some degree, business conducted within the church must not be disclosed to those who are not members.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *First London Confession of Faith* 34 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp.165-6).

<sup>7</sup> *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled* (1701 ed.; repr. London: L. I. Higham, 1815), II, 332, 339. For another use of this image by Keach, see his *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline display'd* (London, 1697), pp.50-1.

<sup>8</sup> Cited Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990), p.124.

<sup>9</sup> The image of the church as a garden is not unique to the Particular Baptists. Listen to Margaret Charlton Baxter (1636-1681), speaking about her conversion: “God hath...engaged me to Himself, by taking me into His Family,

Now, in the minds of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists who used this simile of an enclosed garden, the image would also recall the enclosed gardens of contemporary English horticultural practice. While some of these gardens were developed for aesthetic reasons and consisted primarily of flowers and shrubs, many of them were kitchen gardens, designed to produce small fruits, herbs, salad greens and other vegetables. Generally rectangular in shape, they were enclosed by walls, fences or hedges that might reach as high as sixteen feet. These walls provided both protection from the cooling effects of the wind and privacy for the owner.<sup>10</sup> In fact, during the turbulent era of the 1640s and early 1650s, when the British Isles experienced the horror and ravage of battle and siege, such gardens came to be increasingly seen as “places of secure retreat from the dangers of political and religious strife.”<sup>11</sup> Used as a simile for the church, the idea of an enclosed garden would therefore bring to mind the fact that local churches in their teaching, fellowship and worship are meant to be havens of order, refreshment, and fruitfulness—sanctuaries from the chaos and wilderness of the world.

This image of an enclosed garden, though, had about it an inevitable air of insularity. It could easily become a picture of refusal to engage with what was outside the garden. So it was that far too many sectors of the Particular Baptist community in the eighteenth century were inward-looking and insular, closeting themselves within their meeting-houses and limiting their horizons to the maintenance of church life and their own distinct worship. The image of the “enclosed garden,” which had been such a positive image in the seventeenth century, became a picture of stagnation in the following century.

During the eighteenth century, however, there was a horticultural revolution. The enclosed garden of the seventeenth century gave way to wide, expansive lawns with man-made lakes and groves designed by professional gardeners like Lancelot Brown (1715-1783), otherwise known as

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and planting me in His garden, and watering me with the dew from heaven.”[John T. Wilkinson, *Richard Baxter and Margaret Charlton: A Puritan Love-Story* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), p.78].

<sup>10</sup> Helen M. Leach, “Kitchen garden” in Geoffrey Jellicoe *et al.*, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.314-5; Geoffrey Jellicoe, “Walled garden” in Jellicoe *et al.*, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, pp.592-3; David C. Stuart, *Georgian Gardens* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1979), pp.142-3.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Turner, *English Garden Design. History and styles since 1650* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors’ Club Ltd., 1986), p.9.

“Capability Brown.” The shift well fit the temper of the eighteenth century: optimistic, forward-looking, eager to explore the world. A similar transformation occurred in many of the sectors of the eighteenth-century English Particular Baptist community that had known spiritual stagnation and even decline. Fueled by a recommitment to evangelistic preaching and other forms of fervent evangelism in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, their focus shifted from parochial concerns to the vistas of the wider world.<sup>12</sup> And central to this renewal inevitably were three aspects of Baptist worship: a renewed emphasis on evangelistic preaching; a reconsideration of the meaning of believer’s baptism; and corporate prayer—all played key roles in the revitalization of the Particular Baptist cause in England.

*“Encumbered” with difficulties*

In 1715 there were around 220 Particular Baptist churches in England and Wales. By 1750 that number had declined to about 150.<sup>13</sup> While various reasons can be cited for this declension, there are three in particular that relate to aspects of Baptist worship.<sup>14</sup>

First, there was a tendency to get stuck in traditions of worship and practice that had had lost their efficacy. Baptists, for instance, were the only major group in eighteenth-century Britain that insisted upon believer’s baptism, which, they rightly argued, is the baptism set forth in the New Testament. Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists all upheld infant baptism, while the Quakers dispensed with the rite altogether. Henry Phillips (1719-1789), who was brought to faith in Christ under the preaching of his fellow Welshman, the Calvinistic Methodist Howel Harris (1714-1773), and who later pastored Particular Baptist churches in Ireland and England, well expressed the sentiments of his fellow Baptists when he stated that the ordinance of baptism is “the door into the church, a sign that one is born again, and brought out

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<sup>12</sup> It should be emphasized, though, that there were areas of the English Particular Baptist community that remained spiritually healthy throughout this period. See Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century Baptist ministers trained at Bristol Baptist Academy, 1690-1791* (Milton under Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire: Nigel Lynn Publishing & Marketing Ltd., 2006).

<sup>13</sup> For these figures, see W. T. Whitley, “The Baptist Interest under George I”, *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 2 (1910-1911), 95-109; Arthur S. Langley, “Baptist Ministers in England about 1750 A.D.”, *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 6 (1918-1919), 138-57; Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England. Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London/New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1976), pp.35, 37; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), I, 267-71, 491-510.

<sup>14</sup> For more detail, see Michael A.G. Haykin, *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends, and his times*. (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), pp.15-33.

of darkness, ignorance and unbelief unto God's marvelous light,...and those who actually profess repentance towards God, faith in Xt. [Christ] & obedience to his commands are the only proper subjects of this ordinance."<sup>15</sup> When a person was so baptized, therefore, a distinct declaration of belief was being made.

The fact that baptism was traditionally performed outdoors in a pond, stream, or river often made the act an even more forceful declaration.<sup>16</sup> All and sundry could come and watch what was happening and ideally the Baptists would be furnished with an excellent opportunity to bear witness to their distinct convictions. For example, at the formation of a small 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>17</sup>

In some situations, though, an outdoor baptism had the opposite effect, but having it outdoors was maintained because of tradition. William Steadman (1764-1837), who was a key figure in the renewal among the Yorkshire Baptists, records that when he first came into the county, the older ministers in the county,

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<sup>15</sup> "Reverend Henry Phillips (1719-1789): His Testimony", *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal*, 17 (1984-1985), 34.

<sup>16</sup> For an eighteenth-century description of a baptism, see 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.563.

<sup>17</sup> "The Harvest of 100 Years. Ebenezer Baptist Chapel 1877-1977" (Typescript, 1977), p.1. I am indebted to Mr. Chris Curry of St. Catherines, 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), pp.541-43. 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), pp.98-9.

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 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.<sup>18</sup>

A second reason for the Baptists' declension was the development of the theological position known as High Calvinism, sometimes called Hyper-Calvinism. Pastors and believers of this persuasion were rightly convinced that salvation is ultimately God's great work. On the basis of this conviction, however, they erroneously reasoned that since unbelievers are unable to turn to Christ, it was therefore unscriptural to urge them to come to the Saviour. Genuinely desirous of exalting God's sovereignty in salvation, High Calvinist preachers shied away from calling all and sundry to repentance and faith, lest any of the credit for the salvation of sinners go to them. God, in his own time, would convert the elect and bring them into the "enclosed gardens" of the Particular Baptist community.

Take Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) for instance.<sup>19</sup> He was raised in a Baptist work in the small village of Soham, not far from the university town of Cambridge. Its pastor was John Eve (d.1782), who ministered at Soham from 1752 till his resignation in 1771. Eve was a typical High Calvinist. His preaching, as Fuller later recalled, had no evangelistic thrust for he "had little or nothing to say to the unconverted."<sup>20</sup> Thus, despite the fact that Fuller regularly attended the Baptist meeting-house with his family, he gave little heed or thought to the sermons that he heard. Nevertheless, and in spite of his own experience, after his conversion Fuller found himself preaching much like Eve during the early years of his pastoral ministry. "Encumbered" with theological inhibitions, he could not bring himself to offer the gospel indiscriminately to sinners.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Thomas Steadman, *Memoir of the Rev. William Steadman, D.D.* (London, 1838), pp.234-5. For this quote, I am indebted to Sharon James, "Revival and Renewal in Baptist Life: The Contribution of William Steadman (1764-1837)", *The Baptist Quarterly*, 37 (1997-1998), 268-9.

<sup>19</sup> For details on Fuller, see below.

<sup>20</sup> Cited Andrew Gunton Fuller, "Memoir" [*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I, 2]. For Fuller's love for Eve, see Andrew Gunton Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, I, 10).

<sup>21</sup> "Preface" to *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (*Works*, II, 329).

Finally, it is vital to note that while many Baptists were in this state of declension, from the mid-1730s onwards there was a tremendous movement of revival going on in the British Isles through the preaching of such Anglicans as George Whitefield (1714-1770), the leading evangelist of the eighteenth century, the Wesley brothers, John (1703-1791) and Charles (1707-1788), Howel Harris and Daniel Rowland (c.1711-1790). Many Particular Baptists, however, had deep reservations about the revival. The Wesleys, of course, were Arminians and thus beyond the pale for the Particular Baptists, who were Calvinists.<sup>22</sup> However, Whitefield, Harris and Rowland, as well as many of the others involved in the revival were Calvinists. Yet, the fervency of their evangelism and their urging of the lost to embrace Christ prompted a number of their Baptist critics to complain of what they termed their “Arminian accent.”<sup>23</sup>

Most importantly, the Baptists were disturbed by the fact that the earliest leaders in the revival belonged to the Church of England. Their Baptist forebears in the previous century, after all, had come out of the Church of England at great personal cost and suffering, and they had suffered for their determination to establish gospel churches where there could be true worship. The heritage that had come down to the eighteenth-century Particular Baptists was thus intertwined with a great concern for proper New Testament church order 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.”<sup>24</sup>

Though writing early in the century, Benjamin Keach expressed the ecclesiological convictions that prevailed in the Particular Baptist community for much of the era. In his commentary on the

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<sup>22</sup> The Wesleys’ view of the Baptists was also hardly conducive to good relations. Here is Charles Wesley in 1756 speaking about the Baptists in his diary. In his words they were “a carnal..., contentious sect, always watching to steal away our children, and make them as dead as themselves.” [Cited John R. Tyson, ed., *Charles Wesley. A Reader* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.418].

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1823), III, 280. On the other hand, those committed to the revival were sometimes equally critical of the Baptists for their failure to engage in evangelism. As Howel Harris once remarked of the Nonconformists, which would have included the Baptists, in a comparison of the latter with his friend George Whitefield: “whilst they are in their warm rooms”—which, as has been noted, they called enclosed gardens—“he ventures his life for God.” [Cited Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Howel Harris 1714-1773. The Last Enthusiast* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), p.46].

<sup>24</sup> *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), 23.



parables of Jesus, Keach 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,<sup>25</sup> being not conformable to this world; and into such a church Jesus Christ brings his sheep.

Later in the eighteenth century this position was reiterated by the man who was the leading Particular Baptist divine for much of that century, John Gill (1697-1771). “The Church of England,” he declared in no uncertain terms, “has neither the form nor matter of a true church, nor is the Word of God purely preached in it.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly William Herbert (1697-1745), a Welsh Baptist pastor and a friend of Howel Harris, was critical of the latter’s decision to stay in the Church of England. In a letter that he wrote to Harris early in 1737, a couple of years after the Evangelical Revival had begun in England and Wales, Herbert likened the Church of England to a pub “which is open to all comers,” and to 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”?<sup>27</sup> From

<sup>25</sup> *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled*, II, 383.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

The standard biographical sketch of Gill is John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late Rev. John Gill, D.D.* (Repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Gano Books, 1992). For more recent studies of Gill and his theology, see Graham Harrison, *Dr. John Gill and His Teaching* (Annual Lecture of The Evangelical Library; London: The Evangelical Library, 1971); Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory. A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), pp.73-107, *passim*; George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Eggleston, Co. Durham: Go Publications, 1995); Michael A.G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); and Timothy George, “John Gill” in his and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Rev. ed.; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2001), pp.11-33.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan, “Development of the Baptist Movement in Wales”, pp.39-40.



Herbert's point of view, Harris' commitment to an apostate institution put a serious question-mark upon the latter's entire ministry.<sup>28</sup>

Many eighteenth-century Baptists were thus adamant in their refusal to regard the Evangelical Revival as a genuine work of God and they stood aloof from it. From their perspective, the revival simply did not issue in true gospel churches where God could be worshipped aright. Of course, there were some noteworthy exceptions, but up until the 1770s far too many Particular Baptists seem to have assumed that a revival could only be considered genuine if it preserved and promoted the proper form of the local church and all of the details of their particular type of worship.<sup>29</sup> For many Particular Baptists of the first six or seven decades of the eighteenth century, outward form and inward revival went hand in hand. In their minds, when God brought revival it would have to issue in true gospel churches with worship like theirs.<sup>30</sup>

*Evangelistic preaching, "the duty of every minister of Christ"*

The solution to this dilemma came through men like Andrew Fuller. Raised in a household of farmers, he was a big, broad-shouldered man who had little formal education and looked, to William Wilberforce (1759-1833) at least, as "the very picture of a village blacksmith."<sup>31</sup> Yet, in the words of Benjamin Davies (1814-1875), the Welsh Old Testament scholar who served as the

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<sup>28</sup> A resolution passed by St. Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, in 1754 also reveals this attitude. In the minute book for that year we read that "it is unlawful for any...to attend the meetings of the Methodists, or to join in any worship which is contrary to the doctrines and ordinances of our Lord Jesus." [Cited Charles B. Jewson, "St. Mary's, Norwich", *The Baptist Quarterly*, 10 (1940-1941), 283].

<sup>29</sup> There were Particular Baptist communities in England that did not experience decline. See Roger Hadyen, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century Baptist Ministers trained at Bristol Academy, 1690-1791* (Milton under Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire: Nigel Lynn Publishing & Marketing for the Baptist Historical Society, 2006); *idem*, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Milton under Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire: Nigel Lynn Publishing & Marketing for the The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005), pp.110-1.

<sup>30</sup> R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival 1760-1820* (Wheaton: Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts Publishers, 1989), p.81.

<sup>31</sup> Cited Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p.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*, 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 Arthur H. Kirkby, *Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1961); Phil Roberts, "Andrew Fuller" in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), pp.121-39; Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003).

first principal of Canada Baptist College, 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>32</sup>

Fuller showed Baptists that they could retain their distinctive polity and worship, and yet also be decidedly evangelistic. He argued for the latter most powerfully in his epoch-making work, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. 8.<sup>33</sup> In what was roughly its final form it was completed by 1781.<sup>34</sup> Two editions of the work were published in Fuller’s lifetime. The first edition, published in Northampton in 1785, was subtitled *The Obligations of Men Fully to Credit, and Cordially to Approve, Whatever God Makes Known, Wherein is Considered the Nature of Faith in Christ, and the Duty of Those where the Gospel Comes in that Matter*. The second edition, which appeared in 1801, was more simply subtitled *The Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ*, a subtitle which well expressed the overall theme of the book.<sup>35</sup>

Among other things, Fuller pressed home the fact that ministers of the Word must earnestly exhort their hearers to commit themselves to Christ and that without delay. In so doing they will be faithful imitators of Christ and his Apostles, who “warned, admonished, and entreated” sinners to repent, to believe, and to be reconciled to God. Many Hyper-Calvinist ministers of Fuller’s day, though, were too much like John Eve, Fuller’s first pastor after his conversion, and had next to nothing to say to the unconverted in their congregations, because they believed that these men and women were “poor, impotent, and depraved creatures.” Faith was beyond such men and women, and could not be pressed upon them as an immediate, present duty. Fuller was convinced that this way of conducting a pulpit ministry was unbiblical and simply helped the unconverted to remain in their sin. Fuller put his position well in an article of the statement of faith he made at his induction into the Kettering pastorate in 1783:

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<sup>32</sup> “Ministerial Education”, *The Canada Baptist Magazine*, 3, No.9 (March, 1840), 194-5.

<sup>33</sup> A. G. Fuller, “Memoir of the Rev. Andrew Fuller” in *The Principal Works and Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), p.32, note. Cf. *idem*, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), p.168.

<sup>34</sup> J.W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London, 1816), p.270.

<sup>35</sup> *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in *Works*, II, 328-416.

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 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.<sup>36</sup>

*Baptism, "the distinguishing sign of Christianity"*

Fuller was convinced that renewal of the Particular Baptist cause would be effected by not only a return to a more biblical style of preaching but also by taking seriously other aspects of their worship as Baptists. An excellent window from which to observe his concerns in this regard is a circular letter he wrote 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—issues that had been effectively expounded by Baptists in the previous century. Instead, Fuller 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>37</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 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>38</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,

<sup>36</sup> Cited A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1956), pp.163-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Works*, III, 339.

<sup>38</sup> *Works*, III, 339-40.

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>39</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 both. Among the truths to be believed are the doctrine of the Trinity and that saving faith is a trust in the death of Christ for sinners. But baptism 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>40</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>41</sup> This comparison of baptism to a hedge brings to mind a favoured image for the church in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Particular Baptist circles, namely, the enclosed garden. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Fuller explicitly employing this image a little further on in this circular letter. He has been arguing that 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

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<sup>39</sup> "Thoughts on Open Communion" (*Works*, III, 504-5). See also "Thoughts on Open Communion" (*Works*, III, 512).

<sup>40</sup> *Works*, III, 341.

<sup>41</sup> *Works*, III, 342.

longer a garden enclosed, but an open wilderness, where every beast of prey can range at large.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in using this description of the church as “a garden enclosed” and linking baptism with it, Fuller was re-affirming the fact that at the heart of the Particular Baptist tradition is a radical Nonconformity. And it was a Nonconformity that was much more than a protest with regard to what was perceived as the unscriptural nature of some of the worship rites of the Church of England. “Nonconformity to the ceremonies of the church [of England] is of no account,” Fuller said on another occasion, “if it be attended with conformity to the world.”<sup>43</sup> For Fuller, 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.

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>44</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 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

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<sup>42</sup> *Works*, III, 342-3.

<sup>43</sup> “Evil Things which Pass under Specious Names” (*Works*, III, 800).

<sup>44</sup> *Works*, III, 343.

as churches.”<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the disciple is called to cling to Christ, not to a set of rites of worship or even doctrines.

*John Sutcliff and the Concert of Prayer*

Among the Particular Baptist figures of the late eighteenth century one of the most important is also one of the least known—John Sutcliff (1752-1814), the pastor of the Baptist church in Olney, Buckinghamshire, for thirty-nine years. An extremely close friend of Andrew Fuller and one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society, Sutcliff played a central part in the revival that came to the English Particular Baptists.

In the spring of 1784, at a meeting of the ministers of the Northamptonshire Association, Sutcliff recommended the churches of this association add to their roster of worship services a monthly meeting devoted to prayer for revival. He had been influenced in this direction through the reading of a tract by the New England theologian 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)—henceforth referred to as the *Humble Attempt*. In this work, Edwards had argued for the establishment of regular meetings of prayer for revival.

Sutcliff thus proposed that the churches of the association establish monthly prayer meetings for the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit and the consequent revival of the churches of Great Britain. This proposal was adopted by the representatives of the 16 churches at the meeting, and on the last page of the circular letter sent out that year to the churches of the Association there was a call for them “to wrestle with God for the effusion of His Holy Spirit.”<sup>46</sup> After recommending that there be corporate prayer for one hour on the first Monday evening of the month, the call, most likely drawn up by Sutcliff, continued:

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<sup>45</sup> *Works*, III, 344-5.

<sup>46</sup> Attached to John Ryland, Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), 12.



The grand object in 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 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 denomination 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 inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them, I will increase them with men like a flock” (Ezek. 36:37). Surely we have love enough for Zion to set apart one hour at a time, twelve times in a year, to seek her welfare.<sup>47</sup>

There are at least four noteworthy points about this Prayer Call. First, very much in evidence in this statement, as well as in the extract from Fuller’s sermon, is the conviction that any reversal of the decline of the Calvinistic Baptists could not be accomplished by mere human zeal, but must be effected by the Spirit of God. As Sutcliff noted later in strongly Edwardsean language:

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.<sup>48</sup>

Then there is the catholicity that is recommended with regard to the subjects of prayer. As the Particular Baptists of the Northamptonshire Association gathered together to pray, they were encouraged not to think simply of their own churches and their own denomination, but they were to embrace in prayer believers of other denominational bodies. The kingdom of God consists of more than Particular Baptists! In fact, churches of other associations, were encouraged to join with them in praying for revival.

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<sup>47</sup> Attached to Ryland, Jr., *Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts Illustrated* (London: W. Button, 1791), 12.

Third, there is the distinct missionary emphasis of the Prayer Call. The members of the Association churches were urged to pray that the gospel be spread “to the most distant parts of the habitable globe.” Little did these Baptists realize how God would begin to fulfill these very prayers within the space of less than a decade.

Finally, the sole foundation for praying for revival is located in the Scriptures. Only one text, Ezekiel 36:37, is actually cited, but those issuing this call to prayer are aware of “many gracious promises” in God’s Word which speak of the successful advance of His kingdom. At first glance this passage from Ezekiel hardly seems the best text to support the Prayer Call. But Sutcliff is focusing on a principle here, namely, that preceding times of revival and striking extensions of Christ’s kingdom there invariably occur the concerted and constant prayers of Christians.

In 1789, the number of prayer meetings for revival having grown considerably, Sutcliff decided to bring out an edition of Edwards’s *Humble Attempt* to further encourage those meeting for prayer. Measuring only six and one quarter inches long, and three and three-quarter inches wide, and containing 168 pages, this edition was clearly designed to be a handy pocket-size edition. In his “Preface” to this edition, Sutcliff reemphasized that the Prayer Call issued by the Northamptonshire Association five years earlier was not intended for simply Calvinistic Baptists. Rather, they ardently wished it might become general among the real friends of truth and holiness.

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!<sup>49</sup>

In this text Sutcliff positions the Prayer Call of 1784 on the broad canvas of history, in which God and Satan are waging war for the souls of men women. Prayer, because it is a weapon common to all who are “friends of truth and holiness,” is one sphere in which Christians can present a fully united front against Satan. Sutcliff is well aware that evangelicals in his day held differing theological positions and especially worshiped in different ways. He himself was a convinced Baptist — convinced, for instance, that the Scriptures fully supported congregational polity and believer’s baptism — yet, as he rightly emphasizes in the above “Preface,” such convictions should not prevent believers, committed to the foundational truths of Christianity, uniting together to pray for revival.

### *The return of prayers*

In 1794, five years after the reprinting of Edwards’ *Humble Attempt*, 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup>

Rippon was not exaggerating. There was indeed steady growth among the Particular Baptists during the last four decades of the eighteenth century, but it was not until the final decade of the century that there was a truly rapid influx of converts.<sup>53</sup> It is surely no coincidence that preceding

<sup>49</sup> “Preface,” pp. iv-vi.

<sup>50</sup> *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1797). 2:16,23.

<sup>51</sup> *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1801), 3:40,42.

<sup>52</sup> *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1801), 3:40.

<sup>53</sup> Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People. Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.38.

and accompanying this growth were the concerts of prayer that many churches had established in response to the Prayer Call of 1784.

Recall the first stanza of 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.<sup>54</sup>

The third and fourth stanzas of Isaac Watts' hymn continue thus:

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.<sup>55</sup>

Just as the first stanza of Watts' hymn is an apt one for the state of many Particular Baptist causes for much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so these two stanzas well depict what happened during the last quarter of that century. For revival came to this group of churches during that period, and into the first couple of decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a revival in which the "Spirit divine" did "descend" upon this particular garden of God's people. And as the wind of the Spirit blew through it, he made its "best spices flow abroad," to places like India with William Carey, and Jamaica with William Knibb. But those are other stories...

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<sup>54</sup> *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Book I, Hymn 74 (*Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts*, IV, 274).

<sup>55</sup> *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Book I, Hymn 74 (*Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts*, IV, 274).