

The 1689 Baptist Confession and Its Influence on Early American Missions and Church Planting

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It is often alleged that the seventeenth-century Puritans and Baptists were not missions-minded. Some, who do not understand either the chronology or the meaning of the term, accuse the seventeenth-century Baptists of hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism, which is a real error but not advocated by the Second London Confession, did not develop among the Baptists until the early eighteenth century through the writings of John Skepp (d. 1721) and John Brine (1703-65). Some, more informed, argue that the emphasis on evangelism and missions is a post-Enlightenment development. For example, David W. Bebbington, the preeminent historian of Evangelicalism, claims, “In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was rare to find a Protestant divine commending the spread of the gospel beyond the bounds of Christendom.”¹ Although Bebbington acknowledges some “unusual” exceptions,² he believes that because the seventeenth-century Calvinists lacked assurance they were paralyzed by self-introspection that hindered an evangelistic focus.³ In other words, Calvinists were too worried about their own salvation to be concerned about the salvation of others.

¹David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 40.

²Bebbington cites Richard Baxter as “unusual among the Puritans in expressing an eagerness for the conversion of the nations.” Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 40.

³See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 42-50. Michael A. G. Haykin, in an article in a book interacting with Bebbington’s influential work, has questioned whether missionary zeal was as rare in the seventeenth century as Bebbington had indicated. Haykin cites multiple examples demonstrating that Bebbington’s case is overstated. Michael A. G. Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 52-53.

My thesis in this paper is that the theology contained in the 1689 Baptist Confession was not detrimental to the task of missions and evangelism, but on the contrary it undergirded their efforts in these areas. This will be demonstrated by an examination of some of the original signers of the confession and the confession's effect in North America. By showing that the original signers of the confession were evangelistic and missions-minded and by showing that those who held to the confession in North America were also evangelistic and missions-minded, it is hoped that we can lay to rest the lie that those who held to the 1689 Confession and its theological descendants in America—the Philadelphia and Charleston Confessions—were unconcerned and uninvolved in the work of missions and church planting.

Origins of the Second London Confession

The Second London Confession of Faith was actually written in 1677. In the minutes of the Petty France church an obscure reference was made on August 26, 1677, to the publication of a confession of faith.⁴ This is commonly believed to be the same confession that was first published in 1677, but later adopted by the General Assembly of over one hundred churches in 1689 and that would become known as the Second London Confession of Faith.⁵ Therefore, the Petty France co-pastors William Collins and Nehemiah Coxe were the chief architects of this historic document to which thirty-seven pastors and ministers would affix their names in 1689 in

⁴*Petty France Church Minute Book*, 6. The original confession was published as *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677). Also available in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 241-95.

⁵See Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1823), 3:332. For an excellent analysis of the historical and theological context of the Second London Confession, see James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675–1705*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 17 (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2008), 17-29.

“the Name of and on behalf of the whole Assembly.”⁶ Further evidence of William Collins’ hand in the original writing of the confession is that when the London General Assembly desired a catechism to be drawn up based on the confession, William Collins was drafted for the role.

The early English Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey stated that William Collins’ “eminence...as a scholar and theologian was very great.”⁷ Although William Collins was eminently qualified to speak upon any subject he desired, he insisted upon the clear presentation of the gospel. In his funeral sermon for Collins, John Piggott asserts that the main content of his sermons were related to gospel:

The subjects he ordinarily insisted on in the course of his ministry, were the great and important truths of the gospel, which he handled with great judgment and clearness. How would he open the miseries of the fall! And how moving a manner would he discourse of the excellency of Christ, and the virtues of his blood, and his willingness to save poor awakened burdened sinners!⁸

This was the message that was central in the preaching of the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists.

One of the original signers of the confession when the General Assembly met in 1689 was Hercules Collins (no relation to William). Hercules Collins served as the third pastor of the historic Wapping Church in London from 1677-1702. He was known as a faithful pastor, being described in his funeral sermon (also by John Piggott) as one who “was faithful in every relation, a man of truth and integrity, one entirely devoted to the service of the temple, and zealously bent

⁶*A Confession of Faith, Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations Of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) In London and the Countrey*, 3rd ed. (London: S. Bridge, 1699), front cover verso; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 239.

⁷Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: n.p., 1814), 3:332.

⁸John Piggott, *Eleven Sermons Preach’d Upon Special Occasions* (London: John Darby, 1714), 280-81.

to promote the interest of the Lord Redeemer.”⁹ One part of his pastoral faithfulness was his evangelistic fervor. In his funeral sermon for Collins, Piggott described the evangelistic zeal of Hercules Collins by declaring that “no Man could preach with a more affectionate Regard to the Salvation of Souls.”¹⁰ He later called upon the regular attenders of the Wapping Church who remained unsaved as witnesses to the gospel fervor of Hercules Collins: “You are Witnesses with what Zeal and Fervour, with what Constancy and Seriousness he us’d to warn and persuade you.”¹¹ At this point Piggott began to plead with those who were present by crying out, “Tho you have been deaf to his former Preaching, yet listen to the Voice of this Providence, lest you continue in your Slumber till you sleep the Sleep of Death.” He then closed his sermon with a strong evangelistic appeal which must have been intensified by the presence of Collins’ lifeless body which lay before them.

You cannot but see, unless you will close your Eyes, *that this World and the Fashion of it is passing away*. O what a Change will a few Months or Years make in this numerous Assembly! Yea, what a sad Change has little more than a Fortnight made in this Congregation! He that was so lately preaching in this Pulpit, is now wrapt in his Shroud, and confin’d to his Coffin; and the Lips that so often dispers’d Knowledg amongst you, are seal’d up till the Resurrection.

Here’s the Body of your late Minister; but his Soul is enter’d *into the Joy of his Lord*. O that those of you that would not be persuaded by him living, might be wrought upon by his Death! for tho he is dead, he yet speaketh; and what doth he say both to Ministers and People, but *Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh?*¹²

In a sense, these final words by Piggott allowed Collins to preach one final time to the unconverted who had sat under his ministry.

Additionally at the end of a book written from prison, Hercules Collins prayed for “a universal spreading of the Gospel” in order that “a greater degree of Knowledge and Holiness

⁹ Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 237.

¹⁰ Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 236.

¹¹ Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 240.

¹² Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 240.

will be in the World then [*sic*] ever.”¹³ This is a fascinating request. Clearly, Collins was not devoid of a missionary passion, but was he merely an isolated exception? One further example will suffice to demonstrate that Collins’ prayer for a spread of the gospel was not unique. In a hymn composed by Benjamin Keach, another seventeenth-century London Baptist pastor and signer of the Second London Confession in 1689, one finds a remarkable plea for the nations.¹⁴ Keach voices a desire for the gospel to shine to France, “dark *Spain*,” Italy, Asia, Africa, Egypt, Assyria, China, East India, those “Who live in wild *America*,” and “poor *Israel*.”¹⁵ Benjamin Keach also referred to Matthew 28:19-20 as the “great Commission” over one hundred years prior to the launch of the modern missionary movement.¹⁶ The evidence above demonstrates that there is more continuity between Puritanism and Evangelicalism than is acknowledged by Bebbington.

Transmission of the Second London Confession to America

You may wonder what the Second London Confession of Faith has to do with Baptists in America. After all, it is called the “London” Confession of Faith. To paraphrase Tertullian, What hath London to do with Indianapolis? There is a fascinating story that explains how the Second London Confession became so influential in early American Baptist life. It was largely mediated through the ministry of Elias Keach (1665-1699),¹⁷ the son of Benjamin Keach. Elias Keach would become the first minister of the historic Pennepack Baptist Church located in

¹³Hercules Collins, *A Voice from the Prison* (London: George Larkin, 1684), 33.

¹⁴Benjamin Keach, *War with the Devil: Or the Young Mans Conflict with the Powers of Darkness*, 3rd ed. (London: Benjamin Harris, 1675), 124-28.

¹⁵Keach, *War with the Devil*, 126-28.

¹⁶Benjamin Keach, *Gold Refin’d; or, Baptism in its Primitive Purity* (1689), 64.

¹⁷A recent biographical sketch of Elias Keach is Wade Burleson, “Elias Keach (1665-1669)” in *A Noble Company: Essays on Notable Particular Regular Baptists in America*, vol. 1 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 267-281.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, when the son of the famous preacher first arrived in North America as a twenty-one year old, he was unconverted. Furthermore, he was a charlatan. He pretended to be a preacher in order to take monies from the unsuspecting colonists. Morgan Edwards, an early chronicler of Baptist life in America, describes what happened on one occasion when Elias Keach tried to preach like his father.

He was son of the famous Benj. Keach, of London. Arrived in this country a very wild spark about the year 1686. On his landing he dressed in black and wore a band in order to pass for a minister. The project succeeded to his wishes, and many people resorted to hear the young London divine. He performed well enough till he had advanced pretty far in the sermon. Then, stopping short, looked like a man astonished. The audience concluded he had been seized with a sudden disorder; but, on asking what the matter was, received from him a confession of the imposture with tears in his eyes and much trembling. Great was his distress though it ended happily; for from this time dated he his conversion. He heard there was a Baptist minister at Coldspring in Bucks county between Bristol and Trentown. To him did he repair to seek counsel [*sic*] and comfort; and by him was he baptized and ordained. The minister's name was Thomas Dungan. From Coldspring Mr. Keach came to Pennepek and settled a church there as before related; and thence travelled through Pennsylvania and the Jersies preaching the gospel in the wilderness with great success, in so much that he may be considered as the chief apostle of the Baptists in these parts of America. He and his family embarked for old England early in the spring of the year 1692, after having resigned the care of the church for a considerable time before to the Rev. John Watts.¹⁸

He was converted by his own preaching! He would seek and receive baptism from Thomas Dungan of the Coldspring Baptist Church and was ordained by him for true gospel ministry. Keach founded the Baptist church at Pennepeck and became a means of starting many churches throughout “the wilderness” of Pennsylvania and “the Jersies” (during this period there was an East and West Jersey). So successful was his ministry that he became known “as the chief apostle of the Baptists in these parts of America.” Clearly, he had an influential ministry in the Middle Colonies.

¹⁸Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania Both British and German, Distinguished into FirstDay Baptists Keithian Baptists SeventhDay Baptists Tuncker Baptists Mennonist Baptists*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Joseph Cruickshank and Isaac Collins, 1770), 9-11.

Keach returned to London in 1692 and began to pastor there. In 1697, he and his father produced *A Short Confession of Faith* which summarized the essence of the Second London Confession of Faith, but with some new articles, among which were: “Of Laying on of Hands” and “Of Singing Psalms, etc.”¹⁹ Back in Pennsylvania, a group of churches that had been associated with Elias Keach, including the Pennepack Baptist Church, came together to form the first Baptist association in America in 1707—The Philadelphia Baptist Association. In 1742, this association adopted as its Confession of Faith a revised version of the Second London Confession. The only changes were that two of the articles added by Benjamin and Elias Keach to their 1697 abridgement of the Second London were included, namely the articles in chapter 31 on the laying of hands upon the baptized and chapter 23 on congregational singing of praises to God. These additions by American Baptists are best explained by recognizing the pervasive influence of Elias Keach upon the churches that became the Philadelphia Association of Baptists.

The Influence of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith

First published in 1743, the Philadelphia Confession went through several reprintings over the years. It was adopted by a variety of churches and associations. A list of these associations can be found in William L. Lumpkin’s *Baptist Confessions of Faith*.²⁰ Lumpkin labeled the Philadelphia Confession as “perhaps the most influential of all confessions” in the South.²¹ Even the Virginia Separate Baptists adopted the Philadelphia Confession. In their book *Baptists and the Bible*, Russ Bush and Tom Nettles state:

¹⁹*A Short Confession of Faith: Containing the Substance of all the Fundamental Articles of the Larger Confession Put Forth by the Elders of the Baptized Churches, Owning Personal Election and Final Perseverance* (London, 1697). There were other additions as well, but these two additions are of importance to demonstrate Elias Keach’s influence upon American Baptists.

²⁰Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 352-53.

²¹Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 352.

In 1783, even the Separate General Association of Virginia agreed to adopt the *Philadelphia Confession*. Separate Baptists had opposed written confessions, but they did accept this one along with an additional statement that such formal acceptance did not bind every Baptist to strict observance of every detail, nor should anyone ever think that the confession stood above or even equal to Scripture itself. They did say, however, that they agreed that this confession was “the best composition of the kind now extant” (Lumpkin, 353).²²

This is a remarkable statement, given the Separate Baptists tendency to reject confessions of faith. It demonstrates the pervasive influence of the theology of the Second London Confession mediated through the Philadelphia Confession.

John Gano

The influence of the Philadelphia Confession in the South can be attributed in large measure to the work of John Gano (1727-1804).²³ From 1760-1787, Gano was the founding pastor of what became known as the First Baptist Church of New York City. The church, which was a part of the Philadelphia Association of churches, experienced great growth during his pastorate. Gano is best known for his role as a chaplain during the Revolutionary War, at the end of which he was called upon by General George Washington to pray at the dismissal of the troops. He is even alleged to have baptized George Washington in a secret baptism. As interesting as these matters are, for the interests of this study they pale in comparison to his missionary activity in the South. In 1754, Gano began a series of evangelistic trips in the South as a representative of the Philadelphia Association. According to an entry by Lee W. Hähnlén in the *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Gano “was instrumental in establishing and

²²L Russ Bush and Thomas J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, revised and expanded ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 344-45.

²³For an excellent treatment of Gano’s life and ministry, see Terry Wolever, *The Life of John Gano (1727-1804)* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2012).

reorganizing churches conforming to the Regular Baptist (Calvinist) order.”²⁴ In other words, Gano started churches based on the Philadelphia Confession and reorganized existing churches to be in conformity with that confession. An interesting perspective on the effectiveness on John Gano’s ministry in the South is seen in a recent account from a history of Free Will Baptists. William F. Davidson writes,

The missionary program of the Philadelphia Association was initiated by the very able John Gano. He was commissioned by the association to travel in the southern states as a representative of the Particular Baptists, and by the summer of 1754, he was preaching in North Carolina. Gano probably was the most formidable opponent that the General Baptists faced. David Benedict described him as one of the most important ministers of his day. He was welltrained for the ministry, enjoyed the respect and esteem of the Philadelphia Association, and possessed a confident and overpowering personality. Though his reputation and superior training might have put the General Baptists on the defensive, it was his powerful personality that assured his success among them. Morgan Edwards recorded an example of Gano’s power of persuasion:

... On his arrival [in North Carolina], he sent to the ministers, requesting an interview with them, which they declined, and appointed a meeting among themselves, to consult what to do. Mr. Gano, hearing of it, went to their meeting, and addressed them in words to this effect, ‘I have desired a visit from you, which, as a brother and a stranger, I had a right to expect; but as ye have refused, I give up my claim, and am come to pay you a visit.’ With that, he ascended into the pulpit, and read for his text the following words, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?’ This text he managed in such a manner as to make some afraid of him, and others ashamed of their shyness....²⁵

John Gano was apparently quite effective at representing the Philadelphia Association and spreading a knowledge of the Philadelphia Confession. By 1767, the Charleston Association of Baptist churches had adopted the Second London Confession of Faith as their confession. Thus, when you read about the Philadelphia Confession and the Charleston Confession—the two most influential confessions in the North and South respectively—you are actually reading about the Second London Confession of Faith. Gano would eventually make his way to Kentucky in 1788

²⁴Lee W. Hähnlen, “Gano, John (1727-1804)” in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. D. G. Reid, R. D. Linder, B. L. Shelley, & H. S. Stout (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

²⁵William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in History* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 2001), 64-65.

where he would minister until his death in 1804. After his death, Richard Furman (1755-1825) commented on Gano's doctrine.

As a minister of Christ, he shone like a star of the first magnitude in the American churches and moved in a widely extended field of action. . . . He was not deficient in doctrinal discussion, or what rhetoricians call the demonstrative character of a discourse; but he excelled in the pathetic,—in pungent, forcible addresses to the heart and conscience. The careless and irreverent were suddenly arrested, and stood awed before him; and the insensible were made to feel, while he asserted and maintained the honour of his God, explained the meaning of the Divine law, showing its purity and justice, exposed the sinner's guilt proved him to be miserable, ruined and inexcusable, and called him to unfeigned, immediate repentance. . . . The doctrines he embraced were those which are contained in the Baptist Confession of Faith, and are commonly styled Calvinistic.²⁶

Incidentally, this statement by Furman is revealing about his own theological position. Furman, who served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, SC from 1786 until his death in 1825, could refer to the Calvinistic theology of John Gano as that contained in “the Baptist Confession of Faith.” In 1814 Furman would go on to help organize and become the first president of the Triennial Convention, or the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions. This first nationwide denomination of Baptists formed for fulfillment of the Great Commission was formed and first led by a man who resonated with the theology contained in the Second London Confession of Faith. So much for this theology being opposed to missions and evangelization!

In his later years, Gano would be a part of the Elkhorn Association with the frontier Kentucky Baptist pastor Ambrose Dudley (c. 1752-1827).²⁷

Ambrose Dudley

²⁶Richard Furman “John Gano” in *Annals of the American Pulpit*, ed. William B. Sprague (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 6:66.

²⁷I recently published an essay on Dudley in the series *A Noble Company*. See Steve Weaver, “Ambrose Dudley (c. 1752-1825)” in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America*, vol. 5 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press

One strong evidence of the pervasive influence of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith in America is seen in the ministry Dudley. He served as a Captain in the Virginia Militia during the Revolutionary War.²⁸ He moved to Kentucky in 1786 and served as the pastor of the Bryan's Station Baptist Church²⁹ from October 22, 1786 until his death over thirty-nine years later on January 27, 1825.³⁰ He was recognized as a leader by the other pastors of the associations to which he belonged by being elected moderator twenty-five times.³¹ Dudley preached all across the countryside and was instrumental in the organization of several churches in Kentucky during his lifetime.³² In 1791, Dudley had hazarded the dangers of the wilderness to travel, along with John Taylor, nearly two hundred miles on horseback to establish the Red River Church, the first Baptist church in middle Tennessee.³³

Dudley was known for his proclamation of the doctrines of God's sovereign grace, or Calvinism. In the minutes for the February 1825 church meeting, the first since Dudley's passing on January 27th, Dudley is described as having "served this church for near thirty-nine years, during which time he zealously and undeviatingly maintained the Doctrine of Special Grace as

²⁸Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April 1775, to December, 1783* (Washington, D.C.: Rare Book Shop Pub. Co., 1914), 205.

²⁹Also known as Bryants Station, or the Particular Baptist Church at Bryan's.

³⁰*Bryan's Station Baptist Church Records, 1786-1901* (Fayette Co., KY [manuscript located at Kentucky Historical Society]), Entries for 22 October 1786 and 3rd Saturday of February 1925.

³¹Dudley was moderator of the Elkhorn Association for a total of ten years: 1794, 1796, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1808. He was moderator of the Licking Association for fifteen consecutive years: 1810 - 1824.

³²The Marble Creek, Silas, David's Fork and McConnell's Baptist Churches are among those which acknowledge Ambrose Dudley as instrumental in their founding.

³³Chester Raymond Young, ed. *Baptists on the American Frontier*. 3rd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 25.

held forth in her Church Covenant.”³⁴ This is undoubtedly a reference to Article 5 in the doctrinal statement from the Church Covenant which states:

We fully believe the great doctrine of particular redemption, personal election, effectual calling, justification by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, pardon of sin by his atoneing blood, believers baptized by immersion, the final perseverance of the saints, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³⁵

Dudley himself was involved in the writing of this statement. When the church was constituted in March of 1786 they had simply adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith “as the best human Composition of the Kind and Contains a summary of the articles of our Faith, particulary [*sic*] we Receive what is generally termed the Doctrine of Grace as they are therein contained.”³⁶ Twelve and a half years later the congregation apparently felt the need for a more concise statement of faith and practice. Accordingly, in the church meeting held in October of 1798 a committee of five men was appointed to revise their Church Covenant. The Committee was made up of Ambrose Dudley, Leonard Young, Bartlett Collins, Henry Roach, and John Mason. The revised Church Covenant was summarily adopted by the church in December of 1798. This document included six expansive points of doctrine which were seen as summaries of the doctrine “contained at large in the Philadelphia Confession of faith,”³⁷ along with the rules for church government normally contained in a church covenant. Thus, Dudley clearly identified himself with the theologically robust Calvinism found in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742.

³⁴Bryan’s Station Church Book, Entry from “3rd Saturday in February 1825.”

³⁵This “Church Covenant” has been inserted near the beginning of the Bryan’s Station Church Book on the two pages between the list of members and the first entry from the third Saturday of March, 1786.

³⁶Bryan’s Station Church Book, Entry from “Third Saturday of March One thousand seven and Eighty-six.”

³⁷Bryan’s Station Church Book, “Church Covenant.”

Given Dudley's role in the composition of his church's summary of their confessional statement, that document can be examined for a fuller understanding of his beliefs.³⁸ Dudley also assisted in crafting another confessional statement which can likewise be seen as indicative of his doctrinal commitments. This document consisting of twelve concise creedal statements was adopted in September 1812 by the fledgling Licking Association, which Dudley was instrumental in starting in 1810. These statements were drawn up by Dudley along with the association's clerk, John Price.

The churches composing the Licking association are united as brethren upon the doctrines of grace contained in the Scriptures of the old and new testament, an abstract of which is as follows –

1st We believe in one true and living God, and that there are three persons in the Godhead - The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and that these three are one.

2. We believe that the Scriptures of the old & new testament are the word of God, and the rule of Faith & practice.

3. We believe in the doctrine of Eternal, particular, unconditional election.

4. We believe in particular redemption by Jesus Christ.

5. We believe in the doctrine of Original Sin.

6. We believe in the utter [*sic*] inability of man to save him self, either in whole or in part.

7. We believe that sinners are Justified in the sight of God by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

8. We believe that God's elect shall be called with a holy calling, regenerated, converted & sanctified in time.

9. We believe that the saints shall persevere in grace and never fall finally away.

10. We believe that baptism and the Lord's supper are ordinances of Jesus Christ, and that true believers are the subjects of these ordinances & that the mode of baptism is by immersion.

³⁸See Appendix to this paper "The Church covenant as revised in 1798."

11. We believe in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment, and that the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

12. We believe that no person has the right to administer the ordinances, only such as are regularly called and come under the imposition of the hands of the Presbytery.³⁹

In this confession of faith, Dudley affirms his commitment to the doctrines of the Trinity, the authority of Scriptures, the five points of Calvinism, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification, baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper, the final judgment, and the necessity of ordained persons administering the ordinances. Together these two confessional statements, which Dudley not only affirmed but helped craft, serve as reliable evidence of where Dudley stood on the great doctrines of the faith.

Dudley not only proclaimed the doctrines of grace, he was also an ardent defender of these doctrines. One example of this is found in a biography of the pioneer Disciples of Christ preacher "Racoon" John Smith by John Augustus Williams. Williams describes the preaching of Dudley to "a large concourse of people" at Grassy Lick where a number were being led into embracing the Campbellite teaching through John Smith's preaching. Dudley made "a pleasing and powerful argument" to the effect that the crowd was "deeply impressed with the reasonableness of the Calvinian theory."⁴⁰ The leaders among the Campbellites became worried at the success with which Dudley refuted their teaching. Williams described the substance of Dudley's discourse at some length:

He argued that obedience to any physical law presupposes physical life. The plant, for instance, that unfolds its leaves in the light of spring, obeys a vegetable law by the power of a vegetable life, previously imparted. A dead tree puts forth no leaf, or blossom – it can

³⁹*Licking Association Records, 1810-1901* (Library Special Collections and Archives, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort), September 1812 Minutes.

⁴⁰John Augustus Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith. With Some Account of the Rise and Progress of the Current Reformation* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Company, 1870), 212. That Ambrose Dudley was the preacher at Grassy Lick is made clear in the chapter heading on page 203.

obey no law. In the animal world, also, there are certain physiological laws which each living creature obeys – not by the energy of a vegetable, but of an animal life. Obedience, therefore, does not confer life: the animal must first be made alive, before it can begin to obey. It is so in the spiritual world; there must be spiritual life, before there can be obedience to spiritual law. For argument’s sake, indeed, it might be admitted that life is afterward enjoyed only so long as the quickened man continues to obey; but the first act of obedience, whether it be to repent or to believe, is impossible until life is given by the Spirit of God.⁴¹

After summarizing a portion of Dudley’s address, Williams then seems to quote him directly in the following:

“How absurd, then,” he concluded, “is the doctrine of some, that the gift of life is conditioned on an act of obedience! Rather is obedience conditioned, in the very nature of things, on the previous gift of life. Without life imparted by the Holy Spirit, then, it would be impossible, not only to obey, but even to understand the law.

“Yea, though I were to read and ponder the Word for a hundred years,” said he, “I would not, at the end of that time, unless quickened by the Holy Ghost, have any more knowledge of its meaning, or ability to obey it, than my horse hitched to yonder tree.”⁴²

Even Williams’ unsympathetic recounting of Dudley’s teaching on man’s total inability demonstrates how effective his impassioned rhetoric must have been. No wonder so many, as Williams regretfully acknowledged, were influenced by his discourse.

Clearly, Dudley was an ardent Calvinist who was passionate about defending the doctrines of grace against any who would seek to denigrate them. Nevertheless, despite his strong personal convictions on Calvinism, Dudley was evidently a powerful preacher of the gospel. He was described by a contemporary as “a good natural orator, warm and affectionate in preaching.”⁴³ Kentucky Baptist historian J. H. Spencer called him “a preacher of much zeal,

⁴¹Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith*, 212.

⁴²Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith*, 212-213.

⁴³John H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists* (1886), 1:114-115. Spencer here cites a writer in *Rippon’s Register* from April 1795 who, he says, was “supposed to be Samuel Trott.”

but...tempered by wisdom.”⁴⁴ A remarkable description of the impact of his preaching survives in the diary of Mary Beckley Bristow. Her detailed account as a forty-nine year old of her memory of a sermon which she heard when she was a girl of only eight provides a glimpse into what it must have been like to hear Dudley preach.

The first serious impressions made on my mind that I have any recollections of were produced by hearing old Father Ambrose Dudley preach the funeral sermon of Aunt Sally, Uncle James Clarkson’s first wife, and upon examining the date of her death, I find that I was then in my eighth year.⁴⁵ This sermon must have made a deep impression on my young mind, for though so many years have elapsed, I have a perfect recollection of his appearance, the solemnity of his manner, the place where he stood in my Grandfather’s house. It seems I can almost hear the sound of his pleasant voice this quiet morning, as he repeated his text, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” I remember he exalted the character of God, and one expression of his I shall not forget until memory becomes extinct. It was this, “Oh, Eternity, Eternity, awful, solemn thought! If a little bird was to come once a year and take one grain of sand away until every grain on earth was gone, eternity would be just begun.” So great was the awe inspired in my mind by those solemn words that I trembled from head to foot. Nor was the impression lost for years, but often when I would find myself alone, if that solemn word, eternity, came into my mind, I would immediately run to find company. From that time I was subject to deeply serious impressions, particularly if I heard of the death of anyone near my own age. As I had been sickly from my birth, I greatly feared death and the lonely grave, and worse than either that dread eternity beyond. As I grew up my health improved a little, and I was beginning to enjoy the world, forgetful of eternity.⁴⁶

This striking testimony highlights the fervent method of Dudley as a preacher of the gospel. It bears out what the frontier missionary James Welch said of his preaching: “No one who heard him could doubt that he was deeply impressed with the truths which he delivered, and that the

⁴⁴Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists*, 113.

⁴⁵This identifies the year as 1816.

⁴⁶Mary Beckley Bristow, “A Relation of My Experience, 1857,” [accessed on-line <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~greenwolf/mary/02-relation.htm> on 1 November 2011].

grand object at which he constantly aimed, was not to gain the applause of his hearers, but to save their souls.”⁴⁷

Dudley’s preaching ministry experienced great success. Spencer summarizes something of the scope of his ministry at Bryan’s Station in the following words:

He was always prominent among the pioneer preachers of Kentucky. His fine natural gifts, his superior education, and his clear, practical judgment made him a leader in the business affairs of the churches and associations. He was a preacher of much zeal, but his zeal was tempered by wisdom. He was often moderator of the two associations of which his church was a member at different periods, and was one of the committee that arranged the terms of general union between the Regular and Separate Baptists of Kentucky, in 1801. From the time he came to Kentucky, in 1786, till 1808, few preachers in the State baptized more people than he.⁴⁸

Throughout the 1790s, Bryan’s Station was either the second or third largest church in the Elkhorn Association in their total membership. However, during the “Great Revival” in 1800-1801⁴⁹ the already sizeable congregation which numbered 170 in August of 1800, more than tripled by the addition of 406 members.⁵⁰ 367 converts were baptized at Bryan’s Station during this one year.⁵¹ As a point of contrast, the church had baptized only one during the previous year. Welch provides his own eyewitness testimony of seeing two of Dudley’s extraordinary baptismal services that year: “I saw him baptize, on one occasion, fifty-eight persons at David's Fork; and the following Sabbath he baptized sixty-eight at Bryan's Station, only six miles distant.” Another eyewitness, Robert B. McAfee, wrote in his autobiographical account that “i was at Bryants

⁴⁷Welch, “Ambrose Dudley,” 204.

⁴⁸Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1:113-114.

⁴⁹For more details on the revival in the Elkhorn Association, see Jack Birdwhistell, *The Great Revival in Elkhorn* (Lexington, KY: Elkhorn Baptist Association, 1985). For an overview of the revival in Kentucky, see Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1:535-554.

⁵⁰*Minutes of the Elkhorn Association of Baptists* (1801), 1.

⁵¹*Minutes of the Elkhorn Association*, 1.

station when the Revd. Ambrose Dudley Senr Baptized fifty three persons in one day.”⁵² As a result of this explosion in numerical growth, the church released 294 of its membership to constitute the David’s Fork Baptist Church on August 26, 1801.⁵³ The Bryan’s Station church had held meetings on a rotating basis at a meeting house at David’s Fork for the previous fifteen years with Dudley preaching there and at Bryan’s Station on an alternating schedule.⁵⁴ But now these became two separate congregations. Dudley served both churches as pastor until 1806 when he resigned from the David’s Fork congregation to provide pastoral care exclusively for the mother church. The ministry of Ambrose Dudley clearly demonstrates that one can hold to the theology of the Second London Confession of Faith while still remaining committed to evangelism and church planting.

Isaac McCoy

One Baptist converted during the 1800-1801 revival in Kentucky (though not through the ministry of Ambrose Dudley) was Isaac McCoy (1784-1846). McCoy was born in Fayette County, Pennsylvania on June 13, 1784. When he was six or seven years of age his family moved to Kentucky. While living in Shelby County, Kentucky, the young McCoy was converted and was baptized at the age of sixteen on March 6, 1801. His father, William McCoy, was a minister and eventually moved to Clark County, Indiana to serve the Fourteen Mile Baptist Church, which later became known as Silver Creek Baptist Church. This was the first Baptist church in Indiana, having been founded in 1798. The younger McCoy would eventually settle in

⁵²Robert B. McAfee, *The Life and Times of Robert B. McAfee and His Family and Connections. Written by Himself. Commenced April 23rd, 1845. (Part 9: 1799-1801)* [Accessed on-line <http://jtenlen.drizzlehosting.com/mcafee/life/life10.html> on 5 November 2011].

⁵³Randy Smith, *At the Meetinghouse on David’s Fork: A History of David’s Fork Baptist Church, 1891-2001* (Lexington, KY: The Church Rees Printing Co, 2001), 22.

⁵⁴Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1:142.

Indiana himself. He would go on to become, as one biographer has called him “Apostle of the Western Trail” because of his mission work among Native Americans. He was sent out by the Triennial Convention in 1817 for this mission work. Remember, as we saw above, the founding president of the Triennial Convention was Richard Furman, a man known for his Calvinist theology. If you have any doubts about where Isaac McCoy, he named one of his sons John Calvin McCoy! Yet, this man was a pioneer missionary in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, etc. among the Native Americans. This was remarkable given the fact that these frontier settlers had only recently been engaged in fighting with Native Americans. Now, McCoy, the Calvinist, is going to live among these people and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“By this time,” says he, “my anxiety to preach the gospel to the Indians, had become great.” He now resolved, to use his own words, “To make an effort to establish a mission among the Indians, and to spend the remainder of my life in promoting their temporal and eternal welfare.”⁵⁵

McCoy died in 1846 in Louisville, KY. A dozen years later, his friend Joseph Chambers was asked to provide a tribute for William B. Sprague’s *Annals of the American Pulpit*. Chambers begins by saying, “My acquaintance with him commenced in 1809; he baptized me; I sat under his ministry seven years; and was in friendly relations with him till his death.”⁵⁶ He went on to describe McCoy’s doctrinal beliefs: “His doctrinal views were thoroughly Calvinistic; and their practical influence was abundantly manifest in his life.”⁵⁷ But Chambers continued,

That which more than any thing else must form the enduring memorial of Mr. McCoy is what he did and suffered for the red man. He laboured for him, during a large part of his ministry, with an intensity that nothing could abate; and he has left a mark on the destiny of that unfortunate people which time cannot efface. Well do I remember going, by request, to his house, to join with him in prayer just before his removal into the Indian country. A few years before, we had both been defending ourselves and our families, with our rifles, against the invasion of the Indians, and now he was going to plant himself down among

⁵⁵Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1:682.

⁵⁶Joseph Chambers, “Isaac McCoy” in *Annals of the American Pulpit*, ed. William B. Sprague (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 6:544.

⁵⁷Chambers, “Isaac McCoy,” 6:545.

them, with his wife and seven small children, in the hope of becoming the instrument of their salvation. I will not dissemble that, in the weakness of my faith, I feared that he had fallen upon a Utopian scheme; but, in view of the results, now after forty years, I am constrained to say, in admiration of the wonderful workings of providence and grace,—“What hath God wrought!”⁵⁸

This is the heart for missions and evangelization that was and should be again produced by the theology of the Second London Confession of Faith.

Conclusion

The evidence examined in this presentation has demonstrated that, contrary to the opinions of some, the original framers of the Second London Confession of Faith were evangelistic and missions-minded. This paper has also shown the pervasive influence of the Second London Confession of Faith through the Philadelphia and Charleston Confessions in Baptist life in early America. Furthermore, this paper has shown that the Calvinistic theology imbibed by the early American Baptists did not hinder their passion for evangelism and missions, but rather fueled it.

⁵⁸Chambers, “Isaac McCoy,” 6:545.

[When the Bryan Station Baptist Church constituted in March of 1786, they simply adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith “as the best human Composition of the Kind and Contains a summary of the articles of our Faith, particularly we Receive what is generally termed the Doctrine of Grace as they are therein contained.” In October of 1798, a committee made up of Ambrose Dudley, Leonard Young, Bartlett Collins, Henry Roach, and John Mason were appointed to revise their Church Covenant. The revised Church Covenant was summarily adopted by the church in December of 1798. Along with the rules for church government normally contained in a church covenant, this document also included six expansive points of doctrine which were seen as summaries of the doctrine contained in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. The following is transcribed from the two pages between the list of members and the first entry in the minutes on the third Saturday of March, 1786. – *Steve Weaver* (November 5, 2011)]

The Church covenant as revised in 1798.

The covenant agreed upon and entered into by the Baptist Church of Jesus Christ constituted at Bryans, Fayette County, on the 15th day of April, 1786. Being baptized according to the Apostolic mode, desiring to maintain the true principles of Christianity, to the honor of God and the edification of each other; having united together as a religious society, to worship God, to celebrate his ordinances, to maintain his truths; and to endeavor to promote his glory in the world: We promise by divine assistance to protect, stand by and defend the following doctrine, and to observe the rules of discipline hereafter named.

- 1st That the holy scripture of the Old and the New testament are the word of God, and our only certain and infallible rule of faith and obedience, containing everything needful for us to know, believe or do in the service of God, and able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, by which we expect to be judged at the last day, and to which our opinions and practices out at present and always, to be conformed, and therefore that all Christians who can read, ought to search them daily, praying to God for the light of his holy spirit without which none can effectually understand them.
- 2nd That there is but one living and true God, the almighty creator, preserver and disposer of all things, visible and invisible, in whom we live, move, and have our being, and to whom all divine worship and adoration is to be rendered and ascribed, both in time and eternity, by men and angels, as being most worthy of it, and one that will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to Idols, having strictly forbidden us to worship or adore any but himself.
- 3rd That there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, power and eternity, and therefore not to be divided in his essence, though distinguished by several peculiar properties and personal relations.
- 4th That our Lord Jesus Christ, the second person in the adorable trinity, who was eternally with the Father, did in time take upon him a real human nature, in which he fulfilled the Law and died to make atonement for Sin, is the only saviour of sinners, the prophet, priest and king of his Church, appointed heir of all things, and judge of quick and dead, in whom alone we have redemption and deliverance from divine wrath and eternal misery.

- 5th We fully believe the great doctrine of particular redemption, personal election, effectual calling, justification by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, pardon of sin by his atoneing blood, believers baptized by immersion, the final perseverance of the saints, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.
- 6th That Christ will return in Glory to judge men and angels at the end of the world, at which time the righteous shall enter into everlasting happiness, but the wicked shall be driven away into everlasting and eternal misery; which doctrine is contained at large in the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of faith.

Rules for the government of the Church.

- 1st Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but constantly attending our appointed meetings as far as the Lord shall enable us, not neglecting any of them but in case of necessity.
- 2nd To bear each one his part according as the Lord shall prosper him, in defraying such expenses as are necessary for maintaining the worship of God, in decency and order.
- 3rd Not to expose the infirmities of one another by any means when it may be lawfully avoided.
- 4th Not to remove our residence to any distant part without applying to the Church for dismissal.
- 5th Not willingly to live in the neglect of any known duty to God, our neighbor, nor one another, but to endeavor to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless.
- 6th To bear reproof and to reprove each other in case of visible fault, in Christian Charity and brotherly love as ordained by Christ in the Gospel.
- 7th We will not commune with those who in the opinion of the Church, have not been baptized, on profession of their faith, or with those for whom she has no Christian fellowship.