

Dr. James Renihan has produced a masterly commentary on the First London Baptist Confession of Faith. Anyone with an interest in Baptist history or theology will enjoy and benefit from this work. Dr. Renihan's exposition of the text of the confession draws on his deep immersion in the theology and writings of Baptists and others of the time, but this volume provides far more than that: by exploring the sources used by the framers of the confession, as well as the different editions through which it passed, the reader is introduced to the historical context in which the Confession was produced, which in turn helps to understand it and its role in the development of Baptist life and thought in the seventeenth century. Dr. Renihan's work is a most valuable contribution to the recovery of Baptist theology and heritage, so needed in our day.

**Robert Strivens | Pastor,
Bradford on Avon Baptist Church**

It is a happy combination that brings together Jim Renihan (one of the premier historians of seventeenth-century Baptists) and the First London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1644/46 (the warm and Christ-centered formal expression of the faith of seven young Particular Baptist Churches in London). The conjunction of Jim's scholarship with this important document makes for an extremely insightful historical and theological investigation into the early history of Calvinistic Baptists. Renihan has provided us with an exposition of the 1644 Confession that explores its historical context, its confessional and literary sources, its delights as well as its deficiencies, its reception and its critics, its revisions, and its relationship to the later and fuller Second London Baptist Confession of 1677/1689. The appendices add to the historical value of the book and, with the body of the text, render the volume not only a study in historical theology but also a mini course in biblical and systematic theology. This study is worthy of the attention of all who are interested in Baptist history and theology. I highly recommend it.

**Terry A. Chrisope | Former Professor of History and Bible,
Missouri Baptist University, Legacy Baptist Church of Northwest Arkansas**

I have longed to see a critical exposition of the First London Confession of Faith in print, one that provides a detailed examination of the provenance, structure, theology, editions, and impact of this notable text. This is that! As I read through this new work by Professor Renihan, it was obvious that here was a scholar who had mastered this area of Baptist history, had long pondered the nooks and crannies of its terrain, and was able to compact all his study of this text within the scope of a monograph such as this. In sum: this is a fine work, one that is eminently judicious in its conclusions and, I trust, will be eminently useful for the people of God.

**Michael A. G. Haykin | Chair & Professor of Church History,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.**

I truly wish I had held this publication in my hands a decade earlier. At that time, I was writing my master's thesis on the First London Baptist Confession of Faith. It wasn't an easy task back then to sift through the available sources to examine the historical circumstances of its genesis and theological nuances. Dr. Renihan, whom I know personally and hold in high esteem, has done an extraordinarily elaborate job for anyone with a serious interest in studying the beginnings and doctrinal convictions of early confessional Calvinistic Baptists in England. Dr. Renihan takes us on an exciting and highly educational journey back in time to the first and very few Calvinist Baptist congregations in London, who hold their ground in the face of enemies and persecutors. May this work not only meet with academic interest but also be a means to deepen our own convictions so that we also might stand firm in the faith, especially in a time of growing opposition.

**Peter Schild | Pastor,
Evangelical Reformed Baptist Church,
Frankfurt, Germany**

Dr. James Renihan has given us a major study of the Baptists' First London Confession 1644, which was an apologia justifying the emergence of orthodox independent churches practicing believer's baptism in very dangerous and uncertain times. Ongoing debate and defense necessitated minor adjustments over the next decade. Because of the recent remarkable worldwide emergence of Baptist churches acknowledging the 1677/1689 confession, the earlier document has passed somewhat into the background and has sometimes been misunderstood and its teaching even set over against that of its better known successor. By a careful study of the historical context and the sources behind the 1644 statement, Dr. Renihan has shown that both statements emerge from the Puritanism of the age and bear witness to historic Christianity. He has also made it clear that the men behind both confessions found it necessary to explain and defend their application of the Reformation principle of sola Scriptura to their ecclesiology. One is filled with admiration of the men of the 1640s given the limitations of their background.

Robert Oliver, PhD | Retired Pastor and Scholar

With trademark thoroughness and historical awareness, our guide paces steadily through the landscape of the First London Baptist Confession, analyzing each aspect with careful deliberation. The definite contours of the document are made clear, illuminated by splashes of light from contemporary sources. We are left with a fine view of the Baptists' home territory. With this to help us, we can better appreciate the faith and life of our spiritual forefathers, together with the context in which they labored and the challenges they faced. For their successors, this will prove a genuinely helpful resource.

**Jeremy Walker | Pastor of Maidenbower Baptist Church,
Preacher and Author**

This book is a contribution of inestimable value to the study of the history, faith, and influence of the Particular Baptists. Dr. Renihan provides an exposition of the first confession of faith of the Particular Baptists from an objective perspective that does not paint their actions through rose-colored glasses but explains them in a transparent and honest way. The richness of his sources and the clarity of Dr. Renihan that invites the reader to interact with them, along with the clear and coherent structure of his exposition and the pertinence of his explanations, make this work an invaluable resource for anyone who seeks to better understand the roots of our faith. This book is the result of a lifetime of study, a passionate heart, and a scholarly mind capable of clearly expressing the history of our glorious Baptist legacy. Likewise, his exposition will serve to ignite a flame of devotion and faithfulness to God's Word and an appreciation for the richness of our Particular Baptist heritage in the hearts of generations to come—including those arising in distant lands like Latin America.

**Jorge A. Rodríguez Vega | Pastor of Iglesia Bautista
Gracia Soberana in Santo Domingo, Ecuador,
Director of Seminario Bautista Confesional del Ecuador
and Executive Director of the Publisher Legado Bautista Confesional**

Imagine a small foreign country known only to a very few people, and most of them, not very well. This country is so remote you cannot make the trip yourself, but for some important reason you need to familiarize yourself with it. Then you discover one man, so thoroughly conversant with the place and its people, including their manner of thinking, their habits of expression, their beliefs, and even how surrounding communities have impacted them, that he deserves a reputation among the highest rank in this sphere of knowledge. And it did not come easily. This man has spent a great portion of his lifetime virtually among these people, listening carefully to their conversation, and learning from them with a great deal of sympathy. Finally, to your delight, the expert is willing to take the time to sit with you and, with much less effort and time on your part, bring you up to speed in a clear, convincing way. Listening, you find he is a tour guide *par excellence*.

Such a guide has Dr. James Renihan been to me, and the metaphorical country is the seventeenth-century Particular Baptist world. This book, Dr. Renihan's first volume in Baptist Symbolics, is an exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith—and so much more. From a firm foundation of primary sources of the period, with his own original research, he presents some of the most significant documents along with interpretations of the language consonant with the vocabulary and connotations, theological and ecclesiastical, of that people and their times. In an expeditious way that cost me little, I have been enriched as a student of historical theology in this special area of interest by reading his book. Such knowledge also contributes to a more responsible assessment of general church history as well as Baptist history. Further and importantly, our study of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1677/89 is surprisingly enhanced by an accurate knowledge of the First, as provided in this book. A triumph of Baptist scholarship!

**D. Scott Meadows | Pastor,
Calvary Baptist Church (Reformed),
Exeter, New Hampshire**

In this scrupulously researched and carefully argued book, Professor Renihan uncovers the faith that lies behind the most famous of the Particular Baptist confessions and shows why it matters today. This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the roots of the Particular Baptist movement and the contribution it has made to the formation of Reformed theology.

**Crawford Gribben | Professor of Early Modern British History,
Queen's University Belfast.**

FOR THE
VINDICATION
OF THE
TRUTH

JAMES M. RENIHAN

FOR THE
VINDICATION
OF THE
TRUTH

BAPTIST
Symbolics
VOLUME 1

A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF
THE FIRST LONDON
Baptist Confession of Faith



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Baptist Symbolics

Volume 1

**For the Vindication of the Truth:
A Brief Exposition of the
First London Baptist Confession of Faith**

James M. Renihan

Foreword by

Tom J. Nettles

Published for the information of the ignorant; likewise for
the taking off of those aspersions which are frequently and
unjustly cast upon it.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so
worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in
the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they
themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of
the just and unjust. Acts 24. 14, 15.

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Acts 4. 20.
If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou
me? John 18. 23.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all
manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, &c. Matth. 5. 11-12
& 19. 29.

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To Nathan, Micah, and Sam

For the Vindication of the Truth
A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith

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FOREWORD

Tom J. Nettles

If you are just about to begin your adventure into this world of confessional exposition, get ready for an encounter with a work of art. This examination of the First London Confession of the Particular Baptists (or “baptistic congregationalists”) combines so many pertinent elements in an interesting and orderly fashion that the reader is as much entertained by the organization as he is informed by the content of the narrative.

Before listing these aspects of composition that I found admirable and engaging, I want to make two personal points about the confession itself, ideas that Dr. Renihan has woven into his narrative. First, the confession itself as a literary structure holds importance for Baptist life in a way that it does not for any other denomination. The confession arose basically from the defense John Spilsbery gave for the right (obligation!) to begin a church based on the immersion of believers only. When Spilsbery’s action in forming a church on such a basis was challenged, he wrote a defense of reinstating baptism *de novo* apart from any succession in the ordinance from previous administrators. He enunciated four principles of church formation, or “constituting causes,” in *The Lawfull Subjects of Baptisme*.¹

First must come the Word of God, “fitting and preparing of the matter for the forme.” The preaching and reading of the Word humbles and brings down the proud heart of man and makes him fit matter for the body of Christ, the church. Second, a “confession of faith” *declares* the “fitnes of the matter for the forme.” The power of the Gospel “shining into the heart of man” so convinces the sinner of its truth that its leaven “seasons and sweetens the whole man.” The Word operates like a fire that “breaks forth and discovers itself” with such clarity in “such as have it,” that they delineate specific truths from that Word. A confession of faith consisting of particular doctrines naturally develops. Others so prepared come to the same judgment concerning these truths. This leads to the third “constitut-

1 John Spilsbery, *A treatise concerning the lawfull subject of baptism* (London: 1643).

ing cause” of a church. The believers so fitted by the Word now covenant to be a body of believers joined by “free and mutual consent and agreement upon the practice of that truth so by God revealed, and by faith received.” This voluntary covenant precedes the ordinances. It is in the agreement indicated by such a covenant relationship that the agreeing body then warrants the corporate practice of the ordinances of the New Testament. The seal, then, is set by baptism, an obedient response to apostolic teaching under the authority of Christ himself. This baptism is a confession of faith both in the internal submission to Christ’s redemptive work and in the external expression of the body of truths incorporated in the written confession. The fourth cause, the Spirit’s work in knitting and uniting their hearts together in truth, follows. Unity in love and truth progresses in the body by means of the Spirit’s acting on the proclamation of the Bible. A corporate witness to propositional truths provides the only clear evidence that such a work of the Spirit has, in fact, occurred.

Spilsbery considered this necessary for the being of the church. He declared in no uncertain terms that saving faith must be manifest in the hearty approval and assertion of a body of propositional truths. No church, and thus no baptism, could exist apart from submission to orthodox evangelicalism embodied in a confession of faith. His own ten-point confession is included as an appendix in this volume. Submission to such constituted the covenantal agreement necessary before baptism in Spilsbery’s doctrine of the church. The First London Confession, therefore, gives a public witness not only to truth taught by the churches but also to heart commitments of each of the members expressed before they are received to baptism and membership.

Another remark about the confession is its comprehensive Trinitarian witness to Scripture. This serves to justify the confidence that a coherent and consistent statement of faith can be produced from the written Word of God. The doctrine of God affirms the full truthfulness of Scripture in saying, “Truth is that whereby he [God] declares that alone which he hath decreed, and though his sayings may seeme to sound sometimes another thing, yet the sense of them doth always agree with the decree” (article 3). Scripture never lies. Article 8, to which Renihan refers at the key critical development of revelatory truth, says, “In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know, believe, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.” We are pointed forward to the offices of Christ. In his office as prophet, we find that Christ “hath perfectly revealed the whole will of God out of the bosome of the Father, that is needful for his servants to know, believe, and obey.” The prophetic office of

Christ, therefore, confirms the very Scripture that has taught us about these messianic offices. The Scriptures teach us all we need to know about Christ as prophet, and Christ as prophet reconfirms what Scripture tells us we need to “know, believe, and obey [acknowledge].” Beyond that, the effectual operations of the Spirit in salvation include his work in teaching the elect “to see, know, and believe the truth of the Scriptures, & not onely so, but the excellencie of them above all other writings and things in the world.” Why? Because they “hold forth the glory of God in His attributes [article 3], the excellency of Christ in his nature and offices [articles 17–21], and the power and fulnesse of the Spirit in its workings and operations” [articles 22–26]. The doctrine of Scripture, therefore, promoted in the confession is fully comprehensive in the testimony borne to its truthfulness by each person of the triune God. It breathes the air of full submission to the Bible, giving no room for speculations or additions or irrelevant extrapolations from men.

Finally, the confessors affirm that even if they do not win the confidence of their Protestant contemporaries and are viewed as in vital error, they confess “that after the way which they call heresie, worship we the God of our Fathers, beleiving all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets and Apostles, desiring from our soules to disclaime all heresies and opinions which are not after Christ” (article 52).

Thus, seeing the vital importance for the process of composing a confession and the central place of Scripture in that composition, I want to delineate seven compelling traits of Jim Renihan’s exposition of this confession.

First, this is simply an exposition. What does the confession mean? Why did its writers organize it in this specific way? How do the various articles of faith relate to one another? What do certain words mean? How do these words and ideas relate to the broader theological context, most importantly, the doctrinal expositions maturing in English Puritanism? This expositional quality is an education in itself.

Second, this is an adventure in polemics. How the plain meaning and the contextual clarity of the simple statements of the confession can be twisted by contrarians to the new sect of antipaedobaptists entertains as much as it startles. Enmity is a creative force in its attempts to destroy. On the other hand, the willingness of the new Baptists to concede at every point possible for the sake of peace and the removal of any suspicion of heresy demonstrates the scriptural principle, “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18).

Third, this is a fascinating study in the use of sources. The matching of modern commentators on the confession placed alongside the antiquarian

contemporaries of these seven churches that produced the confession is a work of a seasoned thinker and researcher in difficult historical relations. The richness of Renihan's knowledge and skillful use of primary sources should encourage every historian with the dignity of his calling and the approximation of truth that is possible through hard work. Arising from these sources that hovered around the series of editions of the confession is an explanation of concepts and contextualized language that exhibits an entirely credible display of the purpose of the confession.

Fourth, concerning that purpose, we find that the doctrinal exposition was intended not only to be instructive to the churches and their membership but to align the Baptists with the broad Reformed orthodoxy of the Puritans, the Presbyterians, the Anglicans, and the Independents. They wanted first to establish the conscientiously held truth that they were orthodox in their doctrine of Scripture, the understanding of the Trinity, Christology, the doctrines of grace, and their prayerfulness for and submission to the government in all lawful matters. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and no man can intrude there. While accomplishing this work of stating objective truth, they also wanted to manifest their heartfelt fellowship with orthodox believers in non-baptistic religious bodies. This energy for orthodoxy, pointed out clearly and fittingly throughout this work, is an important point. Much of the twentieth century saw a vaporizing of this primary commitment and shifted the identity of Baptists simply to issues of liberty of conscience. Instead of seeing liberty of conscience as an implication of new covenant orthodoxy properly conceived, many historians condensed Baptist identity to that single affirmation, along with the right of private interpretation. The effect of this reductionistic project was to thrust aside the confessional element that gave rise to Baptists as a flowering of Protestantism into a consistent ecclesiology.

Fifth, Renihan weaves a marvelous tapestry of arguments between the Baptists, their foes, and their friends. One may want to doubt me when I say that this interweaving of theologically precise vocabulary, oddly constructed arguments, and scholastic logic is fascinating and entertaining, but the doubt would not be fitting. The manner in which Renihan shows how ideas and phrases and vocabulary from one writer are used constructively by another and implanted in the confession, while others dispute the accuracy of arguments and condemn the (remote!) implications of certain phrases is a fascinating study of human interaction. It also shows how iron sharpens iron and that theological clarity often is a community work.

Sixth, the author's care in getting behind the articles to the larger discussion is frequently gripping and yields surprising transparency of meaning. For example, his discussion of article 25 on the preaching of the gospel

in relation to preparations of the law is a masterful work in displaying the historical context of doctrinal vocabulary. He demonstrates how words like “absolutely,” “preparations,” “terrors,” “naked,” “sinner,” and “ungodly” work together to produce a profound doctrinal and experimental affirmation. His display of the various nuances of meaning and the interactions of theologians writing on this important issue is deeply instructive. Again, may I say, sections like that produce a deep sense of satisfaction in the beauty and symmetry of biblical truth and the sanctified artistic impulse that works toward such a cogent display of reality.

Seventh, Jim Renihan is himself engulfed in the goodness of the confessional content and purpose. Not only does he express confidence that the framers of the confession were in the “mainstream of federal thought” and “using common language to describe” their ascription to confessional biblical theology but he also seems to exude delight at times with phrases like “It is wonderful how this is expressed.” When a reader knows the writer is fully on board with a weighty subject, has a personal happiness in the content of his matter, and is unafraid to express his unity with certain ideas, it goes a long way to help the reader enjoy and embrace the good things set before him. I believe this will be your experience in your journey through this exposition.

ABBREVIATIONS

1LCF	First London Confession
1LCF44	First London Confession 1644 Edition
1LCF46	First London Confession 1646 Edition
1LCF51	First London Confession 1651 Edition
2LCF	Second London Confession
ALRPCO	Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford
ARPB	<i>Association Records of the Particular Baptists</i>
BDBR	<i>Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals</i>
BHH	<i>Baptist History and Heritage</i>
BQ	<i>Baptist Quarterly</i>
CR	<i>Calamy Revised</i>
DLGTT	<i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms</i> (2nd ed.)
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DWL	Dr. Williams' Library
EEBO	Early English Books Online
HEB	Joseph Ivimey's <i>History of the English Baptists</i>
LMA	London Municipal Archives
Marrow	William Ames's <i>Marrow of Sacred Divinity</i>
MP	Member of Parliament
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
RBTR	<i>Reformed Baptist Theological Review</i>
Savoy	Savoy Declaration of Faith
Thomason	<i>Catalogue of the Pamphlets . . . Collected by George Thomason</i>
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
Wing	<i>Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America</i>

For clarification:

Due to the frequency with which I refer to seventeenth-century confessions, I have chosen to follow a common practice by denoting them with anarthrous abbreviations (e.g., 1LCF, WCF, OED).²

The word *confession* is used in two ways in this book. When referring to a historical document, *Confession* is used; otherwise, *confession* is used.

I have modernized spelling and orthography in some seventeenth-century quotations, though not in titles.

Scripture quotations are generally from the common translation used in the seventeenth century, the Authorized Version. In citations from early modern authors, Scripture passages may be the author's rendering of the original, differing from the Authorized Version.

² See for example, Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009) and Alan D. Strange, *Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ in the Westminster Standards* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019).

INTRODUCTION

Credobaptists are confessors; this is inherent in their doctrine and practice. There is a wonderful double entendre present, perhaps at times unintentional, when Baptists write a confession. Since the act of baptism necessarily involves confessing Christ's lordship, it seems especially apropos for them to pen a document and call it a confession. A common text cited on title pages makes this point: "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my Fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of dead both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24.14–15). Baptists believe that Christ is Lord, and that He calls His disciples to confess their convictions—not just *that* Christ is Lord but *how* Christ's lordship is expressed in faith and practice.

The title for this book is taken from the title page of 1LCF46.¹ Representatives of seven small, relatively new churches in London, faced with strong political and ecclesiastical enemies, published their Confession so that all who were willing to read might understand why they existed, separate from the congregations of the established Church of England. For the subscribers and their churches, 1LCF was a declaration of principles, sometimes poignantly expressed, especially when speaking of their relation to the present government and the uncertainties of the future. While we look back and know the events of the next five decades, they did not. Hindsight is better than foresight! We must remember that in 1644 and 1646 the future was unknown—it was still yet to come for them. They could not see a period of toleration in the 1650s, followed by a period of persecution after 1662, and a change of monarchs in 1688. They wrote during turbulent civil wars, without any certainty for the future. They feared what was sometimes called the "rude mob," the troublemaking portion of the populace who would gladly take up a cause simply to engage in riotous behavior. These are the "ignorant" for whom the Confession is "information." They state that they write "for the

1 The title page reads, *A Confession of Faith of seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (but unjustly) called Anabaptists. Published For the vindication of the Truth, and information of the ignorant; likewise for the taking off of those aspersion which are frequently both in Pulpit and Print unjustly cast upon them* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1646). See appendix A and the bibliography for publication data on the 1644 and 1651/53 editions.

taking off of those aspersions which are frequently both in Pulpit and Print unjustly cast upon them.” Though we cannot hear the voices from pulpits (yet we may hear echoes of the voices in the reports recorded in books such as *Gangraena*),² we do possess many of the aspersions that appeared in print. These will help us understand some of the details of 1LCF.³

It is not my purpose to comment on every word or phrase but, often, especially where the intent of articles is clear, simply to summarize the doctrines expressed. At other points, however, I will probe into details. My desire is to demonstrate the orthodoxy of 1LCF, primarily explaining and refuting some of the charges made against it by its contemporaries. My method of interpretation is simple: I view this Confession as a product of its age. It is not a twentieth or twenty-first century document but, rather, it is nearly four centuries old. It has a context, and that context is crucial to understanding its meaning for the adopting and publishing churches, for it is first and foremost *their* Confession, and they have a right to define its meaning. Christian theology has moved forward in the last 375 years; the temptation today is to read old documents such as these as if they belong in our theological culture and climate. They may fit well into our thought world, but before interpreting through our own lenses, we need to attempt looking through seventeenth-century spectacles. That is my goal. I would want members of the seven churches to be able to read this book and recognize my interpretation. For this reason, I rely heavily on citations from seventeenth-century primary sources. This is unusual, for the current trend in historical studies is to summarize sources rather than incorporate them into the body of the work. While I appreciate the reasons for this, it does not fit my intentions. As this is a study in historical theology, I want my reader to have access to the same material I have used. This also means I have purposely limited interaction with secondary sources. I make extensive use of secondary sources but seldom engage them at any length. While there is a legitimate place for discussion and debate in scholarly literature, to delve into such discussions here would distract from my purpose.

As we shall see, 1LCF is a good and orthodox Confession, though it has potential deficiencies and perhaps even liabilities. The mid-seventeenth-century critics identify these problems—some minor and some more serious—and we will investigate these imperfections as we proceed. Several were ad-

2 Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena: or A Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these last four years* (London: Ralph Smith, 1646).

3 The reasons for publication are the same on the 1644, 1646, 1651, 1652 and 1653 title pages.

dressed by the Particular Baptists themselves as they revised and reissued 1LCF in 1646 and again in 1651, but even the 1646 revision introduced potential theological problems of its own.

A thesis of this book is that these doctrinal weaknesses of 1LCF argue for the necessity of another more carefully constructed and expressed Confession. The editors of 2LCF insist the theology contained in 1LCF and 2LCF is the same, and we ought to take them at their word. Listen to the foreword to the 1677 edition:

Courteous Reader,

It is now many years since divers of us (with other sober Christians then living and walking in the way of the Lord that we profess) did conceive ourselves to be under a necessity of Publishing a Confession of our Faith, for the information, and satisfaction of those, that did not thoroughly understand what our principles were, or had entertained prejudices against our Profession, by reason of the strange representation of them, by some men of note, who had taken very wrong measures, and accordingly led others into misapprehensions, of us, and them: and this was first put forth about the year, 1643, in the name of seven Congregations then gathered in London; since which time, diverse impressions thereof have been dispersed abroad, and our end proposed, in good measure answered, inasmuch as many (and some of those men eminent, both for piety and learning) were thereby satisfied, that we were no way guilty of those Heterodoxies and fundamental errors, which had too frequently been charged upon us without ground, or occasion given on our part. And forasmuch, as that Confession is not now commonly to be had; and also that many others have since embraced the same truth which is owned therein; it was judged necessary by us to join together in giving a testimony to the world; of our firm adhering to those wholesome Principles, by the publication of this which is now in your hand.

And forasmuch as our method, and manner of expressing our sentiments, in this, doth vary from the former (although the substance of the matter is the same) we shall freely impart to you the reason and occasion thereof. One thing that greatly prevailed with us to undertake this work, was (not only to give a full account of our selves, to those Christians that differ from us about the subject of Baptism, but also) the profit that might from thence arise, unto

those that have any account of our labors, in their instruction, and establishment in the great truths of the Gospel; in the clear understanding, and steady belief of which, our comfortable walking with God, and fruitfulness before him, in all our ways, is most nearly concerned; and therefore we did conclude it necessary to express our selves the more fully, and distinctly; and also to fix on such a method as might be most comprehensive of those things which we designed to explain our sense, and belief of; and finding no defect, in this regard, in that fixed on by the assembly,⁴ and after them by those of the Congregational way,⁵ we did readily conclude it best to retain the same *order* in our present confession: and also, when we observed that those last mentioned, did in their confession (for reasons which seemed of weight both to themselves and others) choose not only to express their mind in words concurrent with the former in sense, concerning all those articles wherein they were agreed, but also for the most part without any variation of the terms we did in like manner conclude it best to follow their example in making use of the very same words with them both, in these articles (which are very many) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs, and this we did, the more abundantly, to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion, as also with many others, whose orthodox confessions have been published to the world; on behalf of the Protestants in divers Nations and Cities: and also to convince all, that we have no itch to clog Religion with new words, but do readily acquiesce in that form of sound words, which hath been, in consent with the holy Scriptures, used by others before us; hereby declaring before God, Angels, & Men, our hearty agreement with them, in that wholesome Protestant Doctrine, which with so clear evidence of Scriptures they have asserted: some things indeed, are in some places added, some terms omitted, and some few changed, but these alterations are of that nature, as that we need not doubt, any charge or suspicion of unsoundness in the faith, from any of our brethren upon the account of them.⁶

4 I.e., the Westminster Assembly. See also *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by Authority sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1647).

5 I.e., *The Savoy Declaration and Platform of Polity* published as *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and Practised in the Congregational Churches in England* (London: John Field, 1658).

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 Country* (London: n.p. 1677), sigla

We must not miss this. These men assert that though the “method and manner of expression” is different in the two Confessions, the substance is the same. This common theological stance may be noted in several ways. Some men subscribed to both Confessions—William Kiffen, Hanserd Knollys, and Henry Forty as well as the father/son pairs Benjamin Coxe and Nehemiah Coxe and Edward Harrison and Thomas Harrison — and these men knew what they believed throughout these years. Secondly, some of the churches were the same churches, in which it is not unlikely that some of the members as well as the officers were the same people. Three decades is easily within the life span of most adults, even in the seventeenth century. In the third place, there was a public record that could be consulted to determine the truthfulness of this statement. Everything points to its veracity. Doesn’t it only seem right that we take these men at their word, recognizing that the substance of doctrine in these Confessions is the same? Both the 1644/46/51 and the 1677/88 Confessions, as understood by their original authors, teach the same principles. Anything less is at best a misunderstanding, and at worst a misrepresentation, of seventeenth-century Particular Baptist theology. This does not mean, of course, that there is no variation or progression within or between the Confessions nor that there is agreement on every detail of every statement. There are differences within the three versions of 1LCF. This is simply to say that a fair reading of these documents reveals theological concurrence.

Additionally, the editors of 2LCF indicate they have followed the method and structure of the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration to identify clearly with “the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion” and “that wholesome Protestant Doctrine.” The charges of heterodoxy leveled at points against 1LCF by its opponents are resolved by means of the clarifications incorporated into 2LCF.

Based on the claims in the epistle to 2LCF, the common subscribers, and the weaknesses identified by contemporaries in 1LCF, we must recognize that 1LCF is incomplete without 2LCF. The latter serves as interpreter of the former; 2LCF clarified and/or corrected the deficiencies of 1LCF—it effectively demonstrates the orthodoxy of its predecessor. Without the second Confession, the first might open the door for error—even possibly heresy, a strong word indeed. This may seem like an extreme statement, but contemporary theologians did not think so. We will encounter these problems at several points. May the Lord help us to look honestly at this Confession, rejoicing in the doctrines it teaches.

With the 375th anniversary of the 1646 revision of the First London Confession occurring in 2021, it seems like a suitable time to publish this brief exposition. I wish to express my appreciation for assistance rendered in its writing. Dr. Tom J. Nettles, who supervised my doctoral studies many years ago, graciously agreed to write the foreword. I am thankful for his guidance and friendship. It seemed to me especially appropriate to ask him for this favor, and I am thankful that he accepted. Many friends have graciously consented to read all or part of the manuscript, and their comments have aided me immensely. Some have suggested changes or pointed me to sources, enriching the contents significantly. Among those who have made substantial observations are Richard Barcellos, Chris Hanna, Tom Nettles, Robert Oliver, Sam Renihan, William Rosano, and Robert Strivens. Michael Brealey, librarian at Bristol Baptist College, Bristol, UK; Dr. David Wykes, director of Dr. William's Library, London; and Dr. John Coffey of the University of Leicester provided citation information. Thank you very much.

The book is dedicated to my sons, Nathan, Micah, and Sam. They are each an example of what it means to love the Lord with all your heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Glory be to God.

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