

To the Judicious and Impartial Reader is a trove of theological insight and research that situates the Second London Confession in its early modern context. Illuminated by documents and debates of the period, Dr. Renihan shines welcomed light on this important confession of faith. His diligent labors will benefit future generations of Reformed Baptists but it will also serve many others who profess the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration. Detailed in its analysis, thorough in its scope, and aimed at the heart, Dr. Renihan's work is must-reading.

J. V. Fesko
Harriet Barbour Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary | Jackson, Mississippi

James M. Renihan presents here a magisterial exposition of the Second London Confession of 1677/1689— the most influential confessional document in Baptist history. A work of solid scholarship and genuine theological retrieval, destined to become a classic. Highly recommended!

Timothy George
Distinguished Professor | Beeson Divinity School of Samford University
General editor of the 29-volume Reformation Commentary on Scripture.

This well-researched and historically sensitive exposition offers readers an indispensable guide to the Second London Baptist Confession. In clear, convincing fashion James Renihan explains what the Confession's language would have meant to its original readers, excavates the various backgrounds which informed its composition, and points contemporary readers towards a fresh appreciation of both the Confession itself and the faith it sets forth. In doing so, Renihan successfully locates seventeenth-century English Calvinistic Baptists within the wider tradition of Reformed Protestantism with which they would have identified.

Dr. Matthew C. Bingham
Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Church History | Oak Hill College

We are indebted to James Renihan for this masterful study of the 1689 Confession in its original historical context. His insights, drawn largely from primary sources and the fruit of more than twenty years of teaching on the Confession, illuminate and explain the text in a most helpful and edifying manner. We are led to understand the controversies of the 17th century, many of which are still relevant today. While we are grateful to Dr Renihan for his labours in historical theology, he reminds us that the ultimate goal is not veneration of the Confession itself; it is a means of leading us back to the Scriptures, to worship and adore the Lord and rejoice in our great salvation. There is much here to profit the reader.

Bill James
Principal | London Seminary

While not a Reformed Baptist myself, I have long appreciated the 2LBCF as a key artifact of Baptist history and theology. Its commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy and its bold proclamation of the formal and material principles of the Reformation, sola scriptura & justification by faith alone, are in and of themselves enough to recommend it as a model of a reformational and catholic (small c!) spirit. When we recognize this spirit alongside the confession's doctrinal precision and clarity and its exposition of congregational credobaptist distinctives, we see that it is a confessional model for all Christians, Baptist and non-Baptist alike. James Renihan's careful consideration of this foundational seventeenth century text elucidates its doctrinal beauty, truth, and goodness and brings it to bear on us today. Through retrieving this early Baptist statement of faith, Renihan aids all traditions in their pursuit of biblical and theological fidelity.

Dr. Matthew Y. Emerson
Professor of Religion | Dean of Theology, Arts, and Humanities
Oklahoma Baptist University

This book is required reading for anyone who wants to understand seventeenth reformed theology in general or what it means to be a reformed Baptist. The exposition of the confession sets it in its historical context and illuminates its meaning using the sources of the doctrine summarized in it. It also explores the structure of the confession expertly. Modern Baptists are theologically diverse to the point of confusion in many cases and this study of our origins can help bring clarity to the question of what it means to confess the faith of our forefathers. It is a must read for anyone interested in Baptist theology.

Craig A. Carter
Research Professor of Theology
Tyndale University.

In this second volume on Baptist Symbolics, Dr. Renihan gives us his "contextual historical exposition" of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. Renihan allows us to hear the discussions of the authors of our Confession as they endeavored to align themselves with historical confessional biblical Orthodoxy. He examines the words and phrases of the Confession with incisive clarity and relevance to our own current situation. Here we learn how to express biblical catholicity while humbly holding to our baptistic convictions that Renihan explains, defends, and endorses with convincing cogency.

Alan Dunn
Pastor | Grace Covenant Baptist Church
Flemington, New Jersey

James M. Renihan in his *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* has given to the Christian world a veritable exegesis of our Confession. This is the fruit of our beloved brother's love for Christ, Church, Scripture, and Confession – in that order – and I greatly regret not having this book before, especially since it has been my privilege to study and teach the Confession to the church which I serve. No Reformed Baptist should again teach the Confession before reading this marvelous Exposition.

Francisco Orozco
Pastor | Iglesia Bautista Reformada
Professor | Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua
Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua Mexico

James Renihan states, “I have made a conscious decision (with a few exceptions) not to interact with modern interpretations of the theological statements of the seventeenth century confessions which may differ from my own conclusions. The aim of this book is not primarily polemic but rather explanatory. From my perspective, the key question is what did the confession mean?” He has been faithful to his purpose and the result is a rich, comprehensive work of historical and systematic theology worthy of a lifetime of study and meditation. His engagement with the complete milieu of theological writing, beginning with the Particular Baptists of the seventeenth-century and including the Puritan literature that would have most influenced them, sets the confession in its most original doctrinal context and yields a rich and faithful engagement with the treasure of doctrinal truth so clearly expressed in it. He has given a four-fold structure to the entire confession, shown the logic of doctrinal connection between the heads within each of the four divisions, and shown the inner-connections within each paragraph of the various heads. Renihan also has incorporated the genre of “pious meditations” on the family of confessions to which the Second London Confession belongs and has thus been enabled to turn doctrine into devotion without becoming disconnected from the rigorously developed propositions of divine revelation. This work should be a consistently consulted treasure of truth-centered theological instruction and grace-centered, Christ centered, God-centered spiritual formation.

Tom J. Nettles
Louisville, KY

TO THE
JUDICIOUS
AND IMPARTIAL
READER

JAMES M. RENIHAN

TO THE
JUDICIOUS
AND IMPARTIAL
READER

BAPTIST
Symbolics
VOLUME 2

AN EXPOSITION OF THE
1689 LONDON
Baptist Confession of Faith



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Baptist Symbolics
Volume II

To the Judicious and Impartial Reader:
A Contextual-Historical Exposition
of the Second London Baptist
Confession of Faith

James M. Renihan

Foreword by
Chad Van Dixhoorn

*With the Heart man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the
Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation, Romans 10.10
Search the Scriptures, John 5.39*

Published according to Order.

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A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist
Confession of Faith

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*To the Trustees of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies,
IRBS Theological Seminary, and
International Reformed Baptist Seminary
With many thanks*

PREFACE

Courteous Reader,

“This tale grew in the telling.”¹ With these words, J. R. R. Tolkien began the foreword to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Though this book is not a “tale” in the sense Tolkien intended, I understand what he meant by his words. Long in the making, its contents have frequently expanded. Reining in the temptation to chase ideas has been a great challenge! It has been my pleasure to lecture on the Second London Confession of Faith for more than twenty years, and each time I have learned something new. Students have asked probing questions and written insightful papers; the many visitors to the classroom have likewise sharpened my understanding and aided my thinking. Many have urged me to turn my lecture notes into a book, but I have been reluctant to do so. This is simply because I have never considered myself adequately prepared to tackle this task in such a permanent form. Annual lectures may be updated, but words on a page gain permanency. I still would like more time to read, study, and contemplate the doctrines of the Confession, but I have come to the conclusion that I will never be satisfied with my preparation and now is the time to publish.

I can say truly that this has been a labor of love. Not so much love for the Confession itself, though I have a profound appreciation for it. Really, my love is for the beauty of Christian theology expressed in the Confession. There have been many moments when I have been moved to worship as I have considered and taught these doctrines. I remember one day, sitting in a window seat on a flight from Dallas/Fort Worth to Atlanta, reading the various Trinitarian technical terms in Richard Muller’s *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* and being deeply moved to praise the Lord. Several years ago in Escondido, California, everyone in the classroom was affected by the profundity of the doctrine of God, and we concluded that session singing Thomas Ken’s doxology:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

1 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 5.

I am keenly aware of the shortcomings of this book. Working through each section, chapter, and paragraph, it is obvious that there are many full-length monographs that could be written to explore the various doctrines in their historical contexts. Perhaps this book will serve as a catalyst for future students to penetrate more deeply into the theology expressed and the sources I have used. I have no doubt that there are other and better post-Reformation and Particular Baptist resources beyond those I have employed.

Many friends deserve credit for their assistance as this book has developed. Among those who have read and commented on various chapters are Richard Barcellos, Gatlin Bredeson, David Charles, James Dolezal, Crawford Gribben, Stefan Lindblad, Scott Meadows, Cameron Porter, Micah Renihan, Samuel Renihan, Chuck Rennie, Jeffrey Riddle, William Rosano, Robert Strivens, Scott Thomas, and Jason Walter. Two friends have greatly aided me with Latin quotations, Nick Pollock and Sue Strickland. I am grateful to all for help in improving this volume. I also wish to express my appreciation to Emily Burgoyne and Rebecca Shuttleworth of the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford; Michael Brealey, librarian at Bristol Baptist College, UK; as well as the librarians and staff at the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens of San Marino, California, for their assistance with my research. A special word of appreciation must be extended to Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn for writing the foreword to the book.

I am pleased to dedicate this work to the past and present Trustees of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies, IRBS Theological Seminary, and International Reformed Baptist Seminary who have served since its founding in 1998. Thank you, brothers, for your loving leadership, your care and concern for me and my family, and for your gentle prodding over many years. I can't count the number of times one or another of you has asked a variation of the question "How is the symbolics book coming along?" At last I can say, "Here it is." My hope is that it will further assist the retrieval of sound Scripture-based theology and contribute to the recovery of genuine theological piety.

Soli Deo Gloria.

James M. Renihan

FOREWORD

The Second London Baptist Confession, or 1689 Confession, is, next to the Bible, the most significant guiding document for Reformed Baptists. Widely used since its creation in the late seventeenth century, the Confession has long needed a fresh consideration by a capable and experienced scholar. James Renihan is such a man, and the Reformed world owes him a debt of gratitude for this second major study in Baptist symbolics.

It goes without saying that readers of the Confession will benefit from an experienced guide. In spite of its innocent appearance, even the title page of the Confession contains potential pitfalls: the “Second London Baptist Confession” was actually the third, and for that matter, the “1689 Confession” was not printed in 1689. In his helpful introduction, and in his earlier volume, Dr. Renihan explains such mysteries to the uninitiated, for this is a book that seeks to put this apparently timeless doctrinal text into its original historical context.

Judicious readers will appreciate the author’s abundant use of historical sources, many of them quoted at length. In fact, the Confession itself is explained in part through ever-widening references to key Baptist fathers, Congregationalist divines, and Presbyterian texts, each reference a support to his sustained argument that this Baptist confession is closely related to the Savoy Declaration and the Westminster Confession of Faith. All that is to say that there is a method to his massive use of post-Reformation sources: in faithfulness to the intentions of the Confession’s original authors and approvers, Dr. Renihan is illustrating the extent to which these “Calvinists” were closely related to other “Calvinists,” while differing in their church polities and understandings of New Testament ordinances.

The subtitle of this work promises historical insights, and this study is true to its advertisements. Nonetheless, this large volume remains a commentary on a doctrinal statement. Impartial readers of this volume will almost certainly learn something new in the realm of theology. Renihan explains doctrines, introduces us to important theological terms and distinctions, and shows from the Scriptures why Baptists and others held—and still hold—to teachings found in these classic chapters. They will also learn a few heresies, for Dr. Renihan discusses both ancient heresies and seventeenth-century Baptist heresies that the authors of this confession rejected.

If the catholic spirit of this book on Baptist symbolics is evidenced in the truths celebrated and in the errors refuted, it is most obviously displayed in the conclusion to each chapter. Here the author offers for our meditation scriptural passages related to the chapter's theme. But he also includes many prayers from the writings of John Calvin and an anonymous commentator on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, as well as prayers and meditations not only by the Baptist William Kiffen (in the chapter on baptism) but also by Theodore Beza, the Puritan Edward Dering, and the Presbyterians Richard Rogers and Thomas Watson. The effect of these additions to the commentary is to increase the doxological and devotional tone of a work already tending toward the glory of God and the enjoyment of the reader.

I am thankful to James for giving me early access to this work. This is a volume that theologians and historians will consult with profit, and I encourage students, ministers, and theological libraries to secure copies of both volumes on Baptist symbolics, as they are likely to remain the standard reference works in this field for many years.

Chad Van Dixhoorn

June 1, 2022

Westminster Theological Seminary

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ABBREVIATIONS

1LCF	<i>First London Confession of Faith</i>
1LCF44	<i>First London Confession of Faith 1644 Edition</i>
1LCF46	<i>First London Confession of Faith 1646 Edition</i>
2LCF	<i>Second London Confession of Faith</i>
ALRPCO	<i>Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford</i>
ARPB	<i>Association Records of the Particular Baptists</i>
BRGW	<i>The Breach Repaired in God's Worship</i>
Calamy	<i>Calamy Revised</i>
CMB	<i>Church Minute Book</i>
CUP	<i>Cambridge University Press</i>
DLGTT	<i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms (2nd edition)</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HEB	<i>History of the English Baptists</i>
Marrow	<i>The Marrow of Sacred Divinity</i>
ODCC	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary (Electronic edition)</i>
OHEMT	<i>Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800</i>
OUP	<i>Oxford University Press</i>
PRRD	<i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i>
RBAP	<i>Reformed Baptist Academic Press</i>
Savoy	<i>Savoy Declaration of Faith</i>
SCCP	<i>Southern California Reformed Baptist Pastors' Conference Papers</i>
TVOE	<i>Truth's Victory over Error</i>
WCF	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>
WLC	<i>Westminster Larger Catechism</i>
WSC	<i>Westminster Shorter Catechism</i>

For clarification:

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

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

Orthography of primary sources (including inconsistencies in capitalization, etc.) has been maintained except where noted. In an attempt to maintain consistency with seventeenth-century conventions, I have used a period (full stop) rather than a colon in designations of Scripture texts and chapter/paragraph locations within the Confession. Thus, John 3.16 rather than John 3:16 and 2LCF 1.6 rather than 2LCF 1:6. If a source differs from this style choice, I have maintained the source's usage. In several cases, I have corrected punctuation in the scripture references accompanying the paragraphs of the Confession. I have also chosen to replicate the format of the title of each chapter: i.e., CHAP. I.

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, this usage in texts such as 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

On the 26th of August, 1677, the following entry was recorded in the manuscript minute book of London's Petty France Church: "It was agreed that a Confession of faith, wth the Appendix thereto having bene read & considered by the Bre: should be published."¹ This is the first known literary reference to what has become popularly known as the *1689 Confession of Faith*. It arose in a specific context and reflected the theological commitments and understanding of the members of the churches that first published it. The notation that the document had been "read and considered" by the people of the church ("the Bre[thren]") is significant, in that it demonstrates the contextual nature of the affirmations contained in its thirty-two chapters. The publication was explicitly intended to provide contemporary congregants with a clear doctrinal compass for their lives.

This second volume of *Baptist Symbolics* is a contextual-historical exposition of the contents of the most important and widely accepted of all Baptist confessions of faith, the Second London Baptist Confession. It was first published in 1677 (without identifying a printer) "put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country."² A second edition with identical contents seems to have been published the same year, the only difference being that publication information is provided: "London: Printed for Benjamin Harris, and are to be sold at his Shop at the Stationers Arms in Sweetings Rents, in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1677." A third edition came forth from John Harris's print shop in 1688 with the notation "Aug. 15. 1688. Licensed, and Entered according to Order," indicating that the accession of

1 London Metropolitan Archives, Memoranda and minutes of Church Meetings and Membership Lists of the Congregations Successively meeting at Petty France, Westminster; Artillery Lane, Spitalfields; Walbrook; and Turner's Hall, Philpot Lane, 1675 - 1727. Reference Code: CLC/179/MS20228/001B. A correction in this title is necessary. It confuses the Petty France in Westminster near Buckingham Palace with the former Petty France which was located just outside the walls of London near New Broad Street and All Hallows-on-the-Wall Church. Hereinafter, this book is referred to as "Petty France *CMB*."

2 *A Confession of Faith* (London: Printed in the Year 1677), title page. The three earliest editions included an epistle *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader* and an *Appendix*, which expanded the defense of credobaptism.

William and Mary to the throne of England permitted greater freedom of the press to religious dissenters.³ A fourth printing (labelled “The Third Edition”) without the Appendix affixed to the previous editions was released in 1699. Despite the popular title *1689 Confession*, there is no extant evidence that the Confession was published in 1689. It seems to have acquired this designation because it was subscribed at the 1689 London General Assembly.

I have purposely called this a “contextual-historical exposition.” Each of these words has specific reference. In the introduction to the first volume of this series I provided a brief explanation of my methodology. Adapting that same language provides a helpful *raison d’être* for the approach I have used in this book. My process 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 is nearly three and a half 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 the Confession of many seventeenth-century churches, and they have a right to define its meaning. Christian theology has moved forward in the last 350 years; the temptation today is to read old documents such as this as if they belonged 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 adopting churches to be able to read this book and recognize my interpretation. For this reason, I rely heavily on historical citations from seventeenth- (and even sixteenth-) century primary sources. This is unusual, for the current trend in historical studies is to summarize sources rather than to incorporate them into the body of the work. While I appreciate the reasons for this, it does not fit my intentions. Writing a study in historical theology, I want my reader to have access to the same data I have used.

A key question to ask when evaluating background material for the Confession’s doctrinal assertions is the relative importance of that source for the expression of the principle. Is the theological expression of the earlier document relevant to the language of the Confession? This is not always an easy or simple query to answer. In seeking to draw upon the vast resources available, I have developed something of a hierarchy of usefulness. It is not applied in a hard and fast sense, but I have found it beneficial. In the first place, any resources from Particular Baptist authors and churches, especially

3 Edward Arber’s *The Term Catalogs* (London: Privately Printed, 1905), 2:237 records the publication of this edition during the 1688 “Michaelmas Term” (late summer/autumn). The earlier versions do not appear in his records for 1677. In all likelihood, the unregistered nature of these two editions accounts for this lacuna.

those from the 1640s until the first decade of the eighteenth century, have been given pride of place. Since these men and their congregations were the first generation of subscribers, and held a very high view of confessional subscription, their writings on doctrinal topics provide useful expositions of various loci.⁴ Published books and tracts, manuscript documents in numerous libraries, and even church minute books have been employed. There is, however, a certain level of frustration in this, though this consternation also serves a useful purpose. The majority of Particular Baptist writings were, as might be expected, related to an exposition of, apology for, and defense of their practice of believer's baptism. They often found themselves upholding a ritual that was rejected and sometimes attacked by Puritan worthies. This means that frequently these authors have little to say extensively about other doctrinal and practical matters. Of course, there are some resources from the baptistic congregationalists which address broader theological topics, but perhaps not so many as one would like. In contrast, the benefit of this fact is that it indicates there was little need for positive expositions of the doctrines commonly held with others, so that the writings of the wider Puritan community suffice in support of a shared theology. The Baptists make this evident when they state, in the letter appended to the front of the Confession, that with reference to Savoy and WCF,

We did readily conclude it best to retain the same *order* in our present confession: and also, when we observed that those last mentioned [Savoy], 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 [WCF] 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

4 Writing in 1692 in reference to a controversy surrounding Benjamin Keach, William Kiffen and other Particular Baptist ministers used strong language to express their conviction about subscription: "They must needs be the grossest sort of hypocrites, in professing the contrary by their profession of faith, and yet believing and practicing quite otherwise to what they solemnly professed as their faith in the matter." See William Kiffen, Robert Steed, George Barrett and Edward Man, *A Serious Answer to a Late Book, Stiled, A Reply to Mr. Robert Steed's Epistle concerning Singing* (London: Printed in the Year, 1692), 16-19.

itch to clogge 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.⁵

These sentences point the reader to the wider post-Reformation tradition. The Baptists themselves state that on many doctrinal heads, they agree with the reigning post-Reformation theological climate. For this reason, one may consult the orthodox writings of the era in order to shed light on the articles of the Confession. Familiarity with the earlier expositions, theological writings, and confessions of post-Reformation and English Puritan theology aids the reader's understanding of the theological context of the Confession. As Richard Muller has stated, "The Baptist churches, whether in England or in America, are certainly to be regarded as branches of the Reformed movement."⁶ The direct family resemblance between WCF, Savoy, and 2LCF is unmistakable. Because of this taxonomy, locating 2LCF as a species within the genus of Reformed theology is straightforward.

Even within this broader circle of material, I have observed an order of preference. When the language of 2LCF agrees with WCF or Savoy, I have consulted works by theologians who were present at the Westminster Assembly or the Savoy Synod, followed by those who are known to have subscribed to the confessions published by these gatherings. As a result, I have employed the insights of these authors to enlighten the language of 2LCF. When these writers point to the larger body of contemporary and/or post-Reformation divinity, I have followed their trail and used those texts.

One might illustrate this with concentric circles—the innermost contains the Baptist writings, next are the WCF and Savoy members supplemented with subscribers to these confessions, encompassed by the wider post-Reformation tradition, and at its widest, the broad sweep of Christian theology. It is common to find Particular Baptist authors, in their published works, citing the ancient Fathers, medieval theologians, and even Roman Catholic authors when their views were useful. In fact, it is surprising to note the perhaps unexpected reliance on little-known authors to support some doctrinal points. For example, Nehemiah Coxe occasionally refers to such as the Dominican

5 *A Confession of Faith, sigla A3 recto and verso.*

6 Richard Muller, "Reformed Theology between 1600 and 1800," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*, ed. Ulrich Lehner, Richard Muller and A.G. Roeber. (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 169.

Pagninus, the Frenchman Johannes Mercerus, the Orientalist Benedictus Arias Montanus, and the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius; Benjamin Keach cites sources as diverse as Pliny the Elder, Justin Martyr, Abraham Scultetus, and Joseph Scaliger.⁷ The methodology of the Baptists was not unlike that of the Westminster divine Francis Cheynell who wrote,

We read of the eternal Godhead in the Book of the Creature, Rom. 1. 20. and therefore I prize Philosophy because it is subservient to Divinity; nay that Philosophy which manifests the Eternal Power and God-head of our great Creator is indeed and Truth, nothing else but Natural Divinity: This Natural Divinity is called *The truth*, Rom. 1. 18. and it is a *Divine Truth*, because it doth declare το γνωστόν τοῦ θεοῦ, all that can be known of God by the light of nature, Rom. 1. 19, 20. I subscribe to that of *Clemens Alexandrinus*: We ought not to swear allegiance to any sect of Philosophers, whether Stoicks, Epicures, Platonists or Peripatetiques, but we must select and embrace whatsoever is true and faithfully delivered concerning God by any Sect; and *the Truth selected out of all Sects is not vaine Philosophy, but Natural Divinity*. There is something of the Image of God & Law of Nature written in our hearts and consciences, as is evident by common experience and plain testimonies of the world of God, and therefore the Scripture doth not condemn all Philosophy, but vain Philosophy, *Colos. 2*.⁸

Seventeenth-century Reformed authors were not afraid to “spoil the Egyptians,” and while writings penned by confessional Presbyterians and Congregationalists should never be thought of as “Egyptians,” nonetheless any useful information in support of a doctrine was to be employed. For these reasons, I have at times extended the circle of reference in my exposition to include theologians from similar categories.⁹

7 Coxe’s citations are found in his *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errors asserted by Thomas Collier* (London: Nathaniel Ponder, 1677), and seem to be from first-hand acquaintance with these authors, while Keach’s (scattered throughout his *Tropologia*) to some degree seem to rely on Edward Leigh’s *Critica Sacra* (London: William Crook, 1654).

8 Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Trinitie of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1650), 1-2.

9 In a fascinating concurrence, the General Baptist *Orthodox Creed* of 1679 mirrors 2LCF. Though not widely accepted as a statement of General Baptist faith, it is nevertheless an intriguing attempt to locate and provide at least a portion of these churches with an orthodox identity. Its introductory *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader* (a title identical to the Particular Baptist Confession published two years previously) states that it labors “to avoid the dangerous rocks of Pelagianism, Antinomianism, Arminianism, and the Remonstrants.” This confession seems to have been penned by Thomas Monck, a man deeply concerned with

Likewise, whenever possible, I have chosen to cite earlier printed editions of seventeenth-century works rather than more recent reprints. Many reprints have undergone subtle revisions not noted by their editors. For example, consider this comment from Samuel Bolton’s 1645 work *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*:

1645 edition ¹⁰	1978 Banner of Truth “Puritan Paperbacks” edition ¹¹
<p>But of this Christ doth not here speake, this is our <i>bondage</i>, and not our <i>freedom</i> as I shall show you.</p> <p>Fourthly, There is a <i>spirituall</i> and heavenly freedom; a freedom <i>purchased</i> by Christ, <i>revealed</i> in the Gospel, <i>conveyed</i> to the Saints, as the great <i>dowry</i> of Christ to his Church and Spouse.</p> <p>There are two great things Christ hath intrusted into the hands of his Church: First, <i>Christian Faith</i>. Secondly, <i>Christian liberty</i>. And as we are to contend earnestly for the <i>maintenance</i> of the faith, as the Apostle saith, <i>Jude 3</i>, so also for the <i>maintenance</i> of Christian libertie, against all oppugners and underminers of it. Gal. 5.1. <i>Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made you free.</i></p>	<p>But of this Christ does not here speak. This is our bondage, not our freedom, as I shall show later.</p> <p>It is a spiritual and heavenly freedom of which our text speaks, a freedom purchased by Christ, revealed in the Gospel, and conveyed to the saints of God as the great dowry of Christ to His Church and Spouse.</p> <p>Two great things Christ has entrusted into the hands of His Church—Christian faith and Christian liberty. Just as we are to contend earnestly for the maintenance of the faith (Jude 3), so also for the maintenance of Christian liberty, and that against all who would oppose and undermine it: ‘Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free’ (Gal. 5:1).</p>

some of the theological innovations accepted in certain General Baptist circles. Apparently, the sphere of General Baptist churches around Thomas Monck believed that clear expressions of orthodoxy would aid their congregations. Sadly, the *Orthodox Creed* was allowed to die the death of neglect. See *An Orthodox Creed or A Protestant Confession of Faith*, (London, 1679). This document has fifty articles (2LCF has thirty-two) and is clearly intended for General Baptist churches with their distinctive emphases; nevertheless, it frequently employs the specific language of 2LCF. As an example, in its first “Article” one reads, “We verily believe, that there is but one, only living and true God, whose subsistence is in and of himself, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself...” (page 1). This phraseology is clearly taken from 2LCF, since the latter two clauses are not in WCF or Savoy. The resemblance to 2LCF is clear at many places in the document. A transcription of this creed may be found at <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/orthodox-creed.pdf>. Cf. Clint Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy* (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2020), 40-44.

10 Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London: Philemon Stephens, 1645), 8.

11 Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978 Puritan Paperbacks edition), 20.

In this example, while the sense is basically the same, there are subtle changes. The emphases of the italicized terms in the 1645 edition have been lost and punctuation has been altered. Likewise, Bolton's outline (*fourthly*) has been ignored.¹² Since in some cases alterations may affect the sense of a passage or an author's emphases, I have preferred the earliest form of primary sources whenever possible.

My method also means that I have purposely limited interaction with secondary sources. There are a multitude of monographs, journal articles, and essays written on the many theological topics of the post-Reformation era. I make extensive use of numerous resources, but seldom engage them at any length. While there is a legitimate place for discussion and debate in scholarly literature, to delve into such dialogues would distract from my purpose. The citations provided will assist the reader in exploring specific issues further. Similarly, I have made a conscious decision (with a few exceptions) not to interact with modern interpretations of the theological statements of the seventeenth-century confessions which may differ from my own conclusions. The aim of this book is not primarily polemic but rather explanatory. From my perspective, the key question is *what did the Confession mean* to its readers in its own context. If I have accurately represented that milieu, I will have accomplished my purpose. I ask, though, that the modern reader permit me the occasional indulgence of an appreciative comment on the text. I do subscribe to this Confession as an accurate expression of the teaching of Scripture. There are times when I must express my enthusiasm! At the same time, I hope that if modern readers disagree with statements in the Confession *as they were understood by seventeenth-century subscribers*, they will do so honestly. Certainly, there is a place to differ with the doctrinal emphases or meanings of the first editors and churches but doing so must acknowledge the fact of dissent. To read this (or any other) historical document and simply say, "I understand it differently," without conceding that one's interpretation departs from the context in which the doctrines were published is post-modern—probably applied unconsciously, but not essentially different from the "what does this mean to you?" method used in many popular home Bible study gatherings. It is an example of the reader-response theory of interpreting texts. Surely this cannot be when contemplating theological truth.

12 The "Puritan Paperbacks" edition makes other unhelpful choices. Bolton appended a translation of John Cameron's *Theses* on the nature of the Mosaic covenant to his book. He noted that he has been "in some good measure satisfied" with Cameron's thoughts and has "annexed it to do the like for thee." Bolton frequently cites Cameron in the body of the book. The "Puritan Paperbacks" edition omits all of this. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 351.

As we ponder the contents of the Confession as a whole, we do well to consider Francis Cheynell's observation:

All points of Doctrine revealed in Scripture are profitable, and precious truths; and every man is obliged to receive, beleeve and embrace every truth made known to him in, and by the holy Scriptures; Because all truths contained in Scripture are of equall credit *in respect of the Authority of the Revealer*; but all truths are not of equall necessity, weight and importance *in respect of the Nature and Matter of the points revealed*. There is a vast difference between the nature, matter, weight and importance of these two Propositions;

1. *Paul* left his Cloak, Books and Parchments at *Troas*, 2 *Tim.* 4.13.
2. Jesus Christ is God and man, the only Mediatour between God and man, the only and All-sufficient Saviour of his people from their sins.

The first of these Propositions cannot be refused, because it is grounded upon clear Scripture, and *he who rejects a point of the least concernment*, which he *knowes* to be revealed in Scripture, doth not indeed and truth beleeve and embrace *any truth at all*, no not truths which are of the *highest concernment*, upon the *right ground and true reason*, namely *because God hath revealed them to us in the holy Scriptures of truth*.

A Fundamentall point is of such high concernment, that whosoever is ignorant of it is condemned for his meere *Negative* Infidelity; and whosoever doth refuse to beleeve it, is condemned for his *Positive* Infidelity, because he rejects a truth delivered upon the Authority of God, and a *truth so highly credible, that it is necessary to be known, and beleeved for his own salvation*. Our Faith, Piety, Hope, Charity, Salvation, are all grounded upon these necessary and Fundamentall truths.

Those truths or points of Doctrine are Fundamentall, without the plaine and expresse knowledge whereof we can neither savingly beleeve in Christ, nor rightly worship God in Christ to the obtaining of eternall life.¹³

This is a point well taken and worthy of reflection in approaching a document such as a confession of faith. While all propositions in the document

¹³ Cheynell, *The Divine Trinitie*, 248-250.

are important, and for those who subscribe to that confession are necessary to be believed, still some doctrines and/or practices are more central than others. There are fundamental articles of faith which must be received, and there are others of equal clarity in Scripture but that do not carry the same necessity for saving faith.¹⁴ Several examples come to mind. The juxtaposition of the eleventh and twelfth chapters helps us. The earlier article, *Of Justification*, has since the Reformation been recognized by many as the “article of a standing or falling church.”¹⁵ No serious Reformed believer would doubt the foundational significance of a clear and precise statement of this doctrine. On the other hand, the following chapter, *Of Adoption*, while articulating a profound blessing related to and resulting from justification by faith alone, does not carry the same magnitude in the full expression of Christian doctrine. Errors about justification by faith alone are damning; faulty notions of adoption are not. Likewise, while Christians must properly confess the doctrines of chapter eight, *Of Christ the Mediator*, they may recognize that matters related to oaths and vows (chapter twenty-three) or the civil magistrate (chapter twenty-four), while important in their place (and in some ways related to Christ’s office as mediator), are not of the same value for Christian theology.¹⁶ Those who deny Christ’s full deity and true humanity united in one person are outside the pale of orthodox belief, while differences on the proper use of oaths or the relation of church and state have far less significance.

Even changes in culture may raise the profile of a particular doctrinal position as expressed in a confession. In Western society for most of the twentieth century, marriage was defined and practiced according to traditional Christian values. Chapter twenty-five of 2LCF, *Of Marriage*, based on Scripture, simply expressed the prevailing convictions about marriage in the Western social order at large. As cultural norms changed and the practice of marriage was diminished and its definition altered, the value of this chapter increased. It aids churches and Christians in affirming convictions about this institution based on the Word of God.

It is possible to identify some editing processes used in the production of 2LCF. A portrait of the scene would depict at least two men (perhaps Nehemiah Coxe and William Collins of the Petty France church) seated at a table with a variety of published materials nearby, and perhaps on shelves behind. The books on the table would include a copy of the commonly used

14 Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 40. See the exposition of chapter 26.2 below.

15 Muller, *DLGTT*, 41.

16 See Appendix B.

Authorized Version of the Bible, an edition of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Platform of Polity from 1658,¹⁷ and the Westminster Confession of Faith, almost certainly the imprint published by Parliament in 1648.¹⁸ Beside these would have been a copy of the First London Confession in its 1646 version. These are the primary sources woven together to create 2LCF.

Given the historical and theological context of the Confession, it is possible to speculate on other relevant sources used by the editors. They clearly had facility in Hebrew, Greek (see the comment at proof text (q) at 26.9), and Latin, suggesting that copies of the Scriptures in the original languages were likely at hand, as well as important post-Reformation writings in Latin. Various works of John Owen seem to stand behind assorted statements or phrases in the text, along with Thomas Goodwin, Francis Cheynell, and Edward Leigh. John Lightfoot is cited at length in the appendix, while it is probable that well-known treatments of Scripture such as Matthew Poole's *Synopsis Criticorum*, the *English Annotations*, and expositions of various books of the Bible were consulted.¹⁹

Several editorial principles may be ascertained from close study. To a large degree, 2LCF follows Savoy when it makes emendations to WCF. There are,

17 The Savoy Declaration of Faith and its accompanying guide for the institution of churches (known commonly as the *Platform of Polity*) are products of a synod of Congregationalist theologians held in London in 1658. The Savoy Declaration of Faith is closely based on the Westminster Confession of Faith. References throughout this present work to these two sources will be styled as "Savoy" (or "the Savoy Declaration") and "*Savoy Platform of Polity*." See *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England; agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, Octob. 12. 1658*. (London: John Field, 1658).

18 When WCF was first presented to Parliament, many Members of Parliament were not satisfied with its form, and produced a slightly different version with "alterations." This edition was published in late June 1648. Its title page reads *Articles of Christian Religion, Approved and Passed by both Houses of Parliament, After Advice had with the Assembly of Divines by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster* (London: Edward Husband, 1648). This was the edition used by the Savoy divines when they published the Savoy Declaration: "In drawing up this *Confession of Faith*, we have had before us the *Articles of Religion*, approved and passed by both houses of Parliament, after advice had with an *Assembly of Divines*." *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England*, sigla b verso. This "Parliamentary" version differs from the more common version available today—I call it the "Scottish" version since it is frequently imprinted from Scotland—in a variety of ways, perhaps most significant for 2LCF in the deletion of the WCF paragraphs on divorce from WCF chapter twenty-four Savoy/2LCF chapter twenty-five.

19 Matthaëi Poli, *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae* (Londini: J. Flesher and T. Roycroft, 1669); Certain Learned Divines, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* (London: John Legat, 1645). Throughout this book, I refer to this publication as "the *English Annotations*."

however, at least eleven instances where 2LCF restores the readings of WCF, sometimes by addition, sometimes by subtraction of words or phrases used by Savoy: 6.1, 10.3, 16.1, 18.2, 21.1, 22.5, 27.2 (twice), 30.2, and 32.3. Certain of these alterations are obvious, others subtle.

In some cases, changes to phrases or sentences are simply clarifications arising from contemporary circumstances. For example, in chapter eight, a lengthy statement about Christ's humanity supplements the language of WCF and Savoy. This is probably to express orthodoxy and distinguish the subscribing churches from the heresies of Matthew Caffyn (see 8.2). Other modifications are expansions of thought in response to contemporary issues (see 11.1). On matters related to the distinctive doctrines and practices of the baptized churches, we expect alterations (cf. 28.1-2, 29.1-4). Like most other published volumes of the era, there are printer's errors. In 8.6, a proof text is listed as 1 Corinthians 4.10, a verse that has nothing to do with the point made! But when 1 Corinthians 10.4 is consulted, the proof text makes sense. Despite unintentional mistakes such as these, it may be said that 2LCF was carefully edited and reflects the best of Particular Baptist thinking. It is a clear expression of the subscribers' understanding of and commitment to "wholesome Protestant doctrine."²⁰

It is advantageous to consider the internal structure of the Confession.²¹ The document may be considered in four main units. In the four divisions, the first chapter of each gives the foundation, which is then developed in the following chapters. That structure aids in thinking through the teaching of the section. It is as if the text says, "Here is the basic doctrine, and this is how it is worked out in various ways." Interestingly enough, almost every chapter is structured similarly to the larger unit. The first paragraph of the chapter gives the basic doctrine, and the subsequent paragraphs flesh out various aspects of that doctrine. There are one or two exceptions, but almost always, that is the case.

Additionally, it is imperative to note that 2LCF is a woven document. It must be read back and forth. What I mean by this is that, in the early part of the Confession of Faith, one finds foundational doctrines that prepare the way for things that will be discussed in detail later. At all times the reader should ask the question when studying the earlier portions of the Confession, "What doctrine does this anticipate that may appear later on?" Later in the Confession, the questions, "What does this fulfill? To what does this point

²⁰ See the Epistle below.

²¹ This material is an adapted version of comments found in James M. Renihan, *A Toolkit for Confessions* (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2017), 63-83.

backward? What is the basis, earlier in the Confession, for this?” are appropriate. It must be read back and forth. Sometimes students approach the thirty-two chapters of 2LCF as if they were individual segments of doctrine without relationship to each other, when actually, its theology is very tightly woven together. Readers ought always to ask the question, “What does this anticipate?” or, “What does this fulfill?” forth and back, back and forth. Sometimes the responses will be found close together. Sometimes they will be far apart. For example, the question of the immortality of the soul, which is addressed in 4.2, is very important when coming to the doctrine of the resurrection in chapter thirty-one. What is taught there about the immortality of the soul is based upon what is expressed in chapter four on creation. Students must regularly think back and forth about the doctrines in the Confession. Another illustration might be to consider the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There is no chapter devoted to the third person of the Trinity (nor to the first person), but there is much teaching about the Holy Spirit knit into the fabric of the document. Like looking at a beautiful tapestry, we may notice the theme-strands about God’s Spirit throughout.

Outline of the Confession²²

While there is no extant evidence to demonstrate that the framers of the Confession approached their work with outlines in mind, it may be helpful to think through and propose an outline of the Confession. I freely admit that my outline is imposed on the document and could be adjusted at some points. Likewise, the divisions between “units” are not hard and fast and must not be considered strict segmentations. Nevertheless, it has been helpful to me to think in terms of the larger picture and its constituent parts. As I contemplate the Confession and the development of doctrine within its chapters, I find the outline method useful.

The document naturally divides into four parts: 1) the first six chapters, which may be titled “First Principles”; 2) “The Covenant,” which contains chapters 7–20; 3) “God-Centered Living: Freedom and Boundaries,” comprising chapters 21–30; and, finally, 4) “The World to Come,” chapters thirty-one and thirty-two.

Unit 1: First Principles

“First Principles” includes chapters 1–6. It commences with *Of the Holy Scriptures*. In Reformed orthodox theology, this is called the *principium cognoscendi*, the principle of knowing. Muller’s *Dictionary* defines it as “the ground or

²² See the outline in alphanumeric format in Appendix A below.

basis upon which something is known.”²³ Why does this confession of faith begin with a chapter on the Scriptures? Because one cannot know about subsequent confessional doctrines such as the triunity of God or His plan of salvation without the Word of God. This is classic Reformed scholastic theology, to commence with a chapter on the Scriptures, laying the foundation, and giving the building blocks from which the rest of the doctrines are constructed. The authors are making a crucial statement: everything that comes afterward is based upon, is found in, and comes out of Holy Scripture.

The second element of First Principles is the doctrine of God (which actually incorporates chapters 2-5). This is the *principium essendi*, the principle of being, which Muller defines as “the ground or basis through which something is.”²⁴ We proceed from the principle of knowing to the principle of being, presenting the reality of who God is. If we don’t understand this principle correctly, we cannot move forward with theology at all. Again, this is classic Reformed orthodox scholastic theology in confessional form. In the seventeenth century, everyone would have recognized this immediately.

In the doctrine of God, we find chapter two, Of God and of the Holy Trinity, which speaks to God’s nature, and chapter three, Of God’s Decree, which speaks of the eternal purposes of God. Perhaps it is useful to pause for just a moment to examine the order of the chapters and the doctrines included in them. At this point in its exposition of doctrine, the Baptist Catechism (like its parent document, the Westminster Shorter Catechism) asks the question, “What are the decrees of God?” and answers, “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”²⁵ The next question is important: “How doth God execute his decrees?” The answer is, “God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.”

Consider this structure. The principle of knowledge—the Holy Scriptures—is followed by the principle of being: God’s nature, God’s decree, and the execution of the decree in the works of creation and providence in the next chapters, *Of Creation* and *Of Divine Providence*. In Puritan theology these were considered foundational doctrines. There is God’s being as one and three—His work *ad intra*—and His work *ad extra* in creation and providence. Next comes a necessary doctrine preparing to move forward, the chapter *Of the*

23 Muller, *DLGTT*, 290.

24 Muller, *DLGTT*, 290.

25 “Baptist Catechism” is the popular name for the catechetical summary of the Confession’s doctrine, published in 1693 to summarize the Confession for use in families. The official title: *A Brief Instruction in the Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 5th ed., 1695).

Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof. These are the first principles, the foundation upon which to begin to build a system of theology.

Unit 2: The Covenant

God's work *ad extra* continues to be addressed in unit two, which speaks of the plan, accomplishment, and application of redemption by way of covenant. B. B. Warfield, in his work *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work*, writes about "the architectonic principle . . ." of the Westminster Confession. This simply means the skeleton, the architecture, the two-by-fours, of the Confession.

The architectonic principle of the Westminster Confession is supplied by the schematization of the Federal [covenant] theology, which had obtained by this time in Britain, as on the Continent, a dominant position as the most commodious mode of presenting the *corpus* of Reformed doctrine.²⁶

Warfield's point is that the skeleton of this part of the Confession is the doctrine of the covenant. This is significant, for it provides the clue to the structure of chapters 7–20. Salvation is accomplished by means of covenant. Chapter seven, *Of God's Covenant*, (remembering that the first chapter at the head of the unit provides the basic doctrine) describes to us, from a Baptist perspective, the nature of covenant theology. God's covenant is defined in chapter seven, followed by *Of Christ the Mediator*, the covenant head. Significantly, the end of chapter seven and the beginning of chapter eight are intimately tied together by reference to the covenant of redemption. Chapter eight is placed purposely to speak about Christ as the head of the covenant. He is the one who brings God's purpose in covenant to pass.

Then, chapter nine, *Of Free Will*, presents the covenantal setting, which is what the covenant is about: God's purpose of salvation. The unit focuses on the covenant of grace, and as it proceeds to speak about salvation, it must first address a necessary preliminary doctrine, namely, man's will in its four states: 1) as created, 2) as fallen and in need of covenantal grace, 3) as renewed as exercised in covenantal grace, and 4) as perfected. These three chapters (7–9) prepare the way for a discussion of salvation. The first, chapter seven, lays down the basis. Chapter eight speaks of Christ. Chapter nine provides information about the states of humanity, helping us to move forward into the doctrine of salvation.

26 B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981 reprint), 56. We must remember that 2LCF follows the structure of WCF, thus the quotation applies to both confessions.

One might notice that the order of chapters 10–18 in 2LCF does not follow the typical *ordo salutis*.²⁷ The most obvious way to demonstrate this is to notice that chapter eleven, *Of Justification*, precedes chapter fourteen, *Of Saving Faith*. Usually, when considering the *ordo salutis*, faith, which is the instrument of justification, is presented prior to contemplating justification. Why did the confessors place justification before faith? It is an interesting question, the answer to which provides a specific reason for the way chapters 10–18 of the Confession are ordered. This subsection addresses the blessings of salvation in two particular subcategories.

Chapters 10–13 deal with what might be called covenant blessings. That is, they describe the acts of God on behalf of His people to save them. Richard Muller, in his *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, under the heading *foedus monopleuron*, says this about the covenant of grace: “*one-sided or one-way covenant*; the covenant as bestowed by God and exhibiting his will toward man.”²⁸ Chapters 10–13 present the covenant of grace from the divine perspective, regarding it as a one-sided covenant. As the first sub-section to consider the blessings of salvation, priority is given to the acts of God in saving His people: chapter ten, *Of Effectual Calling*—an act of God the Holy Spirit; chapter eleven, *Of Justification*—God who justifies by Christ; chapter twelve, *Of Adoption*—God who adopts believers; chapter thirteen, *Of Sanctification*—God’s work of setting believers apart for Himself. Thus, the covenant blessings that come in salvation are presented from the divine perspective, specifically that which God does. The blessings of salvation always begin with God.

Yet, in the next subcategory are found what might be called covenant graces, the acts of humans. Again, from Muller at the entry *foedus dipleuron*:

Two-sided, or bilateral, covenant. At the point at which a human being enters into God’s covenant, receives the terms established by God, and, in effect, becomes a partner in covenant with God, the *foedus operum* and *foedus gratiae* can be termed bilateral covenants. . . . Since the covenant is ordained by God alone and cannot be entered by fallen humanity unless God provides the grace necessary to regenerate the will and draw a person into covenant, the covenant is initially unilateral; but once an individual is drawn into the covenant and the will is regenerated, . . . the covenant appears as bilateral.²⁹

27 *Ordo salutis* is a Latin term which we might translate “order of salvation.” Theologians use it to describe the theological order in which God gives the blessings of salvation to us. For example, a typical *ordo salutis* list might be effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, assurance, glorification.

28 Muller, *DLGTT*, 129.

29 Muller, *DLGTT*, 127.

The same covenant is considered from the human perspective. After God has acted, what do people do? The order of the chapters is fascinating material. Covenant graces, or man's acts, are expounded in chapter fourteen, Of Saving Faith. Who believes? People do. Of course, saving faith must be divinely granted; the Puritan theologians did not become Pelagians at this point. God grants the faith, but humans are the ones who believe. Chapter fifteen, Of Repentance unto Life and Salvation, speaks of faith's twin grace, again a divinely granted act of humans. Chapter sixteen, Of Good Works, describes the post-conversion acts of believers by the power of God's Holy Spirit working according to the Word, and chapter seventeen, Of the Perseverance of the Saints, continues the thread. Notice it's not the preservation of the saints; it's the perseverance of the saints. Christians are preserved by grace, but here, based on the two-sided covenant, they are called to persevere. Chapter eighteen, Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation, completes the subsection. God grants assurance, but who enjoys it? Believers do.

In chapters 14–18, then, the covenant is viewed from a human perspective. It is a *foedus dipleuron*. This is the structure of these chapters on the covenant. From this viewpoint, it makes sense why justification precedes saving faith, since it is God's act, and it must come first. These chapters could be ordered differently, according to the *ordo salutis* as known today, but this is the reason these chapters are laid out in this way. The order properly protects the sovereignty of God.

There is one more subsection in the unit on the covenant, which is the means of receiving the covenant: chapter nineteen, Of the Law of God, and chapter twenty, Of the Gospel and of the Extent of the Grace Thereof. Sinners are condemned and shown their sin by means of the law. This is followed by a statement on the grace of God in the gospel and how it spreads around the world. Thus the second major section in the Confession, Of God's Covenant.

Unit 3: God-Centered Living: Freedom and Boundaries

The third unit is also a quite interesting section. The "First Principles" are in chapters 1–6. "The Covenant" is in 7–20. Then comes the third unit, which I have called "God-Centered Living: Freedom and Boundaries." It may be that modern Christians don't understand and appreciate how important the doctrine of Christian liberty is. Three amazing quotations make this point. The first is from John Calvin, from Book Three of the *Institutes*:

We must now discuss Christian freedom. He who proposes to summarize gospel teaching ought by no means to omit an explanation of this topic. For it is a thing of prime necessity, and apart from a knowledge of it consciences dare undertake almost nothing

without doubting; they hesitate and recoil from many things; they constantly waver and are afraid. But freedom is especially an appendage of justification and is of no little avail in understanding its power. Indeed, those who seriously fear God will enjoy the incomparable benefit of this doctrine But, as we have said, unless this freedom be comprehended, neither Christ, nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known.³⁰

Christian liberty is intimately tied to the doctrine of justification. A Christian can hardly act without a proper understanding of it! Does John Calvin think the doctrine is important?

The second is from the great Puritan John Owen:

The second principle of the Reformation, whereon the reformers justified their separation from the Church of *Rome*, was this, *That Christian people were not tyed up unto blind obedience unto Church Guides, but were not only at Liberty, but also obliged to judge for themselves as unto all things that they were to believe and practice in Religion and the Worship of God.* They knew that the whole Fabrick of the Papacy did stand on this *Basis* or Dunghil, that the Mistry of Iniquity was cemented by this Device, namely, *that the people were ignorant*, and to be kept in Ignorance, being obliged in all things unto an implicite Obedience unto their pretended Guides.³¹

“The second principle of the Reformation” John Owen makes this point very clearly. Christian liberty is at the very heart of the Reformation.

Our third witness is another English Puritan, Samuel Bolton, from his well-known book *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*:

There are two great things Christ has intrusted into the hands of his church: First, *Christian faith*. Secondly, *Christian liberty*: and as we are to contend earnestly for the maintenance of the faith, as the Apostle saith, Jude 3. So also for the maintenance of *Christian libertie*, against all oppugners and underminers of it, *Gal. 5.1. Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.*³²

30 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960 translation), 3.19.1 (1:833-34).

31 John Owen, *An Enquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches* (London: Nath. Ponder, 1681).

32 Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London: Printed for P.S. 1656), 8. In the modern Banner of Truth edition, this statement is slightly modernized, but basically expresses the same idea.

Here are three witnesses to aid us in evaluating the importance of the doctrine of Christian liberty. They demonstrate its foundational importance in Puritan and Reformed theology.

This is what the Puritan fathers did: Chapter twenty of the Westminster Confession, or chapter twenty-one in the Second London Confession (WCF doesn't have the chapter on the gospel, 2LCF 20, so the chapter numbers differ from this point onward), was not just placed in this position because something needed to be said about Christian liberty. Rather, this chapter was positioned at the head of an entire section because it is of fundamental importance for Christians to understand. The result is an entire unit in which Christian liberty is worked out in many different ways. The basis of the doctrine is found in the first chapter (twenty-one), which contains that great statement, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men . . ." That is the basis. Christ has purchased liberty for His people. It belongs to them.

Yet how is it worked out? It is detailed in the chapters that follow. The principles of Christian liberty are given in each. First is the worship of God, in chapters twenty-two and twenty-three. The regulative principle of worship was constructed to protect the liberty of God's people. The Puritan doctrine expressed the belief that anything introduced in worship that was not commanded in Scripture was an intrusion on Christian freedom. To make believers participate in actions in worship not commanded by God is a violation of liberty. That is why chapter twenty-two follows chapter twenty-one. It gives instruction in the practice of worship (so that liberty is not violated), and includes teaching about the day of worship, so that the faithful may know how to keep that day. That is a matter related to our liberty. What obligation do Christ's people owe to the Lord on that day? What are they free to do or not to do? The doctrine of Christian liberty has a direct relationship to this question.

Chapter twenty-three, *Of Lawful Oaths and Vows*, is an overlooked chapter. It begins with the words, "A lawful oath is a part of religious worship . . ." This is not about public worship, but private worship. Where are believers bound and where are they free, in terms of oaths? There were very practical applications of this in the seventeenth century, as there are today.

Chapter twenty-four, *Of the Civil Magistrate*, addresses questions such as: What are our responsibilities to the duly-constituted government in the place in which we live? Are we free to do as we please? It teaches that there are restrictions to our liberty, carefully defined for us. Chapter twenty-five, *Of Marriage*, speaks to important matters: Are Christians free to marry anyone? Are there any restrictions for them on marriage? Chapter twenty-five

provides definition to help the people of God understand their Christian liberty in terms of marriage.

Chapters 26–30, on the church, are another subsection. How do they relate to Christian liberty? Notice, in reading chapters 26–30, how frequently the lordship of Christ is emphasized. Christian liberty is about obedience to Christ the Lord. The way the doctrine of the church is worked out is really an expression of what Christian liberty is about. The twenty-sixth chapter, *Of the Church*, deals with Christ’s lordship in both the church universal and the church local. Chapter twenty-seven, *Of the Communion of Saints*, addresses obligations church members have to others. When someone is in need, what must be done to assist? What are a believer’s obligations at that moment?

Chapter twenty-eight, *Of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, provides the basic teaching for a Baptist view of the sacraments. The first paragraph, in several different ways, emphasizes the fact that Christ is the Lord over baptism. Credobaptists practice as they do because Christ is Lord over baptism and must be obeyed, apart from traditions that come down from Rome. We must obey Him and give baptism only to those who are able to profess their faith. Chapter twenty-nine works out this teaching in more detail, followed by an exposition of the other sacrament of the church in chapter thirty, *Of the Lord’s Supper*.

This third section of the Confession expounds the doctrine of Christian liberty. It presents a positive case for Christian freedom while recognizing that the Scripture places boundaries on Christians, all in light of the lordship of Christ.

Unit 4: The World to Come

The final section of the Confession, which I have entitled “The World to Come,” looks to the future of both believers and unbelievers. Chapter thirty-one, *Of the State of Man after Death and of the Resurrection of the Dead*, examines men in their intermediate and resurrection states. The Confession concludes with a chapter on the last judgement, outlining the destiny of all men.

Thus the structure of 2LCF. This outline will assist us in thinking through the entire system. Why is the Confession ordered the way it is? What were the reasons these chapters are placed where they are? Understanding this order—“First Principles,” the well-known, well-established Reformed scholastic principles of knowing and being, the doctrine of God; “The Covenant,” moving toward God’s blessings in salvation; “Christian Liberty,” the “second principle of the Reformation”; and “The World to Come”—will open up the meaning of the Confession for this generation and all those that follow.

When reading through the text of the Confession, one consistently encounters the wonders of the gospel. It reminds us that the *doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of our communion with God and comfortable dependence on Him* (2.3); that God's *free grace and love* is at the root of predestination (3.5); that those subject to the ravages of sin are not hopeless, for by faith *the Lord Jesus set[s] them free* (6.3). We learn that salvation is based in the eternal covenant of redemption (7.3) and that Jesus Christ is the mediator of that covenant (8.1). Divine grace calls the elect to faith (10.1), justification is by faith alone and is purchased by our Lord (11.1, 3), God's Holy Spirit works in sanctification (13.1, 3), faith is the gift of God (14.1), believers will persevere to the end (17.1), they may enjoy infallible assurance (18.2), and much more. In no way does the Confession present dry and dusty theology; rather, it is full of life and vigor. At the conclusion of the exposition of the various chapters, I have incorporated devotional material, the majority taken from a small book, *An Explanation of the Assembly of Divines Shorter Catechism*.³³ It was apparently published anonymously, the "second edition corrected" being issued in 1695, and contains several sections. The first, "An Explanation of the Shorter Catechism," fills the bulk of the book. This is followed by four pages containing the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and "A Short View of Divinity, or Summary of the Assemblies Catechism," basically a précis of the Catechism in two pages. Next is "A Form, or Pattern of Prayer, drawn out of the Assemblies Catechism." This is an attempt to turn doctrine into devotion. I have found its expressions helpful, and thus have chosen to incorporate many of its paragraphs into this book, often concluding the exposition of chapters with its words. This has required some re-ordering of its contents, and not every chapter has a prayer paragraph that fits well. In these cases, I have resorted to other sources. I hope you as a reader will find these seventeenth-century meditations helpful. They are a reminder that the purpose of truth is to call us to worship God.

33 *An Explanation of the Assembly of Divines Shorter Catechism* (London: J. Robinson, 1695).