

The Reformation History

In England during the 1630's and 1640's Congregationalists and Baptists of Calvinistic persuasion emerged from the Church of England. Their early existence was marked by repeated cycles of persecution at the hands of the established religion of crown and Parliament. The infamous Clarendon Code was adopted in the 1660's to crush all dissent from the official religion of the state. Periods of rigorous application and intervals of relaxation of these coercive acts haunted Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists alike.

Presbyterians and Congregationalists suffered less than did Baptists under this harassment. No little reason for their relative success in resisting government tyranny was their united front of doctrinal agreement. All Presbyterians stood by their Westminster Confession of 1646. Congregationalists adopted virtually the same articles of faith in the Savoy Confession of 1658. Feeling their substantial unity with paedobaptists suffering under the same cruel injustice, Calvinistic Baptists met to publish their substantial harmony with them in doctrine.

A circular letter was sent to particular Baptist churches in England and Wales asking each assembly to send representatives to a meeting in London in 1677. A confession consciously modeled after the Westminster Confession of Faith was approved and published. It has ever since born the name of the Second London Confession, The First London Confession had been issued by seven Baptist congregations of London in 1644. That First document had been drawn up to distinguish newly organized Calvinistic Baptists from the Arminian Baptists and the Anabaptists. Because this second London Confession was drawn up in dark hours of oppression, it was issued anonymously.

A preface to the original publication of 1677 says in part: ". . . It is now many years since diverse of us. . . did conceive ourselves 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 . . . This was First put forth about the year 1643, in the name of seven congregations then gathered in London..."

"Forasmuch as this confession is not now commonly to be had; and also that many others have since (1) 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 ..."

"We did conclude it necessary to confess ourselves the more fully and distinctly, . . . and Finding no defect in this regard in that Fixed on by the Assembly?... and after them by those of the Congregational way, we did conclude it best to retain the same order in our present confession. . . for the most part without any variation of the terms . . . making use of the very same words with them both . . . This we did to. . . convince all that we have no itch to clog religion with new words, but to readily acquiesce in that form of sound words which hath been used by others before us . . . In those things wherein we differ from others, we have expressed ourselves with all candor and plainness . . . Contention is most remote from our design in all that we have done in this matter . . ."

William and Mary assumed England's throne in 1689, On May 24 of that very year the Act of Toleration was enacted. Within two months, seven London pastors called for a general meeting of Baptists from England and Wales. Representatives of one hundred and seven congregations met in London from September third to the twelfth. They adopted the Confession of 1677 with the following endorsement:

WE the MINISTERS and MESSENGERS of and concerned for upwards of one hundred baptized congregations in England and Wales (denying Arminianism), being met together in London, from the third of the seventh month to the eleventh of the same, 1689, to consider of some things that might be for the glory of God, and the good of these congregations, have thought meet (for the satisfaction of all other Christians that differ from us in the point of Baptism) to recommend to their perusal the confession of our faith, which confession we own, as containing the doctrine of our faith and practice, and do desire that the members of our churches respectively do furnish themselves therewith.

Hansard Knollys	Pastor	Broken Wharf	London
William Kiffin	Pastor	Devonshire-square	London
John Harris	Pastor	Joiners' Hall	London
William Collins	Pastor	Petty France	London
Hurcules Collins	Pastor	Wapping	London
Robert Steed	Pastor	Broken Wharf	London
Leonard Harrison	Pastor	Limehouse	London
George Barret	Pastor	Mile End Green	London
Isaac Lamb	Pastor	Pennington-street	London
Richard Adams	Minister	Shad Thames	Southwark
Benjamin Keach	Pastor	Horse-lie-down	Southwark
Andrew Gifford	Pastor	Bristol, Fryars	Som. & Glouc.

Thomas Vaux	Pastor	Broadmead	Som. & Glouc
Thomas Winnel	Pastor	Taunton	Som. & Glouc.
James Hitt	Preacher	Dalwood	Dorset
Richard Tidmarsh	Minister	Oxford City	Oxon
William Facey	Pastor	Reading	Berks
Samuel Buttall	Minister	Plymouth	Devon
Christopher Price	Minister	Abergavenny	Monmouth
Daniel Finch	Minister	Kingsworth	Herts
John Ball	Minister	Tiverton	Devon
Edmond White	Pastor	Evershall	Bedford
William Prichard	Pastor	Blaenau	Monmouth
Paul Fruin	Minister	Warwick	Warwick
Richard Ring	Pastor	Southampton	Hants
John Tompkins	Minister	Abingdon	Berks
Toby Willes	Pastor	Bridgewater	Somerset
John Carter	Pastor	Steventon	Bedford
James Webb	Pastor	Devizes	Wilts
Richard Sutton	Pastor	Tring	Herts
Robert Knight	Pastor	Stukeley	Bucks
Edward Price	Pastor	Hereford City	Hereford
William Phipps	Pastor	Exon	Devon
William Hawkins	Pastor	Dimmock	Gloucester
Samuel Ewer	Pastor	Hemstead	Herts
Edward Man	Pastor	Houndsditch	London
Charles Archer	Pastor	Hock-Norton	Oxon

In the name and behalf of the whole assembly.

Because the title page of the newly subscribed creed bore the title "The Baptist Confession of Faith adopted by the ministers and messengers of the General Assembly which met in London in 1689", the Second London Confession, originally composed in 1677, has ever since been called "The 1689 Confession".

This became the most popular confession of Calvinistic Baptists in the English speaking world. It enjoyed editions in Britain in 1693, 1699, 1719, 1720, 1791, 1809. In 1855 C.H. Spurgeon issued a new edition. It was only the second year of his ministry at the New Park Street Chapel. Spurgeon wrote, "I have thought it right to reprint in a cheap form this excellent list of doctrines, which were subscribed to by the Baptist Ministers in the year 1689. We need a banner because of the truth; it may be that this small volume may aid the cause of the glorious gospel by testifying plainly what are its leading doctrines . . . May the Lord soon restore unto Zion a pure language, and may her watchmen see eye to eye." He addressed these remarks to "all the Household of Faith, who rejoice in the glorious doctrines of Free Grace." Other British editions have appeared in 1958, 1963, 1966, 1970, 1972, 1974.

In the later 1600's Benjamin Keach and another minister of London published the 1689 Confession with two articles added, one on "the laying on of hands" and another "the singing of psalms". When Elias Keach, son of Benjamin, became a Baptist minister in America in 1688, he became a part of the Calvinistic Baptists who formed the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1707. Through him the Second London Confession with his father's addenda was adopted by the Philadelphia Association. For years the association appealed to the confession, formally adopting it in 1742. The First edition of the "Philadelphia Confession of Faith" was printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1743. Under this name the 1689 confession became the definitive doctrinal statement of Calvinistic Baptists throughout the colonial and early United States periods. Associations in Virginia (1766), Rhode Island (1767), South Carolina (1767), Kentucky (1785), and Tennessee (1788) adopted the confession. It came to be known in America as "*The Baptist Confession*".

Familiarity with the Confession and its doctrines declined in the latter half of the 19th and First half of the 20th centuries. But since God has remarkably revived Biblical Calvinism among Baptists in recent days, interest in this historic confession has been renewed.

The Elders

Grace Baptist Church

Carlisle, Pennsylvania