

# **A HISTORY OF THE GARBC CONFSSION OF FAITH**

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# INTRODUCTION

WHILE MOST CONFESSIONS OF FAITH seem to remain fixed for centuries, the New Hampshire Confession has continued to be a living document. It is now 150 years since the confession was first published. During those years various Baptist groups have adapted and adopted it. Since it is the basis of the GARBC's confession of faith, it is instructive to trace the steps by which it came to its present form. For years it has been supposed that our confession was simply the New Hampshire with a premillennial ending. It is the purpose of this study to test that dictum, to try to identify the men who did the revisions, and to try to understand their thinking.

Confessions of faith are teaching devices, and at every stage of the history of the New Hampshire Confession, men appear to have been concerned that it transmit a certain body of truth. They tried to convey that truth in as brief and precise a statement as they could form.



# 1 THE NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION is a product of movements in that State during the early nineteenth century.

## Background

The first known Baptist work in New Hampshire was that of Hansard Knollys, the notable Particular Baptist and signer of the Second London Confession. In 1638 he arrived in Boston and that year gathered a church in Dover. Under persecution from Massachusetts authorities, he returned in 1611 to England, and the congregation apparently moved to Long Island.<sup>1</sup> No further Baptist work is known in that colony until 1755, when a church was founded at Newtown, and another at Madbury in 1768. In 1770 a number of Baptist preachers began working in New Hampshire, and despite persecution by the Congregational establishment, about 25 Baptist churches were formed by 1782.<sup>2</sup> Newman gave a figure of 41 churches as of 1795.<sup>3</sup> The first association, the New Hampshire Association, was formed in 1785. Others were organized in 1789, 1809, 1810 and thereafter.

## The Freewill Baptists

In 1780 one Benjamin Randall gathered a church in New Durham. He reacted against the Calvinism of the Baptist churches then in New Hampshire, as well as against their disposition to form doctrinal statements. He was the founder of the Freewill Baptists, also known as the Free Baptists, and he had notable success in organizing such churches in New England.<sup>4</sup> This movement seems to have caused

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<sup>1</sup> William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), p. 385. See also David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination* (New York: Lewis Colby and Co., 1848), pp. 496–497.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict, p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> Albert H. Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1898) p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1965) pp. 257–259.

consternation among the existing Baptists of the State and gave them an increased impulse to declare their views.

Randall's leading ideas seem to have been God's love for all, the free offer of grace to all men, Christ's universal atonement for all, and the Gospel's universal call.<sup>5</sup> By the time of Randall's death in 1808 the group had 130 churches and was apparently still growing. It had the advantage of an appeal to human responsibility, an appeal that seemed to harmonize with and contribute to the great evangelistic ingatherings of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

### **The State Convention**

In 1814 Luther Rice, having returned from India, organized a national convention familiarly known as the Triennial. This was founded strictly as a mission society, but it served as a sort of denominational headquarters for the Baptists in this country. It was supported through local missionary societies. Inevitably, it took on other functions, and by 1820 the pressures toward a democratic system of support led toward the forming of numbers of state conventions. Nine of them came about by 1824, and three more by 1826. One of these three was the New Hampshire, to provide voice and fellowship for the local associations and to channel delegates and support to the Triennial. While that year men from New York and New England diverted the Triennial from its course, that is another story;<sup>7</sup> the state conventions were already in motion. The New Hampshire Convention was now a continuing organization.

### **The Committee**

In 1830, the New Hampshire Convention, meeting in Cornish,<sup>8</sup> passed a resolution appointing a committee of three to draw up a declaration of faith and practice, as well as a covenant, to express their doctrinal position. To this committee they appointed Nathaniel W. Williams, of the Concord church,<sup>9</sup> William Taylor, and I. Person or Pearson. In 1831, about the time that Williams moved to a church in Newburyport, Massachusetts, the convention discharged the committee and asked Mr. Person to finish its work. On June 26, 1832, Person turned his work over to the board of the convention. The board then appointed

<sup>5</sup> Benedict, p. 501.

<sup>6</sup> In 1911 the Freewill Baptists united with the Northern Baptist Convention. The current *World Almanac* shows 2,452 Freewill Baptist churches in the United States, with 227,888 members. *The World Almanac and Book of Facts* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1981) p. 351.

<sup>7</sup> Winthrop Hudson, "Stumbling Into Disorder," *Foundations*, 1:45-71, April, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> William Hurlin, O.C. Sargent, and W.W. Wakeman, *The Baptists of New Hampshire* (Manchester, N.H.: The New Hampshire Baptist Convention, 1902) p. 51. Hiscox quotes Eaton that the convention met in Concord. Edward T. Hiscox, *A New Dictionary for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1894, 1949) p. 539.

<sup>9</sup> Hurlin, p. 51.

Person, a Mr. Going,<sup>10</sup> Baron Stow, and J. Newton Brown to go over the work. Two days later they offered their articles of faith to the convention for adoption. Curiously, the convention then turned the articles back to the board for whatever action it might wish, and this was apparently the last that the convention had to do with the New Hampshire Confession.

Next day, June 29, the board named Stow and Brown to revise the articles and present them at its next meeting. Stow was at this time pastor of a growing church in Portsmouth,<sup>11</sup> and Brown was, since 1829, pastor in Exeter, some fifteen miles from Portsmouth.

In the October 10 board meeting, at Deerfield, Brown reported for the committee. The board considered the articles one by one and next morning discharged the committee, asking Brown to put their suggestions into final form. At the January 15, 1833, board meeting, they changed the word Articles to Declaration, commended Stow and Brown, and ordered the Declaration of Faith to be printed and commended to the churches at a price of two dollars and fifty cents per hundred copies. According to Lumpkin, writing about 1959, not one copy of this printing can now be found.<sup>12</sup>

Brown continued his pastorate until 1838, when he became professor of theology at the New Hampton Institution. In 1845 he left New Hampshire to accept the pastorate of the Baptist church in Lexington, Virginia. Four years later he became editorial secretary of the American Baptist Publication Society. It was in this position that in 1853 he reprinted the New Hampshire Confession over his own name. He made minimal changes in it. Lumpkin compared it with the version that had appeared in William Crowell's *Church Members Handbook*, which version was probably reprinted from the original, and shows how few changes Brown must have made.<sup>13</sup>

## **Content**

The New Hampshire has remained for a century and a half the best-known Baptist doctrinal statement, and for good reasons. It was shorter and more readable than the London and Philadelphia confessions. It received wide circulation in the last century, and its moderate Calvinism reflected the doctrinal position of a great many Baptists. Little wonder then that it became the basis of at least two important confessions of the 1920's. This confession appears at the end of this paper in Appendix I.

The statement on inspiration was adequate to brace it against the

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<sup>10</sup> Lumpkin identifies him as Jonathan Going, possibly the one who was at this time helping Peck found the American Baptist Home Mission Society. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959) p. 360.

<sup>11</sup> Cathcart, pp. 1111–1112.

<sup>12</sup> Lumpkin, p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 361–367.

heresies of the century to follow it, even though it now looks weak. It attributed inspiration to the writers, not specifically to the writings, and it did not spell out inspiration as either plenary or verbal. That said, it did teach absolute inerrancy. It was a statement no Unitarian or Modernist could honestly accept, even though the writers seem not to have had the Unitarians in mind.

It appears that neither Christology nor pneumatology was an issue in the New Hampshire of 1830. Article II mentioned the Trinity, but only Article IV came close to detailing a doctrine of Christ. The two articles that Brown added in 1853, (Numbers VIII and X) mentioned Christ's offices and some ministries of the Holy Spirit. The articles on salvation, however brief, seem adequate, and Brown's additions had more to do with the Holy Spirit than with salvation.<sup>14</sup> Regarding Calvinism, supposedly the reason for formulating this confession, the articles on depravity, sovereignty, grace, and perseverance were clear enough, but they leave out original guilt, any specific statement on election, any mention of reprobation, the extent of the atonement, or whether at conversion regeneration precedes faith.

The confession had a few other marks. Its article on the church can hardly be faulted, but those who later drew on this confession, such as the Baptist Bible Union men, found it necessary to add a great deal. This confession left out any mention of Baptist succession. It limited the Lord's Supper to those who have been Scripturally baptized. It had no section on angels. The brief closing article was amillennial, unlike the London confession of 1644, and even the Southern Baptists later found it necessary to revise and clarify this to include the visible return of Christ.<sup>15</sup> Eschatology was not an issue in 1833.

### **Intent of the Framers**

It would appear that the phrasing of the New Hampshire Declaration<sup>16</sup> intended to chart a course between two strong positions. On the one hand, here was a Calvinist document set in opposition to the historic Calvinism of Congregational New England theology. Granted that the Boston Puritans had regarded Baptists with a visceral dislike, the New Hampshire men in at least two points opposed historic Calvinism. For one thing, they took a different view of human depravity. While in their view man could do nothing to save himself or to please God, the statement at least left room for a voluntary response to the Gospel. While the Puritans may have conceded the voluntary response, their pulpit stress on human inability was enough to generate widespread

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>16</sup> This paper will so refer to the Confession as viewed by its framers. It will call it the New Hampshire Confession in contexts dealing with it as seen by later generations.

fatalism, and this probably accounts for the eighty years of spiritual drought between the Halfway Covenant (1661) and the Great Awakening (1740).<sup>17</sup>

Also missing from the New Hampshire Declaration was covenant theology. While this may seem odd, these men were coming from a simpler Biblicism than were the Puritans, who by the logic of their situation had to reconcile the Bible with an Augustinian and Genevan tradition the Baptists had not inherited. Furthermore, the Baptists were evangelistic, a trait of which the Boston Puritans cannot be accused, and evangelism does not easily spring up in a community already in covenant relationship with God. Further yet, the New Hampshire framers had the influence of an Edwardsean tradition. However deterministic this tradition, it frankly expected depraved and helpless sinners to respond to the preaching of judgment and grace.

The opposite error confronting the New Hampshire framers was of course the Freewill movement. This movement was only the nearest of a number of systems, from the modified Calvinism of Nathaniel W. Taylor to the Arminianism of Charles G. Finney, not to mention that of the Methodists and of hosts of new settlers on the frontier. To all these, self-reliance was an hourly way of life, tying with Yankee ingenuity and the American dream. To the many who had migrated from the coast to hack farms from virgin forests, destiny seemed far more a result of pluck and luck than of election and providence.

This impulse translated easily into a theology of human effort. Commonsense frontier logic seemed to be on the side of the Freewill Baptists; and their growth in the previous fifty years must have to the New Hampshire men seemed a danger to truth. Their declaration then was a bulwark against both positions, the one that denied human ability and the one that built its whole theology on human ability.

It would furthermore appear that as the framers were responding to the Freewill movement, they intended not so much to deepen the differences between them, as to present a moderate and Scriptural option to any who might be hesitating between the Convention and Freewill views. This irenic attempt may explain the phrasing of the article on the harmony of the law and the gospel.

### **Hiscox's Use of the Confession**

Edward T. Hiscox in his often-reprinted *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* began the appendix with a section on creeds and confessions.<sup>18</sup> After some eleven pages of discussing historic Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (New York: Russell and Russell) pp. 12-43.

<sup>18</sup> Hiscox, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 525-562.

creeds, he introduced those of American Baptists. He briefly mentioned the Philadelphia Confession. He then dealt with the New Hampshire Confession and gave a detailed history of how it was written. Then he printed what seems to be the New Hampshire Confession in full.

On comparison with other sources, however, the Hiscox redaction shows a great deal of editing. He took only two articles verbatim (1 and 14), and another nine are almost intact, (2–4, 11, 13, 15, and 18–20). Six of Hiscox's were radically revised (5, 6, 9, 12, 16 and 17), and three were new ones he formulated himself (7, 8, and 10). Many of his changes appear to smooth or clarify the phrasing. For the rest, or nearly half of his confession, the revisions all seem in the area of soteriology, especially to describe a genuine conversion.

A careful reading of Hiscox's revisions gives the impression of a concern about what has in the last generation been called believism. If he was aware of Modernism, the existing articles were a sufficient barrier against it. The issue now seemed to be a shallow evangelism that made light demands on its converts. This tends to agree historically with Vedder's observations closing his *Short History*, in which he lamented the decline in church discipline, in adult conversions in response to preaching, and in the number of baptisms.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1907, 1967) pp. 380–383.

## 2 THE BIBLE BAPTIST UNION

BY ABOUT 1890 a very few leaders in this country had begun to discern what was to become a massive apostasy. Four years before, Spurgeon had raised an alarm at the inroads of this theology in the Baptist Union of Great Britain. While by our view he was right, he found himself virtually alone in his protests. What had gone wrong?

### Occasion

By about 1860 a new religion had taken over almost all of the universities of Germany. This religion passed itself off as a new development of Christianity, but as Machen pointed out in 1923,<sup>20</sup> this system was a radical departure, a separate religion unknown to the Apostles of Jesus. Until about 1910 this system hardly had a name. Riley called its devotees “higher critics”.<sup>21</sup> The terms Modernist and Liberal did not become current until after that time.

This system may be defined as optimistic religious liberalism, which uses a Christian vocabulary but doubts or denies the supernatural. In accepting higher criticism the Modernists regarded the Bible as a record of man’s upward reach, containing divine truth, inspired as Shakespeare and Milton were. To them God was the creative force, immanent in the creation, and while hardly a personality, the Father of all men. Jesus was a nice man and the first Christian. His wonderful moral teachings so moved His disciples that they were willing to believe that He worked miracles. He died an untimely death as an example and martyr. No one knows where He is actually buried. He had predicted a kingdom, which will come about when the church will have Christianized the world. Man, having evolved so far, is fundamentally good and does not need to be saved in the traditional sense. There is surely no hell to be saved from. They wanted to believe in some sort of after-life.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923).

<sup>21</sup> William B. Riley, unpublished correspondence in files of Northwestern College, St. Paul, Minnesota, especially letter to S.T. Ford, January 25, 1910.

While this religion differed so monstrously from that of the Bible, it seemed plausible to fashionable Victorians. It came to this country mainly through affluent young divinity students home from a year or two of graduate study in Germany. These men gravitated toward teaching positions, and between 1880 and 1915 their views came to dominate almost all the traditional seminaries in the north.<sup>22</sup> By 1920 Princeton was the outstanding hold-out. Despite their conquests, Modernists were careful not to be too blatant in their denials, and as yet they influenced only a small minority of church members in the denominations.

Among Baptist believers very few seemed to grasp the enormity of what was going on. A.H. Strong wrote a prophetic statement in the preface to his *Systematic Theology*,<sup>23</sup> but then fought to keep his friend Walter Rauschenbusch on his faculty at Rochester. As late as 1923 J.C. Masee, unquestionably a believer, was meeting with Modernists, trying to formulate a statement on which they could make common cause.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Northern Baptist Convention**

Until 1907 the Baptists in the north had only service organizations to carry on their missionary works. They had no convention to unify these eight societies. Now, with some backing from the rich, Modernists of the Chicago Baptist Association maneuvered the denomination to organize a Northern Baptist Convention. The leader of this movement was Dr. Shailer Mathews, of the University of Chicago Divinity School. This stroke brought the denominational machinery under Modernist control, mainly because only Modernists aspired to become the salaried servants of the convention. Contrary to popular supposition, the convention itself was never a fundamentalist organization. It was founded by Modernists, and its control was never seriously threatened.<sup>25</sup>

It was the New World Movement, an openly social-gospel effort launched in the convention in 1919, that finally aroused the believers to action. In 1920 they organized the Committee on Baptist Fundamentals.<sup>26</sup> Under the mild leadership of Dr. J.C. Masee the committee made little impact on the 1920 annual meeting, and even less in 1921. At the

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<sup>22</sup> Ernest Gordon, *The Leaven of the Sadducees* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1926) pp. 172, 186, 196. Shailer Mathews, *New Faith For Old* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936) p. 268.

<sup>23</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1947) p. viii.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of the executive committee of the Baptist Bible Union, in archives of Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada. Meeting of December 7, 1923.

<sup>25</sup> Robert E. McClernon, "The Formation of the Northern Baptist Convention." Unpublished B.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1956. In recent years the University has no longer made this useful work available.

<sup>26</sup> Known as the Brooklyn Committee and later as the Fundamentalist Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention. As such it became in 1943 the pilot body of the Conservative Baptist movement.

Indianapolis convention of 1922 the Fundamentalist conviction was that they had no hope of dislodging Modernists from control of the denomination when they had no objective way of even identifying the Modernists. It was at a late-night caucus that they heard a reading of the New Hampshire Confession and agreed to move that it be accepted as the convention's doctrinal statement.<sup>27</sup>

The next afternoon W.B. Riley read the confession to the convention and moved that they commend it to the churches. Some minutes later Cornelius Woelfkin offered a substitute motion, "That the Northern Baptist Convention affirm that the New Testament is an all-sufficient ground for Baptist faith and practice, and they need no other doctrinal statement."<sup>28</sup> The debate lasted three hours and ended with a standing vote of 1264 to 637 for the substitute motion. As summarized in the *Watchman—Examiner*, the issues were clear.<sup>29</sup> To vote for the substitute motion was to vote against Fundamentalism, against the New Hampshire Confession, against the New Testament literally interpreted.

### **The Baptist Bible Union Confession of Faith**

The Baptist Bible Union was apparently born a few nights later, in a hotel meeting room. The initiative of R.E. Neighbour and O.W. Van Osdel brought about this meeting. By that fall Neighbour had recruited J. Frank Norris, W.B. Riley and William Pettingill. It was the five men named who formed the original executive committee. While this study has found no official account of the committee on confession, a copy of a tantalizing letter appeared in the files of T.T. Shields, later president of the Bible Union. The letter, from Norris to Riley, dated May 4, 1929, included these lines:

. . . As I go back over those days that you and I spent in preparing the Confession of Faith—of what wonderful days, what precious memories. Those days in Keokuk, Iowa, when we would walk through the snow storm, sit up all night long, hunt up Scriptures, and now to see that Confession of Faith so widely adopted and still going.

While Norris' credibility may be charitably described as erratic, there seems to be no strong reason to question the substance of his

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<sup>27</sup> Robert T. Murdoch, *Portrait of Obedience* (Schaumburg, Illinois: Regular Baptist Press, 1979) pp. 92–94. He gives a vivid account drawn from Dr. Ketcham's recollections. See also the *Watchman-Examiner* for July 27, 1922, for a detailed first-hand report of the caucus and of the debate that followed.

<sup>28</sup> [Sic] the *Watchman-Examiner*, June 29, 1922, p. 814. The wording differs slightly from that in *The New York Times*, June 17, 1922, p. 13 and from that in the *Convention Annual*, 1922.

<sup>29</sup> *Watchman-Examiner*, June 29, 1922, pp. 814–815.

statement. Almost certainly he and Riley did the revisions, and Riley later claimed to have labored for weeks over the form of the organization and the doctrinal statement.<sup>30</sup> The eventual use of the Baptist Bible Union Confession by the Baptist Bible Fellowship would tend to confirm that Norris had a part in preparing it.

## Revisions

The work that Riley and Norris did on the confession bears out the observation that men cannot much anticipate the issues that will become crucial in subsequent years. Despite the work of Person, Stow and Brown and the extended deliberations of the New Hampshire board, the rise of Modernism laid bare weaknesses in the historic Confession. Norris and Riley were equipped for their task. Each was a genius in his own right. Each had a seminary education, from Louisville. Each was a master of pulpit persuasion, and each later built his own religious empire.

In their work of revision they used the 1853 version of the New Hampshire Confession as their starting point.<sup>31</sup> From the article on the Scriptures they omitted some four lines that looked descriptive (i.e., “And is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction, . . .”) and added two statements, 1. specifying that the collection of 66 books, in the original, “IS the very Word of God,” and 2. spelling out inspiration and inerrancy, without actually specifying that inspiration was either plenary or verbal. In Article II, on God, they omitted a phrase and reworded another, apparently using the version of Hiscox.<sup>32</sup>

They then added three new sections: on the Holy Spirit, on the Devil, or Satan, and on creation. The first two served to fill doctrinal gaps, gaps made serious by the denials of Modernism. The article on creation reflected a key issue in the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, and it positioned the Bible Union against any such compromise as theistic evolution.

Their article VI, on the fall of man, corresponds to the old Article III. They substituted the more precise word “sinless” for “holy,” and in the interest of economy omitted about three lines. Article VII, on the virgin birth, was their own addition. Article VIII, on the atonement, followed the New Hampshire for about five lines and then added 46 words specifying that the atonement was a substitution, not an example.

Article IX, on grace in the new creation, was a radical revision in wording. It detailed the new birth, ruling out any naturalistic explanation

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<sup>30</sup> William B. Riley, letter to *Moody Monthly*, cited in *The Gospel Witness*, 5:22, November 4, 1926.

<sup>31</sup> Compare their wording with the explanation and text in Lumpkin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 360–367.

<sup>32</sup> Hiscox, p. 544.

of it, and including two phrases that appear in Hiscox.<sup>33</sup> To preface Article X, on the freeness of salvation, they added the words, “We believe (a) in God’s electing grace . . . .” After they thus strengthened the Calvinism, they ruled out any suggestion of double predestination by saying,

. . . that (d) nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel; (e) which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation.

This wording is slightly different from that of the New Hampshire. Articles XI and XII are mild revisions.

Article XIII, on the church, repeated the original phrasing almost verbatim and then added statements on the mission of the church, on local church autonomy in the face of denominational structures, and on cooperation among churches. The revision almost tripled the length of the article. Articles XIV through XVII are virtually intact; XV added a word, and XVI added a phrase.

The article on the last things raises questions, and it read as follows:

XVIII of the Resurrection and of the Second Coming of Christ. We believe (a) in the bodily resurrection of Christ; (b) that He ascended to the right hand of the majesty on high; (c) that as our High Priest He is our Mediator between God and man. (d) We believe in the literal, personal, bodily and imminent return of our Lord; (e) that He will raise the righteous dead; (f) transform the living in Christ; (g) subdue and rule the world in righteousness and peace for 1,000 years; (h) at the end of which time He will raise and judge the unrighteous; and (i) completing His world supremacy, turn over the Kingdom to God, the Father, that God may be all in all.<sup>34</sup>

The statement was clearly premillennial, even though it did not mention the rapture or the tribulation, much less the sequence of the two. In any case, they printed the confession in a small booklet and mailed out some 20,000 copies to Baptist ministers all over the continent. The eschatology, however soft the statement, brought a storm of protest, mainly from the south. It was also an embarrassment to T.T.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 548.

<sup>34</sup> “Confession of Faith,” put forth by the Baptist Bible Union of America, pp. 28–32. A rare copy was found in the Riley notebooks, at Northwestern College, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Shields, whom Riley was at that time recruiting into the movement.

They officially organized the Baptist Bible Union in Kansas City, Missouri, May 10–15, 1923, just before the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. At the organization, they elected T.T. Shields president, and they authorized a revision of the Confession of Faith. The only thing they eventually changed was the article on eschatology, and the brief wording seems to show the hands of Shields and Riley. At their September meeting, the executive committee voted to destroy the remaining 10,000 copies of the original confession of faith.<sup>35</sup> The revised Article XVIII read as follows:

**XVIII. Of the Resurrection, Return of Christ and Related Events**

We believe in and accept the sacred Scriptures upon these subjects at their full and face value.

- a. The Bodily Resurrection. Matt. 28:6–7, Luke 24:39 etc.
- b. The Ascension.
- c. The High Priesthood.
- d. The Second Coming.
- e. The Resurrection of the Righteous Dead.
- f. The Change of Living in Christ.
- g. On the Throne of David.
- h. His Reign on Earth.<sup>36</sup>

In this form the confession of faith remained during the subsequent history of the Bible Union.

**Des Moines University**

An interesting development took place in 1927. When Shields in the name of the Baptist Bible Union took over the defunct Des Moines University, he offered contracts to any teachers who could sign the Bible Union's confession of faith. Some twenty teachers, about half the previous faculty, signed and were retained under the new administration.<sup>37</sup> In the following two years and the tragic collapse of the school, the records show no residual faculty loyalty to the organization that had preserved their jobs. A group of evangelical moderates were able to sign the doctrinal statement of a militant organization, and at that time, no one seemed to realize the anomaly of the situation. It illustrated the difficulty in composing a confession capable of identifying an over-active religious tolerance. The hold-over teachers had been able to work

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, Baptist Bible Union, September 12, 1923.

<sup>36</sup> Lumpkin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 389. Lumpkin gives all the Scripture references.

<sup>37</sup> George S. May, "Des Moines University and T.T. Shields." *Iowa Journal of History*, 54:206, July, 1956.

as professing Christians under a Modernist administration, and now were able to sign the Bible Union's confession.

There were reasons for appointing teachers who were barely in harmony with the Bible Union. Possibly the new administration was eager to retain as many teachers as they honestly could, so as to provide continuity and retain students. Possibly some teachers signed with mental reservations. Doubtless many signed in good faith, only to find out later what it was like to work for such militants as the Bible Union men. Whatever the explanations, the confession did not filter out religious moderates.

The confession was not so constructed. Both the New Hampshire and the Bible Union confessions were forthright but irenic in tone. The first was written against the Freewill position, the second against Modernism. Both were written to appeal to men of good will whose convictions approximated those of the framers. Note the article on eschatology. For the men who took over Des Moines University, their confession turned out to be the wrong instrument to use, and they paid a high price for their miscalculation.

As a sort of footnote to considering the Bible Union confession, that of the Baptist Bible Fellowship makes an interesting comparison.<sup>38</sup> Of the twenty articles, the first eighteen not only correspond to those of the Bible Union confession; most came through intact. A few, such as XIII and XIV, have a sentence or so of editing. Even the article on eschatology was phrased in the order in which the items had appeared in the revised Bible Union confession. This would tend to confirm Norris' part in preparing the Bible Union confession, possibly even in Keokuk, Iowa.

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<sup>38</sup> Billy Vick Bartlett, *The Beginnings*. (Springfield: Baptist Bible College, 1975) pp. 132-139.



# 3 THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF REGULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES

THE COLLAPSE OF DES MOINES UNIVERSITY all but shattered the Baptist Bible Union. The one clear voice to begin another organization was that of Dr. O.W. Van Osdel, since 1909 pastor of the Wealthy Street Baptist Church of Grand Rapids.

In 1930 the Bible Union's executive committee asked Shields to draw up a constitution for a new association. On Van Osdel's invitation the annual meeting that year was in his church, and to prepare for it he began publishing a series of articles calling for such an association.<sup>39</sup> At the annual meeting, Shields nominated Dr. H.C. Fulton to be his successor as president. (From this point Shields devoted himself almost wholly to his interests in Canada.) The group then appointed a committee of five, still including Shields, to draw up a constitution. Despite Van Osdel's continued pleas, the committee failed to act.<sup>40</sup> For 1931 Fulton did not even call an annual meeting. The country was nearing the depth of the depression, and money was scarce. Van Osdel replaced R.T. Ketcham on the constitution committee, and he continued to call for an association.

The famous Belden Avenue meeting finally took place in May, 1932.<sup>41</sup> Here 34 delegates representing some 22 churches organized the General Association of Regular Baptists, legal successor to the Baptist Bible Union. They appointed a committee to continue work on the constitution and to revise the confession of faith.

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<sup>39</sup> Oliver W. Van Osdel, "A Call to Real Baptists Everywhere," *The Gospel Witness*, 9:1-2, May 22, 1930.

<sup>40</sup> While the file of the *Baptist Temple News*, Van Osdel's paper, is far from complete, those copies that do appear in the archives of Wealthy Park Baptist Church give the impression that he might have been mentioning the matter in almost every issue. But see the issues of November 8 and December 27, 1930. See also articles of his reprinted in *The Gospel Witness*, 9:11-12, June 19, 1930, and 9:3, November 20, 1930.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph M. Stowell, *Background and History of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches* (Hayward, California: J.F. May Press, 1949 pp. 32-35. Stowell's account carefully follows the Minutes of the GARBC, May 15-18, 1932, copies of which are to be found in the Schaumburg archives, and which were also found in the Belden Avenue Baptist Church, and in the Wealthy Park Baptist Church's archives. This last appears to bear Van Osdel's handwritten notes.

### The Committee

This study has been unable to find out who actually served on the committee on constitution and confession. A few weeks after the May meeting, Harry Hamilton, the new president, wrote the secretary, John Muntz, to find out who was actually appointed to that committee. After consulting the minutes, Muntz replied that he did not know, that the minutes showed only the names of the missionary committee, and that presumably it was the task of the executive committee.<sup>42</sup> In the minutes of the following years, reports duly appear, but the men who revised the confession were not named. The same is true of the earliest available copies of the *Baptist Bulletin*. The original executive committee was Hamilton, president, Earle G. Griffith, vice-president, and Muntz, secretary-treasurer, and supposedly the several state vice-presidents, rarely named in the correspondence. If anyone worked on the confession in 1932, it must have been Griffith; the *Baptist Bulletin* account of the 1934 meeting noted Griffith's report on the constitution. Robert Ketcham must have been consulted after the Buffalo meeting of 1933, which Hamilton with difficulty persuaded him to attend and at which he was elected vice-president.<sup>43</sup> Until further evidence comes to light, it appears that these and perhaps others worked on the constitution, and that it was probably Griffith who edited the confession of faith.

### The GARBC Confession of Faith

Accounts of the early meetings record no discussion of the confession of faith inherited from the Bible Union. The leaders did revise it considerably before printing their draft in the *Bulletin* and offering it to the association. Their thinking has to be inferred from the revisions and from the final product that they offered.

Their article on the Scriptures omitted about two-thirds of the Bible Union's statement, added that the original manuscripts were verbally inspired, and retained the wording on inerrancy (see appendix). They took the next two articles intact. Article IV, on Satan, they condensed to about one-third of its former length, and they edited Article V, on evolution, in the same proportion. To the next three articles they added only two words. From Article IX, on grace in the new creation, they took out two lines, and they omitted Article X altogether.<sup>44</sup> This seems curious, that a Calvinist organization would remove a

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<sup>42</sup> John Muntz, personal letter to Harry Hamilton, June 17, 1932, a copy found in Van Osdel papers.

<sup>43</sup> Harry Hamilton, personal letter to O.W. Van Osdel, May 5, 1933. For Ketcham's views on the 1932 meeting, see his letters to Van Osdel March 28, 1932; April 12, 1932, and May 2, 1932, and the copy in the Van Osdel papers of Ketcham's letter to Max Schimpf, May 3, 1932.

<sup>44</sup> See appendix for the text of this.

statement specifying their view of Calvinism. It appears that election was not an issue at the time; but as noted above, this study has found no explanation in either the minutes or the *Baptist Bulletin*.

Of the remaining articles, they took the one on justification verbatim, but reduced “Of Repentance and Faith” to two lines. The leading change in their article on the church was to delete three lines detailing the mission of the church. Their article on baptism leaves out a line, and from the part on the Lord’s Supper they changed three lines. They reduced “Perseverance” to two lines, and took the next two articles almost verbatim.

The concluding article, on the last things, came up for surprisingly little revision. They put the word “Premillennial” in the heading, shortened the introductory sentence, and changed the ending from “His Reign on Earth” to “The Millennial Reign.” This seems odd for a group who were overwhelmingly premillennial and who expected the any-moment rapture. The statement did not mention either the rapture or the tribulation, nor Israel, nor the glorious return of Christ to impose His millennial reign. At this writing, it also seems odd that the committee did not restore the original premillennial ending of the Bible Union confession, but Stowell suggested that probably not one of them still had a copy.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Intent of the Framers**

As a comparison of the two confessions might suggest, the founders of the GARBC produced an irenic statement of faith. Their doctrinal enemy was Modernism, and they left no way for a Modernist to sign their confession. In two issues, however, they took a surprisingly moderate stance. There is reason to believe that many of the pastors took a strong view of divine sovereignty; yet they eliminated the word election and in no way strengthened what they had received from the Bible Union. Regarding eschatology, their only substantial change was to add the word “premillennial.” (This alone may account for Shields’ withdrawal from the movement.) They still had left their statement open to any view on the rapture, and they did not specify an any-moment return of Christ. They made premillennialism a test of fellowship, but they left the widest latitude within that label.

### **The McCaul Episode**

In 1943 Dr. Robert McCaul of the Brooklyn Baptist Tabernacle led his church to join the GARBC.<sup>46</sup> Ten years later, in 1953 according to his

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<sup>45</sup> Joseph M. Stowell, telephone interview with the writer, February 15, 1983.

<sup>46</sup> Robert McCaul, “The Inside Story of the Proposed Expulsion of the Brooklyn Baptist Tabernacle from the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches,” widely distributed brochure, n.d., but c. spring, 1963. Two sequels, dated Fall, 1963 and January,

account, the association's leadership were about to offer a resolution to insert the word "imminent" in the confession of faith. At the annual meeting, held that year in Philadelphia, Dr. Ketcham spoke to the resolution, suggested that it was a widely-accepted view, but withdrew it lest it be a cause for division. Thereupon the chairman asked for a standing vote to test the messengers' approval of immanency. The vote was just short of unanimous in favor. This, to McCaul's admitted chagrin, gave an indication of just how premillennial the membership of the association actually was. After more turbulence a decade later, the GARBC found it necessary to dismiss the Brooklyn Tabernacle from its fellowship.

In a telephone interview, Dr. Joseph Stowell could remember only one other occasion before the 1970's that the leaders seriously considered revising the confession of faith.<sup>47</sup> The occasion was the acceptance among some teachers in approved schools of uniformitarian geology. There was some thought of specifying in the confession that creation took place in six twenty-four-hour days. Stowell suggested in another interview that Dr. Ketcham seemed to become increasingly resistant to suggestions that the confession be revised.

### Typographical Changes

A few changes crept into the confession during the years, apparently from the practice of the typesetters to use a recent copy of the *Annual* to prepare the edition for the following year. Among these are the omission of "intelligent" from Article II, "equal" from Article III (restored about 1963), and from late in the same paragraph, "baptizes," and from Article VII, "ever," which was lost in 1968. In Article VIII "sins" became singular, as did "Scriptures" in Article XII. Also in Article XII, "every church" became "each local church."<sup>48</sup>

### Comparison with the New Hampshire Confession

While it has been common in the movement to speak of the confession as the old New Hampshire with a premillennial ending, it is instructive to compare the two documents. Of the eighteen articles in Brown's 1853 version, only one of them appeared verbatim in the GARBC confession, Article XVI. Further comparison will show that another six articles were modified by two to five lines.<sup>49</sup> Three others were

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1965. See also "Statement by Dr. Ketcham and Dr. Jackson," mimeographed, n.d., but c. 1963.

<sup>47</sup> Interview of February 15, 1983.

<sup>48</sup> Of these, none appears in the confession in Stowell's *Background and History*, which version was apparently copied from a very early *Baptist Bulletin*.

<sup>49</sup> Numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 14, and 17.

extensively revised,<sup>50</sup> and two more were totally changed.<sup>51</sup> The remaining six were dropped altogether and replaced with five articles dealing with new issues.

The New Hampshire confession was clearly the parent document, but comparison corrects the legend. The various committees changed it substantially, even though they retained the spirit and values of previous versions.

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<sup>50</sup> Numbers 4, 7 and 13.

<sup>51</sup> Numbers 11 and 18.



## 4 THE CLARIFICATIONS, 1971–1975

### Occasion

At the June, 1971, meeting of the Council of Fourteen, Dr. Stowell brought up the subject of revising the confession of faith. His suggestion traces to a letter he had recently received from David E. Smith, then pastor of the Burton Avenue Church of Waterloo, Iowa.<sup>52</sup> It seemed that the confession was ripe for revision; nearly forty years had passed without one official change, and several informants remembered a general sentiment in favor of going over the whole document. On a motion by D.O. Fuller, seconded by W.W. Welch, the chairman then appointed a committee of three to study the matter and bring back a report. He named Dr. Ernest Pickering, president of Baptist Bible College, Pastor Donald Sewell, of the historic Emmanuel Baptist Church in Toledo, and as chairman, Dr. David Nettleton, president of Faith Baptist Bible College.

At the December meeting of the council, Nettleton reported that the committee had yet to meet, and he asked the council's views on some five key issues. The minutes recorded that someone mentioned Dr. Paul Jackson's recent book, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, and this became a prime source for the committee's work. The following June Nettleton reported progress, and the council moved that the committee continue its work. Again that December Nettleton reported further progress, and the council moved that the committee continue its work and bring a report in June, 1973.<sup>53</sup>

### The Committee's Suggested Confession

At the June, 1973, meeting, held in Kansas City, the committee presented its suggested revisions. These came in twenty-four articles, based largely on the Jackson confession, which was in turn based on the

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<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the Council of Fourteen, excerpt from June, 1971. Informants in looking back remembered a general impulse toward revision but could recall no specific voice.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, excerpt from December, 1971, June, 1972.

historic confession of the association. After drawing on Jackson, the committee had made its own revisions. Comparing the committee's report with the existing GARBC confession of faith, the reader will note these changes:

Article I now specified plenary and verbal inspiration.

Article V on creation was verbatim from Jackson, completely rephrasing the old statement.

Article VI on the fall of man included in the editing the words "totally depraved."

Article IX on the resurrection and priesthood of Christ was a new one from Jackson.

Articles XI and XIII were new ones by Pickering, XI on justification rewriting the old statement, and XIII on election, a new statement altogether.

Articles XIV on sanctification, XVI on adoption, XX on separation, XXII on Israel, and XXIII on the rapture were all new, and almost verbatim from Jackson.<sup>54</sup>

After recording Nettleton's report, the minutes give nearly a page of discussion of what followed,<sup>55</sup> and other sources indicate that the report generated emotion. The key item was number thirteen, on election, which read as follows:

We believe that all men are totally depraved, without ability to come to God, and hopelessly lost, but that God, in sovereign grace and apart from any consideration of human merit or response, chose some before the foundation of the world to be recipients of His grace in Christ. As the gospel is preached to all nations, those elect ones are caused to hear it and their hearts are opened by the Holy Spirit so that they freely and gladly receive Christ as their Savior, thus becoming children of God. (John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-6)<sup>56</sup>

There is reason to believe that these views were the beliefs of all the men in the room. Only six years before, Dr. Ketcham had published them in the *Baptist Bulletin*.<sup>57</sup> At this point in history, however, these had

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<sup>54</sup> Paul R. Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church* (Schaumburg, Illinois: Regular Baptist Press, 1968, 1980), and the committee's draft confession, included in Minutes, June, 1973. Except by silence, the committee's confession seems to omit any notice of the charismatic movement. In the section on the Holy Spirit it deletes Jackson's lines ruling out the sign-gifts for the present age.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes, June, 1973, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Draft confession.

<sup>57</sup> Robert T. Ketcham, "Some Thoughts on the Sovereignty of God," *Baptist Bulletin*, 32:14-16, July, 1967.

become divisive matters, and some of the words in the proposed Article XIII were slogans of an extreme view.

Dr. Myron Houghton has given his recollections of this event.

Concerning the “clarifications” of the GARB Articles of Faith, I am not at all certain who initiated the revision. I was present at the 1973 Council meeting in Kansas City as the official observer of the Rocky Mountain Association of Regular Baptist Churches. It was at this Council meeting that the Committee (Pickering, Nettleton & Sewell) presented their proposals to the whole Council. I publicly spoke against the inclusion of the election article, not because I could not sign it, but because it would have disfranchised some of the churches . . . .<sup>58</sup>

The minutes bear this out and add, “Stowell agreed with Houghton—he raised a note of cuation (sic) even though he agreed with the statement.” The meeting broke for lunch and then apparently continued for some hours, ending with a motion to complete the work in a schedule that would read half the confession to the next annual meeting and the other half to the meeting of 1975, each half to be voted on a year after its first reading.

### **The Jackson Confession**

After the success of his 1957 book, *The Doctrine of the Local Church*, Dr. Paul R. Jackson wrote a new and larger work on the same general subject, which he published in 1968.<sup>59</sup> At the close of this book he gave numbers of forms for church use, including a confession of faith. This confession was clearly drawn from the existing GARB confession, but it provides Jackson’s own reasoned update of it.<sup>60</sup>

The 1980 edition of this book replaced Jackson’s confession of faith with the clarified confession of the association.

### **Preparations for the Readings**

The committee used the next year editing their proposed confession of faith to prepare it for its reading at Ocean Grove. They added three lines to the statement on Satan. They combined the statements on reconciliation and faith into one, headed “Salvation,” changing about four lines and restoring the last four lines from the old confession. It was apparently in this revised form that the committee

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<sup>58</sup> Myron Houghton, personal letter to the writer, January 24, 1983.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Note the few distinct typographical variants, e.g., in Article VIII, “sin,” in Article XVII, “Scripture,” and the omission of “baptizes” from Article III.

presented the first eleven articles at Ocean Grove, reading them in preparation for a vote the following year. They also read the article on election, and as expected it caused widespread discussion. The *Baptist Bulletin* found it necessary to deny someone's news report that the GARBC had adopted a new statement on election.<sup>61</sup> The same editorial stressed that any changes under consideration were clarifications of positions already held, not revisions.

That winter the Council of Eighteen (recently enlarged from fourteen) received reams of correspondence either for or against inclusion of the article on election. Under such pressures, its chairman, Dr. Carl Elgena, wrote to the churches to state the council's position.<sup>62</sup> His major points were that the council had had no thought of altering the confession of faith, that the GARBC had always been Calvinistic but had never accepted limited atonement, that they rejected Arminianism, and that they wanted to give leadership to young men in the movement who might be drawn toward either extreme position. He then noted some four Calvinistic wordings in the old confession. He concluded by writing that while the entire council agreed to the election article, they did not want it to be a cause of division in the movement.

During that year the committee was able to complete their editing of the confession they had offered in 1973. They rephrased the first article, on the Scriptures, and they dropped the article on adoption. They changed a few words in their article on the church and omitted the last four lines. They modified the article on the ordinances by specifying single immersion and by moving the line about authority of the local church. They emphasized that baptism precedes the Lord's Supper. They changed a few words in the article on eschatology.<sup>63</sup>

### **Winona Lake, 1975**

When the report came up at the 1975 meeting, the reading of the second half of the confession came as a matter of course. The big concern was the article on election. In the committee chairman's distributed report, he duplicated the election article and gave an extended history of the committee's work on it. He went on to discuss the nature of the article and the need he felt that the association declare its historic belief. Since however the matter had become so emotional an issue, he moved that the "Association support the Council in its decision to refrain from presenting this particular article for consideration."<sup>64</sup> He

<sup>61</sup> Editorial, *Baptist Bulletin*, 40:8, October, 1974.

<sup>62</sup> Carl Elgena, Unpublished circular letter, quoted in full in Chapter 12 for Dr. David Nettleton's forthcoming book, a copy of which chapter he graciously sent to the writer. He is holding this chapter to be published separately.

<sup>63</sup> The committee's final revisions read to the association were printed in the *Baptist Bulletin*. 40:15, October, 1974, and 41:15, October, 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Nettleton, Chapter 12, p. 6.

then explained that after the vote on this motion, which dealt with election as a test of fellowship, he would follow it with another motion. His first motion was passed by 1148 to 109. His second motion, to make the election statement a testimony without making it a test of fellowship, led to a two-hour discussion.<sup>65</sup> Eventually the matter ended in a clouded substitute motion, leaving the issue unresolved. Somewhere the first half of the confession was accepted.

### **Polarization**

By about this time Dr. Kenneth Good had published and distributed his book, *Are Baptists Calvinists?* In this book he took a hard-line view in favor of Calvinism, and a considerable group of the association's pastors identified themselves with this view. At the opposite pole was evangelist Robert Sumner, who during the discussion at Winona Lake delivered extended remarks in favor of his Arminian position. In the weeks after the annual meeting, Good's followers organized the Committee of Concerned Regular Baptists, to articulate their position.

The council was determined to steer a middle course between these two positions. Smith recorded several actions that the Council took in attempting to prevent division.<sup>66</sup> In September they put out a circular letter expressing disfavor on any groups attempting to reverse the Winona Lake action or to fragment the movement. Second, the *Baptist Bulletin* began refusing to print letters dealing with the issue, and apparently to accept advertizing which might tend to promote discord in the movement, meaning advertizing from either pole. A third action was at the 1976 annual meeting in Seattle, in which Council member Paul Tassell, in a major evening address, spoke against the CCRB's position, and Smith records that his address drew great applause from the audience.<sup>67</sup>

In 1976 the association accepted the rest of the confession of faith and printed it in the next *Annual*. It seems unlikely that the association will soon make any more clarifications.

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<sup>65</sup> H. Allen Smith, "CCRB Disbands," mimeographed sheets widely distributed, n.d., but c. 1977.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



## CONCLUSIONS

IT IS A TRUISM AMONG BAPTISTS that “We are not a creedal people.” In comparison with other denominations this is almost a Baptist distinctive. Yet even before the Woelfkin resolution of 1922, Baptists realized that a simple New Testament affirmation was not enough. On the one hand, true Baptists hold the New Testament as their only authority and rule for faith and practice, and to them no creed has any authority. On the other hand, all through their documented history they have found it necessary to form confessions of faith in order to specify what the literally-interpreted New Testament conveys.<sup>68</sup> A study of the stages through which the New Hampshire Confession has passed in these 150 years offers several additional lessons.

1. A confession of faith may need to change. This is true because the human mind has not yet found a way to make a perfect and timeless statement. The Bible is perfect and timeless, and this is testimony to its divine origin. Secondly, languages change. However, this study has observed constant rewording and improving in almost every stage of its history. This was true in the work of the original committees in 1830–1833; witness the many suggestions from both board and convention.

Furthermore, issues change. One might almost say that the Devil determines our statements of faith. New heresies require new articles. Which New Hampshire framer could have foreseen that ninety years hence the popular test of faith would be the virgin birth? Could Brown have foreseen that eighty years hence, earnest and informed Baptists would simply drop six of his eighteen articles? Could he have foreseen that creation would become a critical issue? Could Riley and Norris foresee that only ten years later the revisers would greatly condense their statement on creation—and their successors forty years later would expand it again? This suggests that a body should make some cautious provision for upgrading its doctrinal statement, in such a way

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<sup>68</sup> They regard the whole Bible, of course, as inspired; but in any seeming conflict between the Testaments, the New Testament rule prevails.

that it can treat new issues without compromising its founding principles.

2. During the 150 years of its development, the New Hampshire Confession has conveyed a coherent body of truth. With whatever the above paragraph conveys, the substratum of Biblical truth has remained remarkably constant. The only notable qualification to this has to be in eschatology. It is too much to insist that the majority of the New Hampshire men, had they lived so long, would have embraced premillennialism. But aside from our reservations about their closing article, we can with clear conscience assent to their Declaration of Faith. We would hope that with the same easy good will they could accept our clarified Confession of Faith as currently printed.

3. This confession throughout its history has been moderately Calvinistic and evangelistic. It never had any praise for human ability, but at every stage of its development it expected helpless sinners to respond to the gospel.

4. At every stage in its history this confession was an irenic document. None of its framers, from 1830 until 1975, tried to make it overly exclusive. Since the clarifications, numbers of men have remarked that the association needs to take a stronger stand on this or that issue. But this study would suggest that in 1974–1975 the Council of Eighteen acted quite in harmony with the men who preceded them in framing this confession. The original framers sought a middle way between the Freewill Baptists and Old School New England Calvinism. The Bible Union men, Riley and Norris, accepted neither Arminianism nor limited atonement. They were premillennials who softened their statement lest it divide the movement or drive off Canadians or southerners.

When a decade later the founders of the GARBC revised the confession, they actually softened the Calvinism a little and to the loose statement on eschatology they added only the word premillennial. They believed that their real adversaries were Modernists, and among believers they wanted to avoid any needlessly divisive stands.

In the recent Clarifications, the correspondence conveys the same spirit within the committee. At one point Nettleton asked Pickering for a statement on election. He later quoted a few lines from Pickering's reply:

Frankly, I do not think I can produce a definition that will satisfy everyone in our Association. . . . However, I will send you this with the understanding that it may be thought unwise to introduce it because of potential division. I will understand perfectly if this is the case.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ernest Pickering, personal letter to David Nettleton, June 6, 1972, quoted in Nettleton, *Op. Cit.*, p. 150.

The concern among the others in the Council of Eighteen comes through on a similar note. Even though such a group represents a variety of convictions, they seemed united in their handling of the controversy, feeling that it was better to alienate the extreme positions than to permit the whole movement to fragment. They apparently ought to balance their concern to specify New Testament truth with their concern to prevent divisions.

5. A ponderable question is how much the confession of faith had to do in the GARBC's half century of fidelity to the doctrines it held at its beginning. Other groups with strong confessions have left the truths they began with. At least some of the answer must be in the sort of men that the movement first attracted. It cost to be a separatist. Even though they did not write separation into their constitution until six years had passed, the leaders were separatists. The tradition that they stamped upon the movement may have done more than even the confession they formed and preserved.



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