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DR. DANIEL FEATLEY AND THE FIRST CALVINISTIC  
BAPTIST CONFESSION.

BY W. J. M'GLOTHLIN, PH.D., D.D.

Dr. Daniel Featley was an influential and rather liberal clergyman of the Church of England at the outbreak of the Civil War. He was an Oxford graduate, a scholar of very considerable learning, a famous author and controversialist, a preacher of ability, holding high ecclesiastical positions and standing well with the civil authorities. He was a relentless opponent of Catholicism, a convinced supporter of the episcopacy, but opposed to the High-church views and the high-handed practices of Laud, an opponent of the Presbyterians and the Independents. He was rector in London, popular and influential. Proof of his high standing and influence as well as of his liberal views is found in the fact that he was selected by Parliament as one of the very few Episcopalians chosen to sit in the Westminster Assembly. He attended some of the sessions of this body, but was discovered to be in correspondence with Archbishop Ussher, who was with the king and his royal forces at Oxford. As a consequence he was thrown into prison as a suspected spy, and died in 1646 without obtaining release.

Being such a famous controversialist it was perfectly natural that he should take up the cudgel against the Baptists when they began to make their influence felt in the early forties of the seventeenth century. He had quickly discovered them when they began work in London, 1612 or 1613, for he says in the "Epistle Dedicatory" to "Dippers Dipt," written in 1645, that Anabaptism had "thrust out its sting neer the place of my residence, for more than twenty yeeres." October 17, 1642, he had held a public disputation with a company of Anabaptists in Southwark and in his own opinion had overwhelmed them. The distractions of the time seem to have prevented any further conflict with them until his imprisonment gave him leisure to

take up controversy again. While thus confined he wrote against the Catholics on one side and the Puritans on the other. He then took up the controversy against the Baptists again, occasioned, it may be, by the presence of Henry Denne, an influential Baptist preacher, as a fellow prisoner. Moreover the tediousness of his imprisonment had much to do with the origin and bitter tone of his "Dippers Dipt." He says, "I could not think of any fitter employment for the present than to perfect the notes taken long since in that Disputation, [against the Baptists 1642] and to supply whatsoever might seeme lacking to the fuller confutation of those erroneous tenets, and to commend both to the publike view, that the *Antidote might be there ready, where the infection first broke out.*" Again he says it is a "*desire for the time to forget my unsufferable pressures, which hath now set me on worke.*" He felt impelled to preach, he says, and yet could neither regain his freedom nor obtain permission to preach in prison; so he undertakes "to preach with the pen; which I can hardly dip into any other liquor, then the juice of Gall, in regard of the malignity of the times, and the insolencies of the enemies of the truth." Accordingly he furbished up the notes of his disputation with the Baptists held in 1642, added eight other chapters, making a book of two hundred pages, dedicated the whole to Parliament and gave it to the public. It was evidently a last desperate bid for freedom which he had been unable to obtain otherwise. By attacking the supposed disloyalty of the Baptists to the State he thought to prove his own; and thus lead Parliament to relent. And he did dip his pen in gall. Ridicule, invective, denunciation, cries of alarm and danger, and sober Scriptural argument are mingled throughout the book. The frontispiece was a caricature of a baptismal scene which certainly added piquancy to the book. It proved to be his most popular book, running through six editions in as many years, and enjoying an enormous sale for that time.

There can be no doubt that Featley was sincere in his fears of the Baptists. In the "Epistle" dedicating the work to Parliament he warns that body that "of all Heretiques and Schis-

matiques the Anabaptists in three regards ought to be most carefully looked unto, and severely punished, if not utterly exterminated and banished out of the Church and Kingdome." The three regards were (1) "their affinity with many other damnable Heretiques, both ancient and later," (2) "their audacious attempts upon Church and State," for whereas other heretics are disposed to submit to state and church and keep out of view, these Anabaptists come boldly forward and not only demand complete toleration but "upbraid the state with their merit in hazarding their estate and persons in this present War, and boast with swelling words of vanity that they expect somewhat more then a toleration. They preach, and print, and practice their Hereticall impieties openly; they hold their Conventicles weekly in our chiefe Cities, and Suburbs thereof, and there prophesie by turnes; . . . They flock in great multitudes to their *Jordans*, and both Sexes enter into the River, and are dipt after their manner with a kind of *spell* containing the heads of their erroneous tenets." (3) The third reason assigned for the importance of the forcible suppression of the Anabaptists was "the peculiar malignity this heresie hath to Magistracie; other heresies are stricken by Authority, this strikes at Authority itselfe;" they "in expresse termes deny both the Legislative power in the Commons to propound or enact Lawes in matter of Religion, and all coercive power in the house of Peeres, or any other, to inflict civill punishment for the violation of them." In his address to a friend he says that among all heretics "the Papists and Anabaptists are most dangerous and pestilent enemies, the one to the Church, the other to the State."

In most of this *Featley* was undoubtedly right. The Baptists and their views were dangerous enemies to his conceptions of the power and functions both of State and of Church. In fact time has proven that his fears were well grounded. No other body of people have done so much to break the fetters of ecclesiastical and civil tyranny and oppression. They were growing rapidly (he says they then boasted of forty-seven churches) and his alarm proves as well his ability to estimate

the significance of the movement as the completeness of the support given by him to the prevailing views of the time.

But Featley made two serious mistakes. He believed that all Baptists were Pelagian or at least Arminian. This was natural, for the Anabaptists and the earlier English Baptists had held these views. No heresy was worse than Arminianism to the great majority of Englishmen at this time. But the fortunes of the Baptist faith were to be in the keeping of Calvinists for the future, though this was not then known by Featley.

But the capital blunder was in identifying them with the Anabaptists. He knows that there had been Anabaptists, hidden away in England, in the reigns of Elizabeth and James and believes that the distractions of the times have given the opportunity for the terrible error to break forth in the open. "Of late," he says, "since the unhappy distractions which our sinnes have brought upon us, the Temporall Sword being other wayes imployed, and the *Spiritual locked up fast in the scabberd*, this Sect, among others, hath so far presumed upon the patience of the State, that it hath held weekly Conventicles, re-baptized hundreds of men and women together in the twilight in Rivelets, and some armes of the Thames, and elsewhere, dipping them over head and eares." He knew of their rebaptism, their most striking point of similarity with the Anabaptists, and concluded that they were in all respects the same. He and all their opponents called them Anabaptists, while the Calvinistic Baptists repudiated the identification and its implications with all possible decision. Having identified them with the continental Anabaptists he proceeded to charge them with all the errors of doctrine and life of which that body was accused. It is fortunately impossible at this day to understand the apprehension and opprobrium that clung to the name Anabaptist. Some of it was deserved, but most of it was slander or fear of those distinctive tenets of the Anabaptists which are now their glory. But the Baptists did not hold many of their objectionable views, and were free from their fanaticism. What he says therefore against the Anabaptists, which constitutes most of his book, is largely beside the mark. And Featley cannot be wholly

acquitted of blame here. He had the new Confession of Faith of the Baptists, drawn up in 1644, in his hands and could know what they believed. In fact he did know, but could not bring himself to believe that this confession fully and fairly represented their views. And it did not, as we know, represent the views of the entire body of Baptists. The majority of them, perhaps, were Arminian, which in some cases shaded off into Pelagianism and the two parties had little or nothing to do with each other. But this Featley does not seem to understand.

In the last chapter of his book he comes to speak of the confession of 1644. He says that according to this statement, "they neither teach free-will, nor falling away from grace with the *Arminians*, nor deny originall sin with the *Pelagians*, nor disclaime Magistracy with the *Jesuites*, nor maintain plurality of wives with the *Polygamists*, nor community of goods with the *Apostolici*, nor going naked with the *Adamites*; much less averre the mortality of the soule with *Epicures* and *Psychopannichists*." But "they offer to the unlearned their faire cup full of venome, anointing the brim with the honey of sweet and holy words. . . . They cover a little rats-bane in a great quantity of sugar, that it may not be discerned: For, among the fifty-three Articles of their Confession, there are not above six but may passe with a faire construction; and in those six, none of the foulest and most odious positions, wherewith that Sect is aspersed, are expressed." What is the explanation? he asks. Are all who have written against the Anabaptists in the past only slanderers? By no means, says Featley. All that was alleged against those Anabaptists was true, and "if their Scholars in England have learned no such doctrines from them, it is because they are *punies* in their Schoole, and have not taken any *lesson* in the *upper forms*. . . . It seems to me, that these Anabaptists are but *in fieri* (as Schooles speak) not *in facto esse*: like the fish and the serpents in the mud of *Nilus*, not fully shaped; like a statue in the Stone-cutter's shop, not finished: They are Anabaptists but in part, not in whole" (p. 148). He saw clearly that they were not Anabaptists if that confession was expressive of their real sentiments; they them-

selves constantly protested that they were not Anabaptists, and yet some modern historians undertake to prove the identity. The old way was to start from the other end of the line and attempt to prove that Baptists were Anabaptists, the new way is to start from this end and attempt to prove that the Anabaptists were Baptists. Both efforts fail. There were important agreements, but there were also very important differences.

Of the fifty-three articles of their confession he criticises only six. In Article XXXI they had said with regard to the possession of property by Christians: "Whatsoever the Saints, any of them doe possesse or enjoy of God in this life, is onely by faith." These words were declared by Featley to savor of ancient error, and he undertook to prove from Scripture that possession of property was by legal earthly right and not of God's grace.

These words in Article XXXVIII, "That the due maintenance of the officers aforesaid should be the free, and voluntary communication of the Church, and not by constraint to be compelled from the people by a forced Law," he criticised as ambiguous. If they meant that the support of the ministry should be voluntary so that the law need not be invoked he agreed; but if they meant that there should be no power to invoke the law in case of neglect or refusal to support the church officers, this he regards as a damnable error.

Article XXXIX reads as follows, "That Baptisme is an Ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptised." Featley recognizes this as the essence of their Anabaptist contention. "Here they lisper not, but speak out plain their Anabaptisticall doctrine: whereby they exclude all children of the faithfull, from the sacrament of entrance into the Church, and the only outward meanes of their salvation in that state." He declares that the truth of their contention hangs on the word "onely," and that that word is neither found in nor can it be justly inferred from any of the proof texts cited by them. Of

course, he says, all who have come to years must profess faith before baptism. The positive of their proposition is true, but the negative most false. If the word "onely" were omitted from the article it would not be objectionable, Featley asserts.

Article XL defines the mode of baptism as follows: "The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance, the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water; it being a signe, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the washing the whole soule in the blood of Christ; secondly, that interest the Saints have in the death, buriall, and resurrection; thirdly, together with a confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and riseth againe, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reigne with Christ."

On this article Featley remarks, "This Article is wholly sowed with the new leaven of Anabaptisme, I say *new leaven*; for it cannot be proved, that any of the ancient Anabaptists maintained any such position, there being three wayes of baptizing, either by dipping, or washing, or sprinkling." He maintains that Scripture nowhere, either by precept or example, prescribes dipping as the only mode. He has no objection to immersion, but only to the position that immersion is the only Scriptural mode, in this respect being in agreement with many of the leading men of his time.

Article XLI has regard to the administrator or baptism and is as follows: "The persons designed by Christ, to dispense this Ordinance, the Scriptures hold forth to be a preaching Disciple: it being no where tyed to a particular Church-officer, or person extraordinarily sent, the commission injoyning the administration, being given to them under no other consideration, but as considered Disciples."

Naturally this article was very offensive to the Episcopal clergyman, Featley. It had decidedly too little ecclesiasticism in it; it would bring utter confusion in the church of God, he thought. Ordinances must be administered by officers. In particular he ridiculed the expression, "preaching disciple," as



sounding "as harshly as a Scholar-Master, or a Lecturing hearer."

Finally he objected to these words in Article XLV: "That such to whom God hath given gifts, being tryed in the church, may and ought by the appointment of the congregation, to prophesie." The word "prophesy" had been used for lay and unofficial preaching by the Anabaptists and others for a long time. Sometimes wild fanaticism and loose views had found a cloak in this word. Because, therefore, of its history and the flavor of lay activity which clung about it, the word was particularly objectionable to the official church. Featley declares that all the fanatical doings of the wild Anabaptists of the continent were hidden in the word and might break forth again.

Such was the criticism of Dr. Daniel Featley in his famous book "Dippers Dipt." The fact that so able and famous a man should write a book against the Baptists is proof of their rapidly increasing power. Owing to the character of the book and the fame of the author the Baptists felt it incumbent on them to make reply. Henry Denne challenged the author to a public disputation in the prison. The challenge was accepted, but after the debate had proceeded some time Featley refused to go on on the plea that it was dangerous to do so without a license. Denne then published a reply entitled "Anti-christ unmasked, etc." Samuel Richardson also published a reply entitled "Brief considerations on Dr. Featley, his Book, intituled the Dipper Dipt." But these, being replies by individuals, were felt to be inadequate. There should be a united and official answer dedicated, as was Featley's book to Parliament, and brought directly to the attention of that body. But what form should the answer take? Surely nothing could be more appropriate than the very confession which he had criticised and which had been before the public now for two years as the acknowledged and official statement of their views.

For this high service the confession was very carefully revised. The language was made clearer in some places, the material was somewhat rearranged at points and in general made more presentable. But what of Featley's criticisms?

Manifestly it would be the part of wisdom to remove as far as possible the statements to which he had made objection. And this they did to an extent that surprises a Baptist at the present day. They did not give up any of their contentions, but they blunted the point of the language of the confession to such an extent as to lead them to the very edge of unfaithfulness.

In response to Featley's criticism of Article XXXI the revision reads: "Whatsoever the Saints possesse or enjoy of God spiritually, is by faith; and outward and temporall things are lawfully enjoyed by a civill right by them who have no faith." There is nothing surprising here. They only make clear and plain what was probably their original meaning. But it was clearly in response to Featley's criticism.

The change in Article XXXVIII is surprising. Here they omit the phrase "and not by constraint to be compelled from the people by a forced Law" altogether, so that the revised article reads, "The ministers of Christ ought to have whatsoever they shall need, supplied freely by the Church, that according to Christ's ordinance, they that preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel by the law of Christ." The Baptist point of religious freedom and separation between church and state is so far blunted that Dr. Featley himself could have signed it without hesitation or reservation. The Baptists could maintain their position under this article, but no longer by it.

They so far give heed to Dr. Featley's criticism of Article XXXIX on the subject of baptism as to remove the word "only," saying now "it is to be dispensed upon persons professing faith," whereas before it read "only upon persons professing faith." Again the point of the Baptist contention is gone and their critic could sign the revised article without constraint of conscience. One can here scarcely defend them against the charge of unfaithfulness to their convictions.

The change in Article XL on the mode of baptism is equally surprising. In the first edition they say, "The way and manner of the dispensing of this ordinance, the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging, etc." This Featley denied, saying that the Scriptures nowhere, either by precept or example, pre-

scribe immersion as the only mode of baptism. In response to that criticism the article reads in the revised edition, "That the way and manner of the dispensing this ordinance is dipping or plunging, etc.," all reference to Scripture authority being removed. They cling to their mode, but give up or at least do not any longer assert it on Scripture authority. One is positively amazed at these last three concessions on matters that were then and are now regarded as essential Baptist doctrines.

In deference to the criticism on Article XLI they modify the term "preaching disciple" into plain "disciple" and add at the end of the article after the word "Disciples," the phrase "being men able to preach the Gospel." Here they again give nothing away and only remove an unhappy phrase.

There is no evidence that Featley's criticism of the word "prophesy" had any effect on them. To us it is rather surprising that they should have retained this offensive term when they gave up what seems to us so much more important. Perhaps their steadfastness in its retention was due to the fact that it was the word generally applied to unofficial lay preaching, and that they could not and would not give up.

Featley had also declared that they did not regard it as permissible for a Christian to serve as a civil magistrate or take an oath. This was true of the great body of the Anabaptists, but it was not true of the Baptists and it had not occurred to them to put an article on the subject into their first confession. Accordingly they add to the revised edition the following article on those subjects and number it L. "It is lawfull for a Christian to be a Magistrate or Civill Officer; and also it is lawfull to take an Oath, so it be in truth, and in judgement, and in righteousness, for confirmation of truth, and ending of all strife; and that by rash and vaine Oaths the Lord is provoked, and this Land mournes."

From this it will be seen that Featley's book made a profound impression on the Baptists—not on their views, but on the statement of those views. They felt the necessity of removing every possible cause of offense in the statement of those

views, and in three instances they go to the danger line by way of concession, if not beyond it. It only shows how sensitive they were to the dangers that beset them. This revised edition of their confession was dedicated to Parliament and published. It was reprinted several times and be it said to the credit of Englishmen that it very soon removed all fear and misunderstanding of the Baptists among intelligent religious people. It did not convince them of the Baptist peculiarities, but it did convince them that Baptists were not dangerous to the State or society.