

The Administration of the Lord's Supper among the Baptists of the Seventeenth Century

(a) GENERAL BAPTISTS

DR. HORTON DAVIES wrote¹ in 1948 that there was no account of an early Baptist service of the Lord's Supper. However, in his bibliography he does not note a book by Thomas Grantham, which, in fact, gives such an order.² We may analyse this order as follows :

1. Preaching and prayer, as on other occasions.
2. "Decent" preparation of the elements on the Table.
3. (a) Exhortation "to due Humility and reverence".
(b) Statement of the authority for and Institution of the Supper.
(c) Statement of its "mystical signification" regarding the Cross of Christ.
(d) Statement of the spiritual qualifications necessary for all partakers.
4. (a) Taking and blessing of the bread.
(b) Fraction and Words of Institution.
(c) Distribution and reception of the bread.
5. (a) Taking and blessing of the cup.
(b) Libation and Words of Institution.
(c) Distribution and reception of the cup.
6. Exhortation to gratitude.
7. Prayer of thanksgiving.
8. Fellowship offering.
9. "Hymn of Praise".

This order is of particular interest in that apart from the "Double consecration" it seems nearer to the Westminster Directory than the order of service at either Rothwell³ or Bury Street;⁴ these are the only two early orders of service respecting Independent churches which have come down to us. Both the Westminster Directory and the Baptist order have a richer introduction than the Independent orders. Some detail of Grantham's order call for comment.

Following the precedent set by John Smyth,⁵ the General Baptists used no book, not even the English Bible, in their services, for the greater part of the seventeenth century.⁶

With regard to Item 8, the offering had to be at the Lord's Supper because of its two purposes, namely :

- (i) The purchase of bread and wine, and plate when necessary.
- (ii) The expression of Christian love and fellowship, in relieving "the necessities of the saynts".⁷

With regard to Item 9, the term "Hymn of Praise" was frequent on the lips of General Baptists, but it did not mean a metrical psalm or a hymn sung to a formal tune by "conjoint voices". It rather meant a solo, prophetic, edificatory ejaculation.⁸ "Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are all solo activities, comparable with prophesying, preaching and teaching. Grantham, further, would not allow the use of any musical instrument or a choral ensemble.⁹ The "hymn" at the Last Supper was no evidence for or against "conjoint singing". Who sang, what he or they sang and the method of singing are all unknown. The singing to instruments of the Old Testament times was a concession to "the gross hearts of the Jews". Thus, the "Hymn of Praise" at the close of the Lord's Supper was a solo outburst of Praise to God by the elder conducting the Supper.¹⁰

The General Baptists did not engage in psalm-singing, except that the Turner's Hall church sang psalms, including one at the close of the Lord's Supper, after its amalgamation with the Barbican Particular Baptist church.¹¹ In 1689 the General Assembly thought Sternhold and Hopkins so "strangely foreign to the Evangelical worship that it was not conceived anyways safe for the Churches to admit to such Carnall formalities".¹² A solo voice represented the whole church, as in prayer; only whereas in prayer the voice was solemn, in a "hymn" it was joyful.¹³

The General Baptists adjoined to the Lord's Supper an "agape". It had a double justification :

- (i) It was according to the primitive model.
- (ii) It was "necessary that the congregation should be refreshed before it be dismissed".¹⁴ Hence the phrase, "Leg of Mutton Baptists".

The custom, though widespread among the General Baptists in the middle of the seventeenth century, had died out largely by its end; in 1709, only one congregation, that at Lambert Street, Whitechapel, practised it.¹⁵

The Fenstanton church did not regard this "love-feast" as vital, though it did take it as the proper thing to do from the example of the Lord.¹⁶ Thomas Grantham regarded it as a matter of option : the only vital thing, he learned from 1 *Cor.* 10 : 16, was that anything more than the one bread and one cup of the Supper itself must not be abused.¹⁷ A "Feast of Charity" was lawful, but only

the one bread and the one cup of the Supper was necessary. To come to the Supper fasting, however, was equally forbidden by the Scriptures, since the Last Supper followed the Paschal Feast.¹⁸

Like the other Separatist bodies the General Baptists had a conscientious objection to kneeling at the Lord's Supper to receive the elements, and sat, copying the Last Supper as they understood it.¹⁹ It is not true to say, with R. C. Walton,²⁰ that they denied that bodily actions could express spiritual intentions. For Grantham, at least, their posture was an act of spiritual obedience to the Lord, who clearly intended the communicants to sit.²¹ He disagreed with those who would enforce kneeling but also with those who said that the posture was a matter of indifference. The posture was not essential to the "Ordinance", but it was important and of spiritual significance.²²

The General Baptists objected to the use of a knife on the bread at the Lord's Supper,²³ noting the Scriptural expression, "the breaking of bread".

The order of receiving each of the elements was that which commonly obtains today, namely: minister first, congregation second, and deacons delivering the elements last.²⁴

Thomas Grantham appears to be the only General Baptist who gave his people teaching regarding their approach to and use of the Lord's Supper.²⁵

(b) THE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS

No detailed order of service for the Particular Baptists has come down to us. However, it cannot have been substantially different from that supplied by Thomas Grantham regarding the General Baptists, since the latter is so similar to that known to have obtained among the Independents.

A few points call for comment.

As for the Independents and the General Baptists the details of the Last Supper constituted a norm for the Lord's Supper. Thus, for example, the Words of Institution were said to the disciples in general,²⁶ and therefore had to be said to the congregation as a whole. It was wrong of the Anglican priest to repeat them to each communicant, one by one.²⁷

Few Baptists sang psalms. Vavasor Powell was the only Baptist in Wales to encourage the practice.²⁸ Examples of English churches which sang psalms are: Broadmead,²⁹ Bedford (from 1690),³⁰ Kiffin's church³¹ and Paul's Alley.³² These all sang psalms at the Lord's Supper as well as at preaching services.

In the last quarter of the century a great discussion arose among the London Baptists on the question of hymn singing.³³ Benjamin Keach propounded that as the Lord had sung a hymn before going

out from the Last Supper, so the church should sing a hymn at the close of the Lord's Supper. By "hymn" he meant the modern hymn, then unknown to English congregations. His argument was resisted by many contemporary fellow Baptists, though Hercules Collins³⁴ and others supported him.

When in 1668 Keach introduced the singing of a hymn at the close of the Lord's Supper it was the first time that the modern hymn had been sung in England.³⁵ The hymn was the *ad hoc* composition of Keach and was based on the preceding sermon, itself preparatory to the Supper at which the hymn was sung. After six years he introduced hymn singing on all festal occasions; after another 14 years he introduced the hymn to the regular Sunday worship.³⁶ At this a group of people left his church to form another at Maze Pond, where all hymn singing was banned.³⁷ The matter was mooted at the 1689 Assembly, which put it on one side. However, a bitter and wordy dispute descended upon the Baptists. The protagonist of the opposition to Keach was Isaac Marlow. The main apology for hymn singing from Keach was entitled "The Breach Repaired in God's Worship".

The *crux interpretum* was the Gospel account of the Last Supper, and the hymn which Keach was intending to imitate. A main point of discussion was the meaning of "hymn" in this context. The disputants considered the matter generally for the most part, i.e. without reference to the Lord's Supper in particular. Those who sang did so at the Lord's Supper also: those who did not sing at the Lord's Supper did not sing at all. Such matters as the "Mixed nature" of singing by an assembly, women's voices in church, the use of books in worship, solo singing "in the spirit", "stinted forms of worship", as well as textual and exegetical matters were all drawn into the dispute.

At Keach's church and elsewhere the hymn was the very last item in the service. This had Scriptural authority, but also the practical advantage that those who did not agree with the custom could leave before the hymn commenced! That this was so is evidenced by an item in the 1707 Covenant of Communion of the Watford church,³⁸ previously a sub-congregation of the Horsly Down church of Keach. It says:

"Whereas several of our members are satisfied in their judgment concerning singing an hymn after the Lord's Supper, we declare that we are willing our brethren and sisters so satisfied should enjoy the liberty of their conscience in the matter, provided it be performed in this order, viz., after the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is concluded, praises to God by our prayer and contributions made and all other business belonging to the church ended. That then those

who in their judgment are for singing an hymn may stay and so sing without any offence to those who are not satisfied in the practice. And we, on the other hand, declare we will not be offended with any of our brethren and sisters who have not freedom and satisfaction to join with us therein, nor be present while so doing."

A similar practice at Alcester about the same time was directly due to the influence of Keach also.

Further, this practice was recommended by the Western Association meeting at Taunton in 1699,³⁹ thus :

"In reply to the church at Bampton, we humbly think those who are not for the practice of singing after the Lord's Supper may, without wrong to their own consciences, leave those to their liberty who are, for singing, to stay and sing in the same place where the supper is administered, after those who are not for singing are gone, and this we think will be much more honourable to the name of God and our holy profession than to send away dissatisfied members by recommendation."

Keach's hymns⁴⁰ will be found in his "Spiritual Songs" and "Spiritual Melody". Each was composed *ad hoc* and probably sung but once. Few of those published were written for the Lord's Supper: there was only one celebration of the Supper for every eight preaching services. Few of the hymns for the Sacrament have their imagery controlled by the details of the Supper. Predominantly the hymns are concerned to praise God for Christ and his death in a general manner.

Thomas Wilcox⁴¹ also wrote hymns for the Lord's Supper.⁴² While these constitute more tolerable verse than the doggerel of Keach it is not known whether they were ever sung. His compositions were written apparently with more care and at greater leisure than those of Keach, tied as the latter's were to his weekly round of sermon preparation.

In 1697 Joseph Stennett published "Hymns in Commemoration of the Sufferings of our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ, composed for the celebration of His Holy Supper".⁴³ Like those of Keach, and of Watts, these are concerned with the death of Christ in a general way. At times one meets specific reference to the Supper itself, as in No. XVI, part of which we quote :

"How sweet, how charming is the place,
With God's bright presence crowned :
Happy his children, who his board,
As olive-plants surround.

Eat of this feast, says he, my friends,
 Who to my courts repair;
 Come, dearest children, freely drink
 The wine which I prepare.

Here may our faith still on thee feed,
 The only food divine;
 To faith thy flesh is meat indeed,
 Thy blood the noblest wine :

Here we are glad to view thy love,
 Thro figures, and in part;
 But how much greater joy will't be
 To see thee as thou art ! ”

We also quote in full Hymn V of those of Thomas Wilcox, in which the imagery is controlled by the Supper itself :

“ Lo Christ is sacrific'd for us,
 Our Passover from heaven;
 Now therefore let us keep the Feast
 Not with old lumps of leaven.

Who eat and drink unworthily,
 Their own Damnation earn;
 Because they want a spiritual Eye,
 His Body to discern.

Our hearts with care examined,
 Let use be stirred up,
 To eat of this Celestial Bread,
 And drink this sacred Cup.

As often as we eat this Bread,
 And drink this sacred Wine,
 We Shew our Saviour's death until
 He come the second time.”

Baptists allowed no musical instruments to accompany their singing.

Some Particular Baptist churches associated with the Lord's Supper a “Love Feast”, “dressed for them by a Cook”; and “when Supper was ended, before the cloth was taken away, they administered the Lord's Supper”.⁴⁵ The Churches of Dr. Chamberlen,⁴⁶ Bishopsgate,⁴⁷ and Hexham,⁴⁸ had such an “agape”.

Churches such as that at Broadmead, Bristol, had a week-night service preparatory to the Lord's Supper.⁴⁹ The Ilston church had a preparation for one hour in English, then in Welsh, then a

sermon by the pastor, before the "Breaking of Bread".⁵⁰ Also, as we have seen, Benjamin Keach preceded the Supper with a preparatory sermon. It is not possible to say whether the majority of Baptists had such preparatory sermons. Benjamin Keach⁵¹ and Thomas Hardcastle⁵² (of Broomead) also gave their people some instruction in making themselves worthy receivers of the Supper, and advice regarding their personal preparation for it.

Attached to the Supper, at Broomead at least, was the reading of the church roll with a view to following up members not present.⁵³ Here, too, members were received into fellowship at the opening of the Supper, and the names of proposed new members were announced at its close.⁵⁴

The same church, for one, did not expose the elements to the gaze of the people until the Communion service had commenced.⁵⁵ Whether here or elsewhere this was done by the practice, now common, of covering the elements with "a fair white linen cloth" during the preceding preaching service, or by bringing in the elements only when the Communion service had commenced, is not known.

Particular Baptists, such as Hercules Collins,⁵⁶ insisted that the bread must not be cut with a knife but, like the Body of Christ, be broken. However, it may perhaps have been cut part way through before the service to allow of a nice breaking into walnut-sized pieces at the service proper, as it was at the Bury Street Independent church.⁵⁷ Special loaves may have been baked, as in some places in Yorkshire today. Perhaps, too, at some churches, as in some Welsh churches today,⁵⁸ there was an uncut and unbroken cottage loaf on the table and from which the minister took out the inside in one large piece with his hands and broke on to the plates.

Finally, we must note, that at some churches so much time was spent at prophesyings, preaching, etc., that the "breaking of Bread" became a very small item of worship, in point of time. For example, at Lyme Regis,

In 1657 we find another elaborate timetable for Sunday services through the Summer. From seven to nine there was to be trial of gifts, prayer and prophecy. From nine to twelve, public exercise, and again from one to three. Then followed a private meeting for members only, to communicate their experience, exercise discipline, and pass judgement on the gifts exercised.⁵⁹

It is not surprising that Particular Baptists, so pre-occupied, in point of time, with other "Ordinances", gave not so much as a sentence to the Lord's Supper in their 1644 and 1656 Confessions of Faith.

- ¹Davies, Horton: *The Worship of the English Puritans*, p. 93.
- ²Grantham, Th.: *Hear the Church*, pp. 28-30.
- ³Davis, R.: *Doctrine and Discipline*, p. 20. Glass, N.: *The Early History of the Independent Church at Rothwell*, p. 84.
- ⁴*Church Book*; printed in Rippon, J. *Baptist Annual Register*, III, pp. 516-9, IV, pp. 553-9, 597-6 and *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, VI, pp. 333-6.
- ⁵Smyth, J.: *Differences*, pp. 4, 17f.
- ⁶Burgess, W. H.: *John Smith*, pp. 129ff.
- ⁷Smyth, J.: *Works*, I, pp. 38f.
- ⁸Grantham, Th.: *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Part II, Ch. VIII, pp. 99-117. *A Friendly Epistle to the Bishops*, p. 34. Goadby, J. J.: *Bypaths in Baptist History*, pp. 322-330.
- ⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹¹*Church Book*; printed in Baptist Historical Society Transactions, IV, p. 47.
- ¹²Whitley, W. T. (Ed.): *Assembly Minutes*, I, p. 27.
- ¹³*Loc. cit.*, p. 28.
- ¹⁴D'Assigny, M.: *The Mystery of Anabaptism Unmasked*, p. 227. Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Fenstanton Records*, pp. 37, 67-9. *Warboys Records*, p. 272. Goadby, J. J.: *Bypaths in Baptist History*, p. 306.
- ¹⁵Taylor, A.: *The History of the General Baptists*, I, pp. 428f.
- ¹⁶Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Fenstanton Records*, pp. 35, 67-9.
- ¹⁷Grantham, Th.: *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Part II, Ch. 7, §II, pp. 82f, §VIII, 92, 95f.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁹*Op. cit.*, §VIII, pp. 94f.
- ²⁰Walton, R. C.: *The Gathered Community*, p. 132.
- ²¹Grantham, Th.: *Op. cit.*, p. 94.
- ²²*Ibid.*
- ²³Grantham, Th.: *Op. cit.*, p. 95.
- ²⁴Grantham, Th.: *Hear the Church*, pp. 28-30.
- ²⁵Grantham, Th.: *Christianismus Primitivus*, *Loc. cit.*, p. 92, §II *passim*.
- ²⁶Powell, V.: *Common-Prayer Book No Divine Service*, p. 22 (§39).
- ²⁷*Ibid.*
- ²⁸Jones, R. T.: *Vavasor Powell*, p. 238. Thomas, J.: *The History of the Baptist Churches in Wales*, p. 96.
- ²⁹Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Broadmead Records*, *passim*. Hardcastle, Th.: *Expositions*, p. 152.
- ³⁰Scholes, P.: *The Puritans and Music in England and New England*, p. 268.
- ³¹Whiting, C. E.: *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution*, p. 97.
- ³²*Church Book*; printed in Baptist Historical Society Transactions, IV, p. 47.
- ³³Crosby, T. *A History of the English Baptists*, IV, pp. 298-301. Goadby, J. J.: *Bypaths in Baptist History*, pp. 331-349. Whitley, W. T.: *A History of British Baptists*, pp. 187ff. Underwood, A. C.: *A History of English Baptists*, pp. 109-112, 132f. Davies Horton: *The Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 169-173.
- ³⁴Collins, H.: *An Orthodox Catechism*, p. 44.
- ³⁵Curwen, S.: *Studies in Music and Worship*, I, p. 50. Whitley, W. T.: *Op. cit.*, p. 184. *Congregational Hymn Singing in England*, p. 98. Routley, E.: *Hymns and Human Life*, p. 148.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Church Book*; printed in, Stuart, J.: *Beechen Grove Baptist Church, Watford*, p. 16.

³⁹Minutes; printed in Ivimey, J.: *A History of the English Baptists*, p. 540.

⁴⁰See for example *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XV, p. 326.

⁴¹Sometimes referred to as "Wilcocks." He is neither the Thomas Wilcocks of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, nor the Baptist, Thomas Wilcox, of the eighteenth century.

⁴²Wilcox, Th.: *A Guide to Eternal Glory*, X, pp. 166-174.

⁴³The hymns of these Baptists are earlier than, but in the same category as, those "composed on divine subjects" by Isaac Watts (not his metrical psalms or scripture paraphrases).

⁴⁴Keach, B.: *The Breach Repaired in God's Worship*, p. 53.

⁴⁵Edwards, Th.: *Gangraena*, I, p. 136. Ivimey, J.: *A History of British Baptists*, III, p. 391.

⁴⁶Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Hexham Records*, p. 323.

⁴⁷Ivimey, J.: *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁸Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Loc. cit.*, p. 290.

⁴⁹Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Broadmead Records*, pp. 106. 165.

⁵⁰Lee, F.: *Baptist Quarterly*, XIII, p. 156.

⁵¹Keach, B.: *Baptist Catechism*, Q. 104. *Horsly Down Articles of Faith*, XXIV. (These do not give specific guidance, but the inclusion of any reference at all indicates that the matter was of some importance to the writer.) *Tropologia*, p. 622. (Where some specific directions are given.)

⁵²Hardcastle, Th.: *Expositions*, pp. 146-151.

⁵³Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Broadmead Records*, p. 86.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 363ff.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Collins, H.: *Some Reasons for Separation from the Communion of the Church of England*, p. 13.

⁵⁷Bury Street Church Book; *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, VI, pp. 333f.

⁵⁸Dr. E. A. Payne in a letter dated 30.1.53, and some Welsh Baptists subsequently, verbally.

⁵⁹*Baptist Historical Society Transactions*, IV, p. 134.

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