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**BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## EDITORIAL

**I**T is now exactly fifty years since W. J. Mcglothlin produced the collections of documents entitled *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. Although originally published in America, the Baptist Historical Society sponsored a special subscription edition in this country produced by the Kingsgate Press and containing four additional sections. Now, in 1960, a successor to the Mcglothlin collection has arrived from America. Using the same title as Mcglothlin, Dr. William L. Lumpkin has given us a volume of 430 pages, published by the Judson Press and to be sold in this country at the regrettably high price of 42s. The suggestion that the work might be published also in England by the Carey-Kingsgate Press was considered but found to be impracticable.

The new volume is not entirely independent of Mcglothlin for a considerable number of the early Baptist Confessions in this new book appear to have been photographically reproduced from the type of the earlier book and the introduction to some of the documents also owe a good deal to Mcglothlin. In his Foreword, Dr. Lumpkin rightly acknowledges his indebtedness both to Mcglothlin and to the still earlier volume of documents collected together in 1854 by E. B. Underhill and published by the Hanserd Knollys Society of London.

A comparison of the table of contents of this book and Mcglothlin makes clear, however, that there are here some things which are new. The book is divided into six sections and we will glance at each section in turn.

The first section is a brief summary entitled, "Backgrounds of the Baptist Movement." It cannot be said that it is very satisfactory. To attempt such a summary in six and a half pages is brave indeed, but it results in generalisations about Baptist backgrounds which, in the light of modern research, cannot now safely be made—especially as some of the secondary sources quoted are works published several decades ago. The impression is given, for example, that the Anabaptist movement in England during the sixteenth century was both strong and influential—even if those influenced were not aware of the source of the influence. To quote Dr. Lumpkin; "The Anabaptist principles were never entirely forgotten in England: they leavened both the Established Church and the Kingdom; on the basis of them various non-conformist bodies took their rise." (p. 14). As modern research into Anabaptism in England stands today, especially with regard to its influence on the beginnings of Separatism, such a claim—however much we might like it to be true—would be hard to substantiate. Dr. Lumpkin certainly goes some way towards modifying the viewpoint set forth in this first section when, in his introduction to the Separatist Confession; *A True Confession*, 1596, he writes: "The extent of indebtedness of English Separatism to Anabaptism is a much disputed question, but it seems reasonable to conclude that the thinking of the more advanced seekers after reformation in England was in some degree shaped by the thousands of Netherlanders who settled in England, especially along the east coast during the second half of the sixteenth century." This is a much more tentative conclusion than the general emphasis of the first section. It is almost certainly nearer the facts of this matter even though it is not now certain that there was an organised group of Dutch Anabaptists in Norwich when Robert Browne set up his Separatist Church there.

The second section, 'Forerunner Confessions' contains much useful material on the Anabaptist, Mennonite and other early Confessions. It is fuller than the corresponding section in McGlothlin. It is a pity, however, that in connection with the exceedingly important and interesting Schleithem Confession, Dr. Lumpkin does not indicate where further and more detailed discussion of it may be found. We could do with a fuller bibliographical note on this and other confessions. There does not appear to be, for example, any reference to Beatrice Jenny's detailed work *Das Schleitheimer Täuferbekenntnis 1527*, nor to Dr. Payne's article on 'Michael Sattler and the Schleithem Confession in the *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 8. In spite of this bibliographical weakness—which is manifest throughout the book—students of Baptist History will welcome this collection of

Anabaptist and Pioneer English Separatist Baptist Confessions. Incidentally, *A True Confession*, 1596, which deserves a place, can scarcely be classified under either of these two headings in spite of the debt which later Baptist Confessions owe to it.

In the third and fourth sections we are given 'Early English Baptist Associational Confessions' and 'English Baptist General Confessions'. This is a departure in arrangements from Mcglothlin. The earlier work separated the English Baptist Confessions into General and Particular Baptist documents, i.e., Arminian and Calvinistic Baptist documents. Dr. Lumpkin's method is to distinguish between Confessions of Associations and Confessions of General Assemblies and so arrange his two sections. This means that the documents in each of the two sections are arranged in chronological order without separate sections for the two streams of Baptist thought. Whilst this method has much to commend it in that it well illustrates the development of group thinking on two levels amongst both groups of Baptists, the student of Baptist History seeking to trace the progress in thought of the two groups will probably prefer Mcglothlin's method. The paragraph at the end of Section 3 headed 'Other Associational Confessions' is disappointing. The opportunity is missed of providing a more comprehensive note about the use and whereabouts of Association Confessions produced in the eighteenth century—and subsequently. Similarly, at the end of the section on the General Confessions in the paragraphs on 'Statements of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', it is hard to understand the omission of the 1948 Statement on 'The Baptists'. This 'Statement' is probably the most comprehensive declaration of Baptist beliefs in recent times and its omission is all the more regrettable if this book becomes the standard reference book on Baptist confessions for other denominations.

The fifth and sixth sections are of particular interest to British Baptists as they expand considerably the final two sections in Mcglothlin on 'American Baptist Confessions' and 'Confessions of Other Nationalities'. The American Confessions illustrate clearly the variety of expression in which the Baptist witness has manifested itself, though not a few of the Confessions appear to have been produced as a result of controversy within the Baptist ranks. The final section gives us the most recent German Confession of Faith of the Alliance of Evangelical-Free church Congregations (1944); the Swedish Baptist Confession of Faith in a translation, so we are told, by Rev. Eric Ruden, but which appears to be (apart from the alteration of 'will' to 'shall' in paragraph 4) the same translation used by Mcglothlin and attributed to Rev. C. E. Benander; the 1924 version of the 1879 French Confession (a version which is referred to as a condensation, but which in

some sections, notably the doctrinal part appears to be a considerable expansion of the 1879 Confession as given by Mcglathlin); the Doctrinal Basis of the New Zealand Baptist Union and of the Baptist Union of Victoria, Australia, and a Confession of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. All these documents make interesting reading and it is noteworthy to find that the Principle and Ideals of the Baptist Faith as set forward by the Baptist Union of Victoria begins with 'The Child in the Kingdom'.

The book ends with a very brief note headed; 'In Conclusion' which is shown as being the last part of Section 6 but which reads as a concluding comment on the whole book, not simply on 'Confessions of Other Nationalities'. Here again one feels that an opportunity has been missed to make some constructive comment on the differences of emphasis which clearly still exist today in the Baptist world, as reflected in the Confessions, and to remind the reader of the fundamental principles of doctrine which also are reflected in all the Confessions and which unite Baptists the world over.

Whilst we have been critical of points of detail within the book, we would, nevertheless, emphasise the value of having available again the classic Confessions of Baptist Faith. Mcglathlin has been, for too long, out of print. Our criticism arises from a feeling of disappointment. For this book, for which we have waited for so long—useful as it is—could surely have been so much more useful. It seems that Dr. Lumpkin never really decided whether he was going to revise and enlarge Mcglathlin or whether he was going to produce an entirely new and up to date volume on Baptist Confessions of Faith.

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