

Thomas Patient

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IN CROMWELLIAN IRELAND: THOMAS PATIENT AND HIS DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

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BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IN CROMWELLIAN IRELAND: THOMAS PATIENT AND HIS DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

The English Civil War and immediate aftermath drastically altered the religious landscape of the British Isles during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. The Long Parliament abolished episcopacy in 1643, and in the same year appointed the Westminster Assembly, which drafted the Calvinist *Confession of Faith* (1646) and the accompanying catechisms as well as *The Directory of Public Worship* (1644) and *Form of Church Government* (1645), which advocated a national Presbyterian church for England, Scotland, and Ireland.¹ Yet, the Long Parliament's efforts to establish a state Presbyterian Church met with vigorous resistance from Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), general of the New Model Army, which consisted mostly of Independents and many Baptists.² Moreover, Parliament was delinquent in its payments to the said army. Uncompromising opposition to a state Presbyterian church coupled with anger over financial neglect of the army drove Cromwell on December 6, 1648 to order Colonel Thomas Pride to "purge" Parliament of the culpable Presbyterians, leaving only a small number of MPs known collectively as the "Rump Parliament." In 1653, Cromwell dismissed the "Rump Parliament," and ruled England as Lord Protector until his death in 1658. Throughout the period of his Protectorate, Cromwell promoted a policy of limited religious toleration,³ which encouraged the proliferation of sects heretofore proscribed such as the Levellers,

1 The Westminster Assembly's drafting of these documents under the aegis of Parliament was to fulfill the conditions of the *Solemn League and Covenant* (1643) which Parliament signed with Scotland in which the two countries agreed to adopt a common confession of faith as well as ecclesiastical government for a state Presbyterian church for them as well as Ireland.

2 Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: 2003), 31.

3 Roman Catholicism was outlawed while the practices of the then former Church of England as contained in the Book of Common Prayer were greatly proscribed.

Ranters, and Fifth Monarchists as well as the Quakers and Seekers.⁴

Baptists also benefited immensely from the Civil War and the ensuing Protectorate of Cromwell. As mentioned above, many Baptists served in the New Model Army as well as various areas of Cromwell's government.⁵ Moreover, during the years 1648 to 1660 Baptists experienced numerical growth.⁶ Furthermore, the religious freedom afforded Baptists under the Protectorate enabled them to preach publicly, form new churches, organize associations, and openly circulate their views through printed tracts and treatises. These conditions also made it possible for Baptists to carry on their work throughout other areas of the British Isles, including Ireland.

At the forefront of Baptist activity in Ireland was Thomas Patient. A former Anglican and Independent who experienced intolerance in Puritan Massachusetts, Patient worked with William Kiffin (1616-1701) and labored to establish and strengthen the Baptist community in Dublin as well as in many other Irish towns and cities. Significantly, Patient participated in the drafting of the First London Confession (1644) and penned one of the most formidable Reformed critiques of infant baptism, *The Doctrine of Baptism and the Distinction of the Covenants* (1654).⁷ This essay will survey Patient's life and career, which will provide the necessary context for a close examination his *Doctrine of Baptism*. At this point, we will begin with Patient's early life and conversion to Baptist ideas.

Early Life and Rejection of Infant Baptism

Thomas Patient was born at Barnstable, Devonshire in 1591 the son of John Patient, a former naval officer.⁸ From what the scant evidence indicates, both of Thomas' parents were devout members of the established Church as defined by the Elizabethan Settlement.⁹ Demonstrating an aptitude for academic study early in his childhood, Thomas came to the attention of his maternal uncle, John Malden, who was lord

4 Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 31.

5 H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 111.

6 McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 111.

7 Thomas Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism and the Distinction of the Covenants* (London: Printed by Henry Hills, 1654).

8 Joshua E. Wills, *A Biographical Sketch of the Baptist Pioneer Preacher, the Rev. Thomas Patient, Who Visited the American Continent in 1630* (Philadelphia: Harper Printing Company, 1916), 8.

9 Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 8.



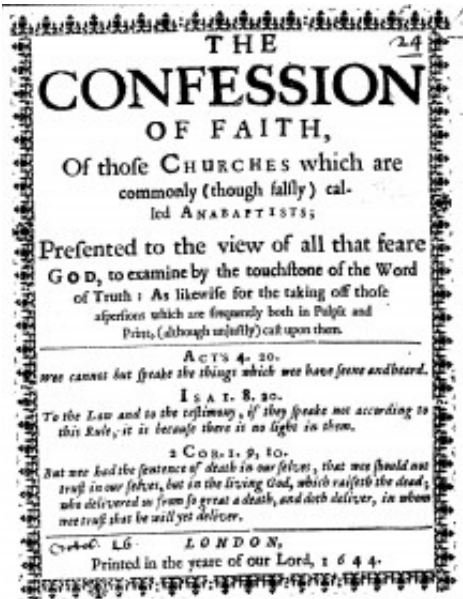
WILLIAM KIFFIN (1616–1701)

of the manor where the Patients resided, and secretary to Sir Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641), the future Earl of Strafford. Due to Malden's influential position, he could send Thomas to the prestigious Winchester College.¹⁰ Regretfully, virtually nothing is known of Patient's own experience at Winchester. In fact, there is no extant record of Patient's whereabouts until sometime well after his departure from Winchester.

Even though it is uncertain as to whether Patient had been initially ordained in the Church of England,¹¹ he nevertheless seemed to have adopted Independent/

¹⁰ Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 8. Winchester College was founded in 1382 by William of Wykeham (dates), Bishop of Winchester, and Chancellor under both Kings Edward III and Richard II. The school was founded in conjunction with New College, Oxford, for which Winchester was intended to serve as a feeder. The fact of Patient's enrollment at Winchester strongly suggests that his patron intended for him to matriculate at New College upon completing his secondary education at Winchester. See H.C. Adams, *Wykehamica: A History of Winchester College* (Oxford, London, and Winchester, 1878).

¹¹ Crawford Gribben, *God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 88.



FIRST LONDON
CONFESSION

points. But I at this time being by the divine power of God, converted from the Church of England, though with a great deal of difficulty, being well furnished with arguments from pulpit and print, and divers disputations for the defense of that false way; but God breaking in by the power of his Spirit with clear Scripture-light subjected my heart to the obedience of the truth, so that I found my heart closing with those truths in the love thereof.¹³

Moreover, around 1616 Patient reportedly spent considerable time in Southampton at the home of John Major, Lord of the Manor of Hursley, himself an Independent and father-in-law of Oliver Cromwell's son, Richard (1626-1712), as well as a Member of Parliament.¹⁴

Apparently throughout most of the 1620s Patient resided in London where

Congregationalist ideas relatively early as well as the agenda of the Roundheads.¹² Patient describes the process whereby he converted from the Church of England to Independency in the Epistle to the Christian Reader prefacing his *Doctrine of Baptism*:

But presently being convinced of the unwarrantbleness of the Government of the Lordly Prelates, and the Liturgy in the Church of England, and the mixed communions in the parish assemblies, I was resolved, God willing, to examine all religion, as well in worship, and the order of God's house, as I had done in other

12 Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 9.

13 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A6.

14 Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 9.

he participated in the formation of the Massachusetts Bay Company.¹⁵ In March, 1630, Patient, as one of the likely stock holders of the Massachusetts Bay Company, embarked with other Independents under the leadership of Governor John Winthrop (1587-1649) aboard the *Arbella* for New England. Per Patient's own testimony in his Preface to the Christian Reader, he left for New England as one who fully subscribed to the ecclesiastical order and practice of the Independents and the commonwealth they intended to establish in New England: "At this time many godly Christians going to New England, and being come up in my judgment to the way of New England in faith and order, went over thither, being not convinced of my error and great darkness is sprinkling the carnal seed of believers. But verily I thought I had good warrant for that practice, having than in substance the same grounds for the defense thereof, that generally to this day is urged for the same."¹⁶ By Patient's own admission, he was thoroughly convinced of the validity of infant baptism at the time of his departure on the *Arbella*.

Patient further reports that after arriving and settling in Massachusetts, for quite some time he totally assented to the order, doctrine, and practice of the colony's ecclesiastical commonwealth. However, sometime later while still residing in the colony, Patient began to entertain doubts about infant baptism, fearing "the danger of receiving truths by Tradition."¹⁷ Therefore, Patient proceeded to examine the biblical foundation of this doctrine.¹⁸ Towards this end, he "constantly resorted to the meetings of the people in New England, desiring to have good satisfaction in them, and their doctrine and practice, before I joined in Communion."¹⁹ The question proved to be so perplexing to Patient that he refrained from the Lord's Supper until he resolved it. Thus, determined to discover the truth, Patient listened attentively to the sermons of Massachusetts ministers on the baptism of the children of believing parents.²⁰ Upon analyzing the Scriptural arguments advanced in these sermons, Patient concluded "that the Scriptures were being generally wrested and abused,

¹⁵ Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 10-11. For the formation of the Massachusetts Bay Company, see Allen Cardin, *Puritan Christianity in America: Religion and Life in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 28.

¹⁶ Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A6-7. This testimony by Patient himself counters Wills' conjecture that Patient adopted Baptist views before leaving for New England, and that he participated in Thomas Helwys' ministry in London. See Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 10.

¹⁷ Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A7.

¹⁸ Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A7.

¹⁹ Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A7.

²⁰ Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, A7.

contrary to their native tendency and proper drift and scope.²¹ Infant baptism rested on biblical passages taken out of context, thereby providing a spurious basis for the practice. According to Patient, this observation led him to understand other aspects of New England doctrine and practice to have depended on the same method of biblical interpretation.²² Yet, despite such conclusions, Patient experienced violent internal conflict:

But upon this Resolution temptations came in upon my heart urging that I was but weak, and in case it were not a truth, did I think so many men eminent for Religion, Piety, Gifts and Parts should not discover it sooner than I? Therefore, it was to no purpose for me to trouble myself. Unto which I had this answer in my soul, that I had been too long misled already on that ground, *submitting to the Liturgy, and that Corrupt Hierarchy.*²³

The burgeoning conviction in Patient's mind was that because it lay upon misconstrued and ill-applied Scripture, the standing order of Massachusetts was utterly corrupt. Specifically, the root cause of Massachusetts' societal debasement was infant baptism.²⁴ However, fear of rejection and reprisal by church and society paralyzed him from publicly acting on this newly discovered truth:

...this temptation came in afresh upon me, what need I trouble myself in a point so disputable, for if by my search and tryall in that matter, I should come to see grounds swaying in conscience against childrens' baptism that I should be generally despised, and slighted of all the godly country, and not only be frustrated of Communion and Fellowship with them, but must expect to suffer imprisonment, confiscation of goods, banishment at least, which would be my ruin, not knowing where to go, but in the woods amongst Indians and wild beasts?²⁵

The risks faced by Patient were dire. Public dissent regarding infant baptism,

21 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B.

22 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B.

23 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B.

24 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B3.

25 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B3.

and hence the Christian commonwealth intimately associated with it would incur excommunication, imprisonment, loss of property, privation, and exile—the same fate that befell Roger Williams in 1636 and Anne Hutchinson in 1638 for challenging the colony’s standing order.²⁶ Such fear, Patient testifies, intensified his turmoil “as my evil and treacherous heart” resisted “the blessed motions of the Spirit of God.”²⁷ Nevertheless, Patient’s crisis reached resolution when “considering that the ground of these discouraging arguments did arise from the flesh and the Devil, as Peter when he said, ‘Pity thy self Master, this thing shall not be to thee, My Resolution was as Christ saith, *Get thee behind me Satan, thou favorest not the things of God.*”²⁸ Thus, Patient continues, it pleased the Lord to set that Scripture home upon my heart, “*Buy the truth, and sell it not, buy the truth at any rate, but fell it at no rate, if truth cost me my life I must buy it, though I might have all the favour and friendship in the world I must not sell it; this wrought in me a grounded and settled resolution, that I would seek after the mind of God, as well in suffering truths, as other.*”²⁹ Even after the cessation of this spiritual crisis, Patient further researched the question of infant baptism by listening to more sermons, and studying intently the works of its advocates.³⁰ These inquiries only confirmed Patient’s conviction regarding the invalidity of infant baptism.³¹ Shortly thereafter, Patient began publicly expressing his newly forged views. Patient’s conflict with the New England order came to an impasse when he refused to have his son baptized, resulting in a summons to appear before the quarterly court in Essex, Massachusetts in June, 1633.³² Failure to resolve this dispute with the General Court soon necessitated Patient’s departure from the colony. From there, Patient made his way to Virginia where he experienced a reception from the Anglican establishment there far worse than in Massachusetts.³³

After leaving Virginia, Patient traveled back north, but this time to South Jersey, where he ministered among the Cohansey Indians about a decade before John

26 Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America*, 199-201.

27 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B4.

28 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B4.

29 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B4.

30 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B5.

31 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B5.

32 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, B6; Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 37.

33 Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 12.

Eliot commenced his famous work among the Native Americans.³⁴ Patient later returned to England in 1639. In that year, England was beset by significant political and ecclesiastical crises.

Political and Ecclesiastical Turmoil in England

Much had transpired in England during Patient's sojourn in the New World. Parliament had not met between 1628 and 1640 since King Charles I (r.1625-49) had dissolved it, and tried henceforth to govern the country independently. Accompanying this flagrant disregard of Parliament was the king and his government flouting the Petition of Right which Parliament enacted in 1628. Moreover, Charles exercised stringent control of both church and state through Sir Thomas Wentworth, now Earl of Stafford, and William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud in particular insisted on restoring some of the traditional elements of liturgical worship which heretofore had been abolished by the Elizabethan Settlement, and regulating preaching, swiftly disciplining those parish ministers who spoke outside the parameters of the Second *Book of Homilies*. The Archbishop, moreover, provoked a violent rebellion in Scotland when he tried to impose a version of the *Book of Common Prayer* which reinstated traditional liturgical elements such as altars, and episcopacy. This rebellion turned into a Scottish invasion of England's northern border, which in turn prompted Charles in 1640 to summon Parliament for the first time in twelve years in order to obtain from it money with which to defend against the Scots. Parliament then insisted that the king agree to certain legislation that would limit his power as a condition for the grant. Charles refused, and then proceeded to dissolve this Parliament, which this time met bitter resistance, eventually resulting in armed hostility towards the king. In short, when Patient arrived in England in 1639, the country had embarked upon the course of civil war. While in England, Patient involved himself with the administration of Parliamentary forces under Cromwell until he traveled to Ireland.

Patient's Ministry in Ireland

In 1640, the ecclesiastical situation in Ireland was nothing less than dire. As a country that was subject to England, Ireland was continuously subject to the ever-shifting policies of the Tudor and Stuart monarchs. Throughout the Reformation, and specifically during the reigns of Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603), and James I (r.1603-25), Protestantism served largely as a means of securing control of the

³⁴ Wills, *Biographical Sketch*, 12.

predominantly Catholic population.³⁵ Despite vigorous attempts to establish the Reformation in Ireland, such as the founding of Protestant Trinity College in Dublin in 1592, and the establishment of learned, capable clergy, which included appointment of ardently Protestant bishops like Archbishop James Ussher of Armagh (1581-1656), these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful as the majority of the Irish still, at least secretly remained steadfastly Catholic. Moreover, the official Church of Ireland clearly manifested some glaring weaknesses such as clerical poverty, pluralism, and non-residence.³⁶ Also, many of the clergy were poorly educated and unable to speak Irish.³⁷ Further exacerbating these conditions was disrepair of most of the church buildings throughout the country.³⁸ The Long Parliament was acutely aware of this severe state of affairs in the Irish Church, and earnestly desired to affect substantial reforms, but this would not occur until later in the decade.³⁹ One of the most conspicuous evidences of the failure of Protestantism in Ireland was violent attack of Protestant planters by disenfranchised citizens from Ulster in 1641, which contributed further to the Civil War in England.⁴⁰

Further complicating the Irish situation was the dilemma, faced by the Long Parliament, which was effectively governing England and its domains, as to which form of Protestantism would be the established one for Ireland, a reformed Anglicanism or Presbyterianism. By 1647, a more definite decision was forthcoming as by this time both Parliament and the Protestant leaders of Ireland rejected Anglicanism with its government by episcopacy.⁴¹ Thus, the agenda was to reform the Irish Church as one with a Presbyterian polity. In 1647, the year in which Parliamentary forces obtained control of Protestant Dublin, Parliament began enacting legislation aimed at structurally changing the Irish Church. On June 24 of this year, Parliament formally outlawed the *Book of Common Prayer*, replacing it instead with the Directory of Public Worship, thus incurring the strident protests

35 John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 367-69.

36 T.C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English Government and Reform in Ireland, 1649-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 90.

37 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 90.

38 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 90.

39 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 90.

40 Guy, *Tudor England*, 369.

41 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 92. It should be noted here that most of the Protestant laity in Ireland for exception of those in Ulster, which was a Presbyterian stronghold, favored the Church of Ireland in its Anglican form.

of Church of Ireland clergy.⁴² Just prior to Dublin's surrender to Parliamentary forces, Parliament, having introduced Presbyterian government to the Church of England, appointed a committee to draft recommendations for implementing the same polity in the Irish Church; however, no such recommendations were ever made.⁴³

It was not until 1649 that the changes enacted by Parliament for dismantling the existing Church of Ireland were enforced, first in Dublin, and throughout the rest of Ireland.⁴⁴ The same "Rump" Parliament undertook the responsibility of arranging the logistics for continuing enforcement.⁴⁵ Specifically, Parliament appointed a commission which drew up an ordinance for the "propagation of the gospel" in Ireland.⁴⁶ The said ordinance passed Parliament on March 8, 1650.⁴⁷ Prior to the ordinance's passage, Cromwell himself, along with his three chaplains, Hugh Peter (1598-1660), the theologian John Owen (1616-83), and Jenkin Lloyd (b. 1624), traveled to Ireland for the purpose of assessing the situation there so as to provide guidance for the directives of the ordinance.⁴⁸

As per the recommendations of the three chaplains, the Irish Ordinance mandated that six ministers be sent to Dublin.⁴⁹ Moreover, the ordinance required that generous salaries and other incentives be offered by the government to entice qualified ministers to move to Ireland and assist in the work of further reformation.⁵⁰ One of the weaknesses of the Ordinance was that since Cromwell displaced Presbyterian hegemony by means of Pride's Purge, and episcopacy had been outlawed, there remained a significant religious vacuum in Ireland to be filled due to Cromwell's policy of religious toleration. This situation presented an unprecedented opportunity to the Baptists.

The new religious environment fostered by Cromwell's policy through his governor of Ireland, Lord Deputy Fleetwood, hastened the increasing popularity of

42 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 95.

43 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 95.

44 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 95.

45 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 95.

46 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 96.

47 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 96.

48 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 96-98.

49 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 98.

50 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 98.

the Baptist movement and Independency both of which had been initially introduced into Ireland by English soldiers.⁵¹ Though himself an Independent, Fleetwood, because of his commitment to religious toleration for the sake of freedom of conscience, afforded unrestricted freedom to the Baptists to preach and teach throughout the country.⁵² However, even though Fleetwood's policy facilitated the spread of Baptist ideas throughout Ireland, it was not, ultimately, the cause of their pervasive, national circulation, but rather, the Baptist ministers who moved to Ireland from England for the purpose of evangelism. Among these preachers the one most likely to have exerted the most influence on the development of the Baptist movement in Ireland was Thomas Patient.

Shortly after his return to England, Patient met William Kiffin (1616-1701) with whom he formed a strong and abiding friendship. Patient went on to assist Kiffin in pastoring a Baptist congregation at Devonshire Square, London.⁵³ Along with Kiffin, Patient signed the 1644 London Confession of Faith as well as the 1646 and 1651 editions (though Patient had departed from London when the third edition was published).⁵⁴ Also in 1646, Patient and Kiffin weighed through the scurrilous accusation of inappropriate conduct with a female baptismal candidate circulated by Thomas Edwards in his anti-Baptist treatise, *Gangraena*.⁵⁵ In the previous year, Patient and Kiffin traveled throughout southeast England engaging in missionary work.⁵⁶ However, their labors in Kent suffered reversal as they lost their converts to Arminian General Baptists.⁵⁷ Additionally, Patient entered the controversy with the Quakers, who denied the authority of Scripture, and instead appealed to the authority of an "inner light," as well as with the Ranters, who espoused an unbridled antinomianism,⁵⁸ and signed the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Daniel King's *A Way to Sion* (1649).⁵⁹

51 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 98.

52 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 100.

53 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 88.

54 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 88.

55 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

56 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

57 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

58 See Christopher Hill, *The World Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972).

59 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

In March, 1649, Parliament selected Patient as one of six ministers who were to go to Dublin on an annual salary of two hundred pounds.⁶⁰ Patient arrived at Kilkenny in April, 1650.⁶¹ By 1651, Patient had journeyed to Waterford and Dublin where he served as pastor of an established congregation, and became chaplain to Colonel John Jones who was one of the Parliamentary commissioners to Ireland.⁶² As a pastor, Patient conducted his ministry uncompromisingly on the basis of theological precision. This insistence for such exactness drove Patient to attack the practice of mix-communion between Baptists and Independents at Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin under the ministry of John Rogers.⁶³ What proved utterly frustrating to Patient was the fact that unlike most Irish Baptist churches, the fellowship at Christ Church did not adopt a strict baptismal policy with regards to communion.⁶⁴ In fact, at Christ Church membership was open to anyone who could testify to a conversion experience regardless of when or by what method they were baptized.⁶⁵ Patient authored a letter strongly rebuking Rogers for this practice. The seemingly stern tone of the letter is counterbalanced by the expressed desire to attain to a true unity among “the churches of Christ in the faith and order of the gospel” based on a communion which reflects it.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the letter proved explosive in advocating strict Baptist principles, especially that of separation from non-Baptists.⁶⁷ Rogers responded by complaining of the divisive effects which the letter had on the congregation, and thus refused to answer the arguments raised by Patient.⁶⁸ Rogers’ inability to curb the effects of Patient’s letter resulted in the permanent division of the fellowship at Christ Church with several prominent members becoming Baptists as well as Rogers’ departure for England.⁶⁹ Despite the rather seismic disruption Patient’s letter seemed to have caused, it is likely that it merely brought to the surface tensions that were already developing

60 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

61 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

62 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

63 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

64 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

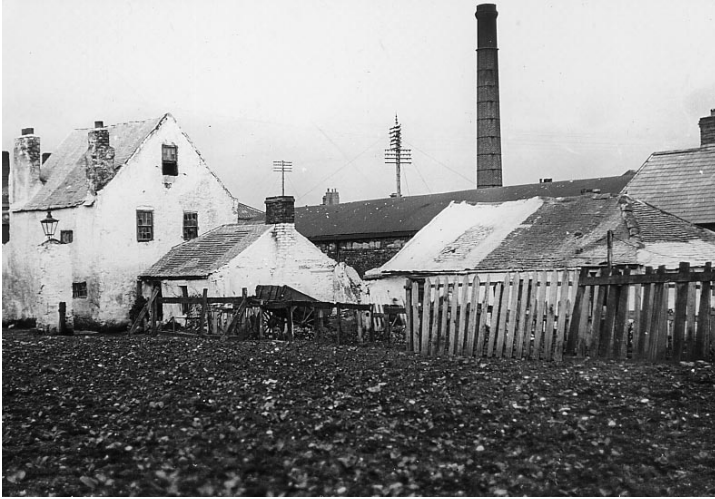
65 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

66 For the letter see Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* (London: Printed by the Author, 1811), 243-47.

67 Also, see, Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89.

68 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 89-90.

69 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 90.



SWIFT'S ALLEY, DUBLIN

between military Baptists, and elite Independents. Indeed, this episode demonstrated in the words of Crawford Gribben, that “there was no room for any middle ground”⁷⁰ between Baptists and Independents, and Patient desired to keep it that way. Patient’s victory in Dublin was confirmed by his appointment as preacher at Christ Church there.⁷¹ This appointment, however, ended when Patient erected the first Baptist meetinghouse at Swift’s Alley, Dublin.⁷² Patient later represented the Dublin Baptists at the Waterford Conference in 1653.⁷³ It is also at this point that Patient’s prestige seems to have somewhat declined. This waning of status appears to have evidenced itself in Patient’s apparent lack of support within his own congregation—an occurrence attested by Cromwell’s secretary, John Thurloe in 1654.⁷⁴ Yet, it was also in 1654 that Patient published his only treatise, *The Doctrine of Baptism and the Distinction of the Covenants*, which is his substantial defense of credo-baptism. As this was his only work dealing with a subject that literally

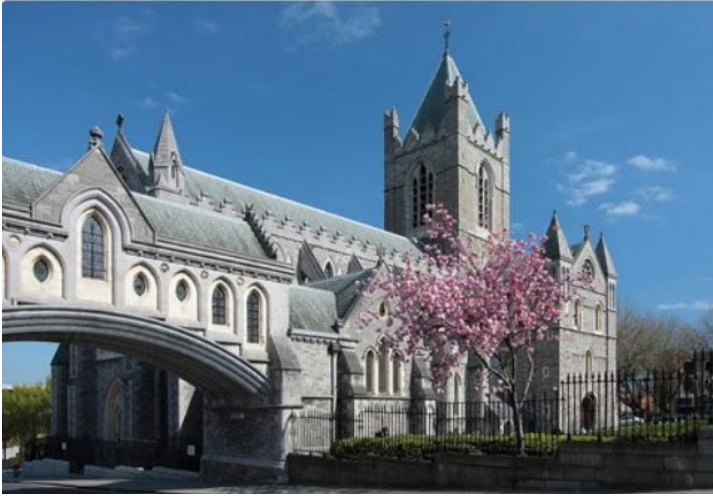
70 Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 90.

71 Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 90.

72 Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 90.

73 Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 90.

74 Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 90.



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, DUBLIN

defined patient's career, a survey of its contents is now in order.

The Doctrine of Baptism and the Distinction of the Covenants

The Doctrine of Baptism and the Distinction of Covenants truly stands as one of the most significant defenses of credo-baptism from a Reformed perspective. As a Particular Baptist, Patient subscribed generally to the same system of theology as Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Independents which emphasized human salvation as the result of God's unilateral and unconditional grace through the work of Jesus Christ within the framework of the Covenant of Grace. As will be apparent below, Patient at once posits his defense of credo-baptism and critique of paedobaptism based on his interpretation of the Covenant of Grace which alleges that since it is a spiritual covenant, it does not depend upon an external sign and seal, but only faith for initiation into it. Conversely, Patient contends that other Reformed groups bolster paedobaptism with an erroneous understanding of the Covenant of Grace by insisting upon the necessity of entering into it by means of an external sign.

Following the "Preface to the Christian Reader," Patient begins the treatise proper by citing Acts 2:37-38. After situating the passage in context, Patient proceeds to describe baptism as containing specifically four elements: the ministry, the

form, the name in which one is to be baptized, and those who are to be baptized.⁷⁵ Regarding the first, only those who preach are to baptize. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 28:16-20 where he includes baptizing as one of the duties entailing the overall preaching of the gospel.⁷⁶ The form of baptism, as attested by at least ten instances in which the word translated “baptism” occurs in the New Testament, is “dipping,” or immersion.⁷⁷ The name, or the formula to be used in administering baptism is that of the Holy Trinity, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.,” which Jesus prescribes in the above passage.⁷⁸ As to the subject of baptism, “this I shall therefore most insist upon, wherein I shall endeavor to make plain to you, first (as I say) that he is to be a believer, a penitent person, as appears in Mark 16:16. *Go preach the Gospel to every Creature, he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.*”⁷⁹ A candidate for baptism thus must possess justifying faith and true repentance. Indeed, such faith and repentance are the prerequisites for baptism. To support this point, Patient engages in an extensive exposition of Acts 8, concentrating particularly on the conversion of the Philippian jailer. Throughout this discussion, Patient maintains that all of the households of those converted, like that of the Philippian jailer, consisted of individuals who were already converted.⁸⁰

Patient’s discussion of the four elements of true baptism above largely constitutes his entire positive defense of credo-baptism with the remainder of the treatise taken up with his refutation of paedo-baptism based on his interpretation of the Covenant of Grace. This later attack on infant baptism ends up becoming the heart of the treatise, and therefore its central concern.

Patient’s argument against paedo-baptism consists largely of an attack on its hermeneutical grounds, which is an inference drawn from the use of circumcision in the Old Testament. The establishment of doctrine based on inferences drawn from the preponderance of other biblical passages in the absence of clearly expressed statements in Scripture was an interpretive practice widely acknowledged and employed by Reformed theologians. For instance, regarding the interpretation of Scripture, the Westminster Confession of Faith avers: “The whole council

75 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 6.

76 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 6.

77 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 8; 9-13.

78 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 14-16.

79 Patient *Doctrine of Baptism*, 17.

80 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 20-21.

of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men."⁸¹ It is thus the reliance upon "good and necessary consequence," or inference for the formulation of doctrine otherwise extraneous to the literal text of Scripture that Patient seeks to invalidate, and therefore discredit paedo-baptism. From Patient's standpoint, this "good and necessary consequence" allows for the addition of, in this case, the "traditions of men." The hermeneutical issue therefore factors considerably in the essence of Patient's stated argument in this part of the treatise:

Though there be no command nor example, yet there is a consequence *viz.* the Covenant of life being made to Believers, and their seed coming out of their loins, Baptism being an Ordinance of that Covenant, doth also belong to them. Now I shall endeavor to prove the falseness and erroneousness of this Consequence. That it cannot be of God, my first ground is because it doth oppose itself to the express Laws, and Commands of the New Testament; and whatsoever consequence men do draw from Scripture, that crosseth the plain Commands of God (to be sure) cannot be of God, but such consequence must needs (according to Scripture light) of Satan, or at the best from the vision of a man's own heart.⁸²

The continuity of baptism as an external sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace to be administered to children entering upon it is predicated upon a more fundamental inference which is more erroneous which is that because the children of the ancient of Israelites were given the outward sign of the national covenant as confirmation of their admission into the community, so children born to Christians must necessarily receive the external sign of the Covenant of Grace, which is now baptism. Patient states his intention to counter this inference upon which depends the doctrine of infant baptism by showing it to contradict clearly the expressed commands of the New Testament. Essentially Patient proposes to employ a Reformed hermeneutic to counter a doctrine espoused by most of the Reformed, thereby showing that it is not Reformed at all because it is not biblical.

81 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.6.

82 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 25.

Patient's case against paedo-baptism consists of four main arguments⁸³: first, in agreement with most Reformed Protestants, there are two distinct covenants in Scripture, "the one a Covenant of Grace, and the other a Covenant of Works, or an absolute Covenant, and a Conditional Covenant"⁸⁴; secondly, "the Covenant of Circumcision was no Covenant of eternal life, but a Conditional Covenant, a Covenant of Works"⁸⁵; thirdly, "none but believers ever had, or shall have right to the Covenant of Grace";⁸⁶ and fourthly, interpretation of those biblical passages alleged in support of paedo-baptism.

In developing the first argument, Patient concentrates on stressing the differences between the two covenants as preparation for expounding more on the second argument. In this regard, Patient stresses the fact that the Covenant of Grace is one which God alone initiates and fully performs, imposing no conditions on anyone.⁸⁷ Furthermore, it is based upon the free promise of God for the sake of the mediatorial work of Christ.⁸⁸ Also, even though the Covenant of Grace commands repentance and faith to appropriate its benefits, these are not works, but rather gifts conferred by God himself in initiating the Covenant.⁸⁹ One of the most significant differences between the two Covenants is that unlike the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace was not initiated upon any physical lineage.⁹⁰ Even though God instituted the Covenant of Circumcision with Abraham's relations for whom it was prerequisite to enjoying the privileges conferred upon him, under the Covenant of Grace, one enjoying those same blessings as one of Abraham's own through faith without need of an external sign.⁹¹

Coming to the second argument, Patient contends that the Covenant of Circumcision was not a covenant of life, but a "typical" covenant, or a covenant of works.⁹² Patient devotes considerable space in supporting this point. He begins

83 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 28.

84 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 28.

85 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 28.

86 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 28.

87 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 31.

88 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 30.

89 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 36.

90 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 38.

91 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 38.

92 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 42.

by examining closely the nature of this covenant. First, when God, in Genesis 17 refers to it as an “everlasting covenant,” he meant that it would last as long as the ancient Jewish state.⁹³ When the commonwealth of Israel ceased, so did this covenant. Moreover, the promise attached to this covenant was the land which anticipated the ultimate possession of Christ which would occur in fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace.⁹⁴ It in this sense of anticipating a greater, spiritual possession that the Covenant of Circumcision is a “typical” covenant. Patient further contends for the Covenant of Circumcision having been a covenant of works on the following specific grounds. First, God gives himself conditionally in the Covenant of Circumcision.⁹⁵ God promised a relationship with Israel indicated by their possession of the land on the condition that they circumcise their sons, and obey the law he gave them.⁹⁶ Secondly, the Covenant of Circumcision was a national covenant.⁹⁷ The blessings promised in this covenant were intended for the nation of Israel in return for its collective obedience.⁹⁸ The Covenant of Circumcision was also a national covenant in the sense that God used it as a sign and seal of Abraham’s descendants in order to confirm to Abraham his own faith.⁹⁹

Another manner in which Patient buttresses his second main argument is by highlighting the fact that Paul, in Romans 4, does not refer to circumcision as a “seal,” but a “sign.”¹⁰⁰ The specific passage Patient has in mind is Romans 4:11: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.” Patient calls attention to three reasons why Paul confines the sealing use of circumcision to Abraham. First, because Abraham had the righteousness of faith before he was circumcised.¹⁰¹ Secondly, Abraham was to be the father of all who believe.¹⁰² For this reason, the sealing aspect of circumcision cannot

93 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 43.

94 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 43.

95 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 44-45.

96 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 44-45.

97 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 48.

98 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 48.

99 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 53.

100 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 53.

101 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 53.

102 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 54.

apply to any of Abraham's posterity.¹⁰³ Circumcision served to guarantee for Abraham God's promise that he would be the father of all nations in the Covenant of Grace.¹⁰⁴ "A third reason is this, Here is the Spirit of God affirming the sealing use of Circumcision to Abraham only, and not to any one of fleshly seed, and as before, upon a reason special to Abraham."¹⁰⁵ The fourth reason is stated in verse 13: the promise to Abraham to be heir of the nations was not through circumcision, but only the righteousness of faith.¹⁰⁶

Patient bases his third main argument, that only believers are heirs to the Covenant of Grace on this conviction: The Covenant of Circumcision, in contrast to the former, never promised eternal life, but rather, guaranteed temporal blessings in the land of Canaan.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, God promising himself to the Israelites only assured them of temporal care and protection while they dwelled in Canaan.¹⁰⁸ In this regard, Patient observes that while those outside the Covenant of Circumcision can be saved, those within it can be damned.¹⁰⁹ This latter point means that the Covenant of Circumcision is capable of being broken.¹¹⁰ Patient, contends, at this point, that if the Covenant of Circumcision could be broken, it is therefore a covenant of works which then would overthrow the following points of evangelical religion.¹¹¹ First, it denies that all human beings, circumcised and uncircumcised, are children of wrath. One can simply ingratiate himself to God by being circumcised. Secondly, by virtue of the fact that the Covenant of Circumcision can be broken means that it diametrically opposes the stability and permanence of the Covenant of Grace. One can lose eternal life as easily as receive it just as the temporal promises in Canaan. Thirdly, this overturns the necessity of conversion and regeneration. One simply needs to undergo an outward observance for divine acceptance. Fourthly, it destroys the very purpose and nature of the new covenant promised initially in Jeremiah 31. Fifthly, the Covenant of Circumcision destroys

103 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 54.

104 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 54.

105 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 54.

106 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 54.

107 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 58.

108 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 58.

109 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 60-61.

110 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 65.

111 Patient, *Doctrine of Baptism*, 71-83.

justification by faith since it proposes another way to obtain justification other than faith in Christ. Sixthly, even worse, the Covenant of Circumcision implies that one can receive eternal life promised by the Covenant of Grace without union with Christ.

The work concludes with the fourth argument consisting of extended exegetical discussions regarding those passages alleged by supporters of paedobaptism. *The Doctrine of Baptism*, indeed stands as one of the definitive works challenging infant baptism on the basis of Reformed hermeneutical categories, especially that of the Covenant of Grace. The publication of *The Doctrine of Baptism* contributed significantly to restoring Patient's reputation as a leader among Baptists which he would enjoy even after leaving Ireland.

End of Irish Ministry, Last Days, and Death

Despite Patient's relative success in Ireland, times for Baptists would become difficult. The new governor, Henry Cromwell (1628-74), wanted to limit the power of the military, to which Baptists had close ties.¹¹² For this reason, the governor was not friendly disposed towards them. In the interest of removing power from the military, Cromwell attempted to regulate stringently even religious affairs. Withdrawal of local government support due to Cromwell's policies weakened the Baptist presence in Ireland. This waning of Baptist influence accelerated with the death of Lord Protector Cromwell, and the removal of his son, Richard, from power for incompetence. By 1660, Baptists not only in Ireland, but throughout the rest of the British Isles were a minority sect who hoped to obtain some degree of toleration from the new king, Charles II. Meanwhile Patient retained his position within the Baptist community as evident in the fact that his name headed a list of one hundred seventeen names affixed to the *Address from the Baptized Christians in Dublin* (1657), which attempted to show loyalty to Protector Cromwell.¹¹³ In 1659, Patient was still serving as chaplain to some military officers.¹¹⁴ Finally, in 1660, the year of the Restoration, Patient returned to England, and served as assistant minister to Henry Hynam in Bristol, where in 1663 he was imprisoned for illegal preaching (as per the Clarendon Code) by Sir John Knight, the mayor.¹¹⁵ In 1666, Patient left for London, where once again he co-pastored with William Kiffin

112 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 106.

113 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 90.

114 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 90.

115 Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 90.

at Devonshire Square, London, the very place where his ministry as a Baptist began. Sadly, after only one month into his labors, Patient died of the plague, leaving his wife, Sarah Patient, as his only survivor.

Conclusion

If anything defined the life and career of Thomas Patient, it was the defense of conviction at the expense of convenience. This was plainly evident in his difficulties in New England, which initially resulted in privation. Moreover, Patient prized truth over peace, insisting that unity must be founded upon purity of truth, and that separation was necessary oftentimes to maintain it.

Probably Patient's greatest role was arguably one as a reformer of the Reformation. He sought fundamentally to reform the Reformed tradition. This seems to be the intent behind his only treatise, the *Doctrine of Baptism* where he masterfully attempted to refute infant baptism by correcting the misappropriated hermeneutic upon which it depended, a concern that drove Patient even back in his New England days. Truly the *Doctrine of Baptism* stands as one of the undisputed classics of Reformed Baptist theology. For it testifies eloquently and learnedly to the continuous need for reforming practices according to the Word of God, which makes this treatise Patient's greatest bequest.

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