

# BAPTIST BOOK REVIEW: ORTHODOX, PURITAN, BAPTIST: HERCULES COLLINS (1647-1702) AND PARTICULAR BAPTIST IDENTITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND BY G. STEPHEN WEAVER JR.

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Although he was a contemporary of and moved in the same circles as the English Baptists Benjamin Keach, William Kiffin, and Hanserd Knollys, Hercules Collins is relatively unknown today except by those who are well-versed in Baptist history. This is unfortunate, because as G. Stephen Weaver shows in *Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins (1647-1702) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England* (hereafter just *Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist*), Collins “was a respected member of the Particular Baptist community” and “a faithful representative of that community” whose “importance in Baptist life far exceeds the brief references given to him” (p. 25). His influence was “pervasive,” and his writings “provide a window into understanding how seventeenth-century Baptists viewed themselves in relationship to historic Christianity and Puritan orthodoxy” (p. 25).

Weaver, an Independent-turned-Southern Baptist, holds M.Div.

and Ph.D. degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville. He is a senior fellow at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at SBTS and the senior pastor of Farmdale Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky. He has served as an adjunct professor at SBTS and at Boyce College, the seminary's undergraduate school.

*Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist* is volume 32 in the publisher's Reformed Historical Theology series. It is a revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation: *Hercules Collins: Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist*. This is not the first thing that Weaver has written concerning Collins. He first became interested in Collins after Michael A. G. Haykin—a professor at SBTS and director of the Andrew Fuller Center—suggested him as “a largely neglected figure” in Baptist life (p. 21). Haykin and Weaver went on to co-edit “*Devoted to the Service of the Temple: Piety, Persecution, and Ministry in the Writings of Hercules Collins*” (2007) and a modernized version of Hercules Collins’ *An Orthodox Catechism* (2013). The research for the first of these required that Weaver “read all of Hercules Collins’ writings, mining them for excerpts demonstrating his piety” (p. 21). This deepened Weaver’s appreciation for Collins and his “commitment to continue to work to bring to light his writings which had long been neglected” (p. 21). And Baptists the world over are in his debt for doing so.

*Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist* is logically divided into five chapters. The first one is biographical, the next three view Collins as “Orthodox,”

“Puritan,” and “Baptist,” and the last one is a conclusion. Each chapter is nicely divided into numbered sections, and the middle three chapters have their own conclusion section. This is a scholarly work. The chapters are preceded by a list of abbreviations, a chronology of the life and works of Collins, a list of figures, a preface (more like an acknowledgments), a foreword, and an introduction. They are followed by two appendixes, a bibliography divided into primary and secondary works, and indexes of names and terms. The book contains a very detailed table of contents and almost 1,000 footnotes.

Collins was born in 1674, the year the Westminster Assembly of divines produced the Westminster Confession of Faith. A few years before his death, he signed, along with 36 other Particular Baptist ministers, the Second London Confession of Faith, a revision of the historic Westminster Confession. Although biographical sketches of Collins were given in their works by the English Baptist historians Thomas Crosby and Joseph Ivimey, they, like Weaver, were dependent on Collins' published funeral sermon preached by John Piggott. From this we learn that Collins was born into a paedobaptist Christian home, had a son who did not live to adulthood, suffered imprisonment for the name of Christ, and left a widow, Sara. Not much is known of Collins until he became, in 1677, the third pastor of the Baptist church in the Wapping area of London, one of the oldest Particular Baptist churches in London. Weaver writes in his first chapter of the persecutions Collins

endured (including a year in London's notorious Newgate Prison), the books he authored, the books he recommended to "those inclined to the ministry," his church controversies, his concern for the education of ministers, and his relationship with Keach, Kiffin, and Knollys.

Chapter 2, "Orthodox," concerns Hercules Collins and Historic Christianity. Collins averred that "truth must be recognized wherever it may be found, even if mixed with error" (p. 78). Accordingly, Collins used the Heidelberg Catechism as the basis of his Orthodox Catechism, included three patristic creeds in his catechism, and used the Church Fathers "to buttress his own arguments" (p.81). His writings "show both a familiarity with a strong commitment to the classic definitions of the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ" hammered out in the Patristic period (p. 92).

Chapter 3, "Puritan," concerns Hercules Collins and Reformed Protestantism. It was only natural that Baptists in seventeenth-century England would emphasize their similarities with Separatists, Congregationalists, Puritans, and other dissenters from the Church of England. They "consistently identified themselves confessionally and catechetically with their Puritan counterparts in doctrine" (p. 96). Weaver uses the term "Puritan" in this chapter in the generic sense of drawing one's faith and practice from the Scriptures. Collins had a Puritan approach to hermeneutics, homiletics, and persecution. Baptists, including Collins, "read and quoted freely from the works of Puritans"

(p. 98). Whenever he "differed from the Puritan establishment on ecclesiological matters, he did so based upon the Puritan regulative principle of worship" (p. 132).

Chapter 4, "Baptist," concerns Hercules Collins and Baptist Ecclesiology. Collins' "desire to promote unity between Baptists and other Protestant groups did not cause him to compromise" on the proper mode and recipients of baptism (pp. 186-187). Collins, like his two predecessors at the Wapping church (John Spilsbury & John Norcott), wrote a treatise on believers' baptism by immersion. He espoused the idea of a regenerate church membership. His church only admitted as members those who had been baptized as believers. He denied "the validity of the baptism of infants based upon the fact that Scripture nowhere commands it" (p. 187). Collins firmly embraced the concept of religious liberty, believing that "none should be compelled to worship God by a temporal sword, but such as come willingly, and none can worship God to acceptance but such" (p. 137). Each church is governed internally by the congregation. The section in this chapter on the Lord's Supper is especially significant. Not because Collins held that "only the baptized may partake of the Lord's Supper" (p. 188), but because many Baptists in Collins' day held to more of a "spiritual presence" view of the Lord's Supper than a memorial view.

Weaver's last chapter neatly summarizes the book and not surprisingly concludes that Hercules Collins was "at once orthodox,

Puritan, and Baptist” (p. 201). He is “a faithful spokesperson for the broader Particular Baptist community of which he was a part” (p. 199).

*Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist* is an important and fascinating study of not only the long-neglected Hercules Collins, but also English Baptists in the seventeenth century.

*Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins  
(1647-1702) and Particular Baptist Identity  
in Early Modern England*

G. Stephen Weaver Jr.

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