# In Essence One, in Persons Three

To Stephen J. Wellum,
a dear friend and colleague,
and gifted Trinitarian theologian



STUDIES IN BAPTIST HISTORY

# IN ESSENCE ONE, IN PERSONS THREE

*The doctrine of the Trinity in Particular Baptist life and thought, 1640s–1840s*

*Edited by*

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN
with ROY M. PAUL



*In Essence One, in Persons Three*

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# Introduction

*Michael A.G. Haykin*

Until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the Ancient Church, which was encapsulated in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (381), remained basically unchallenged. Even during the theological tumult of the Reformation, this vital area of Christian belief did not come into widespread dispute, though there were a few, like Miguel Servet (1511–1553) and the Italians, Lelio Francesco Sozzini (1525–1562) and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539–1604), who rejected Trinitarianism for a Unitarian perspective on the Godhead. However, as Sarah Mortimer has argued in her ground-breaking study of seventeenth-century English Socinianism, in the century after the Reformation the Socinian understanding of human beings as "inquiring, reasoning and active individuals who must take responsibility for their own spiritual lives" did come to play a critical role in undermining the way that "Trinitarian communities" in England had established theological boundaries for themselves.[1] This was part of a growing tide of rationalism in the seventeenth century and the one following that led to what P. Dixon has called a "fading of the trinitarian imagination" and to the doctrine coming under heavy attack.[2] Informed by the Enlightenment's confidence

[1] Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution. The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 240–241.

[2] Paul Dixon, *"Nice and Hot Disputes": The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London/New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 212. See also William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence. How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 164–178.

in the omnicompetence of human reason, increasingly the intellectual *mentalité* of this era either dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as a philosophical and unbiblical construct of the post-Apostolic Church, and turned to classical Arianism as an alternate perspective or simply ridiculed it as utterly illogical and argued for Deism or Socinianism.[3]

Now, what is amazing is that this critical battle over Trinitarianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—its outcome would help determine the shape of later thinking about Christianity's God—is passed over in utter silence by the vast majority of modern studies of the history of this doctrine. Typically, these studies leap over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, moving directly from the Trinitarian reflections of a Reformer like John Calvin (1509–1564) to various nineteenth or twentieth-century theologians.[4] The impression is thus given that between the Reformation and liberal theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) there had been little of significance written on Trinitarian doctrine. To anyone familiar, though, with the writings of the English Puritan John Owen (1616–1683) or the New England theologian of revival Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) on the Trinity, for example, this is a highly questionable claim. In fact, as the following essays demonstrate, the doctrine of the Trinity was *the* central issue at stake in the encounter between the Enlightenment, beginning in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and Christian orthodoxy.

These essays are focused on one Dissenting community, namely, the Particular Baptists, who are often regarded as being marginal to the history of Anglophone Christianity in the long eighteenth century. And yet, throughout this era, the Particular

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[3] G. L. Bray, "Trinity" in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J.I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 694.

[4] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, xi–xii, n.1.

Baptists in the British Isles tenaciously confessed a Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead and so, while other communities, such as the English Presbyterians and the General Baptists largely ceased to be Trinitarian, the Particular Baptists continued to regard themselves, and that rightly, as a Trinitarian community. In the words of the London Baptist minister Benjamin Wallin (1711–1782), the doctrine of the Trinity is, the "first and grand principle of revealed truth and the gospel."[5] In 1690, the London Baptist layman Isaac Marlow (1649–1719), for example, had published a treatise on the Trinity in which he stated his conviction that of those elements of divine truth that redound most to the glory of God and best further the fellowship of believers, "the blessed doctrine of the holy Trin-unity is the chiefest."[6] Nearly fifty years later, the renowned preacher Joseph Stennett II (1692–1758), who was a pillar of this community, similarly affirmed that "the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity, is of the greatest importance to his [that is, God's] glory."[7] And when the members of Chertsey Street Baptist Church in Guildford, Surrey, renewed their church covenant in 1744, they asserted their corporate belief in "the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity; viz. That the Godhead consist in Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and that these three are one living and true God; the same in substance, equal in power and glory."[8]

Unlike the Anglican Church, in which there was a prayer-book and a liturgy, both of which were suffused with Trinitarianism,[9]

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[5] Benjamin Wallin, *The eternal Existence of the Lord Jesus Christ considered and improved* (London, 1766), iv–v.

[6] Isaac Marlow, *A Treatise of the Holy Trinunity* [*sic*] (London, 1690), [i–ii].

[7] Joseph Stennett, *The Christian Strife for the Faith of the Gospel* (London, 1738), 78, cited Roger Hayden, "The Contribution of Bernard Foskett" in William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes with John H. Y. Briggs, ed., *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 197.

[8] "Grace Church Guildford History" (https://www.gracechurchguildford.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Grace-Church-Guildford-History.pdf; accessed July 7, 2021).

[9] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 215–216.

the Particular Baptists had no such resources to use to buttress the Trinitarian faith of their churches. Yet, there were theologians like the London pastor John Gill (1697–1771), of whom Olin C. Robison has rightly stated: "he was the living symbol of Particular Baptist thought during the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century."[10] Gill is often critiqued as a High-Calvinist whose opposition to the free offer of the Gospel helped to undermine Particular Baptist growth for much of his lifetime. The details of Gill's High-Calvinism are a controverted issue that is not easily resolved. But what is certain is the influence of his unflagging commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity. Gill's *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated* was an effective defence of the fact that there is

> but one God; that there is a plurality in the Godhead; that there are three divine Persons in it; that the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; that these are distinct in Personality, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.[11]

The heart of this treatise was incorporated into Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1769) which became for many Particular Baptist pastors their major theological resource, and thus Gill played a central role in keeping a Trinitarian faith front and centre in the minds of many Baptist leaders. As John Rippon (1751–1836), Gill's successor at his London church, bore testimony to Gill's faithfulness to Trinitarian orthodoxy:

> The Doctor not only watched over his *people*, "with great affection, fidelity, and love;" but he also watched his *pulpit* also. He would not, if he knew it, admit any one to preach

[10] Olin C. Robison, "The Legacy of John Gill," *The Baptist Quarterly* 24, no.3 (1971–1972): 122.

[11] John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated*, 2nd ed. (London, 1752), 166–167.

> for him, who was either cold-hearted to the doctrine of the Trinity; or who *denied* the divine filiation of the Son of God; or who *objected* to conclude his prayers with the usual *doxology* to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as three equal Persons in the one Jehovah. Sabellians, Arians, and Socinians, he considered as real enemies of the cross of Christ. They *dared* not ask him to preach, nor *could* he in conscience, permit them to officiate for him. He conceived that, by this uniformity of conduct, he adorned the pastoral office.[12]

He did more than "adorn the pastoral office." Through the written word he helped shepherd the English Particular Baptist community along the pathway of orthodoxy. Due to his commitment to Trinitarian orthodoxy, when the fire of revival began to burn among the Particular Baptists in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, there were coals of orthodoxy to kindle and be enflamed.

The essays in this book not only deal with Gill's Trinitarianism, but also document the Trinitarian Faith of the Particular Baptist from their origins and earliest confessions in the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century when the Irish Particular Baptist Alexander Carson (1776–1844) defended the doctrine against Arian Presbyterians. Apart from Prof. Clary's article on Carson and my essay on Anne Dutton (1692–1765), the other essays all had their origins in papers given at a conference sponsored by the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies on the campus of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2019, the three-hundredth anniversary of the Salters' Hall Synod, a key turning-point in the Trinitarian debates of the eighteenth century. All of the essays, apart from my essay on Dutton, have also appeared in an issue of *Perichoresis: The*

[12] John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D.D.* (1838, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1992), 127–128.

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# 1

# "Three subsistences … one substance": The Doctrine of the Trinity in the *Second London Confession*[1]

*Steve Weaver*

Both the General and Particular branches of the seventeenth-century Baptists faced challenges in key areas of historic Christianity. Each group had prominent leaders in their movements embrace substandard positions on both the Trinity and Christology. For the General Baptists, Matthew Caffyn (1628–1714)[2] would lead many astray with his heretical teachings concerning the nature of the humanity of Jesus. Caffyn denied that Jesus had received his human flesh from the Virgin Mary. Among the Particular Baptists, Thomas Collier (*fl.* 1634–1691)[3] proved to be a moving target in regard to his orthodoxy. Collier denied the historic understanding of the Trinity during the 1640s, passing through a period of orthodoxy in the 1650s and 1660s, before finally rejecting original sin, limited atonement and the incarnation in the 1670s. Both

[1] This essay is a lightly edited and condensed extract from my previously published work on Hercules Collins, G. Stephen Weaver, Jr., *Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins (1647–1702) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2015). Used with permission from the publisher. A version of this essay was also published in the *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 211–225.

[2] For a brief biographical sketch, see Jim Spivey, "Caffyn, Matthew," in *DNB*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[3] For a brief biographical sketch, see Stephen Wright, "Collier, Thomas," in *DNB*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Collier's name is sometimes spelled "Collyer" in his published works. Throughout this essay I have used the spelling "Collier."

Caffyn and Collier would receive responses from capable pastor-theologians within their own respective traditions. While Matthew Caffyn received a thorough response from Thomas Monck, this essay will explore the Particular Baptist response to Thomas Collier. The essay will argue that Hercules Collins' often overlooked writings identify that he was consciously committed to the orthodox Trinitarianism and Christology of the Niceano-Constantinopolitan and Chalcedonian Creeds.

## Collier and the Particular Baptist Response

Thomas Collier was a native of Somerset and a key leader in the Western Association's adoption of the Somerset Confession in 1656.[4] His career, however, was riddled with doctrinal instability.[5] In his Oxford dissertation on Collier, Richard Dale Land states "that there were only relatively brief periods of Collier's career when he was unquestionably orthodox by what the Particular Baptists themselves published as their theological standards, namely *Confession* (1644) and *Confession* (1677)."[6] Indeed, Michael A.G. Haykin has labeled the doctrinal defection of Collier as perhaps the most pressing reason for a new confession of faith in 1677.[7] In

[4] *A Confession Of The Faith of several Churches of Christ, In the Country of Somerset, and of some Churches in the Counties neer adjacent* (London: Henry Hills, 1656).

[5] For more on the career of Thomas Collier, see Richard Dale Land, "Doctrinal Controversies of English Particular Baptists (1644–1691) as Illustrated by the Career and Writings of Thomas Collier" (D.Phil. thesis, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, 1979). For detailed documentation of Collier's departure from Calvinist orthodoxy, see James M. Renihan, "Thomas Collier's Descent into Error: Collier, Calvinism, and the Second London Confession," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (January 2004): 67–83.

[6] Land, "Doctrinal Controversies of English Particular Baptists," 332.

[7] Michael A.G. Haykin, *Kiffen, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage* (Peterborough, ON, 2019), 112. Collier's defection was emblematic of a larger movement in seventeenth-century England, which included men such as John Biddle (1616–1662), that denied the deity of Christ and the Trinity. For a recent detailed study of this doctrinal controversy, see Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). The 1690s saw the rise of English Deism through the writings of such men as Anthony Collins (1676–1729), Matthew Tindal

his 1674 *Body of Divinity*, Collier had denied the Calvinistic doctrine of particular redemption while asserting the eternality of the human nature of Christ.[8] In 1676, in a work titled *An Additional Word to the Body of Divinity*, Collier clarified his stance by strengthening his statements regarding the universal provision of the atonement, the eternality of the human nature of the Son and his refusal to use the term "person" as in the historic Christian orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.[9] The latter rejection reflects Collier's teaching on the subject three decades prior. In 1648, for example, Collier had denied the historic orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Collier wrote that God

> is not, first, as some imagine, *Three Persons yet one God*, or three subsistings, distinguished though not divided; Its altogether impossible to distinguish God in this manner, and not divide him; thus to distinguish is to divide; for three persons are three not only distinguished, but divided: Some say there is, *God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, yet not three, but one God*; Let any one judge if here be not three Gods, if three then not one.[10]

In the words of Thomas Hall, an opponent of the Baptists, Collier was "a most dangerous and blasphemous Heretick," nothing less than an Arian, because he "denied the Trinity."[11] Although Hall

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(1655–1733), and John Toland (1670–1722). For a brief synopsis of this development, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 113–114.

[8] Thomas Collier, *The Body of Divinity, Or, a Confession of Faith, Being the substance of Christianity: Containing the most Material things relating to Matters both of Faith and Practise* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1674), 117 and 31.

[9] Thomas Collier, *An Additional Word To The Body of Divinity, Or Confession Of Faith; Being the substance of Christianity* (London, 1676), 1–18.

[10] Thomas Collier, *A General Epistle, To The Universal Church of the First Born: Whose Names are written in Heaven* (London: Giles Calvert, 1648), 4.

[11] [Thomas Hall], *The Collier in his Colours: or, The Picture of a Collier* (London, 1652), in Hall's *The Font Guarded With XX Arguments* (London, 1652), 123, 125.

was aware that Collier's beliefs were not shared by the generality of the Calvinistic Baptists,[12] others were not so discerning and took Collier's views as representative of the whole of his one-time co-religionists. A response from the Particular Baptist community was therefore necessary. Nehemiah Coxe[13] offered one such response in his 1677 *Vindicae Veritas*.[14] Another response came the same year in the form of the *Second London Confession of Faith*,[15] which was likely composed by Coxe and his fellow Petty France co-pastor William Collins.[16] A largely overlooked response, however, came in the year 1680 from the pen of Hercules Collins.

## Collins and An Orthodox Catechism

In 1680, Hercules Collins published his *An Orthodox Catechism*. This modified version of the historic Protestant Heidelberg Catechism was published, as stated on the title page: "For Preventing the Canker and Poison of Heresy and Error."[17] Collins was concerned with defending his fellow Baptists against charges of heresy while at the same time providing an instrument of instruction in order to prevent the spread of further false teaching among

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[12] Hall, *The Collier in his Colours in The Font Guarded*, 121, 125.

[13] For a brief biographical sketch of Coxe, see James M. Renihan, "An Excellent and Judicious Divine: Nehemiah Coxe," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (July 2007): 61–78.

[14] Nehemiah Coxe, *Vinidicae Veritas, Or A Confutation Of The Heresies and Gross Errours Asserted by Thomas Collier In His Additional Word To His Body of Divinity* (London: Nath. Ponder, 1677).

[15] *A Confession Of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations Of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677).

[16] An obscure reference is made in the minutes of the Petty France church on August 26, 1677, to the publication of a confession of faith. *Petty France Church Minute Book*, 6. This confession would be formally adopted by the General Assembly of Particular Baptists in 1689.

[17] H[ercules] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism: Being the Sum of Christian Religion, Contained in the Law and Gospel* (London, 1680), title page. The text of this catechism, alongside the text of the Heidelberg Catechism, is also provided in James M. Renihan, *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004).

their number. Thus, the catechism had both polemical and pastoral functions. As seen above, the polemical focus of the catechism was necessary due to the fact that one of the leading church planters of the Calvinistic Baptist community in the early decades of their movement, Thomas Collier, had brought the Baptists into disrepute. Collins wrote primarily, however, as a pastor to safeguard the congregation entrusted to him. The catechism was addressed very specifically to "the Church of Christ, who upon Confession of Faith have bin baptized, Meeting in *Old-Gravil-Lane London*."[18] Having become the pastor of the Wapping congregation only four years earlier, Collins modified the Heidelberg so as to use as a tool in fulfilling his pastoral duties. A comparison of the two documents reveals a number of edits, a good number of which are best explained as Collins' attempts to make the catechism more accessible to his local congregation. Collins explicitly stated this concern for the spiritual nurture of the local congregation to which he ministered in the following benediction that concluded his "Preface" to the catechism: "And for those whom the Lord hath committed to my Charge, that the Eternal God may be your Refuge, and underneath you everlasting Arms; that Grace may be opened to your Hearts, and your hearts to Grace; that the blessing of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may be upon you, and the eternal Spirit may be with you, shall be the Prayer of your unworthy Brother, but more unworthy Pastor."[19] For Collins, orthodoxy was not just doctrine to be believed, it was truth to be defended and taught to those under his responsibility as pastor.

*Use of the Creeds*

The Heidelberg Catechism originally contained the Apostles' Creed. Collins, however, would follow the General Baptists' *An*

[18] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, "The Preface;" Renihan, *True Confessions*, 236.

[19] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, "The Preface;" Renihan, *True Confessions*, 238.

*Orthodox Creed*[20] in adding the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.[21] Thus, what Harmon has said of the *Orthodox Creed* as a confession of faith can equally be said of the *Orthodox Catechism* as a catechism, namely that it is the "most explicit and thoroughgoing referencing of the patristic tradition" among Baptist catechisms.[22] In his preface to *An Orthodox Catechism*, Collins would explain his rationale for including the three creeds from the patristic tradition:

> *I have proposed* three Creeds *to your consideration, which ought thoroughly to be believed and embraced by all those that would be accounted Christians,* viz. *The* Nicene Creed, Athanasius his Creed, *and the* Creed *commonly called the* Apostles*; The last of which contains the sum of the Gospels; which is industriously opened and explained; and I beseech you do not slight it because of its Form, nor Antiquity, nor because supposed to be composed by Men; neither because some that hold it, maintain some Errors, or whose Conversation may not be correspondent to such fundamental Principles of Salvation; but take this for a perpetual Rule, That whatever is good in any, owned by any, whatever Error or Vice it may be mixed withal, the Good must not be rejected for the Error or Vice sake, but owned;*

[20] *An Orthodox Creed: Or, A Protestant Confession of Faith. Being An Essay to Unite, and Confirm all true Protestants in the Fundamental Articles of the Christian Religion, against the Errors and Heresies of the Church of Rome* (London, 1679). Complete text also found in William L.Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 297–334.

[21] Four pieces of evidence indicate that Collin was inspired by the *Orthodox Creed* in the formation of his *Orthodox Catechism*. First, most obviously, both documents contain the word "orthodox" in their titles. Second, Collins matches the three creeds of the *Orthodox Creed* by adding the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds to the already present Apostles Creed. Third, the wording of the final sentence of the Athanasian Creed in the *Orthodox Catechism* follows the unique wording found in the *Orthodox Creed* exactly: "This is the Catholick Faith, *&c.* Which, *every one should believe faithfully*." Cf. *Orthodox Creed*, 62; and *Orthodox Catechism*, 74; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 287. Fourth, Collins replicates word-for-word a marginal note on Christ's descent into hell in the Apostles Creed. Cf. *Orthodox Creed*, 57; and *Orthodox Catechism*, 16.

[22] Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 27 (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2006), 77.

*commended, and accepted.*[23]

Here we see that Collins assumed that the classic Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy contained in the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds would "*be believed and embraced by all those that would be accounted Christians.*" Their content, he argued, should not be rejected simply because of their form, antiquity or because composed by humans. Collins also issued a preemptive strike against one of the main reasons many Baptists might have been averse to the creeds—their link to the Roman Catholic Church. Collins avers that truth must be recognized wherever it may be found, even if mixed with error. This insightful statement by Collins reveals not only how he utilized the creeds, but may also reveal how he would read the church fathers, and even the Puritans with whom he might have significant disagreements.

Both the Heidelberg Catechism and its Baptist counterpart are desirous of affirming core elements of the historic catholic teaching of the Ancient Church, of which the central one is the Trinity.[24] Thus, matching the Heidelberg word for word, the *Orthodox Catechism* asks: "Into how many parts is this Creed divided?" The answer: "Into three: the first of the eternal Father, and our creation: the second, of the Son and our redemption: the third, of the Holy Ghost, and our sanctification."[25] In clear contrast to the heterodoxy expressed by Thomas Collier with regard to the Trinity, the *Orthodox Catechism* then asserted the biblical doctrine in these words,

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[23] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, "The Preface;" Renihan, *True Confessions*, 238.

[24] Collins actually included the Nicene Creed of 325—interestingly enough, not the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381—and the Athanasian Creed at the close of his catechism: Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism,* 71–74; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 284–87. As noted above in n. 41, Collins was following the *Orthodox Creed* in this decision.

[25] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 9; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 244.

> Q. Seeing there is but one only substance of God, why namest thou those three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?
>
> A. Because God hath so manifested himself in his Word, that these three distinct persons are that one true everlasting God.[26]

Collins, thus, clearly affirmed the historic orthodox understanding of the Trinity as *tres Personae, una Substantia*. Although, as Harmon has noted, this continuity with the patristic tradition may not be due to a "conscious engagement with the patristic tradition as a source of religious authority," but rather reflects continuities "retained from the ecclesiastical bodies out of which the confessing Baptist communities came or by which they were influenced."[27] This means that Collins likely received his creedal commitments to the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ, not directly from the patristic tradition, but rather through Reformed statements such as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith, along with the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the three creeds from the patristic era in the *Orthodox Creed* and *Orthodox Catechism* argues for a more direct influence, even though these creeds had likely been received by the Baptist community from their inclusion in the Thirty-Nine Articles.[28]

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[26] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism,* 9; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 244. Collins has added an "and" between "true" and "everlasting."

[27] Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, 77.

[28] The language introducing the three creeds used in both article 38 of the *Orthodox Creed* and "The Preface" to the *Orthodox Catechism* is almost identical to the language of article 8 of the Thirty-Nine Articles. "The three Credes, Nicene Crede, Athanasian Crede, and that which is commonlye called the Apostles' Crede, ought throughlye to be receaued and beleaued: for they may be proued by moste certayne warrauntes of holye scripture." Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 3:492.

## Patristic Theology

The patristic era is noted for hammering out the important theological formulations of Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Trinitarianism and Chalcedonian Christology. All of orthodox Christianity is indebted to the meticulous work of the careful Christian theologians of the first four centuries of church history. The confessions of faith of the seventeenth-century Baptists clearly reflect this tradition, though they likely received this tradition through the Reformed confessions of their forbears and contemporaries. The *Second London Confession of Faith*, which Collins signed along with thirty-six other representatives of Particular Baptist churches in and around London, contained clear affirmations of these foundational doctrines including language that can be traced back to their classic formulations in the patristic era.

## Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Trinitarianism

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, the *Second London Confession* states a clear affirmation of Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan theology.

> In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father the Word (or Son) and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and Eternity, each having the whole Divine Essence, yet the Essence undivided, the Father is of none neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son is Eternally begotten of the Father, the holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and Being; but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties, and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.[29]

[29] *A Confession Of Faith* (1677), 12; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 253.

Although much of this language can be traced to the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration, there are some unique Baptist contributions.[30] For example, the *Second London Confession* added the following section to the language adapted from the Westminster and Savoy confessions: "all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and Being; but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties, and personal relations." This selection came from the *First London Confession*, except the last phrase "and personal relations."[31] This observation indicates that while the Baptists were desirous to use the orthodox language of their paedobaptist contemporaries, they were nevertheless both capable and willing to strengthen the language where they deemed necessary. To this point, when describing the three distinct persons of the Trinity, the framers of the *Second London Confession* parted from their esteemed Reformed contemporaries to use the term "subsistence," a common English translation of *hypostasis*.[32] This no doubt reflects that, at the very least, these Baptists had a theological vocabulary that was informed by the Trinitarian debates of the patristic era. The use of "subsistence" also likely indicates that these Baptists were interested in specifically refuting the error of Thomas Collier who explicitly denied that God is "as some imagine, Three Persons yet one God, or three subsistings, distinguished though not divided."[33]

Collins' commitment to the classic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is not only seen in his approbation of the *Second London Confession* as one of its original signatories, he also positively asserted this doctrine in his *An Orthodox Catechism*. As noted

[30] For a comparison of the *Second London Confession* with its three primary source documents (Westminster Confession, Savoy Declaration, and *First London Confession*), see Renihan, *True Confessions*, 63–189.

[31] Cf. *First London Confession*, chapter II.

[32] Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, 75, 75n15.

[33] Collier, *A General* Epistle, 4.

above, the *Orthodox Catechism* follows wholly the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism upon which it is based. The structure of the catechism is Trinitarian, with three sections focusing respectively upon the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Collins explicitly states his commitment to the historic Christian doctrine by following the Heidelberg in including the following pointed catechetical question and response.

> Q. Seeing there is but one only substance of God, why namest thou those three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?
>
> A. Because God hath so manifested himself in his Word, that these three distinct persons are that one true everlasting God.[34]

This statement affirms both of the key aspects of Trinitarian theology: the one substance or essence of God (*Substantia* or *Ousia*) and the three distinct persons (*Personae* or *Hypostases*) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Collins' other writings, a clear commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity is also seen. In his manual on preaching, *The Temple Repair'd*, Collins recommended to prospective preachers "Dr. *Owen* on the Trinity."[35] This was likely a reference to John Owen's *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, first published in 1669.[36] This is yet another indication that Collins would have seen himself as sharing the Trinitarian

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[34] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism,* 9; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 244. Collins has added an "and" between "true" and "everlasting."

[35] Hercules Collins, *The Temple Repair'd: Or, An Essay to revive the long-neglected Ordinances, of exercising the spiritual Gift of Prophecy for the Edification of the Churches; and of ordaining Ministers duly qualified* (London: William and Joseph Marshal, 1702), 49.

[36] John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: R. W., 1669).

theology of his Reformed contemporaries. Additionally, Collins clearly assumed the Triune God in his epic poem tracing the story of redemptive history, *The Marrow of Gospel-History*.[37] In the opening scene, which begins in the throne room of God before the creation of the universe, Collins extolled the "Everliving God" as existing:

> In all his Will immutable,
> For Changes he knows none:
> How can that be, when perfect's he,
> Three Persons yet but One?[38]

This is a clear refutation of Collier's teaching, cited earlier, which explicitly stated that God is "not … Three Persons yet one God."[39] Again, in poetic manner, Collins affirms the one essence and three persons of the Trinity.

Elsewhere, Collins provided insight into his own thinking on the Trinity in his illustration to prospective preachers of how one might draw doctrines from a particular passage of Scripture. The eighth doctrine which Collins drew from Colossians 1:12 was a Trinitarian observation:

> *That it is the Duty of all who are made meet for Heaven, to give Thanks to the Father. Mark one thing, tho it be said, that we should give Thanks to the Father, yet that doth not exclude the Son, nor the Holy Ghost, but it is to the Father as the Fountain of Grace, to the Son as the Procurer of Grace, to the Holy Spirit as the Applier of grace*.[40]

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[37] Hercules Collins, *The Marrow of Gospel-History: Or, A Diversion for Youth at their spare Hours* (London, 1696). Also published in Hercules Collins, *Three Books* (London, 1696).

[38] Collins, *The Marrow of Gospel-History*, 4.

[39] Collier, *A General Epistle*, 4.

[40] Collins, *The Temple Repair'd*, 49.

This reflection indicates that Collins was influenced by Puritan thinkers such as John Owen who often spoke of the Trinity in precisely these terms. In his magisterial work on Puritan theology, Joel R. Beeke has explained Owens' use of this terminology.

> Repeatedly Owen taught that there is a divine economy of operation where each person takes a role in the work of God, a role that reflects the personal relations in the Trinity. The Father acts as origin, authority, fountain, initiator, and sender; the Son acts as executor of the Father's will, treasury of His riches, foundation, worker, purchaser, and accomplisher; the Spirit acts as completer, finisher, immediate efficacy, fruit, and applier. This is not to divide God's works and distribute them among the three persons—the external works of the Trinity are undivided—but rather to recognize that in every work of God all three persons cooperate in distinct ways.[41]

Collins was clearly quite comfortable in expressing his orthodox convictions on the Trinity in terminology made familiar to him by his Puritan contemporaries. Although each member of the Godhead was considered as a distinct person, there was a unity of purpose and cooperation within the Trinity in the accomplishment of that purpose. Again, this was a truth earlier denied by Thomas Collier in the middle of the seventeenth century. Collier asserted that it was "altogether impossible to distinguish God in this manner, and not divide him; thus to distinguish is to divide; for three persons are three not only distinguished, but divided."[42] For Collier, to distinguish the persons of the Trinity in this way made three Gods and this could not be reconciled with the oneness of God. Collins' ruminations upon the Trinity, however, reflected

[41] Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 106.

[42] Collier, *A General Epistle*, 4.

not only the orthodoxy of the patristic period, but also the mature thought of the Puritan divines regarding the relationship between the one essence and three persons of God.

### Chalcedonian Christology

As noted earlier in this essay, the *Second London Confession of Faith* was issued, in part, to set the record straight with the general public that Thomas Collier's heterodox views on the Trinity and the eternality of Christ's human nature did not represent the Particular Baptist community as a whole. The former has already been explored above. The latter is addressed in the confession's strong statement on the full divinity and humanity of Christ united in his one person.

> The *Son* of *God*, the second Person in the *Holy Trinity*, being very and eternal *God*, the brightness of the Fathers glory, of one substance and equal with *him:* who made the World, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made: did when the fullness of time was come take unto him mans nature, with all the Essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin: being conceived by the *Holy Spirit* in the *Womb* of the *Virgin Mary*, the *Holy Spirit* coming down upon her, and the power of the most *High* overshadowing her, and so was made of a *Woman*, of the Tribe of *Judah*, of the Seed of *Abraham*, and *David* according to the *Scriptures*: So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, were inseparably joined together in one *Person*: without *conversion*, *composition*, or *confusion*: which *Person* is very *God*, and very *Man*, yet one *Christ*, the only *Mediator* between *God* and *Man*.[43]

Contra Collier's position on the eternality of Christ's human

[43] *A Confession Of Faith* (1677), 28–29; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 260–61.

nature,[44] the confession asserts that Christ "did when the fullness of time was come take unto him man's nature, with all the Essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin." The human nature was assumed at the incarnation and did not exist prior to this point in human history. At this point, the framers of the *Second London Confession* were following the wording found in the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration. Just after this section, however, the *Second London* adapts language from the *First London Confession* not included in either of these historic Protestant confessions. This wording further emphasized the full humanity assumed by the second person of the Trinity at Bethlehem. They added: "the *Holy Spirit* coming down upon her, and the power of the most *High* overshadowing her, and so was made of a *Woman*, of the Tribe of *Judah*, of the Seed of *Abraham*, and *David* according to the *Scriptures*."[45] This issue was important because these Baptists believed that the same human nature possessed by Eve, Judah, Abraham, and David was shared by the Christ. Only in this way could the prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming be fulfilled.

Collins highlighted another important reason for the real and full humanity of Christ in his *An Orthodox Catechism*. Namely, because "the Justice of God requireth that the same humane nature which hath sinned, do itself likewise make recompence for sin."[46] In order for God's justice to be satisfied, the same human nature which sinned had to make payment for sin. Thus, the Christ had to assume a human nature from his human mother, which had been passed down to her by her human ancestors. But one who is only fully human could not provide atonement for sin, for "he that

[44] Collier, *The Body of Divinity, Or, a Confession of Faith*, 31; Collier, *An Additional Word To The Body of Divinity*, 1–18.

[45] *A Confession of Faith* (1677), 29; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 261; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 96.

[46] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 6; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 242.

is himself a sinner, cannot make recompence for others."[47] This required the deliverer of mankind to be a sinless human and one who has the power to "sustain in his flesh the burthen of God's wrath."[48] Collins follows the Heidelberg Catechism in asserting that this mediator must be fully God and fully human: "Such a one verily as is very man, and perfectly just, and yet in power above all creatures, that is, who is also very God."[49] This mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ who is "together both very God, and a very perfectly just man."[50] This view of the unity of the two natures in the person of Christ reflects the historic formulation of the Creed of Chalcedon of 451 which stated that Christ was

> to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly*, *unchangeably*, *indivisibly*, *inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.[51]

This doctrine was affirmed by the *Second London Confession*'s declaration that in Christ "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, were inseparably jointed together in one *Person*: without *conversion*, *composition*, or *confusion*: which *Person* is very *God*, and very *Man*; yet one *Christ*, the only *Mediator* between *God* and *Man*."[52]

Collins made clear his own personal commitment to this union of two natures in Christ in his own writings. Among his 36

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[47] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 6; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 242.
[48] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 6; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 242.
[49] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 5; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 242.
[50] Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 6; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 242.
[51] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 2:62.
[52] *A Confession of Faith*, 29; Renihan, *True Confessions*, 96–97.

recommendations to preachers on how to rightly handle the Word of God in *The Temple Repair'd*, Collins included an explanation of how scriptural language often reflects this understanding of the union of the two natures.

> In holy Scripture you will sometimes find that which properly belongs to one Nature in Christ is attributed to another by virtue of the personal Union; hence it is that the Church is said to be *purchased with the blood of God*;[53] not that God simply consider'd hath Blood, *for he is a Spirit*;[54] but it is attributed to God, because of the Union of the Human and Divine Nature. Moreover, it is said that the *Son of Man was in Heaven*, when he was discoursing upon Earth:[55] Here that which was proper to the Godhead and the Divine Nature, is attributed to the Human Nature, because of the Union of the Natures.[56]

Here Collins' commitment to the hypostatic union becomes an important hermeneutical principle. He indicated the importance of explaining this in one's preaching "with all the clearness imaginable," because this doctrine "is so necessary to Man's Salvation."[57] For Collins and his fellow Particular Baptists, doctrine mattered. Indeed, the salvation of individuals depended upon the proper explication of the key doctrines of the Christian faith. Collins considered the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures to be at the very core of orthodox Christianity.[58] Humans need a savior who is simultaneously divine, human, and sinless. This is precisely the kind of savior which Collins saw set forth

[53] See Acts 20:28.
[54] See John 4:24.
[55] John 3:13.
[56] Collins, *The Temple Repair'd*, 38–39.
[57] Collins, *The Temple Repair'd*, 39.
[58] In *The Marrow of Gospel-History*, Collins extols the theological truth of the hypostatic union in poetic terms. See Collins, *The Marrow of Gospel-History*, 15, 18, and 93–94.

in Scripture. Ultimately, the never-ending union of the divine and human natures of Christ serve as an illustration of the eternal union between God and his elect because of the work of Christ. Collins expressed the security of the believer's union with Christ poetically in *The Marrow of Gospel-History*.

> That tho by Sin Man's separate
> From God, the chiefest Good,
> Yet now in Christ united are;
> Man shall live still with God.
> And if the Union cannot cease,
> Call'd *Hypostatical*;
> No more can that 'tween God and his,
> Because 'tis Eternal.[59]

## Conclusion

Although admittedly difficult to comprehend fully, the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ were not matters to be avoided by the seventeenth-century English Baptists. Rather, these doctrines were considered to be vital to orthodox Christianity. Both the General and Particular Baptist communities faced challenges to historic Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Trinitarianism and Chalcedonian Christology. The General Baptist response to Matthew Caffyn is found in the *Orthodox Creed*. Particular Baptists also responded to the doctrinal deviations of Thomas Collier with a new confession, the *Second London Confession of Faith* in 1677. Hercules Collins, though an original signer of the *Second London Confession* at the General Assembly in 1689, also utilized the General Baptist's *Orthodox Creed* in the formation of his *Orthodox Catechism* in 1680. His commitment to the Christian orthodoxy of the patristic period is shown in his inclusion of three definitive creeds from the era. Furthermore, his writings are filled

[59] Collins, *The Marrow of Gospel-History*, 94.

with references that demonstrate both a familiarity with and a strong commitment to the classic definitions of the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ hammered out in these early periods.

# Contributors

Jonathan W. Arnold, DPhil (Oxon) is associate professor of theological studies at Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH.

Ian Hugh Clary, PhD (University of the Free State) is associate professor of historical theology at Colorado Christian University, Lakewood, CO, and the review editor for *Evangelical Quarterly*.

Michael A. G. Haykin, ThD (University of Toronto), FRHistS, is the chair and professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, and the director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies that operates under the auspices of Southern Seminary.

Roy M. Paul, ThD (Golden State), FRHistS, is the executive research assistant at the Canadian office of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies.

Jesse F. Owens, PhD (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as pastor of Immanuel Church, Gallatin, TN, and assistant professor of historical and systematic theology at Welch College, Gallatin, TN.

Jonathan E. Swan, PhD (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is book review editor for *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* and Greek teacher at Highlands Latin School, Louisville, KY.

Steve Weaver, PhD (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is an independent historian.

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