ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the covenant theology of the English Particular Baptists between 1642-1704, focusing on the individuals connected with the First and Second London Baptist Confessions of Faith (1644, 1677). After a brief overview of the Particular Baptists’ historical origins in Puritanism in general and Separatism in particular, this thesis lays out a broad model of unity and diversity in the development of Reformed covenant theology. The unity and diversity of the Reformed tradition provides a paradigm for contextual comparison with the Particular Baptists.

The chapters of this thesis follow a chronological progression, beginning with the Particular Baptists’ first publications advocating a covenantal argument in the 1640s and 1650s, and the covenant theology of their first Confession of Faith. These chapters demonstrate that while the Particular Baptists joined the unity of Reformed covenant theology in its basic tenets, their covenantal distinctive was a rejection of equating the Abrahamic covenant and the covenant of grace. Because of this, the majority of their literature serves a polemical, and not systematic, purpose. John Cameron’s thought played an important role in the discussion of the Particular Baptists’ relation to the unity and diversity of Reformed covenant theology.

Subsequent chapters note a decline in literature in the 1660s, due to the restoration of Charles II, but also a resurgence in the 1670s, climaxing in the arguments of Nehemiah Coxe in the 1680s. The Particular Baptists’ literature in the later portion of the seventeenth century often referenced the literature of earlier Particular Baptists, creating a strong chain of continuity in argumentation. As with previous decades, the consistent contention characterizing their polemical covenant theology was a rejection of the conflation of the Abrahamic covenant and the covenant of grace.

From the 1670s onward, John Owen’s theology in his commentaries on the book of Hebrews featured prominently and regularly in the Particular Baptists’ covenantal writings. Appeals to Owen, along with numerous citations from other paedobaptist authors in the Reformed tradition, fueled the Particular Baptists’ insistence that their conclusions in covenant theology resolved inconsistencies and contradictions created by paedobaptism. By the later 1680s and 1690s, the Particular Baptists’ covenantal polemic was well established, and only small points of diversity are noted.

This thesis demonstrates that throughout the seventeenth century the Particular Baptists’ covenant theology developed with considerable unity and minimal diversity. And they presented their distinctive arguments not as a rejection and replacement of Reformed covenant theology as a whole, but as a natural and necessary realignment of inconsistencies within the diversity of the Reformed tradition.