

RESPONSE TO J. MATTHEW PINSON'S "THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION"



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Though a fair number of anti-predestinarian Baptists Socinianized in the eighteenth century, Pinson's essay suggests that those living in the latter seventeenth century held a considerably traditional view of justification and the atonement. In fact, their views of justification and the atonement were much closer to Reformed Orthodoxy than were the views of some contemporary Independents, such as John Goodwin, or even some Puritans, such as Richard Baxter. This was demonstrated through Pinson's judicious comparison of Goodwin's thought to that of the principal theologian of the General Baptists, Thomas Grantham. The essay presents, for the most part, an accurate picture of Grantham's position.

Pinson concluded that "the most practical difference" between Grantham and Goodwin was "for Grantham, salvation consists totally in Christ's righteousness, whereas for Goodwin, it hinges on the individual's faith."¹ But such a conclusion seems to exaggerate the differences between them and it neglects Grantham's emphasis on human volition. Grantham argued that "God imputes Righteousness to Men without Works" and that "what is thus imputed, is not acted by us, but expressly [sic] reckoned as a matter of free Gift, or Grace." But to what extent did he understand justification as a gift? He acknowledged that the possibility of salvation was an undeserved blessing as was the imputation of Jesus' righteousness.² But what about the means of receiving these undeserved blessings? Was faith a work in any sense or was faith a gift in every sense? It was Grantham's view that the righteousness of Christ was "reckoned as ours through believing." Grace was inseparable from faith and yet man played some role in having faith. This is nowhere more obvious than in Grantham's order of causes. Proponents of Reformed Orthodoxy asserted that justification was by faith and that the formal cause of justification

¹Matthew Pinson, "Thomas Grantham's Theology of the Atonement and Justification," 18.

²Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book 2, Part 1, 67.

was the imputation of Jesus' righteousness.³ Grantham's explanation was radically different: "The formal Cause is believing and obeying the Truth through the Spirit." Though Grantham recognized that God was the first mover in regenerating sinners, he utterly rejected the idea that adults were passive in the work of regeneration: "All our faculties are given us of God. It's our duty to put these faculties into Act; to hear, repent, and believe, is Man's duty."⁴ For Grantham, faith was a condition for justification; it was not an instrument of justification granted to the elect. Though bathed in grace, faith was not a gift in every sense.

Where Grantham parted ways with continental Reformed Orthodoxy over the formal cause of justification, he joined a number of clergymen from the Established Church. Like Grantham, Herbert Thorndike's formal cause of justification contained a conditional element. Henry Hammond and George Bull held similar views.⁵ Grantham and the "holy living" divines were passionate defenders of universal atonement and both agreed that salvation could be affected by humans. Citations from the works of Jeremy Taylor abound in Grantham's writings. He would even go so far as to quote Taylor on original sin – a connection that most ministers would have avoided.⁶

Nevertheless, Grantham stood much closer to his Puritan forefathers than did the Caroline Divines who were reluctant to affirm the double imputation of Jesus' righteousness. As Pinson pointed out, Grantham affirmed the imputation of both the passive and the active obedience of Christ. This is all the more remarkable given the theological milieu of the Restoration Church of England. Grantham's context was one in which anti-predestinarianism was steadily gaining ground in the Established Church. Had he followed Grotius more faithfully he would have closed the distance between himself and some potential allies. Against the "holy living" school, Grantham insisted that justification was an instantaneous act through which the convert received the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of his death.

Pinson suggested that Grantham's views of justification and the atonement were also the views of the General Baptists.⁷ However, the identity of the General Baptists is not obvious. Most historians have employed the term broadly.⁸ Sabbatarians aside, all who held believer's

³John Spurr, *Restoration Church of England* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 299.

⁴Thomas Grantham, *Infants Advocate*, 8-9.

⁵C.F. Allison, *Rise of Moralism* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1966), 114, 132.

⁶Grantham, *Infants Advocate*, 11.

⁷"Grantham and the General Baptists defied such classifications, striving instead for a *via media* which, they were certain, was the way of the Bible and the primitive churches." Pinson, "Thomas Grantham's Theology," 20.

⁸See the histories of W.T. Whitley, A.C. Underwood, and B.R. White. Though cautious and with qualification, even Stephen Wright adopted the rather imprecise categories.

baptism and general redemption would qualify as General Baptists. All Baptists who affirmed limited atonement would be classified as Particular Baptists. If Pinson meant for the statement to be applied to all general-redemptionist Baptists, there are some difficulties. The “General Baptists” were hardly uniform beyond the doctrine of universal atonement. For example, Thomas Lambe has often been placed among the General Baptists. Lambe, however, was an Amyraldian Baptist who attacked Goodwin’s anti-predestinarianism.⁹ Edward Barber and John Griffith have typically been regarded as General Baptists but they disagreed over the doctrine of perseverance.¹⁰ Therefore, it is unlikely that all general-redemptionist Baptists held identical views of justification and the atonement as set forth by Grantham.

On the other hand, perhaps, by General Baptists, Pinson was referring to a specific group of general-redemptionist Baptists. By the mid-1650s, certain Baptists had organized a denominational structure called the General Assembly. In 1660 they adopted as their doctrinal statement *A Brief Confession*. Though Grantham did not participate in the original composition of the *Brief Confession*, he both edited and subscribed to later editions. Grantham was undoubtedly an important leader among the General Baptists of the General Assembly and it is very likely that many of his fellow churchmen adopted his doctrines of justification and the atonement. Nonetheless, even a narrower sampling fails to produce soteriological uniformity. Some Baptists who subscribed to the *Brief Confession* also signed the *Orthodox Creed* (1679). Whereas the authors of the *Brief Confession* denied perseverance, the authors of the *Orthodox Creed* declared that those justified “shall certainly persevere unto eternal life.”¹¹ The General Assembly did not discipline the signatories of the *Orthodox Creed*. Their leaders, such as Thomas Monck, continued to participate in the General Assembly. Interestingly, such a measure of latitude which was granted over soteriological concerns was not granted for those who spurned the laying on of hands. Despite its confessional document, which did not address justification and the atonement at great length, the General Assembly seems to have tolerated a variety of views and it is unlikely that all of their churches were in agreement with Grantham.

Samuel Loveday, in fact, seems to have rejected double imputation. In *Personal Reprobation Reprobated* (1676), Loveday borrowed heavily from Goodwin.¹² Commenting on the sinner’s benefit in justification, Loveday wrote “the blessednesse is not that he hath no sin, but that it is not imputed.”¹³ Furthermore, he defined justification in terms more akin to Goodwin than to

⁹Thomas Lambe, *Absolute Freedom from Sin by Christ’s Death for the World*.

¹⁰John Griffith, *A Treatise Touching Falling from Grace*. Ruth Clifford, “General Baptists, 1640-1660,” M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1991, 187.

¹¹William Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1959), 230, 324.

¹²John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 228.

¹³Samuel Loveday, *Personal Reprobation Reprobated*, 320.

Grantham: “But suppose you should ask me, what it is to be justified? I answer; when a person is declared just upon the account of pardon and non-imputation of sin, that is the blessed state which the Apostle speaks of Rom. 4. 6, 7, 8. *blessed is the man to whom God doth not impute sin.*”¹⁴ It is improbable that Loveday was the lone Baptist to be convinced by Goodwin’s arguments while it is most probable that Loveday won some of his fellow churchmen of the General Assembly to his views.

¹⁴Ibid., 136-37.