

Battle for the Church (1517-1644) by David Gay

Disobeying the Golden Rule

George M. Ella | Added: Oct 16, 2006 | Category: Reviews

I must admit that I turned to David Gay's new book on the period between "the break with Rome and the rise of the Particular Baptists" with some reserve, knowing that the author has antagonised many by his anti-Trinitarian claim that the Son and the Father had contradictory wills, reflected by irreconcilable contradictions in the Scriptures. My reservations proved to be justified. I have seldom read such a disturbing book.

The author warns us that he has done no original research. This quickly becomes obvious, though original documents on this period are readily available. Indeed, Gay's inept and unscholarly use of his mainly secondary sources is most frustrating. Page after page is filled up with quotes to back up Gay's own words without his giving source or author or stating whether he or his source has replaced so much original information by lines of dots. Perhaps this would not irritate the reader so much if Gay were not most scathing about those who do not pay enough attention to sources! Yet when Gay reviews the work of saintly people of the past who have done the research that Gay has neglected, he claims that they are 'foolish', 'unwise', 'corrupt', 'apostate' and even 'stupid' and 'clap trap' for disagreeing with his hypothetical and undocumented presentments. Gay's attitude to such people is harsh, unbending and inquisitorial. Yet Gay spends pages of most pathetic whining, pleading and cringing begging his readers not to break out in 'howls of protest' and become angry with him! Obviously the author has not heard of the Golden Rule, "Do as you would be done by."

Some of Gay's theories would be worthy of consideration if he did not put the reader off by alarming exaggeration. For instance, only a generation ago, Baptists were telling us that Constantine was the very man who had helped keep up Baptist succession chiefly because of his supposed Welsh Baptist connections and his delay of Baptism for himself and son. Now we hear that Constantine was the pioneer of infant baptism and any one whom Gay thinks follows Constantine, such as Luther, Calvin, Mary, Elizabeth and the majority of British Reformers, are all apostate and rebels against God and are members of corrupt churches. Gay is so sweeping in his condemnations that he can place Latimer, Ridley and the like in the same hell-bound vehicle as Mary the Bloody herself!

Darkness until Fuller shed his light

In order to explain his theory that spiritual darkness was on the face of Britain until Andrew Fuller lit the country up, Gay is guilty of turning history up-side-down. Indeed, after making marginal notes on one to four easily exposed errors of fact and theology per page for the first 200 pages, I gave up writing otherwise I would have never finished reading the book. Could it be that in arguing that there was no Church in England until the 16th century and even that was 'corrupt', Gay is thinking of the teachings of the doctrines of grace found in such men of God as Bede, Greathead and Bradwardine which Gay cannot stomach? Wycliffe alone disproves Gay's theory of a non-existent Church in England, yet Gay merely mentions Wycliffe in passing as one who preached against the pope.

Gay looks to inessentials as signs of essential Reformation

David Gay's title ought to be 'Battle for the Anabaptist Church' rather than 'Battle for the Church'. The Anabaptists, he tells us came nearest to the New Testament church and not the traditionally accepted Reformers. However, Gay does not seem to have the foggiest idea who the Anabaptists were. Indeed, the only British Reformer that he would accept as such is Hooper, whom, because of his views against vestments, he finds comes closest to an Anabaptist. Yet Hooper, whose story Gay gets hopelessly wrong, was most scathing in his comments on the Anabaptists for their low teaching on Christ and the Word of God. On the other hand, godly Jewel, who was criticised by the Marian party for being an Anabaptist is presented by Gay as a persecutor of Anabaptists and a man who put serving his Queen before obeying God's word. If Gay had read Hooper's correspondence with Bullinger, especially around the time he became a bishop (1550), he would have seen how false were the sentiments he puts into Hooper's shoes. Hooper was a far more gracious and understanding man than Gay depicts and his works refute Gay on all points. This also goes for Jewel whose works it would pay Gay to read. Gay, judging by his bibliography and own confession, is merely writing from hearsay, distorted by his own highly pronounced prejudice.

Page-long belly-aching and historical howlers

Gay's disregard for historical accuracy and true balance is seen further, for instance, in his attitude to King James and Daniel Featley. The author spends page after page belly-aching nauseatingly on the seamy side of his 'Liar King', and even gives us intimate details of how James relieved his bladder during a hunt. Apart from the fact that much of Gay's criticism of James is a snobbish and over-prudish criticism of James' age from Gay's most slanted legal hindsight, that which Gay criticises the most has been common cavalry and hunt practice through all ages. Whatever James' faults, they were not greater than most other British Kings and during his reign, he was used by God to influence the Continental, Irish and English courts, universities and churches towards adopting the doctrines of grace. Indeed, one of the greatest ever blessings to world-wide Christianity, the

Canons of Dort, is directly traceable to King James' own initiative under God. So too, the greatest Bible translation of all time for the English-speaking world, the Authorised or King James Version, was also in God's providence set in motion by the King. Gay's action in dirtying James' reputation is clear. He feels that if he proves the king to be a devil, then there can be no saints in the Reformed Church in his kingdom. We trust that Gay will find himself completely alone with such logic. Under Archbishop George Abbott's great leadership, England became the foremost Reformed nation, as willingly acknowledged by Continental countries such as Holland, Germany, Belgium and France.

Continuing with his historical howlers and speaking of Bible translator and Reformed apologist, Daniel Featley, Gay says he had the marks of the typical persecuting State-Presbyterianism. Gay is thus apparently unaware that Featley was persecuted by the 'State-Presbyterians' for being a member of the Reformed Church of England and had his character blackened by certain Baptists in whom he confided when imprisoned. Featley died as a Dissenter from the Erastian views of the Presbyterians whereas the Baptists of the day not only supported 'State Presbyterianism', but betrayed Featley to it. Gay defends Anabaptists against Featley's criticism, forgetting that the Southwark Debate Baptists called Featley names for accepting the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. He pays no attention to the fact that the London Anabaptist Church criticised by Featley was regarded as Arian by the bulk of the Baptists themselves! Nor does Gay allow that it was Featley's work which helped make the 1644 Baptist Confession the Orthodox document it is. Indeed, it was Featley's brief post-1644 positive testimony (Featley died as a prisoner in 1645) that helped make the Particular Baptists respectable. If Gay would compare John Gill's rejection of the Anabaptists with that of Featley's, he would find many positive parallels. Yet Gay merely mentions Gill in passing as a 'Hyper'. But then, Gay sees little gospel light anywhere until Andrew Fuller brought out his re-hash of Bellamy's Grotianism in his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, issued privately in 1780 but not officially published until 1786.

The Battle of the black and white!

Gay refuses to believe that an Anglican can be a Puritan and draws imaginary divisions between them which he never grounds in documentation. Where he sides with the Presbyterians, Gay invariably sides with the High Church, legalist, Precisian faction, which would please few Presbyterians today, let alone Baptists. What Gay has to say about vestments is quite anachronistic. He seems to object to the Reformed idea that vestments are 'things of indifference' and forgets, when condemning the 'popish garments' of Edward's Reformers that they banned the alb and cope and introduced a simple rochet, such as Coverdale and Ridley wore, for bishops. Gay also forgets that the alternative vestments, ie. 'Turkish merchants' clothing, worn by the Dissenting faction were at first merely meant to be a demonstrative 'dressing-up' protest but were gradually

adopted almost as a fetish by the Presbyterians, many of whom saw the Reformation as a fight between old-fashioned white allegedly 'Aaronic' gowns and the black and fashionable allegedly 'Turkish' robes. There is much of this narrow, nit-picking attitude revealed in Lloyd-Jones book *The Puritans*, one book which Gay has obviously read! Oddly enough, Gay does not criticise 'the Doctor' for the long robes he wore.

Neither Reformed nor Particular Baptist

Gay surprisingly claims to be a Reformed Particular Baptist. Reformed he cannot possibly be as he rejects the bulk of the Reformer's works and witness. Nor can he be a Particular Baptist as his own views of the Trinity, the Atonement and the Scriptures shut the fine beliefs of the Particular Baptists, at least of the Gill-Martin-Brine-Booth-Kinghorn generation fully out. This is the Baptist generation that Anglican James Hervey claimed were Masters in Israel. On the other hand, Gay claims that early British Baptists were Arminian and that the Particular Baptists before Fuller were a 'dunghill' of Hyper-Calvinism until Gay's Latter-Day idol rescued them from their plight. Thus, for Gay, there can be no talk of a Baptist Reformation until 1780 at the earliest. But who nowadays would claim that Fuller was a Particular Baptist without divesting the term of all its traditional and semantic meaning?

Though Gay dwells on the German and Swiss Reformations to the almost total exclusion of the British, he still thinks those churches are apostate. Yet the Continental Reformation hardly spread outside of Geneva and Zurich, in Switzerland and covered only half of France and Germany. The British Reformation was more thorough-going, covered the whole of England and much of Scotland. The bulk of the English Reformers and Anglican Puritans are not even mentioned and even Latimer is merely mentioned once in a quote in the Introduction, but never directly by Gay. However, the author always stresses the Reformed nature of the Anabaptists but fails to see that not all Anabaptists were Baptists by far, indeed, hardly any of them would stand as Reformed Particular Baptists today, either doctrinally or according to church order and discipline. Other Anabaptists were more Roman than Rome and very many were pedobaptists of various brands. The Marian government and church called all Reformed Christians Anabaptists because they did not accept the Roman doctrine of Baptism. Gay argues that the Anglicans did, but a close study of the signatories of the 39 Articles and shows that not one of those Anglican Reformers held to the popish doctrine.

Sadly, in arguing for a church in battle, Gay leaves us wondering which church he is battling for. Odd, too, is the fact that Gay obviously majors on Presbyterian authors for his view of the history of the Baptists, though he judges those authors as belonging to an apostate church! Such standard Baptist works as Evans' *Early British Baptists* and Brown's *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs*

are not used, though Gay deals with this period and argues that the great bulk of those persecuted under Mary were Baptists. Furthermore, Gay uses neither Armitage, Benedict, Hayden, Light, Yuille, Nelson Cote, Clifford, Christian, Good, Goadby, White, Whitley (W.T) etc. i.e. the recognised standard works, nor, though he writes much of Continental Anabaptists and Baptists, does he mention Wengler, Krajewski, Donat, Warns and especially Littel. Kenneth Good would certainly have called Gay a 'Deep Water Presbyterian', whereas this reviewer found Gay regarding history, doctrine and church order 'all at sea'!

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