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The Five Points of a Baptist's Faith.*

IN the Helwys Hall of Regent's Park College, Oxford, there is a large five-pointed star, designed to show the characteristic tenets of the faith and order of Baptists. At its centre are the words, "Jesus is Lord," the earliest and shortest Christian creed. The five arms of the star bear on them the words "Faith," "Baptism," "Fellowship," "Freedom," and "Evangelism." The symbol has no ancient history, but I hope that you will agree that it does sufficiently express those realities which we deem important, those realities of the common faith of Christendom which have a more or less distinctive Baptist interpretation.

The Lordship of Jesus was the essential confession of faith made by the New Testament Christian at the time of his baptism. This is apparent from Romans x. 9:—

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

With this we may link such a passage as the words of Ananias to Saul, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts xxii. 16). One of the New Testament descriptions of Christians was "those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I. Cor. i. 2; cf. II. Tim. ii. 22; Acts ix. 14, 21). The high significance of the confession is shown by the claim that sincere utterance of it is due to divine inspiration:—"No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (I. Cor. xii. 3). This was the central assertion of apostolic preaching: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord" (II. Cor. iv. 5). This was the divine event, not far off, to which the whole creation moved, when "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. ii. 11). The original Aramaic prayer, *marana tha*, "our Lord, come!" familiar in the Aramaic-speaking Church, was treasured even amongst Greek-speaking Christians (I. Cor. xvi. 22; cf. Rev. xxii. 20).

What did this title, "Lord," imply for those men and women who first used it of Jesus? We are on surest ground when we think of its contemporary use for the declaration of loyalty to the Roman emperor. A good example is afforded from the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp, who refers to Christ as "my King Who saved me." Friendly officials met the aged saint on his way to execution, and took him up into their carriage, to persuade him to

(* Address to the London Baptist Board, Oct. 1st, 1941).

recant, saying, "Why, what harm is there in saying, Cæsar is Lord, and offering incense . . . saving thyself?" That the Christian confession was in conscious antithesis to this may be seen from St. Paul's contrast of the "lords many" of the pagan world with the "one Lord, Jesus Christ" (I. Cor. viii. 5, 6). To the Roman emperor as Lord belonged not only sovereignty, but also, where Oriental influences prevailed, divinity (though the Greeks proper do not seem to have used the title of their gods). Claudius, Nero and Vespasian were acclaimed as gods on earth, as had been the Ptolemies of Egypt, and even Herod (by Gentile voices). Broadly speaking, we may say that the term "Lord," as applied to Jesus was the Gentile equivalent of the Jewish term "Messiah," i.e. "Christ" in its original sense of "the anointed one"—the vice-regent of God.

But we do not get the full significance of "Lord" for the Christian until we follow St. Paul along the lines of his great argument in the Epistle to the Philippians (II). There he looks back to the "Heavenly Man," who left his high place and "emptied himself" in the death of the Cross, after accepting the necessary conditions of Incarnation. It was for this redemptive work that God highly exalted him and gave him the title of "Lord." The whole passage is modelled on the picture of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah liii.—humiliated that he might finally be exalted—and the striking phrase, "emptied himself in death," is actually borrowed from the words there found, "poured himself out in death." The point to note is that the Lordship of Christ is no arbitrary title; it has been won by a unique achievement. This might be illustrated by the "new name," which an Indian chief wins from his conduct in his first fight, which henceforth becomes his real name. To say that Jesus is Lord means, therefore, that He has won the right to my devotion by becoming my Redeemer. Henceforth I belong to Him as a slave to the new master who has ransomed him from his captivity, and has brought him into the new service which is perfect freedom. The new relation is warm and intimate with an ever-deepening personal gratitude.

This, then, is the co-ordinating centre from which we approach each article or application of our Christian faith. Loyalty to Jesus Christ as the redeeming Lord is the principle by which all else is to be tested. Yet the test must not be so narrowly applied that we miss the larger setting of this Lordship, the setting in which Jesus lived his life in the days of His flesh and prepared for His death. He inherited the noblest faith of prophet and psalmist, and in appropriating it raised it to a new level. His own faith in the Father and in the Father's unceasing providence should prevent us from making our theology "Christocentric" rather than "theocentric." The work of Christ is done, as St. Paul says, to the glory of God the Father. The worship of Christ is fully justified

because we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Yet we must not so think of Him as to forget the love of God behind the grace of Christ. That would be to imitate the error of those whose worship of the Virgin Mary has tended to obscure the grace of Christ—as in those pictures which represent the Virgin as mediator between man and Christ.

I. FAITH.—The direct personal relation of the believer to his Lord is signified by the term “faith.” “Faith” does not mean mere acceptance of a tradition in which we have grown up, or even the opinion that the tradition is worth upholding. Faith, in the deepest New Testament meaning, is personal conviction. It is personal, not only because it is an individual act, for which no other can make himself sponsor, but because it is the response of the whole personality—thought, feeling, will—to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is conviction because it implies spiritual conquest by One mightier than self. To be convinced is actually as well as etymologically to be conquered by a larger truth. Hooker’s words cannot too often be quoted:—

“If truth do anywhere manifest itself . . . acknowledge the greatness thereof, and think it your best victory when the same doth prevail over you.”

The spiritual forces by which this victory is won are concentrated in Christ, though it is His glory to have many allies from all the values of the Kingdom of God. The light of dawn irradiates the earth before we see the sun’s disc, and the prevenient grace of God prepares us for the grace of Christ in many ways. Not least is it the example of the loyalty of others that first opens our eyes to the meaning of faith and to its significance for life. This light of life may come by way of some homely truth, familiar as the well-trodden path to an old church door, or by the sudden revelation of some arresting phrase, one of those

“jewels five-words long
That on the stretch’d forefinger of all Time
Sparkle for ever.”

Faith may begin humbly enough as a poor relation of the faith of high degree, though a faith that is really high-born will never despise the days of small things in others or in itself. Jesus did not turn away from the half-faith of him who cried, “Help Thou mine unbelief.” The growth of faith may be due to what seems a series of human discoveries, whilst the deeper fact that they are also divine revelations may at first remain hidden. But, whatever the path, when the providence of God has brought us into the real presence of Christ, there comes the intuition that here is One who has authority by what He is, and by what He has done and still does.

Faith in Christ is nurtured from three principal sources. It

dwells lovingly on the story of His ministry, that it may know His mind. Every incident and every spoken word, from the Baptism and the Temptation through the Messianic declaration and warning of Cæsarea Philippi, Gethsemane and the Cross to the Resurrection, make their contribution to this. Discerning faith will recognize the mingling of the transient with the permanent in the teaching and example of Christ, since His first appeal was to a particular generation, with particular political, social and economic conditions. But, even so, the great and permanent principles for a life loyal to Jesus as Lord are easily apparent to the simple reader. The Christian life is a distinctive and characteristic life, with differences that make themselves felt even in a civilization that has absorbed far more of Christian morality into its practice and ideals than it usually realizes. The spirit of a life of Christian loyalty is always and everywhere the spirit of the Cross; by that supreme test it stands or falls.

But the Cross is more than the law of life. It is the hope of life, the ground of redemption, the sacrifice of a suffering which belongs essentially to, and therefore faithfully reveals, the sacrificial love of the invisible God. The great mystery of human suffering here finds its only adequate illumination in the revelation of the Gospel that God Himself shares in the suffering of man, and by sharing transforms His apparent defeat into victory. Since the Cross belongs to God as well as to man, we can never exhaust its meaning. But we know that to come to the Cross is to find the peace of reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins for the Beloved's sake, the approach to God through what God Himself has done in the actuality of our human history.

In the third place faith lifts its eyes to the Risen Lord, the Lord the Spirit. Here the earthly limitations are left behind, though the fruit of the earthly life is fully garnered. The Risen Lord, not the earthly Rabbi and wonder-worker of Jewish interpretation, not the heroic leader with which modern admiration is often content, the Risen Lord is the focus of Christian faith. The Heavenly Man returns with His laurels to His appointed place and henceforth rules for His Father. Is this to be dismissed as mythical, a splendid metaphor, a dazzling picture of something too good to be true? No, for faith here finds confirmation in experience. The cardinal doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, God who is Spirit, taking the things of Christ and making them His own, is here the essential explanation of the reality of Christian experience. The far-off figure of the heavenly places becomes a living Presence. "Through Him," says the apostle, "we have our access in one Spirit unto the Father." In the heart of every loyal Christian, and according to the measure of his loyalty, God by His Holy Spirit becomes the indwelling Christ, carrying onwards the miracle of the Incarnation. Through that divine Presence all the gifts and graces of a genuine Christian

life become possible. They have indeed their natural basis and conditions, yet these too are God's gifts, and by His spiritual activity within man He raises them to new levels. As St. Thomas Aquinas taught, grace does not take away nature, but perfects it. The limitless resources of the whole spiritual order are made ours through faith in Christ—"All things are yours . . . and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (I. Cor. iii. 22).

II. BAPTISM.—The New Testament entrance into this realm of new resources is by baptism in, or into, the name of Jesus. (The Trinitarian formula of Matt. xxviii. 19 seems to be a late development of the usage of the primitive Church as described in Acts and the Pauline epistles). The "name" then implied much more than it is apt to do for us. It was felt to be a wonder-working instrument, and baptism into the name definitely meant the transition into the authority and power of a new Lord, whose ownership and authority over the baptized were thereby asserted. We remember that St. Paul was glad that he had not personally baptized at Corinth, because it might have been said that such baptism was into his own name and authority (I. Cor. i. 15). As we have already seen, the baptism was accompanied by the confession of faith, "Jesus is Lord," which interprets the more forceful expression contributed by the act of baptism.

Because the visible act of water-baptism was into the name of Jesus, it expressed and mediated the invisible baptism into the Holy Spirit, i.e. into the new powers of the heavenly kingdom. This is implied in St. Paul's words: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body . . . and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (I. Cor. xii. 13). The context shows that he is thinking of the common act of water-baptism by which alone there was entrance into the visible Body of Christ, and with this he is closely associating the invisible experience as the normal accompaniment. The Lord's own baptism was accompanied by the descent of the Holy Spirit. In the Acts, from Pentecost onwards (ii. 38) water-baptism and spirit-baptism are intimately linked. In this two-fold sense we ought to interpret all St. Paul's references to baptism: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27); "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. iv. 4-6). The fullest and clearest of all his associations of the outer sign and seal with the inner and invisible grace is that of Romans vi. 3-5, where the act of water-baptism is said to unite the believer with the dying, buried and risen Lord on the one hand, and on the other with the new obligations and new resources of a penitent and "risen" life in Christ. The sacramental emphasis of this spiritual realism is best understood in the light of the prophetic symbolism of the Old Testament. The act of the prophet was, as it were, a fragment, and so an effective

prophecy of the larger whole of the divine activity. The believer did, in fact, enter into the risen Lord's realm and resources by the water of baptism—always on the assumption that he was indeed a believer.

This assumption is a safeguard in the interpretation of Pauline sacramentalism which Baptists have been slow to realize. So far as the evidence of the New Testament goes—and we have no other—all the baptized persons were actual or professed believers. The spiritual condition of faith was therefore always present in the sincere, and faith is the power-point of the Holy Spirit. Baptists, continuing the New Testament practice of baptizing believers only, are in a unique position, through being able to give a high value to water-baptism as a means of grace, without peril to the spirituality of faith. But if water-baptism is not a means of grace, why keep it up? We ought to expect it to be the occasion of a new access of spiritual power.

Whether or not baptism is this will depend on the preparation of faith to receive it, that is, on the intelligent and Scriptural instruction of the believer. I cannot but think that we have been sadly wanting here. We have interpreted believers' baptism in too retrospective a fashion. We have made it almost wholly a public profession of repentance and faith. The New Testament makes it chiefly prospective, as the entrance into a new life in the Holy Spirit. On grounds of actual value to the young convert, it is more important to underline divine grace than the strength of his own resolution to follow Christ. It is more important to believe that Christ has chosen us than that we have chosen Christ. The Christian view is that our human purpose is taken up into the divine purpose, and there guaranteed by the resources of the Holy Spirit. That, I believe, is what the New Testament baptism primarily expresses, however true it also is that such baptism requires repentance and faith. Other communions have rightly emphasized the doctrine of grace in relation to baptism, though, as we Baptists think, in a wrong and dangerous form. It should be for us, with the safeguard of personal faith, to follow the truth, avoiding the error. I believe that the future of the Baptist Church in this country does largely depend on the recovery of a lost sacramental emphasis; on our making more, not less, of believers' baptism.

III. FELLOWSHIP.—The baptism of believers is the door of entrance into the fellowship of the Church, and this "fellowship" or "communion" essentially constitutes the Church. The word translated "fellowship" (*koinonia*) occurs less than a score of times, some of them in other senses, but the idea permeates all that is said of the Church. The reason for this is that such fellowship is the direct and primary product of the Holy Spirit, and that most of the gifts and graces of the Christian life are quite obviously community-

gifts and community-graces. This is plain when we think of the gifts (I. Cor. xii. 4ff.) enabling a Christian to serve the community, or of the "fruit" of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control" (Gal. v. 22, 23). It is such community-life that the familiar benediction contemplates; the communion of the Holy Spirit is not fellowship *with* the Holy Spirit, but the fellowship existing in the true Church, which is the creation of the Holy Spirit. We cannot hold too high a doctrine of the Church, if the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a reality to us. Ideally, the Church is figured as the bride of Christ, "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle" (Eph. v. 27). The realism which our knowledge of human nature, and especially of our own hearts, forces upon us, is no ground for despondency, still less for cynicism.

The Church, however imperfect, is the crown of human fellowship, because, more than any other form of social fellowship, it is the creation of the Holy Spirit. Its actual failures are more easily apparent, just because its ideal is so high. We must still hold to John Smyth's definition of the Church as "a company of the faithful, baptized after confession of faith and of sins, which is endowed with the power of Christ."

The sacramental expression and nourishment of this fellowship is the Lord's Supper. St. Paul describes it as a communion of the body and blood of Christ, a fellowship of participation in His redemptive work (I. Cor. x. 16). That redemption is the creative centre of the fellowship and the constant fountain of its renewal. The breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup are acts of prophetic symbolism, like the baptism of believers, and are certainly not, for St. Paul, what is sometimes called "mere" symbolism. As carried out by believers—here the Church Catholic is in virtual agreement—they both express and in a real and deep sense mediate, the grace of the Lord's redemption. If they are simply memorial acts, pictorially reviving the past, it is difficult to justify their continuance. But the common experience of the Christian Church is that the Lord's Supper, in whatever form, and with whatever explanatory doctrine of grace, does constitute the living centre of the fellowship of the Church.

There is no prescription of any particular form of organization for the Church in the New Testament. It is difficult to see how a stereotyped form could have been prescribed to a living Church. Life has always to adjust itself to new needs in new ways. Scholars recognize to-day that there are, in the New Testament, elements of all the three main types of organization familiar to us to-day—the congregational, the presbyterian, and the episcopal. The apostolic authority was a very real thing, and the elders of a local Church certainly held a ruling place, though we can see that the Church

had also its congregational side, which even the rather autocratic Paul was careful to recognize. A Baptist may well feel that a predominantly congregational type of organization is more expressive of the essential fellowship of the Church than any other type of polity, as he also feels that the New Testament *mode* of baptism provides a truer symbolism than any other. Yet in neither case ought the mode to be made essential to the spiritual reality. No type of Church government should be regarded as sacrosanct, even though some are better than others. A growing number of Baptists is willing to recognize the expediency of some modification of congregational polity. The rule here is the same as that for the worship of the Church, equally unprescribed: "Let everything be for building-up" (I. Cor. xiv. 26). It may fairly be argued that the social temples of the Spirit need not conform to one particular type of ecclesiastical architecture any more than His individual temples. But it must not be forgotten that each type has its own limitations. Baptists especially need a far richer conception of the fellowship of the whole Church as the Body of Christ. I cannot believe that the Holy Spirit is the slave of geography and of the mere accident of locality.

IV. FREEDOM.—It is characteristic of the individualism, which springs from the Baptist emphasis on personal conviction and loyalty to the Lord, that we should have been in the forefront of the demand for freedom. This applies to political and social, as well as to religious, freedom. Baptists held a prominent place in Cromwell's army, as the names of many of his leading officers show—Allen, Deane, Harrison, Hutchinson, Ludlow, Lilburne, Gough. The Baptist share in the abolition of slavery and in the general political struggle for civic liberty cannot here be reviewed. But one fact does deserve emphasis, because it is very insufficiently realized. The first demand for full religious liberty published in England came from a Baptist, Thomas Helwys, who was the lay minister of the first Baptist Church in this country. When, recently, a Jewish Passover was celebrated in the new Helwys Hall of Regent's Park College, I was proud to call attention to those words of Helwys, which cost him his liberty and eventually his life:—

"Our lord the King is but an earthly King, and he hath no authority as a King but in earthly causes, and if the Kings people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane lawes made by the King, our lord the King can require no more: for mens religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King by judg betweene God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure."

Every Baptist minister should have a children's address on the story of John Murton, the disciple of Helwys, who wrote in prison a book on the same lines. Milk was supplied to him from outside the jail in bottles with paper stoppers. He wrote on that paper in milk—a convenient invisible ink—and the manuscript, again screwed up to make a stopper to the empty bottles, escaped from the prison unnoticed. This published book ultimately reached and influenced Roger Williams, the first American Baptist, who founded the first of the states, Rhode Island, to give full religious liberty. Thence it passed into the constitution of the United States, and has found its latest expression in President Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms"—freedom of speech and of worship, freedom from want and from fear. That remarkable sequence of Baptist witness and influence should be better known, and should be a challenge to Baptists to-day to take their hereditary place in the achievement of freedom in the future world-order.

The assertion of the right to freedom, whether political or religious, is itself an act of faith, faith in the dignity of manhood, faith that in the long run enlightened men will not abuse it. The justification for that act of faith, in contrast with all totalitarianism in politics or papalism in religion, is that God Himself has trusted man with moral freedom, and with the responsibility for its use. His providence committed even the Gospel of His Son to the frail and trembling loyalty of a handful of men and women; on their memory and devotion hung the whole future existence of the Church. We may well remember this when we are tempted to think of ourselves—in this land, though not in a wider horizon—as a negligible minority. If it be true, as I believe it is, that some essential truths of the Christian faith are committed to the charge of Baptist hands more emphatically and clearly than to any other form of the Christian Church, that charge is a challenge and ought to be an inspiration. In no merely sectarian spirit, but with a proper pride in our heritage of freedom in particular, we have an opportunity of witness and service to-day not less than any in the past generations. The Baptist faith should make us optimists, not pessimists, about the future of mankind, though with an optimism that draws its strength and justification from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. EVANGELISM.—This brings us to the last point, that of evangelism, by which I mean personal testimony to the Gospel, whether from lips or life, whether direct or indirect, whether abroad or at home. Everything that effectively proclaims and promotes the Lordship of Jesus is evangelism. The successful evangelism of minister or missionary needs as many actively co-operating men and women behind it as does the work of the air-pilot.

In theory, at least, the place of the layman in the ministry of the Gospel is fully recognized, and there is little fear that the Baptist

layman will allow his rights to be ignored. What he sometimes needs to be told, however, is that he has no rights unless he is an evangelist, in the large sense here indicated. Both the professional minister and the ordinary Church member do well to remind themselves that the urge to personal evangelism is the measure of personal conviction. Truth is by its very character universal; to be convinced by the truth is to be pledged to extend it. We do not really believe in the Lordship of Christ if we are not eager to see His universal sovereignty.

The aims of such personal evangelism have been nobly set forth by John Clifford, in words that deserve to be recalled :—

“To get men to Jesus Himself—to His mind, with its illuminating discoveries; to His heart, with its boundless love; to His will, with its quickening and uplifting strength; to His character, with its deathless charm and infinite beauty; to His story, with its inexhaustible suggestiveness; to His Cross, with its message of pardon and grace; to His throne, from which He rules the ages; to His indwelling spirit, by which He is with us even to the end of the world.”

(“Life,” by J. Marchant, p. 214; spoken at Liverpool in 1922).

On the missionary record of Baptists, and on their long line of distinguished evangelical preachers, it is not possible or necessary to dwell. But it is necessary to urge the new opportunity for evangelism in the present generation. We have often lamented the lost sense of sin, without which there can be no genuine repentance and no evangelical faith. But to-day, in terrible but unmistakable fashion, the actuality of moral evil is exhibited as never before. Public events have spoken more eloquently and convincingly than any preacher, and have claimed for their auditorium the whole world. Nor is the interpretation of these things wanting, though from “secular” lips, and with a new vocabulary. The voices of statesmen and journalists to-day proclaim as new discoveries that which evangelical preachers have been saying for many generations. As in the days of the Old Testament, it is only the stern teaching of events that wins a response to the prophet's voice. There is hope for this generation just because, in however confused a fashion, it is learning what sin is and does. That is the necessary prelude to the sense of personal need and to the discovery of the Gospel of God's forgiving love. Let Baptists, in what may prove the beginning of a second “evangelical revival,” not be as backward as they were in that of the eighteenth century

I have been trying to give a comprehensive view of a Baptist's faith, even at the cost of covering far too much ground to deal adequately with any of the points raised. My chief aim has been, not to secure your assent to every proposition, but to stir you to

make a similar review for yourselves, each for himself and in his own way. The final test of its validity is that it should become a pathway into the Catholic faith. Here intensity is of more value than extensivity. It gets us further to press on in one path than to wander about over many. Whatever be the value and prospects of any of the schemes of federal union with other Churches, of which we are likely to hear a good deal in the coming years, I am sure that the worthwhileness of any of them will depend on the vigour and not on the flabbiness of the convictions of each consenting party. To that end I urge the need for clearer conceptions and more systematic teaching of these convictions by Baptist ministers, both in the pulpit and in the catechumen's class. We stand or fall by the clarity of our convictions, for there is often little enough to attract in our architecture or worship or social status—what Bunyan called "Religion in his silver slippers." As an institution we cannot claim the long tradition that seems to reach into the mists of antiquity. It is not altogether surprising that from time to time we have instances of the drift of Baptists to other Churches. A Baptist minister of the last century, after thirty years of work amongst us, went over to the Roman Church, saying that all his life he had been haunted by a question to which he found no answer: "By what authority doest thou these things?" The Baptist who has learnt to think clearly ought to be able to give a direct and convinced answer to that question. The authority lies in the intrinsic worth of truth, to which all the mediation of institutions and books and men is secondary. When we know the intrinsic truth we come nearest to God, and act by His sufficient authority. To follow that authority is to follow the star—whether you make its points five or not—to follow the star which will still lead wise men of the West to Bethlehem.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.