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Who were the Baptists?

(I)

I WAS pleased to have Dr. Payne respond so frankly to my article, "Who were the Baptists?" The purpose of such a response, I assume, is to elicit further discussion. Our disagreement is partly one of emphasis, but it is also apparent that at one or two points I left room for misunderstanding. Quite obviously, I did not make myself clear, for I intended no "unjust reflection" on the Anabaptists. My intention was merely to indicate that they represented a different tradition. Nor was I attempting to deny the similarities and affinities that exist at certain points—the conception of a gathered church, etc. But simply because two men may have brown eyes does not necessarily make one the child of the other. They may be brothers, children of a common parent; or it may be that they are not related at all. The Anabaptists and the Baptists both possessed the Bible, and both groups were familiar with the teachings of the Reformers. Consequently it is difficult to understand why certain similarities should make it necessary to posit indebtedness of one to the other.

Both the conception of a gathered church and of believer's Baptism would seem to be rather easily derived from the New Testament and not entirely illogical deductions from the teachings of the Reformers. Furthermore, if Roland Bainton's analysis of the indispensable supports to a theory of persecution is correct, it is apparent that the Reformation provided the necessary materials to fashion a concept of religious freedom. Lastly, as James Maclear has pointed out, the whole dynamic of the Puritan movement fostered what he calls "the lay tradition." Perhaps there were hidden Anabaptist influences at work in Kent and East Anglia, but they are not necessary to account for the rise of the Baptists.

Dr. Payne rightly points out that in any attempt to assess our heritage it is necessary to distinguish between the two major currents represented by the General and the Particular Baptists. The General Baptists were Arminians, and Arminianism is a variant form of Calvinism. Actually, of course, the General Baptists are of much less importance to us in terms of our own self-understanding than the Particular Baptists. This is true because the Particular Baptists represent the continuing Baptist current, whereas the General Bap-

tists frayed out in England and all but disappeared in the United States.[1]

It is possible to argue, I suppose, that the Particular Baptists adopted the London Confession of 1677 (substantially the Westminster Confession) simply on the basis of expediency, affirming by this means their essential solidarity in a time of persecution with the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and that therefore it is not to be taken seriously as a statement of their own faith. In the light of their other writings which reflect faithfully the point of view of the Confession, this would seem to be a rather untenable argument. But if it is accepted, it is difficult to understand why they should adopt the same Confession in Pennsylvania where they were not subject to "the common sufferings of Dissenters" and had no need "to present a united front." If it is difficult to understand why the Philadelphia Association adopted it, it is even more difficult to understand why the Warren Association in New England should have adopted it, for this association was formed primarily to carry on the struggle against a Congregational establishment. And it was not only adopted, it was vigorously defended by American Baptists.

This common heritage becomes even more apparent when one reads the various books of discipline which were compiled by early American Baptists. The reader is constantly referred to the writings of John Owen and Thomas Goodwin and Thomas Hooker for further explication of the points discussed. I suspect that the same is true of the manuals of the English Baptists of the period. It is true at least of Elias Keach's *The Glory and Ornament of a True Gospel-constituted Church* (1697). He adds Isaac Chauncey to the list of Congregational writers the reader is urged to consult.

Dr. Payne would never divorce the Baptists from the context of English Separatism and Independency, but in the United States there has been a tendency to do this. And this tendency to relate the Baptists in a direct and positive fashion to the Anabaptists has had "unhappy consequences." It led McGlothlin, for example, to include confessions composed by John Smyth after his break with Helwys among his *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. These confessions which reflect points of view which have not been characteristic of Baptists, as a consequence, have been cited as representative Baptist confessions. This tendency has also led others to try to deduce the Baptist doctrine of the church, the nature of the pastoral office, the power of associational bodies, etc. from the writings of Hubmaier rather than to follow the advice of their forebears and consult the

[1] The New Connexion General Baptists were so completely reconstituted under the influence of Evangelicalism as to be generally regarded as representing a new body. The Particular Baptists, both in Britain and America, were penetrated and transformed by Evangelicalism but not to the extent that continuity was destroyed.

writings of Owen, Goodwin, and Hooker to clarify the grounds of their practice.

The religious life of the Commonwealth period was "a tumultuous sea" in which one can find almost anything and everything—Familists, Behemists, Quakers, Muggletonians, Ranters, Seekers, Socinians, Universalists—and in the chaos of the time the Baptists—like other bodies—were a formless grouping played upon by many winds. The problem is which of these winds really shaped the denomination that eventually emerged. William Dell is sometimes referred to as a Baptist, but if one wishes to find his continuing influence embodied in an existing religious communion one must look to the Society of Friends and not to the Baptists. In the same way, the significant fact about Matthew Caffyn was not the fact that he was a Baptist and a Hoffmanite in Christology but the fact that his Christological views were repudiated. The remarkable thing about the Baptists is the way in which they were able to emerge from this confusion with what might be termed a "Reformed churchmanship" still intact. As late as the end of the eighteenth century, John Witherspoon was able to say of the Baptists of New Jersey that, except at the point of Baptism, "Baptists are Presbyterians." Witherspoon was a knowledgeable person. He had been a leader of the Popular party in Scotland and was the most prominent leader among the colonial Presbyterians. His statement indicates that there had been a softening of Presbyterianism in the American environment, but it also indicates the major stance of the Baptists. Is it not possible that the early Baptists knew what they were saying and meant what they said, when they asserted that they were "falsely" and "unjustly" called Anabaptists?

WINTHROP S. HUDSON

Who were the Baptists?

(II)

IN the *Baptist Quarterly*, July, 1956, there is an article dealing with the old question of the relations between the continental Baptizers' movement (Anabaptists) and the origin of the English Baptist churches. It is well known that there have been different opinions on this historical question. The author of the article just mentioned is Dr. Winthrop S. Hudson, and he takes a definite stand for an indigenous origin of the English Baptist movement, quite independent of the Baptizers' movement on the Continent. It is an interesting article and will certainly stimulate further research in its