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incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
EDITORIAL

MANY of our churches have church covenants. Most of these covenants are put into the hands of church members when they join the church. In few churches, probably, are the church members asked to set their name to the covenant to signify their acceptance of it. It was encouraging, therefore, to discover that, not only was this the practice at the Westgate Baptist Church in Bradford, but also that the original twenty-three signatories who set their names to the covenant on 4th December, 1753, are now followed by every church member's signature since then. And a fine array of signatures (and marks) it is. The list includes, for example, the name of John Fawcett, the author of the hymn "Blest be the tie that binds," who joined Westgate on March 11th, 1758.

The covenant itself is of considerable interest not only from the point of view of history, but also as a challenge to Baptist church life today, so we reproduce it here.

THE SOLEMN COVENANT OF CHURCH UNION

WE a small handful of the unworthy dust of Zion usually assembling for the worship of God at Bradford, and in obedience to the command of God and conformity to the example of **JESUS CHRIST**, and his faithful followers, recorded in the New Testament, Baptized with water, in the Name of the **FATHER**, and of the **SON**, and of the **HOLY GHOST**, having first given our own selves to the **LORD**. Are now met together with one accord to give up ourselves one to another, by mutual Consent

and Solemn Covenant according to the will of GOD; with deep Humiliation for our past Sins and earnest prayer to GOD for pardoning mercy and assisting preserving and persevering Grace, we say with our Hearts we are the LORD's, and subscribe unto Him with our hands in manner following. Namely,

1st. We this day Avouch the ever blessed JEHOVAH, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, the one only true and Living GOD, for our new Covenant GOD and all-sufficient Portion and give up ourselves to Him alone, for His peculiar People in a perpetual Covenant, never to be forgotten.

2ndly, we receive and submit to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, as our alone SAVIOUR, PROPHET, PRIEST, and KING; in whom alone we trust for wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

3rdly, we devote and consecrate ourselves, as living Temples to the HOLY GHOST, our Sanctifier, Guide and Comforter, whose gracious operations and Heavenly Conduct, we desire daily more and more to enjoy experience and follow.

4thly, we take the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the only ground and rule of our Faith and Practise, desiring through the help of His GRACE therein promised, to be in all things conformable to the Holy Will of GOD therein revealed.

5thly, according to the Tenor of which Divine Oracles and depending for performance only on the Divine Help, and assistance therein promised as deeply sensible that we are not sufficient of ourselves but that all our sufficiency both to will and to do that which is good is of GOD; whose grace alone is sufficient to enable us to do the following things, through CHRIST strengthening us, in a single dependence on whom and as in duty bound, we now covenant with GOD each for ourselves, and jointly together.

1st, to worship GOD in Spirit and in truth, to observe His commandments and keep His Ordinances, as He hath delivered them to us.

2ndly, to be subject to that divine Order and Discipline which JESUS CHRIST our only KING and Law-giver, hath appointed in His CHURCH and not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together for the public worship of GOD, in its appointed Seasons, but to continue steadfastly in our Relation to one another; and to fill up our places duly in the House of GOD, and cheerfully maintain His worship therein to the best of our Capacity until Death; or evident calls of divine providence, shall separate us from one another.

3rdly, to love one another with pure Hearts fervently; and endeavour to keep a Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace; for the Honour of our GOD and our mutual good unto Edification.

6thly, We will also make it our care through the aforesaid help, to walk before the LORD in our own Houses with upright hearts and to keep up the worship of GOD therein, by daily prayer and praise to GOD and diligent reading the Holy Scriptures, that so the word of GOD may dwell Richly in us.

7thly, And as we have given our Children to the LORD by a Solemn Dedication, so we will endeavour through divine help, to teach them the way of the LORD and command them to keep it setting before them an holy Example worthy of their imitation and continuing in prayer to GOD, for their Conversion and Salvation.

8thly, We will also endeavour by the grace of GOD, to keep ourselves

pure from the Sins and vices of the times and places wherein we live; and so be Holy in all manner of Conversation, that none may have Occasion given, by our unholy lives, to speak evil of God's holy ways.

9thly, And all this under an abiding Sense, that we must shortly give up our Account, to him that is ready to Judge the Quick and the Dead; on to which Solemn covenant, we set our Hands in the presence of the All seeing Heart Searching God.

This fourth day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three.

Many comments could be made on the covenant. We limit ourselves to one. It concerns the statement: "And as we have given our Children to the LORD by a Solemn Dedication...". Many readers may be surprised to find such a statement in an eighteenth-century church covenant. But it seems clear that both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some Baptists practised a form of Infant Dedication on the authority of our Lord's blessing of the children. What is further interesting—and very relevant in the discussions about Baptism—is that there is some evidence to suggest that our forefathers thought the children of Christian parents to be in a different situation "theologically" to children of non-Christians. By the nineteenth century, the practice apparently had fallen out of use and out of mind. We are glad to hear that the Revd. Michael Walker is engaged in research on this whole subject and look forward with very great interest to hearing the outcome of his work.