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THE ATTITUDE OF BAPTISTS TO THE
NON-CHRISTIAN WORLD.

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In order clearly to treat our subject we need first to ascertain what a Baptist ideally is—wherein he represents the Christian norm. This determined, we may proceed to inquire what he signifies to the non-Christian world, and so what his attitude should be.

In attempting to answer this twofold question it is not assumed that the body of Christians designated Baptists are, as they exist, the ideal for all others. The aim rather is to state what religious contribution this people on their principles are adapted to make to the rest of mankind. Doubtless other Christian bodies also have their distinctive values to offer to the Christian world at points where Baptists have been deficient. In the end it will probably be found that the full-orbed ideal will be a composite of the best represented by all.

The Baptist in the great body of truth which he holds is at one with all the evangelical brotherhood the world over. He has no desire for its own sake to be singular and apart from his brethren, but insofar as he does not properly belong with any of the families of the Reformed churches, he is left in a class by himself and must bear the consequences. The Reformers, with all the truth that they accentuated in their separation from Mediaeval Romanism, left out some important values and they brought over from Rome some corrupting and mischievous errors, having in them the seed of imperfect forms of church life, if not serious corruption. At some of these points, confessedly minor yet important, the Baptist has a message in part distinctive from others, essential to evangelical Christianity itself and ultimately to the whole world. Hence in answering a question like that at the head of this article, it is necessary to go over afresh the points at which the Baptists are differentiated from other Christians. It is this message as a whole which expresses their significance and attitude

to all to whom they would minister throughout the world that we attempt to define.

In this time when there is a strong appeal throughout Christendom that a united front should be presented to the non-Christian world, it is urgent that Baptists as well as others should make clear their real position; and that all parties should seek to eliminate elements which falsify or even embarrass their case, and that having found the irreducible minimum of the Christian message, they should go forth to the world with it, all saying the same thing.

As for the writer, he avows himself far more concerned to extend an ideal of New Testament Christianity than to persist in any mere denominational propagandism. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, the position of Baptist Christians is presented at its minimum in the hope that in so doing others may be encouraged to act similarly; also it is hoped by lending themselves as cordially as possible to their brethren of all communions, Baptists may help to diminish all fire from the rear and contribute their full share to the most effective campaign possible for the speedy Christianization of the world.

True, the Lambeth Conference of England in 1888 promulgated their famous Quadrilateral and in some other ways have given emphasis to their conception of Christian unity; yet the Presbyterian General Assembly of this country and some other bodies formally rejected that Quadrilateral. It yet remains to be seen if any single communion or even several of them working together can do better.

The late Ecumenical Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, notwithstanding a wide insistence on the desirability of a more formal unity for an efficient propaganda of missions in the future, did not give out a single definite doctrinal proposal to that end.

Now coming to the distinctive position of Baptists, were we to take for granted what the norm of a Baptist is, the idea of most people would be about as definite as the traditional notion of a man born blind, who when asked what the color of red was like, replied, "Like the sound of a trumpet." He

transposed what normally applied to sight into terms of hearing, his acutest sense. So the idea of many Christians respecting essential principles of Baptists or others outside that communion would probably differ as widely as their prejudices and prepossessions. Nor are the Baptists themselves on their part free from fault for these varying misconceptions, when we consider into how many sectional camps they, (as well as sister communions) have become divided.

The writer lately found himself in a waking dream wherein he was being questioned as to what a Baptist is, anyway. Speaking partly from his subliminal self, he apologetically answered, "Well, my friend, you must know that there are but few, if any, **finished** Baptists. Most of them are but working toward their position. The one I best knew, as most nearly attaining to the finished product, went to heaven years ago."

In justice to the people under review, it may be well to remember that the title Baptist by which they are known was originally a nickname, derisively flung at them, which since they could not shake it off, they have at least striven to make honorable.

In general, it may be said that a Baptist is but a New Testament Christian who individually has found himself in relation to Christ, his risen Lord, and who corporately is joined to other newborn souls in such an organism, called the church, as is best adapted to extend the gospel in its elemental purity and simplicity to all mankind. This definition, if taken with its fair implications, would for the writer suffice for the Baptist Trilateral. But to be more explicit, Baptist conviction consists in the five following principles:

(1). **The New Testament as the sole and sufficient authority for all matters of faith and practice.** In general, most evangelical bodies avow this. Yet among them are those who persistently think that they must formulate historic Christian tradition into a credal statement which at points in our view displaces Bible authority itself. In illustration, at the late Morrison Centenary Conference in Shanghai, when it came to the announcement of the doctrinal basis on which the Conference proposed to stand, there was a paragraph which in ad-

dition to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments would have committed the Conference to the Nicene Creed as "sufficiently expressing the facts of the Christian faith." For a whole forenoon the matter was discussed pro and con and as the debate continued, the disunity increased. At length it was suggested (and the amendment was from the Baptist quarter) that if any form of creed was to be recognized at all, in deference to those who felt it necessary, it should simply be named with the proviso that such creed only "**substantially**" instead of "sufficiently" expressed the facts of the Christian faith. Whereupon the Conference became a unit and all spontaneously arose and sang the Doxology. Is it too much to prophesy that no future conference of evangelical believers will ever succeed in unifying measures that adds to or subtracts from Bible deliverances? Has not a principal cause of past disunity been the attempt to go beyond this? and are not those who insist on such a step the real schismatics?

It is simply Christian to stand for this and there can be nothing of final value in any confessional statement that departs from it.

(2). **The immediate lordship of Jesus Christ in things spiritual to the human soul.** Christ as the revelation of God is the exclusive master of the soul in all matters of religion and conscience; all others are intruders in this realm. Hence the irrelevancy of all hierarchies or any of their imitations in several communions which derive their types of polity from the same root. It is the central principle of the Baptists that the soul is competent under God to find and know the lordship and saviourhood of Jesus Christ for itself, apart from any human priest, mediator, ritual or ceremony whatever. This has been stated with great fullness, as well as cogency, by President E. Y. Mullins in his "Axioms of Religion." The Christian's relation to Christ is personal, firsthand and immediate. He acknowledges no essential, saving relation to any other person or thing than Christ Himself. He may be thankful for the providential relation to a Christian parentage, but even in the realm of Christian nurture the relation to the Christ, the second Adam, rather than to earthly and fleshly parents, is the

matter to be emphasized. It is this which even the great Bushnell in his work on "Christian Nurture" failed to discern—an error into which many another gifted and devout soul has fallen.

Yet while the supremacy of the divine over human authority in all matters of religion is fundamental, Baptists also stand for the noblest patriotism and loyalty to rulers in the civil realm. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's." In mission lands then, whether to the Emperor in China, to the Mikado in Japan, to royal authority in India or tribal rulers in Africa, the Baptists teach loyalty to the civil authorities as compatible with worshipful regard of the one King in Zion.

The Baptist thus occupies a position at the very antipodes of any hierarchy in the Church of God. Hence, monarchically-bred communions, even as represented by the Reformers, have never understood the Baptists at this point nor have they known quite how to reckon with them. Failure at this point has accounted for much historic persecution in Germany, Scandinavia, Russia and other European states. Moreover, because the Baptist doctrine—nay, the New Testament doctrine—on this point is so unique, it has been deemed anarchistic and in Russia, nihilistic, whereas it is really nothing of the sort; it simply insists on the separation in thought and principle of the two realms of Church and State. This principle the new Republic of Portugal and many other ancient States have recently adopted.

(3). **The voluntary principle in the life of the churches.** This point is the logical deduction from the preceding one. If Jesus Christ is the immediate Head and Lord of the individual believer, with no hierarchical or ritualistic go-between, the conscience must be entirely free in its religious choices and activities. The goal of the gospel is the production of a new righteous spontaneity in the soul. But the Christian religion also begins with this principle, expects all disciples of Christ to exercise themselves in the grace of free religious action until it becomes second nature so to do.

To this idea Baptists historically have been devoted. Says

Bancroft in his "History of America;" "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists." True, much is assumed by this position respecting the capacity of human nature in the average to exercise this freedom wisely, and there is much in Baptist history marked by great crudity and some folly. Something no doubt can be said for paternal and prelatical systems respecting the propriety of keeping the Church in leading strings during that stage which might be called the minority of particular embryonic churches. It is also a fact that on both Home and Foreign Mission fields Baptists themselves practically do try to build up the smaller companies of believers in process of tutelage into what may be called **dependent** rather than **independent** churches. Perhaps, reckoning with human nature as it is in its untutored states, this may always be more or less necessary, and it would be difficult to draw hard and fast lines between the dependent and independent stage; nevertheless it is believed by Baptists that, taking things all in all, the best results in the end will be reached by training regenerate people from the beginning to exercise the voluntary principle of self-government. It is believed that by so doing also in little companies of local churches rather than by an organized denomination, a multitude of tendencies to corruption, abuse of power and even tyrannies such as have darkened the pages of past history will be best avoided.

The New Testament church, ideally speaking, is thus a pure democracy with no account taken of age, race, sex, education or wealth. All church members are equal fellow-citizens and the majority decides. The local church itself within the realm of its legitimate purposes is the supreme court of Christ's kingdom, and its officers chosen by itself are of only two kinds—ministers, or overseers, and deacons—the first charged with spiritualities and the second with temporalities. "The idea of a metropolitan bishop, having charge of all the churches of a great city or of a diocesan bishop having charge of a province or state, is of post-apostolic origin and subversive of the scriptural idea of the bishop." The free, personal, individual

soul is thus the unit in salvation and of membership in the Christian church.

There follows from this the spiritual oneness of all believers in Christ, the unity of a common life, fruit of the one Spirit of the risen Lord. The first effect of argument respecting liturgical requirements, the insistence on mere opinion, creates a distinct shock to the divinely begotten fellowship which is of God Himself. The idea therefore that the churches of the future in any land, eastern or western, are likely to be helped to spiritual oneness by imposing upon them bands of artificial ecclesiastical contrivance to render them Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, or what not, is a total misreading of the situation.

(4.) **The place and significance of the two ordinances of Christ's church, viz.:** Baptism and the Lord's supper, exactly as Christ gave them, to be maintained without change "until He come." Note the use of the term "ordinances" and not sacraments. These are mere symbols of living spiritual realities, having no magical or talismanic effect whatever, as the term sacrament generally presupposes. In themselves they absolutely do nothing for the soul, but like the colors or the seal of a state or nation, they **represent** something. They were chosen to stand as the insignia, the sign manual, the heraldry of the Kingdom of God. They are object lessons, both to the participant and the beholder and as such have vast pedagogic value, and it is for this kind of value that Baptists esteem them and so tenaciously adhere to them.

The individual, regenerate soul knows himself in the light of the New Testament and by experience, as spiritually alive from the dead and the younger brother of the Christ who "is the first begotten from the dead." The source of this new life of the disciple is the risen Lord—risen in two senses; first, historically dead and alive again; secondly, as a personal begetter of a new life in the disciple who is spiritually risen.

It is for this reason that the New Testament Christian called Baptist so emphasizes the initial ordinance of the Christian Church. It is distinctly not because he believes in the efficacy of water, even more or less, and applied in any one

of several forms, nor as ritually accomplishing anything in spiritual salvation. The Baptist distinctly repudiates all this matter as savoring of sacramentarianism. It is because immersion, and that only of all conceivable emblems and symbols, so expresses the central element in his faith, namely: that He who once died for him and lives again has also by the Spirit enabled him to die to self and live again, that the Baptist so adheres to immersion. It is on the model and principle of his first act as a believer, namely: that of death to self and living again that his entire Christian life is brought out. Baptism is but the sign of the great foundational truth of Christianity. The Baptist conceives himself as ideally a **Son of the Resurrection**. The pedagogical value of this symbol in teaching spiritual things to all mankind is so great and so indispensable that the Baptist feels bound to promulgate it on all suitable occasions. Take away that symbol from the church and it loses its central object lesson. The very heraldry—the coat of arms—of the new kingdom which Christ himself adopted and enacted at the Jordan is destroyed. The incalculable loss of the impressional influence of this ordinance is ignored and corresponding dishonor is done, however unintentional, to the Christ.

Once throw off this heraldry of the Kingdom and the way is left open for departures even more radical from evangelicalism, departures which have hitherto led to widespread formalism and corruption of the primitive faith, so that in large parts of Europe, even, it has become necessary to re-evangelize vast populations throughout Italy, Austria, South Russia, and even in Germany and Scandinavia, not to instance England.

If therefore the proposal widely made in China since the Morrison Centenary, that mission boards formally consent to the exchange of members in cases of removal of residence in disregard of definite form of baptism were conceded, it will at once be seen how this would bear upon the historic position of Baptists respecting the retention of the ordinances in the form which they believe was divinely intended by the great Head of the Church. It would virtually result in the elimination from Chinese churches of the future of the pedagogic

value and impressional force of the symbol of that which is central in the Christian faith, namely, the atonement of our Lord through His death and resurrection. If the proposition in this light were submitted even to the missionaries, of the non-Baptist communions, in China, we sincerely doubt if they would take up with that position in the Christianity they have to recommend to that pagan empire. Indeed, a deputation of missionaries from a part of China who approached the writer in 1907 on this question, in answer to my queries, replied, "We would not have the Baptist missions in China give up their symbolic ordinance, especially that of baptism, for anything." When further it is remembered that probably one-third of the foreign missionaries in China of various names actually practice immersion for baptism, it will be seen with what reason the brethren referred to hesitated to commit themselves to a conclusion which their interview logically had in mind. Whether or not the matter of unified administrative action also in the conduct of the native churches of the East in the future is within the limit of practicality, is very doubtful.

(5). **The practical obligation upon every Christian to do his utmost for the immediate Christianization of the world in so far as this is practicable with the agencies, divine and human, which are at his command.** It is true that historically Baptists have not always stood for this principle. Indeed that is a part of their history of which they are not proud. Up to the time of Carey in England and Judson in this country, and even afterward, many of this name were radically anti-missionary in their sentiments and doctrinal beliefs. But this was but a mark of that human weakness and narrowness which appertains to human nature as untutored and un sanctified, and since Judson's day that branch of the Baptist people known as anti-missionists and anti-nomians in doctrine, have well nigh gone out of existence. In the light of a better understanding of the Scriptures, including the Great Commission itself, this people have come to see the importance of putting first things first. The first thing in the last commission of our Lord is the command to disciple all nations. Questions of ecclesiastical order and ordinances thus have fallen into their

relative though real place and at this hour it is safe to say that the attitude of this people towards the non-Christian world is in line with the most intelligent, aggressive and forceful bodies of evangelical Christians of every name. Indeed, even as Missions is the resurrection-Errand of the Church, not promulgated until the period of the forty days of the risen Lord, Baptists on their principles are particularly committed to the execution of that Errand, and have with all orientals an immense advantage for getting their message understood. Their present zeal is to ascertain how, with the minimum of obstruction in themselves, their opinions or their practices, they may place themselves in the front rank of those who seek to bring in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in all its fulness.

If these five principles, then, as embracing what Baptists believe to be fundamental are significant to themselves in order to the complete and normal working out of Christ's scheme, that significance to the non-Christian world will depend on: first, the extent to which these principles will increasingly approve themselves to that world in actual practice, as they have already done to a notable extent; and secondly, the degree in which other Christians also can without violence to their conscientious convictions add their seal to them in untrammelled coöperation, and their own personal fidelity to their principles.

Assuming that some cannot wholly agree with the Baptist position let them come forward with such amendments and modifications as they feel morally compelled to propose, approving so much as they can, consistent with Scriptural elements. The ability wanting to do this, we see no other path open but for the separate branches of the Christian Church which cannot agree to go on doing their best with such convictions as they have, with fervent charity among all parties; and thus to work out the best results possible in partially separate camps, while all abide in the same spirit until the Lord Himself shall come and take to Himself His great power and reign the one King in Zion.