

THE BAPTISTS

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The Baptists constitute probably the largest of all the Protestant denominations in U.S.A. On a world-basis in 1954 they number almost 13,000,000, of whom over 10,000,000 are to be found in the United States of America. Apart from all else, therefore, their numerical importance makes them deserving of attention. What is it, in the Baptist presentation of Christianity, which wins the allegiance of so many millions of people? On the other hand, one is compelled to ask what it includes or omits, that the rest of the 685,000,000 of professing Christians (in 1954) in the world should reject it? They are these questions which have prompted the writing of this booklet, devoted to an impartial study of the history and teachings of the Baptist Churches.

1. Origin and Development.

Baptists owe their name to their teaching that Christian baptism may be received by adult believers only, as a symbol of their personal relationship to Christ; and that it must be administered by immersion only.

Their origin as a separate denomination dates from the early 17th century. Some have tried to maintain their continuity through all the centuries from the time of St. John the Baptist, whom they declare to have baptized by immersion. But, historically, the earliest known Baptists had no idea of imposing baptism by immersion. They rejected infant baptism, but in baptizing adult believers, they did so by pouring water upon the head in accordance with the hitherto accepted custom. Baptism by immersion was first prescribed in 1644, over thirty years after the movement began.

Better informed writers make no claim to the continuous corporate existence of their Church through the ages, but say that their main beliefs and practices never lacked representation amongst the pre-Reformation sects which separated from Rome; and that their principles at least are derived from the New Testament and from the first-century Christians. But that is a theory dependent for its value upon historical evidence, evidence which others deny to exist.

Turning to actual history, shortly after Martin Luther began the Protestant reformation in Germany, in 1517, there arose a leader named Thomas Munzer, who felt that Luther had not gone nearly far enough in his repudiation of the old religion. In 1525 Munzer sought to establish what he regarded as a spiritual kingdom of converted souls, independent of all authority, ecclesiastical or civil. With Luther he taught that the Bible is man's only guide to religious truth, and that men are justified by faith alone. But he went further than Luther by declaring that all people who had been baptized as infants were not validly baptized at all; and that they must be converted again to God, and be re-baptized as adults. The name Anabaptists, which signifies re-baptizers, was given to them because of this practice. But the wild and destructive fanaticism which characterized many of these Anabaptists brought them into disrepute, and modern Baptists disclaim any connection with them. The Baptist doctrine of believer's baptism, however, and their insistence on ecclesiastical and civil independence, are undoubtedly due to a great extent to the influence of the Anabaptists.

The actual founder of the Baptists must be regarded as John Smyth. John Smyth was an Anglican clergyman who, together with his flock, refused to conform to the established Church of England. In 1602 he and his followers fled from England to Amsterdam, in Holland. There, influenced by the Anabaptists, he rejected infant baptism, and in 1609 he re-baptized himself by pouring water over his own head. At no time did he believe immersion to be necessary. He did have doubts, however, about the validity of re-baptism administered by himself, and was later baptized again by the Dutch Mennonites; though, once more, not by immersion.

In 1611, with a companion named Thomas Helwys, he drew up a declaration of faith insisting on the Bible as the only authority in religion, on justification by faith, on adult believers as the only lawful subjects of baptism, and laying particular stress on complete separation between Church and State. He declared that civil authorities are obliged to abstract from religion altogether, and to confine themselves to temporal affairs only, leaving subjects absolutely free to adopt and practise any religion, or none, as they pleased. He seemed to apprehend no danger that political rulers,

told to leave religion alone, would soon tell religion to leave them alone, acknowledging no obligation of religion or of its principles in their legislation, the way being left open for the irreligious, and even the anti-religious State!

In the following year, 1612, John Smyth died in Holland. Thomas Helwys, with a number of the exiled English separatists, then returned to England and set up the first Baptist Church at Spitalfields, in London. Thomas Helwys himself died in 1616.

The Baptists founded by Smyth and Helwys were known as “General Baptists” because they repudiated Calvin’s doctrine of the predestination of the elect only, holding that Christ died for all human beings in general. They insisted that every individual is truly responsible for his decision to accept or reject salvation. About 1650, over thirty years after the death of Helwys, the General Baptists began to teach that baptism by immersion is the only valid form. This doctrine they adopted from the “Particular Baptists,”—of whom we shall see more in a moment.

In the 18th century many of the General Baptists drifted from their belief in the Divinity of Christ, and became practically Unitarians. But in 1770, those who remained orthodox on this subject formed a separate association called the “New Connection,” thus continuing the original Baptist Church.

Quite independent of the origin of the General Baptists was that of the Particular Baptists. These were first organized at Southwark, England, in 1633, under John Spillsbury, who had separated from the Independents, the fore-runners of the Congregationalists, taking with him their strict Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Far from believing that Christ died for all men, he held that Christ died for the elect and for no others. Hence the name of “Particular Baptists,” as opposed to “General Baptists.” In 1644 the Particular Baptists added to their doctrine of believer’s baptism the declaration that its only valid form is by immersion; a decision adopted, as we have seen, by the General Baptists in 1650.

At first, owing to their Calvinism, the Particular Baptists were very exclusive. But the influence of the Wesleyan revival brought milder views, and in many of their churches they began to admit even the non-baptized, provided they professed faith in Christ, to membership and communion. They became more moderate, too, in their attitude towards missionary activity. At first all missionary activity was condemned. They felt that it was their duty to wait until those predestined by God came to them. But in 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed by William Carey (1761-1834); and, in 1816, the General Baptists followed suit with their own Missionary Society.

The Baptists in England continued for years divided into two sections, General and Particular; but, in 1891, they united to form the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Many individual congregations, however, held aloof from the Union; and, to this day, there are many separate groups of Baptists in isolated congregations.

In the United States of America the Baptist Churches owe their origin to Roger Williams (1600-1683). They have no strictly historical connection with the Baptist Movement in England; for, although Roger Williams came from England, he did not come as a Baptist. In England, he had been ordained as an Anglican clergyman, but decided to break with the State Church, and become an Independent. He fled to America to safeguard his liberty; and there he came to the conclusion that the Church can consist only of regenerate members. In 1639 he repudiated the baptism he had received as an infant, and a layman named Holliman re-baptized him by immersion at Providence. Then he, in turn, re-baptized Holliman and others. Thus Roger Williams established the first Baptist Church in America. But very soon afterwards he withdrew from the Church he had founded, gave up belief in baptism altogether, and had no more to do with any organized Christian bodies.

The Baptist Church has manifested phenomenal growth in the United States, numbering today in 1954 over 10,000,000 adherents. But these adherents are very divided amongst themselves. Organically they are grouped in three major Conventions, Northern, Southern, and Coloured; and there are hosts of independent Baptist sects, such as Seventh Day Baptists, Dunkards or German Baptists, Free-will Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Six-Principle Baptists, Separate Baptists, United Baptists, Baptist Church of Christ, and many others. But, in general, all agree in rejecting infant baptism, restricting the rite to adult believers alone; and in demanding baptism by immersion only.

2. The Baptist Creed.

In turning to a study of the religious beliefs of Baptists, it should be noted from the outset that their Creed is practically that there should be no Creed at all; or, at least, no Creed anyone is bound in conscience to adopt. They

have resisted every effort of those members who have wanted to secure the acceptance of an authoritative statement of doctrine to be imposed upon the Churches. They declare that, whilst the ancient Creeds are to be respected, they are to be regarded merely as declarations of views prevalent at the time they were drawn up, but in no way as being of obligation. And no subscription to any dogmatic statements is necessary for ordination to the Baptist ministry. They insist that the test of one's Christianity is rather quality of life than any fixed system of doctrine.

At the same time, they could not altogether escape the necessity, of stating their doctrinal position. Thus, in 1688, they issued the "Philadelphia Confession." This was a revision of the "Westminster Confession" of 1642, when the Presbyterian party in the Church of England revised the "Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion" in a Calvinistic direction. In 1833, the less Calvinistic "New Hampshire Confession" was issued; and many other sectional "Confessions of Faith" have been published.

But Baptists insist that all such statements of belief are merely expositions of generally accepted doctrine, that all are subject to revision by appeal, to the Bible; and that each reader of the Bible is competent to form for himself his own ideas of the truth. They do not seem to be disturbed by the thought that, if two individual Baptists arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions, it is impossible for both of them to have arrived at the truth! For them, subjective individualism comes before all the laws of objective logic.

3. The Bible Only.

Despite, however, their rejection of any binding Creed, there are some doctrinal statements which they regard as absolutely essential. They certainly demand the admission of the basic Protestant dogma that the Bible, and the Bible alone, contains "all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

Baptists believe the Bible to be the infallible and authoritative guide for the whole of life. To each individual reader it speaks for itself. There is no need of Church or scholar to explain its meaning; and there is no generally recognized interpretation of the text to which one must adjust his conclusions.

More and more Protestants, however, even including many Baptists, are beginning to doubt the value of the Bible-only principle. In his recent book, "The Bible Today," Prof. C. H. Dodd, of Cambridge, writes that the Protestant reformers "in placing the Bible at the disposal of the uninstructed took a fateful step. It could now be read, and was widely read 'without note or comment,' without the guidance that had been supplied by tradition. To allow and encourage this was inevitably to admit the right of private judgement in interpreting it. . . . But the claim that the Bible could be read just as it stood, without the guidance of tradition, exposed it to the dangers of a chaotic individualism. . . . The demand for unqualified freedom of interpretation opened the way to limitless aberrations." (pp. 21-22.) Prof. H. Wheeler Robinson, himself a Baptist, writes in his book, "The Bible in Its Ancient and English Versions," p. 294, "The Protestant appeal to the Bible is liable to the charge of subjectivity; it is, in fact, open to abuse by any man who would read his own vagaries into the interpretation of the Bible. The Bible has undoubtedly suffered greatly in that way, and the mere claim to be guided by the Spirit of God proves nothing." Prof. Wheeler Robinson's solution of the problem is that, whilst the Bible is a guide to religious knowledge, our interpretation of the Bible must itself be subject to the guidance of the traditions of the Church. Ever the move of those who wish to defend the truth of the Christian religion is back towards the Catholic position too hastily forsaken and denounced by the earliest Protestant reformers.

4. The Baptismal Rite.

A second doctrine to which Baptists originally demanded adherence even to the point of separation from all other Christian groups was their distinctive teaching about the rite of Baptism. The founders of the movement declared that only, those could be regarded as genuine Christians who had been baptized as adults, after having experienced an interior conversion, and having professed their personal faith in Christ. Later on, as we have seen, they repudiated the administration of baptism by pouring water upon the head of the aspirant, and insisted that the only valid form is by the complete immersion of the whole person.

Difficulties at once arise, however, when we ask just what significance Baptists attach to the rite of Baptism.

Despite the words of Christ, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn., 3, 5), they deny that any rebirth is effected by the actual rite of baptism. The “Ordinance of Baptism,” as Baptists prefer to call it rather than the “Sacrament of Baptism,” is but a symbol of a regeneration of soul that has already taken place. The rite itself, therefore, is quite secondary. Personal experience of conversion, and of having received the grace of Christ, constitutes members of the Christian Church. Baptism is but a visible and external sign that one has already become a member of the invisible and spiritual Church of Christ. The aim is a Church of “converted souls,” a Church consisting of saints.

But all this leaves room for doubt as to whether baptism is a necessary rite at all! If one has already become a member of the Church by personal experience of conversion to the Faith, why should anything further be required? If it be said that those who have become members of the invisible Church of Christ must receive the visible rite of baptism to become members of the visible Church, difficulty arises from the fact that most Baptists do not believe in any visible Church of Christ.

Many Baptist Churches, under the influence of such considerations, content themselves with teaching the value and privilege of baptism, leaving to the individual conscience the decision as to whether it be actually received or not. They are prepared to welcome to some kind of restricted membership all evangelical Christians who profess loyalty to Christ, even at times admitting the unbaptized to participation in the communion of the Lord’s Supper. Strict Baptists, however, still insist on baptism by immersion as a condition of membership of the Church, and as a qualification for admission to the communion.

5. Attitude Towards Infants.

The doctrine that the rite of baptism does not cause, but presupposes regeneration, logically results in the rejection of infant baptism. If the Church is a spiritual society of saints, consisting only of those who have experienced conversion and are justified by faith in Christ—an experience symbolized by subsequent baptism—then infants who have not attained to the age of reason neither belong to the Church, nor can be baptized.

Baptists, therefore, reject as sheer “magic” the idea that the Ordinance of Baptism could effect any change in a child unable to make any personal act of faith in Christ: They sanction the dedication of such infants to God as a sign that the Church recognizes God’s claims upon them; but the children do not thereby become members of the Church.

What, then, becomes of infants who die unbaptized? Baptists hold that all children who die before attaining to the age of responsibility will be saved. In his book, “Christian Reunion,” p. 10, Hugh Martin, a prominent Baptist Minister, says, “The refusal of Baptists to baptize infants was, of course, never due to any lack of belief in God’s love for them, or to any failure to recognize the duty of the Church to train them in Christian life and faith; rather indeed the contrary. They held that no rite was necessary to make an infant a child of God.”

Such teaching obviously denies either any supernatural order of grace at all, or the fall of the human race and the birth of every child of Adam in a state of original or inherited sin. It also denies the necessity of the Church established by Christ, and of the Sacraments instituted by Him, as means of salvation, since such infants can be saved without becoming members of the Church either by personal faith and conversion, or by the reception of any Sacrament.

The insistent repudiation of infant baptism creates an unbridgeable gap between the Baptist and other Churches. Hugh Martin himself, in the book just quoted, declares that he could agree to reunion with others, only provided he did not have to give up his belief that infants have no need of baptism, and that they should not receive it. But he would agree to the continuance of infant baptism in other Churches on the understanding that it would have the value only of prayer for the infants so baptized. But that would reduce the Sacrament of Baptism to the level of the anti-baptismal dedication service of the Baptists themselves, and presumably require the repetition of baptism when the child attained to the age of responsibility! As valid baptism, even according to the Baptists, cannot be twice received, the infant baptism Hugh Martin would sanction in other Churches would be of its very nature an invalid rite!

No solution of the problem is possible by compromise. Baptists must ask themselves whether they have not been mistaken in rejecting the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and the practice of admitting infants to the sacramental rite, a doctrine and practice sanctioned by Christian usage through all the centuries, and accepted by the overwhelming

majority of Christians today, as in every previous age.

6. Idea of the Church

(A) But a still more vital element in the Baptist position concerns the doctrine of the Church itself, and the nature of its composition.

Luther in Germany, Calvin in Switzerland, and Anglicans in England, had all wanted to retain a single, visible, organized Church. They declared that they wanted a “Church-Reformed,” though they disagreed as to the way in which it should be reformed. In reality, of course, they abandoned the ancient Church, and set up new Protestant organizations; but their Churches were intended to be single organized institutions, each claiming to be the true and reformed Church, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Anglican, as the case may be.

But others arose, called Independents, who declared the hitherto existent Church to be beyond reformation, and that the only thing for the “Lord’s People” to do was to abandon it altogether, and form themselves as best they could into groups or congregations, to which only the worthy might belong. This principle of the Independents was adopted by the Baptists.

The whole Catholic idea of the Church as a single, united, and visible society, therefore, was rejected by them. For the Baptist, the Church is a voluntary association of converted men and women, composed of believers only. Baptism, as we have seen, is of only incidental importance. The essential thing is the faith and the conversion experienced by the adult, not his baptism.

(B) Moreover, the principle of the Bible only as the rule of faith, with the absolute liberty of each individual reader to interpret it for himself, led to Protestantism in its most extreme and individualistic form. There could be no such thing as Church authority. As each Baptist was a law to himself, so each voluntary group of Baptists was independent of the others, able to make its own regulations, and choose its own ministers. “Church,” for a Baptist, means only a local congregation; so that, in reality, there is no “Baptist Church;” but only “Baptist Churches.” It is significant that Roger Williams, the founder of the Baptist movement in America, ended by severing his connection with all institutional religion, even with Baptist congregationalism!

Whilst Baptists, however, belong to independent Congregations, they have found it necessary for practical purposes to form Conventions within certain geographical limits, State and National. And they now have General Superintendents to supervise the supply of ministers, the educational, charitable, and missionary work of the Churches, and the administration of general funds. Such federation of Baptist Churches is at least an initial step on the return journey to the idea of authority in a united Church organization, and away from the separatism of distinct and independent congregations subject to no legislation but that of each one’s own making.

7. Ministry and Worship.

From all that has gone before, it scarcely needs to be said that Baptists reject everything savouring of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and a sacrificial priesthood. Any idea of a Sacrament of Holy Orders conferring special powers transmitted in the Church by continuous succession from the Apostles is utterly foreign to them. They accept implicitly the Protestant principle that each soul has direct access to God, without the need of any intermediaries. Officers in their Churches, as leaders in prayer and for the preaching of the Word, are chosen by majority vote in each congregation, and ordained by councils of ministers and representatives of neighbouring Churches. Such “ordination” is the authorizing or commissioning of a layman to function in the name of all; and it creates no real difference between the one so ordained and others in the congregation.

The forms of worship in Baptist Churches are much the same as with Methodists and Congregationalists. The pulpit is of supreme importance, for the ministry of preaching. The normal service consists of the reading of Scripture, extempore prayers by the minister, hymns, sermon, and blessing. Two sacramental Ordinances are acknowledged, that of baptism, and that of the Lord’s Supper. The latter is celebrated usually once a month, but at times more often. As with Baptism, so the Communion is not productive of grace, but only the symbol of it. The words of consecration are not believed to effect any change in the elements. Baptists do not believe that there is any “Real Presence of Christ under the outward appearances of bread and wine” after the consecration, as the Catholic Church teaches.

But the rite of the Lord's Supper amongst the Baptists is not regarded as being one merely of commemoration. "How can we have a mere memorial of One who is still alive, still our life, still present with us, and acting in us?", writes P. T. Forsyth, in his book, "The Church and the Sacraments." Baptists believe that special significance for all time was given to the last meal of Jesus with the Apostles; and that, although the bread and wine remain but bread and wine, and are only tokens or symbols of the Lord's body and blood, the commemorative rite carries with it a moral and spiritual significance, awakening amongst the participants a mystical sense of fellowship with Christ and with one another, proportionately to their degree of faith. But whilst they believe that the Lord is spiritually present to them in an altogether special way during the celebration of the eucharistic rite of the Last Supper, they do not believe, as Catholics do, that He intended to leave to His Church His actual Presence in the Eucharist itself.

8. Church and State

One further very definite aspect of Baptist belief calls for attention. No body of professing Christians is more insistent than the Baptists on the absolute separation of Church and State. Each must be completely independent of the other. Secular authority can have nothing whatever to do with religion, and it is the height of absurdity to talk of a State Church.

The history of the Baptists gives a clue to the reasons for their rigid opposition to any connection between Church and State. Their founder in England, John Smyth, and their founder in America, Roger Williams, had both been Anglican clergymen. Both had revolted against the State-dominated Church of England, the former escaping to Holland, the latter to America. Neither wanted ever again to see a State-controlled religion, or a Church-controlled State. They identified the State-controlled religion with Anglicanism, and the Church-controlled State with Catholicism.

But the identification of Church and State, as they imagined it, is a purely Protestant, and never was a Catholic idea. Catholic teaching has ever been that there are two distinct authorities, spiritual and temporal; both intended and sanctioned by God. The Church is to concern itself with the spiritual and eternal welfare of men; civil rulers with public order and the temporal welfare of men in this world. In spiritual and eternal things, all, rulers and subjects alike, owe allegiance to the Church. In temporal and worldly affairs Christians, as good citizens, must obey the just laws of the State. So the whole of society would "render to God the things that are God's, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

But the Protestant reformers, by their demand at Augsburg, 1555, "*Cujus regio, ejus religio*" ["what the ruler is, that is the religion (in his territory)]—that the religion of the State must be that of its civil ruler—paved the way for a State-dominated Church, with disastrous results.

That the Baptists and all other Nonconformists should rebel against that, even as do Catholics, is quite intelligible. But to go to the other extreme, and demand complete separation of Church and State, is, and has proved to be, equally disastrous.

To tell civil rulers that they must ignore religion, and that the State must be non-religious, inevitably leads to irreligious, and even to anti-religious legislation. Not only must all religious institutions be deprived of government assistance, but a State-controlled education must restrict itself to secular matters only, with a consequent decline of religious knowledge and interest in future generations of citizens subjected to so religionless an atmosphere in their most vitally formative years.

Baptists themselves are beginning to see this. Whilst the vast majority of them are still strongly insistent on the absolute separation of Church and State, the more thoughtful amongst them are growing increasingly hesitant. Thus Hugh Martin, in the chapter on "Church and State," in his book, "Christian Reunion," supports the idea that Church and State owe mutual duties to each other, and that each, acting within their respective spheres, may signally promote each other's welfare. He stresses the danger to the Church arising from any kind of patronage by the State, with its consequent temptation to be subservient to the secular power. But he asks, "So long as the State is willing, with-out any illegitimate interference with the sovereignty of the Church in its own peculiar realm, to give the Church recognition and encouragement, is there any reason why the Church should reject its aid?" (p. 168.) And he declares that Free Churchmen are "ready to search for a system of State RECOGNITION of the Christian Church which will

not involve State CONTROL in spiritual matters.”

Not all Free Churchmen would agree with that statement. But Mr. Martin, whilst rejecting any idea of identifying Church and State, denies that the only alternative is that there should be complete separation between them, with no organic connection at all.

According to Catholic teaching, the THEORETICAL ideal is a Christian population in which all profess exactly the same faith, forming one nation from the secular point of view, and one Church from the religious point of view. The whole nation, rulers and subjects alike, would then accept the spiritual guidance of the Church; and the government would safeguard and promote the temporal interests of the Church. The Church in turn would inspire the perfect fulfilment by her members of all duties, both religious and civic.

In PRACTICE, however, such conditions are nowhere perfectly realized; and in the vast majority of the countries of the world, not even approximately realized. And certainly no State could be expected to recognize as a nationally acknowledged Church one which was not widely-representative of the religious life of the nation. Where, then, the people of any country, as in America, profess the most diverse religions, or even none at all, the State has no option but to adopt an attitude of impartial tolerance towards all. But this does not forbid State assistance to the Churches for such work accomplished as the State itself would have to do, did not the Churches undertake it from religious and spiritual motives.

One thing is certain. We must beware of over-simple solutions to so complex a problem. “We all need,” writes the Baptist Hugh Martin, “to pray for deliverance from rigidity in our attitude to this issue. Many of our inherited war-cries sound a little thin in the air today.” *“Christian Reunion,” p. 160.*

9. Common Ground

With much in the exposition given above of those things upon which Baptists place their main emphasis Catholics cannot but be in sympathy. That aspects of the full truth have been unwittingly overlooked should not blind us to the very vital principles for which Baptists stand against the corroding influence of an only too-widespread indifference and unbelief. To a convert to Catholicism from the Baptist Church we would say, “Nothing that is good and true in all you have hitherto held must be abandoned. What you mistakenly believed must be corrected. The further truths to which you have not previously adverted must be allowed to enrich your life. But any genuine truths contained in the religion you have until now professed you will find also in Catholicism, together with new motives for a yet deeper loyalty to them. If you have believed in Christ; believe in Him more firmly still; if you have loved Him, keep that love, and develop it, for never can you love Him as He deserves, and as the Catholic Church desires that you should.”

Take belief in the Bible as the Word of God. That Baptists acknowledge no other authority apart from the Bible does not alter the fact that they do believe the contents of Holy Scripture to have been revealed by God. That they have not always interpreted those contents correctly does not alter the fact that they have fought for the preservation of the Bible against the constant and destructive attacks of rationalist critics. And in this, at least, probably more than any other Protestant Churches, they find themselves in sympathy with a most important aspect of Catholic teaching. For the Catholic Church has defined as an article of faith that God is the Principal Author of both the Old and the New Testaments, a doctrine from which she can never recede. Though Catholics deny that the Bible alone is an adequate source of Christian doctrine, they stand wholeheartedly for the truth of all that the Bible does contain, asking only of those separated from her a deeper consideration of what its contents really imply.

Again, take the necessity of faith. Both Catholics and Baptists agree that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. That cannot be emphasized too greatly. How the virtue of faith can be implanted in the soul of an infant by baptism is a matter to be discussed elsewhere; but that question in no way detracts from Catholic insistence on the necessity of faith. If some Baptists have gone too far, above all those of earlier times, in holding that men can be saved by faith without good works, that exaggerated view is less dangerous than its opposite, that men can be saved by works without faith—an error which would substitute mere humanitarianism and philanthropy for the Christian religion. The Catholic doctrine that both faith and good works for the love of God, that both Christian belief and Christian behaviour are required of the man who wants to save his soul should surely not lack appeal for any good-living Baptist.

The Baptist insistence on the necessity of personal conversion also stresses a very valuable and important aspect of the truth. No merely formal fulfilment of the external practices of religion will save anybody. As St. Thomas Aquinas points out, external religious rites have value as expressions of interior dispositions of piety and love corresponding to them, and awakened by them. Even the Sacraments, whilst possessing a special efficacy in themselves, have their effects proportionately to the dispositions of those receiving them. In this matter, then, Catholic truth lies between the two extremes. If external, institutional religion cannot dispense from personal spiritual religion, it does not follow that the latter can dispense from the former. Man is not a disembodied spirit, and he cannot live by a disembodied religion. As his soul is enshrined in a material body, so a religion in accordance with his nature will be enshrined in visible and tangible Sacraments and ceremonies. Baptists themselves cannot avoid all external rites; and the question is not as to whether ritual practices are lawful, but as to what they will be. That is the problem that more than deserves further thought.

Another Baptist ideal with which, as an ideal, no one could reasonably quarrel, is that of political and religious liberty. All divergencies here concern the application of the ideal, not the ideal itself. In insisting on the absolute separation of Church and State, Baptists dread anything savouring of the political control of religion, or of the religious control of politics. And here is one of the greatest sources of their antipathy towards the Catholic religion, which they think to stand for both. Yet the Catholic Church repudiates both. In 1215, it was the Catholic Archbishop Langton, of Canterbury, who took the lead in wresting from King John that great Document of Liberty, Magna Carta, one provision of which was that the Church should be free from the royal interference. And when, in 1534, Henry VIII fastened the fetters of the State upon the Church in England, Catholics and Non-conformists alike suffered the penalties of opposition to a State Church subservient to a political ruler.

Not less is the Catholic Church opposed to the religious control of politics. She does assert that political rulers ought to frame their laws in accordance with Christian principles, and not in violation of them. But, granted that they keep within the law of God, she insists that temporal administration belongs to temporal rulers, and is not the duty of the Church. Nor, where a purely religious liberty of conscience is concerned could any Baptist quarrel with Catholic doctrine rightly understood. An immense respect for the individual conscience characterizes Catholic theology; so much so that it teaches that one must not only be free to follow his own conscience, but he is obliged before God to do so even though, through inability to discover one's true obligations, it is an erroneous conscience. Once again, the discussion is not really as to the paramount claims of political and religious liberty, but as to their nature and scope.

10. Misunderstandings.

What has been written above suggests doctrinal misunderstandings on the part of Baptists concerning the nature of the Catholic religion. Mr. Hugh Martin, in his book, *“Christian Reunion,”* candidly admits their existence. Indeed, “most Christians,” he writes, “know very little Church history, but they tend to inherit the outlook of long ago controversies. Their picture of what those in other denominations really believe is frequently hopelessly out of date; if indeed it ever was true.” (p. 47.) But the difficulty is not confined to doctrinal inaccuracies. Deeper psychological forces are involved. Unreasonable prejudices, fears, and even antipathies bordering on sheer hatred in regard to anything Catholic are not seldom to be found amongst many Protestants; and truth requires the admission that Baptists are often foremost amongst those denouncing the Catholic Church, and openly expressing distrust of its members. Their attitude is inexplicable to Catholics, and Baptists themselves are unable to give adequate reasons for it. It is an inherited bias which will not so much as let them look at the Catholic position; or, should they do so, permit them to study it in anything like an objective, detached, and impartial way.

The whole question of what happened at the Protestant reformation of the 16th century needs reconsidering in a calmer atmosphere than in those days of heated dissent. The superficial, popular views of the majority of people are certainly not correct.

Dr. Nathaniel Micklem, Congregationalist Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, has recently written, “How much high explosive have we fired at one another, Roman Catholic and Protestant, in the sad controversy of these past four hundred years—and, in the main, with little effect! Controversy there must be, for truth matters supremely; but between us it should be the controversy of brethren who seek to understand, and who mourn our separation:” (*Preface*

to Father Vincent McNabb's "Catholics and Non-conformists," p. 3.)

But a balanced judgement is not easy to attain. To rise above historical prejudices is difficult in the extreme. Yet the effort to do so must be made by those who want the full truth. In his book, "*The Protestant Reformation in Great Britain*," p. XV, Mr. Joseph Clayton, F.R.Hist.S., himself a convert to Catholicism, does not hesitate to write, "Thousands of Catholics are content to dismiss the Reformation as the mere revolt, the rebellion of bad men inspired by greed and moved by the devil to overthrow true religion. Thousands of Protestants complacently regard the Reformation as a great awakening, a glorious work, blessed by God and carried out by good men divinely inspired. Now, obviously, both these judgements cannot be true. And indeed neither is true, for both are fancy pictures painted in good faith but falsely drawn from want of knowledge. Ignorance and prejudice are responsible—rarely deliberate falsehood—for the errors—and the nonsense—that pass for history."

But we are concerned, in this booklet, rather with doctrine than with history; and must pass to the consideration of those aspects of Baptist teaching which fail to do justice to the Christian religion as its Divine Founder intended it to be.

11. False Principle.

In our brief study of the origin of the Baptist movement, we have seen that John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, who founded it in England, and Roger Williams, who founded it in America, had all three originally belonged to the Church of England. But, although dissatisfied with that State-established Church, they did not dream of turning back for the solution of their problems to the Catholic Church which Anglicans had abandoned. They took for granted the Protestant principle that the Bible alone, interpreted by each reader for himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was the only authentic source of Christian truth. And, acting upon this principle, they arrived at unfortunate conclusions which were in reality based on isolated fragments of Scripture, and those misunderstood.

Had they but studied it more closely, they would have discovered that the Bible itself denies that it contains a complete account of God's revelation, and that it expressly condemns the theory of private interpretation. The great final commission given by Christ to His Apostles was that they should teach all nations "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt., 26, 20.) But not all the things He taught the Apostles were committed to writing, by any means. St. John concludes his Gospel with the words, "There are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written." (Jn. 21, 25.)

As a matter of fact, Jesus did not command His Apostles to write anything. He taught them orally, and commissioned them to preach the Gospel. The first Christians are described as "persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles." (Acts 2, 42.) That Apostolic teaching was to be handed on as the tradition of the Church through all subsequent ages. It was not until some twenty or thirty years after the foundation of the Church that part of the Apostolic teaching was committed to writing; but all of it had to be accepted, whether written or not. Thus we find St. Paul writing to the Thessalonians, "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word, or by our epistle." (II Thess., 2, 14.)

The Bible, then, is not in itself a sufficient guide to the fulness of Christian truth. Nor does it sanction private interpretation as a safe guide to the proper understanding of so much as has been written. "Understand this first," St. Peter warns us, "that no prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation." (II Pet., 1, 20.) It may be urged that these words mean that the sacred writings are not due to merely human thought, but to divine inspiration. They do. But they do not mean only that. As the Anglican Bishop Ellicott rightly stresses, they also mean that "the reader must not presume to interpret privately that which is far more than ordinary human thought." So, in the epistle just quoted, St. Peter declares that, in St. Paul's writings, there "are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." (II Pet., 3, 16).

Reason itself tells us that the Bible could never have been intended as each man's guide to the truth. Through over a thousand years before the invention of the printing press, it was impossible to multiply copies of the Bible in sufficient numbers to enable everyone to possess it. And that each reader was meant to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the reading of Scripture is clearly disproved by the fact that, since the universal distribution of the Bible, sincere and

earnest Bible-readers have arrived at a multitude of conflicting and contradictory conclusions. If such individual guidance were a reality, the same Holy Spirit would have led all confiding in His assistance to one and the same truth.

These considerations force us back to the Catholic doctrine that, whilst Scripture and Tradition contain the divine teachings, our immediate guide to the knowledge and understanding of them is the Church established and guaranteed by Christ. "I will build my Church," He said. (Matt. 16, 18.) To that Church, then, represented in the persons of the Apostles, He declared, "He that hears you, hears me." (Lk. 10, 16.) And again, of every member of that Church He said, "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to you as the heathen and the publican." (Matt. 18, 17.)

No wonder St. Paul declared "the Church of the Living God" to be "the pillar and the ground of truth." (I Tim. 3, 15.)

12. Historical Test.

The very mention of the Church in this context introduces us to considerations of history. Christ not only said, "I will build my Church." He added that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16, 18.) And He promised the Apostles—and obviously their lawful successors, since they could not forever continue on earth—"Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. 28, 20.) The true Church of Christ must be able to show that it was personally established by Christ and it has been in this world all days since then, and is still here, even as it will last till the end of time. Protestant Churches all have the same problem. They all have to face the fact that Christ did not say that He would send men in the 16th century to establish His Church. They all have to justify their assumption that the gates of hell had prevailed against the hitherto existent Catholic Church, forcing them to abandon it, and set up other and different Churches, despite the very definite prediction of Christ that such a state of affairs would never arise. And they all have to account for their not having been in this world all days since Christ, to act in His name throughout the centuries. The English Baptists arrived on the scene 1611 years too late for that; the independently established American Baptists 1639 years too late.

13. Problem of Unity.

When we turn to the nature of the Church as understood by the Baptists, we find no real correspondence with the New Testament at all. As we have seen above {see Section 6. (B) }, the Congregationalist principle was adopted, each local group being independent of all others, and subject to no authority or discipline beyond that of its own making. And the result is, as we there pointed out, that there is no single and united Baptist Church, but only "Baptist Churches."

Now Christ Himself said, "I will build My Church," not "My Churches." And the right view is undoubtedly given by the Rev. Dr. Goudge, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. "In the New Testament," he writes, "believers in Christ, not members of the one visible Apostolic Church, are nowhere to be found. We hear, indeed, of 'the Churches' as well as of the Church, but these Churches are very different from 'the Churches' of which we hear today. The Churches of Galatia, or of Macedonia, are the Christian communities, all alike under St. Paul's authority, in the Galatian and Macedonian cities. . . . The relation of the Churches to the Church is like the relation of our local post-offices to the G.P.O. in London. There is only one Post Office, private enterprise not being here permitted. But the G.P.O. has its own local representatives in the towns and villages, and in dealing with them we are dealing with the Department itself. Everywhere in the New Testament the Church is one, and only one." "The Church of England and Reunion," p. 168.

Anglicans are not the only ones beginning to realize this. Writing as a Baptist, Mr. Hugh Martin says, "What is beyond question is the insistence of the New Testament upon unity as an essential mark of the Church. It is implicit in every metaphor used, and urged in the plainest terms in many places. Unity is inherent in the very idea of the Church, as the Gospel is one, and God is one. The central text of John 17, 21, provides no argument for any particular scheme of Church order: yet it speaks of a visible unity so expressed as to be discernible not only to the spiritual but to the world with the eyes of flesh. It is to be a unity manifested in terms understandable by the man in the street. '(I pray) that they may all be one: even as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that You did send me.' It is surely an unreal question which asks whether the Church is visible or invisible. The Church is, and must be, both." "*Christian Reunion*," pp. 67-68.

Though Mr. Martin declares this to be the plain teaching of the New Testament, the original founders of the Baptist movement overlooked it altogether. They thought only of an invisible Church composed of converted men and women bound together by no visible bonds of unity in the one Church at all. No single ecclesiastical authority was acknowledged. In the name of liberty, individuals and groups of individuals could claim independence of others. The result has been all kinds of variations, with no hope of any universal legislation, each new resultant sect still claiming the name of Baptist. An effort at integration has been made by the establishing of Conventions which are beginning to assert more and more authority over Churches affiliated with them; and a Baptist World Alliance was founded in London in 1905. But many Baptist Churches hold aloof from even these forms of association; whilst those who accept them retain their radical independence, so that no more than a voluntary agreement to co-operate for practical purposes is possible. But that is not the organic unity required by the New Testament. Hugh Martin admits that the New Testament demands “a visible unity... manifested in terms understandable by the man in the street.” Is it not significant that all men do recognize the visible and organic unity of the Catholic Church throughout the world? And is it not still more significant that they do not recognize it in any Churches other than the Catholic Church?

14. “Believer’s Baptism”

It may be said that although, as Church organizations, Baptists are independent of one another, existing as local and autonomous congregations, all are united in the doctrine of adult baptism only, and in the denial of the validity of infant baptism. Such united witness to one particular doctrine, however, would not make them the one organic body required by New Testament teaching; nor would it compensate for divergencies in other and more vital doctrinal matters.

But what if, leaving those considerations aside, the Baptist insistence on adult baptism only is erroneous? Yet, undoubtedly, this main feature of their religion is mistaken.

Baptists themselves have to admit that there is no express precept in the New Testament limiting baptism to adult believers only. Their doctrine is based entirely upon unjustified inferences, and upon an unwillingness to admit any inherent efficacy in sacramental rites. They quote the demand of John the Baptist, “Repent and be baptized”; and the teaching of Christ, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” They then infer that, because infants cannot believe and repent, they cannot validly receive baptism.

But they overlook the fact that both John the Baptist and Christ were addressing adults, in whom faith and repentance were absolutely necessary conditions for the reception of baptismal regeneration. The logical conclusion, in the light of baptismal teaching elsewhere in the New Testament, is that those who are not adults are not subject to those same conditions.

Meantime, far more solidly grounded is the inference that baptism, from the very beginning, was administered to infants. St. Paul tells us that baptism is the circumcision of Christians. (Coloss. 2, 2.) In the Old Law, circumcision was administered to infants. Is the New Law to be less perfect than the Old Law, containing no purifying rite for infants? Again, Acts Chapter 16 commemorates the baptism of two complete households into the Church by St. Paul; and there is no reason to suppose that those households were composed of adults only.

But the root difficulty is perhaps theological. Baptists are prejudiced against any idea of baptismal regeneration. They don’t see how a sacramental rite, even though instituted by Christ, can accomplish that. They insist that regeneration must take place by faith and repentance before baptism, the rite being but the symbol of a change of heart which has already occurred. Yet Christ Himself attributes the conferring of the new life of grace to the sacramental action itself. “Unless one be born again,” He says, “of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (Jn. 3, 5.) St. Paul, in turn, expressly declares that we are saved “by the washing of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost.” (Tit. 3, 5.) And who can believe that Christians from the very beginning, and through all the ages, fell into error on this vital point, and that it was left to the Anabaptists in Germany, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in England, and Roger Williams in America, after 16 centuries, to discover the real Christian truth?

Is it any wonder that Baptists themselves are becoming more and more uncertain of their position in regard to baptism? Their unscriptural doctrine is leading them to doubt even the necessity of baptism at all. Amongst them, many “open” Churches no longer insist upon it as a condition of membership; and it would be strange indeed if those who began by staking all on baptism, should end by neglecting it altogether.

15. Immersion.

Let us turn now to another aspect of this subject. In dealing with the way in which baptism should be administered, Baptists say that it must be by complete immersion, if it is to be valid. Since, according to their explanation, baptism does nothing, but only symbolizes a regeneration that has already happened, it is difficult to see how it really matters for them whether it is valid or not. Perhaps that is why they are becoming less insistent upon its reception at all.

However, they still insist that, if it be administered, it must be by immersion, arguing that the Greek word “to baptize” can mean only “to dip under”; that the New Testament, in every case, records baptism by immersion only; and that the symbolism of being buried with Christ and risen with Him to a new life is lost, if any method other than immersion be used. But are these assertions true?

The argument from the meaning of the Greek word “to baptize” has been definitely proved unfounded. In non-biblical Greek the word has been found to have a variety of meanings, being used for the staining of the fingers by fruit-juice, the tingeing of water by dyes, and the smearing of the hands with paint! In the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, the word is used for being “wet with the dew of heaven.” In New Testament Greek the word is used frequently in the sense of washing; and often metaphorically. Both Christ’s sufferings during His passion, and the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, are described as “baptisms.” Whilst, then, the Greek word “to baptize” can mean “to immerse,” it does not always and necessarily mean that.

As for the actual baptisms recorded in the New Testament, there is no certainty at all that they were by immersion. St. John the Baptist could have administered his rite by pouring water over people as they stood in the shallow waters near the banks of the Jordan. After St. Peter’s first sermon over 3000 people were baptized then and there in Jerusalem, and research into the water-supply of the city at that time shows that immersion would have been practically impossible. St. Paul himself was baptized in the house of Ananias. He, later on, whilst in prison, baptized his gaoler there. In neither case would the circumstances permit immersion. Nor should very ill, and dying persons, be refused baptism on the plea that they could not be taken from their sick-beds to be immersed.

Historically, it is absolutely certain that from the very beginning Christians acknowledge as a valid alternative to immersion the pouring of water upon those to be baptized; and they knew that the spiritual symbolism of burial and resurrection with Christ was fully realized in the washing away of the death of sin, and the rising to the new life of grace.

Here again, also, it is impossible to believe that the whole Christian Church had fallen into error for centuries, and that it was left to the Baptists to discover the real truth only after 1600 years! And would it not be strange that, if baptism by immersion be the only valid form, the very founders of the Baptist movement in Europe should have been ignorant of the fact? If the Holy Spirit is responsible for the Baptist doctrine that adult baptism alone is valid, why did not the same Holy Spirit make it clear to the founders, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, that the rite would be null and void unless it were administered by immersion? Yet neither of them knew anything of this. Both of them received re-baptism by having water poured upon them; and both conferred the rite on others in the same way. John Smyth died in 1612; Thomas Helwys in 1616. The Particular Baptists decided in 1644 that immersion was essential; the General Baptists in 1650. And for the teaching that immersion is essential there is no real warrant at all.

16. Baptists Miss Out!

This booklet has dealt chiefly with the history and the positive affirmations of the Baptists, by which they believe themselves justified in maintaining their own Churches, apart and distinct from the Catholic Church. But, besides this positive aspect of the situation, there is also a negative aspect, their rejection of the teachings and practices proper to Catholicism. In other words, a Baptist would explain his inability to become a Catholic, not only by asserting his belief in doctrines which the Catholic Church rejects, but also by his lack of belief in many teachings which that Church affirms.

Now it would be impossible in this small booklet to undertake an exposition of those specifically Catholic doctrines and practice, which seem unacceptable to Baptists, giving all the reasons for them, and answering difficulties concerning them. This booklet, after all, is intended to be an examination of the Baptist position, not of the Catholic position. A positive study of Catholicism, therefore, should be sought elsewhere.

But if what has been said in these pages brings out the weakness of the Baptist claims, suggesting need of their serious re-consideration, it would be wrong not to suggest also where the truth is to be found which all men of goodwill desire. To discover that one is walking in a wrong direction is not necessarily to know the right direction. And it is the latter, above all, which one really needs to know. It is to be found in the Catholic religion.

17. Conclusion.

Historically, scripturally, and logically, no form of Protestantism can stand. Each of the forms of Protestantism, amongst which the Baptist congregations belong, originated at least sixteen centuries too late to be the Church given to the world by Christ Himself. All claim to be based upon the Bible alone, although the Bible itself does not claim to contain an adequate and complete account of the Christian revelation; and all work on the fallacious principle that each reader can infallibly arrive at the true sense of what is written in the Bible, without need of any authoritative guidance from the Church. Yet the fruits of that principle in practice have been doctrinal chaos and endless divisions, with none of the consistency demanded by truth, and no trace of the unity amongst themselves which should characterize the followers of Christ.

On the other hand, historically, the Catholic Church alone goes right back to Christ and the Apostles, and can alone inherit the promise He made that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church, and that He would be with her all days even till the end of the world; scripturally, the Catholic Church alone is in complete accord with all that is contained in God's Word; alone manifests that consistency in her teachings which truth demands; alone exhibits that unity amongst all her members throughout the world to be expected of the one fold under one shepherd Christ intended His Church to be. She alone claims to know her own mind infallibly, and to offer men the certainty to be expected of a divinely-established Church. In her, the teaching, sanctifying, and controlling powers of the Apostles for the spiritual welfare of men have been continued by uninterrupted succession; powers which should be available to Christians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as to those of the first, or of any other age in the Christian era. In her is found the perfection of the sacrificial worship of God instituted by Christ Himself, and all seven sacramental channels provided by Him for the more certain and efficacious transmission of grace to the souls of men.

The Catholic Church alone, then, can substantiate her claims to be the one completely true form of the Christian religion in this world; she alone can tell us definitely what is to be believed and to be done by those who desire really to follow Christ; she alone can offer us all the necessary spiritual helps in the way of guidance, inspiration, and assistance, to know the full truth, and live it in our daily lives. Brilliant scholars throughout the ages have found in the Catholic Church the light and truth to satisfy their souls; the holiest saints have walked along her ways to perfection; weak and frail sinners have found her ever ready to dispense mercy and forgiveness in the Name of God, and to offer renewed hope of salvation to those in need of the Heavenly Physician. To be content with anything less than the Catholic religion is to be content with far too little; with far less than Christ, Our Lord and Our Redeemer, intended us to possess.

Such words may seem strange to those whose ideas of the Catholic Church have been different from these, or even quite opposed to them. But if Protestants have good reasons for doubting the soundness of their own position, is there not room for doubt also as to the correctness of the impressions they have been given, or have formed for themselves concerning Catholicism? And is not the very statement of the Catholic claims an invitation to an earnest and prayerful study of them? Tens of thousands of converts to the Catholic Church will tell you that to yield to that invitation will be seen in later life to have been the first step towards the fulness of the light, refreshment, and peace Christ came to bestow upon the souls of men.

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