

The Place of Baptists in the Christian Church.

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The place of the Baptist people in the Christian church is to be determined by the potency of the Baptist principle for Christian service. The Baptist people are what their essential principle has made them. What they have wrought has been accomplished under its impulse. If they have helped to somewhat clarify the thinking, and spiritualize the life of the Christian church; if they have rendered a distinguished service in setting wide the bounds of civil and religious liberty; if they have been path-finders in evangelism and life-leaders in missionary activity, it is because, as a people, they have been dominated by one grand and overmastering religious idea. In that they have lived their life; from that they have received their character; by that they have obtained their place.

The Baptist denomination is not an accident, nor an incident, nor an experiment; it is the normal development and permanent embodiment of a great Christian principle.

The essential Baptist principle, as I apprehend it, is this: An acute and vivid consciousness of the Sovereignty of Christ, accompanied by a steadfast determination to secure its complete and consistent recognition throughout the world and in all the works and ways of men.

This, for us, is the master fact of religious experience. It is the nerve centre of our denominational sensibility. It is the spinal column of our theology. It is the bed rock of our church policy. It is the main-spring of our missionary activity. It is the sheet anchor of our hope. It is the crown of our rejoicing. "For to this end Christ both died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living." From this germinant conception all our distinctive denominational principles emerge. As the oak springs from the acorn, so our many branched Baptist life is developed from this seed thought. Baptist Christianity lives and moves and has its being in the realm of the doctrine of the Sovereignty of Christ.

From this conception we derive our root idea of Christianity. In its last analysis, Christianity means, to us, the union of a human life with Jesus Christ; this union involving on the one hand a relation of personal Saviourhood and sovereignty, and on the other a relation of personal trust and love and loyalty. This is Christianity stated in terms of its irreducible minimum.

Now this conception is one that carries with it, inextricably, the Baptist doctrine of Individualism. To Christ, and to Christ alone, the individual must stand or fall. There can be no proxy in the matter. There can be no sponsorial performance of religious obligations. It is no more possible for one person to believe or disbelieve in another's behalf than to go to heaven or hell for him. There must be personal repentance, personal faith, personal confession of Christ's name.

This doctrine of individualism has found conspicuous expression and application along two bright and indelible lines of Baptist witness-bearing. In the first place it has made us always and everywhere

AN ANTI-RITUALISTIC PEOPLE.

From first to last we have uttered our steady protestation against all soul reliance upon ceremonial observances. We could do no other. Our fundamental principle lays the axe at the root of all sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. The undelimited sovereignty of Christ renders it forever impossible that the saving grace should be manipulated by any system of man mediation. That union with Christ which is the soul of Christianity, is a union effected by the sovereign operation of the Holy Ghost in the immediate bestowment of divine Grace. Any interposition of ecclesiastical machinery, whether sacraments, or priesthoods, or discipline, or ritual, is a manifest impertinence. It is necessarily and always a usurpation and a wrong. "There is one God, one mediator also between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus." It is not by way of consecrated water, or oil, or bread, or wine, that grace comes to man, Salvation is not by magic. It is by the direct impact of the Christ life upon the human soul. Wherever man puts out the dry fleece of an appealing faith it is soaked by the direct descent of the dew of grace. In the light of the Mediatorial Lordship of Christ, all doctrines of baptismal regeneration and priestly absolution become, not merely meaningless fictions, but unconscious defamations of the crown rights of the Son of God. That has been our Baptist testimony throughout the ages. Hierarchies there have been and are, whose colossal pretensions obscure this truth, and whose far flung shadows fall dark upon the paths of men. So long as the last shade of a shadow of the doctrine of man-mediated grace lingers on the earth, our Baptist mission remains unfulfilled.

In the second place, our doctrine of individualism, under the sovereignty of Christ, has made us the unwavering and strenuous, if sometimes lonely,

CHAMPIONS OF SOUL LIBERTY.

In our postulate of soul liberty we affirm the right of every human being to exemption in matters of

faith and conscience from all coercion or intimidation by any earthly authority whatsoever. Our demand has been, not simply for religious toleration, but religious liberty; not sufferance merely, but freedom; and that, not for ourselves alone, but for all men. We did not stumble upon the doctrine. It inheres in the very essence of our belief. Christ is Lord of all. Every attempt to put the conscience in thrall to human authority is lese majeste to the King of Kings, and a negation of the privileges and responsibilities conferred by him upon the individual soul.

The conscience is the servant only of God and is not subject to the will of man. This truth has indestructible life. Crucify it and the third day it will rise again. Bury it in a sepulchre and the stone will be rolled away while the keepers become as dead men.

With reference to this great principle we can clearly claim a thoroughgoing consistency. Steadfastly refusing to bend our own necks under the yoke of bondage, we have scrupulously withheld our hands from imposing that yoke upon others. Baptists are the one considerable religious body in the world, with three centuries of history behind them, who can claim to have been a non-persecuting people from first to last. Of martyr blood our hands are clean. We have never invoked the sword of temporal power to aid the sword of the Spirit. We have never passed an ordinance inflicting a civic disability on any man because of his religious views, be he Protestant or Papist, Jew or Turk or Infidel. In this regard there is no blot on our escutcheon.

It has been in behalf of soul liberty, primarily, that we have ever stood for

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.

In our deep conviction, the union of these two institutions represents the most baneful mis-alliance of the ages. Whether the state be grafted upon the church or the church upon the state, the fruit therefrom is alike "ate with impoisonment and stung with fire."

"One of the anomalies of history is that Protestants, 'coming out of the Roman Catholic Church, with loud complaints against her tyrannies, so speedily and so greedily copied and emulated her repressive measures.'" Over the whole field swept by the Reformation movement Protestant State Churchism soon reigned supreme. Luther and Melancthon imposed it upon Germany; Zwingli and Calvin rivited it upon Switzerland; Knox and his associates fastened it upon Scotland; Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII. bound the accursed incubus upon the life of England, to which it clings relentlessly and oppressively until this day. At this very moment, minions of the State Church, booted and spurred, are trying to ride the Nonconformist conscience of England under the saddle of an unrighteous school law; in the hope of driving the lambs of Nonconformity into the fold of the establishment. True, they do not find it easy going. Already they are pounding hard in the saddle. Unless all signs fail, saddle and riders will soon be in the ditch, while Nonconformity a little sore, perhaps, but still sturdy and fit, will be found keeping the middle of the road.

We who are delegates to this Congress from over the seas, desire to express the deep satisfaction we feel in that, at this crisis, it has fallen to the English Baptists to give to Nonconformity its outstanding champion and acknowledged leader in the person of their own hero, prophet, and patriot, Dr. John Clifford. No cause could ask a more gallant and intrepid leader. No leader could command a more intense and absolute love-loyalty. In the year of grace 1905, John Clifford is the Prime Minister of England.

And what could be more fitting than that a Baptist should lead in such a cause as this? Baptists created the conscience of this country on the subject of soul liberty. They wrought in advance of their times. As far back as 1611 they formulated the doctrine of non-magisterial interference in religious matters. The earliest work on soul liberty published in the English language was issued by them in 1614—"Religion's Peace, or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience." During the next fifty years so numerous were their publications on this subject that one of their bitterest opponents said, "The presses groan and sweat under the load." And all the while they fought a lonely fight. Their doctrine was sneered at as "a religious paradox", and a raving delirium." It was execrated as "a pestilent error," and "a damnable heresy." But they faltered not. The constant Baptist witnessing fell like a steady rain upon the iron hills of state church pride, and upon the rich wild tracts of a partially developed Nonconformity. Decade after decade, century after century, it has soaked this soil, until today, a mighty river of intelligent, passionate, popular conviction in favor of absolute religious liberty rolls through this land. Upon that river all our ships some day shall ride, and by it all our fields be fertilized.

The brightest chapter of Baptist achievement has, however, been enacted, not in the old world, but in the new. The old spirit of religious intolerance crossed the Atlantic in the "Mayflower." The Pilgrim Fathers were no lambs fleeing from the slaughter. With them it was a question of whose ox was being gored. Their own ox had been gored long enough. They would provide him with a new pas-

ture and an extensive stamping ground. But they had no thought of dehorning him in the interest of universal soul liberty. The Puritans who settled the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1628 were another people but of a similar spirit, and the two soon blended. Together they established, not a state church so much as a church state, in which citizenship was conditioned upon churchmembership. There, then, for a season, was the spectacle of Congregationalism established by law, coercing all into conformity therewith, forbidden all dissent, and enforcing its prohibitions by penalties of disfranchisement, fine, imprisonment, scourging and banishment. But the monstrosity was short lived. The mixture of iron and clay soon crumbled. But nothing was its downfall hastened so much as by the "Passive Resistance" of Baptists within the colony, and their constructive work beyond its bounds. In 1636 Roger Williams, fleeing from oppression in Massachusetts, settled Providence, and obtained a charter which provided that no person was to be in any wise molested, punished, or called in question for any religious opinion.

It may be remembered that Lord Baltimore, a Roman Catholic, under charter from Charles the First, had in 1635 settled a colony in what is now known as Maryland, on what purported to be a basis of religious liberty, but it was liberty with a string to it, and a short string at that. It provided liberty for Christians only. In granting the charter Charles had expressly provided that members of the Church of England should be protected in the exercise of their religion. In 1649 at the instance of Lord Baltimore, to his credit be it said, equal security was guaranteed, "to all believers in Jesus Christ." This was a great advance upon the Massachusetts situation, but how far it was from liberty of conscience may be seen by the proviso that "Whatsoever person shall blaspheme God, or shall deny, or shall reproach the Holy Trinity, or any of the three persons thereof, shall be punished by death." In the Rhode Island colony, however, there were no restrictions, and there, for the first time in the history of the world was a civil government whose corner stone was absolute soul liberty.

Bancroft, speaking of the part played by Roger Williams in the cause of liberty, writes thus: (Vol. page 254 and 255.) "At the time when Germany was desolated by the implacable wars of religion, when even Holland could not pacify vengeful sects, when France was still to go through the fearful struggle of bigotry; when England was gasping under the despotism of intolerance; almost half a century before William Penn became an American proprietor; and while Descartes was constructing modern philosophy on the method of free reflection—Roger Williams asserted the great doctrine of intellectual liberty, and made it the corner stone of a political institution. . . . The principles which he first asserted amid the bickerings of a colonial parish, next sustained in the general court of Massachusetts, and then introduced into the wilds of Narragansett Bay, he found occasion in 1644 to publish in England, and to defend as the basis of the religious freedom of mankind; so that borrowing the language employed by his antagonists in derision, we may compare him to the lark, the pleasant bird of the peaceful summer, that, 'affecting to soar aloft, springs upward from the ground, takes his rise from pale to tree, and at last utters his clear carols through the skies of the morning.'" He was the first person in modern Christendom to establish civil government on the doctrine of the liberty of conscience, the equality of opinions before the law; and in its defence he was the Harbinger of Milton, the precursor and the superior of Jeremy Taylor."

The time allotted to this paper will not permit me to further trace in detail the story of the struggle in the new world. Suffice it to say that owing to the lynx-eyed vigilance with which the Baptist people watched against the possibility of a state connection with the church, the Constitution of the United States, as adopted in 1787 declared: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office in the United States." Lest this should prove inadequate as a safeguard of liberty, it was amended, upon the petition of the Virginia Baptists to read: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That is America's chiefest contribution to the art of government and the science of politics. It is, to a very large extent, a Baptist achievement.

The world must not be permitted to forget what the Baptist doctrine of soul liberty, broadening into the conception of personal liberty and finding expression in the ordinances of civil liberty has wrought for the emancipation of mankind. "Individuality in relation to God and Christ and salvation, the Scriptures and judgment and eternity, conducts by an irresistible sequence to freedom of thought and speech and press, to popular government, to unfettered scientific investigation, to universal education. Soul liberty cannot be dissevered from civil freedom." All modern reforms in government, broadening from the few to the many can be traced to the recognition more or less complete of this great principle.

No man ever appreciated this fact more fully than the unschooled but eloquent William Knibb, who carried the Fiery Cross of Freedom through these British Islands; who applied the torch of his burning enthusiasm to the train which had been laid by Wilber-

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