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THE POSITION OF BAPTISTS, AS A DENOMINATION IN THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE EASTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, CONVENED AT PUGWASH, JULY 4TH, 1868, TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Beloved Brethren,—

It shall be our endeavour on the present occasion to indicate the position that we, as a denomination hold in the christian brotherhood. We can easily show that we are a peculiar people; in some respects indeed identified with all evangelical christians, but in others separated from them. The subject suggested is worthy our gravest consideration;—and more especially at such a time as this, when, not only in political circles, but also in the sphere of religious influences, opinions revolutionary in their tendencies are being proclaimed and accepted; when men's minds impatient of restraint are breaking away from the shackles of creeds, and over-leaping the ancient boundaries of thought; when we perceive an increasing desire for license to reject all that is old, and to embrace whatever is new, and when there is so much danger that the good shall be thrown away with the bad, when religious systems are being so thoroughly discussed, and their very foundations subjected to tests that must prove their merits or their worthlessness at such a time, it surely becomes us as Baptists to look well to ourselves, and the ground we occupy. This accords with the dictates of reason and prudence. It is exceedingly important that we should know our real position, that we should compare it with what is required in the word of God, so that we may retain more tenaciously whatever is scriptural, and reject all that is not.

We are an ancient people.—Do others boast of their antiquity?—we, more. We are older than those Baptists who suffered for their opinions in the first British Colonies of America;—older than the Mennonites of Holland or their reputed ancestors the Waldenses;—older than the ancient Paulicians or suffering Patarines;—older than those Donatists and Novatians who hated, maligned and persecuted, were, nevertheless, among the purest and most scriptural in their times. We look for our origin beyond the days of Tertullian who faithfully resisted Pedobaptism in its first beginning, and contended for purity of church membership; and, since the word expressing the initiatory ordinance cannot in fairness, bear any other meaning than immersion, and since the New Testament does not teach that baptism is to be administered in unconscious infancy, and since it does clearly teach that believers are thus to put on Christ, we may, without presumption, trace our descent, through the line of the apostles, to Christ the Great Head of the church! This claim is ours, irrespective of such historians as Mosheim, who avers "the true origin of the Baptist denomination is hid in the remote depths of antiquity," or of the historians in the Netherlands, who assert that "the Baptists may be considered as of old, the only religious community which has continued from the times of the Apostles." Not that we find any ancient records of a people bearing our present name, for it is to be observed that while the more recent sects of note, retain, generally the name they took at first, those professing sentiments in common with ourselves have existed through all the periods of the church's history under various designations. In the New Testament they are called "disciples," "Christians," "saints," "Holy brethren," &c. Some of our times, who hold the most pernicious errors, seek to cloak themselves under a scripture appellation; but let us remember that a name cannot conceal, or excuse an error. Let it be ours to retain the doctrines and to honor the precepts enforced in the word of God, in the defence of which our brethren from the times of the apostles have suffered, many of them unto death.

We have no connection with the State:—we do not acknowledge its jurisdiction in religious matters. From no documents or records does it appear that churches holding our views ever had any organic connection with the State. Against this they have always protested. They must of necessity do so, because they are followers of Him whose kingdom is not of this world. Whatever sins may be charged against us as a people that of "fornication with the kings of the earth" can never be preferred. To remain in the true apostolic succession, we must ever be free from such an unholy union, from its bondage and corrupting tendencies.

Baptist churches claim to be independent in the management of their affairs, and in the exercise of discipline. They are indeed "under law," but it is to Christ;—they acknowledge the right to obey—but it is in obedience to God, and not to man. The defer to counsels, but they must be those of the "All wise God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

We dare not erect the barriers of caste in the church, nor permit one, nor a body of men, the exercise of hierarchical authority, for we belong to a kingdom whose sovereign is Christ Jesus, and which bestows the highest honors upon those who humble themselves to be the servants of all. "It appears plainly from the sacred narrative," says Archbishop Whately, "that though the many churches which the Apostles founded, were branches of our spiritual brotherhood,

which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Heavenly Head—though there was "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," for all of them, yet they were each a distinct, heavenly community on earth, united by the common principles on which they were founded and by their mutual agreement, affection, and respect, but not having any recognized head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of these societies over others." We can employ no more appropriate language as descriptive of our Baptist polity. The bond of love must unite the individual members of the same church. Each church must be a unit, and joined by the same bond to all the rest, so as to secure the harmony of faith and action in the body;—the same heavenly principle must centre the whole in Christ and bind all to Him as the only source of authority and power.

We strive for a regenerated church membership. We believe that none but new-born souls have any place in the church of Christ. This proposition we have defended in every period of our history. We might mention the Donatists of the 4th century, who "maintained that the church ought to be made up of just or holy men;" or the Waldenses, who from the times of Calvin, have manifested a preference for Presbyterianism, but who originally asserted in the strongest terms the baptizing of believers, and denied that of infants." We would, as far as human knowledge permits, have the church of Christ composed of those only, who are, previous to their admission, members of the kingdom of heaven, through faith in Christ Jesus. This, in our imperfect state, is of course impossible, but the nearer we approach to it, the more closely shall we copy the primitive model. There are other communities with us on this vital point; we welcome such as laborers together with us in the effort to maintain a spiritual religion against the zealous, and alas! too successful endeavours of many in our day to undermine the evangelic faith.

We are peculiar in our views with reference to the design of baptism. Nearly all others connect saving grace with the administration of the ordinance. Some pronounce the baptized, regenerate, others assert that baptism washes away original sin, and others, that by baptism we are introduced into the covenant of grace;—while a more recent sect declares baptism to be a condition of the remission of sins. If either of these opinions be correct, then the unbaptized, whatever proofs of piety they give us, are unregenerate, or they can claim no right to the blessings promised in the covenant, or their sins are unforgiven. If such a conclusion is unfounded, we should surely regard that view of baptism, which upholds it as subversive of godliness, and opposed to the declaration of scripture, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." The advocates of baptismal efficacy betray a feature more or less closely resembling that of the "apostolic church," which denies the doctrine of justification by faith, and boldly declares that baptism regenerates. This fact so impressed the mind of that profound philosopher, Sir Isaac Newton, that, as Whiston, his biographer, declares, he frequently expressed his conviction that "the Baptists were the only christians, who had never symbolised with the church of Rome." This agrees with the statement of the Roman Catholic bishop of New Jersey, that "there are but two denominations of Christians in America, the Roman Catholics and the Baptists."

There is still another feature that is worth while to note—it is our unchangeableness. The word of God needs no alteration to adapt itself to the varied state of society. It must remain entire as God's only revelation to man, until the end. Abiding by the scriptures we cannot change. We have no laws to amend, no fresh enactments to make. Should we ever presume to legislate for the church, we should lose at once our distinctive character, and become unworthy our name and profession. And yet how often do we hear of changes in the codes of laws, by which certain churches are regulated; changes affecting the mode of worship, the manner of administering the ordinance of baptism, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and christian doctrine. This very circumstance is suspicious. What! is not the divine Word a sufficient guide? Once beginning to legislate for the church at what point shall we stop? with one step of departure from the scripture rule, are we not likely to get farther and farther away? are we not on the road to entire renunciation of the sacred oracles.

We have thus far tried briefly to indicate our position. We have not been exhaustive in our delineation of Baptist principles, but we have, we trust, given an outline sufficiently distinct to show the reasonableness of our dissent from other religious bodies.

But we must not only retain the organism of the primitive church, and defend the "faith once delivered to the saints;" we must also exhibit the spirit of the early christians. Without this our boast of apostolicity is only pompous declaration. The life of religion is better than its forms. The husk derives its value from the grain it protects, but when this is gone the chaff may well be consumed.

We look into the New Testament to discover the constitution of the christian church, we compare our own and find a similarity of feature. Thus far, good. We look again and mark the character of those early christians, their love for the truth, the sanctity of their lives, the simplicity of their manners, their patience under sufferings, their constancy in times of persecution; but when we compare these with the state of our own churches, we find it difficult to trace the resemblance. We have successors of those noble ones, "of whom the world was not worthy," who

would die rather than deny their Lord, whose lives are ornaments of the christian profession; but as a general rule, piety is at a low ebb. The great majority of professing christians live in the world as though they were of it. The world and the church seem to have proclaimed a truce, and resolved to dwell together in amity. Why, we would inquire, is it that the ministers of the Gospel are so poorly provided for? Why is it that the prayer meeting is so much despised? Why do so many slight the Lord's Supper? Why do so many places famish for the bread of life? Why is it that so many destitute churches ask in vain for pastors to instruct and guide them? Why is the cry of the perishing heathen so little regarded? Why are the treasuries of our Missionary Boards, and Institutions of learning, so inadequately supplied? Why are there so few young men offering themselves for the christian ministry? Why is it that now in the ministry there is so much evidence that the sacred calling is but slightly esteemed? Let us, dear brethren, deal faithfully with ourselves, as those who must be judged by the Lord Jesus. Let us honestly seek the solution of these, and similar questions that suggest themselves with an earnest desire to fill up whatever is lacking, and to correct whatever is wrong.

That the ranks of the ministry are not filled, is not for the lack of young men. We have them to send abroad in search of wealth. We have them in abundance for the professions, and for every department of industry. That our benevolent institutions are not fully sustained, cannot be the result of poverty. We have wealth in our farms, wealth stored in our warehouses, and wealth upon the sea. We expend every year for our personal comfort more than we give to God. Fine houses, fine carriages, fine dresses abound. Do not these betoken wealth? Not always, as every one knows; but they do this much, they expose the falsehood so frequently uttered, "I have nothing to give."

Our great want is vital godliness. Here lies the true cause of complaint. We lack the degree of spirituality that is essential to the proper development of the christian character and without which we shall be unable to accomplish our heaven-appointed mission. Our pastors, and evangelists need a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit, that they may preach the gospel with greater earnestness and power. Our young men need large measures of grace, to withstand the flattering allurements presented to them in the world, and to impel them into the gospel ministry. O that more of them were filled with a burning desire to proclaim the glad tidings! O that more were willing to endure a life of toil and poverty, if it must be so, for the sake of winning souls! Our churches need reviving influences to raise them to a higher sphere of activity;—they require a more thorough conversion to God, a conversion that will turn over to the service of Christ the treasured wealth that belongs of right to Him. We all need more of Christ in our sermons and exhortations, in our hearts and in our lives. This is the grand specific, the unfailing remedy—the sum of all that can be desired for this world, or needed for the world to come. This to us is an absolute necessity. A church in union with the State, does not depend for its existence upon its religious life. A church that derives its members through infant baptism, may increase in numbers by natural generation. A church that does not make the new-birth a pre-requisite to membership may preserve its name and form, apart from the Spirit's presence and power. This with a Baptist church, is an impossibility. With the departure of spiritual life, nothing is left that is worth retaining we must write "Ichabod" upon our walls. We will not, however, yield to despondency. A faithful God will not forsake his people. His merciful intentions appear by the recent manifestations of grace in our churches. We have confidence in our principles—we have faith in God. Let us seek a higher consecration to his service. Let us contend for the faith in the strength of Christ, and the victory is ours.

For the Christian Messenger.

United States Correspondence.

Madison this week has had its commencement. This University has a distinguished denominational reputation. In its Baptist sentiments are earnestly cherished, and by its Alumni they are as widely promulgated. It was originated and founded by that same class of noble men to whom Acadia College owes its existence, and under circumstances that were precisely similar. Precious memories cluster around it, with it are connected the most sacred associations, in it are granaried some of the choicest denominational treasures. From it have come a most noble ministry.

The war had a depleting influence on Madison. Some of its noblest sons gave themselves for their country. Their heroic sacrifices can never be forgotten. In the nation's heart their memory is embalmed. Their deeds are recorded in imperishable history. While freedom is valued, and love of country is cherished, their devotion to each will reflect honor on their College.

Since their departure none of the classes have been large, now a healthy increase is apparent. Most of the students are from Baptist families. Of the present number over a hundred have the ministry in view, twenty of whom hope in a foreign field to spend their days. Thus, as at first, and in all its past history, the institution is a "school of the prophets," and the prayers of its founders are answered. Next year is