A HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS

TRACED BY THEIR VITAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION.

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A HISTORY of the Baptists should be understood in its objects and aims; and cleared, in the beginning, of misapprehension and perversion. It is not the history of a nationality, a race, an organization, but of a people 'traced by their vital principles and gospel practices.' The unity to be exhibited and demonstrated was not brought about by force, by coercion of pains and penalties, by repressive and punitive Acts of Conformity; but by the recognition and adoption of a common authoritative and completed divine standard.

The error of many previous attempts has consisted in the assumption that a *Church* and *Christianity* were identical. We have had numerous and voluminous histories of Churches and creeds; and untold abuses have resulted from confounding them with Christ's people, and with New Testament doctrines and practices. This *petitio principii* [1] has been the source of much evil. Its hurtful influence has been seen and felt in the arrogant pretensions of these 'Churches,' their alliance with and use of *civil authority*, the abuses which have come from unrestrained and irresponsible power; and in the revulsion and extreme rebound of persons and communities, when reason and conscience and science and patriotism have exposed the deceptiveness of claims, and the hungering soul has had no satisfying response to its clamors for the bread of life. Many infidels have taken refuge in deism, atheism, or agnosticism, because in their ignorance they supposed the 'Church,' as they saw it, to be the embodiment of Christianity, the authorized exponent of Jesus Christ. Much of the ridicule of priest-craft and denial of the inspiration of the Scriptures is directly traceable to the corruption of the clergy, to *autos-da-fé*, [2] to the churchly opposition to science, and support of political tyranny and kingly wrongs. The genesis of the painful skepticism, so abundant in France, Spain, and Italy, one need not search far to find. *'Le Clericalisme, voila l'ennemi'* is the belief of many.[3]

Bossuet [4] advised Catholics, in their controversies with Protestants, to begin with the Church. A Church — in its idea, attributes, organization, membership, officers, and ordinances — has been the battle-ground of ecclesiastical and religious dispute. And literature, thought, public opinion, government, manners, and worship, have been so much affected and controlled by these disputes, that it is not easy now to bring back a discussion, or to confine it, to the real, primal, essential question.

The idea of a New Testament Church is more subjective than objective. A Church is not an *a priori* organization, as innate ideas are *a priori*.

It is not an antecedent agency or instrumentality for the conversion of men. Men are not members by natural birth, by inheritance, by legislative act, or by priestly rite. Believers are

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[1] *petitio principii*: begging the question (presupposing the truth of what is claimed).

[2] *autos-da-fé* – the burning of a heretic by the Spanish Inquisition.

[3] '*Clericalism*, behold: here is the enemy'

[4] Jacques-Bénigne Lignel Bossuet (1627-1704) was a French bishop and theologian in the court of king Louis XIV.

not made such by the *opus operatum* [5] of Church ordinances. They dwell in Christ, and Christ dwells in them by the consciousness of grace imparted. They came together into the primitive Churches by an elective affinity, an inwrought spiritual aptitude and capacity; and they constituted a brotherhood of the baptized, a holy fellowship of the redeemed, a community of regenerated men and women, united to one another by the same animating spirit. A New Testament Church, the apostolic model, was a result, a product, an evolution from antecedent facts and principles. The Christ did not constitute a Church in advance of preaching and salvation and baptism, and endow it with powers and functions to execute the great commission. As the apostles and disciples preached, men and women heard, believed, and were baptized. The believers, coming together in local assemblies, were empowered to perform certain acts for edification and usefulness. These simple organizations, in the early days of Christianity, were the divinely approved Churches. A Church is no more a pre-ordained agency — an exterior antecedent instrumentality for saving men and women — than the fruit is a pre-existing agency for propagating its kind. Both are evolutions and necessities in the wisdom and providence of God. Churches, with their membership, organizations, officers, and ordinances, are evolved from certain elemental principles — the logical and spiritual consequences of regeneration, faith, love, and obedience.

The evolution is none the less such because scriptural precepts can be *produced*. For in the sense in which the word is used, these commands are evolutions of the wisdom and grace of *God*. It is readily seen how too much importance can be attached to forms, and organizations, and officers. Christ taught *truth*, promulgated *ideas*, sowed *seed* — character, life, organism, union, then followed. Philosophy, politics, science, religion, are valuable not as the outcome of a pre-ordained scheme, but as the product and growth of correlated thought, actualized ideas, principles, abstractions, put into concrete, vitalized forms. The moral and spiritual should precede and dominate the physical, just as ideas precede form and organism. Whatever is durable, immortal — whatever conduces to man's well-being, to the development of humanity — that which had its genesis in divine thought — *must* in its ultimate analysis, be traceable to fundamental principles, to eternal verities. Civilization, government, religion, must be imperfect, ephemeral, and fail of their noblest end, if they are not based on an intelligent and cordial adoption of the right, the true, and the imperishable. In so far as mere *expediency* controls, there will be superficiality, imperfectness, and failure. A Christian Church must come from the divine thought, and seek the divine end. A Church in the true New Testament idea, so originated and wrought out, presents a perfect ideal, ever stimulating, beckoning onward and upward, never perfectly attained. It exalts God's word, magnifies Christ's work, relies on the Spirit's presence and power, individualizes and honors man, teaches his personal responsibility and privileges, and necessitates his completest moral and mental development.

INDIVIDUALISM runs through New Testament Christianity. The RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT in religious matters, the requirement of PERSONAL FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, leads inevitably to *civil freedom*. Individuality in relation to God and Christ and salvation, the Scriptures and judgment and eternity, conducts us 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 man's personal relations to God — and to the rejection of sponsors, priests, and mediators in faith and obedience and study. Intense religious activity quickens enterprise

[5] *Opus operatum*: the work wrought.

in all proper directions. Free thought on grand religious problems, awakens thought on other topics. Communion with the King of kings, free and constant and invited access to Him, makes one feel that the artificial distinctions of earth are transitory, and that a joint heir with the Christ is superior in freedom and nobleness and possibilities, to any sovereign on the throne of the Caesars.

New Testament Churches, in their idea and ends, have been perverted. From various causes, they have degenerated into human organizations, and have been so assimilated into States and Nations as to be scarcely distinguishable from the kingdoms of this world. The tests or marks of a State would not be inapplicable to 'The Church' as it has acted, or claimed to act. It has been bound into a body politic, has exercised independent sovereignty and control over all persons and things within its boundaries, through the medium of a common government; has entered into international relations with other political communities; has represented itself by ambassadors and legates; has partitioned continents and oceans; has interfered in successions; has acquired territory; has been known by all the *indicia* of temporal authority. Becoming a secular power, it has claimed equal authority over many distinct kingdoms; exacted from their citizens an allegiance upon oath above that which the municipal law of their own country could impose; claimed Empires as fiefs; exacted oaths of vassalage and collected feudal revenues, absolved sovereigns and subjects from their oaths; claimed for the persons and the property of the officers it employed, and the law by which they were to be governed, a *status* wholly distinct from that of the subjects of the country where such officers were; stirred up crusades against refractory kings and republics, against schismatical princes, against pagans, against heretics; through the INQUISITION it has 'secured to the *ecclesiastical* authority, the arm of the *secular* power, without any right of inquiry or intervention as a condition of its use;' and put infidelity to the *Church* on the same footing as rebellion against the *throne*. All along, through twelve centuries, Churches have claimed the right to enter into alliances with civil governments, to direct executive, legislative and judicial action, and to use the power of the State for the execution of their decrees.

The claim of a Church to universal dominion — like the claim of Spain and Portugal — is based on papal grants, to the exclusive navigation, commerce, and fisheries of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is, however, just as reasonable as the pretense that a parish can be set off by metes and bounds, or that a territorial area can be assigned to a particular minister to exercise exclusive ecclesiastical and spiritual functions therein. The assertion of a Church, or of a man, to supremacy over human conscience and judgments, is even less defensible than a claim to special occupancy of land and water. Some nations have been driven to renounce, as against another, a right to parts of the ocean — but a man, made in the image of the Creator, cannot surrender his inalienable liberty of worship, or his right of free thought.

The continuity of a Church is *not* like that of a State. There is little analogy between the two. One *cannot* by natural birth, by inheritance, by purchase, or by the will of the flesh, become a member of the kingdom of Christ. A State may change its form of civil constitution from a monarchy or an aristocracy, to a republic or to any imaginable shape; but it does not lose its personality, nor forfeit its rights, nor become discharged from its obligations. France under President Grevy, is also the France of Napoleon, or Louis XIV. It retains its identity through all mutations. The corporate body succeeds to the rights and obligations of its predecessor. *'Idem enim est populus Romanus; sub regibus, consulibus, imperatoribus.'* [6] It would require a vast stretch of credulity or ignorance to imagine the hierarchies of the present day to be the same as the Churches to which Paul wrote his letters. Conditions of citizenship, descent or

[6] It is the *people* of Rome, under various kings, consuls, and generals.

alienation of property, distribution of estates, may be changed by human governments; but the conditions of membership in a New Testament Church are unalterable, because they are spiritual and God-prescribed.

Our books contain treaties in reference to intervention by one nation in the internal affairs of another upon the ground of religion; and they contain learned discussions as to the right of law-making departments of government to prescribe, modify, or interpret articles of religious faith. It seems that even in England, there is one and the same identical law-giver for Church and State. In the ACT OF UNIFORMITY of Elizabeth I, the Parliament instituted the THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF RELIGION, and put together a BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER. The atrocious cruelties of the religious persecutions — 'the execrable violations of the rights of mankind,' to use the strong denunciation of Sir James Mackintosh — have grown out of the claims of government and Churches to control and punish men's opinions. An Establishment is necessarily and always a usurpation and a wrong. A New Testament Church *cannot*, by possibility, be in alliance with a State, and still retain its scripturalness, its conformity with apostolical precept. Capability of such a union is the demonstration of a departure from a primitive model.

A tree is known by its fruits. An Establishment, *ex vi termini*,[7] implies discrimination, irregularity, injustice, and an arrogant claim to make Caesar determine what belongs to God. Things will follow tendencies. Those permanently *supported* by the government, *sustain* the government, and resist concessions of popular liberty. In the time of Henry VIII, marriages in England were regulated by the canon law of Rome, 'grounded often on no higher principle than that of papal caprice;' and when the king's conscience and conduct demanded it, the Church found a semblance of excuse for his lust and tyranny. When Elizabeth I was on the throne, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to quiet some doubts as to her legitimacy, was ordered to draw up a 'Table of Degrees' which would place her succession on scriptural grounds. The disingenuous adulation of the dedication to King James in the 'Authorized Version' of the Bible, is disgraceful to those who signed it.

The ecclesiastical Peers in the House of Lords uniformly and almost as a unit have (to quote from Joseph Hume) 'been the aiders and abettors of every tyranny and oppression which the people have been compelled to endure.' Bills for removing Roman Catholic disabilities, Jewish disabilities, University tests, and bills to open church-yards to Non-conformist burial services, etc., etc., have found in them, steadfast opponents.

Joseph Chamberlain, in 1885, in a public address, put this pertinent inquiry:

> 'Is it not a singular thing, that of all the great movements which have abated the claims of privileges, or destroyed the power of tyrants, which have freed the nation or classes from servitude and oppression, or raised the condition of the great mass of the people, there is scarcely one which has owed anything to the initiative or encouragement of the great ecclesiastical organization which lays claim to exclusive national authority and support?'

This hostility to popular rights, and to the removal of abuses, is the natural consequence of the system of union of Church and State. Since the Reformation, there has been much progress in securing the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship without discrimination or preference. Our Federal and State Constitutions, following the lustrous precedent of Rhode Island, have embodied religious liberty in American organic law; and our example and the undisputed success of voluntaryism are teaching lessons of freedom to the crushed millions of earth. In all civilized countries, toleration is practiced. Wearily and

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[7] *ex vi termini*: from the force of its terms.

painfully the work goes on. Privileges are wrested from reluctant hands, always after stubborn resistance, never once through gracious concession. Even when laws are repealed, the social stigma is vigorously applied. 'Have any of the Pharisees believed in Him?' is constantly rung in our ears. Truth will prevail. Sire bequeaths to son freedom's flag, and establishments and endowments must yield to religious equality before the law. It is a delusion to imagine that the final victory has been won. Prerogative and privilege, sanctioned by antiquity and buttressed by wealth and power, will contest every inch. The demands of the pope for the restoration of his temporalities, and his lamentations over his voluntary imprisonment in the Vatican, show that Cardinal Manning spoke *ex cathedra* [8] when he affirmed that the *Unam Sanctam* Decretal, and the Syllabus,[9] contain the doctrines of Ultramontanism [10] and Christianity. Pius IX, in a letter dated August 7, 1873, to William, King of Prussia, claimed that everyone who had been baptized belonged in some way or other *to the pope*. In July 1884, a Cuban archbishop declared in the Spanish Cortes, that

> 'The rights of the Roman pontiff, including the rights of temporal power over the States, were inalienable and cannot be restricted; and were before and superior to the so-called *new rights* of cosmopolitan revolution and the barbarous law of force.'

The tenacity with which the Establishment in England and Scotland holds on to its power and perquisites, and the success up to this time in foiling the Liberationists, are proofs that the battle of a thousand years is still to be prolonged.

The '*History of the Baptists*' shows the victories of the past, and the true principles of the contest if permanent success is to be attained. JUSTIFICATION by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, lays the axe at the root of all sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, alliance of Church with State, and interference with SOUL-LIBERTY. The entire sufficiency and authority of the inspired word of God; the right of private judgment, the individuality of all religious duties, a converted church-membership,[11] and the absolute headship of the Christ, will give success to efforts for a pure Christianity.

Dr. Armitage has exceptional qualifications for writing a history of the Baptists. His birth, education, religious experience, connection with England and the United States, habits of investigation, scholarly tastes and attainments, and mental independence, fit him peculiarly for ascertaining hidden facts, and pushing principles to their logical conclusion.

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[8] *ex cathedra* – with the full authority of his office, or "from the throne."

[9] In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII issued the Papal bull *Unam sanctam* which claims the Roman Catholic Church has sole authority, the necessity of belonging to it for eternal salvation, the position of the pope as supreme head of the Church, and the duty of submission to the pope in order to belong to the Church and thus attain salvation. The pope further claims the superiority of the church over the secular order (i.e., the pope reigns over kings).

[10] *Ultramontanism* - the policy that the absolute authority of the church is vested in the person of the pope.

[11] That is, church membership based on *conversion* (an individual's profession of faith in Christ), not *residence* or regular *attendance.*