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THE PEOPLE CALLED BAPTISTS

By L. S. Walker

I have been deeply concerned for some time about the general air of indifference which has captured the thinking of so many Baptist people relative to the Biblical doctrines and principles of the historic Baptist Faith. It is my firm and considered conviction that the practices and principles of the Baptists - those which are indeed Baptists - are as old as Christianity. To put it another way, I verily believe the Jerusalem Church founded by our Lord Himself, was every bit a Baptist Church in practice and principle. We, therefore, are neither Catholic nor Protestant. We are Baptist!

It is high time that we capture again the flaming spirit of the ancient Baptists of the early centuries. They knew what they were and why.

In the introduction of his book, "The People Called Baptists," Eld. Geo. W. McDaniel says:

"In other decades Baptists were better indoctrinated than they are today. The environment in which they lived, sometimes inimicable to them, was conducive to the mastery of their principles. Of later years, a tendency to depreciate doctrinal discussion is easily discernable, and young converts particularly are not rooted and grounded in the faith. Modern nonchalance acts as if it made little difference what one believes. With cavalier air it belittles the man who has the temerity to make a denominational affirmation."

This is found not only among young converts, but many of our ministers are not too well grounded in the Biblical faith of our fathers - who they are; what they have done.

The name "Christian" was first applied in derision to the followers of Christ by enemies at Antioch. The name "Baptist" was first given in ridicule, by Pseudo-baptist opponents of the people who rejected the baptism of babies. However, it was our Lord who gave John the

name of "The Baptist." Both names, however, like the cross, have been changed from marks of shame to badges of honor.

"The distinguished principles of the people first called "Christians" and now called "Baptists" are:

1. The Scriptures, the only authoritative guide-book for our religious life. There may be no appeal from, or addition to, their precepts and principles.

2. The individual and direct access of every soul to God; none between man and God, save the God-man.

3. The complete separation of church and state in their respective fields; the church dealing with religious, the state with civil affairs.

4. The simple policy of the church's government; each church autonomous and a democracy in itself.

5. The baptism of believers only, or a regenerate church membership. Incidentally, they believe in baptism by immersion only, as symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ; and that the Lord's Supper are church ordinances."

A noble Ancestry.

"To be well born is to enter life with advantage. Baptists are justly proud of their parentage - the New Testament - they have an ancient and scriptural origin."

Certain men in history are known and named as founders of various denominations. For example: Constantine the Great, claiming conversion to Christianity (It is this writer's opinion that Constantine was never really converted, but lived and died a pagan.) and uniting his version of the church with the state in A.D. 313, gave birth to the Catholic Church. The Lutherans had their beginning ^{WITH} Martin Luther in the 16th century reformation; the Presbyterians with Calvin; the Church of England or Episcopalians with King Henry VIII; the Methodists with John Wesley; the Disciples, Campbellites or "Church of Christ" by Alexander Campbell, and in like manner with others. But not so with the Baptists. There is no personality this side of Jesus Christ who is a satisfied explanation of their origin.

The denominational bodies of "Christianity" are legion today. Like wise there are also many bodies of Baptists so-called. The New

Testament Churches were and are independent, self-governing, democratic bodies. The Baptists originated not with the reformation, nor in the dark ages, or any other time after the Apostles. Our marching orders was the Great Commission; and the first Baptist church was the First Church at Jerusalem. Our principles are as old as Christianity, and we acknowledge no founder but Jesus Christ.

The roots of the Baptists lie deeply embedded in the Holy Scriptures themselves. We believe all New Testament churches were Baptist in practice and principle. While at times in history known by names other than "Baptists," given them in derision by those who despised them, the facts of history is that the Baptists have existed in every century beginning with the first century A.D. and the glorious earthly ministry of Jesus. The foot prints of the Baptists were left along the shores of Galilee and the hills of ancient Judea.

The Baptist have proclaimed the message of salvation in Palestine, across the sands of north Africa, in Europe, Asia, the British Isles. America and all the Western Hemisphere have heard the testimony of the Baptists

An Honorable History.

Let us further note the following from the book, "The People Called Baptists;"

"Character is determined by ideals and achievements. If we would know the place of the Baptists, we must consider their historic greatness, their heroic fidelity to human liberty and their part in the life of the world. Our principles develop a type of character and life which tends to make men potent factors in achievements worth while.

Baptists have been pioneers in so many fields to enumerate these might seem to assume a braggart spirit. But a statement of irrefutable facts must be taken as dispassionate and impartial. Baptists have always been champions of civil and religious liberty. Roger Williams, who took ground in advance of his puritan compeers on the subject of personal liberty, being banished from the colony of Massachusetts, went to the present site of Providence, Rhode Island, where he founded what is regarded by some as the First Baptist Church in America, and the first commonwealth on earth in which there was absolute civil and religious liberty. The framers of the Constitution

of the United States caught the spirit of Roger Williams and as a result we have a country which has been the refuge of the persecuted and oppressed of all nations. Article VI on religious liberty in the American Constitution was introduced into it by the united efforts of the Baptists in 1789. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States, guaranteeing freedom of religion and the right to petition, was adopted largely through the activity of Baptists. They took the initiative in a letter to President Washington and a month later Madison, with Washington's approval, presented the amendment."

Dr. John Clarke, highly educated in arts and in medicine, the outright and upright, zealous and influential American Baptist of the seventeenth century, established the first Baptist Church in America at New Port, Rhode Island, in 1638. This was prior to the work founded by Roger Williams. Dr. Clarke did more than anyone else to call the attention of the world to puritan intolerance. He secured the charter of 1643 which made Rhode Island a free democratic State with full provisions for liberty of conscience, and it is believed that he was the originator of the public free school system. He founded the historic Newport church, which for consistent and persistent devotion to Baptist principles, for completeness of organization and fervor in evangelism, deserves the priority.

Among America's great statesmen, educators, patriots, soldiers, and Christian leaders, the Baptists have stood in the front ranks. They believe the Bible as it is for men as they are. May God grant that it ever be.

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