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Cover: Richard Johnson Mays (1808-1864) is the Father of the Florida Baptist Convention.

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INTRODUCTION



Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Florida Baptist Historical Society

Welcome to Issue Eleven of The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage

Our feature in this issue is the celebration of 400 years of Baptist history (1609-2009).

Most of the time in college I did not own an automobile. I caught rides and rode the city bus. There was no Baptist church within walking distance of my Birmingham apartment and my landlady and her daughter were faithful Methodists so sometimes I went to their church with them.

One Sunday after attending the Methodist Church a few times my landlady made an interesting observation. She told me that as a young college student if I continued to attend their vibrant and very highly committed congregational services I would probably become a Methodist. Her statement struck me right where I needed to be hit. That very moment I realized something I had never thought before. I was a Baptist out of convenience but not out of conviction. I was 20 years old and a Baptist because my mother and sister were Baptists and my friends were Baptist. That day I determined to find out as best I could what the Bible taught and I determined to follow it to the best of my ability. I went to the front porch and sat down and started out by reading the Book of Mark. I then began to read books on doctrine and church rule. After about three months I became an active member of a Southern Baptist Church by conviction and not by convenience.

What has swayed your theological thinking? Why are you a Baptist? What mental gymnastics and emotional roller coasters have you toyed with that influenced your decision to choose your church membership?

Our writers for this journal are among the best and brightest of Baptist writers. They are not afraid to ask questions or face facts. They wrote what they believed and they own their convictions. How else can you be a Baptist?

This issue assists us in celebrating a quad-century of Baptist work. Baptist historian Leon McBeth states that Baptists and Jalapeño peppers have something in common. Two or three can add spice to any situation but if you get four or five together they can bring tears to your eyes.

We used the Bible. We used standard Baptist works. We used diaries and encyclopedias and even Wikipedia. We wrote about Baptists as we did because that's who we are.

May this issue bring help for your questions, hope for your life, laughter for your relaxation and maybe even tears to your eyes as 400 years of Baptist work is examined.

Honoring those who honor Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Windsor", with a large, stylized initial "J" and "W".

Jerry M. Windsor



SALVATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

David Coggins

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Introduction

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NASB) The doctrine of salvation is the gateway into a new understanding and relationship with God. Paul reminds us in this passage of not only a historical perspective on man’s need for salvation, but also the church’s mandate to continue the ministry of the Lord Jesus, who Himself said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10 NASB)

The doctrine of salvation is the first and foundational of all practical doctrines to be utilized in the life of the New Testament church. It is the doctrine of salvation, in which man has an opportunity to encounter a valid relationship with God through Christ that makes the application of every other doctrine possible. To only discuss the doctrine of salvation from a theological/philosophical or any other perspective without asking how it impacts the church’s ability to fulfill God’s mission in the world is valuable, but short sighted if this concern is not addressed.

The doctrine of salvation is the point where the doctrine of God and doctrine of man intersect. It is here that God intervened in the life and destiny of mankind and changed the course of eternity for those who believe. In this brief article, a short historical perspective will be covered, a modern day perspective on this issue will be viewed and perhaps most important, the practical implications of this doctrine for the church will be considered.

Historical Perspective: A rich heritage

To say that the doctrine of salvation has enjoyed a rich and historical place in the economy of God’s dealing with mankind is an understatement, because it is in fact as old as time itself. In fact it is older than time. Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:19-21 that He was foreknown before the foundation of the world and that through Him we are believers in God and have faith and hope in God because of Him (Christ). God has been in the “business” of redeeming man to Himself from the beginning of time when Adam and Eve transgressed God’s righteous standard and found themselves in need of redemption and reconciliation. God has shown Himself to be a God of grace and mercy evidenced fully and completely in the work of Christ to bring salvation to mankind fully and completely.

This rich heritage has crossed the lines that often separate theological persuasions and positions. Whether Calvinist, Arminian, or Catholic, there are some commonalities that unite even where there are issues that divide. In the pages of his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge, as he critiqued the rationalism of Friedrich Schleiermacher, wrote a word to remind us of this wonderful heritage when he penned, “to whom Christ is God, St. John assures us, Christ is a Saviour.”¹ This is also seen in the conversations that have been held between evangelicals (Baptists in particular) and Catholics. In discussing the question of what is salvation, Baptists and Catholics have at least agreed, not on the nature of salvation, but on the fact that the “history of the notion of salvation has been the history of theology itself and even though a resolution from the Southern Baptist Convention from 1994 notes that Baptists and Catholics have historically differed on the nature of salvation, they

have found some agreement over the biblically rooted vision of salvation as past, present and future reality.² For this reason, both groups can affirm that "salvation is God's larger purpose for creation. It is not just one of God's many gifts; it is the very ground of creation, the whence and whither of the human race and all else in heaven and on earth."³

Southern Baptists have historically and consistently affirmed biblical realities that point to man's need for salvation and God's activity in salvation. From the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) statement to the 2000 BF&M, Southern Baptists have affirmed biblical and historical truths that have provided a strong foundation upon which to apply this doctrine in the ministries of local congregations and mission efforts. These biblical mandates include, but are not limited to the following.

Man's lostness

Perhaps one of the greatest needs that the church has is to clearly proclaim that man is lost apart from Christ. It does not take long for many Christians to remember what it was to be lost.⁴ While this statement is attributed to Darrel Robinson in his study course on the doctrine of salvation, it is an observation that most Christians have observed in the life of the church. This fact is what has historically kept Southern Baptists affirming and defending the need for a thoroughly biblical and applicable doctrine of salvation. In 1925, the BF&M affirmed that salvation is an act of God's grace to bring about the regeneration, sanctification and ultimately the glorification of man. Even though the structure of the document has changed, the content has not changed. In the 1925 statement, the 1963 statement and the current 2000 statement, the fact that Southern Baptists have affirmed man's need and God's activity has been consistent.

That man is lost is a constant position among Baptists and it is a biblical position. Jesus used the term lost (*apollumi*) a number of times. "It has the strong meaning of to utterly destroy. It is translated in various places as to *be ruined, or rendered useless, to kill or destroy, to be wasted and useless, and to perish.*"⁵ The fact that man is separated from God by sin and the fellowship God intended was bro-

ken is seen in the garden of Eden experience of Adam. Sin separated man from God.⁶ This fact is seen most clearly in Luke 15 where Jesus describes human lostness in three parables. In all three parables, the full expression of the idea of humanities lostness is revealed. There is destruction and ruin, worthlessness and waste and rebellion. This leads to the conclusion that lostness manifests itself in both acts and attitudes of life.⁷

God's act of grace and love

In the Scriptures, the word salvation has various meanings. In the New Testament, the verb form of the word is used in regard to rescuing from danger or destruction, of healing from disease or even solving a problem (Phil. 2:12). But the greatest use of the word is in regard to spiritual salvation through Christ (Matt. 19:25; John 3:17). In this sense, salvation is the full redemption of the whole man. This redemption God did Himself in order to satisfy the demands of His holy, righteous nature, and this He did through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.⁸

The question that is to some extent unanswerable is why? Why would God in His holiness, condescend to man in his sinful, lost condition and bring redemption? Only one word can describe it, grace. The BF&M states that "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which he regenerates, sanctifies and saves sinners. It is perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. It encourages the use of means in the highest degree."⁹ While this statement is from the 1925 version of the BF&M, there is consistency in the three versions. The fact that God extends His grace to His creation in this way is the expression of His love to mankind revealed in the person and the work of His son, Jesus Christ. Paul states in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (NASB)

When speaking from a historical perspective on the fact of God's grace revealed in salvation, it is appropriate to affirm that this

is God's eternal purpose, centered in Christ before the world was begun. God purposed His redemptive plan in Christ for humanity before creation took place. This is Paul's expression of praise in Ephesians 1:3-14, that every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is given to the redeemed, beginning with the blessing of redemption through His son.

Crucial here is the Baptist perspective that we are completely justified by Christ. This does not come about by the surrender of faith as if it were some work on our part that makes us acceptable to God. Faith is not the cause of justification being offered to man, but faith is a response or condition for receiving God's grace, which is in and of itself completely a gift God without pre-condition.¹⁰

Jesus' fulfillment of God's purpose

God's condescending to meet man at the point of his need culminated "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5 NASB) Jesus completed the purpose of God for mankind's redemption when He humbled Himself to our low estate and became the redemptive sacrifice and was Himself the Redeemer. When looking from a historical perspective into the issue of salvation, this truth has been the foundation of the preaching, teaching and discipleship relative to man's being saved. It has been the great rally cry that all of Christendom has sounded forth with hope, with faith, with praise and with worship. The firm reality is that the church has long believed and taught that Jesus alone is the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father without coming first and only through Jesus Christ and His finished work on behalf of those who believe. Unfortunately, the heritage of faithful adherence to this foundational truth, handed to multitudes in the believing community, may be in jeopardy as the church charts its course through the new century.

Modern Perspectives: A tarnished heritage

The doctrine of salvation identifies the remedy for man's sinful condition and gives hope for man's future that would otherwise be a bleak and hopeless existence. It is the work of Christ on our behalf that brings joy, purpose, meaning and hope to those who have experienced its gracious affect in their lives. For this foundational teaching the church has reason to be thankful for those who have established this heritage for us. But this heritage has become a tarnished treasure in the blight of the modern, politically correct influences taking place in culture and in the church today.

The word for the day is religious pluralism, which may just simply be the religious version of being politically correct. As Okholm and Phillips state when quoting Leslie Newbigin,

Simply put, the specter of historicism has corralled religious claims into the private sphere, isolated from political and social discourse. And Western societies demand that everyone assume this relativistic attitude so that each religion must treat the others as if they also have salvific access to God. Popularly we call this political correctness. Everyone is to have an equal voice, especially the marginalized and disenfranchised. That is why the chief virtue in our society is never having to say you're wrong, letting the other have his or her opinion. Religious beliefs amount to little more than matters of personal taste, on a par with one's preference for ice cream or movies.¹¹

The perspective of modern culture seems to be that one should go to whatever lengths possible to not bring offense. The only problem with this perspective is that if the gospel does not bring an offense as a precursor to a salvation experience, it may not result in a genuine experience. Paul made every attempt to reach his first century world with the truth of the gospel knowing full well that it would bring an offense. Paul himself made every effort not to be an offense himself (1 Corinthians 8-9), but he knew that the gospel message presented to lost persons would be a stumbling block and

an offense. This fact did not cause him to soften his message for expediency and pluralism. It did give him reason to be sensitive in how he shared, but what he shared was consistent with the truth of the gospel.

This fact has been lost in a modern, 21st century context. It seems that in this pluralistic and politically correct culture, normative religious claims for the gospel are becoming more and more difficult to maintain. Recent ebbing of inclusivism in theological circles gives evidence of the difficulty of maintaining a historical and biblical consistency with the gospel message of the biblical writers and those who formulated gospel thought for the church's consumption throughout the ages.

Of course this tarnished heritage is not just seen in the theological pluralism espoused by voices of "authority" on television or other platforms, it has invaded even evangelicalism to the degree that it has begun to impact the church and the mission effort. Long known for evangelistic zeal, the number of missionaries supported by North American agencies began to decline in the 1990's for the first time since the 1940's.¹²

The current milieu of Christian thought leaves a distressing and impending fearfulness as it relates to the future and the likelihood that the church will be able to maintain its historic position on this most foundational of doctrines as related to God's activity with man. As Mark Dever states, "At stake is nothing less than the essence of Christianity. Historically understood, Christ's atonement gives hope to Christians in their sin and in their suffering. If we have any assurance of salvation, it is because of Christ's atonement..."¹³

What the church has traded for "acceptance" in a politically correct world and a pluralistic theology is the valued foundational truth of God's judgment on sin and Christ's exclusive gift of Himself for the salvation of mankind. But there is hope. Even though reports are being dispensed about the decline of the Western church and the SBC church, there is hope. At the 2009 Southern Baptist Convention, where the focus was the Great Commission and a possible refocus of efforts toward fulfilling the Great Commission, the recording secretary reported a higher number of younger messengers than has been reported in years past. Young SBC leaders are

concerned about not just the future of the SBC, but they are concerned about the historic gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation of lost men, women and children.

Church Perspectives: Where it matters most

All the historical perspective and the changing landscape of political correctness and theological pluralism is irrelevant if the question is not considered on how the church is impacted. God commissioned the church of the Lord Jesus to be the agent of reconciliation in the world. Local congregations are the greatest missions force in the world. This is the reason that the discussion must always take into consideration what impact positions, debates, theological thinking, etc will have on the ability of the local church to give a clear and resounding message of hope to the world.

Many church leaders have become convinced that the approach to sharing the gospel should be to avoid an offensive message of an atoning sacrifice for man's lost condition. As Dever states some are convinced that evangelicals have become too "Atonement centered, that some believers talk too much about Christ's death, which deals with our guilt due to sin, which is in reality the only way to a relationship with God."¹⁴ This belief becomes clearly evident in messages that tout the blessings in life that come from a self esteem message rather than a message that confronts a person concerning the reality of their sin. In evangelical churches where method often overshadows message, a pragmatic gospel may be heard over the historic message of sin and salvation. This impacts the way that missions is carried out, how church planting is done and how evangelistic efforts are accomplished. The tendency to gather a congregation, then gather converts rather than confront people with the truth of their need for Christ, and help them into a saving relationship with Christ, then disciple them, can give a false message of hope. Persons who are part of the congregation may be lulled into the false perception that they are the converted, when in fact they may never have dealt realistically with their need for salvation through Christ. Historic Baptist doctrine related to salvation is that salvation is not through the church but in Christ and Christ alone.

Let the church get about the eternal business of proclaiming the glorious message of the gospel.

Conclusion

Salvation for the 21st century is no less and no more than salvation proclaimed in the 1st century. Nothing has changed about man's condition or about God's love and His intention and desire to act on man's behalf through Christ. Man is still in need of salvation. Regardless of how sophisticated we think we have progressed beyond medieval imaginations, man is still in need of salvation, Christ is still saving and the church must continue to stand for, proclaim and promote the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Biblical truth and not man's sense of justice and fairness must be our guide in meeting the ultimate spiritual needs of the world. This message of hope and the historical perspective of the church must be the guide for the church, even amidst the voices that decry our narrow-mindedness and bigotry. This is our heritage, and this is our mandate and our mission. Paul says, "...He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." (1 Corinthians 5:19b NASB) This is our heritage; this must be the message that is passed to the next generation of church leaders. Then they can lead their people to be on mission in a world desperate for hope. The words of a wonderful anthem of worship expresses beautifully and simply our theology and our calling.

"Jesus Saves"

Hear the heart of heaven beating, "Jesus Saves. Jesus saves."
And the hush of mercy breathing, "Jesus Saves. Jesus saves."
Hear the host of angels sing, "Glory to the Newborn King."
And the sounding joy repeating, "Jesus saves."

See the humblest hearts adore Him. "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."
And the wisest bow before Him. "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."
See the sky alive with praise, melting darkness in its place
There is life forevermore, "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."

He will live our sorrow sharing, "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."
He will die our burden bearing, "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."
"It is done!" will shout the cross, Christ has paid redemption's cost!
While the empty tomb's declaring, "Jesus saves."

Freedom's calling, chains are falling, hope is dawning bright and true.
Day is breaking, night is quaking, God is making all things new.
"Jesus saves."

Oh to grace, how great a debtor! "Jesus saves. Jesus saves."
All the saints who shout together. "I know that Jesus saves."
Rising us so vast and strong lifting up salvation's song,
The redeemed will sing forever, the redeemed will sing forever, the
redeemed will sing forever, "Jesus saves."
"Jesus saves." (Travis Cottrell, 2008, BrentwoodBenson Music)

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- ¹ Mouw, Richard J. 2008. An open-handed gospel: we have to decide whether we have a stingy God or a generous God. *Christianity Today* 52 (4): 44-47.
- ² Duffy, Stephen J. 2000. Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic soteriologies: a comparative study. *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (Fall) 434-459.
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ Robinson, Darrell W. 1992. *The Doctrine of Salvation*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 8.
- ⁵ *ibid*, 13.
- ⁶ Hobbs, Herschel. 1996. *The Baptist Faith and Message*, revised. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 49.
- ⁷ Robinson. 1992, 13.
- ⁸ Hobbs. 1996, 48-49.
- ⁹ *Baptist Faith and Message*, 1925
- ¹⁰ Duffy. 2000, 439.
- ¹¹ Okholm, Dennis L., Timothy R. Phillips, John Hick, Clark H. Pinnock, Alister E. McGrath, R. Douglas Geivett, and W. Gary

Phillips. 1996. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 9.

¹² *ibid*, 11.

¹³ Dever, Mark. 2006. Nothing but the blood: more and more evangelicals believe Christ's atoning death is merely a grotesque creation of the medieval imagination. Really? *Christianity Today* 50 (May) 29.

¹⁴ Dever. 2006, 29.

THE ART OF DUNKING IN BAPTIST LIFE: A CASE FOR BELIEVER'S BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

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In just a moment, I want you to close your eyes and think about something. You won't have to close them for long. Are you ready? Think about the greatest dunk you have ever witnessed. Now close your eyes and marvel for a few moments!

If you are like me, when you think of a dunk, you immediately have a sense of excitement and joy. You may think of the crowd and how yells fill the air every time a dunk occurs. I have witnessed the rim-rattling aura of a Dwight Howard dunk, and long before his predecessors Wilt Chamberlain, Julius Erving, Michael Jordan and company popularized the dunk, Baptists have been dunking since the 17th century. Obviously, I'm not talking about basketball (I am not even talking about cookies and donuts-our waistlines give us away!), but I am speaking of dunking new believers in the Lord Jesus Christ into baptismal waters.

Such dunks get Baptists excited. Dunking new believers helps us forget, at least momentarily, our petty battles in business meetings. Witnessing dunks helps us tolerate a worship service that pushes past the noon hour. Watching a family member or friend take the plunge floods our minds with memories about our own conversion and subsequent baptism, filling our hearts with gratitude toward God.

But why make a fuss over and insist on dunking? Cannot sprinkling or pouring accomplish the same thing? And why not cover as many people as possible, starting when people are infants? Doesn't it confer some special grace (and which of us couldn't receive a little extra helping of that)?

Baptists' insistence on baptism (dunking) goes back to the early 17th century, a few decades after the initial Protestant Reformation. The central argument concerning believer's baptism by immersion has never been history or tradition but the very Word of God (though this work will reference some Baptist theologians, preachers, and historical documents, the primary source is the Bible). This article argues that the Baptist view of believer's baptism by immersion is first and foremost a biblical position. Any other argument must subject itself to God's Word.

From a biblical perspective, I will argue that baptism is for believers only and that it is always by immersion. This article should help us keep "dunking" as a major expression of our Baptist faith and practice.

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

The first truth I believe the Bible underscores about this subject is that baptism is for believers. We call this kind of baptism "credo-baptism."

BELIEF FIRST, THEN BAPTISM

It is fair to say that the Bible connects baptism with faith, in a way that faith *always* precedes baptism. Though space does not permit me to include every passage of Scripture, numerous texts share baptism of believers in common. People who received the gospel message expressed their belief in Christ through baptism. The baptism of believers occurred in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38-41), Samaria (8:12), Damascus (9:17-18), Caesarea (10:47-48), Galatia (Acts 13-14 in light of Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21), Philippi (16:14-15, 31-33), Corinth (18:8; see also 1 Corinthians 1:2, 13-16), Ephesus (19:4-5; see also Ephesians 4:5), Rome (Romans 6:3-11), and Colossae (Colossians 2:11-12).

This believer's baptism is important, because there is no Scriptural argument for infant baptism (even acknowledged by R.C. Sproul, who sprinkles infants)¹ for "household" baptisms (see Acts 10:44-48; 16:31-34) do not necessitate infants (an argument from silence) and baptism is always of believers. As a side note, someone claiming to be "baptized as a baby" is a misnomer, because it was not immersion (you could drown a baby if you dunked him—more on baptism as immersion below) and it was not as a believer (infants do not have the capacity to believe), so it was not baptism.

A short tract has made its way around to several Baptist pastors. The tract is entitled "What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism." As one opens the single-folded tract, there is nothing inside! On the back of this tract the reader can find this quote from a Presbyterian: "If some intelligent being from Mars should visit. . . and we hand him our Bible. . . he would learn of the great doctrine and practices of the Christian religion without any other aid. He would find the Lord's Supper, the organization of the church, with elders and deacons, and ADULT BAPTISM, but it is safe to say he would never get it into his head that little children are to be baptized. He would not find infant baptism in the Bible because it is not there and cannot be gotten out of the Bible."² Now, if one cannot find infant baptism (paedo-baptism) in the Bible, why would he practice it?

NEW COVENANT BELIEVERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TOOK ON WATER BAPTISM

On another related issue, the Bible *never* speaks of a new covenant believer who has not professed his faith through baptism. Part of the disciples' mission was to baptize those who had been taught Christ (Matthew 28:19). Baptism was (and is) an essential part of Christian discipleship; it was inconceivable for a person in the 1st century to become a Christian and not get baptized. Just to be crystal clear: baptism is not essential for salvation, or it would be seen as a work, but it is important because it is tied to the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection. New Testament believers expressed their belief in Christ through baptism.

BAPTISM IS BY IMMERSION

Not only should one realize that baptism is for believers, but a second truth about baptism in the Bible is that baptism by immersion.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

The meaning of “baptism” is immerse, dip, plunge, or even dunk. The passive of the verb “baptize” was used of ships that sunk. Non-Baptist believers who argue that baptism can be via sprinkling beg the question: “Can a little water sprinkled over a ship cause it to sink?”

An important point to bring up here is that the word “baptism” is not a translation but a transliteration. English churches in the 16th and 17th centuries (the dates for most of the earliest English Bible translations) had carried much of their ecclesiology over from Roman Catholic practices. 16th century Protestants had kept the word “baptize” (from Greek) because their practice had allowed for modes other than total submersion to be used. Baptists addressed this matter of baptism when they came on the scene in the 17th century.³

The Bible clearly has immersion in mind with the use of “baptism.” The people who came to John the Baptist found him at the “river Jordan” (Matthew 3:6). Why would John use a river for baptism if mere drops would suffice? Likewise, the Bible says, “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). Again, why would John be baptizing in a place with “plentiful water” if a cup or pitcher of water would have been an ample supply?

Moreover, the Scriptures describe the recipients of baptism in terms of being immersed, or dunked. Matthew 3:16 says Jesus “went up” from the water during His baptism. When reading Acts 8:36, 38, why would the Ethiopian eunuch make a big deal about coming to water if the water in his canteen would have been adequate?⁴ The text also says they “went down” and “came up.” Can the reader think of any other possible mode of baptism to fit this language than that of immersion? Furthermore, why would the Philippian jailer and his family leave their house for baptism if just a little water could have done the job (Acts 16:32-34)? These examples underscore the exclusive meaning of baptism as immersion (dunking).

Someone may object: “Baptism does not always refer to water baptism in the New Testament.” Agreed. Baptism sometimes occurs as a metaphor for Christ’s suffering and crucifixion (Mark 10:38-40). The question to ask, however, is this: “Was Jesus completely immersed by God’s wrath or sprinkled by it?” The fact that God set Christ forward as a propitiation reveals that Jesus bore the full wrath of God in His sacrifice (Romans 3:25).⁵

Additionally, baptism may refer to baptism in the Spirit. One should ask, “Does a new believer get a little bit of the Spirit sprinkled on him or does the Lord immerse the new believer in the Spirit so that he is completely affected by Him?”⁶ Baptism can even refer to washing one’s hands (Mark 7:4), but the Jews would plunge their hands in a basin of water to wash them, so still here baptism means to submerge.

THE MESSAGE OF BAPTISM

In addition to the meaning of baptism, one should not overlook the message of baptism. Baptism shows and proclaims Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as well as the believer’s identity in Christ in dying to his old life, being buried with Him, and being raised to walk in a new quality of life. The Apostle Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Related passages where baptism signifies at least one element of Christ’s death, burial, or resurrection include Colossians 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:29; and 1 Peter 3:21. Baptism, then, is truly a gospel ordinance, for it is a command given by Christ that represents the gospel message of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

Advocates of pouring have sought to retain this message by saying, “In the case of sprinkling, the water being poured over the head of the person represents the death of Jesus. The water running off represents the resurrection of Jesus.”⁷ But this is not the same thing, for the picture is reversed from the subject in the water to the water on the subject. The Scriptures always speak of the believer acting in the

water (going down, coming up, etc.) and never talk of the water acting on the believer (pouring over, running off). Moreover, in no instance in the Scriptures does one read of water being brought to baptize the believer but the believer goes to the water to get baptized. Thus, the believer dipped and raised in water shows death, burial, and resurrection and the believer in any other mode simply does not express that gospel truth.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM MAGNIFIED IN BAPTIST CONFESSIONS

Numerous confessions of faith in Baptist life have pointed to the meaning and message of baptism in the same way that the Scriptures present them. As a matter of fact, the issue of baptism is among the most common denominators in Baptist confessions. An example from the 17th century includes “A Declaration of Faith of English People” (1611). This statement connects baptism with confession of faith as well as the outward sign of one’s dying to sin and walking in newness of life.⁸ Also, the “First London Confession” (1644) describes baptism as “an Ordinance of the new Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized” and “the way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water,” signifying the gospel.⁹

18th century Baptist life continued to propagate this belief about baptism. The Philadelphia Confession (1742) added a couple of articles to the “Second London Confession” (1689), but retained the language about baptism, stating that “those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordination [ordinance]” and “immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.”¹⁰ The “Articles of Religion of the New Connexion” (1770) declare “that it is the indispensable duty of all who repent and believe the gospel, to be baptized, by immersion in water.”¹¹

An example from the 19th century is the “New Hampshire Confession” (1833), which declares “that Christian Baptism is the

immersion of a believer in water... to show... our faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour.”¹² A quarter-century later, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the pen of Basil Manly, Jr., adopted *The Abstract of Principles* (1859), which state, “Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus, obligatory upon every believer, wherein he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up to God, to live and walk in newness of life.”¹³

One of the best expressions of Baptist faith in the 20th and 21st centuries comes from Southern Baptists’ own *Baptist Faith & Message* (1925, 1963, 2000). This confession states that “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.”¹⁴

Again, let it be said that history, tradition, and even confessions of faith, as helpful as they may be, never carry the same weight as the biblical witness. This appeal to Baptist confessions simply underscores what the Bible says about believer’s baptism by immersion.

The Model for Baptism

The greatest focus in the discussion on believer’s baptism by immersion are the questions of “who?” (believers) and “how?” (immersion). Often overlooked is the question “by whom?” This issue hones in on the model for baptism: one committed Christian baptizing one who is committing himself to Christ through a public confession. The Great Commission and the recorded baptisms in Scripture show believers as responsible for carrying out the ordinance, whether it be the original disciples (Matthew 28:16-20), Philip (Acts 8:38), Paul, or other believers (1 Corinthians 1:12-16).¹⁵

THE MANDATE FOR BAPTISM

While the model for baptism addresses the question “by whom?” (baptized believers), the mandate for baptism answers the question “when?” In the Bible, those who received the Word were apparently baptized immediately. When Peter preached at Pentecost, “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Similarly, the Ethiopian eunuch seems to have been baptized shortly after hearing the good news about Jesus (8:35-38). Other immediate responses of baptism to one’s conversion include Paul, a.k.a. Saul (9:17-18), Cornelius and his household (10:47-48), Lydia and her household (16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer and his household (16:32-33). Each narrative is either explicit or implicit about new believers getting baptized as soon as they could.

Ultimately, baptism is an issue of obedience to our Lord. How many parents like to tell their kids something to do and then watch them postpone it? Adults often want their children to respond immediately-NOW! What makes people think that the Lord wants them to delay their obedience to His command?¹⁶

Now, someone may begin to think, “Does the way we understand baptism make us better than other denominations that sprinkle or pour?” No, but our stance is the biblical position and other modes place history and tradition over Scripture. Furthermore, when considering church history, it is inescapable to observe that baptisteries in ancient churches from the first few centuries were not little bowls or pitchers but huge pools. Surely immersion was far more common than non-Baptist groups care to admit.

A TEST CASE- CLARITY ABOUT CHRIST IN MATTHEW 3:13-17

With all of that said about baptism, one begins to see the real meaning and message about Christian baptism. This may very well have been in the mind of Matthew in recording Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3. Take a moment to read the text:

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Some would say that baptism has little to do with the meaning of Matthew 3:13-17, but hang in there for a moment. Clearly, as seen in the above argument, baptism portrays the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (cf. Romans 6:3). I am proposing that Matthew may very well have recorded Jesus’ baptism to foreshadow His death and resurrection. Sprinkling or pouring as “baptism” fails to make sense of the gospel truth of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. The reader of Matthew’s Gospel knows that Matthew has already alluded to Jesus’ death in 1:21-“He will save His people from their sins,” where salvation from sins points to a sacrifice by death. Moreover, the myrrh as a gift in 2:11 may also refer to the burial spice to be used for the body of Jesus. I simply mention these items to point out that it is not unlikely that Matthew records an event or saying to foreshadow his ultimate purpose-to prove to Jews (and Gentiles) that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.

God can say He is “well-pleased” with His Son (Matthew 3:17) because Jesus obeyed Him even unto death (Philippians 2:6-8). The Bible says it pleased the LORD to crush Him (Isaiah 53:10). On another note, when Matthew cites the voice of God the Father from heaven, he incorporates two messianic texts from the Old Testament-“this is My Son” (from Psalm 2:7) and “My Beloved, in Whom I am well-pleased” (from Isaiah 42:1b). These two messianic texts combine the Divine Son of Psalm 2 with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42-53 into one Person. God’s verbal declaration of Jesus as His Beloved Son is nothing less than an exclamation of Jesus as the Christ.

The Apostle Paul, like Matthew, recognized that God's declaration is powerful, for God declared, in a visual way, Jesus to be the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). Therefore, Matthew's inclusion of the voice from heaven citing Scripture reveals how central Jesus is within God's plan. No one can reject Jesus, who is the Christ via His baptism (death-burial-resurrection), and be pleasing to the Father!

So the imperative that Matthew is building toward for his readers from this text dealing with the baptism of Jesus Christ is to believe in Jesus Christ, once-crucified-yet-risen and then be baptized to declare your faith in Christ as Lord. Now the reader does not get all of that simply by reading up to Matthew 3, but when he understands baptism biblically, he cannot help but come to that kind of conclusion from Matthew's narrative.

The reason this response is important is because God has placed His seal of approval on Jesus, and the only way one can receive God's seal of approval and hear "Well done, good and faithful servant" is to align with Jesus Christ, for God has placed His seal of approval on Him and accepts all those who are in Him (cf. Luke 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:19).

CONCLUSION- THE OLDER BAPTISTS GET, THE MORE THEY DUNK

This mini-sermon from a biblical text brings to memory what other Protestant denominations have called Baptists, "people of the Book." Such a label is appropriate because Baptists, more than any other group of Christians, continually go back to the Bible for matters of faith and practice. History and tradition will never replace biblical authority for every genuine Baptist.

The Baptist commitment to the Bible helps the reader understand the Baptist position on believer's baptism by immersion-Baptists hold this view because it is biblical. That same commitment drives Baptists to evangelize the world, for without hearing the gospel of Christ, none can be saved. Whenever people from various tribes, tongues, and nations receive the gospel, Baptists do what they do best-dunk them in baptismal waters. With more than

1 million baptisms worldwide by Southern Baptists in 2007, it surely seems that Baptists are able to fight off the effects of age. Baptists are 400 years old and counting. May dazzling dunks continue to be the high marks of Baptist life!

¹ R. C. Sproul writes, "The first direct mention of infant baptism is around the middle of the second century A.D." (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992], 228). Of course, Sproul does not make the same appeals to early church history for development of the Eucharist tradition or apostolic succession. While history and tradition can help shed light on our understanding of biblical issues, they should never be allowed to usurp clear biblical teachings.

² A. Pieters, *Why We Baptize Infants*, 8.

³ Several early Baptist writings on believer's baptism and/or baptism by immersion from the first half of the 17th century are in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), including John Smyth, *The Character of the Beast* (1609); "A Declaration of Faith of English People" (1611); Edward Barber, *A Small Treatise on Baptisme, or Dipping* (1641); Christopher Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist* (1644); "The First London Confession" (1644); and "The Kiffin Manuscript" (ca. 1640s).

A few additional works the reader may find helpful that trace these issues include Abraham Booth, *An Apology for the Baptists: In Which They Are Vindicated From the Imputation of Laying an Unwarrantable Stress on the Ordinance of Baptism* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1808); William H. Whitsitt, *A Question in Baptist History* (Louisville: Chas. T. Dearing, 1896); J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931); and Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006).

⁴ Now the text does not say the Ethiopian eunuch had a canteen with him, but he would certainly not make the long trip without some sort of liquid, including water, to quench his thirst.

- ⁵ For a defense of “propitiation,” see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 144-213.
- ⁶ Galatians 3:27 may refer to Spirit baptism, water baptism, or both. A study of conversion in the New Testament church reveals that Spirit baptism and water baptism went hand-in-hand (not in terms of water baptism as a work for salvation, but in terms of it being unheard for a recipient of God’s Spirit not to express that new life through water baptism. See John B. Polhill, “Acts” in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 116-117.
- ⁷ Paraphrase of Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Essential Truths for Becoming Strong in the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 363.
- ⁸ Articles 13 and 14 in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 120.
- ⁹ Articles XXXIX and XL in Lumpkin, 167. The original language has been retained in several of the quotations, resulting in modern-day misspellings.
- ¹⁰ Chapter 30, points 2 and 4 in *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 2007, reprint edition), 65.
- ¹¹ Article 6 in Lumpkin, 344.
- ¹² Article xiv in Lumpkin, 366.
- ¹³ Quoted from B. Spencer Haygood, *The Faith: A Commentary on the Abstract of Principles, Introduction*, Revised ed. (Campobello, SC: Jackson Memorial Baptist Church, 1995), 27-28.
- ¹⁴ *The Baptist Faith & Message*, “Article VII. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000), 14. The quotation comes from both the 1963 and 2000 editions (identical in language). The 1925 version is slightly shorter than its successors. For comparisons of the three editions, see <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm-comparison.asp>.
- ¹⁵ Although I appreciate the influence of J. R. Graves and the Landmark Baptist movement on highlighting the importance of baptizers having been immersed themselves, the Landmark Baptists’ insistence on the validity of one’s baptism being tied up in an unbroken chain of succession back to the New Testament seems unfounded and impossible to prove.
- ¹⁶ Though outside the scope of this work, one could add that the New Testament teaches that baptism is the entrance into the church. The

New Testament has numerous examples where groups of people believe the gospel, express that belief through baptism, and then those baptized believers form a church. The Book of Acts records how several churches got their start, and when we compare the Acts’ accounts with some of the epistles written to the churches, we get a pretty clear picture of how the belief-baptism-church issues are intricately linked together. This kind of order among churches, comprised of baptized believers, are found in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38, 41 v. 47); Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia (Acts 2:9, 38, 41; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21); places like Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra, all of which were in the region of Galatia (Acts 13-14; 16:1-5; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21); Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 31-34; Philippians); Corinth (Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:12-16); Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5; Ephesians 4:5); and Rome (Acts 2:10, 38, 41; Romans 6:3-11). This impressive list of New Testament churches should set the record straight about baptism’s connection to the church. Baptist confessions have also noted that “a New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers. . .” (*The Baptist Faith & Message* [2000], “VI. The Church,” 13).



PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

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“The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38 NKJV). This is the curtain we read about in Exodus 26:31-34:

“You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be gold, upon four sockets of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy. You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy” (NKJV).

The high priest was to go behind the veil once a year to offer the sacrifice to remove the guilt of the people. Henry Turlington, in commenting upon these verses, said “Here in the holy of holies was God's presence considered to be. For the curtain to be torn in two meant the death of Jesus opened to all men freely the way to God.”¹ This “way to God” was made possible through the death of Christ. There is no longer a curtain (or veil) between the believer and his or her God. This is why we have a doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

William Barclay interprets Mark 15:38 this way:

That was the curtain which shut off the Holy of Holies, into which no man might go. Symbolically that tells us two things. (a) The way to God was now wide open. Into the Holy of Holies only the High Priest could go, and he only

once a year on the Day of Atonement. But now, the veil was rent, and the way to God was wide open to every man. (b) Within the Holy of Holies dwelt the very essence of God. But now with the death of Jesus the veil which hid God was rent and men could see God face to face. No longer was God hidden. No longer need men guess and grope. Men could look at Jesus and say, “That is what God is like. God loves like that.”²

Glenn Thomas Miller, former Associate Professor of Church History, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, says that “characteristically, Baptists believe in the authority of the Bible, the right of private interpretation (soul liberty), the baptism of adults only, a regenerate church membership, and the separation of church and state.”³

We sometimes use the term *soul competency* in place of *soul liberty*, but we most often think of the *priesthood of the believers* and *soul competency* as the same thing. Many of us grew up believing that priesthood of the believer(s) meant we did not need any mediator between God and us. We believe that Christ is the high priest and he is both priest and sacrifice; that makes him unique.

Some of us came to believe that we were not only our own priests, but that believers were to exercise their priesthood by praying for and with brothers and sisters. We came to see that sharing with our brothers and sisters in Christ was a part of that priesthood.

The Preamble to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message stated: “Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.”

The Introductory Remarks of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message says: “Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of church. We honor the principles of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God.”

The major difference in these statements is the newer Baptist Faith and Message uses the word *believers* rather than the word *believer*. In both of these documents, no distinction is made between ordained and unordained believers. The clergy has no higher priesthood than the laity. All Christians are on equal footing.

Both of these documents honor the idea of priesthood of the believers. Baptists will continue to claim that the priesthood of believers is a Baptist distinctive, but we must not assume that no other Christian denomination also honors the priesthood of the believer(s).

In a sermon in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel, Al Mohler said, "I want to submit to you that no believer is his own priest," Mohler said. "That is an idea as foreign to the New Testament as that which Paul confronted here. Jesus Christ is our great high priest." He further states that no Baptist "conducts any kind of sacrifice of mass or sacrament claiming that (it) is a priestly function in which this human being is representing us before God. That is heresy. We believe in no such priesthood. And yet in the spirit of the Reformation, we claim ... that we are priests to each other. (We are) not priests delivering atonement, but priests ministering to each other in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our great High Priest."⁴

Obviously, we Baptists never thought of any Baptist clergyman as a priest. Our clergy could be *brother* and/or *pastor* and maybe *preacher*, but not *priest* because we believed only Catholics and Episcopalians had priests.

Some of us came to see that not all liturgical churches had priests. We wondered what the Lutherans thought about the idea of priests in the church. James Leo Garrett, Jr. has written: "Martin Luther, a leader in the Protestant Reformation, is often linked with the concept of the priesthood of believers. Luther challenged the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on the role played by the Roman Catholic priests."⁵ In 1520, Luther wrote in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

How then if they are forced to admit that we are all equally priests, as many of us are baptized, and by this way we truly are; while to them is committed only the Ministry and con-

sented by us? If they recognize this they would know that they have no right to exercise power over us except insofar as we may have granted it to them, for thus it says in I Peter 2, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom." In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the Ministry. Thus I Corinthians 4:1: 'No one should regard us as anything else than ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God.'⁶

In the tract entitled *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, Martin Luther magnified the freedom and priesthood of every believer, whether layman, priest, bishop, or pope.⁷

Norman Nagel, a Lutheran, has written, "We move from Exodus 19, through Matthew 25. 'What I urge you to comes by way of the mercies of God. Bring as your offering the sacrifice of your bodies, living, holy, and acceptable to God.' This is now clearly the way he would be worshiped because the death of the final sacrifice for sin has been bloodily done for the last time. Romans 11 culminates in doxology and liturgical quotation of Scripture. The Lord is the one being addressed."⁸

Paul wrote: "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:34-36 NRSV).

Peter writes that the Christian believers are to "come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:4-5 NRSV). In the same chapter, Peter says that the believers are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (v. 9).

The *Didache* orders its Christian communities to give first fruits

of their produce to the prophets who ministered to them, “for they are your high priests” (13:3). *The Didache* also speaks of the Eucharist as a “sacrifice” and applies to the sacrament the prophecy of Malachi 1:11 concerning the pure offering among the nations. This exegesis of Malachi became a commonplace in Christian apologetic of the second century.⁹ Paul refers to his evangelization as a “priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16 NRSV).¹⁰

Jesus was the sacrifice for our sin. There is no other sacrifice for sin. By his priestly sacrifice, we are priests but we cannot offer sacrifices for our sins; Jesus has done that already. We are living sacrifices whose lives are poured out in sacrifice to him. “I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2 NKJV). We are priests then *coram Deo* (in the presence of God). We cannot make ourselves priests, but we can be used of God to meet the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. W. Barry Garrett put it this way, “Scripturally then, any act or service in the kingdom of God is a priestly act. Singing, praying, giving, worshiping, extending the gospel, and holy living are all activities of the kingdom of priests which God has made of Christians.”¹¹

W. Barry Garrett has written about the implications of the doctrine of priesthood of the believers:

Because of their convictions about the priesthood of believers, Baptists preach (1) justification by faith, (2) believer's baptism, (3) regenerate church membership, (4) the church as a fellowship of believers in a spiritual democracy, (5) private interpretation of Scriptures, (6) freedom of thought, (7) religious liberty, (8) separation of church and state, (9) divine calling for every Christian's occupation, and (10) responsibility for the extension of the kingdom of God on the part of every Christian. Corruptions which Baptist oppose as violating the priesthood of believer's doctrine are

(1) infant baptism, (2) baptismal regeneration, (3) forms of church government (such as presbyterian and episcopal) which violate the rights of the people, (4) distinctions between the clergy and laity, (5) an established or state church, (6) persecution, and (7) totalitarianism in any form.¹²

Theodore A. Gill closes his discussion on the priesthood of believers with these words: “Today, in a continuing effort to reclaim the priesthood of all believers, Protestants who note their own repeated failures are putting most emphasis on the common service to which the doctrine bids all Christians. ‘Every shoemaker can be a priest of God, and stick to his own last while he does it,’ said Luther. Whoever, wherever we are, whatever we do, we are ministers of God.”¹³

How are Baptists different? We are not the only Christians who believe in the priesthood of the believer(s), but we differ with those who believe they can (and should) offer the body and blood of Christ in a communion service. We Baptists partake of the elements (the bread and the cup) of Holy Communion not to offer them as a sacrifice, but we observe the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him who offered himself as the sacrifice for us. We observe the Lord's Supper to remind ourselves that Christ is our high priest who intercedes for us. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12).

In his exposition of Rev. 5:9, Lynn Harold Hough wrote:

“The Lamb took the book of the rule of God. And the living creatures and the princely elders, harp and incense in hand, fell down before the Lamb. With glorious joy they sang the new song of redemption. The great deed of death had given freedom to men who were slaves. It had given a new world of emancipation to men who now tasted a transcendent freedom. They became kings to reign under God, priests to represent God in their new world. So the Cross became that creative deed which remade the ways of human life. The one who wrought in his mighty fashion was worthy to open the book of God. In the words of ascription of praise to the doer of the mighty suffering deed

of redemption there is a music of hope which has been heard in the world ever since. One hears in words like those of Whittier:

*Ring, bells in unrequited steeples,
The joy of unborn peoples!
Sound, trumpets far off blown,
Your triumph is my own!*¹⁴

And so it has sung itself in human hearts.”¹⁵

We, then, should receive the priesthood in humility, giving the Great High Priest all the honor and the glory. Jesus Christ made it possible for us to approach Almighty God and receive the wonderful gift of salvation through the Lamb who was slain for us.

There is no doubt that Southern Baptists will continue to debate with one another over the issues that surround the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer(s), but we can agree that none of us are high priests. We are servants of Jesus Christ and we should be able to serve our fellow men and women. In this priesthood, there is no seniority to be displayed, but we are engaged in the exercise of our priesthood. This priesthood does not give us the right to believe anything we want to believe, but we should have at least some freedom in our interpretation of Holy Scripture.

We need no other mediators between the Father and ourselves other than Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

“Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6 NRSV).

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God.” (Rev. 5:10 NRSV).

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 4-5 NRSV).

¹ Henry Turlington, *Commentary on Mark* in *The Broadman Commentary*, Vol. 8, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969) p. 398.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956. pp. 384-385.

³ Robert A Bullard and Larry D. Shinn, associate editors, *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 90.

⁴ Michael Foust, “Mohler: Question should be over faith in Baptist message, not simply BF&M,” October 13, 2000. www.baptist2baptist.net.

⁵ “Baptists: The Priesthood of the Believer or of Believers.” <http://baptistdistinctives.org/textonly7.html>

⁶ As quoted in “Priesthood of all believers” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_of_all_believers

⁷ Robert A. Baker, *A Summary of Christian History* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959).

⁸ Norman Nagel, “Lutheran and the Priesthood of All Believers,” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* Vol. 61: 4. October 1997.

⁹ *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV: p. 890

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ W. Barry Garrett, "Priesthood of Believers" in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. II (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 1113-1114.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Theodore A. Gill, “Priesthood of Believers” in *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (New York: Fontana Books, 1962), pp 282-284.

¹⁴ John Greenleaf Whittier "My Triumph" in Hyatt H. Waggoner, translator. *The Poetical Works of Whittier* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p.406.

Note: Hough did not include the fourth line of this stanza of Whittier's poem.

¹⁵ Lynn Harold Hough, “Revelation,” in *The Interpreter's Bible* Vol. XII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 408.



THEY CAME PREACHING: CELEBRATING 400 YEARS OF BAPTIST PREACHING

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Preaching has been at the forefront of Baptist life from the beginning. In season and out of season Baptist preachers have proclaimed biblical truth in order to advance the Kingdom of God. In this brief sketch, John Bunyan, and Martin Luther King, Jr. will be discussed. They serve as representative book-ends to the first four centuries of Baptist preaching:

These two preachers were selected from a myriad of effective and influential men in Baptist life who easily could have been chosen to represent their time period. These men left a significant mark on Baptist life and Christianity as a whole. Their life and ministry provides compelling examples for contemporary Baptists to emulate.

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Most widely known for his mystical thinking and allegorical writing, John Bunyan served as a long-tenured Baptist pastor.¹ His pastorate at Bedford served as the seed bed from which grew his deep care for and devotion to making Christ known. His early life and radical conversion gave him a zeal for the conversion of the lost without regard to geographical or established religious boundaries. Bunyan's legacy is easily traced and he continues to speak beyond the grave into the lives of contemporary Christians.

Early Influences

Bunyan's early life was marked by poverty and waywardness. He

seethed with disrespect for his father's trade as a tinker and his mother's unconditional, and in his opinion, pitiful love. He received little formal education, likely less than three years. Much of his developing years were wasted in carousing and mischief. On one particular adolescent venture to steal from a man that he deeply despised, Bunyan fell from a stolen skiff into frigid waters. He tasted the nearness of a Christ-less eternity but managed to find the safety of the shoreline. This event seemed to be the first in a series of events that began to bend Bunyan's heart toward Christ. The death of Bunyan's mother and two sisters within months of each other, a stint in the military where he saw the death of a fellow soldier that volunteered to go into battle in his place, and his marriage to a woman whose entire dowry consisted of two books of Christian theology and practice were each part of this series of events that seemed to push Bunyan toward a beneficent God. Bunyan was finally converted after falling under great conviction while playing at sport on the Lord's Day.

Ministry

Like any good puritanical thinker, Bunyan dealt with doubt and suffered from occasional dark nights of the soul. These thoughts did not overwhelm but surely helped to form his mystical writing style. Two years after his conversion he was called to serve as preaching pastor for the local church in Bedford.² His ministry was marked by opposition from the established state religious leaders and thus the state itself. He also found disagreement among his own ilk in regard to the mode of baptism and open communion. Despite being imprisoned twice, one period of incarceration lasted 12 long years, he remained faithful to the local Baptist church. His dynamic preaching gained him favor and a hearing among the masses. Bunyan adopted the Puritan form of sermon development emulating their use of meticulous analysis and pointed application. John Broadus extols the quality and clarity of his preaching, "Bunyan's sermons, though often wearisome in length and minute analysis, yet show cleverness of arrangement and great fullness of thought, with singular practical point and consuming earnestness."³

Legacy

Bunyan's legacy can easily be seen in the sheer number of written volumes that have been printed. Many of his works are now published in the public domain on the internet for mass consumption. The one significant factor in Bunyan's legacy that should not be overlooked nor devalued is that all of this treasure of Christian literature flowed from the pen of a preaching pastor. No doubt his literary success has far overshadowed his pastoral ministry. In fact, there is not sufficient evidence available for analysis as to ascertain his effectiveness as a pastor.

Yet, the pastor-theologian model emanates from Bunyan's life's work. Not all pastors will write as Bunyan did, but all can think just as deeply. Many significant men in church history acknowledge the affect of his work on them. Men like John Gill, Andrew Fuller, John L. Dagg, and Charles Spurgeon are known to have been greatly influenced by Bunyan.⁴ The legacy of Bunyan is well documented, yet in a media-saturated contemporary culture the future influence of his work is in doubt. Many new ministers will not have the gift of Bunyan given to them at the beginning of their ministry as many have in recent generations. Preserving and passing along his ministry and message is a task that needs consideration.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)

Martin Luther King, Jr. looms large in recent American history as the founder and voice of the nation's civil rights movement. His tragic death, considered martyrdom by some, set the cause of equality at the forefront of American politics and culture. In the ensuing years America has made great strides in correcting the racial wrongs of the past. It seems that the church, particularly Baptists in America, are becoming more intentional in removing racial barriers and much of that intentionality can be traced first to the teachings of Scripture and second to the life and tragic death of King.

Early Influences

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929.⁵ Both King's Father and maternal Grandfather were Baptist

pastors. The young King was bright and excelled in his educational experiences. He was able to skip both the ninth and twelfth grades enabling him to begin his studies at Morehouse College at the age of fifteen. In 1948, King graduated from Morehouse College with a B.A. in Sociology and entered Crozer Theological Seminary where he earned the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1951. Upon completing his seminary training, King entered Boston University where he earned the Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, June 5, 1955. King also received over 20 honorary doctorates from some of the nation's top academic institutions. At age 35, King was the youngest man, the second American, and the third black man awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

King was ordained at the age of nineteen at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia and became assistant pastor there as well. He served several national boards and agencies becoming the vice president of the national Sunday School and Baptist Teaching Union Congress of the National Baptist Convention.

Ministry

Most persons rightly identify King as one of the founders and main leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement. Yet, those who have written of his life have noted his leadership in the movement was based upon his work as a Baptist preacher. Commenting upon the fact that King was first a Georgia-born preacher, Richard Lischer affirms, "No portrait of King that neglects his ministerial identity and commitments will do justice to the true character of his achievement. What might be assumed of any Baptist preacher may be assumed of King: that he discovered his identity and calling in the church, fashioned his world in the image of the Bible, trusted the power of the spoken word, endeavored to practice Christian love at all times, and couldn't shake the preacher's chronic infatuation with conversion."⁶ It truly is difficult for the contemporary thinker to distinguish King as a Baptist pastor. The great convictions that drove King to sacrifice himself for the great cause of equality surely had their root in his Christian faith and call to ministry. Michael Thurman concurs, "It was the African-American church that nurtured him and gave him the sense that God was a god of justice, God was a god of mercy, God was a god of reckoning."⁷

Kim Lawton affirms that, “The role of pastor may be one of the most overlooked sides of Martin Luther King Jr. But it was one of the most important aspects of who he was.”⁸ Lewis Baldwin adds, “The pastoral role was central to everything, virtually everything, Dr. King achieved or sought to achieve in the church and in the society as a whole.”⁹

King arrived in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954 as the newly appointed pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church at the young age of 25. He was in the process of completing his doctoral dissertation as a student at Boston University when he accepted the post. He arrived with a 34-point plan for the future of the church. King’s ability to preach and connect with his hearers was a hallmark of his ministry. Mary Jo Smiley, a member during King’s tenure, remarked that the congregation “felt as if he was speaking directly to [them].”¹⁰ With the mounting responsibilities of the civil rights cause, King was apologetic of the lack of time he devoted to his ministerial work among the congregation at Dexter Avenue. In 1960, King resigned his pastorate in order to devote more time to the national cause but did not completely leave the ministry. Upon his departure from Montgomery, King became an associate pastor at his father’s church, Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Legacy

Martin Luther King’s influence upon contemporary American culture is visible and tangible. Many Americans view Barack Obama’s ascension to the White House as the culmination of “the dream.” King will long be remembered for his civil rights work. The “I have a dream” mantra will be carried forth and at times hijacked for unsavory causes. Yet at the heart of King’s work was a Baptist church. A work to which he was dedicated and seemed to draw his greatest strength and encouragement. Baldwin insists, “Not only was he a pastor at the local congregational level, preaching to the people, responding to the needs of the people, but he was also a pastor to the nation, because he was very interested in the soul of the nation, determined to redeem the soul of the nation.”¹¹

Lischer admits the difficulty of quantifying “the full measure of his contribution.”¹² He adds, “No epitaph can be comprehensive, espe-

cially that of a preacher. Preachers live by the open-endedness of the Word of God, which, like a metaphor or promise, possesses meanings and levels of fulfillment far beyond the preacher’s ken.”¹³ Thus, King’s legacy is in its infancy. The immediate impact of his ministry is seen in the many leaders that have followed in his footsteps. Some have strayed from the original journey while others have stayed the course.

Jesse Nelson, a young, African-American pastor and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary student notes King’s primary influence upon him as a model for scholarship and pastoral ministry.¹⁴ Nelson saw in King an effective communicator that also took his message to the streets by engaging the both the congregation and the community in order to elicit life change. He senses, like King, a call to achieve the highest levels of learning balanced with a ministry of sacrificial pastoral service.

Baptists are slowly melding the diversity of race and culture into their practice and theory. The passing of time will allow a more full reflection on King’s work and its influence on the church, particularly Southern Baptists. In recent years, Southern Baptists through their convention annual meeting have acknowledged and publically repented of their lack of response and indifference to the blight of racism.¹⁵ As historians of both church and culture analyze King’s work and influence greater appreciation for his ministerial work will surely result allowing the contemporary church to glean from his thinking and methodology.

Conclusion

Both Bunyan and King have left a significant mark on the culture as a whole and Christianity in particular. Bunyan’s legacy and influence is much easier to quantify while King’s will be determined in the century ahead. These men were pastors. They were preachers. They were embroiled in controversy. They held fast to their understanding of the Bible. They fleshed out their theology as they ministered in spite of extreme difficulty. They both died carrying out their calling from God.

Contemporary Baptists will do well to emulate the qualities of these men that have made them noteworthy. Their commitment to the call, passion for delivering the message of Christ, compassion on

the hurting and oppressed, and their unending devotion to the local church set King and Bunyan apart.

- ¹ Biographical information on John Bunyan was gleaned from the following sources: Wellman, Sam. *John Bunyan*. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1996. See also online article, *A Baptist Page Portrait: John Bunyan*, <http://www.siteone.com/religion/baptist/baptistpage/Portraits/bunyan.htm>. Accessed online June 30, 2009.
- ² David L. Larsen, *The Company of Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 274.
- ³ John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (Birmingham, Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 208.
- ⁴ See related articles in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds. *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*. Nashville: Broadman, 2001.
- ⁵ Biographical information on King was drawn from: *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Biographical Sketch* from <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/hum/mlk/srs281.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.
- ⁶ Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 267.
- ⁷ Michael Thurman in *Religious & Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006 Episode no. 20, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.
- ⁸ Kim Lawton in *Religious & Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006 Episode no. 20, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.
- ⁹ Lewis Baldwin in *Religious & Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006 Episode no. 20, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.
- ¹⁰ Mary Jo Smiley in *Religious & Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006 Episode no. 20, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.

[thics/week920/feature.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html). Accessed online July 1, 2009.

- ¹¹ Baldwin, in *Religious & Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006 Episode no. 20, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week920/feature.html>. Accessed online July 1, 2009.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Jesse N. Nelson, Email correspondence with writer, July 1, 2009.
- ¹⁵ See *Resolution On Racial Reconciliation On The 150th Anniversary Of The Southern Baptist Convention* adopted at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, June 1995, Atlanta, Georgia. Available at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=899>.



ANDREW FULLER: SERENDIPITOUS REVOLUTIONARY

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Introduction

When Baptists made their presence known in England between 1609 and 1640, they had already divided themselves into two doctrinal camps. The General Baptists believed Christ died for all mankind. The Particular Baptists, on the other hand, held to the Calvinist belief that the death of Christ applies only to the elect. They demonstrated their theological outlook by adapting what they called the Second London Confession, also called the Assembly confession. It was basically the Westminster Confession modified to suit Baptist beliefs about baptism by immersion only for professing believers and substituting the congregational form of church government in place of the hierarchical system of the Presbyterians. They added articles on the laying on of hands, and hymn singing. They interpreted the Lord's Supper as a memorial.

Baptists in the colonies reflected the doctrinal position of their English brethren. The Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted the Second London Confession in 1707, calling it the Philadelphia Confession. Similarly the Charleston Baptist Association adopted the Second London Confession in 1751 dubbing it the Charleston Confession. Calvinistic doctrine became the preferred theology of two of the most significant associations in the Colonies.

The General Baptists were represented in the Colonies, but they lacked the precisely argued doctrinal tenets espoused by the Particular (Calvinistic) churches. The General Baptists were organized in strong associations, thus contributing a vital link to the growth of Baptists.

The Calvinistic Baptists made significant strides in converting General Baptists into Particular Baptist churches, a development chronicled in my book, *Winds of Doctrines: The Origin and Development of Southern Baptist Theology*.¹ My purpose at this point relates to a theological development in England by Andrew Fuller which helped alter the theological landscape for Baptists in the South in the United States. Baron Stow penned words in 1826 about Fuller's contribution saying, "The history of Fuller may be said to consist of a three-fold division, under each of which he will command the admiration and esteem of future generations. We allude to him as the corrector of false Calvinism, the impugner of deistical and Socinian heresy, and the advocate of missions."² Francis Wayland wrote that "Gill's Divinity was a sort of standard" until "a change commenced upon the publication of the writings of Andrew Fuller."³ Jeremiah B. Jeter voiced almost the same sentiments as Wayland.⁴ J. M. Pendleton admitted his own theological indebtedness to Fuller.⁵ James P. Boyce also traced the change in Baptist understanding of the atonement to the work of Andrew Fuller.⁶

To set forth the justification for the above assertions, the following materials will encompass four major subjects: the theology of John Gill with which Andrew Fuller differed, the major theological positions advocated by Fuller, and his efforts in launching the modern missionary movement associated with William Carey. We will conclude with a brief survey of Fuller's impact on Baptists in the South, especially related to Southern Baptists.

John Gill

John Gill (1697-1771) was associated with the Particular Baptists in England. A staunch Calvinist and a brilliant writer, he was the first major writing Baptist theologian.⁷ He became pastor of the Baptist church in Horseydown, Southwark, in 1719, a posi-

tion he held for 51 years. The church later moved to Carter Lane, St. Olive's Street, Southwark. The church, once pastored by Benjamin Keach, would later become the New Park Street Chapel and then the Metropolitan Tabernacle, pastored by Charles Spurgeon.⁸

Friends could not secure for him an entrance to any university. Through private teachers, coupled with his own initiative, he became a superior scholar in Latin, Greek and logic. He later became a profound scholar in "Rabbinical Hebrew and a master of the Targums, Talmud, and Rabbath and the book of Zohar, with their ancient commentaries." Although he had no university training, he was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of Aberdeen in 1748. A listing of his most important works is impressive.

The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated, 1731
The Cause of God and Truth, 4 parts, 1735-38
An Exposition of the New Testament, 3 vols. 1746-48
Exposition of the Old Testament, 6 vols. 1748-63
A Dissertation of the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language, 1767
A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, 1767
*A Body of Practical Divinity, 1770*⁹

Evaluating the impact of his theology presents problems. Whether he was a Calvinist or hyper-Calvinist continues to be a matter of debate. Andrew Fuller, as discussed below, classified him as a hyper-Calvinist. The impact of his preaching on the church of which he was a pastor for 51 years may be indicated by its statistics. Thomas Armitage called him a hyper-Calvinist. His espousal of supralapsarianism was so high "that it is hard to distinguish him from an Antinomian. For example, he could not invite sinners to the Saviour...Under this preaching his Church steadily declined, and after half a century's work he left but a mere handful."¹⁰

Although any attempt at giving a comprehensive survey of his theology would be futile, two of his doctrinal positions evoked the criticism of Andrew Fuller, Gill's ideas about God's decrees and his doctrine of the atonement. As to God's decrees, Gill argued that God

must decree everything whatsoever because:

if anything is by chance and fortune, or the mere effect of second causes, and of free will of men, and if the works under these, in subserviency to them, and takes his measures of operation from them, then he must be dependent on them; and how then can it be said with truth, that *of him, and through him and to him, are all things?* Rom. 11:36. The *immutability* of God requires eternal decrees in him, concerning every thing that is in time; for if anything is done in time, that did not fall under his notice and will in eternity, this must be new to him, and produces a change in him; as if an after-will in arises in him, respecting everything he would have done; which he willed not before, this argues a change in him; whereas, in him there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning.*¹¹

Gill realized the problem of evil in the created order had to be accounted for in the system. He divided God's decrees into two kinds, God's decretive will and God's permissive will. The later allowed Gill to explain the justness of the decree to reprobation in that God permitted their sin. How this could be brought about as a part of God's sovereign decree and apart from human free choice Gill did not make clear.

He came close to a resolution of the dilemma in dealing with the non-elect angels. That some angels fell into rebellion has solid scriptural support. Here is his explanation:

These angels, in their original estate of creation, were in the capacity of obeying the law that was given them..., but fell from it, for being left to the freedom of their will, which was mutable, and is that folly and weakness which angels in their original state were chargeable with by God, and in comparison of him; they sinned and fell...¹²

One could question the reference to "the freedom of their will." Further what was the "folly and weakness" which infected the non-elect angels? Did God so create them with those characteristics? Gill attempted another explanation of how they could fall. Repeating his assertion that they were left to their own free will,

which was mutable, and so of themselves, and not through any temptation without them, sinned and fell; this is always spoken of as their own voluntary act and deed, without any force or persuasion used with them.... It is very probable, that one of them, famous above the rest of the rest for his wisdom and strength might begin the apostasy, [etc].¹³

Gill continues along that line, but he never explains how the angels fell “without any force or persuasion” and could somehow succumb to the leadership of one famous angel.

Turning now from the decrees, a second doctrine which has gained wide acceptance relates to Gill’s doctrine of the atonement. He quotes such verses as Mark 10:45 which says that Christ gave “his life a ransom for many.” Gill notes that the verse says for many, not for all. In his words, “Now from there it appears that the redemption is not universal, is not of all men....” Jesus paid the debt of the elect on the cross and not for all men.¹⁴

Two principle doctrines of Gill having been highlighted, it is now time to bring into focus Andrew Fuller and his assault on Gill and what Fuller calls “hyper Calvinism.” Fuller classified himself as a Calvinist, but decidedly not of the Gill variety.

Andrew Fuller, 1754-1815

To stress the importance of rearing children we often quote the saying, “As the twig is bent.” The first years of a child’s life are critical in establishing skills to be practiced throughout life. Andrew Fuller documented the impact of childhood frustration in forming his theology and giving a direction to his life work.

He was born in Cambridgeshire, England, into a family of Dissenters, but specifically among those known in history as Particular Baptists. They, unlike the General Baptists, held to the doctrine of restricted atonement, that the death of Christ atoned only for the sins of the elect. They were Calvinistic in doctrine whereas the General Baptists, believing the death of Christ was sufficient for the sins of the world, leaned toward Arminianism.

Fuller’s parents attended a church in Soham whose pastor, a Mr. Eve, preached the twin doctrines of God’s decree to elect some to salvation and others, the reprobate, to be lost. By the time Fuller was 14 years old, he became dissatisfied at the doctrines Eve preached. In Fuller’s words, Eve’s doctrines “tinged with false Calvinism, had little or nothing to say to the unconverted.” About the age of 14 he began giving “serious thought about futurity.” He also asked “What is faith?” and thought he might figure it out as he grew older.¹⁵ The journal he kept during these years reveals a recurring pattern of deep despair, self-reformation, encouragement from pertinent Scriptures and so forth, page after page.

During those years he studied John Gill’s *Body of Divinity*, the works of John Bunyan, and Brine, not identified further. A pamphlet written by Abraham Taylor entitled *The Modern Question* convinced Fuller that Christ and the apostles preached to the ungodly the requirement for repentance and faith as connected to the remission of sins. During those years of questioning and seeking, he complained that he sought a “warrant,” probably some Scriptural justification for his by-passing election and pressing his case directly to Christ. In his words, “I was not then aware that *any* poor sinner had a warrant to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, but suppose there must be some kind of qualification to entitle him to it; yet I was aware I had no qualification.”¹⁶ He eventually arrived at a measure of spiritual peace. In March of 1770, he was baptized and joined the church at Soham. He was 16 years of age. He later became the pastor at Soham and then at Kittering.

Fuller had become disillusioned with what he called “the system of false Calvinism.”¹⁷ He found others who shared his sentiments such as John Ryland, Jr., as well as Mr. Sutcliffe, of Olney. He also named Jonathan Edwards as someone whose writings influenced him. Interestingly, both Fuller and Edwards called themselves Calvinists, inveighing against the “false system” of Calvinism popular at the time. Fuller initially called them “high” Calvinists but later, “hyper” Calvinists whom he described as anyone refusing to present Christ to the unsaved.¹⁸

The phrase “Calvinistic system” was more than a casual theme to Fuller. For example, he wrote a book, somewhat tentatively entitled *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared as to Their Moral Tendency: in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Friends of Vital and Practical Religion: To Which is Added a Postscript, Establishing the Principle of the Work Against the Exceptions of Dr. Toulmin, Mr. Belsham, & c.* The key element in the title is “Friends of Vital and Practical Religion.” Fuller remembered how the preaching of Mr. Eve at the Sohan church left him untouched in his inner being because he could not discern whether he was a part of the elect. He learned from experience that doctrine, no matter how sincerely preached, had to have an effect on the way one lived. It had to be vital, practical. In exposing the systems under consideration, he tried to calculate the impact they had on the way the hearers lived. He lumped the Socinians in the group because, in adopting the anti-trinitarianism of Fautus Socinus, they had degenerated into anti-nomianism, the argument that believers could not sin. He referred to an objection to “the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination” as teaching that “holiness of heart and life is as much the object of divine appointment as future happiness; and that this connection can never be broken.”¹⁹ Fatalism, he believed, would be fostered. He later used implications from his insight in constructing his view of God’s decrees.

To illustrate, he took an idea of Gill that justification “terminates in the conscience of a believer, and which (he says) the Scriptures style justification *by faith*.”²⁰ A problem arose in Fuller’s thinking. If by God’s decree the elect were made so prior to the creation, how could their justification have occurred at that point? Where did faith fit in? He picked one clue from Gill who made a distinction in his work *Cause of God and Truth* between “the power in our hand and the power in our heart.”²¹ Whatever Gill intended, Fuller saw an application to the problem of accountability for sin. In his words, “Every man has it in the power of his hand to do good and abstain from evil; and this it is which makes us accountable beings.”²² He cites the view of his “opponents” who saw a general invitation to sinners to be inconsistent with the doctrine of election. He retorted that if their line of

reasoning will prove anything it will prove too much. He cited two examples.²³ It would prove that some men need not seek the means of grace or in any way seek after salvation, nor be concerned about it in that God has already bestowed it on them. Second, if it is consistent to believe that one’s *future* state is determined, then one must believe the same of the *present* state. He concluded, “Yet those who reason as above, with regard to another life, are as attentive to the affairs of this life as other people.”²⁴ After trying to solve the dilemma between God’s decree and human accountability, he rested in this, “The Judge of the whole earth will do right.”²⁵

In writing about the purpose of the death of Christ, Fuller frequently alludes to the death as satisfaction, in terms similar to the ideas of Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) in his famous work *Cur Deus Homo?* Meaning “Why the God-Man?” However, Fuller never names Anselm as one whose thought guided him. In a second motif he describes the work of Christ as fulfilling the law, reminiscent of Hugh Grotius (1583-1645) and his Governmental Theory of the Atonement. However, the ones named by Fuller as most deeply helping him was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790). He also named David Brainerd, the missionary to the American Indians. Both Bellamy and Brainerd were frequent guests in Edwards’ home.

Fuller, as did Edwards, described sin as a debt. Fuller wrote, “Sin is a debt only in a metaphysical sense; properly speaking, it is a crime, and satisfaction for it requires for it to be made, not on punitive, but on moral principles.”²⁶ He specifically rejected the notion that the redemptive work of Christ was “a kind of commercial transaction” but was rather an “expression of the displeasure of the offended against the conduct of the offender, equal to what the nature of the offense is in reality” [italics Fuller’s].²⁷ In a similar vein of thought he described propitiation as “the displeasure of God against sin being manifested” and “mercy to the sinner . . . being exercised without any suspicion of [God’s] having relinquished his regards for righteousness.”²⁸ In the death of Christ for sin, the moral government of God is honored and “the mouths of ungodly sinners stopped.”²⁹ He raised the question of whether the wrath of Christ satisfied divine justice and thereby opened the way

of salvation, concluding, “Certainly it is not for us to attempt any thing like this; but by believing in him, we acquiesce in what he has done and suffered, and so are made conformable in it.”³⁰ Fuller was careful to state his understanding of the meaning of the cross of Christ:

The sufferings of Christ in our stead, therefore, are not a punishment inflicted in the ordinary course of distributive justice, but an extraordinary interposition of infinite wisdom and love; not contrary to, but more than preserving the spirit of it. Such, as well as I am able to explain then, are my views of the substitution of Christ.³¹

This cursory survey of Fuller’s salient ideas about the meaning of the cross would be incomplete without a brief introduction to his approach to theology. He discussed two methods for developing or arranging theology. One, what he calls the analytical plan, begins with the “being and attributes of God, the creation of the world,” and so proceed to redemption by Jesus Christ.³² He refers at this point to *The History of Redemption* by Jonathan Edwards. Fuller began with the doctrine of the cross and then worked successively through other biblical doctrines. To illustrate, he developed the concept of the being of God as it relates to the centrality of the cross.³³ Assuming as traditional theologians might reason that one could reason from successive causations that God is the Uncaused First Cause, Fuller dismissed the issue by stating, “God is the first cause and last end of all things.” To summarize his view he states, “The True knowledge of God is less speculative than practical.”³⁴ In today’s language, he opted for the inductive over the deductive, thus by-passing intricate arguments flowing from the order of God’s decrees. To highlight his dismissal of arguments based on God’s decrees, note his words; “Some have placed all the virtue of the atonement in the appointment of God. But if so, why was it not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin?”³⁵

Fuller was more than an innovative theologian. He was also a vital part of the modern missionary movement. William Carey is sometimes called, “The father of the modern missions.”³⁶ If so, Fuller was its grandfather. He had been praying over the plight of the heathen since 1786.

Most students of Christian missions know two incidents associated with William Carey the missionary. Most can recount a famous sermon he preached, based on Isaiah 54:2, 3 in which he set forth two underlying spiritual principles: “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.” Carey was a Baptist pastor who was also a gifted linguist. He taught himself Latin, learned Greek under the tutelage of a fellow pastor, but also mastered Hebrew, Italian, French, and, while in Serampore, Bengali and Sanskrit.

He was born August 17, 1761, at Paulerspury in Northamptonshire, of parents who were comfortable in finances but not well off. They were Dissenters, refusing to participate in the services of the established church in England. William received a common-school education but never gained entrance into a university. He was lead to Christ by William Manning, a Dissenter and was immersed by John Ryland, Jr.

Carey, failing in his efforts to teach school, moved to Moulton where he applied to a church for admission to the ministry. The group eventually accepted him as pastor. He worked at his trade as a cobbler to meet his financial needs. During this time he read a pamphlet written by Andrew Fuller entitled “The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation.” His zeal for missions grew in intensity.³⁷ Rejected by the ministers to form a missionary society, twelve men met October 2, 1792, in Kettering, England, at the home of Mrs. Wallis, the widow of Beeby Wallis, a close friend of Fuller. He had died in the summer of 1792. They formed the first Baptist Missionary Society which they named “The Particular Baptist Missionary Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathen.” The officers were Andrew Fuller, secretary; Reynard Hoff, treasurer; and a committee of management comprised of John Ryland, Jr., Sutcliffe, and later, Pearce.³⁸ When Carey and his group sailed for India in April, 1793, the modern missionary movement was launched. Carey at that time was pastor at the church in Leicester.³⁹

Fuller and his Committee of Management faced immediate problems. Little or no precedent existed to guide them in establishing a viable organization. As new missionaries were appointed, the

society had to arrange ship fares, obtain legal documents of various kinds, and above all, procure financing. Fuller apparently assumed most of the responsibility as he traveled widely to enlist individuals and churches in the enterprise. His biographer records one of his appeals, worthy of recounting here.

“Friends,” said he, “talk to me about coadjutors and assistants, but I know not how it is. I find a difficulty. Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which have never been explored. We had no one to guide us; and, while we were deliberating, Carey, as it were said, ‘Well, I will go down if you hold the rope.’ But, before he went down, he, as it seemed to me, took an oath from each of us at the mouth of the pit to this effort, that while we lived we should never let go of the rope. You understand me. There was great responsibility attached to us who began the business.”⁴⁰

Fuller traveled to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England to raise money and promote the missions in spite of grave physical problems. Shortly after starting the missionary society, he suffered a stroke which affected one side of his face. That was recovered after a short time, but the stroke “left behind” a headache from which he felt he would never recover.⁴¹ He went to his eternal reward in 1815.

After Carey arrived in India, he eventually re-located to Serampore. While there new arrivals, Luther Rice and Adoniram and Ann Judson, came requesting baptism. They had been sent out by the Board of Commissioners, a Congregational organization, but became convinced of believer’s immersion on the voyage from America. Luther Rice volunteered to return home in an attempt to form a Baptist society and raise money for their support. The result was the establishment of the “General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions” in 1814. Because it convened every three years, it became better known as the “Triennial convention.”

With the establishment of the new convention, Baptists set up and

pioneered the society method of carrying out national missionary work. They would later set up Bible and publishing societies which functioned in a similar fashion with independent, self-sustaining boards without direct connection or oversight by the denomination. When Southern Baptists set up their independent organization in 1845, they placed the home and foreign boards under one organization structure, later adding other boards and commissions. All would be controlled by the local churches.

But that’s another story.

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² Baron Stow, “Sketch of Andrew Fuller,” *The Columbian Star* 5 (December 23, 1826): 204.

³ Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1857), p. 18.

⁴ J. B. Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset, Consisting of Articles on Distinctive Baptist Principles*, new end, ed. (Richmond, Virginia: The Religious Herald Co., 1902), pp. 12-13.

⁵ J. M. Pendleton, “The Atonement of Christ,” *Southern Baptist Review and Eclectic* 2(January-February, 1856): 46.

⁶ James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, rev. F. H. Kerfoot (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), pp. 130-136.

⁷ Wikipedia, S.V. John Gill.

⁸ Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists; Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices, from the Time of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to the year 1886*. (New York: Bryon, Taylor & Co., 1887), p. 560.

⁹ Wikipedia, S.V. John Gill.

¹⁰ Armitage, P. 561.

¹¹ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, vol. 1, (London: 1839. Reprinted by Turner Lassetter: Atlanta, GA, 1950), p. 175

- ¹² Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: As a System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures., The Baptist Faith Series*, vol. 1 (Paris, Arkansas, Reprint, 1984). Pp. 305-306.
- ¹³ _____, p. 307.
- ¹⁴ _____, *A Body of Divinity*, p. 463.
- ¹⁵ Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, With A Memoir of His Life, by Andrew Gunton Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 18145), p. 2.
- ¹⁶ Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 5.
- ¹⁷ _____, p. 16.
- ¹⁸ _____, p. 16.
- ¹⁹ Fuller, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared as to Their Moral Tendency: in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Friends of Vital and Practical Religion: To Which Is Added, A Postscript, Establishing the Principles of the Work Against the Exceptions of Dr. Toulmin, Mr. Belsham, & c.* (Boston: Printed and Published by Lincoln & Edmonds, 1815), p. 96.
- ²⁰ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, vol. 2, p. 797, quoted by Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 17.
- ²¹ Fuller, *Ibid*, p. 10.
- ²² *Ibid*.
- ²³ _____, vol. 2, p. 371.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 14.
- ²⁶ _____, *The Atonement of Christ, and the Justification of the Sinner.*, ed. Joseph Belcher (New York: American Baptist Tract Society, n.d.), p. 68.
- ²⁷ _____, p. 56.
- ²⁸ _____, p. 94.
- ²⁹ _____, p. 74.
- ³⁰ _____, p. 139.
- ³¹ _____, p. 71.
- ³² _____, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 690.
- ³³ _____, p. 692.
- ³⁴ _____, p. 693.
- ³⁵ _____, *The Atonement*, p. 59.

- ³⁶ Wikipedia, s.v. "William Carey, Missionary."
- ³⁷ *Ibid*.
- ³⁸ Amitage, *A History*, p. 580.
- ³⁹ _____, p. 581.
- ⁴⁰ _____, p. 68.
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BAPTISTS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



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Baptist Contributions to Religious Liberty

Baptists have a long and proud history of battling for religious liberty and separation of church and state. This struggle began in the seventeenth century and continues to this day. Methodist Frank Mead noted the contribution of Baptists to religious liberty: “They are God’s patriots, putting allegiance to him always above allegiance to Caesar. Freedom of conscience and complete divorce of church and state! How they suffered for that! They have faced mockery and mud, fines, whippings and iron bars; they have been burned at the stake and pulled on the rack, but they have held to it.”¹ Baptists have stood for religious liberty from their beginning. “This convictional principle,” observed William Brackney, “grows out of Baptist experience and Baptist thought.”² They have held this principle and the closely related principle, separation of church and state throughout their history. Therefore, it is fitting that we remember these principles as we celebrate 400 years of Baptist history.

Baptist History and Religious Liberty

Who were the key leaders who shaped Baptist thinking on religious liberty? What influence did these leaders have on making religious liberty a part of the First Amendment of the United States

Constitution? Did early Baptists have any influence on the thinking of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison or other Founders? These are some of the questions we will seek to answer.

John Smyth

John Smyth (c. 1570-1612) founded the General Baptist Movement. Around 1607, Smyth and his congregation left England because of persecution and settled in Amsterdam because of the religious freedom that existed in that city. In 1609, Smyth baptized himself and members of his congregation who agreed with him that the baptism they received in the Church of England was not valid. They took the Anabaptist position that baptism should be reserved for those who made a confession of faith. Smyth’s congregation sought to join with the Waterlander Mennonites. This would split Smyth’s group with Thomas Helwys leading a group back to England in 1612. Those who remained would eventually merge with the Mennonites after Smyth’s death in 1612. Smyth’s group that remained in Amsterdam drafted a confession after 1612. Article 84 of the confession reads: “That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free to every man’s conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man to man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and the lawgiver of the Church and conscience (James IV; 12).”³

These principles existed in the early Baptist’s Confessions of Faith in the 17th Century in England. For example, in 1660 the General Baptists of England created what was called “The Standard Confession.” Article 24 of this confession reads: “That it is the will, and Mind of God...that all men should have the free liberty of their consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution... and that for any in Authority otherwise to act, we believe is expressly contrary to the mind of Christ.”⁴

Thomas Helwys

Baptists have affirmed throughout its history the religious freedom of all people. They have stood for the idea that all religions

should be treated equally before the law and none of them should receive preferential treatment. One of the first Baptist leaders to champion these ideas was Thomas Helwys (1550-1616). Helwys wrote the following:

We still pray for our lord the King that wee be free from suspect, for having anie thoughts of provoking evill against them of the Romish religion in regard to their profession, if they be true and faithful subjects to the king for wee do freely professe, that our lord the king hath no more power over their consciences than ours, and that is none at all: for our lord the kind is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a King but in earthly causes, and if the Kings people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane laws made by the King, our lord the King can require no more: for mens religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the king shall not answer for it, neither may he be judg between God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.⁵

Helwys was a prominent pastor of the first Baptist church in England. He wrote a book entitled, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. This book defends the right to religious freedom for all. Helwys wrote in his own copy of the book that was given to the king these words: “The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore hath no power over immortall soules of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them.”⁶

William Estep wrote that “such a bold declaration of the principle of religious freedom and the limitation of the king’s authority could hardly have evoked from James’ mentality anything other than total rejection.”⁷ The author was arrested and imprisoned around 1613. It is believed that he died while in jail.

Busher and Murton

First, Smyth argued for religious liberty; then, Helwys argued for religious liberty and sealed his witness with a martyr’s death. Two other early English Baptists who proclaimed religious liberty were Leonard Busher and John Murton. Busher wrote *Religion’s Peace: or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience* in 1614. Leon McBeth

called it the “first Baptist treatise devoted entirely to religious liberty.”⁸ Busher asserted that neither king nor bishop could “command faith.” Bush argued against the use of force in religion. Busher wrote the following in capital letters: “IT IS NOT ONLY UNMERCIFUL, BUT UNNATURAL AND ABOMINABLE; YEA, MONSTROUS FOR ONE CHRISTIAN TO VEX AND DESTROY ANOTHER FOR DIFFERENCE AND QUESTIONS OF RELIGION.”⁹

John Murton was a friend of Helwys and would succeed him as the leader of General Baptists in England. He advocated religious liberty in his treatise: *Persecution for Religion Judg’d and Condemn’d*. It first was released in 1615 and was revised in 1620 and 1662. Murton wrote: “how heinous it is in the sight of the Lord to force men and women by cruel persecutions, to bring their bodies to a worship whereunto they cannot bring their spirits... No man ought to be persecuted for his religion, be it true or false...”¹⁰

Roger Williams

Our next pioneer of religious liberty takes us to the New World. Roger Williams was called a prophet of religious liberty by Harvard professor, Perry Miller. Miller wrote of Williams: “Now, as all the world knows, this separatist figures in history as the pioneer of religious freedom, even of democracy...Some even hail him as the precursor of Jefferson... Call him the prophet of the splendid doctrine that a man’s right to worship as he pleases inalienably given him by nature and nature’s God.”¹¹ Comparing Jefferson with Williams, Perry says that Williams wanted to free the church from the state; in contrast, Jefferson wanted to free the state from the church.¹²

Roger Williams was born in London in 1603. He was educated at Cambridge University. He was friends with Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. Williams was forced to leave England or go to jail. He then travelled to Boston where he was welcomed by friends. He would later be forced to leave Boston because of his insistence on complete separation of church and state. He bought a piece of land from the Indians which he providentially named Providence.

Williams would later return to England to attempt to get a charter for Rhode Island which would guarantee religious freedom.

He was successful and returned to America with a new charter for Rhode Island. The part of the charter that addresses religious liberty reads: "...that no person within said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anywhere molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any difference in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of said colony; but that all and any persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concerns."¹³ Roland H. Bainton, the famous church historian at Yale, thought that Williams' ideas of separation of church and state influenced the founders and the Constitution. Bainton thought that Williams' policy of separating church and state liberated the church and secularized the state. This idea was accepted by the founders because they believed it was best to keep church and state separate. Williams thought the church consisted only of believers; while, the state included everybody.

John Clarke

Roger Williams was soon joined by another Baptist spokesman for religious liberty, John Clarke. In 1637, Clarke and his wife Elizabeth "sailed into Boston harbor, just a few years after Roger Williams and his wife had made a similar escape from England."¹⁴ Williams had been forced to leave a year earlier. He arrived at the time of the trial of Anne Hutchinson. The Puritan leadership was upset with her because she "dared to challenge male and clerical authority, [and] dared to have theological opinions. The Bay Colony authorities did not approve of her 'doing' theology at all, nor did they approve of the particular theology she did."¹⁵ Clarke had more sympathy for Anne than he had for her persecutors. He wrote about this religious tyranny in his diary: "A year in this hotbed of religious tyranny is enough for me. I cannot bear to see men in these uttermost parts of the earth not able to bear with others in matters of conscience and live peaceable together. With so much land before us, I for one will turn aside, shake the dust of Boston off my feet, and betake me to a new place. There I shall make a haven for all those who, like myself, are disgusted and sickened by the Puritan dicta-

torship. I shall make it a place where there will be full freedom of thought and religious conscience."¹⁶

Clarke decided with some others to leave Boston. Roger Williams helped Clarke and his followers to purchase land from the Indians in Narragansett Bay. It is at this place Clarke began his "settlement and town, which he named Newport."¹⁷ Clarke and his followers organized the First Baptist Church of Newport, the second Baptist Church in America. Clarke would be the pastor of this church till his death in 1676.

In 1651, Clarke with John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes, members of his congregation, walked eighty mile to visit an aged, blind, Baptist friend, William Witter, in Lynn, Massachusetts. They led a prayer meeting in his home. All three, Crandall, Holmes and Clarke were arrested. "Here was a serious offense, for it was against the law for anyone to hold divine services except under the auspices or with the consent of the established Congregational Church of the Massachusetts Bay Colony."¹⁸ The judge at the trial said they should be killed. However, if they paid the fine, he would release them. If they did not pay the fine, they would be publicly whipped. Clarke and Crandall's fine was paid, but Holmes refused for his fine to be paid. "Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped, thirty lashes well laid on, in Boston's Market Square."¹⁹

Roger Williams and John Clarke were sent to England in 1651 to obtain a more secure and longer lasting charter for the Rhode Island settlement. Clarke would stay in London for twelve years before securing a second charter. "Not only did the charter confirm the right to the land, but it gave the colonists' permission to attempt 'a lively experiment' in which they could enjoy complete religious liberty."²⁰ *Ill Newes from New England: Or, a Narrative of New England's Persecution*, Clarke's book, played a major role in providing support for the new charter. The book was published in London. This book was important because it gave Clarke the opportunity to defend the Baptist faith that had been denied him in Boston. "Clarke himself," observed Edwin Gaustad emerged as the leading denominational spokesmen for a true religious liberty."²¹

Isaac Backus and John Leland

Two other major Baptist pioneers of religious liberty were Isaac Backus and John Leland. Isaac Backus (1724-1806) was a Baptist minister and champion of religious liberty during the Revolutionary era. He was converted during the Great Awakening in 1742. He was an independent evangelist for over ten years. On January 16, 1756, he became a Baptist and organized a Baptist church in Middleborough, Massachusetts. It was mostly through his pen that Isaac Backus fought for religious liberty. He wrote tracts, pamphlets and petitions arguing for freedom of conscience. "In 1773 his most important tract, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty against the Oppression of the Present Day*, appeared - the best exposition of the eighteenth-century evangelical concept of separation of church and state."²²

John Leland (1754-1841) was another early advocate of religious liberty and separation of church and state. He was converted and then baptized by a Baptist minister. Though born and raised in Massachusetts, he would later pastor Baptist churches in Virginia. Leland and Virginia Baptists would have a major influence on the thinking of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. "Through his preaching, writing and personal friendship with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Leland exercised notable influence in the struggle to disestablish the Anglican Church and establish religious liberty."²³ Leland pressed Madison and the founders to include a guarantee of religious freedom in the Constitution. This protection would later be included in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. E.Y. Mullins, in the *The Axioms of Religion*, asserted that the First Amendment came about because of Baptist insistence. "Their view of soul freedom and separation of church and state is seen in their earliest known confessions of faith, and their practice as a denomination has never parted company with their doctrine."²⁴

George W. Truett

George W. Truett (1867-1944) served as the pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas for forty-seven years. He also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1927 to 1930. He was known as a great champion of religious freedom. He

delivered a sermon on religious liberty on the steps of the nation's capital in Washington, D.C., on May 16, 1920. This address preceded the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention which was being held in the same city.

In this sermon, Truett paid tribute to the early Baptist pioneers of religious liberty. It was because of early Baptists and their sacrifices that religious liberty existed in America. These leaders contributed to both religious and civil liberty in America.²⁵

Truett believed there was a difference between religious liberty and religious toleration. Baptists had a consistent record in regards to religious liberty. According to Truett, "Baptists have never been a party to oppression of conscience. They have forever been the unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil. Their contention ... has been... that it is the natural and fundamental and indefeasible right of every human being to worship God or not, according to the dictates of his conscience... He is to be held accountable alone to God for all his religious beliefs and practices... It is the consistent and insistent contention of our Baptist people... that religion must be forever voluntary and uncoerced, and that it is not the prerogative of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of worship, or to pay taxes for the support of a religious organization to which they do not belong and in whose creed they do not believe. God wants free worshippers and no other kind."²⁶

This quote points out major themes of Truett's thinking on religious liberty. He believed Baptists have stood for freedom of conscience from the beginning and that the ideal was religious liberty, not religious toleration. Belief in and worship of God was something voluntary and not to be coerced by civil or religious authority. He believed that religious liberty was a central doctrine that Baptists had believed and practiced consistently. Baptists had struggled for religious liberty, not only for themselves, but everybody.

Another theme addressed by Truett was a "Free Church in Free State." He thought Jesus words, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's...marked the divorcement of church and state."²⁷ Truett believed that the idea of a

free church in a free state was a Baptist principle that must be kept in continual remembrance and practice. This belief emphasized the separation of church and state. Truett thought the church should use spiritual resources to do its work. He thought dependence on the state was dangerous for the spiritual health of the church. Truett said that “Christ’s religion needs no props of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported it has a millstone hanged about its neck.”²⁸

E.Y. Mullins

E.Y. Mullins (1860-1928) was the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1899 to his death in 1928. He was also a major theologian who wrote many books on theology. It was under his leadership that the first confession was adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. One of his books on theology was called *The Axioms of Religion* which was published in 1908 by the American Baptist Publication Society. We will explore this book to consider Mullins’ views on religious liberty.

E.Y. Mullins believed that Baptists had believed in the ideas of “soul-freedom” and separation of church and state from the beginning. This belief was contained in the earliest Baptist confessions and they have “never parted company” with this doctrine. It is also rooted in Early American Life. Roger Williams planted the seed of religious liberty in Rhode Island and this seed would bear fruit in the First Amendment of the Constitution protecting religious liberty. It was because of the influence of Isaac Backus, John Leland and Virginia Baptists that religious liberty was included in the First Amendment.²⁹

Mullins agreed with George W. Truett and other Baptists that religious liberty and religious toleration is not the same thing. Mullins asserted that religious liberty and religious toleration are “poles apart”. He would agree that Baptists have always stood for religious liberty not religious toleration. It was for religious liberty that many Baptist suffered whippings, banishment and death.

Another idea emphasized in *The Axioms of Religion* is the separation of church and state. Mullins thought that the “functions of church and state are quite distinct.”³⁰ He wrote of these distinctions:

“...The church is a voluntary organization; the state compels obedience. One organization is temporal; the other spiritual...The direct allegiance in the church is to God; in the state, it is to law and government. One is for the protection of life and property; the other for the promotion of spiritual life.”³¹ Mullins thought an established religion destroys the principle of equal rights before the law. He thought the doctrine of separation of church and state is beneficial both to civil and religious institutions. He asserted that it was necessary to keep the church and the state separate to protect both religious and civil liberties.

Conclusion

We have seen through its history, its leaders, its beliefs, that Baptists have made important contributions to religious liberty and separation of church and state. These convictions were consistently held by Baptists throughout its history. Early English Baptists fought for freedom of conscience, and some even sacrificed their own lives in its defense. Roger Williams and John Clarke were co-founders of Rhode Island and its charter of religious liberty. John Leland and Virginia Baptists were influential in getting religious liberty protected by law in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. George W. Truett and E.Y. Mullins were important spokesmen for both religious liberty and separation of church and state. William Brackney speaking on this Baptist heritage says that “the principles of soul freedom, liberty of conscience, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and all their cognates and correlatives are integral to Baptist identity over four centuries of denominational heritage.”³²

There has been lots of controversy over changes in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. One article of the *Baptist Faith and Message* that has not changed is the one on religious liberty. It helps us to see the continuing importance of religious liberty for Baptists. “Religious liberty protects the gospel from corruption by the state.”³³ Because Article XVII asserts, “The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.” Religious liberty protects the church’s programs of worship, evangelism, and missions. For the article affirms, that the “state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends.” It

also says, "The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work." Religious liberty keeps the state from controlling the church and the church from dominating the state. Because it says, "Church and state should be separate." It is good for individual freedom, for it asserts the right "to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without the interference by the civil power." Religious liberty affirms the freedom of conscience because it says, "God alone is Lord of conscience." "Religious liberty is thus good for the gospel, good for the church, good for the state, and good for the individual."³⁴

¹ Herschel H. Hobbs and E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 14.

² William H. Brackney, *A Capsule History of Baptist Principles* (Atlanta: Baptist History and Heritage, 2009), 85.

³ Herschel H. Hobbs and E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978) 41-42.

⁴ Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 42.

⁵ William R. Estep, Jr., "Thomas Helwys: Bold Architect of Baptist Polity on Church-State Relations," *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 no 3 (JL 1985):32

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ H. Leon McBeth, *Source Book*, 72-73.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹ Joseph Martin Dawson, *Baptists and the American Republic* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1956) 16.

¹² Dawson, 16.

¹³ Dawson, *Baptists and the American Republic*, 42.

¹⁴ Edwin S. Gaustad, "John Clarke: 'Good Newes from Rhode Island'," *Baptist History and Heritage* 24 no 4 (Oct 1989): 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ O.K. Armstrong and Majorie Moore Armstrong, *Baptists Who Shaped a Nation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 55.

¹⁷ O.K. Armstrong and Majorie Moore Armstrong, *The Indomitable Baptists: A Narrative of Their Role In Shaping American History*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ Gaustad, John Clarke, 22.

²⁰ W.R. Estep, "John Clarke," in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, 85.

²¹ Gaustad, 24.

²² B.L. Shelly, "Isaac Backus", in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, edited by Bill J. Leonard. (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 36.

²³ W.R. Estep, "John Leland," in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, edited by Bill J. Leonard), 171-172.

²⁴ Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 131.

²⁵ George W. Truett, *God's Call to America: and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1923), 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ Mullins and Tribble, *The Baptist Faith*, 88-89.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

³² Brackney, 85.

³³ Jerry A. Johnson, "Article XVII: Religious Liberty." IN *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestants Denomination*, eds. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*



WHY I AM A BAPTIST- AN EVOLVING DEFINITION

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Have you ever seriously thought about why you are a Baptist? What makes a person a Baptist? Is it his or her heritage? Or is it a person's commitment to a creed, doctrines or principles?

Many of today's older Baptists would likely agree with an adage often declared by the former pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., Robert G. Lee, who said: "Yes, I am a Baptist. I was Baptist born. I was Baptist bred. And when I die, I will be a Baptist dead."¹ Certainly this could be considered an anecdotal truism for people who grew up in a family where being Baptist was "the natural thing to do." Stanton Norman cites another popular truism, which attempts to summarize Baptist beliefs as being comprised of, "the book, the blood, and the blessed hope."²

However contemporary theologian Tom J. Nettles, observes, "Baptists confess a church doctrine in which it is impossible to say, 'I was Baptist born.'" Continuing he explained, "One can not be Baptist until after personal conversion to faith in Christ alone and His saving work," which he said is followed by "immersion in water as a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection."³

While Nettles' theological assertion would be supported by most Baptists, Joe T. Odle observed in 1972, "Baptists believe that they are following the New Testament; yet far too many of our mem-

bers do not know what we believe or why we are Baptists, and little is being written about it."⁴

So the question is framed: Why Am I a Baptist? In the past 150-plus years Baptists of all stripes have sought to play the apologetic's role by defining why they were Baptists. A summary review of selected "position statements" - found in sermons and other published narratives - reflects some uniformity, as well as diversity, in opinions. These personal testimonies are distinctively different from the several volumes which are the standard resources for explaining the systematic theology of Baptists' core doctrines. Among those are: E. C. Dargan's *The Doctrines of Our Faith*, (1905); B. H. Carroll's *Baptists and Their Doctrines*, (1913); Herschel H. Hobbs' *What Baptists Believe*, (1964); and E. Y. Mullins' two books *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*, (1908) and *Baptist Beliefs*, (1925); among others. This article seeks to focus on the writings of selected individuals who have shared their perspective of the distinctives that caused them to embrace the Baptist faith and practice.

"Many opinions have been offered on what constitutes true Baptist distinctives. Some emphasize doctrines like the priesthood of all believers, believer's baptism, a regenerate church membership, the primacy of the Scriptures for faith and practice, or congregational autonomy," explained New Orleans Baptist Seminary professor R. Stanton Norman. "Others point to ideas such as religious freedom, soul competency, or the lordship of Christ as the defining criteria."⁵ While all these distinctives are based upon Scriptural authority, one must look back to the various seventeenth-century European Anabaptists and self-declared Baptists who struggled to define and defend the biblical principles that initially set them apart from other Christian faith groups.

Those seventeenth-century Baptists, who emerged in Amsterdam and England, "were never about the task of creating a new Christian religion," asserted Union University President David Dockery. "In fact, they went to great lengths to point out that they stood in continuity with the faith 'once for all delivered to the saints.' Yet at the same time, Baptists were defined by certain unique theological convictions" to which twentieth-first century Baptists are heirs.⁶

The uniqueness of the Baptist faith began with such stalwarts as German Anabaptist, Balthasar Hubmaier, who insisted that, “in all disputes concerning faith and religion, the Scripture alone, proceeding from the mouth of God, ought to be our level and rule.”⁷ Hubmaier also advocated the principle of believer’s baptism and challenged the automatic sprinkling baptism of children who had not reached the age of accountability.⁸

All faith groups are the beneficiaries of the principle of religious liberty which was championed by John Smyth in the early seventeenth-century. Based upon his understanding of biblical truth, Smyth wrote in 1612 that each person is “responsible solely to God for his eternal destiny.”⁹ At about the same time, Thomas Helwys made a published appeal for liberty of conscience and freedom of worship.¹⁰ Those new understandings were embraced by Baptists who migrated to the newly developing colonies in North America.

Subsequently, those Scripture-inspired Baptists, “joined themselves together in congregations of like-minded believers who were uniquely committed to three principles,” explained David Dockery. Those basic principles were regenerate church membership, believer’s baptism, and congregational church government.¹¹

Early Baptists, according to Norman Cox, “could not debate their case nor defend their position by simple alleging that they got their faith from the Bible. They were surrounded by scholars and officials whose state church had developed their historic creedal statement, much of which was biblical, but some of which was presumptively nonbiblical.”¹² “To defend their position,” Cox explained in a 1961 church study course book, titled *We Southern Baptists*, “Baptists had to develop statements of faith (“confessions” they were called). The first such confession known to have been published was Thomas Helwys’ *The Mystery of Iniquity*, in 1612. In the years which followed, the embattled Baptists in England published many confessions of faith in which they spelled out their understanding of the doctrinal concepts of their belief.”¹³

In the American colonies, the Philadelphia Baptist Association - established in 1707 - sought to provide advice on polity and practice

issues raised by local churches and to represent the “mind of Christ” to the world at large.¹⁴ In 1742 the association developed a confession of faith which served as a model for newly started Baptist churches in the colonies, many of which were established by the association’s own itinerant missionaries. More importantly, this statement provided the theological framework for defining what constituted a Baptist church, and provided clearly defined doctrines on the authority of the scriptures and on the general or invisible church.

Nearly ninety years later - in 1830 - leadership of the Baptist State Convention of New Hampshire sought to develop a document which would define the “important and essential doctrines and practice” of New Hampshire Baptists.¹⁵ That so-called New Hampshire Confession of Faith was later incorporated into *The Baptist Church Manual*, edited by J. Newton Brown, and gained wide circulation among Baptists, particularly those migrating to the South.

According to Charles Kelley, and others, those American confessions of faith, were “intended to clarify and publish the most basic beliefs that frame our faith, our witness, and our worship. In the beginning years of the organized Baptist movement, these statements were often intended to demonstrate that Baptists were fully orthodox as Christian believers. Later, such statements were used to establish identity, confront false teaching, and instruct Christians in the faith.”¹⁶

While these multi-part doctrinal statements defined the “official” position of various Baptist bodies, most individual Baptists do not think in such broad all-encompassing contexts. For some only one or two distinctives define their Baptist identity. Based upon the available literature, it is evident that the emphasis of the “important” distinctives may have been affected by the culture and the theological issues of the day. As an example, nineteenth-century Baptists who wrote or preached about the “why” of their Baptist faith sought to challenge the practices of infant baptism promoted by the Paedobaptists as well as their contention that the Lord’s Supper should be open to all. In contrast, Baptists in the twentieth-century seemed to highlight the importance of cooperation, missions and other personal experience issues.

One of the earliest apologetic narratives on “why” he was a Baptist, produced in the mid-nineteenth century, was written by James L. Pendleton, a protégé of J.R. Graves. The Bowling Green, Kentucky, pastor published a treatise which sought to advance the proposition that apostolic Christians were Baptists and only Baptists could be Christian. His initial 1856 publication was titled, *Three Reasons Why I am a Baptist*. In his introduction, Pendleton candidly observed that other Christian faiths “believe in the Bible to be the word of God, and cordially subscribe to the doctrine of salvation by grace - justification by faith - regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and all kindred topics.” As a result, Pendleton said, “I must show why Baptists differ from other religious denominations.”¹⁷

Pendleton's reasons - the distinctive peculiarities of Baptists - included: (1) “Baptists regard the baptism of infants as unscriptural and insist on the baptism of believers in Christ - and of believers alone;”¹⁸ (2) “Baptists consider the immersion in water, of a believer, essential to baptism;”¹⁹ and (3) Baptists’ congregational form of government is “recognized in the New Testament.”²⁰

In an addendum to the 1856 version of his book, Pendleton added a fourth Baptist distinctive: Baptists’ scriptural understanding of the Lord’s Supper. His main point of contention was with the Catholic position on “transubstantiation” - a literal versus Baptists’ representational belief of the role the bread and wine played in the communion service.²¹ Pendleton used the additional “reason” to reiterate his disdain for the Paedobaptists and what he and others viewed as their misinterpretation of scripture on what constituted a “baptized believer” who could participate in the Lord’s Supper.²²

This concern with the Paedobaptists (which included Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians, among other Christian groups) and their promotion of infant baptism continued into the twentieth-century as a point of contention for some Baptists. This is reflected in the writings of Clarence Larkin, a layman in the Protestant Episcopal Church. He began to study the subjects and mode of baptism which led him to conclude that he should be aligned with Baptists. In 1887 he published a small 54-page booklet titled, *Why I am a Baptist* which presented a compilation of facts “culled from numerous sources after careful and voluminous reading.”²³

Larkin outlined what he called the “Baptist Creed,” although he notes, as did Pendleton, “Baptists agree in the main with all evangelical Christians” in basic theological issues.²⁴ The layman stressed the Baptist distinctive of baptism by immersion in water, and continued by echoing the prevalent Baptist repudiation of infant baptism by denouncing it as “unscriptural.”²⁵ Perhaps because of the thoroughness of Larkin’s defense of Baptist doctrinal, contemporary supporters have ensured the continued reprinting and distribution by sale of his booklet throughout the twentieth-century and into the current millennia.

In his introduction to his undated book, titled *Why Be a Baptist?*, likely published around the beginning of the twentieth-century, H. Boyce Taylor, Sr., wrote that, “Every Baptist ought to be able at any time to give his reasons for being a Baptist: and contrariwise, since the Master never established but one church, every man, who isn’t a Baptist ought to be able to give reasons, good and sufficient to satisfy the Lord Jesus at the judgment, why he is not a Baptist.”²⁶ In keeping with those defenders of the Baptist faith, who came before him, Taylor stressed that, “the Bible alone, is our only and all sufficient rule of faith and practice. If you can’t find it in the Bible it isn’t Baptist doctrine; if it is Baptist doctrine you can find it in the Bible.”²⁷

More significantly, Taylor became one of the earliest proponents to identify missions’ commitment as a distinguishing characteristic of Baptists. According to Taylor, a member of a “Baptist church who doesn’t believe in missions or who doesn’t do something for missions is a hypocrite and disobedient to the last orders” of Christ, he wrote.²⁸ Taylor’s narrative concluded by highlighting several other Baptist positions that included a few old and new distinctives: “the abomination of infant baptism;” Baptists as a democratic people; the importance of closed communion; and the doctrine of becoming, “once saved, always saved.”²⁹

In 1900, J. M. Frost, in his collection of apologetic narratives, *Baptist Why and Why Not*, emphasized Baptist identity as it was understood at the dawning of the twentieth-century. “We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice, and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the Word

of God.”³⁰ In Frost’s point of view, as assessed by Tom Nettles, “Baptists held all that was biblical in other denominations, but in their distinctive, held more tenaciously to the plain teaching of Scripture than others.”³¹

Among the several persons Frost enlisted to write about Baptist distinctives, R. M. Dudley, best summarized what other writers were affirming in detail. For Dudley those Baptist distinctives included: (1) the exercising of religious liberty;³² (2) immersion by water upon a profession of faith;³³ and (3) “the supreme authority and absolute sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures.”³⁴

If J. M. Frost represented the “conservative” branch of then Baptist life, Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch may have represented the “liberal” branch given his advocacy of the Social Gospel movement during the first two decades of the twentieth-century. In 1905 and 1906 Rauschenbusch wrote a series of five brief articles on “Why I Am a Baptist” published in *The Rochester Baptist Journal*. These were later reprinted in their entirety in *Christian Ethics Today* (April 1995).

The former professor of church history at Rochester Theological Seminary was among the first to propose, as a core distinctive of Baptists, “the primacy of personal Christian experience,” which he subsequently explained resulted in “a minimum of emphasis on ritual and creed.”³⁵ A century later, Baptist theologian Stanton Norman, observed that Rauschenbusch’s emphasis upon religious experience was “also determinative for his understanding of congregational polity, ministry, evangelism and the Lord’s Supper.”³⁶

Florida Baptist pastor William D. Nowlin, produced a book titled, *What Baptists Stand For*, in 1918 that was based upon a series of doctrinal sermons he had delivered to messengers attending the 1911 South Florida Baptist Association annual meeting and again at the 1915 Tennessee Baptist Association annual meeting. Nowlin discussed at length the abiding principles that make Baptists unique.

Nowlin unequivocally stressed that “Baptists believe that the Bible... is an inspired revelation from God.” He went on to make a unique observation regarding inspiration, which he noted, “is not

responsible for errors in translation, nor for the teachings of uninspired speakers. In such cases inspiration is responsible only for the correctness of the original records.”³⁷ Nowlin became one of the earliest apologetic writers who stressed the distinctiveness of each individual’s “soul’s competency” which Nowlin declared “is one of the cardinal principles of the New Testament and one of the fundamental principles of Baptists.”³⁸

Atlanta pastor Louie D. Newton, in his 1957 semi-autobiography book titled, *Why I am a Baptist*, related how his experiences while growing up shaped his world-view and final decision to commit to the Baptist faith. As a result of studying the scriptures and reading the works of noted theologians, Newton said he came to identify and embrace four traditional Baptist distinctives. But Newton added two new distinctives that had not been previously stated publicly by others. One included “the complete independence of the local church, and its voluntary interdependence in associated fellowship with other Baptist churches.” And the second new distinctive for Newton was “the underlying and all-inclusive principle of voluntariness.”³⁹ He concluded his summary by observing, “These distinctives include, of course, the priesthood of the believer, and the equality of believers, if someone fears lest I am forgetting or watering down these cherished phrases of Baptist faith and practice.”⁴⁰

His distinctive of “voluntariness” no doubt represented Newton’s growing awareness and appreciation for Southern Baptists’ cooperation in financial support for common endeavors including world wide missionary activities. This emphasis upon world-wide missions, while growing out of scriptural mandate, seemed to find new emphasis among some Baptists as reflected by other writers in Newton’s book.

Nearly fifty pastors, laymen and denominational leaders were enlisted to share their reasons for being Baptist. Representational among the respondents was Baker James Cauthen, a former executive secretary, Foreign Mission Board, SBC. Cauthen, as did many others, affirmed, “I am a Baptist now by conviction.”⁴¹ Cauthen highlighted his convictions that were anchored in traditional Baptist distinctives and which served as the genesis for two additional beliefs: “Baptists

in no sense feel that only Baptists are children of God” and Baptists hold “a deep conviction concerning world missions.”⁴²

In 1972, Joe T. Odle in his book, *Why I Am a Baptist*, presented a compilation of 12 testimonies and six sermons by “average” Baptists who defined their Baptist faith. Among those were two men from different vocational ministries, renowned evangelist Billy Graham, and Noel Smith, the former editor of the Bible Baptist Fellowship International publication, *Baptist Bible Tribune*. While each man mirrored the other in stating traditional Baptist beliefs, Graham added to his list of distinctives Baptists’ “strong emphasis on evangelism and missions,”⁴³ while Smith cited Baptists’ commitment to worldwide missions.⁴⁴

As Southern Baptists moved into the final decades of the twentieth-century, a fundamentalist versus moderate controversy raged within the country’s largest Baptist body. With that dynamic came a changing perspective for some of “why I am a Baptist.”

That reshaping of Baptist identity was evident in a 1999 publication edited by Cecil P. Staton, Jr., titled, *Why I am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*. It featured a series of essays by 26 contemporary Baptists, whom Staton introduced by stating, “With honor or shame, theological and political conservatives, moderates and liberals all continue to wear the name ‘Baptist.’ But something has changed in recent years.” Staton went on to explain that, “this book is not to focus on the controversy or to cast stones at certain members of the Baptist family with whom some of us may disagree.” Rather, Staton writes that he was attempting “to give voice to that which is good and honorable about the Baptist identity.”⁴⁵

Among those enlisted to share why they were still Baptists was Robert C. Balance, Jr., executive editor of *Baptists Today*, who identified himself as “Baptist born, Baptist bred.” Balance noted that, “In addition to the primacy of personal experience, Baptists uphold democracy as an ideal. It is, however, an ideal that often suffers greatly in our church meetings and in our national conventions, convocations, and assemblies.”⁴⁶ Florida native Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, a retired Executive Director, Woman’s Missionary Union - SBC, who defined herself as “always a Baptist,” offered seven abid-

ing reasons. Among her collective rationale, Crumpler said, “I am a Baptist because I believe that we accept the challenge of Christ’s commission to ‘go into all the world,’ which we can do without a hierarchy.”⁴⁷

Gary Parker, who worked for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, opined that “Baptists have staked their denominational tent” on five distinctives which he identified as believers’ baptism, priesthood of the believer, the autonomy of the local church, separation of church and state, and the “confessional but not creedal commitment to the Bible.”⁴⁸

Two years later, Tom Nettles and Russell Moore produced a version of *Why I Am a Baptist*, which they said was “to provide a conservative’s response” to Cecil Staton’s collected narrative. “After all, this title has a grand old tradition in Southern Baptist life,” Nettles asserted. Noting the Stanton book “was different,” Nettles contended it was, “Written by a virtual ‘Who’s Who’ of the Baptist left, this volume made a concerted effort to attempt Baptist identity without Baptist theology. . .” Nettles’ criticism contended the Staton contributors were, “Rejecting confessional boundaries as creedal straitjackets, these moderate writers presented the alternative: a Baptist identity built upon sociological commonality, shared memories, and not much else.”⁴⁹

Referring to the *Why I Am a Baptist* version that he and Russell Moore jointly edited, Nettles said, “this book is more than just a collection of testimonies. Since we are convinced that Baptist identity is at its heart a matter of theological conviction, we decided to invite some of the most theologically engaged Baptists we knew to make the case for Baptist identity from a conservative, confessional perspective.”⁵⁰ What followed were a collection of essays by Baptist stalwarts from the past - Isaac Backus, Ann Judson, and F. H. Kerfoot - to contemporary pastors, laity, professors, and evangelical leaders.

Among the leaders who proposed “what is a Baptist?” was James T. Draper, Jr., who cited six characteristics of a Baptist. According to the former president of LifeWay Christian Resources - SBC, a Baptist is a person who: (1) “has experienced salvation through personal faith in Jesus Christ;” (2) “acknowledges the suffi-

ciency of Scripture;” and (3) “acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ.” Additionally, a Baptist also is: (4) “Trinitarian in his or her understanding of God;” (5) “recognizes the autonomy of the local church;” and (6) “believes in the command of the Great Commission.”⁵¹ Concluding his “tapestry” of distinctives, Draper observed, “We are a believers’ church that voluntarily cooperates around the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word in all matters necessary for life ‘in Christ.’”⁵²

So why be a Baptist? Certainly it’s a combination of personal experience, faith and conviction rooted in a Biblical foundation. But faith and conviction also requires practice or the application of Biblical principles in daily living. This leads this writer to conclude with an observation made by R. M. Dudley, recorded in Frost’s *Baptists Why and Why Not*: “If I am a Baptist and if I am proud of it, I want that it shall affect me not in the way of making me narrow and bigoted and intolerant, but humble, patient, loving towards those who differ from me, and hearty, generous, energetic and persevering in the use of my time, talents and means for the furtherance of the good cause. Let us show our devotion to our principles, not by boastfulness and arrogance, but by a watchful attention to the needs of the cause we love. Thus shall we best show to men our fidelity and zeal; and thus best help the truth in its onward march to complete and final victory.”⁵³

¹ Joe T. Odle, *Why I Am a Baptist*, (Nashville, TN.: Broadman Press, 1972), 20.

² R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 3.

³ Tom J. Nettles, and Russell D. Moore, editors, *Why I Am a Baptist*, (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 4.

⁴ Odle, 9-10.

⁵ Norman, 3.

⁶ David S. Dockery, editor, *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 2009), 26.

⁷ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (Valley Forge,

Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1963), 483.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 483-486.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹¹ Dockery, 26.

¹² Norman W. Cox, *We Southern Baptists*, (Nashville, TN.: Convention Press, 1961), 22-23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ Torbet, p. 212; who cites: Samuel Jones, *A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory*, (Philadelphia, PA.: no publisher, 1798), 37-38.

¹⁵ William R. Estep, *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land*, (Fort Worth, TX: Evans Press, 1976), 60.

¹⁶ Charles S. Kelley, Richard Land, and R. Albert Mohler, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁷ J. M. Pendleton, *Three Reasons Why I am a Baptist*, (St. Louis, MO.: National Baptist Publishing, 1853), 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

²² *Ibid.*, 191.

²³ Clarence Larkin, *Why I Am a Baptist*, (Philadelphia, PA.: American Baptist Publication Society, 1902), 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶ H. Boyce Taylor, Sr., *Why Be a Baptist?* (Murray, KY.: News and Truths Publishing, n.d), 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-17.

³⁰ J. M. Frost, *Baptist Why and Why Not*, (Nashville, TN.: Baptist Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1900), 12.

³¹ Nettles and Moore, 5.

³² R. M. Dudley, “The Distinctive Baptist Way,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, ed. J. M. Frost, 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

- ³⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, "Why I Am a Baptist," *Journal of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 1, #1, April, 1995; pp. 20ff.; reprinted from *The Rochester Baptist Journal*, in a series of five brief articles titled, "Why I Am a Baptist," originally published in 1905 and 1906, p. 2.
- ³⁶ R. Stanton Norman, "Southern Baptist Identity: A Theological Perspective," in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed., David Dockery (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2009), 54.
- ³⁷ William D. Nowlin, *What Baptist Stand For*, (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern Publishers, 1918), 13.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ³⁹ Louie D. Newton, *Why I am a Baptist*, (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 69-70.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 225.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 227-228.
- ⁴³ Odle, 17-18.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37.
- ⁴⁵ Cecil P. Staton, Jr., editor, *Why I Am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*, (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1999), xiii.
- ⁴⁶ Robert C. Balance, Jr., "Baptist Born, Baptist Bred," in *Why I Am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*, ed. Cecil P. Staton, Jr., 10.
- ⁴⁷ Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, "Always a Baptist," in *Why I Am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*, ed. Cecil P. Staton, Jr., 31.
- ⁴⁸ Gary Parker, "The Four 'C's of Being Baptist," in *Why I Am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*, ed. Cecil P. Staton, Jr., 104-105.
- ⁴⁹ Nettles and Moore, xv.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.
- ⁵¹ James T. Draper, Jr., "What is a Baptist?" in *Why I Am a Baptist*, ed. Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 53-55.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁵³ R. M. Dudley, "The Distinctive Baptist Way," in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, ed. J. M. Frost, 24.



BEHOLD I COME: SOUTHERN BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES ON ESCHATOLOGY

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Introduction

The year 2009 marks the 400th anniversary of a people called Baptists. From their sixteenth century origin, eschatology, or the doctrine of end-times, has shaped Baptist doctrine and worldview. The 1609 Short Confession by John Smyth expressed the eschatological views of the first Baptists in two articles. Article 19 states, "That the dead (the living being instantly changed) will rise again with the same bodies; not the substance but the qualities being changed." Article XX affirms, "That after the resurrection, all will be borne to the tribunal of Christ, the Judge, to be judged according to their works; the pious, after sentence of absolution, will enjoy eternal life with Christ in heaven; the wicked, condemned, will be punished with eternal torments in hell with the devil and his angels."¹ Notice that the Short Confession lacks a reference to an intermediate state, the tribulation, Antichrist, Millennium, or even the Second Coming.²

Throughout Baptist history, Baptists have never adopted a distinctive Baptist eschatology. The eschatological positions of Baptists mirror the broader evangelical world. Neither have Baptists adopted a common interpretation of the end-times. *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM) continues the broad trend of non-descriptive eschatological doctrinal statements practiced by most Baptists until the early 20th century. Although

the general nature of the BFM article on “Last Things” favors the amillennial position, all Southern Baptist eschatologies profess adherence to the broad, general, non-descriptive affirmation of the BFM.

In this article, I adopt a descriptive approach to the subject of Baptist eschatology. My purpose is to neither condemn nor proscribe a particular eschatological viewpoint, although in the interest of putative objectivity I acknowledge my affirmation of historical premillennialism. After four hundred years of history, the subject of Baptist eschatology is broad; therefore, I limit this study of Baptist eschatology to Southern Baptist eschatologies. Finally, I approach the subject of Southern Baptist eschatology through four well-known representatives: B. H. Carroll (postmillennialism), Ray Summers (amillennialism), post-tribulational premillennialism (W. A. Criswell), and historic premillennialism (David Dockery). My goal is twofold: to celebrate the people called Baptists, particularly Southern Baptists, and to broaden communication and understanding of the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

B. H. Carroll: Postmillennialism and Missions

Postmillennialism affirms that Christ returns after the millennium. Optimism about the power of the gospel to transform human lives and then society characterizes the postmillennial view. The gospel effectively transforms the nations as people groups accept the good news. The triumph of the gospel results in a lengthy period of universal peace, prosperity, and righteousness. After this period of righteousness, Christ returns. One general resurrection of believers and unbelievers and one general judgment of believers and unbelievers follow the return of Christ.

At the time of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, many key Baptist leaders affirmed postmillennialism. John Broadus acknowledged the popularity of postmillennialism in a letter, “The popular view, which I was accustomed in youth to hold in a vague way, [was] that, before the coming of our Lord, there will be a thousand years of universal and perfect Christian piety.”³ Influential Baptist theologians, J. L. Dagg and James M. Pendleton expressed postmillennialism in systematic theologies.⁴

B. H. Carroll (1834-1914) founded Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Carroll consistently, fervently proclaimed postmillennialism, yet by the time of his death, I believe Carroll earned the epithet, “Southern Baptist Last Great Postmillennialist.” I identified four themes in his brand of postmillennial thought.

First, B. H. Carroll advocated postmillennialism because he observed a connection between postmillennialism and mission fervency. For Carroll, premillennialists espoused a low view of the gospel, a gospel of failure, because premillennialism asserted a different instrumentality than the gospel [supernatural portents] to bring about the kingdom of God.⁵ Carroll contrasted the missionary impulse premillennialism and postmillennialism provided the believer. “Whoever believes that, whoever in his heart believes that this [premillennialism] is the teaching of the Bible, cannot occupy toward the mission work the same position that a man occupies who holds the other theory [postmillennialism].”⁶

Second, B. H. Carroll denied the imminent return of Jesus Christ. “I want to get the idea of imminency out of your mind.”⁷ Carroll concluded from Acts 17:31 that God had fixed the time of Christ’s second advent; therefore, Christ could not return at any time. In his analysis of 2 Thessalonians 2, Carroll identified two events that precede the return of Christ: the falling away and the revelation of the man of sin. Carroll defined the “falling away” as doctrinal error that began in the second century, ripened in the papacy, and culminated in the pope in 1870.⁸ Regarding the description of Christ slaying the “man of sin” at his parousia Carroll wrote, “If I had proof that the man of sin was living I would know that Christ would come in the lifetime of that man, because it is expressly declared that Jesus shall, at his coming, slay the man of sin.”⁹

Third, B. H. Carroll described the nature of the millennium as a period of gospel victory. For Carroll, the millennium has not yet come into existence. Certain events, or precursors, must occur before the beginning of the millennium: downfall of the Roman counterfeit church, the fullness of the times of the Gentiles, the return of the Jews to a homeland, the conversion of the Jews in one

day. During the millennium, Christ reigns from heaven. "It is a victory of the Spirit dispensation through the churches, the ministers, and the gospel." The thousand-year period results in universal peace, fullness of the knowledge of the Lord, prolonged life and powerful evangelism as the majority of the earth's population trusts Christ.¹⁰

Fourth, B. H. Carroll interpreted Revelation as a description of world evangelism rather than a tribulational period. World evangelism through the church functions as the theme of Revelation. He affirmed a view of the relationship of the seals, trumpets and bowls as synchronistic, or in today's term, recapitulation. Each series describes church history from a prophetic-historical perspective from the resurrection of Jesus to the Second Advent. The bowls portray the conflict between the true church and false church (Roman Catholicism). The white horse of chapter 6 is the same white horse of Revelation 19 - the gospel message. Revelation 20:11-15 details the Second Coming of Christ. At the second coming, Christ slays the Antichrist. Carroll distinguished the Antichrist from the "beast from the sea" in Revelation but equated the Antichrist with the "man of sin" in Paul. Finally, heaven is not a spiritual existence "up there." In the final scene of Revelation, believers live a heavenly existence on a renewed earth.

Ray Summers: Amillennialism and Inaugurated Eschatology

Amillennialism denies the existence of a millennial reign of Christ on earth. The majority of amillennialists, however, do believe in the millennium. The millennium refers to the reign of Christ in heaven from the time of his ascension to his return. Because the term "amillennialism" suggests "no millennium," many so-called amillennialists prefer the term "realized millennium." Amillennialists generally regard the church as the new Israel. If the operative word for postmillennialism is optimism, then the operative word for amillennialism is realism. As realists, amillennialists claim to be neither overly optimistic like postmillennialists anticipating a golden age nor overly pessimistic like premillennialists expecting a great tribulation. Amillennialists affirm the present binding of Satan due to the victory of Jesus at

the cross-resurrection. Because of the spread of the gospel, Satan cannot deceive the nations. Although an amillennialist might affirm the moral and spiritual decline of the world before the Second Advent, an amillennialist does not anticipate a special period called "the Great Tribulation." Amillennialists understand the "rapture," that is the transfer of living believers from earth to the presence of Jesus, as taking place at the singular coming of Christ. Like postmillennialists, but unlike premillennialists, amillennialists affirm only one resurrection and judgment.

After the weakening of postmillennialism due to naturalism, radical biblical criticism, and the advent of modern twentieth century warfare, many postmillennialists became amillennialists. The seminaries and the Baptist Sunday School Board (BSSB) became the epicenters of amillennialism among Southern Baptists. During the last two-thirds of the twentieth century, almost all Southern Baptist seminary professors adhered to amillennialism.¹¹ The editors at the BSSB did not allow an author to acknowledge any other eschatological viewpoint.¹² Amillennialism became the de facto position of this vital Southern Baptist agency. Influential theologian E. Y. Mullins and pastor-theologian Herschel Hobbs advocated amillennialism.

Ray Summers (1910-1992) taught at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Southern Baptist Seminary, and founded the graduate program of religion at Baylor University. He wrote a popular commentary on Revelation, *Worthy is the Lamb* that served to educate generations of Southern Baptists.¹³ Moreover, Summers wrote a full-scale monograph on eschatology.¹⁴ I identified three themes expressing aspects of Summer's amillennialism.

First, Summers affirmed a true non-millennialism. Theologians affirm two different types of amillennialism. Augustinian amillennialism equates the millennial reign of Christ with his reign from heaven between the times of the ascension to the Second Advent. In contrast, Theodor Kliefoth (d. 1895) described the millennium as the reign of the believers with Christ during the intermediate state.¹⁵ Apparently, Summers followed the pattern established by E. Y. Mullins and W. T. Conner, Southern Baptist amillennialists that did not define the millennium.¹⁶ Summers critiqued both postmillennial-

ism and premillennialism, but he did not set forth a defining position regarding amillennialism. Thus, rather than being an amillennialist that affirmed a spiritual reign of Christ (an affirmation of millennialism), Summers preferred the label “non-millennialism.”¹⁷ Summers postulated that the so-called millennial passage teaches the overthrow of Satan rather than a reign.¹⁸

Second, Summers affirmed the imminence of the Second Advent. Summers noted that regarding the time issue the Second Coming occurs in an unexpected manner. Summers affirms that Christ could return at any time. B. H. Carroll denied imminence, yet Summers denies that premillennialists, such as Scofield or Larkin properly affirm “an any time coming” of Christ. Classical dispensational premillennialism cannot affirm “an any time coming” of Christ in terms of the Rapture. Summers cited a list of unfulfilled prophecies set forth by classical dispensationalists that God must fulfill prior to the Rapture, namely, the close of the church age, the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple, and the restoration of the ancient Roman Empire.¹⁹

Third, Summers set forth a method called “historical background” in interpreting Revelation. Summers discounted the continual-historical interpretation of B. H. Carroll and the futuristic interpretation of premillennialism. He advocated what he called “the historical-background method.”²⁰ In this methodology, one understands the message of Revelation as addressed in symbolic language to encourage Asian Christians threatened by the Roman authorities near the end of the first century. Summers, therefore, interprets only Revelation 20:11-22:5 as future prophecy.

W. A. Criswell: Classical Pretributational Premillennialism

Two major distinctives separate Classical Premillennialism from other eschatological schemes. First, classical premillennialism separates God’s program for the church from God’s program for ethnic Jews. Some advocates of this view refer to the church as a “parenthesis in God’s plan.” In other words, God’s plan for the Jewish people is primary. God’s plan for the Jewish people finds culmination in a period of intense Jewish persecution and evangelism during the Great Tribulation and the Jewish character of the millennium. Second, clas-

sical premillennialism advocates a two-phase coming of Christ: the Rapture and the Return. Christ comes to Rapture His church before the Great Tribulation. Hence, some prefer the term pretributational premillennialist to classical premillennialism. In the second stage, Christ comes with His church to reign on earth at His Return. Classical premillennialists advocate at least three periods of resurrection and as many as seven judgments

Before the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptists, few, if any, pretributational premillennialists served in convention-related colleges or seminaries. Other than James Merritt, all of the SBC presidents elected since 1979 affirmed the pretributational premillennial view. The Conservative Resurgence opened the door for professors holding to this view to join the faculties of Southern Baptist seminaries. Indeed, currently two seminary presidents (Patterson, Akin) affirm pretributational premillennialism.

Wally Amos Criswell (1909-2002) served as senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas for fifty years (1944-1995). Criswell received a Ph.D. degree from Southern Baptist Seminary; consequently, he served as an influential pastor-theologian in Southern Baptist life. Criswell claimed that he adopted classical premillennialism after he became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Criswell lead the church to revise the Baptist Faith and Message Article on “Last Things.”²¹ The church deleted the first sentence from the article, “God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end.” They added a clear premillennial statement regarding the personal, visible return of Christ.

The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. After the judgments of God upon this sinful world in the Great Tribulation, Jesus our Lord will come with His saints to establish His millennial kingdom.²²

I summarize Criswell’s contribution to Southern Baptist eschatology in three points.

First, Criswell preached and wrote as an apologist for the

cause of classical premillennialism. In his most famous book, *Why I Preach The Bible is Literally True*, Criswell included several messages under the heading “What I Preach Believing the Bible is Literally True.” Topics included in this section are creation vs. evolution, the person and work of Christ, and the Second Coming.²³ Further, in his sermon “Why I Believe in a Premillennial Faith,” Criswell highlighted dangers for a believer when an individual departed from the premillennial faith: hermeneutical confusion and loss of assurance that God keeps promises (a reference to promises to the Jewish people).²⁴ The Dallas pastor maintained that classical premillennialism must be true or God is not trustworthy.

Second, Criswell correlated his eschatological position and evangelism in two aspects. First, evangelism hastened the coming of Christ. Criswell delineated fourteen reasons why he affirmed a pre-tribulational rapture. He labeled the fourteenth reason “The soul-winning commitment.” Criswell believed that Christ’s coming “...waits on our soul-winning dedication.” Jesus returns when the last gentile convert makes complete “the fullness of the gentiles.”²⁵ Second, classical premillennialism provides confirmation to the effective messenger and message. Criswell stated, “An amillennialist is always moving away from the Word of God.” Again, the pastor-theologian wrote, “There is not a premillennialist in the world who does not believe in the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God.”²⁶ The premillennial faith gave confidence in the message proclaimed.

Third, Criswell highlighted current historical events as confirmation of classical premillennialism. The master pulpiteer identified seventeen signs related to the second coming being fulfilled in the latter part of the 20th century. For illustration purposes, I divide his seventeen signs into three broad categories. First, Criswell highlighted the world attention devoted to the Middle East: oil crisis (1973), return of unbelieving Jews to Palestine (1948), Jewish occupation of Jerusalem (1967), Anwar Sadat’s treaty with Israel. Second, the Texas preacher accentuated the ascending role of Russia (God) in expansionist policies and confederation. Third, Criswell emphasized the spiritual condition of the world: worldwide preach-

ing of the gospel, unbelief in the return of Christ, and the Laodicean spirit of the churches.²⁷

David Dockery: Historical Premillennialism and Conservative Resurgence

The nomenclature “historic premillennialism” derives from the advocates of the view that contend this contemporary expression of premillennialism faithfully represents the millennial view of the early patristic church prior to 325 A.D. As suggested by the name, historical premillennialism affirms that Christ returns before the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ on earth. The thousand-year reign of Christ may be a symbolic number for completeness rather than a literal thousand years. Historical premillennialism shares with classical or dispensational premillennialism an affirmation of an end-time tribulation period, a personal Antichrist, and separate resurrections of believers (at the second coming) and unbelievers (at the end of the millennial period). Two key distinctives separate historical premillennialism from classical premillennialism. First, historical premillennialism affirm a singular, unified Return of Christ, that is, they do not divide the parousia into a Rapture before the tribulation and a Return after the tribulation. Believers, therefore, live on the earth during the tribulation period rather than God removing them through rapture. Christ returns at the end of the tribulation period; hence, some call historic premillennialism posttribulationalism. Historic premillennialists deny the concept of the imminence of Christ’s return since the tribulation must occur before the parousia. They prefer the term “impending return.” Second, historical premillennialists do not understand the nature of the millennium as primarily Jewish. While affirming a future role for ethnic Israel, the church is a continuation of God’s plan for Israel. The purpose of the millennium, for historical premillennialists, is not to fulfill the Old Testament promises to the Jewish people.

In the mid-twentieth century, George E. Ladd, an American Baptist New Testament professor at Fuller Seminary, popularized historical premillennialism among academic scholars. Southern Seminary professors George Beasley-Murray and Dale Moody

affirmed the historical premillennial position as did John Newport of Southwestern Seminary.²⁸

David Dockery (b. 1952 -) has served as professor at Criswell College, professor and vice-president of academic administration at Southern Seminary. He currently serves as president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. I personally regard Dockery as the theologian of the Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention. During his academic career, Dockery focused on the issue of the nature and interpretation of Scripture. He consistently advocated a congruent view of inspiration that produced a plenary, verbal, inerrant Scripture.

I summarize Dockery's eschatology in four points.

First, Dockery affirms the tribulational period. He describes the tribulation as a future intense period of suffering in which the church suffers in a more intense form the sufferings the church endured throughout history. Dockery warns against "an escapist" mindset associated with a pretribulational rapture. He reminds believers of biblical teachings regarding a special blessing for those who suffer for the name of Christ. The leader of the end-time tribulation is the Antichrist. "This figure is a satanically empowered counterfeit of the true Christ."²⁹ In the New Testament, the Antichrist is also known as "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2) and "the beast from the sea" (Rev. 13).

Second, Dockery affirms a unified, public Second Coming of Christ. Unlike Carroll or Summers, Dockery understands the rider on the white horse (Rev. 19) as the return of Christ. When believers are "caught up" at the return of Christ, believers accompany Christ to earth rather than returning to heaven (1 Thess. 4:17). The return of Christ is "a public, visible, open, and spectacular event."³⁰ Believers and unbelievers alike will witness the event. He denies a two-stage return of Christ for His saints prior to the tribulation and a return with His saints after the tribulation.

Third, Dockery postulates that the millennium fulfills God's plan of redemption. Citing differences among believers about understanding the millennium, Dockery denies that the differences entail an

attitude of indifference. He regards the millennium as a significant issue to Christian thinking. "The question of the millennium encourages us to think seriously and carefully concerning the climax of human history, understood in terms of God's intention for creation."³¹ Although the term millennium derives from Revelation 20, Dockery denies that the Scriptural teachings about the millennium are limited to this one passage. He points to Old Testament passages that prophecy a coming kingdom of righteousness on earth (Ps. 2; 72; 96; Isa. 11:6-9; Zech. 14:3, 9). As well, Paul's words about the reign of Christ point to the millennium (1 Cor. 15:23-25). Finally, the promise of the risen Christ regarding believers who reign with Him affirms the biblical teachings of the millennium (Rev. 2:26-28).

Historic premillennialism possesses both similarities and dissimilarities with amillennialism and postmillennialism. Unlike postmillennialism and amillennialism, historic premillennialism advocates multiple resurrections. The other positions place the timing of the one general resurrection of believers and unbelievers at the Second Coming. For historic premillennialists, the resurrection of believers occurs at the return of Christ, yet, "the rest of the dead" (unbelievers) do not come to life until the completion of the millennium (Rev. 20). Like postmillennialism and amillennialism, historic premillennialism affirms only one general judgment of believers and unbelievers.

Fourth, Dockery advocates an 'earthy' heaven. God's plan of redemption encompassed fallen humans but also the redemption of all creation. "It is interesting that the image of the eternal state has humankind on a restored earth. Human history climaxes where it began - on the earth."³² Dockery denies that the new Jerusalem functions as an allegory for the church. Neither is the new Jerusalem "a literal city that hovers over the earth." The new Jerusalem is a literal city purposefully designed as the eternal state for the redeemed.

Conclusion

Since their inception, Baptists expressed strong belief in the second coming of Christ and end-time events. Southern Baptists during their history affirmed four broad understandings of end-times events. Southern Baptists failed to "baptize" an eschatological view-

point. In general, four views treated in this essay follow the broader evangelical culture, that is, since the beginning of the SBC, eschatological views progressed in evangelical culture from postmillennialism (19th century), amillennialism (early 20th century), pretribulational premillennialism (mid-twentieth century) to historical premillennialism (latter 20th century). The chronological order of these four representative Baptist leaders illustrates this historical progression of evangelical thought. Southern Baptists enjoyed fellowship, partnered in the gospel, allowed differing positions within the same church.

Eschatology centers on a Person - the Person of Christ. May the focus of Southern Baptists forever remain on the Person of the Eschaton - the Living Lord Jesus Christ.

¹“Short Confession by John Smyth,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 101.

²The London Confession of 1644 is the first Baptist confession of faith that explicitly affirms the Second Coming of Christ.

³A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1910); cited in W. W. Richards, *Winds of Doctrine: The Origin and Development of Southern Baptist Theology* (Lanhan, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 110. W. A. Criswell commented on the influence of postmillennialism among Southern Baptists in the early twentieth century. “All the preachers I had heard and all the teachers I had had were either postmillennial or amillennial.” W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: Volume 8: Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co, 1989), 96.

⁴J. L. Dagg, professor of theology at Mercer University and the first writing Baptist theologian from the South understood the millennium as a period for the church. Further, he critiqued the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857); reprinted., (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books 1990), 354. James M. Pendleton, professor of theology at Union University prior to the Civil War, also debunked the premillennial interpretation of

Revelation 20 and confessed, “My belief that the millennium will precede the personal coming of Christ has been sufficiently indicated.” James M. Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1878), 383.

⁵Sermon “The Way to World Peace” preached February 1898 at First Baptist Church Waco, TX. *The River of Life and Other Sermons*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1928), 148.

⁶Sermon “The Relation of Missions to the Second Coming of Christ,” in *The Day of the Lord*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1936), 177-178.

⁷B. H. Carroll, “Revelation,” in *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 251.

⁸B. H. Carroll, “James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, 107. Carroll must reference here the doctrine of papal infallibility adopted at the First Vatican Council. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 288-289.

⁹Carroll, 107.

¹⁰Carroll provided a helpful synopsis of his millennial views in his exposition of Revelation 20:4-6 in *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, 211-233.

¹¹The exception to amillennialism hegemony at Southern Baptist seminaries was the historic premillennialism of Dale Moody and George Beasley-Murray of Southern Seminary and John Newport of Southwestern Seminary. Dale Moody, *The Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964); George Beasley-Murray, Herschel H. Hobbs, and Ray Frank Robbins, *Revelation: Three Viewpoints* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1977); John P. Newport, *The Lion and the Lamb: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation for Today* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1986).

¹²Richards, 135.

¹³Ray Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1951). Summers revised his 1943 doctoral dissertation. When I was a student at New Orleans Seminary, the book was required for an English exegetical class on Revelation.

- ¹⁴ Ray Summers, *The Life Beyond* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1959).
- ¹⁵ For a discussion of these two types of amillennialism see James L. Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 764-65.
- ¹⁶ E. Y. Mullins opposed postmillennialism and premillennialism; however, he never defined the millennium in either Augustinian or Kliefothite terms. E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1917), 466-472. W.T. Conner commented that theologians should leave the millennium out of theology. W. T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1945), 33. E. A. McDowell, former professor at SBTS and SEBTS, affirmed an Augustinian millennialism in which Christ and the saints reign spiritually between the advents. Edward A. McDowell, *The Meaning and Message of Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1951), 195. Broadman Press published Summer and McDowell's commentaries on Revelation in the same year. Hershel Hobbs follows McDowell in understanding the millennium as the interadvental reign of Christ. Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Cosmic Drama: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 186.
- ¹⁷ Summers illustrates the non-defining character of his amillennialism in his Appendix "Graph of Amillennial Adventism." *Summers, Life Beyond*, 216.
- ¹⁸ Summers, *Worthy*, 202.
- ¹⁹ Summers, *Life Beyond*, 126.
- ²⁰ Summers, *Worthy*, 45.
- ²¹ Paige Patterson details a humorous anecdote regarding discussions between Criswell and a question about George Truett's postmillennialism. Paige Patterson, "W. A. Criswell," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 251. The church's doctrinal statement is included as an appendix in Paige Patterson, ed., *We Believe: The Criswell Center for Biblical Studies Pisteuomen Series Volume 1: Sermons on Baptist Doctrine* (Dallas, TX.: Criswell Publications, 1977), 189-199.
- ²² The Articles of Faith of the First Baptist Church and the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Article X.

- ²³ W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach the Bible as Literally True*, eds. Timothy and Denise George (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 169-176.
- ²⁴ W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: volume 8: Eschatology*, ed. Paige Patterson (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1989), 100-103.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 104
- ²⁷ "Seventeen Signs of His Coming," in *Great Doctrines: Eschatology*, 138-149.
- ²⁸ Beasley-Murray - 3 views, commentary on Rev., Moody: The blessed Hope, Newport - lion and the lamb.
- ²⁹ David S. Dockery, *Our Christian Hope: Biblical Answers to Questions about the Future* (Nashville, TN.: Lifeway Press, 1998), 86.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 118.

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