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THE REVIEW AND EXPOSITOR

Vol. V.

October, 1908.

No. 4.

THE PROBLEM OF BAPTIST PROGRESS.

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The Baptist people have come to the day of their greatest opportunity. For many centuries, the currents of human thought ran contrary to Baptist ideas. During those centuries, hostile institutions, secular and ecclesiastical, crystallized into almost impenetrable walls, shutting out the influence and the light of truth from the greater part of the human race. By long continued processes, the Romish hierarchy developed into its present form. It is not an institution, emanating from the New Testament: but a colossal human structure, directly opposed to the New Testament in its fundamental proposition. For centuries, Romanism moved steadily toward the inevitable promulgation of the infallibility of the Pope. This dogma lay in the heart of Rome long before it was proclaimed.

The spirit, life and purpose of "the church", as Romanism is called in history, led to the union of church and state, for in no other way could the purpose and the supposed destiny of "the church" be realized. The union of church and state meant the domination of the state by the church, as the soul and the mind dominate the body. A study of the vast organism of the Romish hierarchy, its spirit and movements, leads to the inevitable conclusion that universal dominion over the human race is the heart of Rome. This dominion is to extend to the mind, the soul and the body of every human being, and to every human relation.

For centuries, the world was oppressed, repressed and educated to the Romish program. This could not be done, if men were left to think and act for themselves. Therefore, by degrees and for centuries, there went on a process of merging the individual conscience and responsibility into the corporate conscience and responsibility. Mr. Bryce, British Ambassador

to Washington, in his very informing book, "The Holy Roman Empire", devotes especial attention to this feature of Romanism. The completion of this process effaced the individual, and cleared the way for the monstrous doctrines and practices of the dark ages. The merging of the individual conscience into the church conscience, made the sale of indulgences possible, and anything else the Pope might favor. It carried the fateful doctrine that the people lived, moved and had their being for the church, reversing in toto the New Testament concept that churches are by and for individuals. It gave ample foundation for the persecutions, which tried the saints through centuries of blood. In short, this doctrine completely reversed the whole current of New Testament teaching and enthroned Antichrist amid the splendors of gold and scarlet and purple in the city of the Caesars.

The Reformation was a break away from Rome. It was the crash of the vast superstructure of corruption, which was no longer able to bear its own weight. But, while the reformers came out of Rome, there was much of Rome that did not come out of them. Indeed, they brought away with them many of the worst errors of Rome in forms more or less modified. I would be understood as stating these historical facts for the purposes of this discussion and not as wantonly depreciating great bodies of people, who acted in the light they had.

For purposes of information, it needs to be said that when Luther, Calvin, Knox, and other of the reformers ceased from labors, they left behind them incompleated tasks, and their work was imperiled to the limit by the Romish doctrines they put the seal of their approval on. They died, and after their followers struggling between Rome and the New Testament: between an infallible Pope and an infallible Book. And they planted in the heart of their systems the germs, which, unchecked, would develop, overspread and destroy everything vital they loved. Infant baptism, the masterpiece of Rome, with its correlative, baptismal salvation, has in it all the elements necessary to obliterate New Testament Christianity from the earth. It destroys, by a deft process of supplanting, the very first postulate of Christianity—Individualism. It

shifts the responsibility of obedience in baptism from a believer to an unconscious infant, and merges this individual duty into a parental duty.

The doctrine of the union of church and state, together with the hierarchal church governments, and other features of the Reformed churches, are all the remains of Romanism in bodies which bear unmistakable marks of their maternal ancestry.

Against Romanism in the "mother church", and in any and all churches, the Baptists present the New Testament as the law of Christianity. Between the Baptist position and that of Rome, there is an irreconcilable opposition. If the New Testament is the infallible and unchangeable law of Christianity, there is not a square inch of standing ground for Rome, and to this proposition the Pope himself would assent. Against the infallibility of Romanism, with its vast array of clergymen of varying degrees, from Cardinals down, its pomps, its formulas, its solidarity, as one indissoluble body, in which are merged the consciences, the hopes, the responsibilities of all its subjects, the Baptist opposes the New Testament, with its simplicity, its individualism, its democracy, its many simple churches, in which there are no superiors, but all equals. Thus we stand, with Protestants between these two positions, in harmony with neither, but influenced in opposite directions by each.

Up to 125 years ago, Baptists had a slim chance to propagate their simple faith. The whole civilized world was cumbered by vast ecclesiastical systems upheld by all the monarchies of the world. And more, these monarchies employed the secular power to levy tribute on all the people, including Baptists, for the support of these anti-scriptural orders. And not to stop at that, the sword was used, the dungeon and the fagot, to repress the people who stood for the New Testament order against the world.

The opening of America was doubtless God's plan for bringing on a better day for humanity. Here, in the wilderness, the people who hold the doctrines preached first in the wilderness of Judea, were to demonstrate afresh the power of truth to liberate an enslaved race. It was no accident that every

Baptist stood for the independence of the colonies. Their faith committed them to liberty. The war over, and religious liberty embedded in the constitution of the United States, by the efforts of Baptists, America set out on a far-reaching demonstration. The world had been tutored into the belief that neither state nor church could live unless they were bound together, so that the blood of each could flow through the veins of the other. All the hierarchical churches had inculcated this heresy, and all the monarchies had done the same. Against the whole of it, whether in Protestant or Popish communities, the Baptists opposed the unbound individualism of the New Testament, and the demonstration proceeded.

A little more than a century has passed, and democracy has made America the first nation of the world. And nowhere in the world are the vital forces of religion more felt than in this wide battle field of America, where every idea, doctrine and church rises or falls by the volition of the individual, unmolested by the state.

The Frenchman who gave to America the statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World", had a clear vision of the far-reaching and irresistible influence of the democratic demonstration going on in America.

Within a century, the spirit of individualism has largely subverted the old orders in Europe. France is democratic, has cast off Popery as an annex to the state, and has granted religious freedom. Italy has a constitution and enjoys free worship. Fifty years ago, Baptists were imprisoned in Germany. Recently, the Empress made a personal offering to a Baptist church in Berlin. Russia has granted a parliament and freedom of worship. Turkey is to have a Constitution. England is almost as democratic as America. Spain, Portugal and all the rest are coming on. We are in the early hours of the great day of individualism, for which our Baptist fathers, in dens and caves, in wildernesses and prisons, on gibbets and in flames, have prayed and waited.

In our own country, great and beneficent changes have come. The movements are everywhere toward the fundamental doctrines of Baptists, which is only saying that more and more,

the great Protestant communions are coming to recognize individualism in religion. Catholicism in America is undergoing modification, and in the same degree, is there an abandonment of infant baptism and other unscriptural and Popish doctrines. Ecclesiasticism is far less a power than it was even ten years ago. The Baptists have won their battle for the democracy of New Testament churches to an almost unthinkable extent. Immersion is freely admitted to be the New Testament form of Baptism by the great scholars of all communions, and it is believed in by vast numbers in all the denominations from the simple reading of the New Testament. There are tens of thousands in other denominations who are essentially Baptists, and do not know it.

It is a good sign of the times, that the violent and extreme sectarian spirit, which has magnified fictitious differences, is rapidly yielding to a broader, more Christian, and a far more practical spirit. An Episcopal bishop in Texas sometime ago said, that in the smaller towns there ought to be only three churches, Catholics, Baptists, because Baptists stand for distinctive principles, and another for all the other denominations. This is a sign of a wide, irresistible, and I think altogether healthy movement. Union is the largest feature of today. I hold that Baptists should encourage it, because it is right; but guide it to the right basis, and do this in no captious or partisan spirit, but in the wise, tender spirit of the Prince of Peace. It was related that when the infallibility dogma was passed by the Council in Rome, there was wild and tumultuous excitement in St. Peters. Many predicted the disruption of "the church" and dark forebodings were in many hearts. At the crisis, Archbishop, later Cardinal Manning, of England, pale with excitement, standing on an elevation, and holding aloft a copy of the dogma, said: "Let all the world go to bits, and we will reconstruct it on this paper". The old world of thought, of dogma, of ecclesiastical orders is going to bits, and the hour is filled to the limit with opportunity and peril.

Over against the Catholic hierarch's pronouncement, loyal Baptists will lift the Bible, and say by the grace of the good

spirit of the Master we will reconstruct the world on the New Testament as the law of Christianity.

Let no Baptist refuse to recognize the signs of the times, and let no one misinterpret these signs. If the advocates of a Christianity, springing out of the New Testament, and limited by it, are wise to-day and true to their own principles, they may soon see such enlargement as will make them glad.

The real problem of Baptist progress lies in a preaching of the present truth, the truth the times and circumstances call for, in the spirit of the truth. We should reverently, fairly and lovingly deal with a great situation for the good of our fellow Christians and the world. It is not a time for captious criticism, but for wise deliberation and judicious action. And, above all, now is the time for Baptists to stand confidently on their own platform with both feet. We will be utterly unwise, if we do not, within the limits of truth, encourage the rising spirit of unity. We need not fear what the Savior prayed for—the unity of His people. Of all people in the world, Baptists, if they are loyal and true, are best prepared for what is coming. We have no complex and unwieldy ecclesiasticism to embarrass us, as have some others. We have no cast-iron standards to maintain. We do, indeed, have written Articles of Faith, but we are not bound to them in that written form. The truth is just as good written another way. We are bound to nothing but the Word of God. Although we do have a history, largely written in blood by our opponents, yet we are by no means bound to maintain an historic succession. We can stand on the New Testament, pure and simple, and thus doing, we are ready for all comers who are willing to accept it as the law of Christianity, and walk with us in the simple order of God's house.

The Baptist position lends itself in other ways to the situation we are in. It is the deepest doctrine of the New Testament, that every believer in the divinity of Jesus, and every one who trusts the Savior for salvation, is a Christian, a brother or sister, and of the household of faith. We may consistently treat them as such, and co-operate with them in all things in which the purely spiritual and not the ecclesiastical, is the basis of co-operation. Moreover, the independence of our

churches is a powerful factor of usefulness in meeting the many questions growing out of the complex situation. This gives us a freedom of action others cannot enjoy.

We should proceed now, as always, under the compelling conviction that we hold the truth in trust for the world. The world's best good is wrapped up in the teachings of Christ and His inspired apostles. And in every Baptist heart should live the spirit of loyalty to the King eternal and His truth. Loyalty will not permit us to adjust our teachings to the views of majorities, or minorities. It is not allowed us to adjust to current thought, if that thought be wrong. Our supreme obligation is to adjust current thought to the law of Christ. If we abandon "Obedience to Jesus" as the formula of our contention, we have no mission in the world, and, as a people, we become as other people, lose our power, and pass out to give place to others, less pretentious, if not more faithful.

The whole problem of Baptist progress lies in the preaching of the New Testament, affirmatively, but not pugilistically, for itself, not as against something else. The light shining out from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles will be sufficient to guide the seeking sons of men to the true center of unity.

In this new era of opportunity, the Baptists need to look well to themselves. Sir Walter Scott paid his respects to the genius of Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he disliked, in words like these: "There never was a man, who knew so well how to mobilize an army. There never was a man, who knew so well how to train and inspire an army. There never was a man, who knew so well how to plan a battle. There never was a man, who knew so well how to fight a battle. There never was a man, who knew so well how to win a victory. There never was a man, who knew so well how to use a victory." There was little else to be said in praise of the genius of the world's greatest military leader. Baptists need to follow that line of action clear through. History teaches us that some great leaders were strong at some points and weak at others. And history is full of instances of great victories won to be lightly or rashly thrown away. If Baptists are to reap the fruits of victory, they must conserve their own strength. In the re-

nowned debate in the British Parliament between Wm. Pitt, Premier, and Charles James Fox, leader of the opposition, on the question of treating with Napoleon, Pitt reached the climax of sane eloquence, when he declared that British success depended on themselves and not on concessions from Napoleon. Baptist success depends on Baptists, not on half concessions made to the Baptist position by others. If Baptists live up to their faith, if they transmute doctrine into practice; if they demonstrate the truth, as well as preach it, they will rapidly win the Christian world to the New Testament as the center of unity. Much more can be done now by teaching and demonstrating the truth than by denouncing the people who do not hold it, or by a mere exposure of error.

The remainder of this article may be given profitably to some practical suggestions. It has already been said that Baptists need now to give special heed to themselves and to the doctrine.

One of our first cares ought to be the better mobilization of our forces. We are to demonstrate that the voluntary principle in service by which each member acts for himself is not only scriptural, but practical, and this we must do by showing our good deeds. In the controversial days of the past, this demonstration was largely lacking with many, and is yet. If we are wise, we will at once, with great and persistent earnestness, set about the enlistment of all the Baptists in the churches in the work the Master has given us to do. If we give the world a proper demonstration of the value of the voluntary principle in the actual doing of things, it will prove an attractive power to draw people to the truth, and the whole truth. To mobilize our forces, we must constantly keep before them noble enterprises of commanding greatness. We must also study the practical question of adaptation, so as to suit plans to conditions. The enlistment and training of the millions of Baptists in America to discharge their obligations to the world in proclaiming the teachings of Jesus and His inspired apostles, and in demonstrating, by actual practice, the goodness of the doctrines, is a task of measureless importance to Baptist progress.

Baptists must, if they would win the world, learn a lesson of toleration as to differences among themselves. Among a free thinking people, differences are sure to arise. Without a benevolent spirit of toleration, much of our strength must be wasted, and worse than wasted. There are questions of judgment and of taste about which good Baptists differ. Paul gives us the true teaching touching such matters in treating the questions of days in his letter to the Romans. There are other questions of interpretation about which Baptists have always differed and will. They are matters to be discussed in a tolerant spirit; but not to be made tests of fellowship. Here we must show the fine grace of sanctified common sense, that grace which shone so beautifully in Paul, the greatest theologian, preacher and leader of Christian forces in all the tides of time. Paul was the great military spirit of the apostolic period, the Napoleon of that age, the man inspired of God to lay out the entire program of progress.

And in this hopeful era, when the good spirit of fellowship among believers is drawing Christians of all names closer together, Baptists should study the best methods of approachment to those they would influence for good. Nowhere should we approach other people in a captious spirit, but everywhere in a frank, fraternal spirit. Thus did Paul deal with those who needed help in his day. Whereto we have attained, we should walk with all by the same rule. To magnify fictitious differences is as unscriptural as it is inexpedient in the present circumstances. The New Testament, to which we appeal on all questions, gives us the word of wisdom on this point. The weak we are to receive, but not to doubtful disputations. There is no grace, nor wisdom, in making it unduly hard for people to join Baptists churches. The scriptures require far less than a full understanding of the scriptures for church membership.

But it is of supreme importance that Baptists avoid all entangling alliances, and that in all approachments to others, they keep it clear that we do not feel ourselves authorized to compromise any of the teachings of the New Testament. To be strong at this point, is to maintain our strength every-

where. Weakness here is rottenness in our bones. The final battle of principles will be between those who stand for the infallible Book against an infallible Pope. The three churches for small towns, advocated by the bishop in Texas, may be reduced to two, for the full truth lies with the Baptist position, or the Catholic position, and people will go one way or the other, as they hold with the one position or the other.

Baptists' progress depends on the progression of Baptists. If we wait on, or stop to debate every small question, proposed from within or without, our forces will fall apart. Paul more than once warns us not to give heed to vain and foolish questions. Many questions will settle themselves before we can settle them. An aggressive policy along the trunk lines laid down in the Acts of the Apostles will leave the ever recurring brood of small questions to die for want of life. Following the example of Paul and his co-laborers, we should maintain a virile evangelism, year in and year out. And in all our preaching, there should be the straightforward preaching of the doctrines of sin, repentance, faith, confession, baptism, to be followed by training for service. No evangelism is complete that does not track the New Testament and align the converts with the churches for future service. All this should be done in a spirit of love to Jesus and to the souls of men, and done with blood earnestness. Not much will ever be done religiously in cold blood. We need to shun starch and stilts as deadly enemies to life and progress. Of course, Baptists are commoners, as was their Lord, the Prince of Peace. We will have nothing to do with high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Our business is with the masses, not especially with any class. We are the servants of humanity, and if we ever reach the high and mighty, it will be done, even as our Savior did, by bringing them low with the truth.

By a faithful preaching of the Word, in the spirit of love, we can win marvelous victories now as the whole world is turning toward the light. We need to especially remember, in this connection, that there is just as much heresy in a bad spirit as in a bad doctrine.