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## BAPTISTS AND UNITY

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(1888–1945)

## *Harvey Eugene Dana* *(1888–1945)*

### **The Influence of Baptists upon the Modern Conceptions of the Church**

The unfolding of the development of Baptist principles carries the student along the course of some marvelous and thrilling events. The records of Baptist history constitute a romance as intensely fascinating as any produced by the weird imagination of a Victor Hugo, a Bulwer-Lytton, or a Daniel DeFoe. They are records of struggle, stained in many places with martyr's blood, but adorned withal by an intense loyalty to truth and triumphant faith in God; and finally crowned by a most splendid victory for the principles which inspired the conflict. This marvelous history is in fact a rehearsal of the triumphant march of great principles. The unrivaled success of Baptist propaganda in recent centuries is indisputably due to the character of the doctrines which they have advocated. Their progress most certainly cannot be accredited to any traditional prestige or historical advantage, and hardly to any especially favorable developments in the course of their own history. Everywhere history records their progress it has been opposed, and even their right to existence oftentimes disputed; yet their principles have made an advance which finds no parallel in Christian history. This success is not due to the type or multitude of the people, nor to any conspicuously competent leadership, but to the character of those principles which the people have represented.

To trace the progress of Baptist principles in historic detail would be far too large an undertaking for the scope of our present purposes. We shall treat only those particulars which are related to the general discussion. The method pursued will be to consider first the positions of Christendom in general, and then to note the extent to which Baptists have altered or affected these positions. Furthermore, we will limit ourselves to those bodies of Christian people which have been outstanding in their influence upon theology. With these limitations the task becomes feasible.

It may be said at the outset that, while contention has often been sharp between Baptists and Protestants, the wide difference has appeared in comparison with the ecclesiastical dogmas and practices of the Roman

Catholic hierarchy. Baptists and Romanists have stood at the two extremes, and the other denominations have occupied intermediate positions.

The matter of primary interest to us here is the progress of the Baptist conception of the church. But this by no means limits the discussion to a treatment of ecclesiastical organization. It will be seen as we proceed that the church idea is interwoven with nearly every fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. There are two vital points at which the church is related to the great body of Christian doctrine; namely, the matter of salvation, and the matter of authority. From these two cardinal points our discussion may proceed.

### 1. The Church and Salvation

Baptists and Roman Catholics stand at opposite poles on this question. The former hold that regeneration is the indispensable qualification for church membership, while the latter regard church membership as the essential condition, and even the chief means of regeneration.

#### (1) The Baptist Position

Baptists consider that the essential characteristic of a church is its spiritual constituency. The primary point of distinction is that it is composed of individuals who have experienced a spiritual transformation through the agency of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of this change each and every believer is joined to Christ by a common and equal relationship. Every individual believer, as a result of this common and equal relationship, has direct, personal access to Christ: consequently, the *universal priesthood of believers*. In view of this common and equal relationship, no believer shall be subject to any authority save that of Christ; hence, a democratic church polity! When the Christian world has been brought to accept and apply *in toto* the Baptist premise of a regenerated church membership, they will inevitably recognize and practice these two conclusions, which logically result therefrom.

While Baptists have earnestly denied that the church was the chief agency in regeneration, they are far from claiming that it has no part in the process of the world's redemption. On the contrary, they believe the church to be the agency of the Spirit for the spread of the gospel, and that the preaching of that gospel is God's only method for bringing the world to Christ.

This statement is made from the standpoint which prevails in the denomination at the present time. There has been, however, much variation and modification just at this point. From the middle of the seventeenth century until late in the nineteenth a large number of Baptist churches advocated a hyper-Calvinistic interpretation of the atonement. That is to say, it was believed that the entire process of salvation was effected by the Holy

Spirit wholly independent of any intermediate agency. In consequence all evangelistic endeavor was discarded and repudiated. Dr. W.W. Barnes is eminently correct in his conclusion that this view of the atonement was detrimental to the progress of the denomination, tending to paralyze its evangelistic activities, and hence curtail its growth. Fortunately, during the nineteenth century this position has been much modified and toned down. There have been suggested two probable causes contributing to this change. (1) There was a blending of two wings of the denomination holding diverse views of the atonement, known in England as General and Particular Baptists. (2) It is altogether reasonable to believe that the greatly enlarged missionary activities of the denomination during the nineteenth century have had much to do with modifying their extreme Calvinistic views. The final product has been an evangelistic type of Calvinism which Dr. A.H. Newman has well declared to be the most virile and aggressive type of Christianity known to history. This change of view has wrought mightily in the advance of Baptist principles toward world conquest. But while advocating and practicing this missionary view of the saving work of Christ they still believe implicitly in the absolute sovereignty of God in his eternal plan of redemption.

#### (2) The Roman Catholic Position

Only those who have been confirmed by proper ecclesiastical authority in the membership of the Roman Catholic Church have any hope of salvation. The Church is more than an instrumental agency in the propagation of the gospel; it is an efficient and necessary medium in the process of regeneration. This grows out of the theory of sacramental grace. The Holy Spirit can only act in the rites of the Church when officiated by its recognized functionaries. This doctrine constitutes the root evil of the two greatest errors which have ever affected the Christian world: sacerdotalism and pedobaptism. The efficacious administration of the sacraments necessitated an order of Church functionaries, and thus arose the priests; the ultimate application of the doctrine made necessary the baptism of infants. The Roman Church has, for several centuries, included in its ritual seven sacraments, one at every important crisis of human life. Through these sacraments, administered by the Church, is the soul's avenue of approach to God. This doctrine of sacramental grace, or salvation through the Church, has had more to do with the "loyalty" of Roman Catholics to their religion than any other cause.

#### (3) The Protestant<sup>1</sup> Position

Protestant denominations have rejected the majority of the Romanist

<sup>1</sup>By Protestant we mean those denominations which came into being as an outgrowth of the Reformation. Baptists, under the name of Anabaptists, antedated the Reformation, and hence could not have resulted from it.

sacraments, most of them retaining only two, baptism and the Lord's Supper, while some add a third, the sacrament of confirmation. Immediately after the Reformation most Protestants still held to the idea of sacramental grace though in a modified form. They rejected the theory of sacramental regeneration, but still considered that a ministration of grace attended participation in the sacred rites. The grace was not thought of as directly wrought by the sacrament itself, but as a work of the Spirit in response to the faith exerted by the recipient in receiving the sacrament. This theory survived longest in the case of baptism, and still finds expression in the practice of infant baptism.

#### (4) Effects of Baptist Propaganda

In direct opposition to the theory of salvation through the Church and its sacraments Baptists have vigorously proclaimed the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers. While Baptists must be careful not to claim all the credit at this point, yet it is true that in the progress of this doctrine they have exerted a positive and potent influence. They have stormed the very central citadel of all hierarchy by standing aggressively against the whole doctrine of sacramental grace. And their efforts have by no means been ineffective. During the past two centuries important concessions have been made by other denominations at three important points.

(a) Nearly all Protestantism today is a unit in its agreement with Baptists that there are but two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and that these are mainly symbolic in their significance. Baptists have contended for this view of the sacred rites since long before Martin Luther from the dark recesses of his Augustinian monastery hurled across Europe the first fire-brand of the Reformation.

(b) The majority of the Protestant denominations of today concede the necessity of regeneration as a qualification for church membership. This concession grants the contention that the church is primarily spiritual in its nature. But let us beware; the battle at this particular point is not concluded yet. Baptists need to sound out with greater emphasis than ever before the solemn doctrines of sin and blood redemption.

(c) The doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is now accepted in practically the entire Protestant world. While this idea lay at the root of the Reformation, and its success is largely a result of that great movement, yet, Baptists have suffered more in their contention for it than any other group of Christian people, and theirs is a peculiar share in the victory. This concession grants to every believer direct and immediate access to Christ, and thus demolishes the entire theory of sacerdotalism, or salvation through the Church. It acknowledges the equal relationship of all believers

to Christ, and thus involves in its ultimate analysis democratic church polity, and democratic church polity involves local church autonomy.

## **2. The Church and Authority**

### **A. Authority in Religion**

Whither shall the soul of man look for final authority in the interpretation and ordering of his religious experience? This vital question arises from a native impulse of the human soul, and has voiced itself through various modes of expression. In nearly every case some written standard has become the acknowledged authority. In the Christian world two radically different answers have been proposed. One represents the standard of final authority as the Bible, which is God's special revelation of Himself to man; the other admits that the Bible is authoritative but not an immediate authority, being valid only as interpreted and set forth in formal dogmas by the Church. The latter theory really results in making the Church the final authority, and the Bible merely a secondary or corroborative evidence. We shall shortly see just what have been the origin and progress of these two diverse views.

#### (1) The Baptist Position

Baptists have always contended for the exclusive authority of the Scriptures in all matters of religion: the ordinances and practices of the church as well as the conduct and beliefs of the individual. This principle is obviously very closely related to the Baptist theory of the church. Baptists declare for the simple New Testament methods or organization in opposition to the basis of traditional authority or of expediency. Just here they differ from nearly every other Christian denomination. And not only does this belief in the supreme authority of the Bible furnish the basis for Baptist church polity, but it is the determining factor in every other doctrine to which they hold. They accept nothing as part of the Christian faith which has not some real foundation in Scripture.

Intimately related to this matter of the authority of the Bible is the question of its interpretation. Baptists have held ardently and tenaciously to the inalienable right of every individual to interpret the Word of God for himself and follow it in the light of his own conscience. Far back in the shadows of the dark ages we catch occasional glimpses of our doctrinal progenitors, coming into the light of history purely by reason of their aggressive and intrepid advocacy of this theory. Their successors in the stressful centuries following proved themselves wonderfully loyal to this heritage of truth. All along down through history Baptist blood has been copiously spilled in defense of this great principle. It has been one of their chief distinguishing characteristics. We are forced to admit, however,

that they have not always been perfectly consistent with this theory in their attitude toward Christian bodies of opposing views. Nevertheless, the principle has always been deep laid in Baptist life, and today the spirit of absolute tolerance is practically unanimous.

### (2) The Roman Catholic Position

Catholicism regards the Church as the infallible representative of Christ on earth; the dispensary, through its sacerdotal functionaries, of the grace of salvation and all its attendant blessings, constituting through the Pope as its sovereign head the one absolute authority of all humanity: individually, in all matters pertaining to conscience and conduct; of humanity in the aggregate as organized into political units. In their latest statements of creed they have admitted the Scriptures to be a standard and criterion of doctrine, but they do not accord the Bible a place as the one final and immediate standard. All its teachings must be interpreted by the Church and transmitted through the Church which stands in direct contact with man as the infallible authority not only in religion, but in every other relationship of life.

### (3) The Protestant Position

Protestants of the Reformation altered the extreme position of Romanism by two material modifications: first, that the church was not infallible and could possibly err; and second, by removing the church from its place of superiority in civil affairs, and making it a department of the state, subordinate to the central government. This theory of the church obtained in all the state religions of Europe which arose during or grew out of the Reformation. With this conception of the church have been identified at various times, to a greater or less degree, representatives of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational and Lutheran denominations. Later Protestants, especially the non-established representatives, have entirely repudiated the Romanist theory. They now accept the Scriptures as the direct and infallible guide in faith and practice. Where Protestants have erred has been in failing consistently to apply this principle. They have retained and advocated practices for which they have no really scriptural grounds.

A further inconsistency of which they have been guilty in times past has been their refusal to allow the free exercise of individual conscience in the interpretation of Scripture. The Anglican (Episcopalian) Church recognized the Bible as the ultimate appeal in all matters of doctrine, but they retained the right to say just how the Bible should be interpreted. Presbyterians and Congregationalists of post-Reformation times admitted the freedom of conscience, but held that this freedom must not be abused. If anyone were so bold as to thus violate the sacred principles of Christianity—as the church interpreted them—they could properly be turned over to the civil authorities for punishment. We are happy to admit that

Protestant bodies have long since revised their views in this particular. But as we are here considering matters which are logically included under the discussion of the question of church and state we will give them no further attention in this connection.

#### (4) Results of Baptist Influence

Relative to the authority of the scriptures, Baptist influence has not extensively modified Christian thought as to the content of the doctrine, but has been exceedingly active in effecting real consistency in its application. In two important particulars have they inveighed against the inconsistency of pedobaptists in their application of this principle.

(a) As to the mode of baptism. In nearly all of its known history the Baptist denomination has contended earnestly and aggressively for immersion as the only scriptural mode of baptism. Many opponents here and there have arisen and made desperate but vain attempts to refute them. By the close of the nineteenth century the scholarship of the world had conceded us the victory. Every scholar worthy of the title, of every denomination the world over, now admits that immersion was the primitive mode of baptism. Then to accept the absolute authority of the Scriptures is to baptize by immersion.

(b) As to infant baptism. Though in this instance Baptists have not gained such a signal victory as in the preceding case, they have brought a very decided modification. Departing from the old Catholic theory of infant damnation and baptismal regeneration, pedobaptists have now come to teach that this is a harmless and expressive ceremony of dedication, replacing the rite of circumcision. It is only a matter of time until truth shall break through the barriers of tradition and rid the whole Protestant world of this unscriptural relic of Romanistic ritualism.

In the battle for the complete liberty of individual conscience, or the competency of the individual soul in matters of religion, Baptists have won their most decisive victory. For many generations they occupied the battlefield without a single ally. Today the whole Protestant world has joined ranks with them in the defense of this inherent right of man. This concession places every believer upon an equal footing before Christ. Then if every man is equally and directly responsible to Christ for what he believes and does, why any ecclesiastical courts and dogmas to govern the convictions and religious practices of men? The practical effect of the complete liberty of conscience is to remove every vestige of hierarchy from the Christian world.

### **B. Authority in Civil Affairs**

In this realm Baptists have wrought their most splendid achievement; have made their richest contribution to the organization of modern

society. The great Christian principle of democracy, which is the determining factor in their church polity, has been the basis of their attitude toward the interference of civil authority in matters of religion. No true democracy can exist where the individual is deprived of the free exercise of his religious convictions. Pure democracy necessitates the separation of church and state. This noble principle has characterized Baptists wherever they have been known to history, and has actuated their undying resistance to Protestant intolerance.

Upon this battlefield Baptists fought for many centuries practically single-handed, and the laurels are distinctly and unquestionably our own. Romanists claimed the authority of the church over the state and individual conscience; Protestants claimed the authority of the state over the church, and hence individual conscience, or perhaps more accurately, the identification of the church with the state in the exercise of control over individual conscience. Baptists claimed that every man possessed an inherent right to read and interpret the Bible for himself and to follow with absolute freedom the convictions resulting from his interpretation. For the preaching of this doctrine they were ridiculed, maligned and persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike. Nevertheless, they held tenaciously and defiantly to their position, and fought their way through nearly three centuries to victory.

To give a detailed account of this great struggle would be by far too lengthy an undertaking for this brief discussion. We must let it suffice to introduce the testimony of some outstanding and reliable witnesses as to the part Baptists have played in accomplishing the present happy situation of entire freedom in holding and advocating religious convictions. The questions of church and state and of religious liberty are so closely associated, both in their historic progress and their essential meaning, that we shall not regard the distinction between them, but treat them both as a single issue.

According to the almost unanimous testimony of students of the subject, from all denominations, Baptists have been preeminent in every step of the progress of religious liberty, from the tyranny of the exclusive state church to the unchallenged religious freedom of the twentieth century. Even in the early days of the Reformation their voice of protest has been recognized. Sanford H. Cobb in "The Rise of Religious Liberty in America" says, "Among the few and scattered European voices for religious liberty, heard in the two hundred and fifty years from the day of Luther, the place of honor is undoubtedly to be accorded to the Anabaptists" (63). The same author claims that their voice was heard and their protest sensibly felt at the opening of the Reformation. Wallace St. John, PhD, finds a record, dated 1573, of one John Whitgift, an English churchman, who afterward

became an archbishop, complaining against the Continental Anabaptists, that they taught "that the civil magistrate had no authority in ecclesiastical matters, and that he ought not to meddle in causes of religion and faith!" This same churchman charges the English Anabaptists with maintaining a like position. (What a fearfully damaging charge!)

St. John, in his dissertation on "The Contest of Liberty of Conscience in England," gives the English Anabaptists a large place in the origin of the movement. We receive from him this significant statement, "From all sources we learn that this newly formed Baptist denomination followed closely in the footsteps of their progenitors, the Anabaptists." His view of the origin of Baptists is not the case in point, but his disinterested witness to their efficient participation in the English struggle for religious liberty. According to Sanford H. Cobb, as early as 1611 the English Baptists at Amsterdam published in their articles of faith that, "The magistrate is not to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, nor to compel men to this or that form of religion; because Christ is the King and Lawgiver of the church and conscience" (*Rise of Rel. Lib. in Am.*) David Masson in "Life and times of Milton," says, "Not to the Church of England, however, nor to English Puritanism at large, does the honour of the first perception of the full principles of liberty of conscience and its assertion in England, belong. That honour has to be assigned, I believe, to the Independents generally and the Baptists in particular," (Vol. III, 987.) Phillip Schaff, the great church historian, in "Church and State in the United States," declares that "The Baptists and Quakers have always protested against the union of church and state, and against all kinds of religious intolerance." (53). This same eminent scholar, in his treatise on "The Progress of Religion Freedom," says, "The Baptists and Quakers alone (and Protestant denominations of later date) were consistent advocates of universal toleration, and put it in their creeds," (55)

Concerning the comparative effectiveness of Baptists and Quakers, Stanford H. Cobb declares that, "while the Quakers were immovable in their passive resistance to intolerance, the Baptists added to such virtue the active energy which overcomes," (*Rise of Rel. Freedom in Am.*, (64). He states further in the same connection, that, "When . . . the struggle for religious liberty took place in America, among the various churches, the Baptists were most strenuous and sturdy in its defence." "The Baptists had come to stay, and to share with the Quakers the honor of securing liberty of conscience and of worship in Puritan Massachusetts" (229). He also assigns to the Baptists a leading part in the contest in Virginia. Largely as a result of the efforts of Baptists, the evil of intolerance was finally "expunged from the codified laws of every state," and "the last vestige of any

assertion of its (the state's) authority to control in matters of faith has disappeared forever."

Out of Baptist blood and tears has arisen this princely product, which now radiates the light of its mighty influence into every corner of the globe, and the quiet potency of its example shall eventually lead every nation of earth into the full liberty of the individual soul and the democracy of the world.

Such has been the progress of Baptist principles. Such is the record of their struggle and triumph. What shall we do with the tremendous advantage we have thus gained? Shall we cast it aside as an outworn garment? A demand is gradually being brought to bear upon us that we renounce our victories, that we sacrifice our blood-stained convictions and join a great fraternizing movement for the creedless union of all Christian denominations. What shall be our answer? For Baptists, but one course is open to the future. To bring to bear a new and intensified emphasis upon their distinctive principles, and to launch, for the world-wide propagation of those principles, a mighty program, vaster than Christendom has ever witnessed before.

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### **Christian Unity as Taught in the New Testament**

Denominationalism is not the ideal situation for Christianity. This point we are willing to concede in the beginning. But its exact point of defection from the ideal, and the best method for correcting that defection, are the important matters to decide. That denominational divisions are not in perfect accord with the New Testament ideal of unity is easy to discern; but just wherein lies the lack of harmony? This question is not difficult to answer when we have rightly interpreted the idea of unity as presented in the New Testament, and the bearing of this idea upon practical Christian experience.

The fundamental unity of the Christian religion is spiritual unity. An impartial study of the New Testament Scriptures could lead to no other conclusion. Those who cry down denominational differences place much stress on the petition for the oneness of his people in the prayer of Jesus recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John (vv. 11, 21, 23). They propose this passage as evidence that it was Christ's purpose that there should always be but one great Church, represented in various local assemblies. Such an interpretation is a freak of pure assumption. There is not the least suggestion in this prayer of our Lord by which it may be linked on to a

theory of ecclesiastical organization. In fact, the matter of organization in the work of his kingdom received but small attention from Jesus, there being but two recorded references to the church in all his teachings (Matt 16:18; 18:17). The obvious reason for this seeming indifference of our Lord to this important element of kingdom progress is that organization was not the primary function of his ministry.

The full establishment of the church as the agency of redemption was, in accordance with the divine plan, to be inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, it being the part of Christ to provide the divine basis for the truth of its message and the character of its constituency. The dominant element in the life of Christ was the kingdom idea. His teachings were the enunciation of its governing principles, and his prayers were for its full and certain realization. Such is clearly the burden of his prayer in John 17. A candid glance at the prayer as a whole will convince one of this fact. He prays the Father to keep his people; to preserve them from the power of the evil one; to sanctify them in the truth. To what end? That they may be gathered with him as a blood-bought possession to receive the fullness of his glory (cf. v. 24). If such is the final object of the other petitions of the prayer, why not regard it as likewise the aim of the petitions for unity? And the end thus described is clearly a great spiritual reality reaching its perfect accomplishment in the future life.

There is perfect harmony between this transcendent spiritual conception and the prayer for unity. He asks that his people "may be one, even as we" (v. 11) ; "that they may all be one, even as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us" (v. 21); "that they may be perfected into one" (v. 23). It is nothing less than preposterous to conceive of these exalted spiritual ideas as representing a plan of church organization. Christ and the Father are not one by virtue of any organic relation, but in *spiritual identity*. Neither can we regard the "perfection into one" of Christ's followers as being the accomplishment of ecclesiastical union. The point of the whole passage is the vital, spiritual union of all believers with and in Christ as a means to their preservation, whereby the world may be convinced of the divine source and authority of Christ's ministry, and of God's love for his followers. The unmistakable import of this passage is spiritual unity.

Paul clearly presents some idea of unity in his figure of believers as constituting the "body of Christ." This figure is presented twice in his earlier epistles (Rom 12:4 ff.; 1 Cor 12:12ff), and a number of times in the imprisonment epistles (Eph and Col) The significance of the figure in the later epistles where it is connected with the church idea is in a profound discussion of the mystical union of Christ with His saints.

The emphatic idea in these epistles is certainly not the inter-relation of believers, but the relation of believers to Christ. Hence the idea of unity must be spiritual. In Romans 12:5 believers are said to be one body "in Christ," and not in ecclesiastical organization. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 the bond of unity is said to consist "in one Spirit," hence, spiritual unity. The same is true of Ephesians 4:3, where reference is made to "the unity of the Spirit." This verse is a favorite proof text with the advocates of the "one Church" idea. But whether we interpret the phrase, "of the Spirit," as describing the character of the unity as applying to the spirits of believers, or the production of unity by the work of the Holy Spirit, it is in either case manifestly spiritual unity. We feel that the examination of these, the chief passages from the New Testament bearing upon the subject, is sufficient to establish our contention that the idea of universal ecclesiastical unity is positively without exegetical grounds. The only unity contemplated by the New Testament is spiritual unity.

Does this spiritual unity relate itself in any way to the matter of organization? Without question it does. But we must dig to the very foundations of the kingdom in order to interpret their connection. The fact that all believers are one in Christ is not true merely for the reason that God has arbitrarily declared it to be so. It belongs to the essential nature of the kingdom. It is a spiritual result produced by the operation of certain definite factors, which factors may be described as the "structural principles" of the kingdom. The unity of believers in Christ results from the fact that there is but one Christ; but one way of salvation; but one regenerating Spirit; but one creative process by which we become new creatures in Christ Jesus. By these structural processes we are built up into one body in Christ.

This oneness of believers finds its most natural expression in organization. It so expressed itself in the very earliest developments of Christian history. The production of the New Testament church was not a planned and prearranged movement, in so far as the human factor was concerned, but a spontaneous outgrowth of the consciousness of spiritual unity. The structural principles of the kingdom found their embodiment in the church. But this native and spontaneous expression of spiritual unity produced the *local* church, and in the local church found perfectly adequate demonstration. It was only after Christianity had lapsed into a subversion of some of the vital elements of Christian truth that there came the development of ecclesiastical organization.

The local church can give sufficient expression to spiritual unity, and only the local church can give adequate demonstration to the productive causes by which spiritual unity is to be accomplished. For instance, the access of every soul to Christ requires democracy in organization, and cannot be consistently realized in a national or universal Church. Hence church

policy is to be determined, not only by the sense of the oneness of believers, but mainly by the underlying constructive principles of the kingdom. These productive causes relate themselves to church organization at two vital points.

In the first place, they must receive fair and consistent interpretation. The realization of the purpose of Jesus for His whole redemptive program is dependent upon the proper interpretation and application of the basal principles of His kingdom by those who hold the sacred trust of their propagation. Hence no body of people can enter upon the function of a church of Christ until they have rightly interpreted the fundamentals of His kingdom. These fundamentals are comprehended in the New Testament in the oft-recurring word "truth." This term is conceived of by the New Testament writers as including every known element of divine revelation. To Paul it signified the very essence of all that may be known about God; and the mystical John went even a step farther than Paul, and having summed up in the term the totality of divine revelation, objectified it, and set it in motion as an active agency, operating in the experiences of men for the defense and realization of the whole program of redemption.

The New Testament regards nothing in all this body of truth as incidental or non-essential. It conceived of its every element as bearing the inviolable sanctity of the divine nature from which it originated. It was all Christ's truth, every doctrine of it, and nothing which he taught, or inspired others to teach, was regarded as an indifferent matter. No self-constituted human authority—be it in the form of dogmas or traditions; courts, councils or committees—could change the vital nature of that truth. To the apostolic mind this body of truth was the fruition of Calvary, so that the authority of Christ was the last appeal. Hence, there can be no organic developments in the kingdom of Christ which are not based upon *a doctrinal agreement which will retain inviolate the authority of Jesus Christ.*

In the second place we would say that the structural processes of the kingdom must find adequate and effective articulation in the forms and methods of ecclesiastical administration. Types of church polity are not matters to be arbitrarily decided, nor yet left to haphazard development. No proposition has ever been submitted to the Christian mind which was more inimical to the revealed will of Christ than the Unionist theory of the indigenous church. Nothing could more certainly make ship-wreck of gospel propagation than to leave the vital matter of church organization to the caprice of those who are but newly converted from heathenism. There is no fact of history more certainly demonstrable than that the interpretation placed upon the truth of Christianity determines the organization of Christianity. The theory of the mediation of the grace of Christ through functions of the clergy leads to sacerdotalism and hierarchy. The theory

of the competency of the individual soul for fellowship and communion with God results in democracy. Belief in salvation as based upon the merits of human life leads to the development of sacramentalism. Belief in the doctrine of justification by faith renders the rites of the church symbolical ordinances. Acceptance of the absolute and final authority of the Bible as a supernatural revelation from God destroys the validity of councils and episcopates. Thus it may be seen that the matter of church organization must be determined by the nature of the body of truth which the church is commissioned to proclaim. It is also true that "the form of visible or organic Christianity will force right or wrong views of spiritual truth" (Gambrell). The two elements of doctrine and organization interact, the one upon the other.

If the realization of Christian unity does mean organic union, then we admit that the New Testament sanctions the idea of a universal church. But if we accept this view, immediately we find the wisdom of the New Testament impeachable by the undeniable testimony of history. The saddest day that Christian history ever saw was the day when there was but one great church. Roman Catholicism, with all its unscrupulous tyranny, baptizing the dark ages with the blood of helpless martyrs and staining its own records with the ineffacable crime of the Inquisition, this monster of ecclesiastical despotism, was the natural and inevitable outgrowth of the idea of a Universal Church. Every tenet of its dogmas and every crime of its persecution were logical sequences of this idea. The only unity which is safe for Christianity and true to the New Testament is the unity of a common faith. Such is the only unity which is essential, or ever was essential, to the progress of the kingdom of Christ.

The advocates of more elaborate church organization seek to defend their position by contending that the course of events and the development of the new conditions demanded a departure from the single apostolic pattern of church organization. They claim that as Christianity advanced in its ever expanding program of world conquest the very complications of the civilization which it was the largest factor in producing required more ecclesiastical machinery. If this were true it is certain that the apostolic mode of church life could not at all survive in modern times, for there was never a more complex age in all the history of civilization than exists in the world of today. Yet the vastness and efficiency of the present Baptist denomination is demonstrating in a most impressive way the adaptability of apostolic church polity to twentieth century conditions. Baptists have had the honor of proving to the world the wisdom and efficiency of simple New Testament principles.

The world does not need one great Church. It needs a multitude of independent, God honoring, Christ loving churches, built upon the simple

principles of the New Testament, and in loving cooperation committed to the whole program of Jesus. The blood stained cross of Christ sends forth this hour its silent but irresistible appeal to the Baptist hosts of the world to fling themselves with glorious abandon and sacrifice into the holy task of bringing into complete realization this ideal of New Testament teaching. It cannot be done by compromise and amalgamation; it can be accomplished only by unflinching loyalty to our convictions, the giving of our money in millions, and the unflinching surrender of our lives to march ahead with set faces and fearless hearts under the crimson banner of the cross.

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Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary offers a one hundred year history of graduates who have a legacy of service and commitment to the Gospel message. Since 1974, a Doctor of Ministry degree from Southwestern Seminary has opened doors and possibilities to men and women who are committed to the Word of God and the Great Commission. A Southwestern DMin will prepare you to be scholarly in the Scriptures, sound in your proclamation of God's Word, and skillful in your ministry.

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