

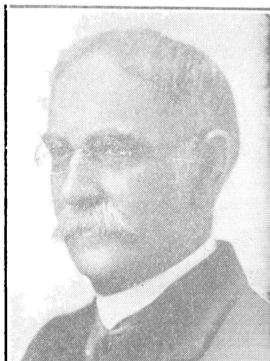
# Baptist Contribution to Christian Unity

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## Baptist Contribution to Christian Unity

“THIS DAY is most auspicious. In the language of the psalmist: ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.’

“On my own behalf, as well as that of the people whom I have the honor to represent, I would first of all thank our Heavenly Father and then the bishop, dean, canons and others for the opportunity afforded me of participation in this love feast. Whoever wishes to apply to his own soul one of the best tests of Christian discipleship will naturally have recourse to the assurance of the apostle John: ‘We know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.’

“Our Baptist people in the South, in America, and elsewhere are not indifferent to the great issue of Christian union. Quite the contrary. Certain deliverances prove this. Let me quote first from that of the Baptist General Convention of Texas expressing in 1913 the views and sentiments of 600,000 communicants. It is as follows: ‘We look with deep and sympathetic interest on the efforts now making throughout the Christian world to reunite the scattered and oft-time antagonistic forces of Christendom. We deplore the divisions that obtain among the lovers of Jesus and the many evils resulting therefrom. We long for Christian union. We pray for it, and will labor for it on a Scriptural basis.’

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ALL BELIEVERS SAVED.

“Another deliverance is that of the Southern Baptist Convention, now with 3,000,000 communicants,

made at Nashville in 1914: 'This convention,' the document avows, 'rejoices in the many evidences of increasing interest in the subject of Christian union among Christian people everywhere. Many evils arise from the divided state of modern Christendom. The prayer of Jesus in the seventeenth chapter of John and the many exhortations to unity in the epistles of the New Testament should keep us constantly reminded that this matter lay very near the heart of the Master and His disciples.'

"Please be kind enough at the very outset specially to note one distinguishing tenet of the Baptists. It deserves extraordinary emphasis in this connection if we are to be understood. It is our doctrine of the unity of all believers. Let me quote: 'We hold the immemorial position of Baptists that all true believers in Christ as their personal Savior are saved, having been born again; and this without the intervention of preacher, priest, ordinance, sacrament or church.' Mark these words. Quoting again: 'Therefore we profoundly rejoice in our spiritual union with all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. We love their fellowship and maintain that the spiritual union of all believers is now and ever will be a blessed reality.' Upon what does this spiritual union depend? Hear the answer to that inquiry: 'This spiritual union does not depend on organization or form or rituals. It is deeper, broader, higher, more stable than any or all organizations.' Who are embraced in this spiritual union? Here there is no possibility of misunderstanding. This is the deliverance: 'We hold that all people who believe in Christ as their personal Savior are brothers in the common salvation, whether they be in the Roman Catholic com-

munion or in a Protestant communion or in no communion. This fellowship and brotherhood exist independently of any church or all churches.'

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### BAPTISTS MUCH DIVIDED.

"We cannot conceive, let me say, of any broader presentation of the meaning and compass of Christianity. Who can be more catholic?"

"It may be admitted that Baptists, as a people, have not so frequently or so urgently insisted upon plans for organic Christian union as brethren of some other denominations, notably the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church of America. There are reasons for this. One, peradventure, is that the Baptists have not yet been able to unite the several sects into which they are divided, some sixteen or seventeen in number. Until we have set our own house in order, would it not appear perilously near presumption to preach union to others?"

"Again, believing all others to be as conscientious as ourselves and unwilling as we are to abandon convictions drawn from the Word of God, we have hesitated to ask for a union which would mean nothing more or less than an invitation to join us. Once more we have expressed in a communication to the Episcopal church, through a late president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist conception of the Scriptural, logical and chronological order of loyalty, liberty and unity.

"BIBLE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS."

"This is the extract I would name: 'Three

great sayings of the apostle Paul will state them for us. In II Corinthians x:5, note these words: "Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." In II Corinthians iii:17, these words: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." In Ephesians iv:3, these words: "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace." Loyalty, liberty, unity—these three, and the greatest of these is loyalty.' Dr. Dargan, the author of the communication quoted, adds: 'Loyalty maintained, liberty respected, unity in large measure and in some form will be secured. Can we predict that ultimate and as yet unattained form? Probably not. But the present situation suggests that it will not be doctrinal uniformity, nor a dominant organization, but a guiding and controlling spirit of fellowship, and, out of this, such co-operation as may follow without surrender of liberty or sacrifice of loyalty.'

"In order that we may come at once to the true center of Christian union as understood by my people, let me bring to your attention a clause in the first article of the confession of faith most commonly used among us. These are the words: 'We believe that the Holy Bible is and shall remain to the end of the world the true center of Christian union and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and opinions should be tried.'

"We may not forget the slogan of the Reformation, 'The Bible, the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants.' Critics of the Baptist position have characterized if not caricatured us as the 'Dissidence of Dissent and the most Protestant of Protestant people.' They imply we are in danger of bibliolatry

## “DO NOT DARE CLAIM INFALLIBILITY.

“In this free and fraternal forum I take it for granted that frankness concerning certain differentiating doctrines is both expected and desired, if presented with malice toward none and with charity for all. Concealment or even reserve in this connection would be disingenuous. As before stated ‘the Bible is and must remain to the end of the world the true center of Christian union.’ Naturally enough in one of the Baptist deliverances on Christian union we find these words: ‘Our message to our brethren of other communions is that, since the present divided condition of Christendom is unquestionably the result of departure from the simple teachings of the Scriptures, the only possible road to organic union is back to the Scriptures fairly interpreted. If it is said that this is, in our present state, impracticable and impossible, we reply that if that be so then organic union is impossible for Baptists, for we are unalterably bound to the Scriptures as our law and guide. We speak on this point with absolute frankness and with great plainness because we crave to be understood by our fellow-Christians. We neither ask nor wish any one to come to us except upon a personal conviction; we would have all to study the Holy Scriptures to find the path of duty and our confidence is un-failing that there is light sufficient in the Scriptures to guide us all to the union the Master wishes.

“We are not bigots. We do not presume for one moment to dare to claim infallibility for our interpretation of the Scriptures. It is simply the best we can offer with the light we have and the one we must maintain, propagate and defend

until more light breaks forth out of the Word of God.

“In our interpretation of the Scriptures we give, after acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, a large and primary place to the three doctrines of individualism, democracy and spirituality.

“Our individualism confessedly is stalwart and unbending. We hold that religion is essentially a personal matter between each soul and God. Right here there is a deep line of cleavage between ourselves and many others. Mark it well. We cannot accept proxyship, sponsorship or deputyship in religion. The individual soul is the religious unit. We hold that where there is no ability there is no responsibility. This is fundamental, axiomatic. We maintain that each consciously responsible soul must personally repent, personally believe, personally confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and personally evidence this inward experience by personal baptism. According to this view quite manifestly we must frankly but affectionately affirm that there is no room in the Scripture for what dissenting brethren recognize as infant baptism or infant church membership.

“Our doctrine of the church is fundamentally democratic. A church formed on the New Testament pattern, as we understand the Scriptures to teach, is a body of believers who have been scripturally baptized and are covenanted together to teach and do all things commanded by Jesus Christ. We believe that such a local church of Jesus Christ is a pure democracy. It is independent. It is self-governing. It is self-sufficient, if directed by the Great Head of the church. It may co-operate with other churches in any way

not inconsistent with its sovereignty. On the other hand, it may not subject itself to any outside control, whether called a Baptist Association or General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, or Southern Baptist Convention or Baptist World Congress. All these may advise, but cannot control a Baptist church. Each church is absolutely self-governing. Naturally, therefore, if every local church is independent of the denomination whose name it wears, it may not subject itself to any other denomination or group of denominations, not to say any ecumenical council or ecclesiastical autocracy at home or abroad.

“With then our cherished belief in the unity of all Christians in their experience of grace and their common acceptance of the Saviourship and the Lordship of Jesus Christ we are confronted, as we unreservedly admit, with great and strong barriers to outward visible organic ecclesiastical merging with our well-beloved and highly-esteemed brethren of other denominations. Our denomination in its present state of evolution, if you prefer to have it so, has not gotten beyond the farewell caution of Washington anent entangling alliances.

“To put the matter concretely, note this condition. If it be unscriptural, in their judgment, for the Broadway Baptist church of Louisville to sink its independence and sovereignty in a league of other Baptist churches, to which it is closely related in doctrine and government, composing the Baptist denomination, by what persuasion may it be induced, except on abandonment of fundamental principles, to subject itself to oversight by any other church or denomination or union of denominations?



“One word as to spirituality. Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world.’ ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you.’ It is the rule of Christ in the regenerated human spirit. It is subjective. It is spiritual. Hence our doctrine of soul liberty and the entire separation of church and State. Hence our spiritual interpretation of the only two ordinances of the church, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism as we understand it saves no one. No one has to be baptized to be saved. Only those already saved should be baptized. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is an act of obedience on the part of a believer. In our judgment it symbolizes, in a striking pictorial way, a vital Christian experience already enjoyed. That experience is death to the old life of disobedience and disbelief and a resurrection to a new life of union with the Saviour in spirit and conduct. It sets forth the burial and resurrection of our Lord, upon whom and not upon baptism or good works of whatsoever kind rests our ground of acceptance with our heavenly Father. Baptism has no regenerating power. It is in no sense mystical. It is simply an expression of obedience, a test of loyalty, a proof of consecration and filial love. Only in that sense do we believe it to be binding on the Christian conscience. In that sense, however, it is indispensable to the full discharge of Christian duty.

“May I not pause again for a passing moment to thank you, my dear brethren, for your beautiful catholicity of spirit in permitting me to say these things. I must say them or be recreant to my trust. No word of controversy or debate do I intend. No desire do I cherish that you should accept our differentiating doctrines, unless, to be

**sure** after careful study of the Scripture and prayer for guidance by the Holy Spirit, you should come to believe that they are not Baptist tenets at all whatsoever, in no degree sectarian, but the substance 'of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.'

"What then of our suggestions as to organic Christian union? Our views we give modestly and in all humility and only because you ask us to offer them.

"First, do not forget that we hold, as I have said before, to the present unity of all Christians, regardless of church connection or no church connection. We do not believe that you would ask for outward union based on compromise of truth and principle. We know that your Christly souls abhor the thought of any ecclesiastical consolidation inspired by convenience or by a desire to save money. We know that you believe with us that there is one thing worse than commercialized vice and that is commercialized religion. So soon as religion becomes an economic question it ceases to be Christianity. We know you have no toleration for the many cheap and cheapening methods employed to break down the soul's supreme convictions and to establish a mechanical union with none of the spirit of Christ. We know that as trustees of the truth, as you see it, you yourselves are unwilling to surrender the irriducible minimum of doctrine. By the memory of the faggots and flames which Episcopal martyrs have endured with unsurpassed courage, faith and heroism, through those dark days which tried men's souls, you will die rather than prove recreant to your trust. We hail you, we salute you, we honor you, for what your forbears wrought on behalf of our common Protestantism,

**and believe you to be sons worthy of your sires. May God enable us to imitate your glorious loyalty.**

**“We believe, as we are profoundly gratified to declare, that it is practicable to express and promote Christian fellowship in many ways and more now than ever before. One way is hold more meetings like this for joint worship, fellowship and consultation. In our hymns and prayers the unity of Protestants is incontestable. When we talk to our Heavenly Father or sing His praises we use a common language, expressing a common faith in a common Lord.**

**“Another method for promoting union is by co-operation in good works. Quoting from a Baptist deliverance several times mentioned I ask attention to these words: ‘Pending the working out of the problem of union we are glad to say that we stand ready, at all times, to co-operate with our fellow Christians and our fellow citizens, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, whether Jew or Gentile, in every worthy effort for the moral and social uplift of humanity as well as for the equal civil and religious rights of all men in all lands.’ Another thing to be desired is the avoidance of all references to other religious bodies than one’s own in press or pulpit or private conversation anything that would excite unfraternal and uncharitable discussion. Frank expression of one’s own views and sentiments is obligatory and helpful. The right of private judgment must be held sacred, but its utterance must be in harmony with the spirit of Christ.**

**“Most of all, as Baptists, we pledge our solemn word to exalt the centrality and centralizing might and magnetism of the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The closer we get to**

our Saviour the shorter is the diameter of the Christian circle.

“As we press forward toward him, little thinking of ourselves, or even not at all, inevitably we are drawn into closer personal contact and find ourselves with inexpressible joy shoulder to shoulder, hand to hand, heart to heart in one brotherhood of all Christians of which God is the Father, the whole world our realm of evangelical activity and Heaven the eternal home. To that end we ask your prayers. A British statesman has said that the British empire ‘is a state of mind rather than an aggregation of territory.’ So the empire of our Lord Jesus is ‘a state of mind,’ inward and indestructible unity brought about by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. As the loyalty of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and all her independent and self-governing colonies, bound by the invisible but indissoluble links of love to the motherland, rallied to her support and defense in the world war, so in the war for truth and righteousness you may be sure the various groups of Christian believers, without compulsion from without, whether by centralization or autocracy, more and more are coming, to face in the same way and to be actuated by the same altruistic motives and to push forward Christ’s cosmopolitan conquest. In that glorious enterprise may you and we and all others be faithful till the end shall come and Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father and God shall be all and in all.”