

HISTORY OF BAPTIST ORGANIZATION.

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Baptists claim to make the New Testament Scriptures their standard of practice as well as of faith, and if their claim be justifiable, as the writer thinks it is, it should be easy to find the essentials of church organization and some guidance to the inter-relations of local churches in apostolic precept and example. It is generally admitted by scholars of presbyterially and prelatically organized bodies that the New Testament churches were congregational in their polity. Presbyterians find in the plurality of elders, a certain justification for their elaborate system of local church government by elders and its graduated tribunals (sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assemblies). The presbyterial organization of the Jewish synagogues, with their boards of elders that presided over the bodies and the local sanhedrins that exercised disciplinary functions, are supposed by Presbyterians to have greatly influenced primitive Christian local organizations, while the appeal that was provided in local difficulties to the central sanhedrin in Jerusalem is thought to furnish some sort of justification for the general assembly. Without attempting a complete critique of the Presbyterian system, it may here be remarked that Calvin and his followers went much too far, in the writer's opinion, in indentifying the Old Testament church with the New, in seeking to establish a theocracy, in justifying infant baptism as taking the place of circumcision and as a condition of membership in the Christian theocracy, in justifying the infliction of temporal punishments for supposed errors in doctrine and neglect of religious duties, in indentifying the Lord's Day with the Jewish Sabbath, etc. It would be easy to show, furthermore, that many of the harsher statements of divine sovereignty and arbitrariness by Calvin and his more radical followers, while ostensibly based upon expressions in the Pauline epistles, are

really based upon Old Testament conceptions not understood in their true relations.

The organization of local churches in the apostolic age was exceedingly simple. In the Pentecostal time at Jerusalem the apostles as the recognized exponents of the religion of Christ and as men filled with the Holy Spirit naturally assumed the leadership. When owing to the great concourse of converts, many of whom were far from home and without means of support, the equitable distribution of the provisions brought together by those who had means for the common sustenance called for responsible stewards, the apostles requested the brethren to choose seven men, whom they (the apostles) would appoint over this business and upon whom when they had been selected they solemnly laid their hands. There is no evidence that after the martyrdom of Stephen and the dispersion of the other six servers of tables their places were filled by the appointment of others.

It is not a little remarkable that the word "deacon" does not occur at all in the Book of Acts. The term occurs several times in the Gospels but is never applied to a church officer. In Romans 13:4 the word is applied to the civil magistrate, who is called God's deacon or minister. In Romans 15:6 Jesus Christ is designated as the deacon or minister of the circumcision. In Romans 16:1 Phoebe is spoken of as a deacon (deaconess) or minister of the church that is in Cenchrea. In 1 Cor. 3:5 Paul speaks of himself and Apollos as deacons or ministers through whom the Corinthians believed. In 2 Cor. 3:6 Paul speaks of himself and his fellow-workers as deacons or ministers of a new covenant and in 6:4 as ministers of God. In 2 Cor. 11:15 deacons or ministers of Satan are represented as fashioning themselves as deacons or ministers of righteousness and in 11:23 Paul speaks of himself and other Christian workers again as deacons or ministers of Christ. In Gal. 2:17 Paul repudiates the thought of Christ being the deacon or minister of sin. In Eph. 3:7 Paul speaks of himself as having become a deacon or minister in the Lord. In Phil. 1:1 Paul salutes the bishops and deacons or ministers. In Col. 1:7 Paul speaks of Epaphras as a faithful deacon or

minister of Christ, in 1:23 of himself as having become a deacon or minister of the gospel (so also in v. 25). In 4:7 he again speaks of Tychicus as a faithful deacon or minister. In 1 Thess. 3:2 Paul speaks of Timothy as a deacon or minister of God. In 1 Tim. 3:8 and 12 the qualifications of deacons or ministers are set forth after the qualifications of overseers or bishops have been given. In 4:6 Timothy is told that if he puts the brethren in mind of the foregoing things he will be a good deacon or minister of Christ Jesus.

From the foregoing examples of the use of the term **diakonos** in the New Testament, which seems to be exhaustive, it is evident that the term was not much used as a technical designation of a class of church officers, but as a generic term to indicate those who perform any kind of service from the most menial even to the most exalted. We read nowhere of the ordination of deacons except in the case of the seven appointed to serve tables.

On the other hand, the term **presbuteros**, (elder) while in some cases it may have no technical significance and may simply indicate the authority and leadership that naturally belong to mature age, it is undoubtedly employed in many cases to designate the officers of local churches. According to Acts 15 the brethren at Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas and certain others to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to consult about the question of requiring circumcision of Gentile converts. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders." Here the elders stand out prominently side by side with the apostles as leaders in the church. After Paul and Barnabas and Peter and James had been heard, "it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose out men of their company and send them to Antioch." Here again the elders stand out as a distinct class. According to Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas on their missionary tour appointed for their converts elders in every church. According to Acts 20:17 Paul called to him the elders of the church at Ephesus and in his address to them he speaks of the Holy Spirit having made them overseers or bishops. In 1 Tim. 5:17

double honor is accorded to elders that rule well or are efficient leaders in the churches. This does not imply that there was in the apostolic churches a special class of ruling elders, but that in any given church some of the elders would possess special gifts of leadership which should be suitably recognized in their exercises. In Titus 1:5 Titus is said to have been left in Crete by the apostle with directions to appoint elders in every city.

Another circumstance connected with the organization of churches in the New Testament time is the absence of evidence of the existence of more than one church organization in any city or town. However numerous the Christians may have become in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth or Rome, and however many meeting places may have been utilized for the convenience of the membership, there seems to have been no thought of the independent organization of community churches. In the apostolic age there was probably no occasion for such separate organization. During the early post-apostolic age the enlargement of Christian work in the great centers led to more elaborate organization than is contemplated by the apostles. A large board of elders would require a presiding officer and the elder with most of consecrated talent (sometimes perhaps the most aggressive and ambitious) would come to be the recognized leader or overseer (bishop). It became usual to entrust to the bishop the responsibility of managing the finances, that is, collecting what was necessary for the maintenance of the church work and for charity and administering the funds collected. As this function became more and more centered in the head elder or bishop, the importance of the office became greater and greater. Individual presbyters or elders were frequently assigned to local congregations in different parts of the city and suburbs and the bishop would have a general supervision of the work of all the elders. The chief function of deacons came to be to assist the bishop in the collection and the distribution of funds and to give personal attention to the sick and the needy. It is easy to account for the subsequent development of local episcopacy into prelacy and ultimately into papacy without supposing

any deliberate and malicious determination to pervert the apostolic church order. Just when the churches founded by the apostles and those modeled upon these ceased to be Baptist churches it would be hard to determine, so gradually did errors in doctrine and practice do their disastrous work. The early intrusion of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and of the doctrine that unbaptized infants are excluded from salvation was a calamity. This error brought in its wake the rise and spread of infant baptism with the destruction of the apostolic principle of regenerate church membership and the gradual obliteration of the distinction between the church and the world.

The apostolic age furnished no occasion for the working out of any elaborate system of interrelation and intercommunion of churches. Apostolic men planted churches, revisited them, corresponded with them, conveyed greetings from one church to another, collected funds in more prosperous churches for the relief of the needy. The sending of messengers by the Antiochian brethren to consult with the apostles and elders and the whole church in Jerusalem about the Gentile work, the discussion of the issues involved, the decision of the Jerusalem brethren as to the attitude that they would assume, and the sending of messengers by the Jerusalem church to accompany the Antiochian messengers to Antioch so as to explain in person the attitude of the Jerusalem brethren, furnish sufficient warrant for such an interrelation and co-operation of churches as shall not interfere with their proper autonomy.

It is probable that in Armenia a form of Christianity prevailed from the second century onward that kept closer to the apostolic standard than did any that we have information about in Palestine, Asia Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Egypt, North Africa or Italy. Unfortunately this old Armenian party, that has been perpetuated to the present time in Paulicianism, when the matter of Christ's eternal sonship and of His co-equality, co-eternity, and consubstantiality with the Father came to be a subject of controversy in Graeco-Roman circles and the fully developed doctrine was formulated in opposition to Arianism by the Nicene Council, refused to rec-

ognize the value and truth of the formulated doctrine and continued to hold to the adoptionist view, propagated no doubt in simple form even in the apostolic age by Judaizing teachers who looked with disfavor upon the teachings of Paul and John respecting the absolute deity of Christ. But their rigorous insistence on believers' baptism and their zeal for converted church membership constitutes them by far the best known representatives of Baptist principles that have had continuous existence from the early centuries to the present time. It will be interesting and instructive to note their views of the church and of its officers. The Paulicians as represented by "The Key of Truth" (a church book of the Paulicians which assumed its present form in the early middle ages but embodies very early doctrine and practice, translated from the Armenian and edited by F. C. Conybeare, Oxford, 1898), did not hesitate to speak of themselves as the "holy universal and apostolic Catholic church," and of the Greek, Roman and Gregorian bodies as "schismatics and heretics," whose father and inspirer is the Devil. They regarded the entire body of true believers in fellowship as the one only church of Jesus Christ and made little of local congregations except as constituent parts of the universal church in which the ordinances are administered and Christian life and work find place. While every ordained man is designated an "elect one" and all the "elect" or apostles have complete authority to bind and to loose, several classes of church officials are designated. A bishop or general superintendent of the entire connection seems from an early time to have guided the entire "universal and apostolic Catholic holy church." Then we have rulers and archrulers, and in addition to these, elders. The head officer of the connection is sometimes called president, sometimes apostle, and sometimes bishop (or overseer). When a local pastor (or "elect one") is to be set apart to the work of the ministry, the elders bring him before the president and the rulers and archrulers pray the bishop or president to lay hands on him ("Key of Truth," p. 106 seq.)

The same is essentially true of the Waldenses, many of whom were antipedobaptist. According to David of Augsburg

(c. 1260), they "affirm that they alone are the church of Christ and disciples of Christ. They say that they themselves are the successors of the apostles and have apostolic authority and the keys of binding and loosing. They say that the Roman church is the Babylonian harlot and that all who obey it are damned." He charges some of these with repudiating infant baptism and denying the real presence in the supper. The local congregations were regarded as constituent parts of the one apostolic church, to which all the active workers belonged. The "elect" or the ordained workers were for the most part celibates and without private property and were expected to devote themselves wholly to itineracy and evangelism. The major or general superintendent was elected by all the elders and deacons and ordained by another major, if such were living or available, otherwise by an elder, all the elders and deacons laying hands upon him, one by one. Elders were ordained by the major, all elders present joining with the major in the laying on of hands. The deacon is ordained by the imposition of the hands of the major alone, and like the majors and elders assumes the obligations of poverty, chastity, and obedience, involving complete devotion to active Christian work, his distinctive function being to provide for the temporal needs of the major and the elders. They held annually, usually in Lombardy, Italy, a great convention, at which reports were given by each of his year's work, collections were brought together, plans were made for the ensuing year, and (probably) the ordination of new members took place.

The Bohemian brethren, historically connected with the Waldenses, adopted at the time of their organization the connectional system with general superintendency or episcopacy as a fundamental principle.

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, whenever they had an opportunity to complete their organization and to put in practice their ideas, adopted the connectional system in very much the same form as had been employed by Waldenses and Bohemian brethren. In February, 1527, a number of antipedobaptist brethren under the leadership of Michael Sattler met at Schlatten am Randen to discuss questions that had arisen

among them and to establish a brotherly union by agreeing on baptism, church discipline, breaking of bread, separation from abominations, pastors in the congregation, the sword, and the oath. In the autumn of the same year a large gathering of antipedobaptist preachers met in Augsburg for the purpose, no doubt, of conferring on matters of common interest and agreeing upon points of doctrine and practice with a view to a larger concerted movement for the advancement of gospel teaching. When in about a year and a half, (1526-28) Balthasar Hubmaier gathered a community of from 6,000 to 12,000 antipedobaptists in the domains of the Lichstensten Lords, who themselves became members, there is no indication of any thought of dividing this great body into independent congregations, although there were several eminent ministers in the church. The communistic Anabaptists of Moravia, who at the time of their greatest prosperity had about seventy households with a membership of from 20,000 to 50,000, had a single head elder or bishop, who exercised an almost absolute authority over the entire body. Each great household was equipped with ministers of the word, or elders, and ministers of need, or deacons. The head of the connection was supreme not only in the spiritual realm but also in the secular and shaped the entire policy of the body, with the advice of the other ministers. Missionaries were sent out by him and their work directed by him and reported to him.

Omitting the theocratic kingdom established at Münster with its king, its prophets, and its despotic government, as an episode in Anabaptist history due to a frantic premillenianism, we find that the reorganization of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and surrounding regions by Menno Simons, as the earlier organization under Melchior Hofmann had been in a more rudimentary way, was strongly connectional. Menno as the recognized head of all the congregations in fellowship associated with himself as head elders or bishops, Obbe and Dirk Philips, Gillis of Aachen, Henry of Vrenen, Antony of Cologne, and Leonard Bouwens, with a view to the widespread propagation of his views, the organization of congregations, and the maintenance of a rigorous discipline. The

local congregations were equipped with elders and deacons. Most Mennonite bodies have up to the present time maintained a partially presbyterial and partially episcopal form of church government.

The Arminian (Socinian) churches that were constituted by Helwys and Murton, who had been associated with John Smyth in his antipedobaptist movement at Amsterdam (1609) and who refused to follow him in seeking union with the Mennonites, made common cause in dealing with promulgators of error and in seeking the moral support of the Mennonites of Holland. It is evident that the little communities at London, Tiverton, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Coventry stood in the closest relations to each other. The confession of faith signed by Smyth and his party after they had been excommunicated by Helwys and his party provides for teachers, elders and deacons. These are to be elected or called by the church, but invested by the elders of the church through the laying on of hands. The administration of the ordinances is assigned to the ministry of teaching. A plurality of elders in the congregation seems to be contemplated. In Smyth's "Propositions and Conclusions" it is stated that "Christ hath set in his outward church two sorts of ministers, viz: some who are called pastors, teachers, or elders, who administer in the word and sacraments, and others who are called deacons, men and women; whose ministry is to serve tables and wash the saint's feet."

The first Calvinistic (Particular) Baptist confession of faith put forth by seven congregations in London in 1644, explains in the introduction or address: "We do therefore here subscribe it, some of each body in the name, and by the appointment of seven congregations, who though we be distinct in respect of our particular bodies, for conveniency sake, being as many as can well meet together in one place, yet are all one in communion, holding Jesus Christ to be our head and Lord." The officers of the local church to be chosen by the members are thus enumerated: "Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons," "for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of Christ's church."

Before the middle of the seventeenth century the General

(Arminian) Baptists seem to have had ten associations, which met quarterly, semi-annually or annually, and dealt with cases of discipline for immoral conduct, heresy, etc., presented by the churches, the expectation being that the churches or congregations would put into effect the decisions reached. For many years (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) the General Baptists of England maintained a General Assembly, which constituted a court of appeal from the disciplinary and doctrinal decisions of the churches and associations. To look after the carrying out of the decisions of the General Assembly and to promote the general interests of the brotherhood bishops or messengers (taking the place of the New Testament apostolate) were appointed. According to the Orthodox Creed (1678) "the bishops have the government of those churches that had suffrage in their election, ordinarily, as also to preach the word to the world."

English Particular Baptists, while they never went so far as the General Baptists along the line of connectional organization, continued to work co-operatively. In 1651 four congregations gathered in Wales by John Myles and Vavasour Powell met at Carmarthen to consider the questions of singing psalms and laying-on of hands. Regular associations were soon afterward formed and Welsh Baptists have made much of associations, using them not only for purposes of edification, but also for the determination of questions of doctrine, practice and discipline, the promotion of missionary work, the supplying of churches with ministers, the discountenancing of unworthy ministers, etc. While they have sought to maintain the independence of the churches, they have fully recognized the right and duty of interdependence and mutual helpfulness.

In response to overtures from several Irish Baptist congregations that had been formed through the labors of English Baptists (1653), London Particular Baptists sent messengers to many churches to confer with them about matters of common interest and to arrange for the organization of associations. The Western Association was formed the same year and two years later the Midland. The former (1655) appointed Thomas Collier "General Superintendent and mess-

enger to all the associated churches." Collier was a man of leadership and no doubt his office authorized him to intermeddle in a paternal way in the affairs of the associated churches. The Somerset Confession (1656) probably drafted by Collier sets forth the "duty of the members of Christ in the order of the gospel, though in several congregations and assemblies (being one in the Head), if occasion be, to communicate each to other in things spiritual and things temporal." It also recognizes the duty of the churches through gifted and qualified brethren "to preach the gospel to the world." The obligation of Christians to evangelize the Jews is also impressively stated.

At the close of the period of persecution under Charles II the Particular Baptist ministers of London sent an invitation to the churches of England and Wales to send representatives to London the following May to consult about matters of common interest, especially the taking of steps for the education of ministers. A large number of messengers assembled in London in 1677 and adopted an elaborate confession of faith modeled on the Westminster. Afterwards adopted with some modifications by the Philadelphia Association and known thenceforth as the Philadelphia confession.

A still more complete organization was effected by the Particular Baptists in 1689, just after the Revolution. The constitution of this assembly provides most carefully for the independence of the churches upon essentially the basis on which it rests at present with English and American Baptists. In 1692 the Assembly which had representatives of a hundred churches and twelve associations divided into two, one portion to meet at Bristol, the other to continue meeting in London.

In 1717 we have in London perhaps the first instance of the constitution of a Baptist Board on a financial basis. Every church contributing fifty pounds was entitled to send one messenger with their elder, every one contributing one hundred and fifty pounds, three messengers. These were to be managers of the fund and were to have the liberty to invite any gentlemen who contributed to the fund to act with them as **managers.**

In 1723 or 1724 there was formed in London a "Society of Ministers of the Particular Baptist Persuasion, meeting at the Gloucestershire Coffee-house." For many years this self-constituted body held itself ready to aid churches in settling difficulties, to raise funds for deserving denominational objects at home and abroad, to recommend worthy ministers and to warn against unworthy ones, to recommend or discourage the erection of church buildings outside of London, to assist in bringing forward and educating young men for the ministry, to use their influence with the government for the redress of Baptist grievances in Britain or America, and in general, to promote the interests of the denomination at large.

In 1792 ministers of the Northamptonshire Association and others organized the Baptist Missionary Society on the basis of interest in the work to be manifested by contributions. It would have been out of the question at that time to secure the united action of all the churches in such a cause.

In 1812 steps were taken toward the organization of the Baptist Union, which since 1832 has been highly influential in unifying, fortifying and directing the religious efforts of British Baptists of various types and in making the Baptist principles effective in the cause of civil and religious liberty. Basis of membership is in part financial and in part representative. The council is made up of former officials, representatives of associations, honorary members appointed by the Assembly, and a large number of members elected directly by the Assembly. The harmonious relations of Particular and General Baptists in the Union led (1891) to the dropping of the party names and the amalgamation of the two denominations. The Union maintains a publication department, a home work department (church aid, evangelization, church extension), an annuity fund for retired ministers and ministers' widows and orphans, education fund for aiding ministers in the education of their children, a home of rest for ministers and missionaries, a ministerial recognition committee, which prescribes courses of study for candidates for the ministry, conducts examinations, and passes upon their moral and spiritual qualifications, a theological scholarship fund, a local preachers' federation,

a young people's union, a chapel property committee, a committee of arbitrators, and a library. Recently the Union has adopted an elaborate scheme in accordance with which the Council is to assist pastorless churches in securing pastors, and churchless pastors in securing churches, to aid in bringing about changes in the pastoral relationship when the interest of the work seems to demand them, to supplement salaries paid by feeble churches through funds contributed by ministers with larger salaries and by stronger churches, etc.

The earliest Calvinistic Baptist churches in America were too few and far between, as well as too stalwartly independent, to effect any General organization. The General Baptist churches, on the other hand, having formed a number of congregations in Rhode Island and Connecticut, began at an early date to hold associations or general meetings. Calvinistic Baptist churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware (1684 onward), in which the Welsh element soon came to prevail, began at an early date to hold meetings for evangelistic and communion purposes. In 1707 it was decided to transform the general meeting into a regularly constituted association made up of representatives of the congregations who should meet annually "to consult about such things as were wanting in the churches, and to set them in order." It was agreed that the association should entertain appeals from aggrieved parties in the various churches and that those concerned should acquiesce in the determination of the associated brethren. The brethren of the Philadelphia were not over-scrupulous about conserving the independence of the churches, but insisted most rigorously upon the conformity of churches and pastors that wished to be in fellowship with the body to the standards of conduct, doctrine, and practice that had been set up. This association early entered vigorously upon missionary work in the more neglected parts of the country and was an inspiring and energizing force at a time when other Calvinistic Baptist churches were inactive and declining. It set an example for the organization of associations in the Carolinas, Virginia and New England, and was the pioneer in promoting denominational education.

The conversion to Baptist views of Judson and Rice (1812), who had gone to India as missionaries of the newly organized American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, thrust upon the Baptists of the United States, now a strong and widespread denomination, prevailing Calvinistic in doctrine, the obligation to enter at once upon the foreign missionary enterprise. After a number of local missionary societies had been formed in different parts of the country and considerable correspondence among leaders North and South had taken place, it was agreed that delegates from these societies should meet in Philadelphia in May, 1814. Thirty-three delegates were present from eleven states. These delegates proceeded to effect a general organization under the name "General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions." It was arranged that meetings should be triennial, and that it should be composed of delegates of societies contributing not less than \$100 a year to the funds of the convention. A Board of Commissioners of twenty-one was constituted for the "executive part of the missionary concern." The subsequent constitution under the auspices of the convention of organizations for Home Missions, Education, Publication, etc, cannot here be described.

Interest in missions, education, the production and circulation of religious literature, Sunday School work, etc., on the one hand, and determined, even malignant, opposition to all kinds of organized effort and all innovations, on the other, led to the organization of State Conventions, in which membership was limited to representatives of contributing churches, associations and societies, and to individual contributors.

The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 as a result of friction caused by the slavery question in the Triennial Convention and its Boards. It proceeded at once to constitute Home and Foreign Mission Boards, and maintains besides a Sunday School Board and a fostering relation to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The Boards that were constituted by the Triennial Convention soon after the

withdrawal of the Southern brethren began to meet annually at the same place, the apportionment of time being arranged by the officials, but each society being entirely independent. In May, 1907, at Washington, D. C., the Northern Baptist Convention was formed with a view to co-ordinating and regulating the various Boards somewhat on the model of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Baptist General Convention was formed (1905) with a view to bringing the Baptists of all parts of America into closer fellowship and promoting an American Baptist *esprit de corps*. Northern, Southern, Colored, Canadian and Mexican Baptists are included in its membership.

In 1905 the Baptist World Alliance was formed at a Baptist World Congress that had met in London for this purpose. A full programme had been arranged for the London meeting. The aim of the organization is declared to be "to manifest the essential oneness in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . of the churches of the Baptist order and faith throughout the world, and to promote the spirit of fellowship, service and co-operation among them, while recognizing the independence of each particular church and not assuming the functions of any existing organization." The Executive Committee consists of the president, treasurer, secretaries and twenty-one other members, of whom five shall be from Great Britain, seven from the United States, two from Canada, and seven from the rest of the world. General assemblies are to be held once in five years.

The Baptists of Canada have (besides smaller conventions in the West) two great conventions, the one for the Maritime Provinces and the other for Ontario and Quebec. These have adopted the principle of direct representation of the churches on the basis of membership, financial considerations, and ex-officio membership of all kinds being entirely excluded. Each church being entitled to a definite number of representatives may choose representatives from other churches nearer the place of meeting. The conventions made up exclusively of delegates of churches elect Home and Foreign Mission, Publication and Education Boards., etc. There being no organized opposition in Canada to missions, education, etc., the plan works well.