

BAPTISTS IN THE MODERN WORLD.

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The modern world is a world of profound interest to Baptists on many accounts. One of the most vital and searching of all tests which could be applied to a religious denomination is the power of adaptation to the world in which it seeks to do its work, and in its ability to grapple successfully with the conditions which confront it. Some of the characteristics of the modern world we may briefly enumerate simply by way of reminder to the reader.

That which has done more than any other one thing to change conditions in the modern world is physical science. Invention and discovery have revolutionized the industrial world. Scientific methods and principles have changed the type of thought in the intellectual world. A new philosophy has arisen on the basis of scientific discovery. As a result, there have come changes in a number of directions. The influence of science in reorganizing the industrial world has awakened a very widespread social unrest, and the prevalence of scientific methods of investigation has deepened the sense of mystery in religion led many to questionings unknown in past ages. And yet there has been remarkable missionary activity and a deepening of religious conviction on the part of a large element of the modern Christian world. Democracy in modern times has made unparalleled strides forward. Baptists in England are exerting an increasing influence upon the public life of the community, and all over Europe and particularly in Russia a Baptist movement is in progress, while in the United States of America, Baptists are the most numerous body of Christians and equal to any in equipment for work. In Canada also Baptists are a progressive and vigorous people, pushing forward to greater things. Baptists have become in a sense never before true a genuine world force. I invite the attention of the reader to a consideration of:

The problem of adaptation which confronts Baptists in the modern world. Life is defined in terms of correspond-

ence between internal and external relations. The power of the organism to adapt itself to an environment and utilize the environment for its own ends is the measure of its vigor. Vitalism is a form of philosophic thought which conceives of the universe as being in a process of change. The philosophy of becoming, under the influence of the evolutionary hypothesis, has seized strong hold upon many modern thinkers. Indeed, it has been carried to a wholly unwarranted extreme by those who wish to exalt it as the supreme category of being. That which is characteristic of life, however, needs no proof, and that adaptation to environment is a fundamental necessity of all living things cannot be gainsaid. This must not be understood as excluding the element of the permanent. Reality, on the contrary, contains both the permanent and the impermanent. The problem of adaptation, therefore, presents itself to Baptists as to all other peoples. The truths of theology, insofar as they are final, of course do not change. Christianity is the final religion, and its truths are ultimate. But human conceptions of the meaning of Christianity inevitably undergo change. Theologies written seventy-five or a hundred years ago fail to touch many vital issues which present themselves in modern times, not because the theologies were necessarily false, but because the controversies have shifted to new ground. Ritschlianism, for example, in modern times, is a theological and philosophical expression of the modern scientific point of view, and it has given rise to a controversy of a totally new kind. Adaptation to environment, therefore, theologically, involves the meeting of this and other issues which have taken their rise in our day.

Again, adaptation is called for through changes in human relationships, giving rise to new ethical problems. Moral principles remain unchanged, but concrete conditions change. Modern business has given rise to a large number of ethical questions not previously known. The trust, as an instrument of commerce, is in itself a great ethical problem. The claim that many are making that morals are transient in principle and that right and wrong vary with the age is essentially an unsound position. Conditions affect relationships. The devel-

opment of the social organism gives rise to new relationships, and it is in the application of moral principles to these new relationships that adaptation is called for.

Again, in denominational organization the problem of adaptation arises. The unity of the denomination, our increasing numbers and wealth, opportunities in the mission field, the collision of forces in denominational work, the necessity for effective forms of denominational and religious organization impose the necessity for thoughtful and careful attention to forms of organization. With Baptists the problem here consists of the necessity for preserving the genius of our denominational life and at the same time to achieve efficiency. There are other directions in which the problem of adaptation presents itself, but these will be sufficient for our immediate purpose.

Let us note, in the next place, the opportunities and duties of the Baptists in the modern world. The missionary opportunity is the greatest which has ever confronted Christendom. This is a commonplace which needs no emphasis. In the pagan nations rapid development is in progress and a wide door of opportunity is open. But for Baptists there is a very special and peculiar opportunity in the present situation in Europe. It is interesting to observe that in Europe there is a revival of the Anabaptists, which became a spent force in the age of the Reformation. The principles of the Anabaptists were too radical for the age in which Anabaptism exerted its influence. It was without political or governmental backing and without any of the forms of governmental or physical power, and as a consequence it was soon driven off the face of the earth in Europe. State churches arose in the Reformation countries, and in Roman Catholic countries of course such a movement was predestined to fail. But during the last century democratic government has made great strides in European countries, and in many of them there are popular assemblies representing the people and passing laws for their government. Education has been diffused much more widely, the circulation of the Scriptures has gone on apace, and while religious liberty in the full sense is not known as yet, toleration has made great

strides, and throughout Europe a Baptist movement of very profound significance is in progress. In Russia especially do we see the movement gaining great momentum. Under modern conditions the Baptist movement in Europe is bound to go forward. American and English Baptists, who enjoy a much larger measure of religious freedom, and who have grown in numbers, influence and power until they are able to do anything which they undertake, should give heed to the loud call which comes from Europe in the present course of events.

In the social and political sphere throughout the earth, Baptist principles are making rapid strides forward. If the general principle is true that social development has as its fundamental principle religion, then we may conclude that the Baptist type of religion is most fundamentally in accord with the ongoing of the world toward democracy. This point of consanguinity between Baptists and modern democracy in the political sphere constitutes one of our very greatest opportunities, and it would be calamitous to the social and political development of the world, as well as to the Baptists as a people, should they, in this age of the triumph of the principles of democracy, abandon their own ideals of individualism and independency. There is, therefore, a great opportunity for Baptists to demonstrate to the world the efficiency of democracy in church life. To this end, of course, unity is called for. Voluntary co-operation is the only principle on which ecclesiastical efficiency can be achieved among Baptists, unless we change radically our ideal and conception of our mission to the world and our function in society.

It follows from the above that a supreme duty resting upon Baptists is in the direction of education. Spiritual life which is unintelligent can never achieve the highest results. A people great in numbers, great in wealth, great in principles, must needs have the very best educational equipment in order that it may supply leaders for the work it is called upon to do. There is, therefore, confronting Baptists an opportunity for unified effort through intelligent leadership such as we have never known in the history of the world. This does not

necessarily mean the merging of existing organizations in one another. But it does mean intelligent co-operation and fraternal adjustments upon the great world field.

I note in the next place the perils of the Baptists. Here, again, we shall consider the matter from the point of view of the church itself, of Christian doctrine and social and political life. We note, first the perils of the Baptists ecclesiastically. These may be summed up in two general statements. The first is the peril of over-emphasis of the ecclesiastical side of our life to the detriment of the spiritual and missionary and practical. The other peril is in the direction of an under-emphasis of the ecclesiastical in behalf of the other interests. Let us note, next, the dangers of over-emphasis. The democratic and simple organization of a New Testament church is inevitably placed at a certain disadvantage in comparison with a great hierarchy. Being without ecclesiastical dignitaries clothed with authority, the local church seems to be a feeble thing. There is, therefore, a sort of natural tendency on the part of many to make up for the absence of a great ecclesiastical organization by accentuating the simple forms of ecclesiastical organization. The sense of danger impels in this direction. And yet, of all peoples in the world, Baptists need to guard against the perils of ecclesiasticism. It is altogether possible for their true message to suffer total eclipse where the energy and genius and scholarship of the denomination are concentrated exclusively upon the effort to prove the validity and Scripturalness of the polity and the ordinances. The attitude of over-emphasis in this direction invariably fails in its appeal to the great masses of men, and give rise to a tendency to isolation and insulation from the currents of life round about. Ecclesiasticism in all its forms is at a discount in modern times, and false ecclesiasticism among Baptists is fatal to growth and progress.

On the other hand, there is a danger of an opposite kind. The reaction against the ecclesiastical conception may swing so far that our church life will be destroyed. I think Christian history is conclusive on the point that Christianity as a historic force requires an external organization in the form

of a church. Without such an organization it is very likely that Christianity will evaporate into intellectualism or mysticism. Somehow, it seems to be true that the characteristic truths of the gospel require external symbols for their propagation in the earth. A church and ordinances which symbolize the essentials of Christianity are therefore of the greatest possible value in practical effort. Baptists hold to the minimum of ordinances and church organization. It is scarcely possible to reduce Christianity in this respect to lower terms. We are already almost a disembodied spirit. To abandon our plea for a legitimate church life and for the Scripturalness of the ordinances would be to weaken our position greatly. Baptists, therefore, would seem to be called upon to avoid the extremes in both these directions.

Christian union is becoming one of the burning questions of the times. Baptists are naturally, of course, opposed to such forms of Christian union as tend to exalt ecclesiastical authorities to a position of lordship over the churches. Instinctively, we look to the kind of union which is voluntary and spiritual rather than that which is organic and official. We cannot, however, afford to ignore movements for Christian union. There are many ways in which we may practically co-operate with other religious bodies without the compromise of our principles. As a practical matter this is being done now and will continue no doubt in increasing measure. It is an interesting fact that nearly all forms of interdenominational Christian coöperative effort are Baptist in form—that is, voluntary. The tendency, therefore, and movement toward Christian union is in a very large degree a Baptist tendency. Baptists have not presented programs of Christian union because they have felt that Christian union would come as the result of growth, rather than through contrivances, ecclesiastical or otherwise, looking toward that end. They are not without the utmost interest in means for Christian union, but they believe union will come along lines of individualism and the voluntary principle.

Doctrinally there is also a peril which needs to be considered by Baptists. We live in a scientific age. The supreme

criterion of truth is that of causation, and this principle is taken from the sphere of physical science. The whole intellectual movement of modern times has been in the direction of reconstructing all doctrines and all systems of truth in obedience to this principle of physical science. There has been to a very large extent an ignoring of the personal and voluntary principles in the conception of truth itself. The intellect alone has been taken as the measure of humanity, whereas the will is as vital and essential as the intellect. The peril doctrinally, among Baptists, lies not so much in the modifications of particular doctrines which are taking place within evangelical limits, as in a passion for reconstructing all conceptions of doctrine in a manner which ignores the religious side of experience. The fundamental distinction here is that between Christianity as intellectually and Christianity as religiously conceived. Doctrine is not the result of the activity of pure intellect. It is the expression of the life of the spirit in religion. Doctrine can never be economized and modified purely in the interest of a criterion of truth taken from physical science without fatal results to religion itself. Christ is the center of Christianity, and any view which robs Him of His central place will be fatal to the religious interests of mankind. Baptists, with their fondness for freedom, are exposed to the danger of intellectualism. We need to give increasing emphasis to the conservation of religion itself as revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ.

In the direction of social life there is a peril of a twofold nature. First, there is danger that Baptists as a rule will fail to correlate truth with life. We have been eminently successful as an evangelistic force, and have grown tremendously in numbers and influence. We are called upon today to exert our proper influence in the social sphere as well. And yet, there is a corresponding danger in the other direction; namely, that we will lose the truth we have in the effort to discharge our social obligation. The urgency of the social question is felt increasingly by large numbers of the finest spirits among us—men whose spirits revolt at the wrong and injustice of the modern social order, and who are deeply convinced that

Christianity is not discharging its full obligation in the matter of guiding the social development. Certainly religion was designed to affect life at all points, and as a denomination Baptists will fail of their mission unless they seek to share in the solution of the great social problems of the age. There is not space here to unfold even a tentative program. Our Presbyterian friends have established a social propaganda which seems to be doing excellent service. In any event, the denomination which sees clearly and grasps firmly the opportunity for social service will find a great sphere of usefulness awaiting it in modern life. At the same time, if we lose the evangelistic note and an individualistic message, we will inevitably lose our ground.

In closing it is sufficient to add that Baptists in the modern world face a marvelous opportunity for service. The sense of unity which is beginning to pervade our life everywhere ought to result in the setting in operation of a large number of very helpful influences. The Baptists of the world are a great and mighty people who are coming to a consciousness of their power.