

THE BAPTIST TRADITION

The chief concern of the Baptists is not the administration of baptism but the doctrine of the church.

The New Testament Church Composed of Baptized Believers

A living and direct acquaintance with Christ is held basic to church membership. Membership, therefore, does not include infants. They repudiate the Reformed view by deleting the phrase "together with their children" from the definition of the church. The local church is entered voluntarily and only believers may participate in its ordinances.

The Local Church

Although the invisible church consists of all the redeemed in heaven and in earth, past, present and future, the church on earth is composed of believers living together in the fellowship of the gospel and under the sovereignty of Christ. The church is governed through the voice of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the members of each local church.

Ordinances of the Church

Baptists prefer to use the word "ordinances" rather than "sacrament." The word ordinance points to the command of Christ which lies behind the practice of the two ordinances - Baptism by immersion and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

"Baptism always follows conversion. It has nothing to do with our salvation but is essential to obedience. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience. The believer publicly declares that he has been born again; that his old nature has been buried and he is risen to newness of life; that he has passed from death unto life." (pp. 58f, *This I Believe* by Audrey Zoschke. Baptist Training Union. Denver, Colorado, 1955.)

The Lord's Supper

"The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast. We observe it to remind us of the death of the Lord Jesus to save us from the penalty of sin..... There is no special power received in partaking of the bread and wine and the only blessing one receives is that which comes from obedience to Christ and from meditating upon what He has done for us." (Ibid. pp. 59f.)

The Ministry

The Baptists do not believe in a ministerial order in the sense of a priestly caste. Pastors and deacons are chosen and appointed by the local church. Though the official emphasis is on the priesthood of all believers and democracy, the Baptists sometimes have strong, authoritative pastors, who speak in the name of the church.

"Ordination constitutes public recognition, on the part of the ordaining church, of the man's call and qualification as a servant of the Lord." (p. 32, *Doctrine of the Local Church* by Paul R. Jackson. Regular Baptist Press, Chicago, 1957)

Definition of a Baptist Church

"A local New Testament church is a body of believers immersed upon a credible confession of faith in Jesus Christ, having two officers (pastors and deacons), sovereign in polity, and banded together for work, worship, the observance of the ordinances and the world-wide proclamation of the gospel." (p. 20)

The Baptists in Canada

The Baptists in Canada are woefully divided, although not as badly as in the U.S. The divisions are the result of different origins, geography and lack of agreement in doctrine.

History

Until mid-20th century the Baptists were more oriented to Great Britain than the U.S. For example, in the 19th century they received financial assistance from Great Britain. Funds were sent for a college for the training of pastors. This institution was opened in Montreal in 1838 and persisted until 1849. In 1837 the Baptist Canadian Missionary Society was organized in England to collect funds for the Baptist cause in Canada. (p. 20, *A history of the expansion of Christianity: Volume 5. The Great Century: The Americas Australia and Africa. 1800 A.D. to 1914 A.D.* by Kenneth Scott Latourette. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Second Printing, 1971). Between the census of 1851 and 1891 the population had increased by 249 percent. (p. 62, *This dominion. His dominion.* by Leslie K. Tarr. Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches, Willowdale, ON. 1968). But according to S.D. Clark, this growth did not come through evangelism but through education.

Reliance shifted from conversion to education as a technique of recruitment ... The Baptist churches became more concerned with preserving the support of the young people growing up within the fold that with winning the support of people outside. (p. 252, *Church and sect in Canada* by S. D. Clark. University of Toronto Press, 1948).

In 1871 the Baptists constituted 6.8 percent of the population. By 1941 they had dropped to 4.2 percent. Walsh observed that this was a clear indication of the constant internecine strife which had militated against the growth of the Baptist community in Canada. (p. 219, *The Christian church in Canada* by H.H. Walsh. The Ryerson Press, Toronto, ON. 1956.)

Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

BCOQ was incorporated in 1888. The Toronto Baptist College provided ministerial training. The Canadian Literary Institute was founded in 1857 (became Woodstock

College in 1883) as a school not only for training pastors but also as "a Christian school of social and intellectual culture for all who wished to study." (p. 49, *Woodstock College 1857-1926* by W. Gordon Carder. The Canadian Society of Church History Papers, 1980). This school was supported by the BCOQ and worked in cooperation with the University of Toronto. Lesslie notes, "The Convention, in 1890, voted to unite Woodstock College and Toronto Baptist College to form McMaster University. The new university, like the former Toronto Baptist College, was indebted to the generosity of Senator William McMaster, a member of the Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto. The McMaster trust deed clearly indicated that the founder envisaged a school that would be a citadel of orthodox scholarship and Baptist distinctives." (p. 62 Ibid.)

The Convention has a mixture of evangelicals, neo-orthodox and liberals. It is a member of the Canadian Council of Churches. The official school for training pastors is McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, though some churches draw their pastors from Bible Colleges or evangelical seminaries.

The Trans-Canada Fellowship of Baptist Churches (The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists)

It is one of the largest evangelical denominations in Canada. It was formed in 1953 by merging the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec (founded in 1927) and the Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches (1933). Seventy of these churches had formerly belonged to the Convention of Ontario and Quebec but had left on account of their stand for the Deity of Christ and the unique inspiration of the Bible during the liberal controversy of the 1920s. McMaster University was the storm centre at that time. The leading Baptist of the time was Dr. T. T. Shields of the Jarvis Baptist Church in Toronto.

The Heritage Seminary and Bible College (formerly Central Baptist Seminary and Bible College) in London and Northwest Baptist Theological College, Vancouver B.C., cooperate with the churches in training pastors, missionaries, and layworkers. They also draw leadership from a variety of Canadian and American Bible Colleges and Seminaries. The official publication is *The Evangelical Baptist*.

Some of the churches are amillennial. They have been strongly influenced by Reformed theology. Among the Reformed Baptists there is an interest in the Reformed perspective of education.

Many churches are premillennial or dispensationalists (Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* theology). Christians must withdraw from this evil world, which is controlled by Satan, and prepare themselves for the rapture.

Evangelicals of dispensationalist/premillennial persuasion who are interested in Christian schools see the latter as protective havens for their youth. The concern is more for the evangelization of the child than the development of a consistent world and life view.

Many Baptists are still convinced that their children should be witnesses within the public school systems. These Baptists often refer to Christian schools as "hot houses."

The Baptist Federation of Canada

The BFC, founded in 1944, was a means of coordinating the programs of the existing conventions - The United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, and the Baptist Union of Western Union of Canada. (p. 146 Vol. 5, *The 20th century outside Europe* by Kenneth Scott Latourette. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962). The Federation never played a major role in Canadian Baptist life. They are a member of the Canadian Council of Churches. (p. 126, D. J. Wilson, *The church grows in Canada. Canadian Council of Churches*, Toronto, Ontario, 1966.)