

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

THE REVIEW AND EXPOSITOR

Vol. VIII.

July, 1911

No. 3

THE ATTITUDE OF BAPTISTS TO CATHOLICISM— ROMAN AND GREEK.

BY THE REV. JOHN CLIFFORD, M. A., D. D., LL. D., LONDON, ENG.

What is it that gives such special importance, at this moment, to the question of the attitude of the Baptist churches of the world, towards the Roman Catholic and the Greek or Eastern churches?

Three facts, from amongst others, may be cited.

First, there is the emergence of what is called the Baptist World consciousness. The language is new; and it is descriptive of an experience that is also new, in its intensity, wide range and special developments. It is only within recent years that it has found voice, first in the denominationl newspapers, then more audibly in the Baptist World Congress held in London six years ago; next in the response of Baptists all over the world to a remarkable awakening of spiritual life in Russia and Southeastern Europe; again at the gatherings of the Baptists of Europe in Berlin in 1908; and once more in the assembling of representatives of Baptist churches from all parts of the earth in a second Congress at Philadelphia.

Surprising as it may seem that the birth of the conviction of belonging to a Catholic or Universal Church is so late, the historical student knows how to account for it. It was so with

primitive Christianity. The first disciples of Christ went forward with their work without realizing the universality of their principles, and the catholicity of their religion. Professor Ramsay says, "The Church gradually became conscious of the real character of the task which it had undertaken. It came gradually to realize that it was a world-wide institution, and must organize a world-wide system of administration. It grew as a vigorous and healthy organism, which worked out its own purposes, and maintained itself against the disintegrating influence of surrounding forces; but the line of its growth was determined by its environment."¹

Ideas inherent in a social organism may have to wait long before they find the conditions favourable to their development. It has been so with the Baptist churches. Their governing principles are intrinsically catholic. They build on universal foundations; on the rock of truth and not on the accumulated moss of tradition and custom. They assert the absolute, sufficient and exclusive authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in and over the individual Christian, and in and over the community of believers. That is central to their faith, and it is catholic. They hold that the New Testament contains the will of the Head of the Church, that each Christian must have free and unrestrained access to it, and be unfettered in his interpretation of and obedience to it. They contend for the essential principle that the Church of Christ is only built according to His will when it consists of those who are consciously His disciples, and have personally experienced the transforming influences of His spirit. They stand for a spiritual church. That carries all the other principles of their faith and practice.

Now these principles and their logical corollaries were the stock of original Christianity, and held full sway in the Christian churches of the first century. In the century that followed, "The church was" in the language of Professor Harnack, "lifted out of its original environment and plunged into Hellenic modes of thought, that is, into the syncretism of

¹The Church in the Roman Empire before A. D. 170, by Prof. W. M. Ramsay, M. A., LL. D., D. C. L. p. 361.

the age and the idealistic philosophy."² Still, an intractable element remained outside. The transfer was resisted. There was a revolt against the surrender. For ages a protest was maintained; partly by individuals, partly by communities of Christian men who constituted an unceasing witness for the ideas and principles which form the soul of the Baptist faith and life.³ But the individuals were few, and the societies sporadic. The resistance was unpopular, and those who made it were persecuted. They were driven into the holes and corners of the earth; had to fight for their lives, and often fell in battle. Grateful if they were allowed to exist at all, nothing seemed more remote than that they should cherish dreams of filling the world with the harvests of their toil.

But in these later years the Baptist churches have been coming to their own; only to a very slight extent at present on the continent of Europe; to a larger degree in Britian, and to the fullest measure in the great Republic of the West. The bounds of freedom have been widened. Governments have taken a neutral position towards religious organizations. Facilities for travel have increased. Inter-communion has been multiplied. The churches have become acquainted with one another, and with their dispersion over the earth, and thereby they have discovered not only that they are in possession of the vital and vitalizing principles of a true Catholic Church, of an eternal religion, stripped clear of the blighting and burdensome accretions of the ages; but also that they have a capacity for taking the lead in furthering the religious life of mankind; a capacity inherent, not in any mere mechanical organization, or in the personalities of any period, but in those central and catholic ideas and principles in which, as churches, they live and move and have their being.

II.

The second fact is not less significant. It is the invasion of Protestant lands by Rome in a spirit of fierce aggressiveness, resolute determination, infinite craft, rigid exclusive-

²The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries, by Prof. Adolph Harnack, p. 254.

³Barclay's "Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth," p. 12.

ness and uncompromising intolerance. Since 1870 the classical land of Italy has been in revolt against the venerable Church. Portugal is expectant of release from its grip. Spain seethes with distrust and hatred of its sway. Crowds have left "the faith" in Austria. "Modernism" is eating like a canker at the heart of Rome, and taxing all the skill and patience of the Curia and of the Pope to limit its ravages. Therefore the forces of Roman Catholicism are now directed to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon race. That is the goal of the policy of the Pope. With absolute devotion and splendid zeal the leaders and representatives of Rome are dedicated to the capture of the progressive peoples. Enormous sacrifices are being made. Nothing is held back. No effort is too great. No expenditure of time and money is regarded as too costly to win the young from their allegiance to Protestantism. The machinery of education is worked with sleepless vigilance. Superstition is welcomed. The arts of magic are employed to win the unreflecting, and a low morality follows in their track; for as Lecky says, "When credulity is inculcated as a virtue, falsehood will not long be stigmatised as a vice."⁴ It is an hour of special danger to the gospel of Jesus Christ, a menace to the spirituality and power of religion.

The third fact, though the most recent, is certainly most prophetic. It is the spiritual and intellectual renaissance now proceeding amongst the races dominated by the presence of the "Holy Oriental Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church," or using the briefer designation, "The Eastern Church." That church did not share in the Reformation.⁵ It is only just emerging from the Middle Ages; the stagnation of centuries is broken up. The church, which according to Dean Stanley, has always "been ready to die, but never surrender the minutest point which Council or Father has bequeathed it," and is as remarkable for its immobility as for its faithfulness to the Creeds, is astir with apprehension of, and aflame with indig-

⁴"History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne," Vol. II, p13, Prof. W. E. H. Lecky.

⁵The Greek and Eastern Churches, by Walter F. Adeney, M. A., D. D., p. 160.

nation towards, the Baptist communities, that have sprung up straight from the pages of the New Testament in Russia and Servia, Herzgovina and Bosnia, Bulgaria and Hungary, and other parts of the southeast of Europe. The sleep of ages is ending; the winter is passing; the warm breath of the new spring is blowing healthily; the songs of the birds of freedom are heard, and the flowers and fruits of Russian non-conformity are beginning to appear. These events of the wonder-working Spirit of God have brought us face to face with new problems, new privileges, and new responsibilities; and together with the tactics of Rome have compelled the Baptist churches to realize more vividly the universal sweep of their principles and the catholicity of their ideas.

III.

For both these churches are great, venerated, and venerable. Their roots strike deep and far into the soil of the world's life. Great men have enriched them, and true saints have hallowed them. Their martyrs have exultantly gone to prison and death and their missionaries have poured out rivers of self-sacrificing toil for the extension of their sway and the increase of their numbers. Millions upon millions owe them allegiance, and look to them as the one way of salvation. Both are sacerdotal and sacramental. Both defend the magical interpretation of the ordinances, and offer a richly ornate, spectacular, dramatic and sensuous worship to the people. In each episcopacy is vital; and each asserts its superiority to the State in which it dwells. Both are exclusive, each of the other, and each of all other churches. In fact no two churches have so many points in common as the Oriental and Occidental, and yet no churches are so strongly averse to one another. But the exclusiveness springs in the Greek Church from an inflexible fidelity to orthodoxy; whilst in the Roman Church it is due to Papal absolutism and the necessity for a rigid resistance to anything approaching to insubordination. Thus Catholicism, both Roman and Greek, challenges us to combat. We can not escape. Our ideas

and principles force us on to the field. Whoever declines the contest, we can not. Loyalty to the Lord Jesus compels us to assert a third catholicism, a catholicism not of the letter but of the spirit, not of external form but of inward and personal experience; not exclusive but inclusive of all who in any place, and in or out of the churches, accept Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord; and possess a faith in Him that works by love and keeps the commandments of God.

Cardinal Newman affirms that the ultimate question between Catholicism and Protestantism is one not of history or of individual doctrine, but of first principles. That is not wholly true, nor is it all the truth; but it is accurate to represent the conflict between Catholicism, Roman and Greek, and Greek, and the catholicism that is Protestant, as at bottom a conflict of ideas and principles, that like fire and water, are in eternal collision. It is no mere war of this church and that. The real encounter is between ideas and the systems they create for their embodiment. On all sides men are honest and sincere, devoted and zealous; but the warfare is far deeper than the men, though it proceeds through the men and by the men. The men are but the visible garniture of the ideas; the collision is in the constitutive and regulative ideas of the Roman and Greek Churches on the one side, and the Baptist and their sister Protestant churches on the other—ideas that mould the character of the individual, fix the form, and determine the activities and influences of the ecclesiastical society created, and regulate the relation both of the individual and of the society to the State. The conflict is, (1) of different conceptions of Christian unity; in what it consists, how it can be secured and maintained; (2) of deeply opposed interpretations of religion; what it is, and how it is meditated to the souls of men; (3) of antagonistic conceptions of faith; its object and exercise, its nourishment and life; (4) of contrary and contradictory ideas of the ministry of the Church as to whether it is sacerdotal, episcopal, and exclusive, or personal, catholic and free, and (5) of alien notions of the relations of the State to religious Societies. These are the forces in conflict; and it does not appear to me to be more than the truth

to say that on these things the Roman and Greek Churches are not only at war with us, but with the mass of men outside all churches, in all lands, with the advancing life of the world and with the true Catholicism of the Church of Christ.

IV.

On nothing is the difference between these churches deeper or more decided than on the subject of catholicism itself. Roman and Greek Churches agree in asserting their claims to catholicism, and in maintaining an absolutely exclusive attitude not only towards all Protestant Churches, but also towards each other. Each proclaims itself the one and only true church; the one center of unity. Each claims that it stands where it was placed by Christ on the rock, endowed with the prerogatives He bestowed, enriched with all supernatural grace, and against her the gates of hell shall not prevail; and each contends that its genesis, ecclesiastical organization, and the New Testament are all part of one and the same divine growth.

The latest expression of the Roman doctrine of the church is given by Sohm, and expounded by Harnack. According to Sohm, the Roman Church is the logical and necessary consequence of primitive Christianity. It is the one ecclesiastical entity. There is no church outside it. It has no "sister churches." There is no "invisible church." There is no "people of God" beyond the bounds of the mighty and august institution of Rome. It is the primary and eternal unity, and out of it come the Papal monarchy, Papal infallibility, and the entire Papal system.

Now all this is in direct antagonism to the documents on which we depend for our knowledge of original Christianity. There is not so much as a trace of it in the apostolic gospel. Our "sources" paint an utterly different picture of the organized Christian life of the first hundred years. There we see "churches" meeting in Corinth and Rome, Thessalonica and Ephesus, acting as self-contained units, sovereign within their own area, independent of each other yet in loving fellowship, embracing all those who "are called to be saints in Christ Jesus" wherever placed, and irrespective of the race to

which they belonged or the social position they occupied, and forming altogether that religious "entity", (of all the most sacred and transcendent) "the body of Christ", "the habitation of God through the Spirit." It is the realized presence of Christ in the hearts of trustful and loving disciples as they meet together, that makes a church. Harnack bears witness that "the independence of the individual community was at its greatest about 150 A. D., although every community may have considered itself as an embodiment of the One Church;" for "this view and complete independence do not exclude but rather postulate one another."⁶ The thought of the unity of all believers in Christ was always present, binding these far-sundered societies into a glad fraternity; but the reality, completeness and independence of the individual communities was assured and acted upon without question and with a progressive efficiency.

That is the catholicism of the churches of the New Testament. They do not constitute a formal and visible unity. They have a brotherly but not a corporate relation; a real but not a mechanical oneness. They are not staked off and hedged round by unreal creeds, or the ascendancy of one supreme ecclesiastical person. No doubt the cast-iron unity of the Roman and Greek Churches has increased their domination over men, enforced their claims to universal sovereignty, given to it majesty as an institution, kept its forces together, made it invincible as a persecutor, multiplied its members and increased its successes. But what a prodigious price these Churches have paid for the retention of this false notion of ecclesiastical unity! They have saved their Churches, and lost religion. Christianity has been slain by those who professed it, and it would have passed from amongst men but for the Reformation. The gospel has been betrayed. An idea of God has been taught contrary to that revealed by Jesus Christ. The mind has been put in fetters; originality has been stifled; initiative quenched, superstition nourished, immorality promoted, compromise fostered, equivocation encouraged, justice

⁶The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries, by Prof. Adolf Harnack, p. 234.

denied, freedom refused and even wars created in the name of religion, and for the sake of the church.⁷ The tactics, the ideas that organized the Roman and Greek Churches are not those of the Christian religion. They come from other sources. They do not express the policy of the New Testament. They are its opposite. They are imperial and political supremacies transferred to the empire of the spirit.

V.

To secure this formal and mechanical unity, the Oriental and Occidental Churches have insisted upon an inflexible orthodoxy on speculative and subtle points of theological belief, and not on personal trust in, and union with, the Lord Jesus as the basis of Christian fellowship. They start the Christian life in a sacramental and theological sphere, not in that of conscious discipleship to the Saviour. They agree in giving a primary place to the acceptance of an archaic intellectual and sacerdotal system of faith, and not to a fresh and living experience of the grace and power of Christ. Accordingly the Church is identified with a philosophical body of doctrine claiming to rest on revelation, but "developed," that is, increased, restricted or expanded from age to age by Council and Pope, and then imposed as the one condition of salvation.

But as if to demonstrate the utter folly of this test and basis, it is on this very subject that the two Catholicisms split. Centuries ago the quarrel began, and today it still goes on, as to the *filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed; i. e., as to the question involving the profoundest mysteries of the nature of God, whether men should affirm their faith in a "single procession" of the Holy Spirit from the Father (as held by the Eastern Church), or in a "double procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, as is maintained by the Church of Rome. True! the controversy was not solely due to an

⁷"But the most hopeless barrier to Russian progress is her Church, the Greek Church. From the Greek Church it is impossible to see how she will escape. Wherever the Greek Church has become paramount, it has proved infinitely more sterilizing in its influence than has the Roman Catholic Church." Dr. Emil Reich's "Success Among Nations," p. 200.

unbridled eagerness to fix a subtle point in the definition of the Trinity! It was not about mere words. It went deeper. It sprang from many causes, some of them racial, others political, and again others due to the rivalries of the Patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople. But the radical mistake was the insistence on intellectual agreement upon the mysteries of the Divine Nature as requisite for salvation; thereby turning the Church of Christ into a school of theology under professors and masters, instead of a brotherhood of disciples of the One Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. At the center of the Christian faith there was placed a certain speculative and philosophical definition of the Christian idea of God, instead of the simple sufficing revelation of the Father, in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing to sinful men their trespasses. The Church was built on logic, not on the soul's experience of Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Battles raged over the unavoidable differences of human judgment on the contents of revelation and the difficulties of apprehending the doctrines of theology, when peace ought to have been found by recognizing the fact that varieties of intellectual opinion may subsist side by side with a common realization of salvation by faith in Christ, and a complete unity of subjection to His authority.

The results of this controversy have been most deplorable. Not only has it separated the Catholic Churches of the East and West; but it has produced sterility of thought, poverty of effort, and degradation of morals. Lecky says, "It introduced among men a principle of interminable and implacable dissension, but it scarcely tempered in any appreciable degree their luxury or their sensuality. . . . A boundless intolerance of all divergence of opinion was united with an equally boundless toleration of all falsehood and deliberate fraud that could favor received opinions."⁸ Would that had been all! But it is not. Nothing has done more or is doing more now, to hinder the progress of the gospel than this demand for the acceptance of theological propositions as if acquiescence in

⁸History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, by Prof. W. E. H. Lecky, Vol. II. pp. 14, 15.

them were the "faith" of the New Testament and the new life depended solely on exercises of the intellect. It has misrepresented the teaching of Christ, given men a false idea of God, blocked the way to peace, thrust men into a prison house of despair and dejection, quenched the springs of joy, and sapped the sources of moral strength.

Not that Articles of Faith, Confessions and Creeds are without value. By no means. "There can be no religion without thought; for a man must conceive an object before he can sustain any natural relation to it;" but God is larger than all our creeds, religion is too rich and vast to be set out in a few phrases, and Christianity is so completely centered in personal acts of mind and heart and will towards the personal Christ, that it is fatal to offer the gospel to men inseparably bound up with a view of history and of the world, of God and of life, derived from the past and divorced from the living present, instead of carrying men into the presence of the crucified and risen Christ Himself as the one and only Saviour and Master and Lord of His people.

VI.

But far more destructive of the Christianity of Christ Jesus is the claim of these two Churches to circumscribe, control, and limit the action of the grace of God towards men. The Eastern and Western Churches are supersaturated with sacerdotalism and have created a colossal priestly order, a great official class, a clerical tyranny, shutting out God and His Son Jesus Christ from the souls of men. The priest lays claim to a magical character and power, asserts that he alone is able to secure the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting, gives to the "ordinances" of Christ a magical interpretation, and through them becomes God's substitute; an intermediary, who with his instruments and ideas robs religion of its spiritual immediacy, ethical breadth and sipiritual intensity. Canon Newbolt voices the teachings of the sacerdotalists of all churches when he says "Baptism is the initial force which is brought to bear on the soul born by nature in sin."⁹ The

⁹Religion, by Canon Newbolt, p. 60.

priestly administrator mediates the new life through the water he has consecrated, and then sustains the life which he has created by "the bread and wine," now become the actual "body and blood of Christ" by his consecrating act. Thus the simple institutions of baptism and the Lord's Supper are converted into vehicles of grace over whose dispensing the priest has full control, so that he can say to men, "You must come to me before you can get to God: and accept my services in order to be sure of entering into His favor." So these Churches carried the ancient Pagan faiths with their degrading priestly ideas over to the simplicities of the gospel of God, and changed the glory of the revelation of God in Christ into a profanation of the Divine Name and an appalling calamity to the human race.

For there is not the faintest tincture of sacerdotalism in the religion of Jesus. He never called Himself a priest. Living face to face with a priestly religion, He was the open foe of the priesthood, and designedly shut it out of the plans He gave for His new religion. He will have none of it. Nor does it obtain even the slightest recognition in the Church of the New Testament. "Disciples," "apostles," "prophets," "pastors," "teachers" are all there; but no "priests" as they were known in other regions. Nothing is more decidedly alien to the spirit of Christ than that priesthood which has been the great enemy of God and man.

VII.

The main support of sacerdotalism is the doctrine and domination of the Episcopate. "The supremacy," says Cardinal Newman, "of Apostle or Pope or Church or Bishop is the essence of Revealed Religion." "No bishop, no church," is the pivotal dogma of the Catholicism of East and West. The monarchical and imperial idea reigns with unchecked sway both at Rome and Constantinople. Each Church is a hierarchy; its center is the bishop; and naturally and logically the issue is the Papacy of the West, and the Patriarchates of the East. Government is centralized. The Church consists of bishops,

priests and deacons. They rule. The laity have no place. The stately fabric of papal and patriarchal power, built up through centuries to its present prodigious height, withstands all change, and defies every attack. Itself a depotism, episcopacy abets tyranny. "Representative government" it will not endure. "Modern civilization" it denounces. Arrogance and intolerance it feeds and to superstition it gives strength. It makes individual freedom impossible, denies the right of private judgment, thwarts social ameliorative effort, and stands right across the way of human progress.

That surely is not the New Testament polity. There is no bishop in the modern sense within its covers: and all we read about him consists of hints and warnings against permitting his appearance and domination amongst the followers of Jesus Christ. "The kings of the Gentiles are their masters, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. **With you it is not so; but let the greatest among you be as the younger, and the leader be like him who serves.**" (Luke xxii., 25, 26.)

It follows from these hierarchical and sacerdotal ideas that wherever Roman and Greek Churches are, they claim supremacy. They set themselves above every earthly power. Either they enter upon a contest for precedence, or the State accepts the control of the Church. In Russia State and Church are one, and in effect the Church is that one. The Roman Church is a rival and potent State within the State. "It is a political creation." . . . "It is just as essential to this Church," says Harnack, "to exercise governmental power as to proclaim the gospel . . . It employs all the means of which states avail themselves, including therefore, crafty diplomacy and force." It interferes in the affairs of nations; is courteous to some and hostile to others; persecutes openly where it dare, and subtly where it is not easy to show its hand; dictates or warps policies, supports or checkmates dynasties, negotiates with the parties in power, claims diplomatic rights, creates wars, and subordinates all things to the supposed interests of the Church.

Like the Scottish Covenanters, Baptists give their witness

to "the covenanted work of the Reformation and Christ's kingly government of His House." They stand for the complete neutrality of the State towards all religious Societies, for the full and equal rights of citizens as citizens in the government of the State, irrespective of theological belief or ecclesiastical relationship. Their motto is a Free Church in a Free State.

Baptist catholicism is thus committed to the task:

(1) Of completely eliminating in all lands the hurtful policy which makes Commonwealths subordinate to Churches on the one hand; or subjects the Churches to the patronage and control of parliaments on the other.

(2) Of excluding the monarchial or episcopal idea and method from the ministry of the churches; destroying the division between laity and the clergy, and making a free course for the use of all the gifts with which the Head of the Church enriches His people.

(3) Of ejecting the last traces of magic from the exposition and use of the ordinances of the Christian religion.

(4) Of restoring conscious discipleship to Christ, and personal experience of the grace of God in and through Christ Jesus, to the place from which it has been so long dismissed by a misleading intellectualism; and

(5) lastly, of bringing in that true catholicism which secures the unity of the Church by embracing all the redeeming action of Christ Jesus and all the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men.