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The Testimony of Alexander Campbell As To The History of Baptist Churches

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Recommended Citation
Campbell, Alexander, "The Testimony of Alexander Campbell As To The History of Baptist Churches" (1945). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 233.
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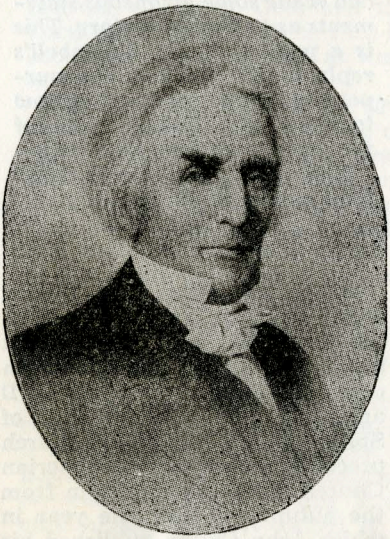
THE TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AS TO THE HISTORY OF BAPTIST CHURCHES



By Alexander Campbell

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article by Mr. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), the instigator of Campbellism and founder of the Campbellite Church, is taken from the book entitled, "Campbell - Walker Debate." This debate was held in 1820, a few years prior to Mr. Campbell's complete departure from

the Faith. It is to be regretted that Mr. Campbell thus departed from the Faith but we are happy that he left this printed testimony as to the history of Baptists.

The portion of the book from which this article is taken, was added to the printed debate by Mr. Campbell, in reply to a Mr. Ralston, a Presbyterian, who had made some erroneous statements as to Baptist history. This is a portion of Mr. Campbell's reply to Mr. Ralston, the purpose of which was to show how ignorant Mr. Ralston was of the history of the Baptists.

This book can be ordered from us for $2.75.

* * *

While the Protestant church must date its origin from the nineteenth of April 1529 — that memorable day on which fourteen cities of Germany *PROTESTED* against a decree of the Diet of Spires, which met in the March preceding; while the Presbyterian Church must date its origin from the autumn of 1537, the year in which John Calvin published his Confession of Faith, had a *PUBLIC DEBATE* with Peter Caroli, and constituted a church in Geneva: whilst the Scotch Presbyterians must date their origin from the arrival of John Knox in Scotland from Geneva, who arriving there Anno Domini 1558, and becoming a champion in the cause of Presbyterianism, was de-

nominated the "Scotch Apostle John Knox": while the English Presbyterians must date their origin from November 20, 1572, "when a small Presbyterian church was erected at Wandsworth, a village near London:" whilst the Seceders must date their origin from August, 1733, when Messrs. E. Erskine, W. Wilson, A. Moncrief, and J. Fisher, were deposed and excluded from the communion of the Presbyterian church, and became the founders of a new sect: while the Unionists or Scotch Burghers, must date their origin from the year 1747: the Methodists from John Wesley, 1729: the Quakers from George Fox, 1655:—I say, while all these sects are of recent origin, not one of them yet 300 years old—not one of them able to furnish a *MODEL* of their peculiarities, or antiquity, greater than I have mentioned, *the Baptists can trace their origin to apostolic times, and produce unequivocal testimonies of their existence in every century down to the present time; and the MODEL of their peculiarities the Scriptures themselves afford, as far as the name BAPTIST is concerned.*

It must be acknowleded that each sect is distinguished by some peculiarity which is generally expressed in the name of it. The history of a sect is the history of a people adhering to one general system of peculiarities, which distinguishes them from all others. The date of the origin of a sect must, then, be the date of the

origin of its grand peculiarities. Were we to adopt any other method we should be obliged to describe sects by that which is not peculiar to them, which would be impossible, for all sects would then be alike. The grand peculiarity, from which the Baptists have found their name, is found in the Scriptures as a part of Christianity, and is simply this —*To require faith or repentance, as previous to Baptism; and to immerse the subject professing faith and repentance in water, in the name, or into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

This is the peculiarity from which Baptists have their name; all that believe and practice in this way, are Baptists; and all that do not are not Baptists. I now proceed to show that the Baptists have existed in every century from the Christian era to the present day.

The First Church

First Century. Anno Domini 33, we read, in a well attested history, of a large Baptist church which was formed and exhibited as a *GRAND MODEL*, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, 3000 souls were illumined, led to repentance, converted, baptized, and added to the church. The history of this church, and of many others like it, is clearly and forcibly written by an excellent writer, styled Luke the Physician. This Luke is the oldest ecclesiastical writer in the world. He writes a

history of the Christian Church for little better than thirty years. See his Treatise styled "Acts of the Apostles," chapter 2:41-47, "They that gladly received his word were baptized: and the *SAME* day there were added unto them about 3000 souls: and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers — praising God, and the Lord added daily to them such as should be saved," or such as were saved.

The members, then, of the first Christian church ever planted on earth, gladly received the word *BEFORE* they were baptized, and upon the *SAME* day of their baptism were added to the church; and thence forward *CONTINUED* in the above practices. It is then incontrovertibly evident, that the FIRST Christian church planted on earth was, in respect of baptism, as now distinguished, a *BAPTIST CHURCH;* or a church composed of baptized believers. It is true, it is not called by Luke, a Baptist church, for all the churches were imitators of this first church, and to have called it a Baptist church would have implied that there was a Pedo-baptist church too, which was a thing unknown in the apostolic age, as all ancient historians declare.

The Second Church

The second church that was planted was at Samaria—"Philip went down into Samaria and preached Christ into them. And

the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake — and there was *GREAT JOY* in that city. *WHEN* (not before) they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were *BAPTIZED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.*" The second church planted on earth was also composed of men and women who professed faith before baptism; consequently, a Baptist church. Acts 8:5-13.

The Third Church

The third church of note, and in order of time, was the church of Caesaria, a church interesting to us, inasmuch, as it was a Gentile church, or a Gentile people composed it. This church was evidently a Baptist church—"while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost *FELL ON ALL THEM WHICH HEARD THE WORD*— Then said Peter, can any man forbid *WATER*, that those should not be baptized, seeing *THEY HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST* as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Acts 10:44 to the close.

To these I might add all the churches in the New Testament; for there is something said of the baptism of most of them. Particularly something is said of the church at Philippi, at Corinth, at Rome, at Ephesus, at Colosse, and of the churches of Galatia, with regard to their baptism. Of all of

these cities and regions, it might be said, as was said of the Corinthians, viz. "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized." This is the *SACRED ORDER* of these three words: first, to hear; second, to believe, and third, to be baptized.

The testimonies of the holy oracles reach down to the close of the first century; and these, as has been observed, mention no other kind of churches than those composed of believers, baptized upon a profession of their faith, a fact which should perfectly satisfy the mind of every Christian upon this subject. But there has has been a cloud of witnesses in every age attesting the same important truth, viz. that believers are the *ONLY* proper *SUBJECTS* and that immersion is the *ONLY* proper *ACTION* of baptism. The testimonies of God are the foundation on which our faith and practice rest.

(In other spots throughout Mr. Campbell's reply to Mr. Ralston, we have such statements as the following:)

It would be imposing upon the reader, and an imputation of his understanding, to be more copious in furnishing documents to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men who would assert that the **Baptist denomination** grew out of the wild, fanatic, enthusiastic Anabaptists of Germany. That men professing Baptist principles have acted in many instances incorrectly, is a very common truth. That some individuals professing

Baptist principles might have been in that, or any other insurrection, may be conceded, without at the same time yielding that the Baptists arose from the Anabaptists of Germany. As truly might it be said that the church of Christ in Jerusalem, planted A. D. 33, arose out of the Anabaptists in Germany in the sixteenth century — Yes, Mr. Ralston with equal truth and honesty might have said that all Christians originated from the Mohamedans, or Socinians, as that the Baptists arose from the Anabaptists of of Germany. . . .

Thus I have shown, that even in England, the Baptists have continued from the apostolic times to the present day, as also that there have been in every century advocates for Baptist principles. . . .

We cannot subscribe to the maxim which saith, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion," nor can we excuse that ignorance of history which caused Mr. Ralston to fix the origin of the Baptists at Munster. If his assertion did not proceed from ignorance, it must have proceeded from something worse. For it is the offspring of either ignorance or malevolence.

(To Mr. Alexander Campbell's contention as to Baptist history, we say "Amen and amen!")

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