

BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

Introductory Note from the General Secretary

In connection with the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Baptist World Alliance in Denmark in August, 1952, conferences were held in which 23 invited consultants in addition to the 47 members and proxies took part, 70 persons in all. With the exception of the presidents and secretaries of the Baptist World Alliance, Drs. F. Townley Lord, C. Oscar Johnson, W. O. Lewis, Joel Sorenson and the undersigned, who mostly went from group to group, the meeting was divided into three discussion groups. No. 1, on the Doctrine of the Church, was chaired by Dr. John Skoglund; No. 2, on Religious Liberty, was chaired by Dr. Gunnar Westin; No. 3, on the European Field, was chaired by Dr. Theodore F. Adams.

The main part of the report of Group No. 2 has been published in a large part of our Baptist Press. The report of Group No. 3 has been printed in the minutes of the Tollöse meeting and given wide circulation among Baptist bodies. It was decided that the report of Group No. 1, on the Doctrine of the Church, should be sent to the Commission on the Doctrine of the Church as a contribution towards its discussions. Furthermore, the material was to be mimeographed and sent to members of the Executive Committee, the proxies and consultants with a statement that it is for study purposes only and not for publication, and that it does not carry the endorsement of the Baptist World Alliance.

Arnold T. Ohrn

NOTE:

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Report of the Discussion Group on "The Doctrine of the Church", meeting at Tølløse, Denmark, August 4 to 8, 1952.

The following persons participated in the discussion group:

Rev. Emlyn Davies, Canada, Principal Johannes Nørgaard, Denmark, President Duke K. McCall, U.S.A., Dr. Robert J. McCracken, U.S.A., Dr. Reuben Nelson, U.S.A., Principal K. C. Dykes, Great Britain, Dr. E. H. Pruden, U.S.A., Dr. George Friden, Sweden, President Sanford Fleming, U.S.A., Rev. G. Beasley-Murray, Great Britain, Principal Nils Engelsen, Norway, Rev. Baungaard Thomsen, Denmark, Professor Heber F. Peacock, Switzerland, U Ba Hmyin, Burma, Principal A. Sundquist, Finland, Dr. Ernest A. Payne, Great Britain, Principal Hans Luckey, Germany, Professor Roger Fredrickson, U.S.A., Dr. M. T. Rankin, U.S.A., Rev. Victor Hayward, Great Britain, Dr. John Skoglund, chairman.

The group met for two hours each day of the Conference. The general purpose of the meeting was to further explore the Baptist doctrine of the church. This process of study was initiated under the auspices of the Baptist World Alliance with the establishment of its Commission on the Church. This Commission met in connection with the Congress meetings at Cleveland. At that time (1950) a paper was read by Dr. G. P. Gilmore, the chairman of the Commission. This paper was reviewed at the outset of the Tølløse meetings. In addition, two papers were presented: one by the chairman entitled "Some Observations on the Baptist Doctrine of the Church"; the other was given by President Nørgaard on "The Baptist Doctrine of the Church." A copy of the chairman's paper is included with this report. President Nørgaard laid stress upon the identity of the Church with the Old Testament concept of the people of God. The Church, however, marks a distinct advance over the Old Testament concept, for the Church is "a universal community of believers created by the redemptive action of Christ." It is characterized by certain prerogatives, namely (1) the calling of God, (2) personal salvation, (3) baptism and the Lord's Supper, (4) the anointment of the Holy Spirit, (5) its missionary and evangelistic obligation, and (6) its eternal promises or eschatological perspective. The foundation of the Church is to be characterized as Biblical, Christ-centered and apostolic. The primary function of the Church centers in its call to missionary service. As such the Church is to intercede on behalf of the world and to witness to the world concerning the redemptive love of God as found in Jesus Christ. In this it is characterized by a certain exclusiveness, for even though it is "in the world it is not of the world."

The major portion of the time at Tølløse was devoted to a discussion of the papers and an amplification of some of the problems that emerged in the discussions. As the discussions developed it was felt advisable that the group should divide itself into four sections to discuss certain aspects of the general problem. The four questions which were studied by the smaller groups were: (1) the New Testament pattern of the Church, (2) the relationships of the local Baptist Church to other church bodies, (3) the relationship of Baptist churches and Baptist church bodies to other Christian groups, and (4) Baptist churches in relation to society. The reports of these groups varied both in length and in method of presentation. One statement consisted of a series of questions which need further exploration. Another used

considerable historical reference and background. These statements are presented in the way in which they came before the group. They in no sense represent a final report of the group, but rather reflect something of the thinking which emerged during the days spent together at Töllöse.

I. The New Testament Pattern of the Church

We would first of all recognize the fact that Baptists, in the establishment of their doctrine of the church, must make use of the New Testament on a selective basis. Not all that is found in the New Testament can be incorporated in our church life. The New Testament exhibits a variety of form which makes impossible the incorporation of all elements in a single church. We would also recognize that the Baptist selection and reconstruction is not the only possible one which may be drawn from the New Testament.

We would however affirm that in spite of the variety found in the New Testament, it is possible to discern a definite pattern within the New Testament which we believe to be correct and from which we believe it is not safe to depart. The discernible New Testament pattern must always be employed as a corrective to the historical developments which came in the post-apostolic period. We would not necessarily deny the validity of later developments or deny the possibility of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in these developments, but we believe that all such developments must be tested in the light of the New Testament.

We further believe that in any detailed statement of the doctrine of the church certain basic matters clearly present in the New Testament ought to be carefully considered. We have not attempted to be exhaustive in listing these factors and we have not reached complete agreement in regard to order and emphasis, but in spite of our differences we believe that all of the following are vitally important:

- (1) The church must be considered as the renewed people of God. That is, the church cannot be fully understood without taking into account its connection with the Old Testament developments.
- (2) The church must be considered as a fellowship of believers created through the redemptive action of God in Jesus Christ. It is not only a fellowship but a fellowship created and controlled by God through the Holy Spirit.
- (3) The church must be considered in its local and universal aspects. The New Testament does not present an atomistic view of the church as simply the sum-total of all local churches. The church is manifested in local fellowships which carry within themselves the full prerogatives of the universal fellowship and unity and are linked with the church triumphant.
- (4) The church must be considered as receiving its life and continued existence directly through Christ as the Head of the church. It is through this rule that the divine life of the church is sustained in the proclamation of the Word, in the observance of the positive ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, in the discipline of the church, in the gifts of the Spirit, and in the fulfillment of its mission.
- (5) The church must be considered from the standpoint of its development and growth into the fullness of Christ and as a foretaste of the future consummation of the divine purpose.

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II. The Relation Between the Local Church and the Wider Denominational Groups.

A. Considerations drawn from the New Testament.

1. The Church began as a nucleus of disciples, called by the Lord into fellowship with the service for Him, and was truly constituted into the Church by the events of redemption and gift of the Spirit. Its expansion was by the formation of other groups, sharing the same faith and participating in the life of the same Spirit. How early such other groups were formed cannot be known; it is not impossible that some of the 3000 converts of Pentecost had a home elsewhere than in Jerusalem and immediately began a separate life.

It should not go unnoticed that the characteristic use of the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament is to denote these local groups, which may be viewed as expressions in a given locality of the whole Church.

A local church manifests the characteristics of the whole Church. Many of the symbols used to denote the Church's relation to Christ are capable of application to the local church: cf. Paul's application of the phrase Body of Christ to the Church of Corinth, 1 Cor. 2.27, and cf. Church as Temple of God, Household of God. A local church therefore exercises in its own life the functions of the Church as such, having competency to elect its own officers, maintain discipline and good order, offer worship and engage in evangelism.

2. The inter-relatedness of the churches manifested itself in various ways:

a. Concern in their mutual problems created by the expansion of the Church (cf. the relations between Jerusalem and Samaria, Antioch, and especially the Council caused through the first missionary journey of Paul.)

b. Material assistance in cases of need: cf. the collection of Antioch for Jerusalem and the larger offering of the Gentile churches or Paul's foundation.

c. Supervision exercised by Church leaders in limited groups of churches (e.g. Paul, Timothy and Titus, John and perhaps the John of Book of Revelation).. We decline to comment further on the nature of this supervision and its accreditation, and on the subsequent development of these precedents in the sub-apostolic Church.

B. The Church of the Post-Apostolic Age.

Difference of opinion is inevitable within our denomination on the relation, both in theory and practice, between the New Testament Churches and ourselves. Some would demand that every deviation from the New Testament pattern of church organization in later times is unjustified, others that the principle of development within the local church organization and within the wider groups is demanded by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Without pronouncing on this matter, we feel that, since the New Testament furnishes us with the pattern for the Church's life, any subsequent development must conform to the principles inherent therein.

C. Modern Baptist Churches.

Our churches are characterized by a sense of their autonomy. Gathered under the lordship of Christ, possessed of the guidance of the Spirit, they have felt it right to stress the competence of each community to conduct its own affairs. This has sometimes led to exaggerated formulation, but from the first our churches have felt the necessity of expressing their relatedness to other churches. As is stated in the declaration of the British Baptist Union in 1948, "We believe that a local church lacks one of the marks of a truly Christian community if it does not seek the fellowship of other Baptist churches, does not seek a true relationship with Christians and churches of other communions and is not conscious of its place in the one Catholic Church. To quote from the Confession of 1677: 'As each church and all members of it are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ in all places, and upon occasion to further it...so the churches ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love and mutual edification.'"

This cooperation has expressed itself through various organizations and agencies, especially in regard to fellowship and missionary enterprise:

1. Local associations, into which churches group themselves.

2. State conventions and national conventions and unions, which are an extension of this principle of a wider scale. It should be noticed that in Britain the national Union is an association of both churches and associations, not of churches only, and it operates mediately through the local associations in many important matters.

The Baptist World Alliance unites the national unions into a world-wide body, both demonstrating our unity in fellowship and furthering opportunities for cooperative effort and witness.

The authority exercised by the larger associations is an authority voluntarily accorded by the local groups for the better ordering of their life and work. This authority is more evident and perhaps wider than is sometimes realized, particularly in respect to the ministry in the churches.

e.g. In South Australia the State Baptist Council, elected by vote of members of the churches, have responsibility for ordinations, discipline beyond the local church, and in external relations with other bodies.

In Norway permission to exercise a ministry beyond the local church has to be obtained from the district association, and for the country at large and beyond by the National Mission Board.

In Britain every candidate for entry into a theological college must be approved first by his own church, then by the local association, and finally, after training, advancement from probation must be granted by a committee authorized by the national union. The institution of area superintendents for purposes of counsel and ministerial settlement provides a further example of voluntary submission to the larger denominational group.

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Illustrations can be multiplied, but these suffice to show that our churches have felt guided to limit their autonomy in many ways for their own individual good, for that of other churches, and for the cause of Christ by the furtherance of the Gospel. That we have already done this should be carefully noted, as it affects our doctrine of the Church as a whole, the local church is not wholly independent.

This according of authority to the larger denominational association has often been felt to be dangerous, and is feared by some, the more so in view of the pressing claims of episcopacy now being urged upon us. On the other hand, it may be that as the local church requires leadership for the effective expression of its worship and witness and corporate life, so leadership in the wider groups is necessary for the effective expression of their cooperation. The example of the early churches voluntarily submitting themselves to the decision of the whole in conference is seen in Acts 15, which, however, should perhaps be thought of in terms of cheerfully doing the will of God as understood by the whole, rather than submission to authority. It may be perhaps not irrelevant to remember that the one group that refused the decision of the larger group, that of the Judaistic Christians, proved a stumbling block to missionary progress for several decades to come.

The lines of thought here indicated have yet to be pursued more thoroughly in our schemes of association for the future.

III. The Relation of Baptist Churches and Bodies to other Christian Groups.

1. What is the Church Catholic? Is it visible, or invisible, or both?
2. What do we mean by Christian unity, and how should it express itself?

The 1677 (English) Confession says, "the churches...ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love and mutual edification."

Are (a) Intercommunion and

(b) Comity

necessary expressions of Christian unity?

3. Do such expressions of Christian unity lead to a lessening of vitality within a denomination?

IV. Baptist Churches in Relation to Present-Day Society.

One of the obvious features of our present-day Baptist church life is the sharp contrast between the actual church situation and the New Testament pattern of church life in fidelity to which our own is maintained. We claim that our local Baptist church is "according to the primitive pattern," and that we can exercise within it a ministry as extensive and as free as that which was exercised in New Testament days.

We are impressed by the fact that our situation does not reproduce the primitive pattern. We are not as free as we imagine ourselves to be within our church fellowship. Is the minister, for example, free to apply the gospel message to matters of financial, economic, educational or racial significance? Are not vital issues in

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these and other realms which affect the lives of men and women for whom Christ died, to be submitted to the security of the gospel?

This raises the whole question of the nature of the ministry of the church. We stand in the prophetic tradition. Our ministry is claimed as the ordained means whereby God can speak, personally and directly, to the needs of those entrusted to our care. However, in practice, to what extent is the prophetic insight and the exposure of the whole life of man to the penetrating light of God's word accepted by our congregations?

Further, we know that our claim to be a democratic fellowship (so-called, apparently, because every person has the same standing before God and ought, therefore, to have the same value for the fellowship) is constantly being falsified. Small pressure groups, sometimes members of one family, sometimes a group of financially privileged persons, can exercise a tyranny over our Baptist life which is contrary to our understanding of the mind of Christ. This same unscriptural practice is often adopted in the interest of a doctrine or an orthodoxy, and is comparable to the witch and heresy hunts of by-gone days.

In addition, there is the necessity to express our fellowship, or one-ness in Christ, in economic and financial terms. To take one specific example, for which the church alone is responsible, there are certain areas in which the salaries of ministers and other full time servants of the church can no longer be regarded merely as a financial issue. This has become a crucial test of spiritual health and maturity. The primitive church provided "according as each had need," and there was no hesitation on the part of the church to testify to its faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ through its experiment in common ownership and common responsibility.

We would assert that our Baptist church life should become a pattern of community for the world, and that each Baptist church should ever keep itself sensitive to any social injustice and be prepared to resist evil no matter where it rears its head.

We would declare our concern that if the Baptist churches take seriously the Biblical ground of their faith and order, they should apply themselves forthwith to a re-study of the freedom and the fellowship which have ever been the pride of the Baptist tradition.

Finally, we would re-affirm our conviction that believer's baptism implied an urgent sense of mission on the part of every church member. Christian discipleship demands a dedication to the task of confronting every realm of human life with the claims of Christ. Baptists, in particular, should maintain that every Christian must be a missionary.

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These four statements were presented to the enlarged executive committee meeting at Töllöse. No action was taken except to indicate that these should be circulated among the members of the Executive Committee, the Commission on the Church and those who participated in the Töllöse discussion. It was felt that these matters should not in any way be regarded as an official statement of any Baptist groups, but that they represent attempts to think through the Baptist doctrine of the church and ought to be thought of as materials to be considered in any further discussions of the Commission. Any further use of these materials are in the hands of the Commission itself.

Also after discussion on the part of the group certain questions were formulated. These questions are herewith submitted to the Commission on the Church for their further study:

Further Questions to be Considered.

1. Methodology - Approach.

Can we actually immerse ourselves into the N.T. church or are we so historically conditioned that this is impossible? Does history as such mean anything in our views on the church? What place do we give to tradition? Are we actually putting limits on the working of the Holy Spirit when we seek to rigidly maintain that we have a New Testament church. Do not the following factors actually combine to give us the church:- the Bible, history and the Holy Spirit?

Are we willing to accept as a method "compromise with our Bibles in our hands?"
-- "made of the two one new man in Christ?"

2. Nature of the Church.

Human -- divine elements in a statement on the church. Cleveland statement lays too much stress on the human aspect of the church without giving enough recognition to the divine.

Is it correct to identify the church with the Israel of God, or did Jesus make an entirely new beginning with a gathered company which in turn began a process of gathering?

In defining the church the matter of fellowship vs. ordered fellowship must be considered.

3. Function of the Church.

Must we now understand the church in the light of its largest functioning in today's world which is to give to the world "community". Redemption in its largest meaning?

4. Authority and ministry.

The Episcopate or "oversight" in the early church.

Special authority in the church, e.g. apostles, teachers, prophets, etc. What was the scope of the authority of these so designated? Was it above congregational authority? Was it an ecumenical authority? What was the basis of such authority? If such authority existed in N.T. church what is parallel to it in present day Baptist organization?

5. Sacraments.

Do the sacraments (or ordinances) when received in faith convey grace or is the observance purely symbolical?

6. Baptists and Christian Unity.

What constitutes the true unity of the church? Baptists and the ecumenical (organized) movements - Baptists and the ecumenical spirit. Organizational vs. spiritual division.

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The group meeting in Töllöse had a very strong feeling that the study on the Baptist doctrine of the church ought to be continued with real vigor. Certainly in the face of the deepening of interest in the general study of the church on the part of all denominations there is need for Baptists to understand their own conception of the church far more significantly than ever before. Not only is there need for Baptists to understand themselves, but also they need to understand themselves in order to more adequately represent themselves to others who are discussing the church. Present developments in the ecumenical movement cannot afford to go on without the Baptist witness on the nature and function of the church. It was strongly urged by the group meeting at Töllöse that the studies be continued by the Commission on the Church. It was hoped that prior to the meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in London in 1955 that a series of papers might be drawn up by various Baptist scholars on themes related to the church and become the basis for discussion at a meeting of the Commission in connection with the Congress. It was further hoped that out of such a discussion there might emerge at the time of the 1955 Congress some fairly definitive statement concerning the Baptist doctrine of the church. If such a project is to be undertaken it will have to be launched in the near future. Authors will have to be selected and time ought to be allowed for ample circulation of the papers to the members of the Commission. It is hoped that out of such a study great good will come and that the Baptists will be more than a unity in name but also in a sense of common faith and practice.

John E. Skoglund
Chairman