

THE BELIEFS, ANTIQUITY AND SUCCESSION OF THE BAPTISTS
By John Henry

INTRODUCTION:

The Lord Jesus Christ guaranteed the continuance of His church forever when He said, "...lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt 28:20).

Even without the testimony of history the Word of God alone proves that there has been a succession of like minded churches from the time of the Lord Jesus Christ till now. However, I hope to use both the Bible and the testimony of history to prove this fact.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH:

The Lord established His church during His earthly sojourn. That the church began at Pentecost is a common error that has been taught extensively for over 100 years. The Lord empowered His already established church to do His work on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5, 8; Luke 24:46-49). The New Testament church is rather local and visible. Here is Scriptural proof that the New Testament church predates Pentecost:

1. The apostles were the first members of Christ's church (1 Cor 12:28; Luke 6:12-16).
2. They were commissioned before Pentecost (Matt 9:36-10:8, 28:18-20).
3. The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were already in place before Pentecost. (John 3:22; Luke 22:14-20).
4. The Lord set a system in place for the NT church to discipline members before Pentecost (Matt 18:15-20).
5. The church that the Lord Jesus started fit the common definition of the Greek word (ekklesia) which is translated "church." To the Greek of Christ's day "ekklesia" simply meant "an assembly or gathering of citizens called out from their homes and convened in the public place for the purpose of deliberating." It means an assembly.
6. The church had 2 pastors prior to the day of Pentecost: Christ and then Peter (John 10:11, 14, 21:15-17; Acts 1:15, 2:14; 1 Pet 5:1-4).
7. The church assembled regularly before Pentecost (John 20:19, 26; Acts 1:4, 13, 14).
8. Christ's gave His assembly ability to understand His Word and authority to carry out His will on earth before Pentecost (John 16:13-14, 20:21-23; Luke 21:44-47)
9. They had a church roll of 120 names before Pentecost (Acts 1:15).
10. On the day of Pentecost 3000 souls were added to them (the church) (Acts 1:41). The church had to already be established in order for it to be added to.

CONFUSION ABOUT WHAT THE CHURCH IS:

Even though it is true that believers of this Age, both living and dead, are seated "together in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 2:6) we will not physically assemble until the Rapture. A church that has never assembled is not a church yet. That is the church in prospect (Eph 1:21-23, 5:23-27; Col 1:18-22). Christ's future church in Heaven will be made up of all the saved of this Church Age (Rev 1:19, 4:1). However, there is no such thing as either a universal (catholic) visible or invisible church on this earth.

New Testament Baptists Have Always Been The True Church:

Most, even Baptists themselves, believe the Baptists are Protestants. However, Baptists predate both the Roman Catholic system and the Protestant groups.

The Roman Catholic "Church" was started by the Roman Emperor Constantine almost 300 years too late to be Christ's church. This corrupt system teaches baptismal regeneration, idolatry, marries the church with the state, has a hierarchy, and persecutes true believers, etc., etc.

Protestant groups seeing the corruption of Romanism began to separate from it in the 1530's. That's 1,500 years too late to be the Lord's Church. In spite of this separation they retained many of the traits of their mother church (Job 14:4).

MARKS OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH:*

Historically New Testament churches have always held these doctrines (Matt 28:20):

1. It's Head and Founder -- Christ. (Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22, 4:15, 5:23)
2. It's only Rule of Faith and Practice -- The Bible (II Tim 3:15-17; Acts 2:41-42; 1 Tim 3:15)
3. It's Name: "Church", "Churches" (Matt 16:18 Rev 2, 3; 22:16; Gal 1:1)
4. It's Form of Government -- Congregational (John 20:23; Matt 18:17, 20:25-27; Acts 1:24-26, 6:3; Rev 2:6)
5. It's Members -- Only Saved people and only people who of their own free will and accord united with that Congregation (Eph 2:21 I Pet 2:5; Acts 2:41; Eph 2:8,9).
6. It's ordinances -- Believer's Baptism, followed by the Lord's Supper (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42)
7. It's Officers -- Pastors and Deacons (I Tim 3:1-16; Phil 1:1)
8. It's Work -- Getting folks saved through the preaching of the gospel (I Cor 15:1-4); baptizing them; and teaching them to observe all things that Christ commanded (Matt 28:16-20).
9. It's Financial Plan -- Tithes and Offerings. (I Cor 9:14; Mal 3:8-10; Matt 23:23; I Cor 16:1,2; II Cor 8:14)
10. It's Independence -- Separation of church and state (Matt 22:21)

SECULAR HISTORY ON THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BAPTIST:

The Baptists of the Reformation claimed that they had an ancient origin and went so far as to suggest a "succession of churches". This claim was put forth by them at the very beginning of the Reformation A. D. 1521. An old letter is in existence founding "Successio Ana-baptistica." The letter bears its own date as "that of the Swiss brethren, written to the Netherland Anabaptists, respecting their origin, a year before, Anno 1522" (Suptibus Bernardi Gaultheri. Coloniae, 1663 and 1612). The letter is particularly important since it shows that the Baptists as early as 1521 claimed a succession. (Christian)

A notable proof of the antiquity of the Baptists of Moravia is here recorded. Johanna Schlecta Costelacius wrote a letter from Bohemia, October 10, 1519, to Erasmus, affirming that for one hundred years the Picards had been dipping believers, and that they rebaptized and were therefore Anabaptists. His words are: "Such as come over to their sect must every one be dipped in mere water (in aqua simplici rebaptizari)" (Pauli Colimesii, Opera Theologica, Critica et Historica No. XXX. 534, 535, Hamburg, 1469 as quoted by Christian).

Both Catholic and Protestants testify to the fact that Baptists existed long before the Reformation:

Roman Catholic Testimony:

In 1524 the Roman Catholic Cardinal Hosius, who became the President of the Council of Trent (1560), admitted that Baptists dated back to the days of the Roman Emperor Constantine who was the first "Christian" Pontifex Maximus. Hosius said:

"Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past twelve hundred years, they would swarm in greater number than all the Reformers." (Hosius, Letters Apud Opera, pp.112,113 as quoted in Trail of Blood, p. 3, Ashland Av. Baptist Church, Lexington, KY, 1933)

Hosius further stated:

"The Anabaptists are a pernicious sect of which kind the Waldensian brethren seem to have been although some of them lately, as they testify in their apology, declare that they will no longer re-baptize, as was their former custom; nevertheless, it is certain that many of them retain their custom, and have united with the Anabaptists." (Hosius, Works of the Heresatics of our Times, Bk. I. 431. Ed. 1584 as quoted by John T. Christian).

In a court of law Hosius would be considered a hostile witness for the Baptists. The testimony of a hostile witness is the most convincing kind.

Zwingli, the first Protestant Reformed theologian said:

"The institution of Anabaptism is no novelty, but for three hundred years has caused great disturbance in the church, and has acquired such strength that the attempt in this age to contend with it appears futile for a time." (Christian)

Mosheim, the Lutheran historian states:

". . . I believe the Mennonites are not altogether in the wrong, when they boast of a descent from these Waldenses, Petrobrusians, and others, who are usually styled witnesses for the truth before Luther. Prior to the age of Luther, there lay concealed in almost every country of Europe but especially in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, very many persons, in whose minds were deeply rooted that principle which the Waldenses, Wyclifites, and the Husites maintained, some more covertly and others more openly; namely, that the kingdom which Christ set up on the earth, or the visible church, is an assembly of holy persons; and ought therefore to be entirely free from not only ungodly persons and sinners, but from all institutions of human device against ungodliness. This principle lay at the foundation which was the source of all that was new and singular in the religion of the Mennonites; and the greatest part of their singular opinions, as is well attested, were approved some centuries before the time of

Luther, by those who had such views of the Church of Christ (Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, III. 200).

The Reformed Church of the Netherlands:

The claim of the Dutch Baptists to apostolic origin was made the object of a special investigation in the year 1819, by Dr. Ypeij, Professor of Theology in Gronigen, and the Rev. J. J. Dermout, Chaplain to the King of the Netherlands, both of whom were learned members of the Reformed Church. Many pages might be filled with the reports that they made to the King. In the opinion of these writers:

The Mennonites are descended from the tolerably pure evangelical Waldenses, who were driven by persecution into various countries; and who during the latter part of the twelfth century fled into Flanders; and into the provinces of Holland and Zealand, where they lived simple and exemplary lives, in the villages as farmers, in the towns by trades, free from the charge of any gross immoralities, and professing the most pure and simple principles, which they exemplified in a holy conversation. They were, therefore, in existence long before the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

We have now seen that the Baptists who were formerly called Anabaptist, and in later times Mennonites, were the original Waldenses. and who have long in the history of the church received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian society which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the Gospel through all ages. The perfectly correct external and internal economy of the Baptist denomination tends to confirm the truth, disputed by the Romish Church, that the Reformation brought about in the sixteenth century was in the highest degree necessary, and at the same time goes to refute the erroneous notion of the Catholics, that their denomination is the most ancient." (Ypeij en Dermout, Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Hervornude Kerk. Breda, 1819)

This testimony from the highest authority of the Dutch Reformed Church, through a Commission appointed by the King of the Netherlands, is a rare instance of liberality and justice to another denomination. It concedes all that Baptists have ever claimed in regard to the continuity of their history. On this account State patronage was tendered to the Baptists, which they politely, but firmly declined. (Christian)

CONCLUSION:

In those places where the Waldenses flourished there the Baptists set deep root. This statement holds good from country to country, and from city to city. Innumerable examples might be given.*

There has been a succession of churches from the time of Christ to this day who have believed the doctrines which He commanded. Just as each believer should reproduce himself through soul winning, so also should the churches reproduce themselves.

There are two essentials concerning church succession: 1) the New Testament Doctrine held, and 2) authority from a like church.

Authority to establish a new church at times may have been from just a hand full of members or in extreme cases perhaps only from one member. However, when possible a new church should have the blessing of a mother church.

Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph 3:21)

Marks Of A New Testament Church
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A History of the Baptists
Volume I, Chapter VII
John T. Christian, A.M., D.D., LL.D.
1922, 1926

<http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/henry/baptistbeliefssuccession.htm>