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# Roger Williams' Individualism in Baptist Theology and Church Polity

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The cause of Extreme Individualism in Baptistry?

# ROGER WILLIAMS' INDIVIDUALISM

# IN

# BAPTIST THEOLOGY AND CHURCH POLITY

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

"Great Christians are Individualists"! That is the title of an article in "The Watchman Examiner" for November 10,1938. In this article the author states the following:

> "The most fascinating phase of life in great and real democracies is that individuals may develop themselves to the highest and apply themselves freely to causes close to their hearts. Democracy is no affair of masses; it is the breaking up of voiceless masses into individuals, each having within his own control the mastery of his own fate. When great masses of people,for reasons of economic, political or religious control, blindly surrender their individual judgment to that of a leader, an organization or a party, you no longer have there the exercise of democratic principle—you are seeing democracy accepting a form of autocracy.
>
> "We may use the term 'the rights of the people' until it is worn as an ancient dime, but if it does not mean the rights of the individuals who collectively constitute the people, it becomes sheer oratorical euphony by means of which the people themselves are deceived. Christianity exists in this world to reveal to all men their individual worth; it calls them out from under the tyrants' regressive rule to exercise their freedom as the blood-bought sons of God. No wonder that dictators show their antipathy toward true religion, for what trouble even one man who will not cease to battle for absolute right against what he believes is an absolute wrong can cause?"

The principles laid down here are similar to those held by Roger Williams. The early American Baptists were organized chiefly on the basis of the individualism of Roger Williams. In this thesis the writer proposes the following: first, to point out how this principle of individualism manifested itself in the life and work of Roger Williams; secondly, to prove that this individualism is basic in Baptist theology and church polity today.

# PART I

## EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES OF ROGER WILLIAMS

# CHAPTER I

## EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES OF ROGER WILLIAMS

Roger Williams, the generally recognized founder of the American Baptists, was born in the Williams' home on Cow Lane without Newgate, London, England, at the beginning of the seventeenth century.[1] His father, James Williams, was a merchant tailor of London, and a man of high social esteem. His mother, Alice Pemberton Williams, was the daughter of Robert Pemberton, a man of social and political prominence. The boyhood days of Roger Williams were spent in the vicinity of Cow Lane on Snow Hill, in Newgate, Smithfiled, and Holborn, London. He grew up in one of the main centers of London life. Some of the youthful social contacts to which he refers, as well as some of the political favors granted him later in life, can be traced to the Pemberton influence.

Already in his youth Williams showed a leaning toward individual supremacy. This becomes evident especially at the age of eleven, when he came under the influence of nonconformist preachers of London and was "converted" to Puritan tenets. He dared to oppose his parents in religious matters, and dared to rebel against the authority of the Established Church of England. Furthermore, in spite of the protests of his parents, Williams disapproved of the divers pleasures and pasttimes of his countrymen. He joined the Puritans in their revolt against feudalism. The result was that as a boy Roger Williams was "per-

1. The exact date of Williams' birth is not known. Straus, in his book, "Roger Williams", fixes the date as sometime between 1599-1607. (p.3-4)

secuted in and out of his father's house."(2

Williams' rapid mastering of shorthand and his ability to take down legal speeches gained for him the support of Sir Edward Coke, the most distinguished lawyer and jurist of his day. Sir Edward Coke selected him to take notes of the proceedings in the Star Chamber and transcribe them for him. The Star Chamber was the Crown Court in Westminster Hall where offenders against the Crown were tried, and justice dispensed by arbitrary authority instead of by regular legal process. Coke fought for a free Parliament's prerogative, and it was due largely to him that the sovereignty of England passed from king to Parliament to Coke. Coke wanted justice to be dispensed with according to law. It was due chiefly to him that liberty was granted and guaranteed to all subjects in religion,speech,and press. Taking down the speeches of Coke in behalf of liberty, Williams was learning the principles of law and government and the rights of Parliament and kings. He received exceptional training in civil and political philosophy, in aggressive statesmanship and controversy, which he applied later with telling effect to state-building in the American wilderness. Coke lent a definite contribution to Williams' principle of individual supremacy.

Coke became such an ardent admirer of Williams, that he secured for him admission to the Charterhouse or Sutton's Hospital. The most authentic data on this early period of Wil-

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2. James Ernst, "Roger Williams:New England Firebrand",p.13.

liams' life is found in a note by Mrs.Sadlier,daughter of Sir Edward Coke:

> "This Roger Williams when he was a youth,would in a shorthand, take sermons and speeches in the Star Chamber, and present them to my dear father. He seeing so hopeful a youth, took such a liking to him that he sent him into Sutton's Hospital,and he was the second that was placed there". (1

Williams entered the Charterhouse School in October,1621. Through the influence of Coke, Williams received an appointment to Pembroke College, Cambridge University, entering on June 29,1623. In the early seventeenth century Cambridge University was a hotbed of radicalism and protest against authority. Williams took part in the religious and political discussions. His studies in history, theology, and philosophy had brought him into conttact with the popular sovereign and natural rights notions of the Christian and pagan thinkers. Williams resorted to these principles of the sovereign right of the individual, as advocated by these pagan and Greek thinkers, in his protests against civil and ecclesiastical authorities. At Cambridge ~~he~~ Williams again took up the fight of the Puritans and reformers, joining Coke and Sir John Eliot in opposing Bishop Laud's church polity. This attack became more pronounced in 1629,after his departure from Pembroke. At Pembroke Williams began more specifically to prepare himself for the church, and his study of theology turned him against the Established Church.

After his graduation from Pembroke College with a B.A.

1. "MS. letters of Roger Williams to Mrs.Sadlier," in the library of Trinity College,Cambridge. Publication of the Narragansett Club,Vol.VI,p.252

in 1627, tradition says that Williams studied law for a short time under Sir Coke. However, he soon forsook law for a deeper study of theology;and in December,1628, or January,1629, he was admitted to holy orders. In February, 1629, we find Williams living at Otes, serving as chaplain to Sir William Masham. At Otes Williams was at the center of the religious and political protest that was shaking the English nation to its very foundation. The Puritans and reformers were protesting against Bishop Laud's church polity, and against the absolute authority exercised by the monarchy. The Parliament of 1629 ignored the Petition of Rights and continued to uphold Laud's party in the church, as well as the Divine Rights of doctrine. Laws were passed denouncing Popery, Arminianism,and laying of taxes without a grant from that body. King Charles had become an absolute monarch, and did not listen to Parliament. In 1626 he sent Sir William Masham and Sir Francis Barrington to Marshalsea Prison, in Southward, for their refussal to contribute to the king's loan without a grant from Parliament. By 1630 Charles' rule had become an autocratic one. The clergy under Bishops Laud, Neile, and Mainwaring were encouraged to preach the Divine Rights of Kings from the pulpits. Charles ordered the publication of sermons upholding the absolute monarchy. Williams protested against this autocratic rule of the king in the State and of Laud in the Church. He maintained that such sermons should not be preached from the pulpits, since no king nor bishop had the right to force any views upon any individual. He became a decided opponent of the Established Church,and wanted

to reform the church. This matter of church reform was discussed on a ride to and from Sempringham by Hooker, Williams, and Cotton. The incident is related by Williams in his "Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy":

> "Master Cotton may call to mind that the discusser, riding with himself and one other of precious memory, Master Hooker, to and from Sempringham, presented his arguments from Scripture why he durst not join with them in their use of Common Prayer." (1

Williams attacked the Book of Common Prayer, the formal service, the new ceremonies, and Laud's church reform in general, saying that these matters encroached upon the rights of the individual in regard to freedom of worship. See P. 14 Williams' opposition to the Established Church is, also, alluded to in one of his letters to Mrs. Sadlier:

> "And truly it was as bitter as death to me when Bishop Laud pursued me out of this land, and my conscience was persuaded against the national church, and ceremonies, and bishops, beyond the conscience of your dear father." (2

In a letter to John Cotton of Plymouth, the son of John Cotton of Boston, Williams remarks:

> "He (God) knows what gains and preferments I have refused in universities, city, country, and court in Old England.....to keep my soul undefiled in this point and not to act with doubting conscience." (3

By the summer of 1629 Williams had become a Semi-Separatist in his religious views.

To blot out Puritanism and Sectarian dissent from the Established Church, Laud started a persecution. The persecu-

1. Williams: "The Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy", Vol. IV, p. 65.
2. Elton: "Life of Roger Williams", p. 89.
3. Narragansett Club Publication, Vol. VI, p. 356

secution became so severe that many were compelled to flee, some going to Holland and others coming to America. Among those leaving for America was Roger Williams. He embarked from Bristol, England, with his wife (1 on the ship "Lyon", December 1,1630. After a stormy voyage of sixty-six days, they arrived off Nantasket, near Boston Harbor, February 5, 1631. Governor Winthrop recorded his arrival as that of "a godly minister". (2

Almost immediately after his arrival in America Williams got into a controversy with the ecclesiastical authorities of Boston "for asserting and maintaining with unwavering fidelity and aggressiveness those principles which have immortalized his name as the champion of religious liberty". (3 ~~Before~~ Before considering Williams' fight for individual supremacy in America, his fight for absolute soul-liberty, his untiring efforts for the principle of absolute separation of Church and State, it is necessary that some space be devoted for a survey of the persons and events in England which may have influenced Williams in his struggle for the principle of individualism in America.

1. Williams was married shortly before leaving for America.
2. "Winthrop's History of New England", Vol.I,p.41.
3. Straus:"Roger Williams",p.15.

## CHAPTER II

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## ADVOCATES OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN ENGLAND IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In the year 1611 the "Baptist Confession of Faith" was published, containing the following declaration:

> "The magistrate is not, by his office, to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force and compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, for Christ only is the king and lawgiver of the Church and the Conscience." (1

The ideas of toleration came into England, under Elizabeth and James, through the Anglo-Dutch Anabaptists, with John Smyth as their leader. This group of separatists from Gainsborough had gone to Amsterdam in search of religious freedom. Like the Mennonites, they rejected infant baptism, and adopted baptism upon the profession of faith alone. They became the first body of English Baptists. Shortly before the death of Smyth, in 1621, they drew up "A Short Confession of Faith", which contains the following article regarding "Magistracy":

> "The office of the worldly authority the Lord Jesus hath not ordained in his Spiritual Kingdom, the church of the New Testament, nor adjoined to the offices of his church." (2

Shortly after Smyth's death this group drew up another Confession of faith, in which they declared:

> "That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of

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1. G.J.Johnson: "Our American Liberty and the Baptists".
2. McGlothlin: "Baptist Confessions of Faith", p.63.

religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's consciences, and to handle only civil transgressions." (1

In 1614 Leonard Busher, member of a little Baptist congregation in old London which was founded by Thomas Helwys in 1611, published his tract entitled,"Religious Peace or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience". In this work Busher speaks of the relation of civil powers to religious authorities, and states that for religious authorities to call the civil powers to their aid is

> "a great sign they are none of Christ's bishops and ministers.....Kings and magistrates are to rule temporal affairs by the swords of their temporal kingdoms, and bishops and ministers are to rule spiritual affairs by the word and spirit of God,the sword of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and not to intermeddle one with another's authority,office, function." (2

Busher advocates liberty of conscience,furthermore, in these words:

> "As kings and bishops can not command the wind,so they can not command faith, and as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so is every man that is born of the Spirit. You may force men to church against their consciences, but they will believe as they did before, when they come there.....I read that Jews,Christians, and Turks are tolerated in Constantinople, and yet are peaceable, though so contrary the one to the other. If this be so, how much more ought Christians not to force one another to religion! And how much more ought Christians to tolerate Christians,when as the Turks do tolerate them! Shall we be less merciful than the Turks?" (3

Williams may also have been familiar with the writings of John Murton, who in 1615 presented to the King his "Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned", in which we have

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1. McGlothlin:"Baptist Confessions of Faith",p.63.
2. "Tracts on Liberty of Conscience", p.23.
3. Edward A.Van Dyck:"Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire". Government Printing Office,Washington, 1881.

statements like the following:

> "No man ought to be persecuted for his religion,be it true or false, so they testify their faithful allegiance to the king.... What authority can any mortal man require more,than our body, goods,life and all that appertaineth to the outward man. The heart God requireth."(1

That Williams was more than likely familiar with the writings of Murton can be concluded from the fact that the above confession appears in a slightly altered form in Williams' letter to Governor Endicott in protest against the whipping of Obadiah Holmes:

> "It is possible(may you well say)....I have fought against many several sorts of Consciences, is it beyond any possibility and hazard, that I have fought against God, that I have not persecuted Jesus in some of them." (2

In 1620 a London Baptist was imprisoned in Newgate for conscience' sake. While in prison he voiced the right of all to have religious liberty in spite of civil authority. His confinement in prison was so rigid that he was denied paper, pens,and ink. In spite of this he managed to write,while in prison, his tract, "An Humble Supplication to the King's Majesty as it was Presented in 1620", in which he described his rigid confinement. The treatise was written in milk on paper provided him by a friend in London as stoppers to the bottle containing his daily allowance of milk. The prisoner thus returned the paper, written with milk, to his friend, who read it by the fire, later publishing the complete tract. When Cot-

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1. Edward A.Van Dyck:"Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire". Government Printing Office,Washington,1881.
2. Narragansett Club Publication, Vol.VI,p.225.

ton quoted Scripture for the justification of the persecution, then Williams wrote "The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace". In this pamphlet, addressed to the civil and ecclesiastical rulers in England, Wiliams gives a practical conception of the functions and relations of Church and State.

In this atmosphere Williams spent his young manhood. "It was the first half of this seventeenth century that England wrought out her parliamentary system and laid the foundations for her constitutional form of government. Roger Williams, young, alert, impressionable, intimate associate of some of the great leaders of that glorious age(Sir Edward Coke and Sir William Masham), student in the most radical university of the day, must certainly have had his views shaped and fashioned by it. And in New England, on virgin soil, those revolutionary principles were being tried and tested. To him was granted the privilege and the open door of opportunity for a 'livelie experiment'. His own experiences made it possible. The fortunate sufferer of persecution and exile found ground clear of encumbering tradition or authority upon which to create his new society in equality and freedom." (1

1. R.M.M.Harkness:"Roger Williams--Prophet of Tomorrow", in "The Journal of Religion",October,1935, p.425.

# PART II

## ROGER WILLIAMS' PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUALISM

# CHAPTER I

## WILLIAMS' CONFLICT WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES IN BOSTON

With Roger Williams we leave England and sail for America, touching soil here in 1631. Soon after his arrival he refused to accept a position as teacher in the Boston Church as successor to John Wilson, who was about to revisit England. Two chief reasons are given for his refusal to accept the position: first, the Boston Church still held communion with the Church of England while members visited there; secondly, he denied the power of the magistrates to punish any breach of the First Table(duties of man to God). At the very outset of his career in America Williams announced the three principles that were to reappear in his later controversies: rigid separatism; absolute soul-liberty; separation of Church and State. "His position struck at the root and foundation of the Holy Commonwealth of the Bay Colony, where the statute book was the Bible, pure and simple, and the Ten Commandments were the cornerstone of their social fabric." (1 Williams insisted on absolute sepration from the Established Church of England. He,furthermore, pointed out that civil magistrates had no right to rule in spiritual matters. Because of this position which he advocated, Williams came into conflict with civil and ecclesiastical authorities. He could not agree with their ideas of church ceremonies, church polity, and civil theory.

1. Ernst:"Roger Williams,New England Firebrand",p.64

In order to understand the circumstances which brought about this conflict between Williams and the New England authorities, it will be necessary to review the ecclesiastical and civil policy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The people who settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts were Pilgrims. They had become Separatists already in Holland, severing relations with the Established Church of England. Each church was independent of the other. Furthermore, these Pilgrims, while in Holland, insisted that the state had no right whatsoever to punish people for some breach of an ecclesiastical law. The state had no right to interfere in the affairs of the church. They had left England for America via Holland when they were persecuted in their attempts to enforce these principles in England.

On the other hand, the people who settled in Boston, Salem, and other towns of Massachusetts Bay, had not separated from the Established Church while in England. They were nonconformists, indeed, since they objected to many of the ceremonies of that Church; but they wanted to bring about a reform within the Church of England by remaining members of that Church. When they later emigrated to America, they departed as members of the Established Church of England. When they came to America they wished to establish the independence of their church, yet at the same time retain their connection with the Church of England, without, however, subjecting themselves to its ecclesiastical control. The Boston Church was just such a church.

It wanted to be independent, yet keep up its relations with the mother church. Accordingly, when this church called Williams to succeed Wilson as teacher, Williams promptly declined, "upon conscientious grounds, because they of Boston were an unseparated people". (1

Williams' stay in Boston was brief, though stormy. Two months after his arrival in Boston, he accepted a call to the congregation in Salem, as assistant Teacher to the aged Mr. Skelton. He was selected over the protest of the General Court of the Colony of Boston. He began his work in Salem on April 12,1631. The Salem Church was an independent congregational church, its members being non-Separatist Puritan. The affairs of the church were in the hands of the people themselves. Ministers were elected by free choice of the members. They refused to have anything to do with the Established Church of England. Such a form of church government appealed to Williams. Consequently, when upon the death of Rev. Francis Higginson, he was called to assist Skelton, Williams accepted the call. The General Court, on May 18,1631, enacted the following law: "For time to come, no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic, but such as are members of some church within the limits of the same".(2 Williams protested vehemently against this interference of the civil court in the affairs of the church. However, pressure forced upon the Salem church by the church at

1. Letter to Rev. John Cotton, Jr., March 25,1671.
2. Ernst: "Roger Williams, New England Firebrand", p.67.68.

Boston compelled Williams to leave Salem before the close of the summer of 1631. He went to Plymouth.

# CHAPTER II

## THE PASTOR AT PLYMOUTH

In autumn, 1631, we find Williams in Plymouth. For two years he served as assistant to Rev. Ralph Smith. Because the church at Plymouth did not believe in separation of church and state nor in religious liberty, Williams refused any compensation for his services.

During his stay in Plymouth Williams became friendly with the Indians who occasionally visited Plymouth. He studied the language, customs, religions, of Indians. He became a missionary to the Indians. Already in Plymouth he emphasized the fact the individual rights of the Indians were denied them by those who took away their land. According to Williams, the Pilgrims had no right to live on the land at Plymouth. That land belonged to the Indians, since the Pilgrims had not purchased it from the Indians, the lawful owners. Williams openly condemned the patent given to Plymouth in 1630 by the King of England, by which he falsely claimed ownership to the land by right of discovery and by virtue of his Christianity. In December,1632, he prepared a pamphlet giving his arguments and proofs against the right of the inhabitants of Plymouth to Indian lands, but nothing came of it.

Williams ministry at Plymouth made friends, but also enemies. In the second year of his stay he became deeply involved in religious and civil disputes. He reemphasized the truth that

the land belonged to the Indians, not to the king. His opposition to the civil authorities led to opposition to ecclesiastical authorities. He began to dispute about worship and church discipline. When he came to Plymouth civil and ecclesiastical authorities were united in religious services. That this is true can be seen from the following record in Governor Winthrop's journal, made after he and Mr.Wilson(teacher at the Boston Church), and several others, attended services at the church where Williams officiated. The record reads as follows:

> "On the Lord's Day there was a sacrament which they did partake in, and in the afternoon Mr.Roger Williams(according to custom) propounded a question to which the pastor, Mr.Smith, spake briefly, then Mr. Williams prophesied;and after the Governor of Plymouth spake to the question; and after him the elder, then some two or three more of the congregation. Then the elder desired the Governor of Massachusetts and Mr.Wilson to speak of it,which they did." (1

Williams began to protest against such a form of worship. He maintained that the church and the state each had its own sphere of work. He attracted to him and to his principles of soul-liberty some of the members of the Plymouth church. His opponents,however, feared that his principles would result in rigid separatism. During one time Elder Brewster warned the whole church of the danger of Williams spirit of rigid separation and anabaptistry. (2 Opposition to his principles of soul-liberty became so great that Williams requested a letter of dismission from the Plymouth Church, so that he could accept a second call which came to him from the church at Salem.

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1. "Winthrop's History of New England",Vol.I,p.91.
2. Underhill's Introduction to the "Bloudy Tenent",p.11.

# CHAPTER III

## SALEM, A COMMONWEALTH OF SAINTS

With the return of Williams to Salem in August,1633, as assistant to the ill Mr.Skelton, many controversies began. In Salem the Puritans established a real theocratic form of government. The individual had absolutely nothing to say, neither in civil affairs nor in religious matters. Mr.James Ernst says that the Puritans strove to know the will of God in all things.

> "Dress,social manners,speech, pleasures, and duties were minutely regulated in accord to the Will of God revealed in Scripture,which only the elect could interpret rightly. The state,civil laws, Sabbath, rules of conduct,justice,and equity in life and thought must derive sanctions from the Old Testament in which he believed that God had revealed for all time in its entirety all true religion, a revelation absolute and final."([1]

Governor Winthrop consulted ministers in all important civil matters. On March 4,1635, the Court ordered "every inhabitant" to attend services on the Lord's Day under penalty of five shillings or imprisonment, and requested the ministers "to consult and advise of one uniform order and discipline in the churches agreeable to the Scriptures". Ministers controlled the temporal affairs of Salem. Salem had a real theocracy. However, it was more than that--it was also an oligarchy. The magistrates, who were also church members,with the clergy had the right to grant all civil franchises. If there was a place in New England at that time where an individual had few rights, it was Salem. The clergy controlled the colony. Church and State were,indeed, mixed.

1. Ernst:"Roger Williams,New England Firebrand",p.89.

Had Roger Williams not appeared on the scene at this time, no doubt the individual would have had little right to express himself in Salem for quite some time. It was the object of the great "Prophet of Tomorrow" to elevate the individual. He repeatedly challenged the "Holy Commonwealth"(as Salem has been rightfully called). He maintained that the Old Testament law is not applicable to the modern state. Williams said:

> "Not only was the door of calling to magistracy shut against natural and unregenerate man,though excellently fitted for civil office, but also against the best and ablest servants of God, except they entered into church estate....For a subject,a magistrate, may be a good subject, a good magistrate,in respect of civil and moral goodness...though Godliness....be wanting....that civil places of trust and credit need not be monopolized into the hands of church members(who sometimes are not fitted for them) and all others deprived and despoiled of their Natural and Civil Rights and Liberties.
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> "I affirm there was never civil state in the world (for that of the Jews was mixed and ceremonial) that ever did or ever shall make good work of it,with a civil sword in spiritual matters....The bodies of all nations are a part of the world,and although the Holy Spirit of God in every nation where the Word comes washeth white some Blackamores and changeth some Leopard spots, yet the bodies and bulks of nations cannot by all the Acts and Statutes under heaven put off the Blackamore skin and the Leopard spots.
>
> "Hence I affirm it lamentably to be against the Testimony of Christ Jesus,for the civil state to impose upon the souls of the people, a religion, a worship, a ministry, oaths(in religious and civil affairs), tithes, times,days,marryings and buryings in holy ground." Instead the state should give "free and absolute permission of conscience to all men in what is merely spiritual....and provide for the liberty of the magistrate's conscience also." (1

Williams saw the great danger involved in the mixture of Church and State; he saw that the State might encroach upon the individual's right of freedom of worship; therefore, he insisted

1. Idem,p.95.96

that the two remain separate, each performing its work within the proper sphere of authority.

Williams was not alone fearful that the clergy would get too much authority in civil affairs, but also conceived of the great danger involved if the clergy would be supreme in ecclesiastical affairs. He did not want a hierachy or a presbyery, but insisted that the local church remain supreme. Because of this principle, he took exception to the meetings held by the ministers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, from the churches of Boston, Newtowne, Watertown, Dorchester, Roxbury, Salem. These ministers met for the discussion of religious questions. Williams objected to these meetings, fearing that they might grow in time to a presbytery or superintendency, which would infringe upon the liberty of the local church. He despised everything which might make for intolerance.

In his relation to the local church, Williams insisted that only such be admitted to church membership who renounced fellowship with the Church of England. A believer was to be subject only to Christ, not to any high authority in the Church.

A treatise written by Williams in Plymouth against the patent of the king, in which the former asserted that title to the land belonged to the Indians, brought forth further opposition on the part of the magistrates and ministers of Salem. Williams even went so far as to accuse King James of telling a lie in claiming to be "the first Christian to discover the land". Fearful lest the king withdraw the royal patent, the

governor summoned Williams to appear in court on December 27, 1633. Seeing the grave danger to the colony, Williams agreed to give evidence of loyalty.

Shortly afterwards a new question concerning the propriety of administering an oath was raised by Mr.Williams. This question links up with his foregoing pamphlet written against the royal patent. The pamphlet on patents and the threats of England to send over a governor to rule the colony caused the magistrates to order, in April,1634, that all Bay residents,not freemen, take a Resident's Oath, by which the people pledged themselves to submit to the orders of the General Court,and not "to plot nor practice evil" against it. On May 14,1634, the Freemen's Oath was passed, requiring every freeman to pledge allegiance to the General Court and officers.(1 Williams denied the right of the Court to impose such oaths, on the grounds that an oath is an act of worship and prayer, which could not be taken sincerely by an irreligious man. Williams maintained that it would

> "be a profanation of both(worship and prayer) to force them on one on whose lips they would be false and sinful....An oath,being an invocation of a true or false God to judge in a case, is an action of spiritual and religious nature....whether civil or religious..... Christian men conscientiously ought not to take an oath which is part of God's worship to establish mortal men in their office....Carnal men ought not to be required to take a religious oath or perform a religious act to set up men in civil office." (2

1. In May,1631, the General Court voted to admit as freemen only "such as are members of the churches within the Bay Colony". (Ernst,p.91)
2. Ernst:"Roger Williams,New England Firebrand",p.113.114.

Williams refused to take either oath, holding true to his principle that the civil authorities were falsely usurping authority over the consciences of men. When the people supported his position, the Court was compelled to desist.

The result of his many conflicts with civil authorities was a summons to appear before the General Court at Boston on July 8, 1635, before which Court he was accused of maintaining the following "dangerous opinions":

> "First, That the magistrates ought not to punish the breach of the first table, otherwise than in such cases as did disturb the civil peace. Secondly, That he ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man. Thirdly, That a man ought not to pray with such, though wife and child, etc. Fourthly, That a man ought not to give thanks after sacrament, not after meat, etc." (1

The ministers who had been requested to attend the sessions of the Court, and the magistrates adjudged these opinions to be very dangerous and erroneous. Why? Because these opinions of religious liberty advocated by Roger Williams, predicated upon the separation of Church and State, were in direct conflict with the claims of the theocratic government as established in Massachusetts Bay. Williams was given time to reconsider his "dangerous opinions" until the General Court convened in October, 1635. When he steadfastly refused to retract anything he had said or written in respect to an individual's right of conscience, the Court passed the following sentence:

> "Whereas Mr. Roger Williams, one of the elders of the Church of Salem, hath broached and divulged divers new and dangerous opinions against the authority of the magistrates and churches here, and that before any con-

1. Winthrop: "History of New England", Vol. I, p. 162.

> viction and yet maintaineth the same without any retractions; it is therefore ordered that the said Mr. Williams shall depart out of this jurisdiction within six weeks now next ensuing,which,if he neglect to perform, it shall be lawful for the Governor and two of the magistrates to send him to some place out of this jurisdiction, not to return any more without license from the Court." (1

The decision was practically unanimous, "all the ministers,save one, approving the sentence".(2 Williams wanted absolute separation of Church and State; the Bay Colony was a union of the two. In church polity, Williams was a rigid and extreme separatist; the Bay Colony was independent,non-Separatist,congregational Puritan. Williams upheld the sovereignty of the individual people and the rights of man; the Bay Colony was a theocracy and an oligarchy. When, in spite of protests by the General Court, Williams held to the truth of his convictions, he was banished as a rebel against civil authorities. Dexter is correct in his assertion:

> "I cannot help thinking that the weight of evidence is conclusive to the point: this exclusion from the colony took place for reasons purely political,and having no relation to his notions about toleration".(3

Banished from Salem, Williams must struggle alone against the united power of Church and State. Having suffered persecution for his devotion to the principles of soul-liberty,he proceeded through the wilderness to Providence,where "for the first time in history a form of government was adopted which drew a clear line between the temporal and spiritual power....."(4

1.Dexter:"As to Roger Williams",p.51.
2.Winthrop:"History of New England",Vol.I,p.171. According to Ernst,p.133,Master John Cotton was the only one who voted against the decision of the Court.
3.Dexter:"As to Roger Williams",p.79.
4.Prof.J.L.Diman. Quoted in Strickland:"Roger Williams",p.28.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE PROVIDENCE EXPERIMENT

Williams left Salem secretly in January, 1636, leaving his wife and children behind. Alone he began his perilous journey through the wilderness in the midst of a New England winter, until he came to Seekonk. He was joined there by four companions, his wife, and two children. This small group of eight left Seekonk in June,1636, journeying down the Seekonk River,then up the Mooshausick River, finally settling upon the the ascending slope of the hill. Here they began the first settlement of Rhode Island, which Williams named Providence, in gratitude to God's merciful providence to him in his distress.

Here,among the Indians of Providence, Williams first sought to apply his doctrine of soul-liberty. He recognized the Indian ownership of the land,and purchased if from them before he began a permanent settlement. He had bitterly fought the Puritan position that the pagan heathen, the Indians, had no property rights. He at once put into practice that principle of soul-liberty for which he had been banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, by purchasing the land from the Indians, the original and rightful owners.

June 16,1636, the community was incorporated into a town fellowship under the following social compact:

> "We whose names are hereunder-written,being desirous to inhabit in the town of Providence, do promise to submit ourselves, in active or passive obedience,to all such orders or agreements, as shall be made for

> the public good of the body, in an orderly way, by the major consent of the present inhabitants, masters of families incorporated together into a township, and such others whom they shall admit unto the same, only in civil things." (1

The new civil government dealt "only in civil things". Separation of Church and State and liberty of conscience now became a reality. Providence was the first modern government from which religious power was eliminated, and it was one of the earliest governments in which the individual decided what was to be done in the state. The social compact placed a government formed by the people solely in the control of the civil arm. Mr. E. J. Carpenter says:

> "It gave the first example of a pure democracy, from which all ecclesiastical power was eliminated. It was the first enunciation of a great principle, which years later, formed the cornerstone of the great republic. It was the act of a statesman fully a century in advance of his time." (2

In all the laws that were enacted in Providence the fundamental rights of conscience were regarded. In all the provisions respecting liberty of conscience, which lies at the basis of the laws, careful discriminations were made so as not to confound the liberties of conscience with license in civil matters in contempt of law and order. Church and State were to be separate, and each was to carry out its own work.

Near the close of 1638 we have an immigration of Baptists, or, as they were called, Anabaptists, from Massachusetts to Providence. They came in search of religious freedom. Prominent

1. Straus: "Roger Williams", p.80.
2. Quoted in Strickland's "Roger Williams", p.40.

among these were Ezekiel Holyman(or Holliman) and Mrs.Scott, sister-in-law of Mrs.Anne Hutchinson. It is not surprising that Williams should have felt a desire to become better acquainted with this sect, which had been preaching the "gospel of love", had abhorred and abstained from persecution,and had maintained the rights of conscience. It was only natural that he should join the movement, which was in agreement with those principles for which he was striving. Like Williams, these Anabaptists were Separatists of the most pronounced type. They were in agreement with him as to the ideas concerning a complete separation of the churches in New England from the Established Church of England; he was in full agreement with them with respect to the principle of absolute separation of Church and State; he was in agreement with them in the insistence upon a regenerate church-membership. It may be that Williams did not recognize the remarkable similarity until he met Mrs.Scott and received instructions from him as to the Baptist(Anabaptist) movement. The earliest reference as to what occurred at Providence at this time appears in Winthrop's "History of New England", where we read:

> "At Providence,things grew still worse;for a sister of Mrs.Hutchinson, the wife of one Scott, being infected with Anabaptistry and going last year to live at Providence, Mr.Williams was taken(or rather emboldened)by her to make open profession thereof(i.e.Anabaptism)and accordingly was rebaptized by one Holyman, a poor man, late of Salem. Then Mr.Williams rebaptized him and some ten more.They also denied the baptism of infants and would have no magistrates." (1

Williams was baptized by Holyman sometime before March,1639,and

1. Winthrop:"History of New England",Vol.I,p.293.

then in turn administered the rite to him and ten others. This event has generally been looked upon as the establishment of the first Baptist church in America. Williams,however, retained his connections with them for only three or four months. (1 He became dissatisfied with their set form of creeds. He believed in unrestrained individualism in matters of belief, believing that to be aprerequisite for full liberty of conscience. Williams was soon troubled also in regard to his Baptism. He knew of no Baptist minister or baptized believer ordained to the ministry in America when he was baptized. An unbaptized person had baptized him. Since he doubted the apostolic authority of all orders ot the church, he severed connections with the first Baptist Church.(2 Cotton Mather, describing the separation of Mr.Williams from the Providence group,says:

> "He was now satisfied that there was none upon earth who could administer baptism,and so that their late baptism,as well as their first,was a nullity,for the want of a called administrator; he advised them therefore to forego all,to dislike everything and wait for the coming of the new apostles; whereupon they dissolved themselves and became that sort of sect which

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1. Richard Scott, in a letter to George Fox,asserted:"I walked with him in the Baptists' way about three or four months, in which time he broke from the society,and declared at large the ground and reasons of it;that their baptism could not be right because it was not administered by an apostle."(Isaac Backus:"A History of New England",Vol.I,p.89).

2. Although Williams severed his membership with the Baptist Church,nevertheless he remained on relations with his successor in the ministry,Rev.Chad.Brown. The probability that Williams was unionistically inclined can perhaps be inferred from the following reply of his to George Fox,written in 1676,in which he says:"I profess that if my soul could find rest in joining unto any of the churches professing Christ Jesus now extant,I would readily and gladly do it,yea,unto themselves whom I now opposed." (George Fox:"Digged out of His Burrows",p.66).

> we term seekers, keeping to that one principle that everyone should have liberty to worship God according to the 'light of his own conscience'; but owning of no true churches or ordinances now in the world." (1

Williams left the Baptist Church and became what in New England was known as a "Seeker","a term which is aptly applied to those who, in any age of the church, are dissatisfied with the prevailing creeds and institutions and seek for more congenial views of truth, or a faith better adapted to their spiritual wants."(2 As a Seeker Williams remained out of fellowship with every type of church in New England. He became a persistent individualist and dissenter. He declared that all Christian churches, since Apostolic times, were false and anti-Christian. Seekerism was a return to the pattern of the primitive church, and a turning to "a searching of the originals alone". The "searching of the originals" left Williams unsatisfied about the "true call and sending of the ministry now extant". "Searching the originals" Williams concluded that the Holy Scripture is the only outward standing rule and record and guide "by which God witnesseth himself and his truth in the world",and the only "authority and sole external direction how to judge of all pretending Christs,prophets,doctrines,churches and spirits".(3 Of the original Scriptures Williams said:

> "Christ Jesus and his Testaments are enough for Christians, making revelation full in all matters,although we had never heard of Moses" or "the whole Old Testament". The Scripture is,moreover, "only figuratively the Word of God by his holy men" in the same way as "our King's majesty his Declarations and Charters".(4

1. "Magnalia Christi Americana",II,p.498.
2. Straus:"Roger Williams",p.109.
3. Williams'own reasons for becoming a "Seeker" are found in Ernst,p.475 ff.
4. Ernst:"Roger Williams",p.482.

Williams stated that it was the duty of God's people to get acquainted with the original Scriptures. Consequently, he objected to church control of higher education, maintaining that the university should remain in the field of the intellect,arts, and culture,and be supported by the civil state.(1

As the colony of Rhode Island grew it became necessary to organize a more systematic and compact form of government. Therefore, in the summer of 1643 Williams set sail for England to secure a charter for the colony. The charter was granted, dated March 17,1644, giving to the towns of Providence,Portsmouth, and Newport, under the designation of "The Providence Plantations" full power to rule themselves "as they shall by free consent agree thereto". The charter contains very liberal provisions. Laws and constitutions and punishments permitted by the charter should be conformable to the laws of England only so far as circumstances permit. Emphasis is laid upon the provision that the powers of government should be limited to civil affairs. The civil government should not interfer in matters of conscience. Everyone in the colony of Rhode Island had a right to believe as he pleased.These provisions of the charter seem to place a stamp of approval upon the principles of soul-liberty and rights of conscience laid down by its founder,Roger Williams.

Before leaving for America with thise newly-acquired charter,Williams wrote his pamphlet,"The Bloudy Tenent of Per-

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1. For further information as to the position of Williams regarding higher education,see Ernst,p.489,where Ernst gives Williams own words on his position.

secution for the Cause of Conscience discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace", in which he discharged a parting shot against the designs of the Presbyterian divines of England,who sought to establish an intolerant national church. The pamphlet was Williams"clarion call"for liberty and the rights of man,as can be seen from the following excerpt from the pamphlet:

> "All civil states with their offices of justice, in their respective consitution and administrations, are proved essentially civil and therefore not judges,governors or defenders of the Spiritual or Christian State or worship.God requireth not a uniformity or religion enacted or enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity,sooner or later,is the greatest occasion of civil war,ravishing of conscience... and of hypocrisy. Enforced uniformity confounds civil and religious,and denies the principles of Christianity and civility.
>
> "A national church was not instituted by Christ Jesus. That cannot be a true religion which needs carnal weapons to uphold it.God's people must be non-conformists to evil.Evil is always evil,yet permission of it may in case be good....
>
> "Forcing of conscience is soul-rape....No man should be bound to wroship or maintain a worship against his own will. Few Christians are wise and noble,and qualified for affairs of state.An unbelieving magistrate is no more a magistrate than an unbelieving.Civil magistrates were never appointed by God,Defenders of the Faith of Jesus. No magistrate can execute justice in killing soul for soul.....
>
> "The Civil Power is originally and fundamentally in the People....Magistrates can have no more power than the common consent of the People shall betrust them with. The spiritual and civil sword cannot be managed by one and the same person.The punishments civil which magistrates inflict upon the church for cívil crimes are lawful and necessary. The civil magistrates are bound to preserve the Bodies and Goods of their subjects,and not to destroy them for conscience sake.The civil magistrate owes two things to false worship:(1)Permission, (2) Protection." (1

1. "The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution",as citied by Ernst, p.244.245.

Early in August,1644, Williams sailed from England with the Free Civil Charter of the Providence Plantations. After the charter was adopted, it took Williams awhile to put it into effect. The authorities of Massachusetts were still hostile to him and to his principles, and made every effort to interfer with his work in Providence. Hubbard, one of the magistrates of Massachusetts said that as long as Williams maintained

> "his dangerous principles of separation,unless he can be brought to lay them down, they see no reason why to concede to him,or any so persuaded,free liberty of ingress or egress." (1

In spite of opposition from within and from without, Williams insisted on carrying out his ideas of soul-liberty in Providence. Every individual had a right to express his own opinions and have his own convictions as to what was right or wrong in Church and State, just as long as he did not mix the two. Williams played a very prominent part in the newly organized Commonwealth of Providence. He was the Moderator of town-meetings,served on committees dealing with local disputes, land problems, and Indian affairs. The form of government was really not agreed upon until the general assembly of the people met in May,1647,at which time the code of laws was drawn up, in which particular attention is paid to the natural and civil rights and privileges due each individual as a man,subject,and a citizen. Williams great task in Providence was to adjust civil power and authority to their rights and liberties of the individual in society. By his doctrine the government was only the servant of the people,and all the laws which it passed had

1.Hubbard:"History of New England",p.349.

to serve the highest good and well-being of the individual in society. To safeguard these individual rights new relations had to be established between man and government,and between man and man. Man had to give over certain natural rights in exchange for guaranteed civil rights and liberties. He,however, retained some natural rights. As society became more complex, man was forced by circumstances for self-defence to sacrifice more of his natural rights into the temporary keeping of the social group. Each individual had to guarantee the same rights to others that he claimed for himself. This concept of individualism Williams expressed in the words:"I desire not that liberty for myself which I would not gladly and impartially weigh out to all." Some of these individual rights were temporarily given over by the people to the government,but the people themselves as individual members of society remained the fountainhead of all civil power and sovereignty in the government. Williams' doctrine of the Rights of Man had been set forth already in the Social Compact of 1636, but it is again stated in the preamble of the Constitution of 1647 in the following words:

> "We ....do engage ourselves to the utmost of our estates and strength to maintain the authority to enjoy the liberty granted us....and to maintain in each other by the same in his lawful rights and liberties....to the end that we may give each other as hopeful assurance as we are able,touching each man's peaceable and quiet enjoyment of his lawful right and liberty" of life,estates,and equal justice; "to the end that we may show ourselves not only not willing that our popularity should prove, as some conjecture it will,an anarchy and so a com-

> mon tyranny but willing and exceedingly desirous to preserve every man in his person,name,and estate...as far as the nature and constitution of our place will admit." (1

In the government of Providence, in accordance with Williams' principle of individualism, the freemen remained individual men and retained the right to decide what laws were for public good,and they promised to "maintain each other in lawful rights and liberties". To safeguard the rights of the individual the men instituted the iniative, referendum, and recall of all acts, laws, and officers in both the local and central government. If the government became unjust and oppressive and began to persecute the people, such a government was to be overthrown by the individuals who had appointed the government,since it opposed the voice and will of the individuals who make up a government. However,as long as the civil government did not overstep its bounds, either by oppressing an individual or by interfering with the work of the Church,then it was the duty of the individual members of society to obey it. Such,then,was Williams' doctrine of the relation of man to man and of man to civil government in the new society founded at Providence.

Not only did Williams insist on carrying out his principle of individualism with respect to secular government,but also in regard to ecclesiastical rule. This becomes apparent when we consider his insistence upon the principle of religious

1. Ernst:"Roger Williams,New England Firebrand",p.446.

liberty. Each man had a right to believe as he chose, and was not to be persecuted for his religious conviction. Religious liberty, said Williams, "is not hurtful to any commonwealth, and it depriveth not Kings of any power given by God."(1 Religious liberty meant morethan toleration, since the latter denied the principle of full liberty of conscience, and assumed that one form of worship is better than another and has, therefore, a better right to exist. Religious liberty, on the other hand, assumes that all men are equal before God and the civil laws, and everyone has a right to practice and hold in doctrine or worship whatever his individual conscience dictates. Williams wrote a letter to Governor Endicott of Massachusetts, stating:

> "Sir I must be humbly bold to say 'tis impossible for any man or men to maintain their Christ by their sword and to worship a true Christ! to fight against all Consciences opposite theirs, and not to fight against God in some of them, and to hunt after the previous life of the true Lord Jesus Christ."(2

This letter was written after John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes had been arrested in Lynn by two constables for preaching "erroneous doctrines". Brought before the governor for trial, they were reviled as Anabaptists, convicted, and sentences. This action was not in conformity with Williams principle of religious liberty; consequently, he wrote the above letter.

Williams practiced this principle of religious liberty in his dealings with the Quakers. He disapproved of their doctrines and practices, yet permitted them to live in Rhode Island.

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1. Ernst: "Roger Williams, New England Firebrand", p.433.
2. Narragansett Club Publication, Vol.IV, p.502.

One of the clearest statements of Williams concerning the doctrine of liberty of conscience and the distinct and separate nature of the church and civil state is the following:

> "All civil states and their officers or justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are essentially civil,and therefore not judges, governors,or defenders of the spiritual or Christian state or worship. It is the will and command of God, that,since the coming of his son Lord Jesus, a permission of the most paganish,Jewish,Turkish or Antichristian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries; and they are only to be fought against with the sword of God's spirit, the word of God. God requireth not uniformity of religion,which sooner or later is the greatest occasion of civil war,ravishing of conscience,persecuting of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls. An uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and Jesus Christ come in the flesh. True civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary consciences in a state or kingdom,either Jews or Gentiles." (1

Such was the idea of liberty of conscience and separation of Church and State which was worked out in detail by Roger Williams in the Providence Plantations. His was an individualistic society, a society which gave to each individual the right and privileges due him, both in state and church.

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1. Ernst:"Roger Williams,New England Firebrand",p.439.440.

# CHAPTER V

## INDIVIDUALISM PASSING IN REVIEW

From the time Roger Williams first set foot upon American soil, until his death, he fought for one great principle, individualism. Around this one word "individualism" all his other principles revolve. He opposed the secular government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on the ground that it deprived the individual of the right to voice his position in the government. He refused to accept the position of teacher in the church at Boston, because it still retained relations with the Established Church of England, which was a national church, and Williams wanted absolute separation of Church and State. He maintained, over against the position of the Bay Colony, that an unbelieving magistrate might administer the law more ably than a believing one; therefore he concluded that it was wrong to demand of an individual that he go against his conscience and become affiliated with a church before he could become a magistrate. Williams remained firm to the conviction that the civil government has no jurisdiction over religious faith, worship, order, discipline, and polity. Church and State are to be and remain separate. Each has its own sphere of activity. Whenever one interferes with the work of the other, the individual is bound to suffer. Furthermore, the individuals, whether they be Jew, Catholic, Mohammedon, atheist, agnostic, have the right to decide for himself whether he desires to accept Christ. The state had no power over the soul. Only when the acts of an

individual infringe upon the civil peace has the state the right and duty to intervene.

Not only did Williams fight for the principle of individualism in civil affairs, but also in ecclesiastical affairs. He insisted that each individual make a confession of his faith before he be accepted into membership in a church. He wanted a regenerate church membership. At Providence he repudiated not only his first baptism as a child but also his second baptism as an adult. WHY? He was firmly convinced that he was not a regenerate believer, since his was not a true baptism. According to Williams, true baptism had ceased with the apostolic age. The prevailing creeds and institutions were not truly apostolic. Accordingly, he withdrew from the First Baptist Church of Providence and became a "Seeker". As a "Seeker" he became convinced that the relation of an individual believer to the Church depended on and expressed his previous relation to Christ. To find out whether one was a regenerate believer, an individual had to look into the New Testament, since Christ's ordinances are found only there. Each individual has a right to interpret Scripture as he thinks best. No church organization may do so for him. Williams opposed the meetings held by the ministers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, lest they develop into a presbytery, which would try to dictate to the individual in matters or religion. Not a presbytery, but each individual was to decide for himself what he wanted to believe. There was to be absolute soul-liberty, or liberty of conscience.

The individualism of Williams is evident also in his church polity. The local church was to be supreme. For proof, we need point only to his opposition to the meetings of the ministerial conference in New England. He feared that such meetings would establish a presbytery which would rob the local church of its congregational privileges.

Roger Williams fought for individualism in church and state. He was a champion of those doctrines and practices which are found today in the heart of Baptist theology and church polity. The Baptists of the past and of the present have some kinship of spirit with Williams. Whether or not Williams was a Baptist throughout his life, matters not. One thing is certain, namely, that after his separation from the church at Providence, he left no uncertainty as to his Baptist views. The late Reuben A. Guild, for many years librarian of Brown University, writes thus of Roger Williams in his history of Brown University:

> "In regard to the other great doctrines held by the Baptists, liberty of conscience, of soul-liberty, the entire separation of Church and State, the supreme headship of Christ in all spiritual matters, regeneration through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and a hearty belief in the Bible as God's divinely inspired and miraculously preserved word and the all-sufficient rule for faith and practice. He was throughout life a sincere believer in them all and an earnest advocate of them, as his letters and published works abundantly show." (1

A survey of Baptist theology and church polity will show how this principle of individualism, developed by Williams, has found its way into the heart of the doctrines and practices of the Baptists.

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1. Cited by Strickland: "Roger Williams", p.61.62.

# PART III

# BAPTIST THEOLOGY

# CHAPTER I

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS

The word "Baptists", as the descriptive name of a body of Christians, was first used in English literature,so far as it is known, in 1644. The name was not chosen by them,but applied to them by opponents. In 1644 the Particular Baptists issued the first Confession of Faith, in which document they describe themselves "as commonly(but unjustly) called Anabaptists". Even though they did repudiate the name "Anabaptists", nevertheless they did not use the name "Baptists" for some time. The Baptists themselves originally preferred to be called "baptized believers",or, as in the Assembly's Confession of 1654, "Christians baptized upon profession of their faith". Gradually,however, they fell in with the growing pupular usuage. In 1654 the name "Baptists" was first used publicly by Mr.William Britten, in his book, "The Moderate Baptist". The first official use of the name by one of their own number is in "The Baptist Catechism",issued by the authority of the Assembly,and prepared and printed shortly after the Assembly's Catechism.

The name"Baptist"first came into use around this time because the churches of England first held,practised,and avowed those principles of individualism ever since associated with the name "Baptists". The name "Anabaptists" had been known before this time, being associated with a radical group of Reformers springing up in Germany,Switzerland,and Holland,who denied the validity of infant baptism and insisted on rebaptism, or the baptism of believers only. Because they baptized over again,they were called Anabaptists, the Greek word for re-baptizers. Many of them were extremely radical, even to the extent

of revolution by the sword. Although the Anabaptist gave the first impulse to Baptist teachings, the founding of the Baptist church, as we know it today, cannot be traced to such a radical group.

Another group of Anabaptists, under the leadership of Menno Simons, became what we know we know today as the Mennonites. These people were peaceable, orderly, in carrying on their work in Switzerland. Simons, also, repudiated infant baptism, and insisted upon rebaptism. He had been deeply influenced by the martyrdom of an Anabaptist by the name of Freerks, a tailor, who in 1531 had been executed for his rebaptism and repudiation of infant baptism. The Mennonites baptized only those who gave credible evidence of their faith, their regeneration. They had no formal creeds and professed the Scriptures alone as their standard of faith and practice. When they were persecuted for their beliefs, they had to flee from Switzerland. Some of the followers of Menno Simon fled to Holland. When they were persecuted in Holland, they fled to England, where we find them in the sixteenth century. Here they greatly influenced the subsequent history of the Baptists. That these early Anabaptists actually held some of the principles which are basic in Baptist theology today, can be gathered from the following proclamation of Henry VIII, in which their alleged heresies are mentioned:

> "Infants ought not to be baptised; it is not lawful for a Christian man to bear office or rule in the

commonwealth; every manner of death,with the time and hour thereof, is so certainly prescribed,appointed, and determined to every man by God,that neither any prince by his word can alter it, nor any man by his willfulness prevent or change it." (1

Although the Anabaptists did hold some of the teachings that are basic in Baptist theology and church polity today, it is not until the seventeenth century, around the year 1640, that the Baptist doctrine and practice were found in all essential features as they are today.

The first church composed entirely of English Baptists was organized in Holland by Rev.John Smyth. He insisted that the church should consist of regenerate only. Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and thirty-six others formed in 1638 the first Baptist church composed of Englishmen.

Smyth was a socalled "Se-Baptist",that is,he baptized himself. He perhaps had a direct influence upon the life of Williams in America,since the latter was also a "Se-Baptist". Like Williams, Smyth believed that the real apostolic succession is a succession of true faith and practice, not a succession of outward ordinances and visible organizations. He,therefore, believed that the ancient,true apostolic succession had been lost,and that the only way to recover it was to begin a church anew on the apostolic model.

When persecution became less severe in England, then Helwys and others returned to London. In 1611 Helwys organized the

1. Vedder:"A Short History of the Baptists",p.128.

first Baptist church of London, the first church composed of Englishmen known to have existed on English soil. They became known as the Arminian, or General Baptists, because they believed in a general atonement for all men.

The Calvinistic(Particular Baptists) had their origin in 1616. They maintained that baptism should not be administered to infants, but only to such as had professed their faith in Christ. Believing that they acted from a principle of conscience, they organized their church on September 12,1633, with John Spilsbury as their pastor. Both the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists organized their church in order to give each individual the right to profess his own faith.

In the year 1644 the seven Particular Baptist churches and one French church of the same faith united in issuing a Confession of faith, composed of fifty articles,which Vedder calls "one of the chief landmarks of Baptist history".(1 Two things are worthy of mention in this confession. First,the Confession pronounces baptism

> "an ordinance of the New Testament given by Christ,to be dispensed upon persons professing faith,or that are made disciples; who,upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized,and afterward to partake of the Lord's Supper."(2

Secondly,it is to be noted that this Confession of Faith of 1644 is very strong in its advocacy of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Article XLVIII contains the following

1. Vedder:"A Short History of the Baptists",p.142.
2. Idem.

statement regarding freedom of conscience:

> "XLVIII. A civil magistracy is an ordinance of God, set up by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; and that in all lawful things, commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord, not only for the wrath, but for conscience' sake; and that we are to make supplications and prayers for kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
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> "The supreme magistracy of this kingdom we acknowledge to be King and Parliament....And concerning the worship of God, there is but one lawgiver....Which is Jesus Christ....So it is the magistrate's duty to tender the liberty of men's conscience(Eccl.8,8), (which is the tenderest thing unto all conscientious men, and most dear unto them, and without which all other liberties will not be worth naming, much less the enjoying), and to protect all under them from all wrong, injury, oppression, and molestation....And as we cannot do anything contrary to our understandings and consciences, so neither can we forbear the doing of that which our understandings and consciences bind us to do. And if the magistrates should require us to do otherwise, we are to yield our persons in a passive way to their power, as the saints of old have done".(1

The individuals who drew up this Confession of Faith held essentially the same principles which are held by Baptist churches today, namely, that every individual has a right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, without any interference whatever on the part of any ecclesiastical or civil authorities. King Charles I wanted a national religion, and when the Baptists firmly resisted him, insisting upon the rights of the individual, they were persecuted. Crownwell tolerated all religious views, granting all Christians equal rights and privileges. However, with the ascendance to the throne of Charles Stuart in 1660, and the passage of the Act of Uniformity, Baptists were again persecuted. Finding it impossible to find religious freedom in England, some Baptists, among them Williams, sail for America. From here we take up their theology.

# CHAPTER II

## SOUL-LIBERTY

We have seen the early struggles of Roger Williams and the principles for which he fought. When death intervened, others took up that fight. The Baptists are indebted to Williams for the principles which they hold today. Like Williams, the Baptists have fought valiantly for religious and civil liberty. Oscar Straus says:

> "The Baptists....had a much more enlightened and advanced view: they held that Christianity should propagate itself by its own spiritual force; that the civil government was entirely apart and distinct and should have no control over conscience, or power to inflict punishment for spiritual censures."

The principles held today by the Baptists were in vogue already in the founding and history of the First Baptist Church of Providence. The Church adopted no articles of faith. The rejection of creeds is based upon the doctrine of soul-liberty, freedom of conscience.

In the early days this principle of soul-liberty had a special and negative emphasis. Their adherence to soul-liberty appeared usually as a denial of the authority of king or magistrate in the realm of conscience. Speaking of this point in the "Watchman-Examiner", Dr. James H. Rushbrooke states:

> "That is the aspect to which the historian gives chief attention. Nevertheless, it is unjust to regard these protagonists simply as persons crying 'hands off' to the state. They were not seeking liberty to do as they pleased. Their concern was for truth, for the authority of God, for what came later to be described in another connection as 'the rights of the Redeemer'. In one sense they were no

more tolerant than those whom they opposed. They did not shrink from controversy,and they carried on their polemic 'without gloves'. 'Christ only,as John Smyth puts it, 'is the King and the Lawgiver of the church and conscience; and,therefore, denounce error as they might and did,they insisted that enforcement by the secular power even of true opinion in the realm of religion is an invasion of the rights of the person whom God has fashioned for freedom and made responsible to himself alone."(1

By liberty of conscience,then,Baptists hold that every individual has the right to believe and act as God commands. No human authority has the right to superimpose itself on any individual or any local church, lest some restraint be placed upon one's conscientious obedience to the will of God. Absolute liberty of conscience is said to be secure only insofar as an individual renders obedience to the absolute authority of Christ. When any law of a state would usurp the authority of Christ, the Baptists insist that they have the right to resist that human law.

The rejection of any man-made law is one of the reasons why Baptists have consistently declined to subscribe to any written creed. They may believe every statement in a certain creed,for example,the Apostles' Creed,yet they do not wish to be bound by any statement of that creed. The Bible alone is said to be their only sufficient rule of faith and practice. This matter became very clear in an interview which the writer had with the Rev.Edwin T.Dahlberg,in December,1938,a Baptist preacher in St.Paul,Minnesota. During the course of the inter-

1. James H.Rushbrooke,D.D.:"Baptists as Defenders of Religious Freedom", in "The Watchman Examiner",July 7,1938.

view Rev.Dahlberg stated:

> "Because there may be someone who has mental reservations on a certain point, hence we bind no one to a creed,like the Apostles' Creed; yet that does not say we do not believe that Creed---many Baptists know it verbatim."(1

When a resolution was made about fifteen years ago at the Northern Baptist Convention at Indianapolis to give a statement on the fundamental doctrines of the Baptists,the resolution was voted down. It was resolved to adopt Scripture, and not man-made creeds,as the only rule of faith. Rev.Dahlberg, in referring to this resolution in a sermon of his in the First Baptist Church,St.Paul,Minnesota, on December 18,1938,stated:

> "Baptists believe in the freedom of individual conscience. No creed,no catechism,no statement of doctrine,only open Bible in hands of believers. Attempts to formulate a creed or statement of doctrine at Indianapolis convention. Never forget the dramtic moment when Dr.White made the motion:'I move we adopt the N.T. Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice'. No one dared to vote against that motion, because to do so would be to imply that we needed some other statement,some man-made thing,with which to supplement the N.T. rule of faith, and practice. We do not even recite the Apostles' Creed,which by the way is not a creed drawn up by the apostles but by later rulers of the church,who sought to summarize Christian doctrine in a compact statement of belief. But even that written statement no Baptist church would officially adopt,for it might seem to force upon some member a particular interpretation of doctrine, as the Virgin Birth, the atonement, the resurrection,or the nature of the hereafter. We desire the Christian to be guided only by the Scriptures,as interpreted to him by the Holy Spirit in his own heart. That is why Baptists have always been very free and radical and independent, the very opposite of the totalitarian state."(2

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1. Interview between Rev.Edwin T.Dahlberg,pastor of First Baptist Church,St.Paul,Minnesota,and the writer on Dec.20,1938.
2. "What Baptists Believe?" A sermon delivered by Rev.Dahlberg in First Baptist Church,St.Paul,Minnesota,on Dec.18,1938. The sermon in manuscript form is in the hands of the writer.

The freedom of the individual to express and promote his own views on any subject became evident in 1844, when the Northern and Southern Baptist churches separated on the question of slavery. The anti-slavery sentiment had grown in the North about 1825. The North held that a Christian man ought not to be a holder of slaves. Finally, in 1844, at the meeting of the General Convention, the question of the relation of the Baptist churches to slavery came up. The following resolution was almost unanimously adopted:

> "Resolved, That in cooperating together as members of this Convention in the work of foreign missions, we disclaim all sanctions either expressed or implied, whether of slavery or anti-slavery; but as individuals we are free to express and to promote elsewhere our views on these subjects in a Christian manner and spirit."(1

When the terms of this resolution were not respected, the split came. The Executive Board later stated that it would appoint no one as missionary who owned slaves and would insist on retaining them. Finally, in April, 1845, the American Baptist Home Mission Society decided that the North and the South should have separate organizations in carrying out its work. The following month the Southern Baptist Convention was organized at Augusta, Georgia.

When speaking of soul-liberty, one should not overlook the Baptist principle of religious liberty. This principle is so important that it merits separate consideration; therefore, it will be treated in the next chapter.

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1. Vedder: "A Short History of the Baptists", p.233.234.

# CHAPTER III

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The principle of religious liberty appears to follow directly from the principle of soul-liberty. As soon as some state attempts to force upon any individual some belief, then religious liberty ceases to exist. Freedom of conscience cannot be dissociated from the principle of religious liberty. In substantiation of this principle of the Baptists, the writer refers you to an article by the Rev. Daniel Heitmeyer, entitled "Freedom of Conscience", in which the following is stated:

> "The problem of preserving religious liberty and freedom of conscience can not be dissociated from the problem of maintaining the vitality of religion. When religion ceases to be a matter of individual responsibility and personal experience, religious liberty as a principle will soon cease to have much meaning, and will be allowed to elapse. People who pay little attention to their consciences will not worry about what may happen to freedom of conscience. Freedom of religion has never died except in lands where religion had become in the main a matter of externals....The central principle of Protestantism, as indeed it is the central principle of New Testament Christianity, is that religion is a matter of individual responsibility and personal experience." (1

The unrelentless struggle of the Baptists for religious liberty, brought them into conflict with the authorities of Virginia in the early days of the state's existence. The Virginians wanted a uniform religion here, as the mother country, England, had. Laws were passed between 1659 and 1663 against those who failed to have their children baptized. The early Baptists of Virginia were of the common people, and their ministers were illiterate.

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1. "The Watchman Examiner", March 23, 1939, p.304.

For a while, therefore, the Baptists escaped notice. We have the first imprisonment of the Baptists in the county of Spottsylvania, Virginia, June 4, 1768. Three Baptists, John Waller, Lewis Craig, James Childs, with others, were arrested for disturbing the peace. In spite of all persecution the Baptists continued their struggle to secure religious liberty. They eventually secured the support of Patrick Henry, a member of the Church of England, but a firm friend of all who stood for civil and religious liberty. To him the Baptists give credit for their final victory in Virginia---religious liberty. In 1788 the Baptists turned to the national issue. Baptists were dissatisfied with Article VI of the National Constitution, which provided:

> "No religious test should ever be required as a qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

Baptists opposed this article on the grounds that religious tests might be imposed for other purposes than those specified. In a letter, drafted by John Leland, a Baptist minister, they stated their grievance to President Washington, closing their appeal with these words:

> "If religious liberty is rather insecure in the Constitution the administration will certainly prevent all oppression, for a Washington will preside. Should the horrid evils that have been so pestiferous in Asia and Europe, faction, ambition, war, perfidy, fraud, and persecution for conscience sake, ever approach the borders of our happy nation, may the name and administration of our beloved President, like the radiant source of day, scatter all dark clouds from the American hemisphere."(1

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1. Strickland: "Roger Williams", p.135.

Shortly thereafter we have the First Amendment to the Constitution, which specified:

> "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abriding freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

# CHAPTER IV

## REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Baptist principle of individualism also becomes evident when we consider their belief in a regenerate church membership. The relation of the believer to the church depends on, follows, and expresses his previous relation to Christ. A person is not saved because of his membership in a certain church, but because of his union with Christ. A person must come to Christ before he can be accepted into church membership. It is not enough that a person believes in Christ, but he must be able to profess that faith publicly. Infants are unable to profess their faith; consequently Baptists reject infant baptism. Baptism is regarded as an individual, personal act, in which each individual must approach God with his own heart. No one may profess that faith in his stead. Godparents are unable to speak for the child, since they do not know the belief of a child. The child is itself utterly ignorant of the whole proceeding; therefore, it cannot be a believer, cannot be regenerate. No life can be cleansed by baptism. It is cleansed by repentance, and by forgiveness and faith of the believer, and baptism is simply an outward confession or symbol of what has already transpired in the mind and soul of the individual. Regarding the sacramental idea of baptism, the Rev. Dahlberg states:

> "All this physical, sacramental idea of baptism we Baptists hold to be a relic of paganism, and utterly contrary to the mind of Christ, who commanded baptism of believers only."(1

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1. "Baptist Principles in the United States". Sermon delivered by Rev. Edwin T. Dahlberg in the First Baptist Church, St. Paul, Minn., October 21, 1934. Manuscript in possession of the writer.

That only baptized believers may become members of a Baptist congregation is stated expressly in "The New Hampshire Baptist Confession.A.D.1833":

> "Article XIII. We believe that a visible Church is a congregation of baptized believers,associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws,and exercising the gifts,rights,and privileges invested in them by his Word."

In the "Confession of the Free-Will Baptists.A.D.1834.1868", we read:

> "Chapter XV.The church. A Christian Church is an organized body of believers in Christ, who statedly assemble to worship God,and sustain the ordinances of the gospel agreeably to his Word. In a more general sense it is the whole body of Christians throughout the world and only the regenerate are real members. Believers are admitted to a particular church, on giving evidence of faith, and receiving baptism and the hand of fellowship."

# CHAPTER V

## FREE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Though every member of a Baptist congregation must be a regenerate believer, yet it is not required that he must agree with all the teachings of that church, even though such teachings may be said to be based on the Bible. Each individual is at freedom to interpret Scripture as he thinks best. He has "full spiritual freedom". Since Baptists believe in the right of private interpretation as part of their "spiritual freedom" diversity of views about any subject are often found. In a letter to the writer, Dr. C. M. Gallup, Recording Secretary of the Northern Baptist Convention, stated (letter of December 15, 1938):

> "As for theology, the right of private conscience is so strong among Baptists that you find many varieties of slightly divergent views in a congregation of any large Baptist Church."

This freedom of interpretation of Scripture becomes evident when we consider the principle differences between the Particular and the General Baptists. The former maintain, like Calvin, that God elected only a select view to salvation. The latter, however, believe in a general atonement, universal salvation, of all men. Perhaps the best proof that can be offered in substantiation of the free interpretation of Scripture is the following statement of A. H. Strong:

> "Both as Baptists and as Christians we need to defend the liberty of all men to form and utter their own religious opinions. The free interpretation of Scrip-

ture is as important an article of faith as the divine inspiration of Scripture. Let me preach the gospel,and let every other man preach his. By their fruits men shall know truth from error, and every plant which our heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up."(1

Again,

"I recognize the right of others to another conclusion than mine. I am not willing to stake the Christian faith upon the correctness even of the original autographs of Scripture in matters so unessential as these. I open my mind to evidence. I do not prejudge the case. I refuse to impose on students for the ministry the dogma of absolute inerrancy in matters which do not affect the substance of the Bible History, or the substance of the Bible doctrine."(2

1.A.H.Strong:"Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism",p.462.

2. Idem,p.127.

# CHAPTER VI

## SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Like Williams, Baptists have always stood for the absolute separation of Church and State. From the beginning they have maintained that the Church should be completely independent of the State. This principle grew directly out of their doctrine of the direct relation of the individual Christian to Christ. Christ is the only Lawgiver, the only Lord of the conscience; therefore, there can be no rightly human lordship over the Church. Since each local church is directly subject to Christ, it is absolutely independent of interference or control by any civil power. Baptists have always insisted that "the union of Church and State is contrary to the word of God, contrary to natural justice, and destructive to both parties to the union."(1 The majority should not determine what the community should believe, how men should worship God. The State has nothing to do with matters pertaining to the soul. The straining of men's consciences by the civil power makes of men hypocrits, and serves to keep out all true religion. The freedom of a state-established church is never safe. Its privileged position predisposes it to adopt an attitude of snobbery or patronage. Baptists have suffered persecution in Rumania the past year in their struggle for religious liberty. The trouble began when the Rumanian government, on June 14,1938, passed "Decizie No.26208", to which Baptists refused to conform on the ground that the conditions laid down for the continuance of Baptist work were simply impos-

1.Vedder:"A Short History of the Baptists",p.319.

sible to fulfill. Baptists feared that by adhering to this administrative ordinance, they would be extinguished. Consequently, the Baptist World Alliance protested against the "Decision" on the following grounds:

"1. The 'decizie' in question is directly opposed to the principle of religious freedom,which includes liberty of provate and public worship, preaching and teaching.
"2. It subordinates churches to the secular authority by denying their right to determine the nature of their church government and the qualifications of their ministers and members.
"3. "It denies the generally acknowledged rights of the Church,as set forth(for example) by the Oxford Conference of 1937, in which the Rumanian Orthodox Church participated.
"4. It embodies the entirely false principle that the freedom and rights of Christian churches are dependent upon their numerical strength.
"5. Its application would involve the closing of practically all the meeting-places of the Baptist communion in Rumania.
"6. Already before the day appointed for the full application of the 'decizie', Baptist churches have been closed under its provisions,and Baptist preachers arrested and imprisoned for exercising their right to preach the Gospel."(1

If should not be falsely concluded that because Baptists speak of the rights of religion and conscience as against the requirements of the state, that they have not been good citizens,or that they have been disobedient to the just obligations of government. In times of tranquility and justice, when the government is stable and well-ordered in its demands, then Baptists admit that they have a duty as loyal and obedient citizens. However, in times of crisis,when because of ungoldly and worldly rulers, the State makes demands that are contrary to God and moral principle, then Baptists insist that God must be obeyed rather than men."The New Hampshire Confession" states

1. "Repression of Baptists in Rumania",by Dr.J.Hushbrooke. In "The Watchman Examiner",October 20,1938,p.1128.

the following with regard to civil government:

> "Article XVI. Of Civil government. We believe that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interests and good order of human society; and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed; except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the prince of the kings of the earth."

As churches, Baptists have divorced themselves from all political and financial relationships with the state, and insisted that the fellowship of the gospel was something over which earthly governments had no jurisdiction. Throughout their history they have consistently refused State control and patronage. Taxation, they say, should not be permitted for the support of ministers and churches. Where such taxation is permitted for the support of the ministry, there is evidence of unjust and destructive use of state authority. Baptists are also opposed to any provision whereby a minister will receive any pension from the government. It is the solemn duty of each local church to supply him a living salary, both during his active years and when old age or sickness force himto become inactive. This is the position taken by Dr. George L. White in "The Watchman Examiner":

> "What has state taxation of churches and ministers to do with the question of soul-liberty? To this we reply that in many countries during past centuries as well as at the present time, there has been and is, evidence of unjust, unrighteous, and destructive use of state authority where taxation has been permitted for the support of the ministry. Provision which assures pensions is a definite part of the support of the ministry. A local church which simply pays a living salary during the active years is not giving full support to its minister, it is temporarily getting by.....In countries where the state has assumed either in full or in part the support of the ministry of one or of more religious bodies, injustice and persecution have followed."(1

1. Watchman Examiner, March 16, 1939, p.271.

Baptists are opposed to any legislation whereby any church bodies will be included under the operation of the Social Security Act, thereby placing the care of the aged pastors into the hands of the government. Baptists opposed any such proposal as a matter of conviction and of conscience before God. They believe that if the government demands money from their churches for any cause, it might eventually also demand that certain doctrines be preached to serve the purposes of the government. Firmly believing that the inclusion of churches under the Social Security Act to be a violation of the principles of religious liberty, the Boston Baptist Ministers' Conference recently passed the following resolution:

> "Whereas, we have been informed that our National Congress has been requested to include the churches of our country under the operation of the National Security Act, we the members of the Boston Baptists Ministers Conference, hereby express our opposition to any such inclusion, whether it be by act, or resolve of Congress, or by executive order of the President of the United States, or any other officer of our government.
>
> "We believe that such inclusion would be subversive to the moral and spiritual welfare of the churches, and contrary to the provisions of our National Constitution guaranteeing religious liberty. This is a matter of profound conviction of conscience with us to which we cannot willingly submit.....
>
> "Resolved that we encourage our members and lay members of our churches, to send personal letters to their representatives in Congress expressing their disapproval of such inclusion of churches under the Social Security Act as being a violation of religious liberty." (1

In carrying out their principle of absolute separation of Church and State, Baptists are opposed to any legislative

1. "What Shall Baptists Say about Inclusion under the Social Security Act?", by Otis W. Foye, D.D. In "The Watchman Examiner", March 16, 1939, p.271.272.

measures whereby public money might be appropriated for parochial schools,parochial school buses, and the like. Likewise, any legislative measures to appoint an American ambassador to the Vatican is against the principle of absolute separation of Church and State. The Baptist congregation at Anacostia, D.C., protested to President Roosevelt regarding the adjournment of Congress out of respect to Pope Pius XI, holding such action to be against the principle of absolute separation of Church and State.(1 Baptists maintain that there is no absolute separation of Church and State in our country, and that there never will be, unless the following practices are abolished: that the American Congress and the state legislatures are opened with prayer; that the President, the governors, and civil officials, and courts of justice take and use oaths sworn on the Bible; that the army and the navy have chaplains and Christian associations; that ministers and churches make efforts to enforce the Blue Laws and Prohibition; that ministers and churches attempt to control public schools and universities;that church property is exempted from taxation. (2 Some Baptists even fear that such a simple thing as the pledging of allegiance to the flag,

> "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,and to the Republic for which it stands; one nation,indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,"(1

is likely to inculcate in the minds of their children that the state is their religion and their first allegiance.Baptists will continue to raise their voices loudly against any all practices in the state whereby the Church is involved in any way.

1. "Lutheran Witness",March 21,1939,p.97.
2. Sermon manuscript to Rev.E.T.Dahlberg,delivered October 21, 1934,at First Baptist Church,St.Paul,Minnesota.

# PART IV

# BAPTIST CHURCH POLITY

# CHAPTER I

## UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

The following words by A.H.Strong just about sum up the principles underlying the polity in the Baptist churches:

> "We have a polity analogous to that of our republic, and therefore adapted to win the increasing favor of loyal Americans. What I mean is that we represent in the Church that same principle of equality and freedom which we cherish so greatly in the State. Our church government is democratic or congregational. Since every member of the church is a member of Christ, he has a right to interpret Christ's will for himself, and to have an equal voice in the conduct of ecclesiastical affairs."(1

Basic in Baptist Church polity is their belief in the universal priesthood of the individual believer, or the competency of every soul before God through Jesus Christ. No distinction of authority is made between the clergy and the laity. It is good Baptist doctrine that a layman or unordained preacher has the same right to baptize and to conduct the Lord's Supper that the ordained minister has,although custom sets aside certain recognized pastoral leaders for these functions. Baptists stress this equality of the clergy and the laity in order to preserve the priesthood and the democracy of believers. The final authority of the church is in the congregation, not in the clergy. Every believer has the same approach to God,without any need of priestly mediation or forgiveness,and with the Bible as his only sufficient guide to faith and practice. They have consistently declined to subscribe to any written creed, believing in the right of every member to interpret Scripture for himself and to have a voice in the government and discipline

1.Strong:"Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism",p.257.

of the church. In a letter to the writer on December 15,1938, Dr.Clarence M.Gallup,Recording Secretary of the Northern Baptist Convention,stated the following with regard to Baptist Church polity:

> "As for church polity, every Baptist church is a law unto itself. There is no standard,I mean, of any church, and no ecclesiastical officers or tribunal exists to exercise authority.Whatever rules are followed are by consent of constituents, either locally or nationally."

# CHAPTER II

## INDEPENDENCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Baptist Church polity is congregational or independent. Each church is sovereign, as far as its own discipline and worship are concerned. Baptists claim that their polity is the same as that found in the church at Jerusalem. The apostles at first were the only overseers over the flock. As greater demands were made upon them, so that the work became far greater than the apostles could care for, then additional church officers were appointed. The first step was the appointment of deacons, in order to relieve the apostles from the labor and responsibility of distributing alms. Later pastors were appointed to have oversight of the churches,so that the apostles might be free to give themselves to their specific work of evangelization. Baptists assert that the New Testament bishop was not alone chosen by the entire church to be the officer of that single congregation, but that he was also regarded as one of them and one with them. No priestly character or function is ascribed either to the bishop or the deacon, no distinction is made between "clergy" and "laity", but the universal priesthood of believers is taught. Baptists maintain that there is not a single instance in the New Testament of a church, or body of churches, being ruled by ecclesiastical authority.

The only officers regarded as essential in the Baptist

1. For a history of the organization of Baptist churches,see Vedder's "A Short History of the Baptists",p.30 ff.

churches today are those mentioned in the New Testament: pastors (who are also called elders and bishops) and deacons. This is expressly stated in "The New Hampshire Baptist Confession", Article XIII:

> "We believe that a visible church is a congregation of baptized believers.....that its only spiritual officers are Bishops, or Pastors, and Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus."

Each local church calls or dismisses its own pastor, elects its own deacons, and attends to its own affairs. Being regarded as a "spiritual democracy", it is subject to no other outside power or tribunal. Any discipline required is administered by the members themselves. Admission to church membership is by vote of the local church, usually after examination of each individual candidate by a church committee. This committee is composed of the local pastor, the deacons, and such other persons as the church may elect. No specific age limit is given as to the requirements for membership, although admission of every young child is discouraged. Members are elected, and they are also transferred or excluded by their fellow members. The general care of the local church is in the hands of the church committee, which is also a standing committee. This committee has no authority except that specifically delegated it by the individual members of the local church. Likewise, no minister has any authority in a church save that one which has called him to be its pastor. Every church, therefore, when it expresses its own belief, expresses the belief of no

other than its own members.

The Baptist church has historically stood opposed to the building of great ecclesiastical systems, and has insisted upon the authority of the local church as against any authority or overhead organizations. They even resent the name "Northern Baptist Church",and insist upon "Northern Baptist Convention". They hold that the only visible corporate church body is the local church,and that it is contrary to the New Testament teaching to apply the term "church" to any corporate body such as the Episcopalians, Methodists, Roman Catholics,etc. This matter is discussed at some length in "The Watchman Examiner" for December 8,1938,p.1294, where the writer gives the following reasons for the objection of the Baptists to the name "Northern Baptist Church":

> "It is one of our Baptist tenents that there is no such thing as a visible corporate church body other than the local church. We hold that the application of the term 'church' to the various sects is contrary to the New Testament teaching and example. Moreover, such usuage takes on the nature of a presumption. To give to corporate bodies such as the Presbyterians,Episcopalians,Methodists or Roman Catholics the right to be called a church is to make an exclusive claim that each of these sects looks upon itself as the church.
>
> "Baptists do not look upon themselves as such nor do they admit the right ofgreat bodies of Christian churches to claim that they are the church. For the sake of a clear understanding we would inform our friends in other denominations that the Northern Baptist Convention is a voluntary fellowship of thousands of sovereign,local Baptist churches. These churches are independent of each other and their independence is absolute. None of our Convention officials will attempt to invade the self-government of any local church. Those of our officials who, in the past, may have forgotten the rule and have meddled in the affairs of the local churches in which they have no membership, not only failed to accomplish anything, but they suffered instead.
>
> "Baptists follow the New Testament method. There we do not read of corporate bodies of churches. None

> of the churches of that day set up any theological or geographical clusters of local churches and call them the church."

Baptists fear that an ecumenical church might at first be a bureaucy, with a representative form of government, but that it is destined ultimately to become an autocracy. Rev.C.A. Wade asserts:

> "We should remember that with Catholics a bureaucy preceded an autocracy."(1

If democracy is abandoned in the church,the result will be a rise of dictators in the church who will enthrone an autocracy. Lest this occur, Baptists struggle valiantly for this goal,namely, thatthe local church be an independent body.

1."The Debt the Baptists Owe theWorld",by Rev.C.A.Wade. In the "Watchman Examiner",June 23,1938,p.707.

# CHAPTER III

## CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY

Candidates for the ministry may differ in their views. The ordination councils in the Baptist churches are interested today more in the personal and spiritual qualifications of the candidates than in severe theological tests. Nevertheless, candidates are expected to espouse the following principles: divine authority of the Scriptures, conscience-freedom, need of redemptive experience. Professor A.H.Strong, President of Rochester Theological Seminary, asserts:

> "I recognize the right of others to another conclusion than mine. I am not willing to stake the Christian faith upon the correctness even of the original autographs of Scripture in matters so unessential as these. I open my mind to evidence. I do not prejudge the case. I refuse to impose on students for the ministry the dogma of absolute inerrancy in matters which do not affect the substance of the Bible history, or the substance of the Bible doctrine."(1

Applicants for the ministry are licensed to preach by the church in which they hold membership. After a period of service as licentiate, the candidate may desire ordination. A council of sister churches is called by the church in which the candidate holds membership. On the recommendation of this council, the church arranges for ordination. It should be noted that the right to license and the right to ordain are held by the individual members of the church. During the ministry of a certain pastor, he usually is a member of the church which he serves, and is amenable to its discipline, although each individual pastor may hold membership in some other church.

1. Strong: "Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism", p.127.

# CHAPTER IV

## LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Baptists believe today that too great independence, too much individualism, will result in schisms and sectarianism. Consequently, they are organized into various associations. The local associations usually follow county lines, or small groups of counties; or a group of pastors from a large city may be organization into such an association. Each local church authorizes as its delegates the pastor plus one delegate for every one hundred members or fraction thereof. A church with 625 members would, accordingly, have seven delegates, in addition to the local pastor. The state or provincial conventions have the same representation. There are several national societies or boards, some of them incorporated and fulfilling large religious and financial responsibilities. To this latter group belongs the American Baptist Publication Society(1824), the Baptist Board of Education(1920), Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board(1912). It might be interesting to note that in the Northern Baptist Convention we have thirty-six State Conventions, 27 City Missi n Societies, a Baptist Young Peoples Union of America, National Council of Northern Baptist Men, Ministers Council, seventeen Conferences of Foreign Language Peoples, a score of Councils and Commissions for special service, forty-two homes for the aged, orphanages and hospitals, seventy national journals and state bulletins.(1

1. This information has been received from Dr.C.M.Gallup, Recording Secretary of the Northern Baptist Convention, and is taken from an article which has been written for the Nelson Encyclopedia(which is not yet on the market).

The three largest national Baptist bodies in the United States are the Northern Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Convention, and National Baptist Convention(Negro). These three bodies include the larger part of the approximately 11,000,000 Baptists in North America. The Canadian groups are the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces, Baptist Union of Western Canada. Mexico has a small Baptist Convention. In Australia and New Zealand there are seven Baptist unions. In Great Britain,the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland is outstanding. Baptist work is well established in sixty-eight countries. It is broadly supervised by the Baptist World Alliance, organized in 1905, with headquarters in London. It meets every five years. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America includes various national Baptist bodies associated for cooperative religious and social projects. In 1938, a World Council of Churches was organized in Utrecht,Holland, which the Baptists have joined,and to which they give their fullest and most cordial cooperation. It should be noted that none of these associations or conventions have any authority to legislate for the churches, and have no power to enforce any action they may take. They meet regularly for inspiration and consultation on educational,missionary, and philanthropic matters.

Baptists believe that only through incessant evangelization will the Baptist churches grow. Therefore, it is their duty

to bring the gospel to other people. The Baptist churches,as a church, would never think of sending out missionaries. That is the work of individual societies. At first there were no missionaries societies of any kind. Some of the Associations, like the Philadelphia Association, did mission work. In May, 1814, in Philadelphia, we have the formation of the "General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions". In 1832, with the organization of the "American Baptist Home Mission Society", provision was made for the permanent work of Home Missions. The year 1871 saw the formation of the "American Baptist Foreign Mission Society", as well as the "Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society". The "Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society" was founded in 1877.

## CONCLUSION

### SAFEGUARDING THIS INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Since Baptists are convinced that they have the true religion, they feel conscience-bound to safeguard that truth. That implies the obligation to educate themselves and to care for the education of others. With their provision of education, however, there must also be the spirit of freedom, the liberty to follow truth to the farthest bounds of thoughts. This principle lay at the basis of the establishment of their schools, both for the better education of their children and the rising ministry. Private schools were established in various states.

About 1750 some Baptists in the Philadelphia Association considered the possibility of founding a higher institution of learning, since many of the existing colleges were strongly anti-Baptist in sentiment and teaching. When they encountered some difficulty in obtaining a charter for such an institution from the legislatures of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, the men turned to Rhode Island. From this latter state the Baptists received a liberal charter for the establishment of a college. With James Manning, a graduate of Princeton, as President, Brown University was founded.[1] The university was founded on a broad basis of religious freedom, but under the special care of the Baptists. The charter, accepted by the legislature of Rhode Island in 1764, provided that the president, twenty-two trustees, and eight fellows were forever to be Baptists; but the remaining trustees of the thirty-six were to be of the dif-

1. At first called Rhode Island College, the name was later changed to Brown University.

ferent denominations represented in the State; while the four fellows were to be elected "indifferently of any or all denominations". To all positions on the faculty, save that of president, and to all other honors and advantages, persons of all religious denominations were to be freely admitted. Although this charter, prepared by Rev.Ezra Stiles, congregational minister of Newport, did give to the Baptists perpetual control of the institution, yet it was in perfect harmony with the spirit of religious liberty that had characterized the colony of Rhode Island from the beginning. After Dr.Manning's death in 1791 the corporation voted:

> "That the children of the Jews may be admitted into this institution and entirely enjoy the freedom of their own religion, without any constraint or imposition whatever."(1

In 1819 Colgate University was founded. To supply the need of a better theological education, we get Newton Theological Institution in Boston, in 1825. These institutions,like Brown University, hold to the principle of soul-liberty, freedom of conscience. Further information on the institutions founded by the Baptists can be obtained in any good history of them.

Not only by a good educational system , but also by joining an organization like the World Council of Churches Baptists believe that they are able to safeguard their principle of individualism. Through the World Council of Churches they testify

1. Strickland:"Roger Williams",p.108.

of the principles for which they stand. In answer to the question, "How Should Baptists look at the World Council of Churches?", Dr.K.S.Scott gives the following answer:

> "First, through the World Council of Churches we can give our Baptist witness to the church of Christ as a whole....Through participating in its gatherings and its organization we have an opportunity to make clear to our fellowChristians of other communions the principles for which we as Baptists are called to stand.
>
> "Second, through the World Council of Churches we Baptists can enter more fully into fellowship with followers of Christ who are not of our tradition.... What is best in our Baptist heritage can be strengthened through the World Council of Churches. Our Baptist conviction of the direct access to God of each believer makes for variety, for because of our differing backgrounds and temperaments God is heard by each of us in differing tones....."(1

Baptists assert that the best safeguard of their individual freedom is their socalled principle of stability, that is, the principle of direct and entire obedience to Christ. While they claim to be an absolute democracy as far as the interpretation of Christ's will is concerned, at the same time they maintain they are an absolute monarchy so far as respects direct obedience to that will itself. They adhere to His word as the only standard of truth.

> "Soul-liberty, under bonds to none but Christ and his word, has been in the past the secret of Baptist success and progress. If any man assumes to impose his authority upon the free spirit and to dictate what we shall believe, let Baptist blood arise and Baptist courage answer: 'Who are you, to interpose between me and Christ? To my Master alone I stand or fall!'"(2

1. "The Watchman Examiner", March 16,1939,p.273-274.
2. Strong:"Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism",p.265.

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# ERRATA

Page

5 , line 9, read "Smithfield" for "Smithfiled".
7 , line 9, read "contact" for "conttact".
8 , line 17, read "refusal" for "refussal".
14 , line 5, read "Williams" for "Wiliams".
17 , line 17, read "separation" for sepration".
25 , line 6, read "presbytery" for "presbyery".
32 , line 12, read "of" for "ot".
35 , line 20 of quotation, read "worship" for "wroship".
35 , line 23 of quotation, read "believing" for "unbelieving".
36 , line 11, read "ingress and egress" for "ingress or "egress".
37 , line 23, omit "in" and read "maintain each other".
38 , line 19, read "society" for "socieity".
49 , line 13, the "w" in "Which" should be written small("which").
52 , line17 , read "dramatic" for "dramtic".
62 , line 35, read "ungodly" for"ungoldly".
74 , line 6, read "organized" for "organization".