

A short description of Historic Baptists

By Raul Enyedi

As the preservers of the doctrinal and practical simplicity found in the New Testament, and having a continuous existence from the first Christian century until this day, among the Baptists are to be found the original Christians. Our founder is not a man, but the Savior Jesus Christ Himself.

In history we have been known under different names which were given to us due to a certain characteristic or a certain leader or place. Novatians, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigenses, Waldenses are just a few of these names. Generally we were known by the deprecatory name “Anabaptists” (rebaptizers). This was because we did not recognize acts performed by churches which we considered not authentic and baptized those who were converted to our faith. However, we never acknowledged that name, because we did not consider that we baptized the second time. Rather we baptized for the first time in a correct, biblical way. In the course of time the prefix “ana” was dropped and we remained known as “Baptists” (baptizers).

Our historic development is different than that of the traditional Churches. We did not come out of the Protestant Reformation, nor from the Roman Church, nor from the Greek. We did not identify with any of these churches and we are not like them. Sir Isaac Newton, the great man of science, stated that he was convinced that the Baptists are the only Christians “that have never symbolized with Rome.” Looking back in history, we take this statement as a great compliment.

Being unjustly called “heretics” (Mircea Eliade, the great historian of religion, said “the first Christian forms were closer to those who were classed later on as heretical”), our forefathers were severely persecuted by both the ecclesiastic and secular authorities. Many paid with their own lives for what was thought to be the ultimate guilt, that of believing and practicing in their everyday lives the principles of the New Testament and of asking for freedom for all people to serve God according to the dictates of their conscience. Even though millions were martyred for their faith, in their turn they never persecuted any other person. Nobody suffered persecution at the hand of the Baptists and not even one drop of blood was spilled in the name of our religion!

The particularities after which our churches can be identified today, as well as in any given time of Christian history are the following:

1. According to the biblical definition, **the church is the assembly of baptized believers in a given place – an organization centered on spiritual activities, whose Founder, Head and Lawgiver is the Savior Jesus Christ.** The church is not a building and is not formed only of the clergy. We do not believe in concepts like national or universal Church, these being in contradiction with the Scriptures.

2. **Members of a church can be only persons who believed the Gospel and whose lives have been visibly changed.** To believe the Gospel means to believe that man deserves death for his sins, and can be saved only by God, by grace (that is, without deserving salvation) because of the fact that Christ suffered the punishment for his sins. We believe that man cannot save himself by his works and cannot possibly cause God to be favorable toward him. Man is totally dependent on God's mercy.
3. **The way to enter the church is by baptism (performed only by immersion) based on the personal testimony of each candidate.** This is the beginning of the Christian life. From that moment follows obedience and faithfulness toward all the teachings of the New Testament.
4. **The church has only two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper.** These are symbolic. Nothing miraculous happens during these ceremonies. They commemorate the death and the resurrection of the Lord and show our identification with Him. These are not saving sacraments, therefore, participation in them does not assure anyone's salvation.
5. **The laws and ordinances upon which the church functions are found exclusively in the New Testament** (even though we believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God). The church is a New Testament institution. Therefore, we do not accept other standards, viz. Old Testament Jewish forms and practices, Church tradition, teachings of a modern prophet, etc.
6. **There is no hierarchy or clergy in the church.** The church has only two sorts of servants. Pastors, who are also called bishops and elders in the Scriptures. They have responsibility for the teaching and spiritual growth of believers; and deacons, who take care of the natural duties of the church.
7. **The church functions as a pure democracy.** Every member is actively involved in the life of the church and the decisions are made by the vote of the majority. There are no differences between members, all being equal. We do not have boards, committees or other ruling bodies.
8. **The churches – local assemblies – are independent** one from another in the exercise of their laws and discipline, but cooperate one with another as equals in different activities. No church has authority over another one. The association of churches in different supra-church structures is unbiblical and harmful to local churches.

9. **We believe in the absolute separation between church and state.** We pay authorities what we owe them, as citizens of the state in which we live. We do not demand concessions from the government. We believe that the expenses of each church are not public expenses, but must be supported by the members of that church.
10. **We believe and maintain that every man has the right to religious freedom.** Nobody has the right to impose a religion by force, because every person is responsible before God for what he believes and for the way he lives his life.

These ten particularities make us differ from many churches that are still called “Baptist,” but they represent the doctrinal and practical skeleton by which a Baptist church, can be recognized, whatever name it bore or historic period in which it existed. Since all these principles are found in the Scriptures, we consider them all to be essential characteristics without which a church cannot be an authentic church of Christ.

A few other characteristics are worth noticing.

We believe that the only intermediary between God and men is Jesus Christ. Through Him we have free access to God, without needing the intercession of priests or saints.

Our churches do not have holydays. What most people consider to be Christian holydays are actually Jewish rituals, but even more often old pagan celebrations to which were given Christian names. From these pagan celebrations the practices and sometimes even the dates were kept. The celebration of Christmas, for example, is also called the celebration of the Lord’s Nativity. But the Scriptures do not give an exact date of His birth, but only the approximate period (end of September, beginning of October). If we try to find in history the origin of the date and practices of Christmas we shall find them as coming from paganism. Moreover, the Bible does not tell us that we must celebrate His birth. These are sufficient reasons for us not to be involved in such holydays. For the Christian, every day lived in obedience to God is a day of celebration, of rest for the soul.

We believe that the purpose of the church is not that of granting salvation to men. The principle “there is no salvation outside the church” is unbiblical. God is the one who saves souls, not men. Men cannot save themselves and cannot save anyone else, whoever they might be and whatever they might do. The purpose of the church is that of representing Christ and His message before the rest of the world and of helping the spiritual growth of believers. An authentic church is the place where God accepts the worship and the service of believers.

Baptists always promoted the increase of knowledge and education among men. The concept of blind faith is foreign to us. We do not have lists of forbidden books, secular or religious, and we encourage true science. The Bible does not encourage narrowness and ignorance. The saying “believe and search not” is not biblical, as many

believe. The Bible states the contrary: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." This is our principle.

We are not part of the ecumenical movement (the movement of unification of churches) because, unfortunately, they do not return to truth, or to the spirituality of original Christianity, or to the teachings and practices of the New Testament. On the contrary, these are continually ignored. The doctrinal basis of ecumenism is the decrees of the first ecumenical councils.

We are different and separated from Baptist churches that are involved directly or indirectly, through the representatives of their ruling bodies, in the ecumenical movement or have given up some of the fundamental Baptist principles.

Our purpose is not the conversion of the world or a certain nation to one ideology. We do not use marketing strategies for development and do not seek financial success or advantages. What we hope to accomplish, and that we shall do, if the Lord wills, is to present the Gospel of Christ to as many people as we can and to convince them to read the Holy Scriptures because there is found the way to eternal life. The rest depends on God.