

CHAPTER V.

EASTERN STATES.

We come now to look into the history of the Eastern States on this question, taking the Philadelphia Association as to the center. This is the oldest Association in America, constituted in 1707 A.D. and the London Confession of Faith which they adopted, in 1742, with slight alteration, thus making it their own, has been considered the most satisfactory statement of Baptist belief to be found anywhere, outside of the Bible. The churches composing this Association were organized of Baptists emigrating from England and Wales, except the Old Welch Tract Church, which emigrated from Wales in church capacity.

What has been the practice of this mother Association, and the Eastern States, in regard to alien immersion? What did they esteem as necessary to valid baptism? These are the questions to be settled in the light of the records.

This Association for a considerable period of time embraced practically all the churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, with some of the Virginia and New England churches. To determine the practice of this Association on this question is to settle the question concerning a large scope of country. They were organized as an Association thirty-five years before they put forth any Confession of Faith. They were Baptists and knew why they were Baptists. They knew what they believed and why they believed it. They were what their enemies were

pleased to call Ana-baptists. But in 1742 A. D., they reached the conclusion that it was best to put forth a statement of their belief that others might know where they stood. So they adopted the London Confession of Faith, with slight changes, as the expression of their own belief, thus making it theirs, and which since that time has been known as the “Philadelphia Confession of Faith”. This confession either in full, or in an abridged form, was adopted by practically all the old Associations, and churches, up until the middle of last century, when the New Hampshire Confession was put forth. The Philadelphia, with many other old and new Associations and churches, still retain it. The Twenty-eighth Article reads thus: “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only Lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world. These holy appointments are to be administered by those only who are qualified and thereunto called, according to the commission of Christ.”

It has been argued that this article does not involve the question of alien immersion, and that no such thought occupied the mind of the messengers of Philadelphia Association when they adopted it. But to this author’s mind the language is plain and the diction forces such a conclusion.

In the first place baptism is “to be continued in his church to the end of the world”. With these words we are driven to one or the other of the following conclusions: First – That this language

was intended to exclude baptisms in other denominations; or, Second – That the Philadelphia Association regarded these denominations as the church of Jesus Christ. Which horn of the dilemma will the reader take? At that very time these same Baptists were being fined, imprisoned, whipped and persecuted in every conceivable way, by these denominations. There were forced, by taxation to pay the salaries of Pedo-baptist pastors. They taxed the poor Baptist preacher to support Pedo-baptist preachers.

“Three hundred and ninety-eight acres of land belonging, in part, to Dr. Ebenezer Smith, Baptist minister, and the Ashfield Baptists, had been seized and sold to build a Congregational meeting house. On this land was a dwelling house and orchard, and also a burying-ground, so that the Baptists found their dead taken from them as well as their property.” Armitage, p. 329.

“Taylor says that the Baptists ministers were ‘fined, pelted, beaten, imprisoned, poisoned and hunted with dogs; their congregations were assaulted and dispersed; the solemn ordinance of baptism was rudely interrupted, both administrators and candidates being plunged and held beneath the water till nearly dead; they suffered mock trials, and even in the courts of justice were subjected to indignation’.” Armitage, p. 349.

When they were confiscating the property of the Baptists, one of their ministers got up to preach to the poor wicked (?) Baptists, and among other things he said:

“The Baptists, for refusing to pay an orthodox minister, shall be cut in pound pieces, and boiled for their fat to grease the devil’s carriage.” Old Landmarkism, p. 197.

This was the state of affairs at the time the Philadelphia Association adopted their Confession of Faith. Who can believe for one moment that they had in mind and meant to refer to these persecuting bodies, when they spoke of baptism continuing in the church of Jesus Christ? This you must believe, or accept the only alternative, that they meant to confine baptism within the pales of Baptist churches.

In the second place they say: That those “only” can baptize “who are qualified and thereunto called according to the commission of Christ”.

What do they mean by being qualified? They state positively that he must be called for that specific purpose. Can any one believe that these Baptists regarded the minister of these denominations called of God to baptize when they would come to where the Baptists had met to baptize and baptize dogs in mockery, and then drag the Baptist preachers off and put them in jail, and whip their bare backs till the blood would run down upon the ground? Does any one suppose these Baptists, regarded them “Called according to the commission of Christ” to baptize? when they were doing all within their power to destroy baptism from off the face of the earth? It seems such a conclusion would be

impossible. But if any one is still skeptical on this point, we turn to their minutes where they forever put the matter at rest.

In their minutes, 1787, the First church of New York presented the following query: “Whether a person applying to one of our churches for admission as a member, and satisfies the church that he has been previously baptized by immersion, on a profession of his faith in Christ, but at the same time confesses the person who administered the ordinance was, at the time, neither ordained to the work of the ministry, now baptized himself by immersion, but only chosen and called by a religious society to officiate as their teacher or minister, should be received?”

This matter was laid over until the next sitting of the Association, that they might have a whole year to deliberate on it: that their action might be the result of mature thought. At the next meeting of the body (1788) they gave the following reply: “We deem such baptism null and void.”

“First – Because a person that has not been baptized must be disqualified to administer baptism to others, and especially if he be also unordained.

“Second – Because to admit such baptism as valid, would make void the ordinances of Christ, throw contempt on his authority, and tend to confusion, for if baptism be not necessary for an administrator of it, neither can it be for church communion, which is an inferior act; and if such baptism be valid, then

ordination is unnecessary, contrary to Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 4:14, Titus 1:5, and our Confession of Faith, Chapter 27.

“Third – Of this opinion we find were our Associations in times past; who put a negative on such baptisms in 1729, 1732, 1744, 1749 and 1768.

“Fourth – Because such administrator has no commission to baptize, for the words of the Commission were addressed to the apostles, and their successors in the ministry, to the end of the world, and these are such, whom the church of Christ appoints to the whole work of the ministry.”

It would seem from the above that they studied their words employing the very strongest terms possible, and basing the whole upon their “Confession of Faith.” But we are not done with this matter yet. In 1791 there came a request from Abraham Booth of London England, that the Association would rescind this action. Again, they laid the matter over for one year. So in 1792 they took the matter up and passed the following:

“A query respecting the validity of baptism by an unordained and unbaptized administrator, referred in the sixth of October 5, in our minutes of last year, was taken up and determined in the negative”.

Thus after a lapse of five years time, and two years deliberation, this, the oldest and largest Association in America, with between fifty and one hundred churches, covering several

States, filed their opposition to Baptist churches receiving alien immersion, in the very strongest terms it was possible for them to employ. In this Association at that time were such ministers of renown as Samuel Jones, Samuel Morgan, John Boggs, Oliver Hart, Morgan Edwards, William Rogers, Thomas Ustick and many others, too numerous to mention.

Over against this two instances have been cited as “clear cases” of this Association receiving alien immersion. As it is the purpose of this author to give as nearly as possible an impartial history I make note of them. From the minutes of 1765 I take the following:

“Query, from Smith’s Creek: Whether it be proper to receive a person into communion who had been baptized by immersion by a minister of the church of England, if no other objection could be made? Answer: yea, if he had been baptized on a profession of faith and repentance.”

If we assume that the church of England refers to the Episcopal church, then the case is made out. There are some reasons, however, why we have reached the conclusion that such was not the case. In the first place; the term “church” in the minutes begins with a small letter instead of a capital, which would not have been the case, if it had been a denominational title. In the second place; in the action of the Association in 1788, when they refer to the former actions of the Association, on this question, they make no mention of this case. In the third place, just three years

after this (1768) we find the following: “In answer to a query from New York, it was agreed that baptism, administered by a person not ordained, was invalid and disorderly.” In taking this action they make no reference to the action of 1765, three years previous.

The question come back, if they did not refer to the State Church of England, what did they refer to? This was the year that the Philadelphia Association was having so much trouble with the General Baptists of England, and their custom of baptizing unconverted people. I think it more probable that they referred to these as the “church of England”. This was the year in which Kehukee Association was constituted through the ministry of missionaries from Philadelphia Association, and every student of history known full well that the question of baptizing by these people without any profession faith on the part of the one baptized, was a question more than any other being discussed at that time. The answer, in which they emphasized this one point of faith before baptism, is, we think, a strong pointer that the question referred to the General Baptist church of England.

The other instance referred to is found in the minutes for 1806, and is as follows:

“Query: Whether can an orthodox Baptist church receive a person who has been baptized by a Tunker Universalist, without baptizing him again? The person has renounced Universalist principles. Answer: Yes”.

Now, it is well known that “Tunkers” is but another name for German Baptists. The fact that in this query, “Baptist church” is qualified by the term “orthodox,” would seem to indicate that they regarded the applicant from some sort of a “Baptist” church. We are not informed as to all the circumstances connected with this case. But the fact that from time to time they put their unequivocal veto on the reception of alien immersion is sufficient proof that they did not regard this as a case of alien immersion. In fact a whole church of Tunkers , or German Baptists, united with the Philadelphia Association in 1848, and so far as this author knows is still a member of that body.

It seems that it would take quite an amount of credulity, to believe that these two doubtful cases, were plain cases of alien immersion, when the same body composed of the same men, put forth so many unequivocal statements to the contrary both before and after.

We append some other instances in the Philadelphia Association not heretofore mentioned.

In 1732 we have the following: “Whether a person not being baptized himself, and presuming in private, to baptize another; whether pretended baptism be valid or no, or whether it might not be adjudged a nullity.

“Resolved, We judge such baptism is invalid, and no better than if it had never been done.”

In 1740, “a query from Cohansie: Whether a pious person, of the number of Pedo-baptists, who forbears to have his own children sprinkled, may be admitted into our communion without being baptized?...

“Given to vote, and palled all in the negative, Nemine Contradicente.” (Without Opposition.)

In 1744 there came a “query from the church of Bethlehem: Suppose a person baptized by a man, who takes upon him to preach the gospel and proceeds to administer the ordinances without a regular call or ordination from any church; whether the person so baptized my be admitted into any orderly church. Yes or nay?

“Resolved, We cannot encourage such irregular proceedings; because it hath ill consequence every way attending it; it is also opposite to our discipline. We therefore give our sentiments that such administrations are irregular, invalid, and of no effect.”

In 1746. “Query: Whether it is regular for an Association to receive in, and admit as members of the Association, such as at the same time they would not admit to their church communion, if opportunity offered?”

“We answer, no.”

They everywhere prohibit Pedo-baptists from their communion. In 1749 they reaffirm these positions.

In 1768. “In answer to a query from New York, it was agreed that baptism, administered by a person not ordained, was invalid and disorderly.

This old association advised their ministers and churches against pulpit affiliation with other denominations. (See Minutes for 1734, 1747, and 1771.)

In order that the reader may understand what these people mean by an ordained minister, we append a circumstance reported by J. M. Pendleton, when he resided in Upland, Penn. His report was published in *The Baptist*:

“Rev. Henry Losch, a Presbyterian preacher, having learned the way of the Lord more perfectly, united with the Memorial church (Philadelphia) and was baptized by the pastor, Dr. Henson. In due time a council was called to consider the matter of Mr. Losch’s ordination. It was, fortunately, a large council, confined, so far as I know, to our city churches, and therefore it was not my privilege to be present. The council having been organized, Dr. J. Wheaton indorsing the validity of the Presbyterian ordination already received by the brother. This led to an earnest discussion, and the vote on the resolution was quite significant – two for it, fifty against it. Dr. Smith was, of course, chagrined, and referred in no very courteous way to the decision as an ‘outrage on a Christian church,’ but the council was firm. The brother has been ordained – I do not say re-ordained, but simply ordained.”

This shows very clearly that when they speak of an “ordained minister” they mean a minister ordained by a Baptist church.

We will close this chapter with a letter from Spencer H. Cone, who was at the time he wrote this (1845) pastor of the First Baptist church in New York City. This church for a half century represented in the Philadelphia Association. Spencer H. Cone, in his prime, was considered the greatest preacher in America. Hear his testimony:

“DEAR BRETHREN: – The question you ask was presented to me in July by Brother J. Tripp, Jr., of your church. I replied that, in my opinion, valid baptism could only be administered by a duly authorized minister; and stated my impression also that the ‘regular Baptist churches of England and the United States ’ had long held the same sentiment. I wrote in the midst of numerous calls, and without dreaming that the hasty line was to appear in print, but make no complaint. My Baptist sentiments are public property, for in things pertaining to faith and practice I have no secrets.

“First, then, what has been the sentiment of ‘Regular Baptist churches’ in England and the United States upon this subject? The ministers and messengers of more than one hundred baptized congregations of England and Wales (denying Arminianism) met in London, July 3-11, A. D., 1689, and published what they call ‘The Confession of our Faith,’ and

recommended it perusal not only to the members of our churches, but to all other Christians who differ from us. Among these ministers you have the names of Knollys, Kiffin, Keach, Collins, Harris, Gifford, Vaux, Price, Finch, and a host of others, whose praise was in all the regular Baptist churches, viz.: such as was opposed to ‘general redemption and open communion.’ Under the head of baptism, among other things, they stated that it is to be administered by those only who are qualified and thereunto called.’

“The Philadelphia Association was formed in 1707 and adopted, with alternation, the London Confession of 1689; so that in this county it has gone by the name of the Philadelphia confession of faith; and since that period most of the Associations in the Middle States have been formed upon the same platform. The New York Association, organized in 1791, has always held the views I advocate. In 1821, the particular point before us was discussed and settled, in answer to a ‘query’ from one of the churches similar to that contained in your letter. Mr. Parkinson was appointed to write a circular letter on baptism, in which he maintained the ‘immersion of professing believers, by a baptized minister, as essential to gospel baptism.’

“After the adoption of this circular a resolution was passed, stating that although they considered the query sufficiently answered in the circular, nevertheless they record the opinion of the Association, that Baptist churches had better never receive person, either as members, or even as transient communicants

upon such baptism, viz.: by unimmersed administrators, many reasons are embodied in the resolution to sustain the opinion given, as the disunion, inconvenience, uneasiness, etc., which have always arisen in churches receiving such members.’ But the basis of their opinion is thus set down in plain words – ‘Pedo-baptist administrators, as far as we can see, are unknown in the Holy Scriptures.’ And that is just as far as I can see, and no further.

“The First church in this city, of which I am pastor, was founded in 1745, and as the Bible has not changed, she still adheres to her original Confession of Faith. The article on baptism closes thus: ‘That nothing is a Scriptural administration of baptism, but a total immersion of the subject in water, in the name of the Holy Trinity, by a man duly authorized to administer gospel ordinances.’ (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:40-42.) The action of this church for one hundred years has been to reject as invalid, baptism administered by an unimmersed administrator. During my residence in Maryland and Virginia, the Baltimore, Columbia and Kettocton Associations (which I attended for eight or ten years, and was personally acquainted with every minister belonging to them) held the same sentiment. The subject was called up in the Associations while I was pastor of the Alexandria Baptist church, D. C., thus: A Mr. Plummer, from down East, a Free-Will Baptist, or ‘Christian,’ as he called himself, immersed a number of persons in Virginia, and founded a Baptist church. He baptized in the name of the Father, son and Spirit, and yet denied the divinity of the Son. In a year or two he departed from our borders—his disciples were

scattered. Some of them were really converted, and wished to unite with some Baptist church in the vicinity. The church and pastor in Alexandria being satisfied with the Christian experience and deportment of two of them, I baptized them into the name of our God, Father, Son and Spirit—co-equal and co-eternal—and we no more considered their baptism by Plummer, as Christian, than we should if they had been dipped by a Mohammedan into the name of his prophet. These Associations then held that valid baptism must be administered, not only by an immersed minister, but also one in good standing in our denomination.

“In the early part of my ministry, I was intimately acquainted with Gano, Baldwin, Holcomb, Staughton, Williams, Richards, Fristoe, Mercer and many others, now gone to glory; and I never heard one of them drop a hint that baptism by a Pedobaptist minister opened the door into a regular Baptist church. Indispensable engagements compel me to close. That there are now many pastors and churches opposed to my views I know—painfully know—but all this does not convince me that our fathers were wrong in this matter. I must be made over again before I count that to be ‘valid baptism’ when neither the administrator nor those who ordained him, believed immersion of believers any part of their commission, and never submitted to it themselves in obedience to the command of the King of Zion. Affectionately, your brother in gospel bonds. S. H. Cone. “New York, September 30, 1845.”

This letter was published in a number of papers and one book that I know. This is taken from the columns of the Baptist Messenger, which in turn took it from the Examiner and Chronicle. In the Examiner and Chronicle we find the following note appended:

“Mr. Editor:—While the valid administration of baptism is under consideration, I hope you will publish the following letter from Rev. Spencer H. Cone, D. D. , written to certain brethren in South Carolina . I copy the letter from my ‘scrapbook,’ and I advise all our young ministers especially to keep scrapbooks, that they may preserve important newspaper articles. In behalf of truth. J. M. P.”

The “J. M. P.” evidently stands for J. M. Pendleton.

Spencer H. Cone was born and spent all of his eventful ministerial life within the bounds of what was once Philadelphia Association. No one could speak with more authority upon these questions. His letter settles two points. First—That up until less than one hundred years ago, the Baptists of America, as a denomination, stood solidly against the reception of alien immersion. Second—Within the first half of the nineteenth century the contrary sentiment began to assert itself; until today numbers within the denomination will apologize for it, while some openly espouse the cause of alien immersion.