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**THE BAPTIST HISTORY COLLECTION**  
**SPECIFIC HISTORICAL ISSUES**

**THE REFORMATION AND  
BAPTIST COMPROMISE**

*by I. K. Cross*

*A Concern Booklet*

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth*

— <sup><1960></sup>Psalm 60:4

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# THE REFORMATION AND BAPTIST COMPROMISE

I. K. CROSS

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# THE REFORMATION AND BAPTIST COMPROMISE

Baptists have been betrayed into the hands of Protestantism by their own historians. While Protestantism failed in the 16th and 17th centuries to destroy them by fire and imprisonment, they have succeeded in the 20th century through compromise and the rewriting of history in absorbing much of Baptist life.

The issue involved is whether Jesus made and kept His promise to the *church of God* that it would never fail through all ages, from its origin to His return, or whether that promise was made only to the *kingdom of God*, while the true church became hopelessly corrupted prior to the 16th century Reformation. In more simple terms: do we have a perpetuity of true New Testament churches from Galilee and the ministry of Jesus, or do we have it only from the Reformation of the 16th century?

The answer to this question depends largely upon the *nature* of the church as set forth in the New Testament Scriptures.

## NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The issue that has separated Baptists from Protestants through the centuries has been the *nature of the church*. Baptists have held that the church is always *local* in nature. It is a visible body. Protestants, not able to completely free themselves from the influence of their Roman mother, hold that the *true* church is *universal* in nature, and therefore invisible. They are not able to distinguish between the *kingdom of God* into which all believers are born, and the *church of God*, which Jesus called out as a distinct body to serve as the executive of the kingdom.

The only place to determine the true nature of a New Testament church is the New Testament itself. Just what did Jesus declare that He was going to build, and what did His apostles and other New Testament writers consider to be the nature of the churches to whom they ministered and wrote? Did Jesus call her together Himself, or did He leave her to the minds of theologians to determine for themselves in later centuries? Does she have distinct teachings set forth in the New Testament, or are men free to make their own?

Just what *kind* of church did Jesus say He was going to build? When Jesus and John the Baptist came preaching, they declared that the “kingdom of heaven [or kingdom of God]” was at hand, and when Jesus spoke to the multitude that believed on Him, He told them about the *kingdom* of God. He told them that

many would “sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the *kingdom of heaven*” (<sup><4081></sup>Matthew 8:11). When He spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, He spoke about entering the *kingdom of God* (<sup><4083></sup>John 3:3, 5). He also told Pilate, “My *kingdom* is not of this world” (<sup><41836></sup>John 18:36). But when He took His twelve chosen apostles to upper Galilee for a more intimate discussion, He introduced a totally different word to them. There in the regions of Caesarea Philippi He told the twelve that He was going to *build His church* — His “*ekklesia*.”

While this was a new word introduced into Jesus’ discussion with His disciples, it was not new to the Greek vocabulary in which the record is written, but a term that was well-known and commonly understood.

The word is actually a compound of two Greek terms: “ek,” meaning “out of,” and “kaleo,” meaning “to call.” There can be little question of the intent of its usage in the New Testament. Even Dr. C.I. Scofield, who is largely responsible for popularizing the universal, invisible church theory through his notes in the Scofield Bible, states that an accurate definition of the word is,

“an assembly of called-out ones. The word is used of any assembly; the word itself implies no more. ...”<sup>f1</sup>

If the word implies no more, then any other concept of a New Testament church has come from the minds of men and not from the words of Jesus Christ.

An old standard Bible encyclopedia published in 1915 makes a very clear statement separating the kingdom from the church:

“*The kingdom is quite evidently not the church*, for we could hardly proclaim the Church as the first apostles proclaimed the kingdom (<sup><4082></sup>Acts 8:12). On the other hand, we certainly cannot say that the Church is an alternative after the rejection of the kingdom. To the extent that the Church is a fellowship of those who have accepted the kingdom, submitted to its rule, and become its heirs, we may rather believe that it is a creation and instrument and therefore a form and manifestation of the kingdom prior to its final establishment in glory.

“While the kingdom is still the theme of apostolic preaching, the word ‘church’ is regularly used in Acts to denote *the company of believers*, more especially in the local sense.”<sup>f2</sup>

A new work just off the press gives this *primary definition* of a church:

“A group or assembly of persons called together for a particular purpose,”<sup>f3</sup>

The common use of “ekklesia” among the Greeks referred not merely to an ambiguous assembly, but rather to a particular *kind* of assembly. Dr. Paul Goodwin, for forty years a professor at the Missionary Baptist Seminary, Little Rock, Arkansas, has clearly presented its use. He says,

“A close observation of the word ‘ekklesia’ (church) reveals three ways in which it is used: namely,

- (1) Greek;
- (2) Hebrew;
- (3) Christian.

“The Greek ekklesia was the assembly of free citizens of a city-state. The meeting was usually called by an individual who ran through the streets of the city blowing a horn.”

As he points out, the only place this usage is found in the New Testament is in <sup><41925></sup>Acts 19:35-41, where the town clerk stops a mob and reminds them that there is a *lawful assembly* (ekklesia) where such matters should be settled. But, as he then states,

“Even this mob ‘called out’ to stop the work of Paul and his fellow helpers was called a ‘church.’ The word used is ‘ekklesia’ and is translated ‘assembly’ only three times in all the New Testament. The rest of the time it is translated ‘church.’ This mob was a crowd of people called out for a purpose, and that means it was a church, but certainly it was not the Lord’s church, a New Testament Church!

“In <sup><40738></sup>Acts 7:38 the assembly of the children of Israel before the tabernacle is called a church. ‘This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers who received the lively oracles to give unto us. There were about two million members in the ekklesia (church) in the wilderness. Now no one would say it was a New Testament Church, for that was centuries before Christ, but it was a church, nevertheless, and a big one!” <sup>f4</sup>

Universal church brethren often use this passage to support their concept that the church is made up of all believers in both the Old and New Testaments, but this passage proves more than they can swallow. These brethren want a universal and *invisible* church, yet no such word is found here. Ekklesia in <sup><40738></sup>Acts 7:38 describes a very *local* and *visible* assembly. Such a concept would also make national Israel the church in the Old Testament, a concept that Jesus Himself would not recognize in His personal ministry. This group certainly did not become a part of the church simply adapted to the New

Testament period. Instead, John the Baptist upbraided them without mercy, refused to accept them, and made *new* converts to form a *new* organization, as is clearly stated in <sup><4012></sup>Acts 1:21, 22. If the church of the New Testament can be an invisible body, is it not reasonable to believe that an assembly described in the Old Testament by the same word would also be invisible? Yet there is no evidence whatever that the congregation of Israel, referred to as “the church in the wilderness,” was ever conceived as being invisible. Thus <sup><4073></sup>Acts 7:38 sets forth more clearly than ever that the use of “ekklesia” in the New Testament refers to a congregation of people both *local* and *visible*, and it is so used consistently throughout the New Testament.

Continuing with his definition of this word, Dr. Goodwin says,

“Let us note the Christian aspect of the word ‘ekklesia.’ When Jesus said, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church,’ He meant the church as an institution. He used the pronoun ‘my’ to distinguish His church from the Hebrew and Greek assemblies. Paul referred to the church as an institution when he wrote: ‘But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth’ (<sup><5415></sup>1 Timothy 3:15).

“No reference is made here to any particular church. Timothy was to behave himself in what-ever church he happened to be working.”<sup>45</sup>

Jesus did not introduce a new word to His disciples when He announced to them He was going to build His church, but rather He used a word that was commonly used and well understood by them. The difference only being that He was telling them He was going to build *His* church (ekklesia), and consequently He would establish the laws by which she would be governed. The laws of the New Testament are the laws of that church. They are God-given by its only head and founder, and no man on earth can presume to change its nature or the laws by which it is governed.

## A PLAY ON WORDS

Protestants and Baptists who have fallen into its trap usually turn to the use of the word “body” to try to establish their theory of an invisible and universal church, in addition to the obvious local congregation so clearly set forth by our Lord in His use of the word “ekklesia.” This is simply a play on words. The term “body” is used as a figure of speech. If the term Jesus used in speaking of His church was so commonly understood to refer to a local and visible assembly called out for a specific purpose, is it not reasonable to believe He chose that particular word because of this clear fact? There were two other words He

could have used which would have also referred to an assembly. “Synagoga,” obviously the word from which the word synagogue comes, could have been used to refer simply to an assembly, or He could have used the word “paneguris,” which also refers to any kind of an assembly, usually on a festive occasion. However, instead He used the most definitive word in the Greek language to describe a particular kind of assembly, and it is used consistently throughout the New Testament.

It therefore follows that any figure used to speak of the church *must* speak of the only clearly defined church in the New Testament Scriptures. A figure is not used to *change* the nature of what it illustrates, but rather to further set forth the original. There is simply no Scripture or logic to support a conclusion that the use of the term “body” speaks of a *different kind* of church, or, to use the term of Protestant theologians, the “church universal.” W. E. Vine, in defining the term “body” states that “in its figurative uses the essential idea is preserved.” Then in an effort to join the Protestant theologians and save his reputation with them he states, “It is also used metaphorically, of the mystic Body of Christ, with reference to the whole Church.” But he also then adds in the same paragraph that it is used “also of a local church.”<sup>16</sup> Pray tell me how a figure can speak of a “mystic” body and a *real* body also if there is no other warrant in discussing the nature of the church to permit it. Obviously the idea of a mystical body referring to the “whole church,” commonly accepted by Protestant thinking, is an improvisation created during the Reformation to accommodate Rome’s daughters.

There can really be no question about the “body” being a figurative reference to the “ekklesia” when Paul states plainly in <sup><4012></sup>Ephesians 1:22, 23 of “the church [ekklesia], which *is* his body.” To further close the issue he states in <sup><4004></sup>Ephesians 4:4 that “there is *one* [kind of] body.” There is not a local body and an invisible body. It is either one or the other. He adds further in verse 5 that this one kind of body has only “one faith,” one belief. That is, it cannot be composed of many different kinds of beliefs. That “faith” is “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” which Jude writes about with reference to the teachings of the New Testament in <sup><6010></sup>Jude 1:3.

The church, or ekklesia, is spoken of in an institutional sense, just as we speak of the home, or the family, as an institution. We do not speak of a large universal, invisible family, but an institution that is always recognized as referring to *any* local household anywhere. Thus we do not have to change the nature of the church to speak of it as an institution. In fact Paul speaks of the husband being the head of the wife “even as Christ is the head of the church [ekklesia].” No one has any question about what Paul meant when he said “the husband is the head of the wife,” so why should there be any question as to

what he meant when he said “Christ is the head of the church?” This doesn’t change the nature of the local assembly, and Paul declares that this is what the body is also. He further adds that this *ekklesia*, which is His body, also has only *one baptism*. This forever eliminates the attempt to have all believers baptized into the universal, invisible church by the Holy Spirit, as is so frequently attempted in ~~4:12:13~~ 1 Corinthians 12:13. Otherwise, this would invalidate baptism in water, a practice commonly accepted as biblically standard by Baptist churches.

It is noteworthy also that many of the epistles are addressed to a particular *ekklesia*. Never are they addressed to the body, or to an invisible something that cannot be identified. When Paul writes to “all that be in Rome.” He does not declare that he is writing to a church there, but to all the believers there, “beloved of God, called to be saints.” He gives no indication that he is writing to either an *ekklesia* or the “body.” He makes it rather clear that this particular epistle is written to all the believers in Rome.

However, it is quite different when he writes to “the *church* of God which *is at Corinth*.” Here he addresses an *ekklesia*, the one that is located in the city of Corinth. Likewise when he writes to “the *churches* [plural] of Galatia.” He does not address the epistle to *the church* of Galatia as one body in that Roman province, but to a number of local congregations located there, each one an *ekklesia*. When he writes to “the saints *which are at Ephesus*,” he restricts this letter to a particular city, with instructions that are applicable to all saints, but addressed to Ephesus — a very visible location in Asia. Likewise when he writes to Philippi and Colosse. When he writes to the Thessalonians, he addresses the epistle to “the church [ekklesia]” in that city.

If the so-called “true church” was a universal body when John wrote “the revelation of Jesus Christ” which was to be delivered to the churches of Asia, why didn’t the Holy Spirit have him address the letter to “the church of Asia?” Instead, He had him address it to “the *seven churches*” which are in Asia. Each of these was a particular *ekklesia*, and a particular message is addressed to each of them. If some would presume to say, “But he is addressing each of these messages to the *local* body,” that is just the point. You can’t have it both ways. Either the church is an *ekklesia*, a local congregation that can receive a particular message, or it is a universal conglomerate of believers that has no particular faith and therefore no need of a particular rebuke for what it believes.

Furthermore, Jesus purchased an *institution* with His own blood. Paul, speaking to the elders from the church at Ephesus, admonishes them to “feed the church [ekklesia] of God, which *he hath purchased with his own blood*” (~~4:10:28~~ Acts 20:28). Individual believers are purchased with the blood of Christ, as is clearly

stated throughout the New Testament. Examples are <sup><40107</sup>Ephesians 1:7 and <sup><51017</sup>Colossians 1:17. These believers make up the *kingdom* of God. Jesus did not have to purchase His kingdom, it was already His. But when He paid the price for our redemption, He also purchased the *church* of God which He had established while on earth. After His resurrection He commissioned her to evangelize the world. That institution, made up entirely of local congregations, is identified by the New Testament doctrines it holds, and not by an invisible something that compromises the true teachings of the New Testament. To misappropriate a figure, such as the body, and make it represent something other than the true New Testament *ekklesia* is a tragic error that should not be tolerated.

## ENTER THE COUNTERFEIT

All historians are aware that the universal, visible church came into being as a result of the merger of the state with the church under the Roman empire. The church became, in the mind of Rome, a universal body over which the pope became, and continues to be, head, with all Roman Catholic churches subject to his authority. This brought on the terrible persecutions of what is commonly known as the Dark Ages. When the Reformers separated from this system in the 16th century, they were determined never to come under the pope's control again, but they had no other concept of the church. This is made clear in a number of histories, but an example of the record is found in one edited by Hans J. Hillerbrand:

“Like all medieval criticism, Zwingli's preaching was directed *not against the system* from which the abuses flowed, but *only against the abuses* themselves.”<sup>f7</sup>

Consequently, they conceived the idea of the church being universal, but *invisible*, thus eliminating the visible earthly head. That this was the goal is clearly indicated in a statement made by John Knox in a discussion with Vicar-general Winham of Scotland:

“I will be of no other church but that which has Jesus Christ for pastor.”<sup>f8</sup>

This could only be a universal church, and of necessity invisible.

Martin Luther expressed his concept clearly when he said,

“We are all one body.”<sup>f9</sup>

Philip Schaff implies the same when he says, “The Reformed church is a church of the Christian people,” implying that it recognizes no distinct doctrinal

identity. He then states rather clearly the transfer of the *visible* church for the spiritual, or *invisible* one:

“The Reformation came out of the bosom of the Latin Church and broke up the *visible* unity of Western Christendom, but prepared the way for a higher *spiritual* unity.”<sup>f10</sup>

He then tells how the Reformers developed a national church, holding to the old Roman system of the church using the state to enforce its beliefs, and thus became persecutor of the Baptists as had Rome. While Protestant denominations in America can no longer have a state church, they do continue to carry the universal denominational concept.

R. K. Maiden, Kansas City, Missouri, has put the origin of this counterfeit very clearly in this summary:

“The conception and adoption of the ‘Universal church’ theory is the parent heresy in ecclesiology. How, when and where did this theory originate? The change from the idea of the individual, self-governing church to the universal church had its origin in one of the most colossal blunders of all Christian history — that of making *ecclesia* and *basileia* identical. So far from being identical, the difference between ‘Church and ‘Kingdom’ is so great as to require that they be contrasted rather than compared. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament never confused the two terms; never used one where the other can be substituted without doing violence to both terms. With two or three exceptions, *ecclesia* is used in the New Testament in the local, particular, multiple sense, while, with-out a single exception, *basileia* is used in the singular and universal sense. The taproot of the universal church theory is the identification of the Church and the Kingdom, making these two coincident, coextensive and coterminous. The theory of the identity of the Church and Kingdom and of the universality of the church were twin-born. The New Testament writers knew nothing of a world church. As nearly as can be determined, the first formal, official identification of Church and Kingdom was projected when the Roman Empire became nominally Christianized, about the time of the consummation of the great ecclesiastical apostasy. It was the Eucumenical Council of Nice, called by Constantine, Emperor of Rome, that affirmed and projected as its creed the idea of a ‘Catholic’ World Church. From then down to the Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century, the universal, *visible* theory of the church held the field, except for the scattered, comparatively obscure, hunted and persecuted little churches, known by various names at different times and places —

churches of the New Testament type in doctrine and polity. Following the Reformation movement, there emerged a new theory of the church — the universal, *invisible* spiritual theory.”<sup>f11</sup>

A Protestant minister debating a Baptist minister on this particular issue should be able to clearly define his concept of the church, and that is exactly what a Methodist minister did. Jacob Ditzler, D. D., a Methodist minister, in a debate with Dr. J. R. Graves in Carrollton, Missouri, clearly defines the Protestant version of the church:

“God has a people whom we call ‘The Universal Church’ — all in heaven and earth who are in a saved relation to God, through Christ — who, were they to die as they are, would be saved. ... The invisible church on earth — all who are in a saved relation to him — whose names are in the book of life.”<sup>f12</sup>

While there are many versions of the so-called universal, invisible church, this pretty well de-fines the general view commonly accepted by Protestantism in America today.

## BETRAYED

Prior to the 20th century, Baptists generally accepted the New Testament church as being a local assembly, rejecting the universal, invisible concept as the babe born of Protestantism. Even the “Short Confession of Faith” prepared by John Smyth in 1609 defines the church in Article 12 as follows:

“That the church of Christ is a company of the faithful; baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ.”<sup>f13</sup>

While John Smyth is hardly the most dependable Baptist that ever came down the road, he is recognized by Southern Baptists and others as being the founder of Baptist churches from which they have come. If they are willing to accept this man as their founder then it is presumed that they also accept his definition of a church.

The well-known Baptist Confession of 1611 likewise affirms the local church view. Written by Thomas Helwys and his congregation, it was printed in 1611 as “A Declaration of Faith of English People,” who were at that time still in Holland. Article 10 states,

“That the church of Christ is a company of faithful people ... separated from the world by the word and Spirit of God, ... being knit unto the Lord, and one unto another, ... by baptism, ... upon their own confession of faith and sins.”

Article 13 further states,

“That every church is to receive in all their members by baptism upon the confession of their faith and sins wrought by the preaching of the Gospel, according to the primitive Institution ... and practice. And therefore Churches constituted after any other manner, or of any other persons are not according to Christ’s Testament.”<sup>f14</sup> (Modern English by I. K. Cross)

It is interesting to note also that *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, edited by William Cathcart in 1883, accepts this definition from the 1611 declaration as the true definition of “A True Gospel Church.”<sup>f15</sup>

The famous “London Confession” of 1644 continues the visible church concept in these words:

“That Christ hath here on earth a spiritual Kingdom, ... which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed to himself, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King.”<sup>f16</sup>

The confession of 1646 states specifically that

“The church is a company of visible saints.”<sup>f17</sup>

However, by the time of the “Second London Confession” of 1677, Protestantism and the Reformation in England had taken its toll, and the influence of John Calvin’s Presbyterianism, along with the influence of the Congregationalists made their inroads into the Particular Baptist camp. They determined to make the Westminster Confession the basis for their own new confession of faith,<sup>f18</sup> and Baptists were betrayed to the universal and invisible concept. This comes through loud and clear in Article 26,

“The Catholic ... Church, which (with respect to internal work of the Spirit, and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the Elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”<sup>f19</sup>

From this point on, the protestant idea of a universal, invisible church begins to pollute Baptist life to this day, and has become a battleground among Baptists.

## THE OLD AND THE NEW

Baptists of the 20th century who are accepting the Protestant concept of the church are putting new wine in old bottles, and the bottles are bursting and spilling much Baptist truth never to be recovered.

The nature of the church was what separated Baptist churches from the state church which developed as a result of the Council of Nice in A.D. 325. It was the Donatists who refused to go along with the merging of the church with the power of the Roman empire, and it was the *nature* of the church that was so important to them. The Donatist movement was basically a rebellion against Constantine's change in the church structure. Leonard Verduin states that

“it was the question of the nature of the church as a society and its relationship to the world, ... that formed the heart of the controversy between the Catholics and the Donatists. ... The Donatists continued to think of the Church of Christ as a ‘small body of the saved surrounded by the unregenerate mass.’ ... This then was Donatism — an attempt to conserve the concept of the Church ‘based on personal faith’ and to obstruct the drift toward a Church ‘including all in a given locality.’”<sup>f20</sup>

At this point Baptists have to make a decision to go with the Donatists or the Catholics, and it is too obvious to miss that it was the *Catholics* under the influence of Constantine who made the change in the nature of the church, not the Donatists.

This concept of the church simply as a local congregation has not been confined to the Donatists prior to the Reformation, but was consistently held by those Baptists, called heretics by those who held the catholic (universal) concept. Verduin quotes Adolf von Harnack as saying,

“In the twelve centuries that went before the Reformation it has never lacked for attempts *to get away from the State-Church Priests' Church* and to reinstate the apostolic *congregational structurization*.”<sup>f21</sup>

Luther and the other Reformers could not break free of the catholic, or universal concept, and, as has been pointed out, it continues to plague us.

“Luther stopped short of a full reformation, ... (and) bogged down half-way between Catholicism and the New Testament Church organization.”<sup>f22</sup>

The result of this failure to break free of the universal church concept, and its infiltration into Baptist ranks brought also a compromise in doctrinal errors such as open communion, alien baptism, and other Protestant compromises.

## THE BATTLE ARRIVES IN AMERICA

The initiation of the universal concept into Baptist confessions brought about the dual concept that is so popular today, that is the claim that Christ has *two* kinds of churches — both the local and the universal. Dr. John Gill, in his “A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,” could not break free of this Protestant concept that had now fastened itself upon Baptist Confessions. He makes it very clear that the use of the word *ekklesia* “always used for church, signifies an *assembly* called *and* met together.” And again he says,

“The church may be considered as a particular assembly of saints meeting together in one place for religious worship.”

But he also goes to some length to point out that

“there is another sense in which the church may be said to be *catholic*, or *general*, as it may consist of such in any age, and in several parts of the world, who have true faith in Christ, and hold him to be head, and are baptized by one Spirit into one body; ... all such who are truly partakers of his grace; though they have not made an open profession of him in a formal manner.”<sup>f23</sup>

Thus this dual concept was planted in the Baptist theology of England following the Reformation, and came to these shores with many of the Baptists migrating from the British Isles.

This is how the universal church concept got into the Declaration of Faith of the Philadelphia Association, founded in 1707, the first Baptist Association in America. They voted to reprint the London Confession of 1689, “with a short treatise of church discipline, to be annexed.”<sup>f24</sup> This association was formed originally of sound churches from Wales, but confessions of faith were new to them, and they borrowed from the Protestants as guidelines, and H. G. Jones’ preface to this bit of history states that it was printed by Benjamin Franklin and “it differs but slightly from the Westminster Confession,” the one that infiltrated the Second London Confession. Since it was taken as the standard for many years because of the immense influence of the association through its mission endeavors, Baptists were not aware of this problem until the New Hampshire Confession was finally published in 1833.

Evidence of the influence of the Philadelphia Association is seen in the fact that the Kehukee Association, which was originally formed largely of General Baptist persuasion, was virtually re-organized by missionaries from the Philadelphia Association, and accepted the Confession of Faith published in London in 1689. These same missionaries also went into North Carolina with the same results.<sup>f25</sup> The Sandy Creek Association of North Carolina, influenced

by the mission work of the same association, leaves in its statement of faith the clear impression that they also had accepted this dual concept, since they introduced their definition of the church in article six with the statement:

“That the *visible* Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful persons,  
...”

This implies that they may well have had an *invisible* concept as well. <sup>f26</sup>

## THE NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION AND THE LANDMARK COP-OUT

On June 24, 1830, the Baptist Convention of New Hampshire appointed a committee to prepare a declaration of faith, which was finally approved on January 15, 1833. It came to the attention of the general public when J. Newton Brown, editorial secretary of the American Baptist Publication Society, published it in his *Baptist Church Manual* in 1853, with a couple of revisions, and it has been the basis for Baptists generally ever since, with revisions as each group chose to accommodate their own concepts. *This* declaration was silent on the universal church. <sup>f27</sup> Baptists had finally thrown off the influence of the Reformation and returned to their own original belief concerning the nature of the church. However, those in the 20th century who want to come again under the Protestant canopy have chosen to lay this return to the biblical concept at the feet of those they choose to call “Landmarkers,” a term taken from the writings of Dr. J. R. Graves. They would like to make it appear that this was the concept of a small radical group, and never really accepted by Baptists generally. <sup>f28</sup>

However, this is a cop-out, and will not hold up under the searchlight of history. Baptists to-day known as Landmark Baptists gladly identify with this position, but it was not they who produced the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, and they are not necessarily responsible for its wide acceptance. W. L. Lumpkin says that it “became the most widely disseminated creedal declaration of American Baptists.” J. Newton Brown certainly was not a part of the so-called Landmark movement, and J. M. Pendleton, who adapted the confession to his church manual, while having worked with Dr. Graves some years earlier, was in Pennsylvania when he wrote this work. Hiscox also used it in his church manual. If Landmark Baptists are responsible for the wide acceptance of this New Testament concept of the nature of the church, it is interesting to note that there was no organized Landmark movement until 1902 when a General Association of Baptist Churches was formed.

The Southern Baptist Convention was organized nearly 50 years before this, 1845, and this concept was accepted by them until well past the middle of the

20th century. Why does everyone now want to “blame” Landmarkers for this widespread concept? Simple! Because the larger movements have lapsed back into the old Protestant concept of the universal, invisible church, or a dual concept of both a local and a universal concept.

That Southern Baptists accepted the local church concept is not difficult to prove. It was evident everywhere until Protestant professors began to infiltrate their seminary classrooms. In a book, *Re-Thinking Baptist Doctrines*, edited by Victor I. Masters, and published by the Western Recorder Publishers of Louisville, Kentucky, a very clear definition of a church is given:

“A church is properly defined as ‘a congregation of Christ’s baptized disciples, acknowledging Him as their Head, relying on His atoning sacrifice for justification before God, depending on the Holy Spirit for sanctification, united in the belief of the Gospel, agreeing to maintain its ordinances and obey its precepts, meeting together for worship, and cooperating for the extension of Christ’s kingdom in the world.’”<sup>f29</sup>

It should not be overlooked that the *Western Recorder* is the Southern Baptist state paper in Kentucky. In fact, the same book has a chapter headed, “Universal Church *Heresy*,” which makes it very clear that at that time Southern Baptists wanted in no way to be identified with the Protestant concept.<sup>f30</sup>

In 1925 the Southern Baptist Convention adopted their own confession of faith which continues to be published under the title of “The Baptist Faith and Message.” In it a very clear definition of “A Gospel Church” is given as Article 12:

“A church of Christ 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 law, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Its scriptural officers are bishops or elders and deacons.”<sup>f31</sup>

This was accepted as the standard concept of a New Testament church until the “Baptist Faith and Message” was revised in 1963. At this time the article on the church, which became article VI, contained the definition of the local church, but also added a section which reads as follows:

“The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ *which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.*”<sup>f32</sup>

Here they reverted to the Protestant position which has become so popular today, to recognize both a local and a universal concept of the church — but the Scriptures will not let you have it both ways.

In selling out to Protestantism, Baptists have turned their backs on the plain teachings of the Scripture, and also a position defended with great honor by some of the greatest Baptist names on the pages of Baptist history. Their own historian, Dr. John T. Christian, wrote a two volume history of Baptists which was taught in their seminaries from its publication in 1922 until they finally let it go out of print because Protestantism had invaded their campuses. In their own *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, published by Broadman Press in 1958, in Volume 1 he is described as “pastor, professor, historian.” They also state that he was

“Professor of Christian history and librarian at Baptist Bible Institute, New Orleans, from 1919-25. Christian traveled repeatedly in Europe and the Near East for study and collection of books. He donated his personal library of over 15,000 volumes to Baptist Bible Institute.”<sup>f33</sup>

He held membership in such prestigious organizations as the Society of Christian Archaeology of Greece, the Academy of History of France, the Academy of Science, the American Society of History, etc. He defines a church as follows:

“A New Testament Church is a company of baptized believers voluntarily associated together for the maintenance of the ordinances and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>f34</sup>

Are the studies and learning of such men simply to be set aside because it has become popular to think and write today with the Protestants?

Yet this is what historians in most denominations have done. It should be pointed out that today’s Protestant-thinking Baptist historians have discarded Dr. Christian as not having been “scientifically trained” as a historian.

No less a personage than Dr. J. B. Moody, who hosted the Southern Baptist Convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1900, states in lectures delivered to the Theological Class at Hall-Moody Institute, Martin, Tennessee:

“A Baptist church is composed of volunteers associated in congregational effort, each member in equal authority, and each church complete in itself and independent of all other churches and of all outside authorities.”<sup>f35</sup>

We have established that the New Testament Scriptures speak only of the church as local congregations, or in an institutional sense. That the Reformers did not break completely free of Rome and come back to the New Testament

order, but held to the universal church concept mothered by Rome, and simply made it an invisible body. That during the 16th and 17th centuries this was gradually adapted to much of Baptist life. That in the 18th and 19th centuries a large number of Baptists were brought back to the scriptural concept again, but in the 20th century we have again been betrayed into the hands of Protestantism by large numbers of Baptists drifting into the universal, invisible church concept.

It is common among those who speak of a dual nature of the church to refer to the *ekklesia* as local congregations, and in turn speak of the *universal* church as the “*true*” church. If this were true, the so-called “true” church would not be as pure as the visible churches, because it would be made up of believers with every kind of theology imaginable, or none at all. It would include the careless and undisciplined, which was never allowed in the congregations that held the faith during the centuries prior to the Reformation. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, said that Christ gave Himself for the *ekklesia*, and that He cleanses it and sanctifies it “with the washing of water by the word.” He will present it without spot, wrinkle or blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27). This certainly cannot be done if it is filled with all kinds of corrupt doctrine and permissive living. Local congregations are not perfect, but only there can discipline be administered to attempt to keep them pure, and there the Word of God is used to cleanse them that Christ may present that institution to the Father without blemish.

Tragically the universal, invisible concept has been woven into the thinking today of most major “Baptist” denominations as though it were an unchallenged Baptist teaching. Checking only a few examples soon makes this clear. We have already pointed out that it has been accepted by the Southern Baptist Convention, that calls itself the “largest *Protestant* denomination” in the world. The same definition is found in their *Southern Baptist Encyclopedia*. They first define *ekklesia* very accurately, then they add these definitions which completely violate the meaning of the word:

“In the New Testament the church (*ecclesia*) appears as the result of God’s redemptive action, as the object of his continuing interest, and as the organ of his saving purpose for the world. It is continued through Christ as the ‘New People of God,’ i.e. as the new and true Israel. ... Those who by faith saw this was so, who by grace were incorporated into his divine life, and upon whom the Spirit came in regenerating power, were made the church. ... This view sees the church wherever the Holy Spirit is present with regenerating power and finds the distinctiveness of the faith in the change which is produced in the believer.” f36

Though this violates every church principle for which Southern Baptists originally stood, with it being written into their new declaration of faith, and into their denominational encyclopedia, it will be accepted by their people, and their young ministers as being the historic Baptist position without realizing they have been betrayed by a theology conceived and delivered by Protestantism.

As for Baptists in the north, Robert G. Torbet is accepted as their historian and he puts it in a very few words:

“The faith and life of Baptists cannot be separated from that of other reform groups of the sixteenth century.”<sup>f37</sup>

In a book written by Samuel Hill and Robert Torbet they make no attempt to separate themselves from the Protestant church concept in these statements: “Baptists in the North began early as one Protestant group among several major ones. They existed as part of a pluralistic Protestant society.” And again:

“Baptists belong to the Puritan movement within the English Reformation of the sixteen and seventeenth centuries.”<sup>f38</sup>

The General Association of Regular Baptists (GARB), which came out of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1933, apparently kept their Protestant concept of the church. In a book, *Confidently Committed*, Virgil Bopp states:

“Of the approximately 120 times the word (*ekklesia*) appears, roughly ten percent refers to a vast Universal Church made up of all true believers. ... Actually the word “universal” is not a New Testament term. Rather, the New Testament refers to the Universal Church as the “body” of Christ. ... One becomes a part of the Universal Church by being ‘born again’ and baptized into the Body by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>f39</sup>

Since the book was published by Regular Baptist Press, and is highly commended by one of their outstanding pastors, Jack W. Jacobs, Th.D., Senior Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Westlake, Ohio, I think we could clearly assume that this pretty well sets forth the position most generally held by the GARB. However that position is challenged by another one of their writers, Kenneth Good, who states that

“regardless of the emphasis placed upon the ‘invisible church’ by some other systems of ecclesiology, the simple arithmetic related to the evidences in the Scriptures show beyond the shadow of a doubt that the priority usage of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is upon the visible and organized local church.”<sup>f40</sup>

However even this brother's strong stand for a local church does not rule out a claim that there is also an invisible church.

But why go on? It is clearly evident that the majority of those who fly the Baptist flag these days have placed themselves under the Protestant umbrella where the nature of the church is concerned. This makes church growth easier, and opens many doors to them that would otherwise be closed. The very serious question we are left to answer is this: "Will we sell our Baptist heritage for a mess of Protestant pottage?" The nature of the church determines many other important issues that have identified Baptists through the ages, and if we compromise here, there is no limit to further compromise once the gate has been opened.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>ft1</sup> The Scofield Reference Bible, 1917 edition. Note on ~~<orig>~~Matthew 16:18.
- <sup>ft2</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1915 (1979 edition), Vol. 1, pg. 693.
- <sup>ft3</sup> Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1988, Vol. 1, pg. 458.
- <sup>ft4</sup> Credenda, Seminary Press, 1950, pgs. 79, 80.
- <sup>ft5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>ft6</sup> Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1971.
- <sup>ft7</sup> The Reformation, Hans. J. Hillerbrand, 1981, pg. 104.
- <sup>ft8</sup> Calvinistic Family Library, 1838, pg. 33.
- <sup>ft9</sup> History of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff, 1910, Vol. 7, pg. 25.
- <sup>ft10</sup> Ibid, pgs. 26, 43.
- <sup>ft11</sup> Re-Thinking Baptist Doctrines, edited by V. I. Masters, 1937, pgs. 160, 161.
- <sup>ft12</sup> The Great Carrollton Debate, 1876, pg. 910.
- <sup>ft13</sup> Baptist Confessions of Faith, W. L. Lumpkin, 1959, pg. 101.
- <sup>ft14</sup> Ibid, pgs. 119, 120.
- <sup>ft15</sup> The Baptist Encyclopedia, William Cathcart, 1883, Vol. 1, pgs 222, 223.
- <sup>ft16</sup> Baptist Confessions of Faith, Lumpkin, pg 165.
- <sup>ft17</sup> The Baptist Encyclopedia, Cathcart, pg 223.
- <sup>ft18</sup> The First London Confession, 1646, Publisher's Introduction, 1981, pg 5.
- <sup>ft19</sup> Baptist Confessions of Faith, Lumpkin, pg 285.
- <sup>ft20</sup> The Reformers and their Stepchildren, Leonard Verduin, 1964, pgs. 32, 33.
- <sup>ft21</sup> Ibid, pg. 35.
- <sup>ft22</sup> Ibid, pg. 38.
- <sup>ft23</sup> A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, John Gill, 1969-70, from 1984 <sup>ft</sup> reprint, pgs. 853, 854.
- <sup>ft24</sup> Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707-1807, from 1976 reprint, pg. 46.
- <sup>ft25</sup> A Concise History of the Kehukee Baptist Association, Burkitt and Read, 1850, pgs. 31-33.
- <sup>ft26</sup> Baptist Confessions of Faith, Lumpkin, pg. 358.

<sup>ft27</sup> Ibid, pg. 361.

<sup>ft28</sup> Ibid, pg. 361.

<sup>ft29</sup> Re-Thinking Baptist Doctrines, V. I. Masters, 1937, pg. 140.

<sup>ft30</sup> Ibid, pg. 157.

<sup>ft31</sup> Ibid, pg. 395.

<sup>ft32</sup> Southern Baptist Convention 1963 Annual, pg. 275.

<sup>ft33</sup> Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol. 1, pg. 258.

<sup>ft34</sup> A History of the Baptists, John T. Christian, 1922, pg 13.

<sup>ft35</sup> My Church, J. B. Moody, Reprint 1974, pg. 13.

<sup>ft36</sup> Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, 1958, Vol. 1, pgs. 273, 274.

<sup>ft37</sup> A History of the Baptists, Robert G. Torbet, 1950, pg 22.

<sup>ft38</sup> Baptists North and South, Samuel S. Hill, Jr. and Robert G. Torbet, 1964, pgs. 83, 24.

<sup>ft39</sup> Confidently Committed, Virgil W. Bopp, 1987, pg. 14.

<sup>ft40</sup> Are Baptist Reformed?, Kenneth H. Good, 1986, pg. 285.