

A History of the Baptists

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CHAPTER X BAPTISTS IN THE PRACTICE OF DIPPING

REFERENCE has already been made, in former pages, to the fact that the Waldenses practiced dipping; that this was at first the custom: of the Reformers; and some reliable testimony has been introduced to show the practice of the Baptists. The point of controversy between the Baptists and the Reformers on baptism was not dipping, but the necessity of infant baptism. There is much more available material on the form of baptism among the Baptists. That subject is now pursued further.

L'Abbe Fleury, the great Roman Catholic historian, under date of 1523, gives an account of the Baptist practice. He says:

This was called the heresy of the Anabaptists, because the name was attributed to this erroneous sect. for they baptized in a sacred fountain all those baptized in infancy, and they condemned baptism given to little children . . . Neither did they detest baptism the less, and all, as many as gave name to their own faction, dipped again in the sacred fountain; Whence they were called Anabaptists (Fleury, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXIV. 282)

These clear and circumstantial statements are confirmed by a book published in Dutch, as early as 1523, called the Sum of the Holy Scripture, which was translated by Simon Fish, in 1529, into English, and was for more than a generation the handbook of the English Baptists. The author of the old book says:

The water of baptism taketh not away our sin for then it were a precious water. And then it behooved us daily to wash therein. Neither hath the water of the fountain more virtue in itself than the water that runneth in the River Rhine. For we may as well be baptized in the Rhine as in the font. . . . We be plunged under the water. . . . And this we promised to do when we be baptized and we signify even the same, when we be plunged under the water (Sum of Scripture, British Museum. 4401 b. 2),

The subject was a believer, the act was immersion and the river Rhine was the place. The Rhine for the Baptists became a famous baptizing place.

It is a significant fact that the most distinguished advocate of Baptist views in Switzerland, Conrad Grebel, dipped his converts upon a profession of

faith. Associated with him was George Blaurock, a monk of Coire; on account of his eloquence called the "mighty George."

The account which follows is given prominent place in some histories of the Baptists in Switzerland, and from it are deducted some remarkable conclusions as to the practice of sprinkling among Baptists. The representation is that the account is taken from an anonymous Moravian chronicle. The account is as follows:

At one of the meetings of the "brethren" at Zurich, according to a Moravian chronicle, all bowed in prayer before God that he would grant them power to fulfill the divine will. Blaurock, thereupon, arose and asked Grebel to baptize him upon a confession of his faith. Again he fell to his knees, and Grebel baptized him. All the rest present were baptized by Blaurock. The celebration of the Lord's Supper followed. At the house of Rudolf Thoman, at Zolikon, a like scene was enacted not long after. There was a meeting of the brethren there. After they had long read and conversed together, John Brubach, of Zurich, arose and wept loud, saying that he was a great sinner, and desired others to pray for him. Here upon Blaurock asked him if he desired the grace of God. He replied: "Yes" Then Manz arose and said: "Who will forbid me to baptize this person?" "No one," replied Blaurock. He then took a dipper of water and baptized him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Then Hottinger arose and desired baptism (Cornelius, *Geschichte des Munsterischen Aufruhrs*, II. 26, 27).

If the events described above took place, of which there is much doubt, it was at the time Grebel had first broken with Zwingli, and was still a Presbyterian, and Blaurock had just come from the Roman Catholic Church, and before either of them had embraced Baptist views. But did those things occur? The authority given is an anonymous Moravian chronicle. Why a "Moravian chronicle"? Would not a Swiss chronicle do better? This "Moravian chronicle" has been made to do good service. Who wrote the "Moravian chronicle?" What is its date, and where did it come from? Who has it now, and who ever saw it? There are too many of these anonymous "chronicles," and "manuscripts," and all of them unauthenticated. All of them are quoted by Pedobaptists in support of sprinkling among Baptists. Not much importance can be attached to such statements. All who mention this circumstance concerning Blaurock quote the "Moravian chronicle" as their authority. This was true of Fusslin (1740); Cornelius (1860), and Egli (1879)-all of them Pedobaptists. Not one of these writers claims to have seen the "Moravian chronicle," not one gives the date of it, not one mentions the year or even century in which it was written, not one gives the page.

The face of the narrative is against the authenticity of the "Moravian chronicle." It was manifestly not written by the "Brethren," but by an enemy. The details are circumstantial enough for the writer to have been an eyewitness. It was from the nature of the case impossible for an enemy to have been present in these assemblies. These were dangerous times and no very accurate account could have been expected of the private meetings of the "Brethren." It is opposed to the spirit of the Baptists of the sixteenth century. It is said that Blaurock asked Brubach "if he desired the grace of God," referring to baptism. The Baptists did not call baptism "the grace of God." They were accused of despising baptism, and it is certain that they did not regard it as a means of grace. The language does not sound natural in the mouth of a Baptist of the sixteenth century, and it does have the flavor of Pedobaptist writers of a later time. It is contrary to the known fact that Grebel, a few days later, was in the practice of dipping, and that Manz practiced dipping, and that dipping was the act of baptism used at Zolikon.

There is another version of this same affair (Hosek, Balthasar Hubmaier, ch. V.), which takes no account of affusion. The story is told in a different manner, the people are crossing themselves as Roman Catholics, and evidently they were not Baptists. All such unauthenticated documents should be received with caution.

It must be remembered that in the early days of the Reformation men of every character, and of almost every opinion, were called Anabaptists. It was only needful that a man should assail Roman Catholicism in the interest of human freedom to be thus classed. The Roman Catholics did not closely discriminate when speaking of their opponents. They hastened to brand them with such epithets as appeared to be useful. There were those who practiced infant baptism who were called Anabaptists. It was an hour of revolution. Men today did not hold views they warmly advocated yesterday. Transition was every where.

It is possible that some converts turning from Romanism practiced sprinkling; but it is equally true, a little later, that some of these persons were in the practice of dipping (Nitsche, *Geschichte der Zuricher Reformation*, 282. Zurich, 1879). The account given above as coming from a "Moravian chronicle" is described elsewhere as a trial before a court (Egli, *Actensammlung zur Geschichte ver Zurischer Reformation*, 282. Zurich, 1879). It is not certain that these persons were identified at this moment with the Baptist movement. It is certain that some of them were just turning from Romanism, and it is further certain at this time that dipping was the normal act of baptism among the Baptists (Kessler, *Sabbatta*, III. 266). At first they were probably followers of Luther or Zwingli from the Romanists. and they passed through several stages of thought before they became

Baptists. In the, meantime, by their enemies, they were all classed as Anabaptists.

There is no obscurity in the fact that Grebel practiced dipping. In March, 1525, Grebel baptized Ulimann by dipping him into the Rhine (Stark, *Geschichte der Taufe*, 184). The account is taken from Kessler, who says:

Wolfgang Ulimann, on the journey to Schaffhausen, met Conrad Grebel who instructed him so highly in the knowledge of Anabaptism that he would not sprinkle out of a dish, but was drawn under and covered over with the waters of the Rhine (Kessler, *Sabbatta*, II. 266).

Dipping is here declared, by this contemporary writer to be the distinctive Baptist practice. Kessler expressly says Grebel "instructed him (Ulimann) so highly in the knowledge of Anabaptism that he would not be sprinkled out of a dish," but was dipped in the waters of the Rhine. Dipping in the waters of the Rhine was, therefore, well instructed Anabaptist knowledge. Hence dipping was the normal act of baptism among the Baptists of Switzerland. The teaching of Grebel, and his associates, procured for them the name of Dippers or Baptists (Van Braght, *Martyrology*, I. 7). Therefore, according to this contemporary Lutheran Pastor Kessler, neither sprinkling nor pouring were well instructed Baptist doctrines.

Grebel returned to St Gall, and when he learned that Kessler was allowed to preach in one of the churches, he asked permission to do the same. Being refused, March 18, he announced a great meeting in the Weavers' Hall, and further declared that he would preach in the Square, the Market Place, the Marsh and elsewhere. The people came to hear him from all parts of St. Gall, Appenzell and many other parts of the country. The success of his plea was instantaneous (Arx, *Geschichte des Kantons St Gallen*, II. 501. St. Gall, 1811). Great numbers of converts were made and dipped in a baptistery especially prepared for the purpose (Kessler, *Sabbatta*, 270). Daily the people from the surrounding country flocked to St. Gall inquiring for the baptistery. Augustus Naef, Secretary to the Council of St. Gall, in a work published in 1850, records the success of the Baptist movement. He says: "They baptized those who believed with them in rivers and lakes, and in a great Wooden cask in Butcher's Square before a great crowd" (Naef, *Chronik Stadt und Landschaft St Gallen*, 1021). The number of converts grew with such rapidity that the baptistery was not sufficient for the immersions. Then it was that the Baptists sought the Sitter River. The Sitter River is two or three miles from St. Gall, and is gained by a difficult road. The only solution for the choice of the river is that it was a suitable place for Grebel to baptize his converts.

For the success of the Baptist movement at St. Gall there is the testimony of Fredolin Sickers, a Roman Catholic eye-witness. He says:

The number of converts increased so that the baptistery could not contain the crowd, and they were compelled to use the streams of the Sitter River (Arx, Geschichte des Kantons St. Gallen, 501).

One of the baptismal occasions was Palm Sunday, April 9, 1525. On that day Grebel led out to the Sitter River a great company of converts and baptized them (Kessler, Sabbatta, 267). The Baptist church at St. Gall soon had eight hundred members. The Bible was read, its divine lessons were earnestly and tenderly unfolded, and sinners were urged to flee from the wrath to come. It was a new gospel to thousands, and multitudes, with tears and repentance, asked the privilege of confessing Christ, and retired to some mountain stream to exclaim with the eunuch, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" The solemn ordinance was administered, and coming forth from the water both the convert and the bearer of the glad tidings "went on their way rejoicing" (Burrage, Anabaptists, 108).

When Grebel was forced by persecution to flee from St. Gall, Roggenacher, a skinner, and Eberle Polt, continued to teach and preach. The latter, Kessler says, was a pious, good-hearted man, practiced in the Scriptures, and of agreeable speech. He preached during the Eastertide in the Butcher's Hall and on the Berlingsberg. Sickers says:

Crowds came to be baptized in large vessels in the fields, and to each of the new baptized a new name was given (Sickers, Chronik, XX. 19).

The Council induced the Burgomaster to invite Eberle to his house, and urged him to leave the city. He went on the following Friday, and eight days afterwards, May 29, he suffered martyrdom at Schwyz.

It has already been recorded that the people of Appenzell came to St. Gall to be immersed by Conrad Grebel. In 1525 the Baptists had three places in this district where meetings were held. The largest was at Teuffen, with a second at Herisau, and a third at Brunnen. In all of these places the services were held under the open sky, while the converts were baptized in the neighboring brooks and streams. Indeed, these are the exact words of the Appenzell Chronicle (Appenzell, Chronik, Gabriel Walser, 440. St. Gallen, 1740).

John Stumpf, who lived in the vicinity of Zurich, in the period under survey, was familiar with the Baptist contention in Switzerland. He is, therefore, a valuable witness. He says the early Baptists in Switzerland were "rebaptized

in rivers and brooks" (Stumpf, Gemeiner Loblicher Eydgenossenschaft, 1722). This testimony is direct and of an authoritative character.

The Council of St. Gall, at the instigation of Zwingli, it is alleged, determined to rid themselves of the "Dippers." As the Baptists dipped for baptism they were to be drowned for punishment. The edict is as follows:

In order that the dangerous, wicked, turbulent and seditious sect of the Baptists may be eradicated, we have thus decreed: If any one is suspected of rebaptism, he is to be warned by the magistracy to leave the territory under penalty of the designated punishment. Every person is obliged to report those favorable to rebaptism. Whoever shall not comply with this ordinance is liable to punishment according to the sentence of the magistracy. Teachers of rebaptism, baptizing preachers, and leaders of hedge meetings are to be drowned. Those previously released from prison who have sworn to desist from such things, shall incur the same penalty. Foreign Baptists are to be driven out; if they return they shall be drowned. No one is allowed to secede from the (Zwinglian) church and to absent himself from the Holy Supper. Whoever flees from one jurisdiction to another shall be banished or extradited upon demand (Simler, Sammlung, I. ii. 449)

The date of the decree is September 9, 1527. The decree did not produce the desired effect, for upon March 26, 1530, another edict was put forth. It enjoined:

All who adhere to or favor the false sect of the Baptists, and who attend hedge-meetings, shall suffer the most severe punishments. Baptist leaders, their followers, and protectors shall be drowned without mercy. Those, however, who assist them, or fail to report or to arrest them shall be punished otherwise on body and goods as injurious and faithless subjects. (Bullinger, Reformationsgeschichte, II. 287).

Matters were worse in Zurich. Zwingli and the Council of Zurich knew no mercy towards the Baptists. At first Zwingli held debates with their leaders with indifferent success, then he evoked the strong arm of the law. The first Zurich decree, A. D., 1525, was as follows:

We, therefore, ordain and require that hereafter all men, women, boys and girls forsake rebaptism, and shall not make use of it hereafter, and shall let infants be baptized; whoever shall act contrary to this public edict shall be fined for every offense, one mark; and if any be disobedient and stubborn they shall be treated with severity; for, the obedient we will protect; the disobedient we will punish according to his deserts, without fail; by this all

are to conduct themselves. All this we confirm by this public document, stamped with the seal of our city, and given on St. Andrew's Day, A. D., 1525).

The decree went into effect at once. For the good name of Zwingli it could have been wished that he would never be more severe. There is preserved another official decree which indicates that the Baptists of Switzerland practiced immersion. On March 6, 1526, the Senate of Zurich decreed:

Decrevit clarissimus Senatus aqua mergere, qui merscrit baptismo suo, qui prius emererat (Zwingli, *Elenchus contra Cantabaptistas*. 115., 364).

It is elsewhere written in shorter form. *Qui mersus fuerit mergatur*, that he who immerses shall be immersed (Starke 183). This is the official statement of the Senate of Zurich that the Baptists of Switzerland practiced immersion.

The civil authorities of Zurich set an example of severity scarcely surpassed by Protestants, and of the deplorable execution of the sentence many examples are on record. The persecutors delighted to fit the penalty, as they cruelly judged it, to the fault, and so they put the Baptists to death by drowning.

Upon the very day of the decree of the Senate, of Zurich against the Baptists, Zwingli, who evidently was greatly pleased with the action of the Senate,, wrote to Vadian:

It has been decreed this day by the Council of the Two Hundred (of Zurich) that the leaders of the Catabaptists shall be cast into the Tower, in which they formerly lay, and allured by bread and water diet until either they give up the ghost or surrender. It is also added that he who after this is dipped shall be submerged permanently (*qtti posthac tingatur, prossus mcrgatur*) ; this is not published (Zwingli, *Opera*, vii. 477).

Zwingli is even more explicit as to the form of baptism among the Baptists, for he further says of this decree:

But the illustrious Senate decreed, after having come together, which without doubt has been the tenth time after others either publicly or private, to sink in water whoever should immerse in baptism him who before had emersed. This may be a somewhat disgusting thrust to your observant reader (Zwingli, *Opera*, 111.364).

Persons, even Anabaptists, if there were such in Switzerland, who practiced sprinkling, were not included in this verdict;. Only those who immersed in

baptism were to be drowned. The punishment was as ironical as it was terrible. Since the Baptists immersed in baptism they were drowned.

Gastins, who was a contemporary, was quite sarcastic towards the Baptists. He refers to the decree of the Senate of Zurich, just quoted, in these words: "To immerse in water whoever should immerse in baptism him before was emersed," and adds: "They like immersion, so let us immerse them (*aquis mergere, qui merserit baptismo eo, qui primus emergerit*)" (Gastins, *De Anabaptiami*, 8. Basite, 1544). Gastins in another place enumerates the errors, as he calls them, of the Baptists, and one of them was that they "immersed in water (*immergunter aquis*)" (Ibid, 129, 130).

The edict of March 7 was ratified November 19, 1526. The Baptists were to be delivered to the executioner, who should bind their hands, place them in a boat and throw them into the water to die. Great numbers of Baptists thus perished. So much was this true that it became a matter of international correspondence (Calendar of State Papers in Venice, IV. 35. A. D. 1532. Sannto Diaries, V. lvi. 380).

Among the number thus imprisoned was Felix Manz, who was convicted, January 5, 1527. He was sentenced to death and drowned. Bullinger says of him:

As he came down from the Wellingberg to the Fish Market and was led through the shambles to the boat. he praised God that he was about to die for the truth; for Anabaptism was right and founded upon the Word of God, and Christ had foretold that his followers should suffer for the truth's sake. And the like discourse he urged much discussing with the preacher who attended him. On the way his mother and brother came to him and exhorted him to be steadfast, and he persevered in his folly to the end. When he was bound upon the hurdle and was about to be thrown into the stream by the executioner, he sang in a loud voice, *In menus tuas, Domine, eommodo spiritum meum*, "In thy hands, Lord, I commend my spirit," and herewith was drawn into the water by the executioner and drowned (Bullinger, *Reformations Geschichte*, II. 382).

In consequence of these terrible persecutions the Baptists fled to other lands. In many instances they were followed, captured, and put to death by drowning. "At Vienna many Anabaptists were so tied together in chains, that one drew the other after him into the river, wherein they were all suffocated" (Featley, *The Dippers Dipped*, 73). "Here you see the hand of God," continues Dr. Featley, "in punishing these sectaries some way answerable to their sin according to the observation of the wise man, *quo quis peccat eo puniatur*, they who drew others into the whirlpool of error, by

constraint draw one another into the river to be drowned; and they who profaned baptism by a second dipping, rue it by a third immersion. But the punishment of these Catabaptists we leave to them that have the legislative power in their hands, who though by present connivance they may seem to give them line; yet, no doubt, it is that they may entangle themselves and more easily be caught".

The neighboring Italian Baptists were likewise in the practice of dipping (Benrath, *Wiedertauffer in Venetianischen. Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1885). The Reformation and the Baptists did not make as great gains in Italy as in other countries; but they did not keep themselves aloof from agitation. The Roman Catholic writer, Cantu, says: "Although the love for the new ideas did not carry away either the people or the princes, and although those who were anxious about the condition of their own belief were very few, compared with the number of those who lived believing without analyzing their creed, yet he who thinks that the Reformation had neither extension nor civil or political consequences on this side of the Alps, makes a great mistake" (Cantu, *Gli eretici d'Italia*. Quoted from McCrie). Cantu further remarks that "whilst the Reformation in Germany was associated with princes, and in France with the nobility, in Italy it principally touched the men of letters." This was practically true, but not exclusively so. It to a degree extended its influence among all classes.

The sixteenth century was essentially a selfish one. The great historian of those times, Francesco Guicciardini wrote: "I do not know if there be a man more disgusted than I am with the ambition, avarice, and effeminacy of the priests nevertheless, my position at the Court of several popes made it necessary for me, in view of my own private interests, to love their greatness; had it not been for that reason, I should have loved Martin Luther dearly, not in order to be rid of the laws laid upon us by the Christian religion as it is commonly interpreted and understood, but in order to see that pack of villains reduced to the point of being either without vices, or without authority" (Guicciardini, *Opere inedite*, Ricordo 28). The Baptist cause flourished only feebly in Italy, but even there some believed the faith once for all delivered to the saints.