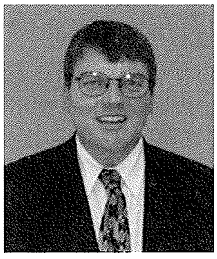
Doctrine in the Baptist Tradition

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Canadian Baptists, like many other Christian denominations within Canada with a long history, has had its beliefs gleaned from many traditions. Besides earlier Baptist history which developed in Europe and then spread to other parts of the world, Baptists place very strong importance on New Testament roots as perceived within our tradition. Those perceptions may vary from Baptist body to Baptist body and, indeed, from individual to individual. Some value is also placed on the doctrinal developments of the early church.

Historically, Baptists have valued the creeds of the early church. I believe four are worthy of mention. The Athanasian Creed is cited in the Orthodox Creed of 1678[1] perceived by the general Baptists as of great importance. This creed, along with the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed, is cited as of great importance:

> The three creeds, viz. Nicene Creed, Athanasius's Creed, and the Apostles Creed, as they are commonly called, ought thoroughly to be received, and believed. For we believe they may be proved, by most undoubted authority of holy scripture, and are necessary to be understood of all Christians; and to be instructed in the knowledge of them, by the ministers of Christ, according to the analogy of faith, recorded in sacred scriptures, upon which these creeds are grounded, and catechistically opened, and expounded in all Christian families, for the edification of the young and old, which might be a means to prevent heresy in doctrine, and practice, these creeds containing all things in a brief manner, that are necessary to be known, fundamentally in order to our salvation; to which end they may be considered, and better understood by of all men, we have here printed them under their several titles as followeth....[2]

A fourth creed that has been valued in Baptist circles is the Creed of Chalcedon also known as the Fourth Ecumenical Council. This author has not located a reference where it is explicitly stated as important. However, in the Second London Confession of the Particular Baptists (1677)[3] and the Orthodox Creed of the General Baptists (1678)[4], it is implicitly accepted.

One further note about the creeds is important to note. The Nicene Creed arose out of the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. It was modified slightly at the ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. While the Apostles Creed may have had earlier forms in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian (late second and early third century), the creed was not formally accepted until much later than the Nicene Creed. While early Baptists recognized the priority of the Nicene Creed over the Apostles' Creed, Canadian Baptists have not always tuned into this significant distinction. On the limitations of the Apostles' Creed, Philip Schaff has probably stated it best:

> At the same time, it must be admitted that the very simplicity and brevity of this Creed, which so admirably adapt it for all classes of Christians and for public worship, make it insufficient as a regulator of public doctrine for a more advanced stage of theological knowledge.... Thus the Nicene Creed gives clearer and stronger expression to

the doctrine of Christ's divinity against the Arians, the Athanasian Creed to the whole doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ's person against the various heresies of the post-Nicene age. The Reformation Creeds are more explicit on the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures and the doctrines of sin and grace, which are passed by or merely implied in the Apostles' Creed.[5]

One other factor that has contributed to theological understanding within the Canadian Baptist context is immigration. As Jerald Zeman has pointed out, Canadian Baptists, along with Roman Catholics[6], are the most culturally diverse denominations within Canada. While Canadian Baptists rejoice and celebrate this reality, we also are recognizing that the beliefs of those Baptists who have come to us from places other than the United Kingdom and the United States, are not necessarily the same. Recent immigrants bring with them the theological challenges that they have experienced in other countries. There are numerous anecdotal situations one could cite. In the interests of brevity, I will mention one situation. Baptist theologian, Clark H. Pinnock, in his article "Baptists and the 'Latter Rain': A Contemporary Challenge and Hope for Tomorrow" pleads for a more charismatic emphasis within the Canadian Baptist family as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is manifested.[7] At the same time, numerous Brazilian Baptist missionaries are arriving from their native Brazil to partner with Canadian Baptist congregations. Due to doctrinal controversy in Brazil within the Brazilian Baptist Convention, a strong position has been taken there against speaking in tongues, etc. Despite these differences there has been, for the most part, mutual respect within Canada.

1. What is dogma or doctrine in your tradition?

Baptists, like Anabaptists, have historically looked back to what they believe are the New Testament ideals in terms of how the church should be and what it should believe. However, they also tried to avoid the excesses of the radical reformation. While there was significant influence from the Anabaptist tradition, Baptists actually flow out of the English Separatist movement and celebrated their 400th anniversary in 2009. They met in the city of the first Baptist congregation, Amsterdam, Netherlands where a group of expatriate English Christians fleeing the tyranny of King James 1 lived in exile. As they studied the Scriptures they moved from being a subsection of the Puritan movement to a whole new denomination.

Within the Baptist movement, one sometimes hears people stand on statements like "no creed but Christ". In fact, this seems to have been borrowed from the early years of the Disciples of Christ movement.[8] The reality is that from the earliest history of Baptists there were numerous confessions of faith and at least one creed. As was the case of the early church, Baptists were always "doing theology" with respect to the issues of the time. For instance, during the reign of Charles II, Baptists had to distinguish themselves from the seditious Fifth Monarchists who plotted against the government and brought disrepute and sufferings to Baptists. Most Baptists followed the nonviolent views of Kiffin and Collier.

Leon McBeth's *The Baptist Heritage* explains how this was done historically:

> Perhaps no group in England made more use of public disputations than did Baptists. Between 1641 and 1700 at least 109 such public debates involving Baptists were held in England, with 79 of these between 1641 and 1660. These debates pitted one or more Baptist champions against opponents from Anglican, Quaker, Independent, or, sometimes, Roman Catholic groups. Baptists welcomed these occasions, for they gave opportunity for declaring the gospel to large crowds, helped defend Baptists against unjust slanders, and often led to numerous conversions and the planting of new Baptist churches. Many leading Baptists of that time were converted at public disputations, such as John Tombes, Henry Vessey, and

Christopher Blackwood. All of these became popular disputation leaders themselves, along with other Baptists such as William Kiffin, Jeremiah Ives, and John Bunyan.

Subjects debated might include baptism, whether for infants or believers and whether by immersion or sprinkling; the authority of Scripture; the nature of the church; the nature and deity of Christ; the necessity of outward ordinances; the "inner light"; and the seventh day Sabbath. Sometimes Baptists also debated among themselves on the atonement, laying on of hands, singing as part of public worship, predestination, open versus closed communion, falling from grace, and the extent of Christian obligation to obey earthly government.

The impact of these disputations was vast. Many Baptists became skilled debaters; they cultivated a direct approach, emphasizing Scripture and clear logic. While many of their scholarly opponents obscured their points in elaborate language and pedantic form, the Baptists (with some exceptions) preferred to speak in plain "people talk." This was not to say that Baptists did not have scholars; in fact, many of the Baptist disputants were university graduates, such as Tombes, Jessey, Blackwood, and others. Some Baptists developed, one might say, "specialties" in their debates. Thus Tombes was known for his effective arguments against infant baptism and for religious liberty; John Bunyan was known for his refutation of the Quakers, against whom he conducted six public disputations.[9]

As one reads McBeth, one pictures Tommy Douglas, a twentieth century Canadian Baptist, who in his own way, engaged in disputations.

For Baptists, Christianity is a way of life, a kind of behaviour, and a style of living. But Christianity most certainly involves a set of teachings, a way of viewing reality and oneself, and a perspective from which all of experience makes sense. The teachings have often had to be recast. For instance, Baptist theologies differ depending on whether they were written with respect to a pre-Enlightenment context, modernity, and a postmodern context. In the case of the latter, the late Stanley Grenz, a Canadian Baptist theologian, was one of the leaders in developing theology for a postmodern context.

2. What are considered to be doctrinal statements?

Baptist doctrinal statements can be lengthy or very short. Some will include Scriptural references and some will not. John Smyth's short confession of 1609 takes up only two pages in Lumpkin's *Baptist Confessions*. It contained twenty articles. Thomas Helwys' Confession of 1611 contained twenty-seven articles and covers about seven pages. The Orthodox Creed of 1678 had fifty articles and covered nearly forty pages in Lumpkin's book.

3. Who can make doctrinal statements?

When Thomas Helwys' group came back to England in 1612 from Amsterdam, there were no more than a dozen Baptists at that time. Despite varieties of length, authorship, and content, all of the early Baptist confessions were just that: *confessions*. A confession was the norm and fell short of the status of creeds. Lutheran and then Orthodox scholar, Jaroslav Pelikan, makes a convincing case that there is no distinction between creed and confession in his excellent book *Credo*. However, early Baptists thought there were real and important differences. A confession *affirms* what a group of Baptists, large or small, believe at any given time and place; a creed *prescribes* what members must believe. Confessions include; creeds exclude. Early Baptists were careful to emphasize that confessions were merely human statements; that they might later be revised. They are meant to indicate a consensus of beliefs and not meant to be something that each individual member must sign to indicate that they must affirm.

While the Baptist World Alliance does not have a confession of faith, many individual Baptist congregations, associations, and conferences/unions/conventions have confessions or statements of faith. Often they originate with one individual or a small group of people and they are examined and improved by a larger group until the draft becomes an accepted statement. Within the Canadian Baptist context, all four Baptist unions/conventions have statements of agreed doctrine (the French Baptist Union, the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec (formerly the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec), and the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (formerly the Baptist Union of Western Canada). The Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec formalized the This We Believe study document at its 2008 Convention Assembly. For the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, they have a culture statement which affirms both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. But they also have a statement of faith reflecting the beliefs adopted by Carey Theological College. The Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches adopted the Basis of Union theological statement back in 1905/06. The French Baptist Union, properly known as the Union d'Églises Baptistes Françaises au Canada, has had a statement of faith for many years.

4. What is the relationship between doctrine and revelation?

We believe that doctrine flows out of the teachings of the Scriptures. Historically, Baptists sought to determine the "plain sense" of Scripture. But they also insisted that every believer had the right to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. They also believed as Roger Williams insisted that there was always more light to be found in the Scriptures. More recently, attention to the genre of Scripture has also been considered to be important. Confessions never approach the authority of Scriptures. They are always subject to change and are usually accepted by a regional body, large or small. For instance, confessions might be altered depending upon whether a group accepted or rejected the New Understanding of the Apostle Paul promoted by people like James Dunn and N. T. Wright and challenged by the likes of Stephen Westerholm and Scot Simon Gathercole. At stake is the doctrine of the atonement.

Baptists accept the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as authoritative. The Apocrypha has never been held in the same light although many Baptists would find it interesting to read.

Having emphasized the local and regional nature of confessions, it should be emphasized that the Second London Confession has many descendants including the Philadelphia Confession, the New Hampshire Confession, and all Southern Baptist statements. Some offer a broader interpretation and some like the 2000 statement of belief are meant to exclude. However, even the latter document known as the Baptist Faith and Message document is described in its preamble as a general statement of belief. However, Southern Baptist missionaries, among others, were required to sign it. Often it is a prerequisite for receiving a call to a local church within the Southern Baptist family. Canadian Baptists, by contrast, have not limited fellowship in such a narrow sense. We would do well to remember the words of two late Southern Baptists:

> The life in the Church, to which we are called by God's grace, is a life of fellowship. This, of course, means more than the enjoyment of the company of others who think as we do, or who enjoy the same things as we delight in. When fellowship is limited to such a superficial level as this, it cannot stand the stresses of disagreement or disappointment. The fellowship of the Church that results from, and is a part of, conversion is first of all a fellowship of shared participation in the call and gift of God's mercy. Resulting from this is another sharing, as Christians recognize their common responsibility not only to each other but also to the rest of the world.[10]

1. W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Judson Press, 1974), p. 326.
2. Lumpkin, p. 326.
3. Lumpkin, p. 260-263.
4. Lumpkin, p. 299-301.
5. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes,* Sixth Edition, (Harper and Row, 1931), volume one, p. 16.
6. Jarold Zeman, *They Speak in Other Tongues: Witness Among Immigrants* in *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity*, (G. R. Welch Company, Limited, 1980), pp. 67-86.
7. Clark H. Pinnock, *Baptists and the "Latter Rain": A Contemporary Challenge and Hope for Tomorrow* in *Costly Vision: The Baptist Pilgrimage in Canada* (Welch Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1988), pp. 255-272. It should be noted that there is no unanimity among Canadian Baptists about Clark Pinnock's statement. In all likelihood the same could be said about Brazilian Baptists serving in Canada with regard to their view on the manifestation of the charismatic gifts.
8. Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ, denigrated the importance of creeds. For an example of his views, see Curtis W. Freeman, James William McClendon Jr., and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Judson Press, 1999), pp. 227, 231. A further example may be found in the sometime Baptist, Harry Emerson Fosdick, in his writing found on page 313 of *Baptist Roots*. Despite occasional aberrations amongst Baptists regarding the creeds, the editors of *Baptist Roots* summarize Baptist views on page 14 where they write, "Baptists as a class did not deny the historic Christian creeds."
9. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Broadman Press, 1987), pp. 64-65.
10. Brooks Hays and John E. Steely, *The Baptist Way of Life: What It Means to Live and Worship as a Baptist*, (Mercer University Press, 1981).



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