

THE NEGLECTED HERITAGE : AN EXAMINATION OF THE ANABAPTIST ROOTS OF THE
SOUTH AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES*

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ABSTRACT

This article concentrates on the predominantly white Baptist Union of South Africa. Attention is first given to the debate concerning the historical association between the English Baptists and the Anabaptists. Then the question of the theological indebtedness of the English Baptists (and thereby the South African Baptists) is raised. Finally attention is given to the contemporary implications of this heritage for South African Baptists.

The South African Baptists have variously omitted, repudiated or inadequately applied their historical and theological indebtedness to the 16th century Anabaptists. These mistaken interpretations of their theological heritage have both deprived them of an accurate understanding of their own history and have diminished their ability to respond effectively to the current social situation in South Africa and the crisis within their own ranks. This is not to say that the Anabaptists were the sole founders of the Baptists, but it is certainly a corrective to current South African Baptist misconceptions concerning Baptist origins.

In this article, the term "the Baptists" is used to refer to the members of the South African Baptist Union (SABU). Ostensibly, the Baptist Union has in the past incorporated all the racial groups within its structure, either as direct member churches or as associations. Thus in 1977, for example, there were fourteen associations; seven territorial associations; two general associations (the SA Baptist Men's and Women's Associations) and five linguistic or ethnic associations (Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk, SA Baptist (Coloured) Alliance, Natal Baptist Association, Indian Baptist Mission, and the black Baptist Convention) (Parnell, in Hudson Reed 1977: 138). In reality, however, the Union was, and is,

* This article was written in January 1990 and does not therefore discuss more recent political developments.

essentially dominated by the concerns of the large numbers of white member churches and the policies formed within the predominantly white leadership structures. As with other South African denominations, this has led to dissatisfaction and division. In 1980 an independent Transkei Baptist Union was formed and in 1987 the black Baptist Convention broke away from the South African Baptist Union.¹⁾ In both cases the reasons for this schism included the blacks' rejection of white paternalism, a consciousness that they existed within the Union as spectators rather than actors, and a desire to develop their own leaders and policies.

The decision to concentrate on the predominantly white Baptist Union of South Africa is prompted by the fact that the available literature on the Anabaptists derives from the writings of members of this group. To my knowledge, other Baptist groupings have not yet undertaken extensive analysis of the relationship between modern South African Baptists and the 16th century Anabaptists nor the contemporary significance of this heritage.

A second reason for concentrating on the SABU is that it represents the dominant Baptist theological tradition and, as such, is central to the thinking of Baptists within the Union and, to some extent, still influences the theology of those who have broken away from it. This article seeks to question some of the assumptions and teachings of this dominant tradition concerning its own historical and theological heritage.

Thirdly, it is hoped that this analysis will make a contribution to the ongoing task of the newly formed Baptist Convention (and the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists) to become more aware of their rich theological heritage and to re-read Baptist doctrine in the light of contemporary South African issues.

1. Space does not permit a more detailed description of the structures of the SABU nor the exact situation of the "Coloureds", Indians and Africans within it.

Another term that requires definition is "the Anabaptists". From the 16th century up until very recently, this term has been largely misunderstood and its adherents much maligned by both Catholic and Reformed writers. Recent studies by first Dutch, Swiss and German, and then by English and American writers such as Ernest A Payne, Henry C Vedder, Ronald H Bainton, G H Williams, Harold S Bender, W Klassen, etc. have forever changed the face of Anabaptist scholarship (cf Hershberger 1957:1-56). In this article the term is used to refer to the "evangelical" or "biblical" Anabaptists and not to the diverse rational, revolutionary and mystical groups which were also prominent elements of the radical Reformation. This definition is important because it avoids the simplistic, but all too common, English and South African Baptist negation of all the Anabaptists as heretical, violent revolutionaries or as a group that is theologically essentially different from the modern Baptists.

Sixteenth century Anabaptist theology was neither systematic nor fully analogous. Nevertheless, the theologies of Conrad Grebel, the Schleithem Confession, Balthasar Hübmaier, Michael Sattler and Menno Simons, for example, exhibit sufficient similarities for them to be loosely grouped together. This article is not, however, concerned with the Anabaptists per se but rather with the way that they have been perceived by South African Baptist writers. Further, because the field of Anabaptist study has become so enormous, attention cannot be given to all the relevant aspects. The central doctrines emphasised in this article are the regenerate church, believer's baptism and the notion of the separation between the Church and the State.

The available literature reveals at least three basic approaches on the part of South African Baptists towards the sixteenth and seventeenth century Anabaptists. The first of these is to omit mention of the historical and theological Anabaptist heritage altogether. The second is to admit the historical link, but to seek to distance the Baptists, theologically speaking, from the Anabaptists. The third tendency is to admit both the historical and theological associations but to neglect to

draw out the contemporary implications of this heritage. In the pages that follow, attention is first given to the debate concerning the historical association between the English Baptists and the Anabaptists. Thereafter, the question of the theological indebtedness of the English Baptists (and thereby the South African Baptists) is raised. Finally, attention is given to the contemporary implications of this heritage for the South African Baptists.

THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ENGLISH BAPTISTS AND THE ANABAPTISTS

The fact that the South African Baptists are directly descended from the handful of English Baptists who came to South Africa along with the 1820 settlers is not disputed.²⁾ What is at issue is the historical and theological origins of the English Baptists themselves. In the past there has been a tendency on the part of English Baptists to deny or limit their association with the Anabaptists (see Mosteller 1957: a & b). Similarly, the South African Baptist commentator, H J Batts referred to the Baptists amongst the 1820 settlers as follows:

There these pioneers, like the Pilgrim Fathers of an earlier date, from the same stock, and with the same traditions, claimed their freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, untrammelled by State restrictions or sacerdotal interference, and they set up their banner ... in the name of the Lord God and Jesus Christ ... (Batts 1920: 4).

Significantly, Batts likens these Baptists to the Separatist Pilgrim Fathers who journeyed to North America rather than to the Anabaptists who were the first Protestants to promulgate the doctrine of the separation between the Church and State and the resultant freedom of worship.

An even more striking example of the omission of the historical and theological links between the English Baptists and the Anabaptists is provided in the current lecture notes on "Ecclesiology" and "Baptist Principles" supplied by the Baptist Theological College in Johannesburg

2. The limitations of this article do not permit a discussion of the origins and influences of the German Baptists who came to South Africa in 1856-8.

to their external students. Chapter 8 of the notes, entitled "Baptist Principles", deals with the subject of believer's baptism by emphasising the mode of baptism and the relevant New Testament data. In its historical overview, magisterial reformers such as Luther and Calvin are mentioned several times whilst detailed discussion on the Anabaptists is entirely absent. Only in one sentence does the term Anabaptist even appear where it is said that:

The return to believer's baptism began in Switzerland with the Anabaptists and was developed further in England by the Baptists in the 17th century ("Baptist Principles": 47)

Significantly, the very considerable contribution of the Anabaptists in the restoration of believer's baptism is not only virtually ignored, but discussion of the socio-political significance of the rejection of infant baptism is entirely omitted.

A further example of the failure to acknowledge the indebtedness of the Baptists to the Anabaptists, in these notes on "Baptist Principles", is the discussion of Religious Liberty. Whilst Smyth and Helwys are mentioned, their Anabaptist forefathers, who defended this doctrine with their very lives, are not even acknowledged. Further, religious and civic liberty, which were regarded as two sides of the same coin by both the Anabaptists and the English Baptists, are regarded by many South African Baptists as separable, even unrelated.

Similar tendencies to those discussed above are discernable in the lecture notes entitled "Ecclesiology". No mention is made of the Anabaptists who, during the Reformation, restored the notion of regenerate church membership. Whilst Luther is mentioned as an example of someone who failed to establish a believer's church, the Anabaptists, who succeeded, are completely ignored. These notes on Ecclesiology also contain several pages of discussion on believer's baptism which, again, omit all mention of the Anabaptists.

Admittedly, it might be argued that lecture notes do not reflect the total views of the lecturers since they are supplemented by the actual

lectures. But this does not apply to the external students who do not attend classes and for whom the notes were specifically compiled. It is an inescapable conclusion that Baptist students supplied with these notes are being taught that the Anabaptists played little, if any, part in the historical and theological formation of the Baptist denomination.

A final example of the omission of the Baptists' indebtedness to the Anabaptists is the content of a booklet entitled Baptist Blue-Print 1965 which deals, amongst other things, with the nature and purpose of the Church. Whilst other reformers such as Calvin, Luther and Zwingli are mentioned, not a single reference to the Anabaptists is to be found.

Having outlined the way in which some South African Baptists view the Anabaptists, it is now necessary to ask why this is so. One central reason is that the South Africans regard the English Separatists, rather than the Continental Anabaptists, as the forerunners of the English Baptists. Thus, Hudson Reed says this concerning the origins of the English Baptists:

The consensus of scholastic opinion, however, would trace the beginning of English Baptist witness to a specialization of Puritan Separatism rather than the outcome of the older Anabaptist movement of the 16th Century (Hudson Reed 1972:10).

But, the question of origins is not that easily solved. Some have argued that the Baptist roots lie in English Separatism and others that they lie with the Dutch Mennonites, especially the Waterlanders (Brachlow 1985: 179; Estep 1975: 203-227).

The Separatist influence on the early English Baptists is undeniable and is evidenced in the following areas. The most obvious is that many prominent leaders (as well as ordinary members) were Separatists before they became Baptists (Hudson 1953:173). This is clearly seen, for example, in the career of John Smyth. After graduating from Cambridge University, Smyth was appointed as a preacher in Lincoln in 1600. In 1602, he lost this position and later became the minister of a Separatist congregation in Gainsborough. By 1607/8, together with his congregation, he fled to Holland to avoid persecution in England and formed the "second" Separatist church in Amsterdam.

During the next two centuries, Baptists and Separatists (or more correctly Congregationalists) maintained close ties, often held joint services and shared many doctrinal positions, including acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith (except for the clauses concerning infant baptism).

The fact that the Separatists strongly influenced the Baptists does not, however, mean that they were the only influence. Despite attempts by some, such as the early Baptist historian Thomas Crosby (?1685-1752) as well as more recent writers, such as J H Shakespeare, W T Whitley and W Hudson and S Hudson Reed to dissociate the English Baptists from the Anabaptists, their influence cannot be so easily evaded. The first reason being that the Separatists were themselves influenced by the Anabaptists, especially with regard to the notion of a gathered church and the separation between the Church and the State (Villa-Vicencio 1986: 63-66, 77-79; Estep 1975: 203-217).

Secondly, it is false to assume that Separatism was the only religious movement in existence at the time of the establishment of the Baptist denomination. Indeed, during the 16th and 17th centuries, England experienced an almost incredible religious ferment as a result of the influence of the Lollards, Latimer, Tyndale and Robert Browne, to mention but a few. As early as the reign of Henry VIII, there were also Anabaptist refugees in England. Although these refugees did not exist in significant numbers, it is probable that they, together with other groups, exerted an indirect influence on the English Baptists of the 17th century (Payne 1978:3; Vedder 1907:197).

Thirdly, whilst these early Anabaptist links may be regarded as somewhat tenuous, the evidence for the close association between the Baptist founders, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, and the Dutch Mennonites is certain. These Mennonites consisted of those Anabaptists who had survived the Münster revolt and its aftermath and had been reconstituted by Menno Simons. The Waterlanders, with whom Smyth associated, were the more "liberal" branch of the Mennonite movement. They were less strict

than the other Mennonites with respect to their views on marriage between Mennonites and non-Mennonites and in that they permitted their members to hold certain types of civil office. They were particularly well represented in Amsterdam and Smyth, in fact, lodged with a Mennonite family for two years.

Smyth's contact with the Waterlanders encouraged his growing dissatisfaction with Separatism. In 1609 he wrote The Character of the Beast in which he expressed doubts concerning Calvinist interpretations of the atonement and rejected infant baptism. Smyth was no longer a Separatist, he was now an incipient Baptist. By the time he drafted the 1610 Confession of Faith, he saw believer's baptism, rather than the Separatist covenant, as the sign of a regenerated church (Robinson 1938:63). Smyth's view that believer's baptism was a precondition of church membership caused a noticeable rift between his congregation and their erstwhile Separatist allies. Therefore, the crucial influence of the Mennonites with respect to a regenerate church and believer's baptism cannot be denied and should not be minimised (Estep 1975:217-221).

Smyth's sympathy with Mennonite views was further illustrated in his decision to unite his congregation with the Waterlanders (Coggins 1986:128-138). No longer did he regard them as heretics, on the contrary, he wished to join them. Even though Smyth died in 1612, the negotiations continued and in 1615 forty-two members signed the Mennonite Confession drawn up by Hans de Ries and the churches were united (George 1984:35).

But what, it may be asked, of Thomas Helwys? Is it valid to regard his views as diametrically opposed to those of Smyth and the Mennonites? Helwys was not, in fact, in total agreement with Smyth. He did not wish to merge with the Mennonite churches for a number of reasons : he did not accept that their church in Amsterdam should have to accept baptism from the Mennonites; he saw it as his task to return to England and bear witness there rather than remaining in the Netherlands; he rejected the Hoffmanite Christology; and, like Hübmaier, he believed that a Christian

could serve as a magistrate. Significantly, Helwys did not break off contact with the Mennonites and the association between them and his church in London continued long after his own death. In short, his decision not to unite with the Dutch Anabaptists was not as a consequence of his rejection of the central doctrines of the church and baptism (Estep 1975:222-225). It is also worth noting that Helwys, on his return to England, established an English Baptist church rather than joining existing Separatist congregations. As Robinson concludes concerning the historical origins of the English Baptists:

The Mennonite Church, which flourished particularly in the Netherlands, has an important historical place, through its influence on the Baptist Churches of England and America (Robinson 1938:61).

THE THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE ENGLISH AND SOUTH AFRICAN BAPTISTS

If one tendency amongst South African Baptists is to omit reference to the Anabaptists and to see the Separatists as the forerunners of the Baptists, a second tendency is to seek to distance themselves theologically from the Anabaptists. Hudson Reed says:

Not only did the early English Baptist churches repudiate the name Anabaptist, but there were such differences of faith and practice between them and the sober Mennonites, the true heirs of the Anabaptists would not admit the English Baptist churches into fellowship (Hudson Reed 1972:101).

Hudson Reed makes essentially three claims here that require further discussion: that the English Baptist churches repudiated the name "Anabaptist"; that there were differences of faith and practice between the two; and that the Mennonites would not accept the English Baptist churches into fellowship.

It cannot be denied that the English Baptists, soon after their return to England, began to repudiate the title "Anabaptist". But why was this so? One reason was certainly a pragmatic one. They hoped to avoid further persecution from the authorities who greatly feared the possible spread of "revolutionary, continental Anabaptism". To the authorities, the Peasant's Revolt of 1524-25 and the later Münsterite debacle were proof of the violent and revolutionary ideas and policies of all Anabaptists. No distinction was made between different Anabaptists or between the

English Baptists and the Anabaptists. In short, the English Baptists repudiated the Anabaptists because their lives and the future of their movement depended upon it. Even once the immediate pressure of persecution abated (after the 1689 Act of Toleration) English Baptists remained reluctant to emphasise their Anabaptist origins.

Similarly, in South Africa, Baptists were loath to admit their Anabaptist roots, especially in the face of accusation from more powerful denominations. During the 19th century, for example, the evangelistic zeal and success of the German Baptists induced a Lutheran missionary by the name of Leifeldt to write of the:

... revolt of the Anabaptists in Kaffraria; a great number of the German immigrants join this movement ... we fear that a wild reverie like the North American situation will develop in our midst (Haüs 1975:4).

F Haüs also relates an incident in which the German lay-leader, Carsten Langhein, refused to be drawn into an argument with a visitor concerning Thomas Müntzer (Haüs nd:61). The silence of the early German and British Baptists in South Africa concerning the Anabaptists indicates a sociological reason for their desire to distance themselves from the Anabaptists. A small group numerically, the Baptists were beleaguered by all the problems of a church struggling to gain a foothold in a vast country. Initially drawn from the poorer and uneducated classes, the Baptists could not afford to follow a path which they knew to be socially unacceptable. Moreover, they had certainly accepted the distorted view that was generally held by scholars concerning the Anabaptists at that time. It is only in recent years that the prediction made in 1905 by H C Vedder is being realised:

The time is rapidly approaching when the Anabaptists will be as abundantly honored as, in the past four centuries, they have been unjustly condemned (quoted by Mosteller 1957:3).

If, then, the repudiation of the name Anabaptist cannot be seen as a valid reason for distancing the Baptists from their 16th century forebears, what of the "differences of faith and practice" to which Hudson Reed refers? It would be foolish to argue that the Baptists and

the Anabaptists were, or are, theologically alike in every respect. Not even the various Anabaptist groups in Holland were, theologically, fully analogous. This article does not deny the differences between these groups but it seeks to draw out those similarities which have previously been ignored or repudiated.

The theological affinities between the Anabaptists and the Baptists include several of the distinguishing doctrinal features of these two groups. Hudson Reed has himself identified "regenerated church membership", the "equality and priesthood of believers" and the "separation of Church and State" as central features of Baptist belief (Hudson Reed 1972:160).

To begin with, the notion of the priesthood of believers was common to both the magisterial and radical reformers though, arguably, the latter came closest to fulfilling its demands, especially in relation to the laity and women. The other two doctrines, however, were tenets held essentially by the Anabaptists. Regenerated church membership is a prominent feature of Baptist doctrine but, unlike Separatism, it incorporates believer's baptism which clearly indicates its theological similarity to Anabaptist doctrine. Smyth argued that infants should not be baptised because this was not taught in the New Testament, in fact, disciples were first to be made and then baptised (Tull 1984:25; Selbie nd: 531). Even Helwys, whatever other reservations he may have had concerning Mennonite doctrine, held that the gathered church was a church of baptised believers (White 1983:26).

Early English Baptist views on baptism, together with its implied critique of State control over faith and practice, closely resembled those of their Anabaptist forebears. This was in sharp contrast with the ideas of both the Anglicans and the Presbyterians in England, both of whom adhered to the Constantinian Church/State model and held that the government and church must together maintain "true religion" (Tull 1984:11ff; George 1984:30-49). In contrast, the English Baptists rejected the collusion of Church and State and preached the separation of

these two authorities. They were not prepared to render absolute obedience to the State, and in order to preserve their independence, Baptist ministers refused to accept State stipends (Cook 1961:186-188; White 1983:37). Consequently, the civic authorities regarded them as nothing other than dangerous revolutionaries who preached unacceptable notions of State and society (Cook 1961:17, 32ff, 199-201; G Hugh Wamble 1985:5). The Baptists, therefore, derived their essential doctrines of the Church, Baptism and Church/State separation from none other than the much maligned Anabaptists.

This theological adherence to Anabaptist principles is also seen in the views of the English Baptists concerning the civic liberty to practice their religious faith. In a booklet entitled The Mystery of Iniquity (1612) Thomas Helwys addressed King James as follows:

Heare O king, and despise not the counsell of the poore ... the king is a mortall man, and not God, therefore hath no power over the immortal soules of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them (quoted by Durnbaugh 1985:97).

Like the Anabaptists, the English Baptists asserted that even if people were heretics, Turks, or Jews, it was not within the authority of the government to judge or persecute them. Nor should civic penalties such as imprisonment, fines or the confiscation of goods be imposed. They went even further in that they criticised the payment of tithes to the Anglican Church as well as the acceptance of State stipends by all ministers of religion (George 1984:40; White 1983:34, 88-92).

There were, however, certain Anabaptist views which the Baptists clearly rejected. For example, they did not accept the Hoffmanite Christology (which denied that Christ had taken human flesh from Mary) held by some of the Continental Anabaptists and they opposed the view that a Christian could be neither a magistrate nor a soldier (Whitley 1932:32-4, 38, 45-58). With respect to their views on the holding of civil office, the Baptists revealed the influence of the Waterlanders who, unlike other Mennonite groups, permitted their members to hold certain civil offices. The issue that thus divided them was not so much that of holding civil

office but that of carrying arms. The Baptists, it must be remembered, saw in the Civil War an opportunity to achieve what had been impossible for all previous Anabaptists, namely to gain both religious and civic liberty through the force of arms.

These differences resulted in the non-acceptance of Helwys' English Baptists by the Dutch Mennonites. The Mennonites also objected to the fact that the English believers had baptised themselves (rather than accepting baptism from the Mennonites). In addition, after the adoption of immersion (rather than affusion) by the English Baptists in 1644, all further contact with the Dutch Mennonites was broken off since the English now regarded the Dutch as unbaptised! (Vedder 1907:209).

By way of summary, the differences between the Anabaptists and the Baptists should not obscure the very considerable debt which the English Baptists owed to the Mennonites. Furthermore, it would seem that the theological similarities between them (regenerate church membership, baptism and the separation of Church and State) cannot be negated by the dissimilarities (Hoffmanite Christology and the carrying of arms). Indeed, modern South African Baptists need to take cognizance of the growing body of knowledge on the Anabaptists and rid themselves of previously commonly held distorted views.

A CONTEXTUAL RE-READING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BAPTIST'S THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

A third tendency amongst South African Baptist writers is to admit the historical and theological link between themselves and the Anabaptists but to fail to develop the contemporary implications of this relationship. It would seem that the radical political connotations of Anabaptist and early English Baptist theology have been subsumed within the modern quietism of the Baptist denomination.

In a paper presented to the students of the Cape Town Baptist College entitled "Baptists and Social Concern", Jeffree James said this concerning the Anabaptists:

"Undoubtably the Anabaptists of the 16th century are amongst the spiritual, if not lineal, ancestors of the modern Baptist movement which originated in England with the formation of the Gainsborough Baptist church under the leadership of John Smyth in 1608" (J James c1988:1).

James also notes the social concerns of both the Anabaptists and the English Baptists but, he fails to explicitly state the contemporary South African implications of these doctrines.

Parnell, in his book Being a Baptist, admits that the previous criticisms of the Anabaptists have been based on false propaganda (Parnell 1980:43-44). He also notes that it was the Anabaptists who first stressed regenerate church membership and thereby opposed the "power-complex" of state imposed religious belief (1980:34-35, 82-83). Parnell does not, however, say how these principles could be applied within the modern South African situation. Similarly, the contributions of Smyth and Helwys to religious freedom are discussed without reference to its attendant civic freedom (1980:46-48). Ellis Andre's interesting thesis entitled, "The Baptist understanding of the relationship between Church and State, with particular reference to the South African Situation" (1984), notes the influence of the Anabaptists but fails to embark upon a systematic attempt to apply Anabaptist principles to the modern South African situation, nor has the practical implications of his thesis been implemented by the Baptist Union's central leadership and local churches.

South African Baptist discussions on believer's baptism reveal the same tendency to abstract theologising. Again, Parnell stresses the personal and ecclesiastical implications of baptism and entry into the church but makes no reference to the social implications of this act (1980:44). In the booklet Baptist Blue-Print (1965:47) and a pamphlet printed by the Roodepoort Mission Press entitled "A command of Jesus Christ : Baptism" the same approach is evident, namely an exclusively individual and ecclesial discussion of baptism.

Believer's baptism is not simply a doctrinal nor an ecclesial idiosyncrasy, it is inextricably tied to the Anabaptist doctrines of the Church and Church/State relations. Baptism is a sign of entry to the new community of the church which, in turn, is to work for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the midst of the evil social structures of a fallen world. It was their attempt to live as a New Testament church that resulted in the persecution of the 16th century Anabaptists. The South African Baptists, by over-emphasising the ecclesiastical significance of baptism (especially its mode) and under-emphasising the socio-political significance of baptism, have distorted its 16th century meaning.

How, then, did the Anabaptists (and the early English Baptists) understand the doctrines of baptism, the gathered church and the separation between the Church and the State?

Believer's baptism, during the Reformation, was the symbol of a new understanding of Christian identity and church membership (cf the discussion of Sattler and Hübmaier in Estep 1986:199-211). Only baptised believers could be admitted to the Corpus Christi (which excluded all those who had been baptised as undiscerning infants) and baptism was regarded as a symbol of the person's commitment to follow Christ. In other words, baptism and discipleship could not be separated. For the Anabaptists, including the Dutch Mennonites, true repentance, faith and a moral life-style were the marks of a Christian. Being born of supposedly Christian parents in a supposedly Christian state and then being baptised into the Christian Church as undiscerning infants was to them a mockery of Christianity. The true test of faith was not the accident of one's birth, but rather discipleship (Nachfolge Christi) (Bender 1957:43). Moreover, the Anabaptists regarded the church as a visible, historical community, not an invisible a-historical entity :

... sixteenth century Anabaptists regarded the true church as a concrete expression of the "present kingdom of Christ which is being established in the midst of and alongside of the kingdom of this world; not ... deferred to some millennial future". In a word, the

Anabaptist vision is a boldly historical one, giving rise to the theological concept of an alternative community (Villa-Vicencio 1986: 61; Friedmann 1957:105-134).

This meant that the implications of regenerate church membership and believer's baptism were not exhausted by their ecclesial meanings. Indeed, the socio-political implications of these doctrines were even more portentous for they implied a critique of the Constantinian Church/State model (Corpus Christianum) and its replacement with a new model, that of the Free/Voluntary Church Freiwilligkeitskirche or, more often, the Corpus Christi (Durnbaugh 1985:26-33, 64-105). The Anabaptists rejected the Volkskirche (national church) of the magisterial reformers and replaced it with the Freiwilligkeitskirche (Littell 1957:119-134). They also ignored the principle of cuius regio eius religio by preaching to all they met, irrespective of whether they lived in Catholic or Protestant principalities. For the Anabaptists, religious faith was something arrived at as a personal decision, not a belief dictated by one's rulers. As a result, they believed in the separation between the Church and State and refused to swear the civic oath least it compel them to act against the dictates of Christ. The civil authorities, they said, could not compel one's conscience nor could they use civic force to punish or change religious belief. As early as the Schleithem Confession of 1527, because of the evil of "the world" and the vicious, unjust nature of the actions of the magistrates against them, the Anabaptists held that a Christian could not be a magistrate. To protect ministers from undue influence and coercion, they held that ministers should not be paid by the State. In all these ways they repulsed the totalitarian power of the rulers.

From the viewpoint of the political and religious authorities, all these teachings struck at the very roots of 16th century notions of Church, citizenship and civic authority. This was why for two centuries the various Anabaptist groups were subjected to an intensely brutal campaign of persecution, justified and encouraged by the combined force of Lutheran, Calvinist and Catholic theologians. In short, the religious and political authorities perceived the godly, righteous and pacifist

Anabaptists as a threat to the entire fabric of the socio-religious system of the time.

What, then, of the South African Baptists' application of the doctrines of baptism and the separation of Church and State?

Believer's baptism is an important part of south African Baptist doctrine. Usually, full membership, and certainly leadership positions are only granted to those who have been baptised as believers. New converts, who were baptised as infants in other churches, are re-baptised. South African Baptists, unlike the Anabaptists, place a great deal of emphasis on the mode of baptism and, neglect the social and political implications of baptism which were so prevalent in the 16th century. But, it may be asked, as the same socio-political situation no longer pertains in the 20th century secular world, how could these doctrines still have socio-political relevance?

Admittedly, secularization has, for better or worse, changed the context within which people live. No longer do all live under the absolute sway of the religious authorities, nor do the magistrates hold the excessive power that was theirs in the 16th century. Arguably, however, within the South African situation the existence of religious and civic freedom is nothing but a dangerous illusion. The totalitarian power of the Nationalist government, despite recent actions such as permitting a number of protest marches, the release of certain detainees, and indications of possible future negotiations, remains essentially intact. Given the existence of Apartheid legislation, the security forces and the State of Emergency, South Africa - especially for blacks - hardly resembles a modern Western democracy. Furthermore, the civil religion and political ideology of the Afrikaners who have justified and enforced Apartheid for over forty years, bears close resemblance to the 16th century Constantinian Church/State model.

Within this context, freedom of religion is ostensibly permitted, but it rarely amounts to more than the freedom of Sunday worship at churches in areas where certain groups are compelled by law to live. The churches, including the Baptist Churches, may have objected to 1957 Native Laws Amendment Bill but, by permitting the imposition of the Group Areas Act, they condemned the churches to function within racially segregated zones. Other examples of State interference in ecclesial praxis include the 1977 banning of the Christian Institute, the harassment of the staff of other religious organisations such as the SACC (South African Council of Churches) and the ICT (Institute of Contextual Theology) and the distorted presentations of various forms of Liberation Theology that appear in the government-controlled SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation). In other words, the totalitarian attitudes and civil religion of those presently in power in South Africa do bear some resemblance to the religio-political notions of the 16th century rulers.

Within such a situation, and given their historic and theological heritage, how should the South African Baptists respond?

Firstly, Christian discipleship must amount to more than adherence to a personal moral code. Love, righteousness, justice and reconciliation are not simply terms that involve the individual and God, nor only the members of a single local church. Unless they are actively practised within the total community, and especially outside one's own class, race and gender categories, they are not being practiced at all.

Secondly, a historical vision of the Church must include a determined effort to bear practical witness to the principles of the Kingdom of God which is already partly evident in history. But, whereas even the enemies of the Anabaptists admitted their exemplary lifestyles and their sacrificial love for those within the community, amongst South African Baptists, enormous social divisions exist; between Afrikaans and English-speaking members, between black and white and between different classes. In addition, members of the Union do not appear overly perturbed at the break-away of the Convention, and Union officials have

reportedly negotiated with Convention member churches without the knowledge or consent of the Convention Executive. Amongst Baptists in South Africa today, paternalism, division, suspicion and disunity far outweigh any experience of a truly regenerate church and genuine Christian community concern.

The fact that the Union is multi-racial only in name was clearly evidenced at the 1989 Assembly in Kimberley. Despite the presence of members of other race groups, whites dominated the leadership panel, discussions, issues on the agenda and decisions concerning future policies. In a country within which the activities of the army and police are a very sensitive issue, the Assembly planning committee, despite stated misgivings on the part of the Union Executive, arranged for the business sessions of the Assembly to be held at the local Defence Force Camp! Despite spirited objections by several Coloured ministers and a decision to change venues, a motion was brought at the next session to return to the army camp. The motion was only narrowly defeated, 126 to 103. If such is the state of affairs within the denomination, it is little wonder that the innumerable statements addressed to the government by the Union concerning their rejection of Apartheid and its evil outworking, carry little weight both within and without the denomination.

What, then, of the anti-totalitarian praxis of the Anabaptists? In South Africa, this should have led the Baptists to question and oppose the ideology of apartheid, instead, they have implemented it within their structures and local churches. To my mind, this practice contradicts, even negates, the many statements made against this ideology by the SABU. Moreover, the doctrine of the separation between Church and State has all too often been understood to mean that the church must withdraw and allow the State control over political affairs whilst the church concerns itself only with religious affairs (Kretzchmar 1989:103ff). Whilst it is true that the Anabaptists did preach a measure of withdrawal, this was largely forced upon them by the authorities of the day. Further, in terms of their prophetic witness, missionary involvement, radical stewardship and social concern within, and without of the community,

the Anabaptists did not distance themselves from the needs of those around them (Hershberger 1957:152-166, 194-201). For all these reasons, Anabaptism was a popular movement and not an isolated sect. Furthermore, in their determination to win the freedom of worship, the Anabaptists and English Baptists also spear-headed the call for civic rights such as the freedom of opinion, speech and association.

Local Baptists should realise, as did the English Baptists in their Confession of 1644, that there is an intimate connection between religious and political liberty:

... concerning the worship of God, there is but one lawgiver ... which is Jesus Christ ... So it is the magistrate's duty to tender the liberty of men's consciences (Eccl 8:8) which is the dearest thing to all conscientious men, ... and to protect all under them from all wrong, injury, oppression, and molestation ... (Quoted by Vedder 1907:212).

These claims for religious and civic liberty were made within extremely unfavourable circumstances. Various laws (such as the Corporation Act of 1661, the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and the Conventicle Act of 1664) were enacted against all non-conformists. As a result they could not hold public office, were expected to adhere to the thirty-nine articles and could not hold normal religious meetings. In short, religious and civic liberty is indivisible. As Vedder puts it:

By these laws, those who refused, for conscience sake, to conform to the church established by law were deprived of all their religious and a great part of their civil rights (Vedder 1907:231).

The non-conformists of this period, like blacks in South Africa today, were restricted in terms of holding civil offices, attending certain universities, and associating with like-minded people, in short, of socio-economic and political advancement. And yet, the South African Baptists seemingly restrict their understanding of liberty to "matters of faith". Their Statement of Principles says this:

... no individual should be coerced by the State or any secular, ecclesiastical or religious group in matters of faith. The right of private conscience is to be respected. For each believer this means the right to interpret the scriptures responsibly and to act in the light of his conscience. (my emphasis). (South African Baptist Handbook 1987-88:179).

In other words, religious liberty is affirmed, but it is largely isolated from civic liberty. Matters of faith seldom include the application of the Christian faith to the social realm. Whilst statements from the Union Executive and the Christian Citizenship Committee do sometimes concern themselves with socio-political matters, there is little evidence that the local congregations are actively concerned with vital areas such as military conscription, land-ownership, detention without trial, lack of political representation and black exclusion from white educational institutions and residential areas. White Baptists privatise the Gospel whilst thousands of Black Baptist "brothers and sisters" live daily under the deprivations and humiliations of the very socio-economic system which has lifted the white Baptists to the middle and upper-middle classes.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the South African Baptists have either ignored and denied their Anabaptist roots, or have limited the application of Anabaptist doctrine to narrowly conceived personal and ecclesial concerns. Despite this tendency to neglect their Anabaptist roots, there is an indirect historical and theological link between the South African Baptists and the Anabaptists through the agency of the English Baptists. Though the Separatists were an important factor in the establishment of the English Baptist churches, the equally important, perhaps greater, contribution of the Anabaptists should be stressed. Because this has not been done, South African Baptists have failed to benefit from the many insights of Anabaptist (and early English Baptist) doctrine and experience.

Instead of putting the Anabaptist stress on community life into practice in opposition to the racial divisions of their context, they have

repeated the worldly patterns of paternalism and dominance within their own ecclesial structures. By neglecting the social dimensions of the doctrines of the church, baptism and Church/State relations, they have served the interests of the white group at the expense of the civic and religious concerns of black Baptists. The lack of a socially applicable morality, and the inability to practice a form of community life that moves beyond the lines of gender, race and culture, has made the Baptists largely irrelevant and ineffective in the modern South African social context.

The Baptists' tendency to withdraw from socio-political matters has left the State free to pursue its aims unchallenged by a Christian social ethic. The local churches have become so distanced from the socio-economic and political affairs of society that they are, in fact, largely subservient to the State. The local churches seldom question, let alone actively oppose, the institutionalised evil of the "rulers". Thus, even though in theory the South African Baptists espouse the principle of a Free Church, this denomination's witness and impact on the State is extremely circumscribed. It is tragic that the very Church whose traditions and history have best equipped it to resist the demonic power of an unjust State, has been and still is so ill-equipped to stand against governmental tyranny.

Political and religious struggles are inseparable, paradoxically precisely because of the Baptist belief that the Church and the State should be separate. For this separation does not mean that the Church should withdraw into itself, it is separate precisely in order to bear witness to God's hatred of injustice, racial arrogance and tyranny. But in the case of the South African Baptists, individualism has led to withdrawal, and withdrawal has resulted in a Church acquiescent to the totalitarian claims of the State.

The South African Baptist Union is faced with a choice. Either to continue to cling to an illusory unity or to pursue a vision of the church that includes : the establishment of a genuine form of

discipleship which is both personally and socially relevant; a separation from paternalism and racism; a single and truly multi-racial church; and the active resistance of the tyranny and injustice of the State. If the Baptist Union could take a public stand concerning the application of Baptist doctrine within the modern South African context, and determinedly strive for a meaningful unity of Baptists across cultural, class, racial and gender lines, they could see a revival of the enormous spiritual power of their Anabaptist forebears.

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