

*A Timely Reminder from
Fred R. Leuck:
Historical Baptist Works Must Not
Be Forgotten*

In 1853, the American, John Quincy Adams, published his *Baptists: The Only Thorough Religious Reformers*.¹ When Adams was in London in 1868, Charles Haddon Spurgeon told him that he (Spurgeon) had used Adams' volume as a textbook in his College because he thought it the best manual of Baptist principles he had come across. In 1980, Backus Book Publishers, Rochester, New York, reprinted 3200 copies of the work and, two years later, a further 3000 copies under the title *Baptists: Thorough Reformers*. Fred R. Leuck of Metamora, Michigan, in his Preface for the 1982 reprint, expressed his preference for the original title, undaunted by the fact that his stance might lead some to call him 'narrow'. Nearly forty years too late, alas, I applaud his spirit!

Moreover, Leuck's Preface contained material that should not be lost – and for the very reasons he himself expressed in that Preface. He drew attention to the importance of the publication of historical Baptist works. I wholeheartedly endorse this sentiment. Many invaluable Baptist works are, sad to say, often unknown, forgotten or ignored, simply gathering dust on shelves or buried in the archives of the academic world. Now since I myself have been privileged to do something towards putting such works before a wider audience,² I was moved to produce this little selection of

¹ In this article I allow Adams' use of 'religious'. I would have preferred 'spiritual'.

² See my *John Bunyan: Antinomian, New-Covenant Theologian, or...?; Exalting Christ: Thomas Collier on the New Covenant; Collier on the New Covenant; Anne Dutton Speaks Today; The Spirituality of Anne Dutton; Govett on the New Covenant; Horne on*

extracts from Leuck's Preface, laced with a few comments of my own.³ May the resultant article punch above its weight. I believe it can. I believe it should.

While Leuck acknowledged that 'many old works [have been] reprinted which are of great value to the church', he deplored the fact that:

...few... if any of the reprints have come from the pen of Baptists who wrote *for* Baptists and who were totally committed *to* Baptist theology and church polity [that is, Baptist church constitution]. Indeed, Baptists themselves have all but forgotten their historical roots, and have opted instead to rely upon the Puritans and the infant-baptiser Reformers for their understanding of the theology and local church structure. This has produced a 'strange animal' which, though adhering to believer's baptism by immersion, has practically adopted, in total, the strong covenant emphasis and ecclesiastical rule so characteristic of infant baptisers. It is as though men have assumed that the Reformation began and ended with the infant-baptiser Reformers.

What a percipient observation! How true! How sad! How grievous it to see many Reformed Baptists flirting with covenant theology! And how few Baptists are interested in Anabaptist history! And not a few of those who do have some knowledge of such men and women only know of them through Reformed prejudice and ignorance. Since 1982, when Leuck was writing, I am glad to record an increase in the momentum of the long-overdue rescue of the Anabaptists from the consequences of Reformed misinformation, misinformation which has been promulgated for the best (rather, worst) part of four hundred years. Alas, however, with the welter of Reformed works now available, many continue to capitulate to the philosophical system of covenant theology,

the True Sabbath; Clarity Dispelling Confusion: S.W.Lynd on the Abrahamic Covenant; Purnell on the New Covenant; Spurgeon on the New Covenant.

³ I have replaced Leuck's 'pedobaptism [paedobaptism]' with 'infant baptism' (or their equivalents).

and all that that involves; not least, infant baptism has a growing attraction for many. I deplore this. I deplore it, not because I am a Baptist. No! But because infant baptism – more properly, baby sprinkling – is manifestly unscriptural, as I have argued in many works. Going down the road to infant baptism is not a trivial matter. As I have documented in detail, its consequences are dire. The reading of Scripture, the understanding and appreciation of the new covenant, the gospel itself, and conversion are all at stake.⁴ And that is why Leuck's reminder is timely.

He continued:

John Quincy Adams (1825-1881) in [his] little book... ably demonstrates that it was (and by principle ever will be) the Baptists who carried the work of reformation to its fullest and purest extent – from the corruptions of Roman Catholicism back to the New Testament Scriptures. This does not mean that reform is finished, for by the very nature of things the church is constantly being corrupted by heresy, tradition, prejudice, *etc.*, which must be exposed by all God-fearing men.

Leuck has hit the bull's eye once again. In some of my works, though I have gone back to the past, I have urged my readers (and I include myself) not to live there. We have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as now (Esther 4:14), and now is when we must raise our testimony for Christ.

Leuck moved on to make a subtle point, subtle but very necessary:

Even though the cry of the Reformation was *sola scriptura* (the Scriptures alone for faith and practice), Adams shows that the infant-baptiser brethren had adopted that principle only insofar as it did not disturb and challenge their traditional practice of infant baptism. Nowhere in Scripture can it be shown that infants were the objects of Christian baptism, or that any but converted, born-again believers were made part of the New Testament church. The Baptists were bold enough, not only to teach believer's baptism by immersion, but to refuse to comply with the [retained, that is,

⁴ See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

retained by the Reformers]⁵ Romanist doctrine of infant baptism practiced by other Protestants. The courage to stand on the Bible alone cost some of them their lives. They were slaughtered not only by the sword of Rome, but also by the sword of infant-baptiser Protestants.

And so they were!⁶

Leuck went on, making the point that he was not saying this to open old wounds, but to raise awareness of the vital principles which are involved and are at risk. We are not talking about the age of a person to be baptised. Nor are we concerned merely with the amount of water. We are talking about *believer's* baptism by immersion or dipping as against any other sort of baptism. And, as I have said, massive issues are tied up with this. We are not discussing something optional. The New Testament could not be more explicit. Following conversion, immersion – that is, dipping or plunging – is Christ's law for the believer. It is an essential mark of obedience to Christ for those who are saved. Two passages will suffice to make the point:

Jesus came and said to them [that is, his disciples]: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:18-20).

[Christ] said to them [that is, his disciples]: 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:15-16).

With Christ's words ringing in our ears, let no man dismiss this topic as trivial!

As I say, Leuck was not trying to open old wounds for the sake of it. As he made clear:

⁵ Leuck had 'hold-over'.

⁶ See my *Battle For The Church: 1517-1644*.

All of the above-mentioned is said not to incite anger against infant baptisers, but to point out that believer's baptism by immersion is not the insignificant matter most assume it to be. [Adams] points out that the corruption of this one doctrine [and its practice] has been responsible for unbiblical and erroneous doctrines of church membership, wrong definition and practice of religious liberty, corrupt church order and government, and even deliberate mistranslation of the Scriptures. Something as far-reaching as this cannot be dismissed as being an 'insignificant matter'.

Alas, many Baptists are losing their grip on this. Leuck issued a clarion wake-up call. Forty years later, sad to record, this call is still needed as much as ever it was. Far too many Baptists are living virtually in the old covenant, adopting the errors introduced by the Fathers – clergydom, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism (priestcraft), living under Moses rather than Christ, and so on. Some are even adopting Baptist sacramentalism.⁷ These are serious matters, serious in the extreme.⁸

As Leuck expressed it:

Yet for many Baptists, the significance of their doctrinal position *has* eluded them. Baptist churches are being ruled by a religious hierarchy of pastors, elders, or deacons every bit as stifling to self-rule as that hierarchy found in infant-baptiser churches... Adams' point is well-taken: 'Man thirsts for power. He loves to be elevated above his fellows, and occupy a position of acknowledged superiority. He delights to be clothed with a little brief authority, which would enable

⁷ See my *Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists*.

⁸ Sacramentalism is the idea that certain men can convey grace to others by their actions, by their observance of rites and ceremonies. Sacerdotalists delegate their worship into the hands of others, who they feel are better able, more qualified, to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests. Hence has arisen the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity. But in the new covenant there is no justification for sacerdotalism, or any notion of clergy and laity. The priesthood of all believers, as interpreted by the New Testament, certainly gives no warrant for sacerdotalism or its twin sister, sacramentalism.

him to look on all around him as inferiors. It is the working of the spirit of arrogance and assumption that has created so many grades among men, both in the world and in the church'.

Too true, I am sorry to say.⁹

That's not all. Even today, Baptists are among those looking to get governments on their side, hoping that the political powers-that-be will bolster a decaying Christianity for them. But the weapons of our warfare are not only not military; they are not political either:

Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

But as Leuck had the courage to point out:

More than a few Baptists are enamoured, though at a loss as to how to achieve it, with the idea of establishing a State religion, a society in which the government becomes 'Christian', and thus the protector and defender of the church. They have forgotten the past persecution from government-backed Protestant brethren who did not share the same doctrinal views as the Baptists. They have not distinguished between religious toleration and true religious freedom. Adams remarks: 'Toleration is the allowance of that which is not wholly approved. As applied to religion, the term is objectionable, because it presupposes the existence of some mere human authority, which has power to grant to, or withhold from, man the exercise of freedom in matters of religion – and this is Popery'. The Baptists have always sought for religious liberty for all men, including their enemies.

How true! It is the spirit of the new covenant.

Leuck, quoting Adams, then addressed the American scene, but their words have a far wider resonance than

⁹ See my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?; The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?*

America in the 19th and 20th centuries. They need to be weighed by American believers today. Indeed, they need to be heeded by all believers:

[Adams] points out that it was the Baptists who were responsible for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution which guaranteed that ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances’. This is most relevant for today. Can we not see in our country, not only the intrusion of the government into the affairs of the church, but a denial and even a reversal by Baptists (and other believers) of this principle of religious freedom and separation of church and State?

What a salutary question! How relevant!

May Leuck’s ‘reminder’, and my publication of this selection from his Preface to John Quincy Adams’ book, with my added comments, do something to promote the truth for which our Baptist forebears stood so resolutely, and stood for at such tremendous personal cost. May this little piece encourage many to look more closely into these vital principles.