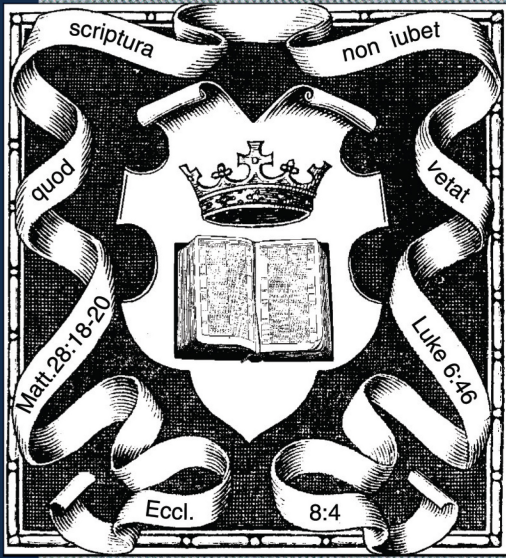


The Baptist Distinctives Series

Number 53



The Price of Soul-Liberty and Who Paid It

Henry C. Fish



Quod scriptura, non iubet velat

The Latin translates, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:”

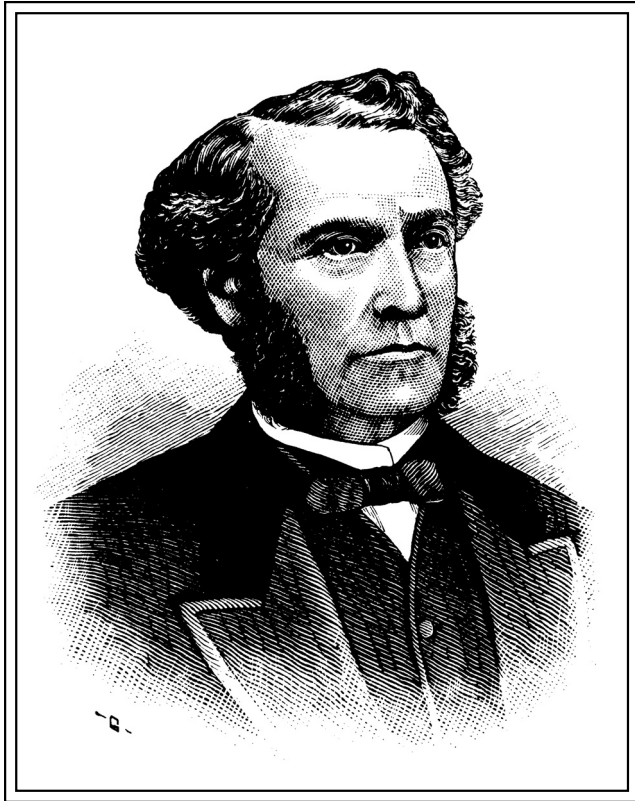
On the Cover: Baptists rejoice to hold in common with other evangelicals the main principles of the orthodox Christian faith. However, there are points of difference and these differences are significant. In fact, because these differences arise out of God’s revealed will, they are of vital importance. Hence, the barriers of separation between Baptists and others can hardly be considered a trifling matter. To suppose that Baptists are kept apart solely by their views on Baptism or the Lord’s Supper is a regrettable misunderstanding. Baptists hold views which distinguish them from Catholics, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians, and the differences are so great as not only to justify, but to demand, the separate denominational existence of Baptists. Some people think Baptists ought not teach and emphasize their differences but as E.J. Forrester stated in 1893, “Any denomination that has views which justify its separate existence, is bound to promulgate those views. If those views are of sufficient importance to justify a separate existence, they are important enough to create a duty for their promulgation ... the very same reasons which justify the separate existence of any denomination make it the duty of that denomination to teach the distinctive doctrines upon which its separate existence rests.” If Baptists have a right to a separate denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which their separate life cannot be justified or maintained.

Many among today’s professing Baptists have an agenda to revise the Baptist distinctives and redefine what it means to be a Baptist. Others don’t understand why it even matters. The books being reproduced in the *Baptist Distinctives Series* are republished in order that Baptists from the past may state, explain and defend the primary Baptist distinctives as they understood them. It is hoped that this Series will provide a more thorough historical perspective on what it means to be distinctively Baptist.

The Lord Jesus Christ asked, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). The immediate context surrounding this question explains what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. Addressing the same issue, Christ’s question is meant to show that a confession of discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is inconsistent and untrue if it is not accompanied with a corresponding submission to His authoritative commands. Christ’s question teaches us that a true recognition of His authority as Lord inevitably includes a submission to the authority of His Word. Hence, with this question Christ has made it forever impossible to separate His authority as King from the authority of His Word. These two principles—the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word—are the two most fundamental Baptist distinctives. The first gives rise to the second and out of these two all the other Baptist distinctives emanate. As F.M. Jans wrote in 1894, “Loyalty to Christ as King, manifesting itself in a constant and unswerving obedience to His will as revealed in His written Word, is the real source of all the Baptist distinctives:’ In the search for the *primary* Baptist distinctive many have settled on the Lordship of Christ as the most basic distinctive. Strangely, in doing this, some have attempted to separate Christ’s Lordship from the authority of Scripture, as if you could embrace Christ’s authority without submitting to what He commanded. However, while Christ’s Lordship and Kingly authority can be isolated and considered essentially for discussion’s sake, we see from Christ’s own words in Luke 6:46 that His Lordship is really inseparable from His Word and, with regard to real Christian discipleship, there can be no practical submission to the one without a practical submission to the other.

In the symbol above the Kingly Crown and the Open Bible represent the inseparable truths of Christ’s Kingly and Biblical authority. The Crown and Bible graphics are supplemented by three Bible verses (Ecclesiastes 8:4, Matthew 28:18-20, and Luke 6:46) that reiterate and reinforce the inextricable connection between the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word. The truths symbolized by these components are further emphasized by the Latin quotation - *quod scriptura, non iubet vetat*— *i.e.*, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:’ This Latin quote has been considered historically as a summary statement of the regulative principle of Scripture. Together these various symbolic components converge to exhibit the two most foundational Baptist Distinctives out of which all the other Baptist Distinctives arise. Consequently, we have chosen this composite symbol as a logo to represent the primary truths set forth in the *Baptist Distinctives Series*.

**THE PRICE
OF
SOUL-LIBERTY
AND WHO PAID IT**



HENRY CLAY FISH
1820-1877

THE PRICE
OF
SOUL-LIBERTY
AND WHO PAID IT

BY
HENRY C. FISH, D.D.

"Freedom of Conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was, from the first, the trophy of the Baptists." —George Bancroft.



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

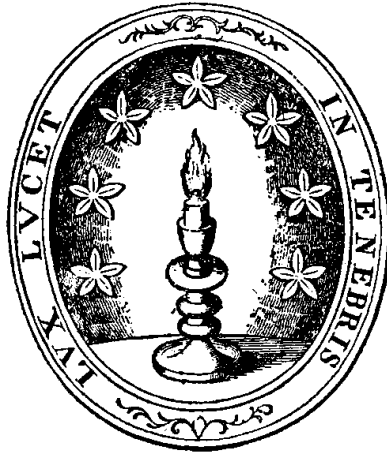
-- *Psalm 60:4*

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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Preface to the 1983 Reprint

The first murder in history was on the ground of religious difference. Cains often murder Abels. Those with divine favor are always hated by those who refuse the grace of God. In all ages and in all cultures, men have shown themselves more willing to persecute others on the ground of religious dissent than for any other single reason.

Issues of religious liberty proliferate on every hand. Devotees of modern cults are being deprogrammed, sometimes against their will. In some states, magistrates are usurping authority over the parents of Christian day-school students in attempts to force them to return to the public school. In their attempts to disseminate the truth, many Christian radio broadcasters are in constant friction with the FCC. One of the greatest challenges of our time seems to be the totalitarian state's claim to have absolute rights over the individual conscience. Thus, we are happy to see the reappearance of this book by Henry Fish. It will surely prove timely for any pertinent discussion of contemporary church-state issues.

Man was created to be different from the other creatures. Only he was made in the divine image. Only he had a will. He could reason and make decisions. Unlike the birds in the air which were programmed to fly and unlike the fish in the ocean which were programmed to swim, man was not programmed. He had the power of choice.

This was his greatest glory... and the most expensive part of creation, for it cost God His Son. When man fell into sin, however, his will became enslaved so that he could no longer choose God. Decision-making was still possible, even hard and difficult ones based on high moral and ethical principles, but the *Imago Dei* was effaced. Here, in Henry Fish's reprinted book, we are reminded that man's tarnished image has often expressed itself in religious bigotry.

Three hundred years ago, Louis Du Moulin wrote these words:

A particular person, or church, ought not to submit their faith, their religion, nor the guidance of their manners to an authority which is subject to error, but only to the Word of God, which is an infallible authority.

Even before that, Robert Brown, in his book *Reformation Without Tarrying for Any*, said:

The Lord's people is of the willing sort...for it is the conscience and not the power of man that will drive it to seek the Lord's kingdom.

Neither of these writers was a Baptist in a strict sense of the term, but both of them shared the views later made famous by many Baptist authors. In 1614, Leonard Bushar wrote a tract entitled *Religious Peace, or a Plea for a Liberty of Conscience*. The following year, an obscure member of Thomas Helwy's church wrote a book named *Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned*. Samuel Richardson, a member of a Particular Baptist church in London, authored a book entitled *The Necessity of Toleration in Matters of Religion* (1647). Another book appeared in 1660, *The Humble Petition and Representation of the Sufferings of Several Peaceable and Innocent Subjects, called by the Name of Anabaptists...for the Testimony of*

Our Good Conscience. The next year, John Sturghion wrote a pamphlet called *A Plea for Toleration of Opinion and Persuasion in Matters of Religion... Showing the Unreasonableness of Prescribing to Other Men's Faith and the Evil of Persecuting Different Opinions*. Greatest of them all was Roger Williams' publication called *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, which appeared in 1644. The ideas in this monumental effort would be perpetuated as part of the American Constitution in Article I of the Bill of Rights.

Baptist views on soul-liberty are in marked contrast to Roman Catholic and Protestant concepts. Ann Freemantle, in her book, *The Papal Encyclicals*, has reprinted many of the modern papal statements including some which denounce liberty of conscience. One 19th century pope called religious liberty "insanity." The reformers were not far behind. In 1885, a statue was erected in the city of Zurich to honor Zwingli. The great reformer is shown with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other, symbolizing the civil power in unholy alliance with ecclesiastical power. Similar statues could have been erected to Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in Geneva, John Knox in Scotland, Thomas Cranmer in England, and John Cotton in New England. All of them believed as Augustine did, namely, that God has two hands by which He administers the affairs of this world. One hand is the church; the other is the magistrate. Just as one hand must help the other in normal bodily functions, so the church and the state must help each other as God performs His task in human history.

Protestant confessions of faith from the 16th and 17th centuries gave the magistrate a coercive power in religious

affairs. Even the most venerable statement coming out of the Westminster Assembly of 1647 stated that religious dissenters should be “lawfully called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church, and by the power of the Civil Magistrate.” Thus, the state was to help enforce the law against deviations of worship. Many of the Presbyterian members of the Westminster Assembly published books against religious liberty. Ephraim Pagitt, Richard Byfield, Adam Stewart, and Samuel Rutherford were only a few of the many. Separation of church and state was missing from all of their writings. Neither in the 16th nor 17th centuries do we find the reformers or their children exhibiting much tolerance of religious dissent.

Luther and Calvin believed in magisterial force. The former said: “Since it is not good that in one parish the people should be exposed to contradictory preaching, he (the magistrate) should order to be silent whatever does not consist with the Scriptures.” Calvin agreed: “Godly princes may issue edicts for compelling obstinate and religious persons to worship the true God and to maintain the unity of the faith.” In 1520, Martin Luther had written his famous tract entitled *Liberty of the Christian Man*, but within a very few years he was urging the nobility of the land to use force against the Baptists.

From such seed plots many theocratic notions have sprung. A famous law against religious dissent was adopted in Massachusetts in 1644. Baptists were sentenced to banishment. One of the New England leaders, John Cotton, wrote that “toleration made the world anti-Christian.”

Eventually the history of religious bigotry was going to change, however. In the United States, church and state

were finally separated by the Bill of Rights. Two of the thirteen colonies displayed Baptist influence in the forefront of this struggle. Rhode Island had as its founder Roger Williams, ensuring the adoption of religious toleration from the very beginning. In Pennsylvania, William Penn, also influenced by Baptist beliefs, was another who espoused religious liberty.

Basic concepts of soul-liberty can be found in all the great Baptist confessions such as the Schleithem Confession (1527), the London Confession (1644), the General Baptist Confession (1660), the Orthodox Creed (1678), and the New Hampshire Confession (1833). These all reveal that Baptists have spoken with a united voice regarding the great principle of soul-liberty.

Many modern fundamentalist leaders have continued to drink at the theocratic well which was dug by ancients from Augustine to Luther and beyond. John Cotton was not the only one who equated the American experiment with the Old Testament economy of Israel in order to erect a modern counterpart of Manifest Destiny. Our founding fathers separated church and state, but ideas of civil religion have persisted through the two hundred years of our history. A study of the material in Henry C. Fish's book will undoubtedly prove to be of great interest to those who are caught in the theocratic web of modern Christian political activism.

It is time that Baptists did some serious thinking about this great principle of soul-liberty, independent thinking which is not encumbered by four hundred years of theocratic Protestant tradition. Although Baptists were condemned by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, yet today they are behaving like the reformers in many cur-

rent church-state activities. Indeed, theirs has been the only denomination in all of church history which has consistently denied the use of magisterial force to accomplish spiritual ends. Only in modern times has this principle been called into question.

Western civilization is surely indebted to our Baptist forefathers for giving clear testimony to the advantage of the separation of church and state. Augustine viewed the church and the state as coexistent. Much error resulted as the church then has the power of capital punishment. For a thousand years throughout the Middle Ages this was the opinion of the papal church. Sixteenth-century Anabaptists such as Dietrich Philips, Menno Simons, and Henry Jacob all parted company with Augustine's philosophy. They wrote against the equation of Israel and the church. By doing so, they established a new basis for soul-liberty. Later on, covenant theology came into being as a result of the work of Cocceius in the middle of the 17th century. Covenant theology has proven to be a very weak basis on which to establish the great doctrine of individual conscience. Protestants who have been most involved with covenant theology need to reread the writings of Isaac Backus and Roger Williams, who parted company with theocratic tendencies in the interest of maintaining the great Baptist principle of religious liberty.

We welcome this new edition of Henry Fish's book on soul-liberty. Evangelical discussion of church-state relationships will be more sharply focused because of its reappearance.

Rembert B. Carter, M.Div., Ph.D.
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Baptist Bible College of Pennsylvania

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Upon the subject treated in the following pages, there is little room for originality; since almost every thing brought forward must necessarily be gleaned from the writings of those who have gone before us.

At the same time, it is believed that nowhere else are exhibited so fully and authoritatively (certainly not in the same compass,) the facts bearing upon the struggles and triumphs of RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, especially in these United States.

These facts ought to be known by each succeeding generation of Christians. Church members, generally, should be in possession of them; the children in our Sunday Schools should become familiar with them; and converts added to the Churches should know how dearly purchased, by our fathers, are the privileges which they enjoy.

It has been justly said, that without a strong regard to the history and the principles of their ancestors, a denomination may quite lose sight of those distinctive peculiarities which have been the source of its usefulness.

The hope is entertained, therefore, that the humble mission of this little volume will be one of usefulness.

NEWARK, June 7, 1860.

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SOUL-LIBERTY

SOUL-LIBERTY is the liberty to think and act in religious matters without human dictation or control.

The people of this country, and of some other parts of the world, now enjoy this privilege; but the time was when it was denied them.

The chief captain said to Paul, "With a great price I obtained this freedom." So may we say, with respect to religious freedom. The price of it was great; a price paid in tears, and toils, and blood.

But who paid this price? We ought to know, for how else shall we appreciate this great blessing, and cherish, as we ought, the memory of those who suffered to procure it?

It is a remark of the great American historian, Bancroft, that "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first, the trophy of the BAPTISTS."

This is a just remark; and it is the purpose of this little book, to furnish some of these deeply interesting facts upon which such an assertion is based.

It is not denied that religious liberty has had noble champions of a different faith; but its main, and chief, and foremost advocates have been among the Baptists.

This would be naturally expected, for two reasons: First, from their peculiarity of belief. The distinguishing tenet of this denomination is, *direct personal and individual responsibility to God*. With them it is a fundamental doctrine, that no man has a right to dictate to another in religion; to control the action of his conscience, or to compel him to any creed or form of worship against his will. Everything pertaining to religion, must be a matter of *intelligent conviction and voluntary choice*. To God each man, for himself, either stands or falls. As Paul has it, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant. To his own master he standeth or falleth."

Or, as it is expressed in the familiar couplet:

"Consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord's alone."

Hence the Baptists never baptize infants. Besides wanting, as they believe, the support of the Scriptures, it impinges upon this matter of voluntary religious action. It deprives the child of the liberty of deciding *for himself* as to what is obedience to a certain Gospel command, and performing, for himself, intelligently, a duty enjoined upon all true believers. He is under engagements, when he grows up, in the forming of which engagements, he had no voluntary agency.

And declining interference as to the *child's* freedom, the Baptists, would, of course, resist it in respect to the adult.

The other reason why it might be expected that the

Baptists would be the foremost defenders of religious freedom, is, because they have suffered most from religious intolerance and oppression. Other denominations have suffered something — they *much*. The period of their suffering has been long.

In every age of the Christian era, there have been those holding their views; and they have always been subject to some degree of suffering for holding them.

The fourth century had not passed, when the doctrine of *sacramental efficacy* came to be a prevailing opinion. Baptism was considered the medium of grace; and without it, there could be no salvation. Hence arose “clinic,” or sick-room baptism; as also that of unconscious children. Against this practice some protested, declaring that it was a perversion of the original design of the ordinance, which in such cases was not valid.

The protesting party were denounced and assailed. In the year 413 re-baptism, as it was termed, was forbidden throughout the Roman Empire, under the penalty of death.

In the following year, the council of Carthage, of which Augustine was the President, thus decreed: “We will that whosoever denies that little children, by baptism, are freed from perdition and eternally saved, that they be accursed.” Justinian, in the beginning of the sixth century, ordered new-born babes to be baptized, under a penalty for neglecting it.

To whom these acts referred, it is not difficult to perceive.

Thus early did Baptists begin to pay the price of Soul-Liberty. And, ever suffering for their faith, is it strange

that they should have been first and foremost in denouncing religious tyranny, and proclaiming the sanctity of conscience?

“REASONS WHY BAPTISTS OUGHT TO TEACH THEIR DISTINCTIVE VIEWS . . . First, it is a duty we owe to ourselves. We must teach these views in order to be consistent in holding them. Because of these we stand apart from other Christians, in separate organizations. . . We have no right thus to stand apart unless the matters of difference have real importance; and if they are really important, we certainly ought to teach them.”

JOHN A. BROADUS

The Duty of Baptists To Teach Their Distinctive Views.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881).

“No religious denomination has a moral right to a separate existence unless it differs essentially from others. Ecclesiastical differences ought always to spring from profound doctrinal differences. *To divide Christians, except for reasons of gravest import, is criminal schism.* Separate religious denominations are justifiable only for matters of conscience growing out of clear scriptural precept.”

J. L. M. CURRY

A Baptist Church Radically Different From Paedobaptist Churches.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1889).

“There is something distinctive in the principles of Baptists. They differ from all other denominations; and the difference is so great as not only to justify, but to demand, their separate existence as a people . . . What distinctive mission have the Baptists, if this is not their mission? - to present the truth in love on the matters wherein they differ from Pedobaptists. What is there but this that justifies their separate denominational existence and saves them from the reproach of being schismatics? *If they have a right to denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which that life cannot be justified or maintained.*”

J. M. PENDLETON

Distinctive Principles of Baptists.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882).

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