

*While on a quest to understand our region's history I came upon a series of articles written by Walter Rauschenbusch about what it means to be a Baptist. I thought you might enjoy reading this series of articles - Alan Newton*

## **THE ROCHESTER BAPTIST MONTHLY – November 1905**

### *Why I am a Baptist* **BY PROFESSOR WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH** **PRELUDE**

Why am I a Baptist? Well, at the outset, because my father was one. He was a Lutheran minister in Germany; he came to America, got into contact with the Baptists, found in their teachings the truths that he had been groping for and, under great loss of position and trouble of soul, became a Baptist. If he had remained a Lutheran minister in Germany, I should probably not be a Baptist minister in America. There is no use in denying that our family relations and the training of our childhood exert a very strong influence on all of us and determine our religious affiliations for us. In countries that have an "Established Church" "it is considered a horrible and impious thing for anyone to leave the religion of his fathers, and even in our country, which is the paradise of religious liberty and individualism, only a minority of persons are so strongly swayed by individual convictions that they can break the soft and twining bonds of family love and family tradition. Most men are Catholics or Protestants or Jews, because their parents were Catholics or Protestants or *Jews*, and that's all there is of it. If the angels tonight should steal a hundred Baptist babies and replace them by Episcopalian babies, it is fair to assume that the babies which might have grown up to champion episcopacy and the apostolic succession and the Prayer Book, would learn to smile the smile of conscious superiority at those very things. There are some of us who have become Baptists from simple conviction, and have had to leave the denomination of their parents to follow where truth led them. But the majority of us were born in Baptist families, and I am one of that majority.

But that expresses only half of the truth. We are Americans because we were born so. But it is our duty and our right clearly and increasingly to understand what our country stands for and to adopt as our personal principles those ideals of democracy and equality on which our national life is founded. We are Americans by birth, but we must become Baptists by conviction. And no man is a true Baptist until his inherited tendency has been transformed into conscious purpose. In a big freight yard you can watch a locomotive distributing a freight train over the various sidings. It will bunt a car along and let it roll along by itself. The car moves, but it moves by the power of inertia. It has no living energy in it. By and by it will slow up and stop. No Baptist boy or girl ought to grow up to resemble that car. They must develop their own Baptist convictions and run under their own steam. They have inherited a great legacy of truth; let them learn what is already theirs; let them hold by the surer title of personal acquisition what is theirs by hereditary right.

I began by being a Baptist because my father was, but to-day I am a Baptist, because, with my convictions, I could not well be anything else. I now stand on my own feet and am ready to give an account of the faith I hold. It is a good thing to raise the question: "Why are you

a Baptist?" I wish all our church members had to answer it clearly and fully. It is possible to be a Baptist on small grounds or on large grounds. Some man will say: "I am a Baptist because the Greek word *baptizo* means immerse. That is quite true, but that is a pretty small peg to hang your religious convictions on. A near-sighted child was taken to the Zoo and stood in front of the lion's cage. The lion's tail was hanging down through the bars. "But I thought the lion was different," said the child, "it looks like a yellow rope." So there are Baptists who have hitherto discovered only the tail-end of our Baptist ideals and convictions, and it is no wonder that they turn out as narrow as the tail they devoutly believe in. It is possible to play "Nearer, my God, to Thee" with one finger on a little reed-organ of four octaves. But it is very different music when the same melody is played with all the richness of full harmony. Little beliefs make little men. Many Baptists are cut on a small pattern because their convictions are so small.

The minds of men are widening today. There are large thoughts pouring and flooding all about us. And men who have grasped great ideas in one part of their life feel impatient with petty ideas in any other part of their life, especially in their religion. Only a large faith, built on generous, gigantic lines will win the thoughtful men and women of the future. I do believe that we Baptists have a magnificent body of truth – free, vital, honest, spiritual, and wholly in line with the noblest tendencies of our age. But we must realize its largeness and present it in all its out-of-door greatness and freshness, and not show people a few dried plants and stuffed animals as exponents of the Promised Land to which God has led us and to which we invite them.

In the next issue of the MONTHLY I shall try to set forth some of the convictions that have become dear to me personally. I can not guarantee that my ideas will measure up to the full Baptist stature. Indeed, the likelihood is all the other way. No one man is likely to see the whole, nor even to say the whole of what he sees. If I fall short, this is a free country, and anybody is at liberty to hoist the Baptist colors on a taller pole than mine.

***Why I am a Baptist—My First Reason***  
***SECOND PAPER IN THE SERIES—BY PROFESSOR RAUSCHENBUSCH***

"Religion has taken a great variety of forms in the various Christian bodies. Take a solemn mass in a Roman Catholic cathedral, with the dim religious light, the swelling music, the candles, the trooping of the priests and acolytes, the wafting of the incense, the tinkle of the bell, the prostration of the people as the wafer is miraculously transformed into the very body of the Lord. Take on the other hand a little experience meeting in a country church where one simple soul after the other arises to tell in rude words of its dealings with God. How far apart they are! And yet it is only fair to believe that all Christian bodies aim at the same thing: to bring the human soul into saving contact with God through Christ and to secure for it the knowledge and power of a holy life. Let us rejoice that we are all one in that fundamental aim.

"But on the other hand it is only true to assert that some religious bodies seek to attain that aim by means that hinder the soul from finding God more than they help it. Judaism, too, sought God with its elaborate temple worship, its bloody sacrifices, its detailed forms. But Christ taught us to approach God by a simpler and more spiritual way. The all-important question of just where to worship and how to worship was relegated to the background as obsolete and outgrown for those who had learned to worship God in spirit and in truth. All religious bodies carry with them a good many clinging remnants of their childhood stage, beliefs and customs that were

superstitious in their origin and never belonged to genuine Christianity. And some religious bodies have squarely refused ever to strip these things off; they cherish remnants of heathenism as their most precious and fundamental possessions. Thus it becomes a matter of importance for an intelligent Christian to inquire where he can find Christianity in its least adulterated form. Where is the fundamental aim of bringing the human soul into saving fellowship with God attained most clearly? Where is worship most spiritual? Where is attention least diverted from what is essential in the religious and ethical life?

“I have repeatedly attended confirmation services in the Lutheran Church and was deeply interested in them. The children there are examined as to their knowledge of the catechism and of passages of Scripture. They recite them from memory. I wish Baptist children knew as much of the Bible and the hymns of the church by heart. I regard the systematic instruction given for months previous to confirmation as one of the finest features of the Lutheran Church and wish we could copy it. It offers an unrivalled opportunity for a devout pastor. But when the mental exercise of memoriter recitation is made the test for admission to the Church and its sacrament, personal experience is supplanted by something totally different and inferior. I know from personal contact with the people how many get the impression that such instruction makes a person a Christian.

“Now consider how great a thing it is for a church body to assert that a man may and must come into direct personal relations with God, and to adapt all its church life to create such direct and spiritual experiences in men. I have met people in other churches who not only have no such experience themselves, but they doubt if anybody can have it. It seems presumption to them for a man to assert that he knows he has received pardon from God and is living in conscious fellowship with him. Yet what is all the apparatus of church life good for, if it does not help men to that experience?

“The Christian faith as Baptists hold it, sets *spiritual experience* boldly to the front as the one great thing in religion. It aims at experimental religion. We are an evangelistic body. We summon all men to conscious repentance from sin, to conscious prayer for forgiveness. We ask a man: “Have you put your faith in Christ? Have you submitted your will to His will? Have you received the inward assurance that your sins are forgiven and that you are at peace with God? Have you made experience of God?” If anyone desires to enter our churches we ask for ‘evidence of such experience and we ask for nothing else. We do not ask him to recite a creed or catechism. The more simple and heartfelt the testimony is, the better we like it. If it is glib and wordy, we distrust it. Experience is our sole requisite for receiving baptism; it is fundamental ‘in our church life.

“We apply the same test as our ministry. The first thing we ask a candidate is about his conversion and Christian experience. The next thing we ask him is if he is conscious of being personally called to the work of the ministry; that also probes for experience with God. Finally we ask him for his views of doctrine, but there, too, we discourage any mere recitation of what is orthodox, and are best pleased if all his intellectual beliefs are plainly born of inward conviction and experience.

“Thus our church membership and our ministry are both based on religious experience. So is the

ordinary course of our church life. Take our churches right through and nothing so draws and wins them in preaching as the note of personal experience of God; nothing so touches and melts them in the social meetings as the heart-note of experience. When we insist so strongly on true baptism, it is not an insistence on external forms, but a protest against any external form that has no experience back of it. Baptism of believers is an outward act *plus* an inward experience. Infant baptism, we believe, is an outward act *minus* any inward experience, and we will have none of it.

“In this direct insistence on conscious personal experience a true Baptist Church is about as clear-cut and untrammled as any religious body can well be. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, also seeks to put a man in contact with the grace of God, but the grace of God is received through the sacraments. In the regenerating water of baptism, in the mysterious wafer of the communion, in the absolution pronounced by the priest in the sacrament of penance, they say a man meets God. But does he? Or does he only meet the Church? Has the Church not interposed a lot of man-made ceremonies between the soul and God, so that thousands who punctiliously go through all this ritual never experience God in fact, and are kept from doing so by the very things in which they are taught that they meet him?

“Some churches make much of ritual and sacrament, in the belief that this furnishes access to God. Others make much of a formulated creed, in the belief that correct intellectual comprehension is the fundamental thing in the Christian life. Baptists have simplified ritual until we have only two obligatory ritual actions left, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and we insist on experience as the essential ingredient in these too. We believe in clear convictions of truth, but we have no formulated creed to which anybody, minister or layman, is required to assent. Intellectual statements of belief are useful if they are the outgrowth of personal experience; if not, they are likely to be a harmful substitute for experience.

“The great mass of men take their religion at second hand. Some strong religious soul in the past has had a real experience with God. He tells others about it; they believe it and then take their belief in his experience as a substitute for having any such experience themselves.

“The religion of the past is deposited in the Bible, the creeds, the rites and beliefs of the Church, and men devoutly rehearse all that and assent to it, and think that is religion. It is no more religion than moon-light is sunlight. The thoughts and experiences of others are invaluable to us because they enrich and broaden our own, but in religion nothing will take the place of personal experience. In the study of the natural sciences the modern method is to put the student into direct contact with nature. The dissection of a single animal will give more realizing knowledge of biology than the best text-books in which a student reads what others have observed. Baptists believe in advanced methods in religion. They confront the soul with God.

“Experimental religion is necessarily free and voluntary. Men can compel attendance at the mass. They can compel subscription to a creed. They can not compel an inner experience. It has to be free and spontaneous. And nothing has any value in the sight of God that is not the free outflow of the man’s life. What would we care for the compulsory love of a wife or child? What does God care for compulsory faith and adoration? When we insist on experience, and not on ritual or creed, we place religion where it is necessarily free, and then, if it is freely given, it has

value in God's sight.

“Experimental religion is more likely to have an outcome in moral life than any other kind. In the lower forms of heathen religion ritual is nearly all there is of religion; morality is only an incidental outcome. Every real rise in the evolution of religion makes it less ritual and more ethical. In the higher forms of religion there is always danger of gliding back into the lower stages, and of emphasizing ritual at the expense of morality. When we insist on repentance from sin and submission to the will of God, that is a religious experience directly leading to a higher moral life. Such religion lends the most powerful reinforcement to ethical duty and is of high service to the common life of humanity.

“We can see how profoundly important such a direct experience of God is from the fact that in times of doubt it is often the only thing that remains unshaken. Many a man has felt his intellectual beliefs crumbling away, and yet his faith in God has weathered the storm like a granite cliff. When arguments went to pieces, he could still say: “But I know that God made a new man of me; the experience I had in years gone by is just as certain to me as that I am alive.” And on that basis he was able to build up a wider faith. A church that helps men to personal experience of religion therefore helps them to the most essential and abiding thing in the moral and spiritual life.

“I like to think also that a church body which demands religious experience and that alone is deeply democratic. It takes a trained mind to understand the fine distinctions of the creeds. It takes a good deal of historical information merely to understand the ritual and symbols of some of the old churches. If anybody knows just what each garment means which a Catholic priest wears before the altar, and how this garb originated and what changes it has passed through, he knows enough history to write a book. On the other hand, experience of God is open to the simplest mind, just as love is. A little child can love before it can think. A poor German or Italian mother can not follow the new learning which her children get in this country, but she can outclass anybody in loving them. The intellect is aristocratic; human love and religious faith are both democratic.

“We Baptists insist on personal experience as the only essential thing in religion, we are hewing our way back to original Christianity. The gorgeous ritual that drapes the limbs of the ancient churches was wrought out piece by piece in later generations, and modern historical scholarship is constantly making it clearer that the shimmering silk of which those garments are made and the golden threads with which they are embroidered, were taken from the heathenism of the ancient world. The insistence on correct thinking, on exact orthodoxy of definition, was likewise a product of Greek intellectualism after Christianity had amalgamated with the Greek civilization of the heathen world. These things were not part of Christianity as the apostles knew it. Much less were they part of the Christianity of Jesus himself. Original Christianity was exceedingly simple; it was just a new life with God and a new life with men. Faith in Christ was a spiritual experience. Those who believed in him, felt a new spirit, the Holy Spirit, living in their hearts, inspiring their prayers and testimonies, melting away their selfishness, emboldening them to heroism. Paul called that new life “faith.” That word with him does not merely mean an intellectual belief. It is a kind of algebraic symbol, expressing the inner religious experience and life in Christ.

I am a Baptist, then, because in our church life we have a minimum of emphasis on ritual and creed, and a maximum of emphasis on spiritual experience, and the more I study the history of religion, the more I see how great and fruitful such a position is.

“When I claim such a purely spiritual religion for Baptists, I am well aware that not all Baptists possess it. Many do not even realize that that is the essence of our Baptist faith. We have some who insist on immersion in a purely legal and ritualistic spirit. We have others who would be only too glad if we had an iron-clad Baptist creed with a thousand points that they might insist on it. I know, too, that “experience” with very many is a very shallow emotion, copied often from others, and passing away again without changing life and conduct at all, unless it be to add religious conceit to all other faults. This is the smallness and pettiness that is inseparable from human life. But our Baptist faith, like our American political constitution, is founded on great principles, and even if some misuse it, or misunderstand it, or are inwardly traitors to it, its greatness lifts others up to it. Baptists uphold Baptist principles; and Baptist principles in turn lift up Baptists.”

*Why I am a Baptist - My Second Reason*  
**THIRD PAPER IN THE SERIES—BY PROFESSOR RAUSCHENBUSCH**

In the last issue of the Monthly I set forth how important and valuable it seems to me that Baptists in all their church life emphasize the necessity of personal experience with God and thus confront the soul with Him to work out its spiritual salvation. As Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist met God alone amid the lonely crags of the desert, so we want every man to go into that inner solitude of his own soul where no man can follow him, to hear the still small voice of the Eternal and to settle the past and the future with the great Father of his spirit.

But religion is not a purely individual matter. Nothing in human life is. We are social beings, and all elements of our life come to their full development only through social interchange and co-operation. A man working alone is an inefficient producer; by division of labor and co-operation the productive efficiency of all is multiplied. A person educating himself is at a great disadvantage compared with a student who has teachers and fellow-students to stimulate him. Our pleasures, our affections, our moral aspirations are all lifted to higher power and scope by sharing them with others. An isolated individual is to that extent a crippled man. We never realize all our powers and enthusiasms until we shout with others in a public meeting, or keep step with others to the drum-beat, and see the flag, which is the symbol of our common life, leading us forward.

It stands to reason that religion, too, demands social expression, and will come to its full strength and richness only when it is shared with others. And so in fact we find it. There is a sweetness in private prayer, but there is an additional thrill when we join in a heartfelt hymn and are swept on the wave-crest of a common emotion. Most of us have come to the great religious decision in life only under the influence of social emotion. With most of us the flame of religious longing and determination would flicker lower and lower in the course of the years, if it were not fanned afresh by contact with the experiences and, the religious will-power of others. When

Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is in the midst of them, he expressed the profound truth **V** that his presence is fully realized only in a Christian society; it may be a very small group, but it needs at least one other human heart next to ours to be fully sensible of the Christ.

The Christian church gets its justification from these fundamental facts of human nature. It is not an end in itself. It is always a means to an end. It is to create and foster the religious life in the individual; it is to build up the Kingdom of God in all humanity.

Christians have had no end of controversy about the proper organization of the church. The Roman Catholic Church holds that there is no true church apart from the bishops and the Roman pope. Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 solemnly asserted: "The one and unique church has one body, and one head, namely Christ, and the vicar of Christ, Peter, and the successor of Peter. Further we declare, assert and define that for every human being it is absolutely essential for salvation that he be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Pope Pius IX in 1854 reiterated that "it is part of faith that outside of the apostolic Roman church no one can be saved". The Episcopal church holds that all ministerial authority is derived through the ordination coming down through the historic episcopate, and that Presbyterian and Baptist ministers, while they may be very good men and blessed of God in saving souls, are not ministers of the Christian church in the proper sense. Thus the one church makes salvation and the other makes ministerial authority depend on connection with the right church organization. There are Baptists, too, who are ready to assert that none but a Baptist church is a true church at all.

To my mind the essential matter is not that a church body is very ancient, or that it has a continuous history, but that it embodies the Christian spirit in the method of its organization, and by its very constitution offers the largest possible opportunity to its members to live a truly Christian life together. The fundamental question is not even whether a certain church order is biblical, but whether it is Christian. The Bible merely helps us to see if it is Christian.

Now I think our Baptist church organization, though it is faulty in many ways and though it creaks and groans as it works along, just as all other human organizations do, is built on very noble Christian lines and therefore it is dear to me.

1. It tries to create an organization of really Christian people. It admits to membership only those who deliberately apply for it and who can assert that they have met Christ and love him and want to follow him. It scrutinizes their statements to save them from self-deception and votes to receive them only if it feels confident that there is a real beginning of conscious spiritual life. It also eliminates from its membership those who are manifestly not living Christian life. It may make many mistakes in receiving too quickly and in excluding too slowly, but at least it tries to keep its membership clean and homogeneous. Churches may become so worldly that it is hard to see any line dividing them from the world, but still the principle is embedded in the very constitution of our church life, and that always offers a ready possibility of reformation. On the other hand with other churches their very constitution works the other way. Individual pastors in such churches may strive to create a really Christian fellowship, but their churches neutralize these efforts by admitting everybody through the gate of infant baptism.
2. Our churches are Christian democracies. The people are sovereign in them. All power wielded by its ministers and officers is conferred by the church. It makes ample room for those who have God-given powers for leadership, but it holds them down to the service of the people by making them responsible to the church for their actions. That democracy of the Baptist churches is something to be proud of. One of the noblest elements in the life of our Teutonic ancestors was that their village communities governed themselves in the town meeting. That has been called the mark of the Aryan race. It was the germ of all popular liberties. A Baptist church meeting is exactly that sort of self-governing assembly of the people. It is more democratic than delegated government by a presbytery. It also corresponds more completely to primitive Christianity. The farther we get back to apostolic Christianity the completer is the democracy we encounter. The Roman Catholic Church is a benevolent despotism. All power flows from the pope downward. That type of church organization originated under the despotism of imperial Rome and has perpetuated the political ideas and customs of that epoch. Government by bishops also has strong affinities for a monarchy. As James I said: "No bishop, no king". He saw in the bishops the best props against Puritan democracy. Our congregational government originated in a great wave of popular democracy in England, and has embodied and perpetuated the democratic ideals of the Puritan Revolution. I am proud to think that our church life is in harmony with that great ideal of government of the people, by the people and for the people, which mankind is slowly toiling to realize.
3. Our Baptist churches recognize no priestly class. Our ministers are not essentially different from the laity. According to Catholic and high church views a priest receives an indelible character in ordination which enables him to do things which no other man can do. We take no such view of our ministry and I thank God we do not. The havoc which priestly assumption of power has wrought in the history of the church is incalculable. The priest is an inheritance from heathenism. He is needed only if there are magical sacraments to be offered or administered. Jesus was not a priest, nor the creator of priests. Other churches have only a vague line of demarcation between the church and the world, but a very sharp

line of demarcation between the ministry and the laity. We reverse that. We have a sharp line of demarcation between church and world, but only a vague line between ministry and laity. Which is most Christian?

4. We have no hierarchy within our ministry. We have no rector above the vicar, no bishop 'above the rector, no archbishop above the bishop, no pope above them all. Jesus bids us call no man father or master, but all of us are to be brethren, and, the only greatness is to be by preeminent service Matthew 23:1-12). That settles all hierarchies for me. Some have greater natural gifts than others, and that inequality should be frankly recognized. Some have a holier 'character and deeper spiritual insight, and they should have honor and leadership accordingly. But fraternity in the ministry.
5. Our churches have home-rule. Each church is sovereign in its own affairs. In that respect we follow the same principle on which our country is built up. One cause why our cities are so badly governed is because they lack home-rule and are run by distant State legislatures. Every man knows best where the shoe pinches him, and every community on the whole is best acquainted with its own affairs. The self-government of our churches does not hinder them from joining with others in fraternal cooperation, in associations and State conventions, in city mission societies and national missionary organizations. I do think, however, that our Baptist churches have lagged in this voluntary cooperation, and have too generally allowed each church to struggle along as best it could. In Rochester, for instance, we have no adequate organic expression of our unity.
6. Our Baptist churches decline all alliances with the State. They accept no dictation from the State in their spiritual affairs. They ask no favors from the State, except that they accept such exemption from taxation as the State grants to all institutions which labor for the common good and not for private profit. Baptists insisted on separation between church and State at a time when the principle was novel and revolutionary. Some Baptists seem to think that this separation is based on the idea that the spiritual life has nothing to do with the secular life. I utterly deny that assertion and think it a calamitous heresy. Our Baptist forefathers insisted on that separation because they saw that it wrought mischief when unspiritual men, actuated by political or covetous motives, tried to interfere with the centers of religious and moral life. To let the churches alone meant to let the religious and moral life of the nation work out its own problems unhampered and unthwarted by baser considerations and forces. But in turn it was also found that the political life of the nation is freed from a warping and disturbing influence when ecclesiastical questions are removed from politics. Other churches have had to be wrenched loose forcibly from their hold on public income and political power. Baptists have the far nobler and prouder position of declining these things voluntarily and of being pioneers in that principle toward which the civilized nations are slowly drifting.

My second reason for being a Baptist is, then, that Baptist churches in their very constitution approximate Christian principles of organization and give a fair chance to any Christian community to form a Christian social life. They seek to organize communities of really Christian people. They trust the people with self-government and form Christian democracies. They have no priestly or clerical class set apart from the people. They have no graded hierarchy

in the ministry. Their local churches combine home-rule with fraternal cooperation. And they are on principle free from any entangling alliance with non-religious forces.

I know well that Baptist churches have not lived up to these magnificent principles. Churches, like individuals, are in perpetual danger of backsliding. There are churches that admit almost anybody and exclude scarcely anybody. There are Baptist churches in which a small junta of men rule and democracy has become a mere name. There are Baptist ministers who are priestlier in spirit and temper than the present pope. But it is a great thing for a nation to have adopted a constitution guaranteeing freedom, even if that nation is ridden by bosses and sold out to those who pay; it is a great thing for a young man to have committed himself definitely to a life of unselfish service, even if he is often led away by selfish impulses; and it is a great thing for a body of churches to have embodied such advanced Christian principles in their very constitution, even if individually or collectively they drop below them.

*Why I am a Baptist - My Third Reason*  
**FOURTH PAPER IN THE SERIES—BY PROFESSOR RAUSCHENBUSCH**

The first reason which I gave for embracing my Baptist inheritance with heartiness *and* intelligence was that personal religious experience is cultivated among Baptists. The second was that our church organization is approximately Christian in its essence. My third reason deals with the conception of worship.

I can best make this clear by going back a little into the history of religion. In the rude and primitive forms of religion, worship is mainly an attempt to “get on the right side” of the gods. Men are afraid of the terrible powers of nature, of thunder, disease, blight, flood and drought, and they try to placate and conciliate the supernatural beings who show their displeasure by sending these terrors on helpless mortals. So they offer sacrifices and piteous prayers, just as they would bring gifts and wail before the angry human despots with whose ferocity and whims they were well acquainted. Men want good harvests, health, offspring, revenge and protection, and they tell the gods of their wants and bring them presents to win their help and favor. To ward off evil and to secure favors is the main object of worship in these lower stages of religion.

But each god has his peculiar tastes and disposition which must be consulted. One god likes rice and flowers; another wants the smell of burning mutton or beef another insists on human blood. They have their sacred places where they have appeared and where they can best be approached. They have their sacred names and formulas by which they can be summoned. And they have their priests, who are experts on all these matters, and are allowed to draw near the god and offer sacrifices on behalf of the ignorant and unclean folk—for a consideration. These forms of worship are handed down from generation to generation, and are carefully preserved in the memory of the experts, for their effectiveness depends on the very wording of a prayer or on a prostration to right or left. In heathen Rome the priests muttered ancient prayers which they no longer understood. Religion is marvelously conservative about the forms of worship. All old religions are full of petrified usages.

In a higher state of religious development men want Personal contact with the deity. They have a sense of impurity and defilement. They are told that by being bathed with water or anointed with oil, or touched with hot blood—all, of course, with the proper magic formula,—they will be supernaturally cleansed and made holy and freed from the power of the evil forces. Men now have a deep sense of the frail and perishable nature of mortal life; they long for immortality and the assurance of it. They are told that if they pass through certain mysterious rites, they will come under the protection of the gods who rule the hereafter amid will be saved from death; or something of the divine life will enter into them and survive death. Thus in this higher stage of religion men seek expiation of guilt, freedom from impurity, victory over death, direct and concrete contact with the deity. In this stage, too, the forms of worship are supposed to be of the utmost importance. If they are not performed exactly, they lose their power.

To anyone who knows the dense pall of superstition that has hung over mankind, it is a wonderful relief to pass from this smoke of incense and burnt-offering to the outdoor air and sunlight in which Jesus walked with his Father. The crew of supernatural despots who want sacrifices and who love to see men cringe and implore has vanished away, and the Best Being in the universe bows down with fatherly love. Holy places, holy times, holy formulas, holy experts are all left behind, and the only thing God asks for is love for himself and love for our fellowmen. The old cowering fear of the slave is gone, and instead we see the free love and obedience of the son and child of God. Jesus did not pray because he had to or because he wanted to get something from God, but because he loved to pray and speak to his Father. To become a disciple of Jesus means to learn to think of God and live with Him as Jesus did, and to let all life be transformed by that new knowledge and faith.

Paul understood Jesus. His contest against the Law was a mighty effort to cut away the old forms of religion that cramped and gagged the spirit of religion, and to set Christians free to look at Christ before them and to listen to the Spirit within them. Read Romans 8 or Galatians from that point of view.

But the old religious habits of mind were very strong in men. It took hard work to emancipate the Jewish Christians from their old Jewish forms of religion, and the people who had lived in heathenism very soon created a new system of ceremonialism, which had a Christian face but a pagan spirit. Christianity had only two religious acts in which form counted for anything, baptism and the Lord's Supper; one was a bath, the other a meal. These two simple acts of daily life were used to express great spiritual thoughts. But men with pagan habits of mind seized on these and saw in them just what they were looking for. Baptism was to them a mystic cleansing which washed away guilt and defilement, a magic bath from which a man rose regenerate as a new man with the past all cleaned away. When they heard the words "This is my body, this is my blood," they felt that in some mysterious way Christ was really present in the bread and wine, and when they swallowed the elements, his divine life entered into them and gave them the assurance and power of immortality. These superstitious ideas became ever more powerful and concrete as time passed; they were adopted by theologians and defended as part of the essence of Christianity. Gradually it was believed that Christ was not merely present in the sacrament; the bread and wine were actually changed into his body and blood and chewed with the teeth, and this new body of Christ, which was created under the magic formula of the priest, was offered anew to God in the sacrifice of the mass. A new priesthood early grew up, equipped with

mysterious powers to consecrate the sacraments and to forgive sins. Additional sacraments were developed. Christianity once more had its holy places, holy times, holy formulas, its sacrifice and incense, its set prayers and all the apparatus of worship, just like the heathen religions, only more so. Through it all still breathed the spirit of Jesus with pitying and saving power, but the saving power was largely in spite of what was called Christian worship, and not by means of it. And this established religion was exceedingly conservative and anxious to keep things just as they had been, and refused to let the spirit of Jesus educate it up to better things. Just as the ancient heathen priest in Rome muttered formulas in a dead language, so the Christian priest in Rome chants his formulas in Latin, which was a living language when Christianity began and is now a dead language. The Greek Church, too, uses a ritual language which has become unintelligible to the people. This is merely a trifling indication of the petrifying conservatism in religion.

The Reformation was a rising of the religious and democratic and national spirit against this dead inheritance of the past. Among other things the Reformation simplified worship and swept out a great mass of superstitious ceremonial. In some countries the break from Catholic forms of worship was far more thorough than in others. The Calvinistic churches in Switzerland, France, Holland, Scotland and parts of Germany were very thorough; the Lutheran churches in Germany and Scandinavia not quite so thorough; and the Church of England least of all. The Baptists, and all those bodies with whom we are historically connected, marched in the vanguard of Protestantism. That is one reason why I am a Baptist, because by being a Baptist I am a radical Protestant. I can help to cleanse Christianity of the mass of heathen influence which leaked in during the early centuries and was afterward so religiously preserved and cherished. I can help to bring humanity to that simple, ethical, spiritual worship which Jesus taught and which has been so sadly overlaid by the gilded and jeweled worship of a paganized church.

Baptists are, in fact, more Protestant than the great Reformers on some points. The Reformers all retained infant baptism. But infant baptism was part and parcel of that very paganizing tendency which I have tried to describe. It grew out of a double root: the belief that original sin damns even infants to hell; and the belief that baptism regenerates. If baptism saves and if children need salvation, of course human love wanted the children to be baptized in order to save them from the risk of hell. There was wide-spread doubt about infant baptism at the beginning of the Reformation, but to reject it would have meant churches of baptized believers and would have unchurched the great mass of men. The Reformers recoiled from so sweeping a change, largely for political reasons, and infant baptism was maintained, defended and extolled. It was an alien element in Protestantism, and has been most subtly influential in opening the door to other alien elements in worship, organization and doctrine. It is now slowly dying out. Modern Protestant Christians no longer believe that unbaptized infants go to hell through their original sin, nor do they believe that baptism regenerates. And if a baby does not need baptism and if baptism does not do it any good, why should the baby be baptized? Other sentimental reasons are now used to prop the custom, but the number of infant baptisms is constantly decreasing. People are sensibly concluding to give their children a chance to be baptized when it will mean something to them. Of course, Baptists have largely helped to bring this result about. They made a cleaner sweep of the old pagan leaven at the outset, and the slow development of the purified Christian spirit in modern Protestantism is swinging their way.

The real worship, the only thing that God really cares for, is a Christ-like life. To live all the time in the consciousness of the love and nearness of God, to merge all our desires and purposes in His will, to walk humbly before Him and justly and lovingly with all men, this is the real Christian worship. Without that no prayer, no song, no “divine service” on Sunday is more than discordant noise in the ears of God. That is what Paul meant when he tells us to offer our bodies, our own selves, as a living sacrifice, and says that will be our “reasonable service,” that is, our rational form of worship. He was well acquainted with many irrational forms of worship. When James says that a pure and undefiled “religion” consists in helping the helpless and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, the word “religion” means liturgy or ceremonial. A loving and pure life is the true liturgy of Christian worship.

The life of Jesus was as full of religion as a nightingale is full of song or a rose full of fragrance, but the bent of his life was away from the inherited forms of worship, and he can scarcely be said to have taught new forms. He taught a prayer when his disciples asked for it, but that prayer was not meant to teach utter simplicity. In our common worship we shall come closest to the spirit of true Christianity if every act is full of joy in God and his fellowship, love for one another, hatred for all evil, and an honest desire to live a right life in the sight of Christ. Our worship should eliminate as far as possible all selfish greed, all superstition, and all untrue and unworthy ideas about God. It should clear our conception of the right life by instruction our moral nature; it should give our will strong, steady, lasting impulses toward righteous action; and it should breed and foster habits of reverence and the faculty of adoration.

For all this the way is cleared in our Baptist religious life. It is made easy for us to be simple, truthful, spiritual. We are not led into temptation to slop back into superstition by the survival of pagan forms in our ritual. If our service has a fixed liturgy with responsive features and artistic adornment, that is not necessarily a departure from Baptist fundamentals. “When two do the same thing, it is not the same thing.” Just how much spirituality and essential religion there is in a given Baptist church service, is another question. That depends entirely on the men and women who engage in it. It may be utterly barren and dead. But even then there is an advantage in our simplicity of form, for the deadness will not be hidden and masked by the borrowed life of mere ceremonial. An unspiritual priest may sing the mass more beautifully than the sweetest saint, but a Baptist minister or church can not be dead ling without having men know it and then there is a fair chance for repentance.

***Why Am I a Baptist – My Fourth Reason***  
***Concluding Paper in the Series by Professor Rauschenbusch***

Religion appeals to the whole of man and finds expression in the various sides of his nature. There is an intellectual element in all religion, and that grows stronger as we follow the development of religion from the rude and barbarous peoples to the civilized nations. We can not help reflecting on this world about us and this soul within us. How did the world originate? Was it made by a good or a bad power, with a wise purpose or through folly? If a good being made it, why is there so much suffering and evil in it? How did sin and death come into the

world? How can man be saved from sin and its penalty? What comes after death? What is the future of the world and of the human soul? These are questions with which natural science and philosophy deal, but they are also religious questions and a religious man craves an answer, and seeks in some way to build up a satisfactory and harmonious edifice of thought in which his intellect can dwell content.

But the answer which contents a man at one stage of his life is outgrown at the next stage. If he is a growing man, his belief must keep on growing and adjust itself to his expanding information. The same thing is true of mankind at large. If an African chief believes that the world ends on the other side of the mountains and that his god makes a new sun every day and extinguishes it in the evening that is a satisfactory scheme of the universe for him, but not for a boy of ten in our schools. If Christians in the Middle Ages believed that our earth was the universe, and that the stars were set in various crystal globes which revolved around the earth, that was a religious and scientific conception of the universe which satisfied men in that day, but we live in a vaster world now, and a man would commit intellectual suicide if he tried to "stand pat" on that explanation of God's universe. To the moral feelings of a past age it seemed quite right and fair that God should condemn men for a sin which Adam committed and that all heathen were hopelessly lost. Our moral judgment has been made more tender and true by the more searching tuition of the spirit of Christianity, and we repudiate such ideas about God's dealings with mankind. It is of the utmost importance that the individual and the race shall retain the capacity for growth in religious thought. It is fatal to make the religious thought of one age binding for a higher age. It condemns a grown man not to put away childish things, but still to think and talk like a child.

Yet that is what religion has very commonly done. After Christianity had become the State religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great, it was a matter of great concern to the emperors that the Church should remain united and not be broken up by bitter doctrinal fights. So, if some doctrinal question was giving trouble, they summoned a great council of bishops and had them decide by a mere majority vote on the profoundest questions. Moreover these councils were usually packed and engineered by wire-pulling exactly like modern political conventions, and the result was usually reached by compromises or intimidation. Yet when the result was reached, it became the binding law of orthodoxy, and men believed that the Holy Ghost, who had promised to lead the Church into all truth, had guided the decisions. Such a general council could not err, and its decisions were binding on all Christian thinkers. Such infallible decisions increased as the centuries went on, and each was riveted around the intellect of the Church like an iron hoop around a barrel. Hoops are good around barrels, but I should not advise putting nice, tightly fitting hoops around the body of a growing child. It is hard to overstate the damage that was done to the intellectual and moral and religious growing power of humanity by this incubus of dead authority. For instance, the doctrine of transubstantiation, that is, the belief that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are actually changed into the flesh and blood of Christ, was the product of the Dark Ages. When education and science were at their lowest stage, when the civilization of the ancient world lay buried under the raw barbarism of the Teutonic tribes, when superstition sprouted like toad-stools in the dark, this belief was evolved which laughs at common sense and reason. But the Catholic Church solemnly adopted it, and now American Catholic scholars of the twentieth century have to believe it. And they do. But they can not without crippling their intellect in other ways.

While the Reformation was in progress, the Reformed bodies also produced creeds in plenty. They grew at first out of political necessities. For instance, in 1530 the Lutheran party in Germany was in great danger of being persecuted and suppressed by the Emperor. At the Diet of Augsburg they presented a Confession, a summary of their belief, to show that they agreed with the Catholics on all vital points and were not so bad as they had been made out to be. This Augsburg Confession was drafted by Melancthon, who was by nature a timid soul and at that time desperately frightened, and he kept all the braver assertions of the Reformation carefully out of sight. It is easy to sympathize with this conciliatory attitude in that dangerous situation. But this Confession afterward was adopted as one of the creeds of the Lutheran Church and still has to be accepted and subscribed as a binding statement of Gospel truth. It is very hard, almost impossible; to get rid of a creed again after it is once adopted. Our Presbyterian brethren have long been restless under the straight Calvinism of their Westminster Confession, and it has cost them a long struggle to secure some modification of it. The great church historian Harnack, knowing how tenaciously creeds cling to a church, was lost in admiration when our American Presbyterians first began to make the effort.

Now we Baptists have no authoritative creed. Our ministers and professors are not required solemnly to declare that they adopt some obsolete statement as their belief and will always teach that. We have a couple of summaries, called the New Hampshire and the Philadelphia Confession, which are often adopted by newly organized churches, but no one is compelled to use them. So far as I remember I never read either of them until I had been several years a Baptist minister, and when I did read them, I was not interested in them. This freedom from creeds has left Baptists free to grow without jars and struggles. We used to be strict Calvinists, just like our Presbyterian brethren, and we, too, have insensibly grown away from rigid Calvinism, but we have had no creed to tinker and no conflict about it. Like Topsy, we just “grewed.”

Yet Baptists have been remarkably free from doctrinal vagaries. They have not moved zigzag, but in a fairly straight line. There was enough conservative instinct to balance their thinking without carrying a big stick of timber on their shoulders to balance them.

Baptists have always insisted that they recognize the Bible alone as their sufficient authority for faith and practice. There are, indeed, many Baptists who have tried to use the Bible just as other denominations use their creeds. They have turned the Bible into one huge creed, and practically that meant: “You must believe everything which *we* think the Bible means and says.” They have tried to impose on us their little interpretation of the great Book as the creed to which all good Baptists must cleave.

But fortunately the Bible is totally different from a creed. A creed contains sharply defined and abstract theology; the Bible contains a record of concrete and glowing religious life. A creed addresses itself to the intellect; the Bible appeals to the whole soul and edifies it. A creed tells you what you must believe; the Bible tells you what holy men have believed. A creed is religious philosophy, the Bible is religious history. A creed gives the truth as it looked to one set of clever men at one particular stage of human history; the Bible gives the truth as it looked to a great number of God-filled men running through many hundreds of years. The strength of a creed is in

its uniformity and its tight fit; the beauty of the Bible is in its marvelous variety and richness. A creed imposes a law and binds thought; the Bible imparts a spirit and awakens thought.

Any collection of historical documents, growing right out of human life, would be more useful and instructive to after-times than the cleverest piece of abstract thinking done by a single man or group of men. The epoch-making treatises of the past grow obsolete with fearful rapidity; human nature with its love and hate and fear and hope and sin and passion is always the same, and what was true in the days of Rameses II under the shadow of the pyramids, is true in the days of Roosevelt I under the shadow of the sky-scrapers. Hence creeds are dead and the Bible is alive. And such a life in it! A unique and gifted nation, with a lofty conception of God and a thrilling faith in him, preserves the thoughts of its most daring thinkers, its prophets and revolutionists, its poets and religious historians, and the whole collection throbs with the living breath of God—if only we have a mind to respond. And then comes the Highest One of all, the Son of God and the King of Humanity, and his life and thought are preserved in artless books, and the powerful impulse which he gives to human souls records itself in a series of letters and tracts, and these are added to the Old Bible of the Jewish people as the New Bible of the Christian people.

These books are the deposit of the purest and freshest form of Christianity. It is the mountain-brook before it has grown muddy in the plain by the inflow of other waters. The New Testament has been the conscience in the heart of the Church, always warning and recalling it from its sinful wanderings. It is still calling us up higher to-day, beyond traditional Christianity to the religion of Christ. In the New Testament lies the power of perpetual reformation for the Church. Baptists, in tying to the New Testament, have hitched their chariot to a star, and they will have to keep moving.

It seems to me a great thing that Baptists are not chained by creeds, but have taken the Bible as their authority. The full significance of that principle has never yet appeared among us. We have paralyzed the Bible by turning it into a law-book and a collection of proof-texts. We have often refused to take it in its own plain meaning and to comprehend the larger sweep of history in it. We have fussed about trifles in it and have missed the greatest things. We have reduced it all to a single level, as if Esther was equal to Isaiah, and the Old Testament to the New, and Zephaniah or Jude to our Lord Jesus Christ. But my faith is that the old veil of Moses will yet be taken away from the Bible and its full light will break forth.

This is the last reason which I shall give for being a Baptist. Baptists have not bound the religious intellect by the adoption of a creed, and they have undertaken to learn the Bible can tell them and to guide their life thereby. This is to me a satisfactory adjustment between the two great principles of Freedom and Authority; between the initiative of the individual and the authority of the church; between faithfulness to the past and obedience to the call of the future. I do not mean that Baptists have been faultless in their application of these principles; they have sinned and bungled more often than not. But the principle is right and has a saving power of guidance in it.

Postlude – Herewith ends this little series. The articles written off-hand and amid the pressures of work, and their faults crave a kindly judgment. My hope was that a few people might actually take time to read them and be helped to a clearer understanding of their own faith and the nature

of our denomination would get some new light by approaching the familiar subject by fresh ways.

Sometimes while writing these articles I felt in doubt whether I was doing good or harm. I should do harm if I gave Baptists the impression that “we are the people and there are no others.” We are not a perfect denomination. We are capable of being just as narrow and small as anybody. There are fine qualities in which other denominations surpass us. I do not want to foster Baptist self-conceit, because thereby I should grieve the spirit of Christ. I do not want to make Baptists shut themselves up in their clam-shells and be indifferent to the ocean outside of them. I am a Baptist, but I am more than a Baptist. All things are mine; whether Francis of Assisi, or Luther, or Knox, or Wesley; all are mine because I am Christ’s. The old Adam is a strict denominationalist; the new Adam is just a Christian.