

BAPTISTS VS. ROMAN CATHOLICS

Preached May 31, 1959, by Pastor Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church,
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It is a well-known fact that both Baptists and Roman Catholics make claim to apostolic origin. When reduced to the last analysis, the question of church succession is forced into this conclusion: namely, there are but two denominations that can claim to have existed from the days of the apostles to the present time. These are the Baptists and Catholic. To one or the other of these, we must look for the fulfillment of that promise: ***“upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18)***

The study of the statements of the highest and most noteworthy authorities of the different denominations as to who organized the first Baptist church, and where it originated, will show that their answers mutually contradict, refute, and falsify one another. It is to be seen that all other denominations occupy a middle ground somewhere between the Baptists and the Catholics.

If one should take all the doctrines and practices which have a decidedly Catholic origin from these denominations, nothing would be left but the doctrines and practices of the Baptists. On the other hand, if all of the doctrines and practices which have a decidedly Baptist origin were taken from the denominations, nothing would be left but the doctrines and practices of the Catholics. In short, the positions of the Baptists and the Catholics, from a doctrinal and practical standpoint, are at opposite poles from one another.

There is no personality this side of Jesus Christ who is a satisfactory explanation of the origin of the Baptist religion. The New Testament churches were independent, self-governing, democratic bodies, like the Baptist churches of today. We originated not at the reformation, nor in the Dark Ages, nor in any century after the apostles. Our marching order has been the commission of the LORD Jesus Christ.

The first Baptist church was the first church at Jerusalem. Our principles are as old as Christianity, and we acknowledge no founder but Jesus Christ, our LORD and Savior. We believe that Baptist principles and practices are the principles and practices of the savior and His apostles. The first Baptist church at Jerusalem was not swallowed up by the Catholic Church, and the principles and practices of said

church have never ceased to exist. Rather, they have had a continuation through all the centuries until this present time. What is more, Historians of note, who are not Baptists themselves, say so.

In 1819, the King of Holland appointed Professor Ypeig, who was Professor of Theology in the University of Groningen, and J.J. Durmont, Chaplain to the King, both learned men and members of the Dutch Reformed Church, to prepare a history of their church. They did so. In the authentic volume, they dedicated one chapter to the Baptists, and in this chapter, they made this statement:

“We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites, were the original Waldenses, and who long in the history of the church, received the honor of that origin. On this account, the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the apostles, and as a Christian society, has preserved pure the doctrine of the gospel through all the ages.”

And Cardinal Hossius, President of the Council of Trent, says:

“If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and cheerfulness which a man in any sect shows in suffering, then the opinion and persuasion of no sect can be truer and surer than that of the Anabaptists, since there have been none for these twelve hundred years past, that have been more generally punished, or that have more cheerfully and steadily, undergone or even offered themselves to, the most cruel sorts of punishment than these people.”

Cardinal Hossius lived and wrote during the Sixteenth century. (This quote being from 1560 A.D.)

Now these authors, friends, whom I have quoted, are not Baptists, and many more could be quoted corroborative of the fact that the principles and practices of Baptists have existed through every age since the days of Jesus Christ on Earth.

Beginning early in the third century, a number of errors were gradually introduced into the life of many of the churches, which resulted in their departure from and perversion of the faith. The tendency toward hierarchy, was manifested in the churches of the large cities, such as Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria, Rome, Carthage, Jerusalem, and later Constantinople. The Bishops or Pastors of these churches began to assume an unscriptural authority over the churches, and it was not long until the

clergy began to be distinguished from the laity. Hence the heresy began of calling preachers “Reverend.”

The Bishops or Pastors assumed the titles and offices of the Jewish Priesthood. The primitive virtues by which many of the Pastors of the metropolitan churches were distinguished caused them to be regarded as advisers of the neighboring churches, and paved the way for an assertion of superiority, which speedily passed by the bounds that were set by the apostles.

The Bishop gradually became one apart from the Presbyters, and the Deacons were regarded as an order in the ministry; all of this contrary to the scriptures. The rights of ordination and confirmation were also reserved to the Bishops. It became an exclusively Episcopal function to set apart candidates to the ministry. The Bishops gradually assumed control over the neighboring churches, and this collection of churches was called a diocese.

You see the gradual departure from the truth of the faith. All of the Bishops in the cities were independent of one another, and not one of them at first acknowledged any other Bishop as ‘Supreme Head of the Church,’ ‘Universal Father,’ or ‘The Pope.’ It was not long until the Bishops in the larger cities were regarded as ‘Bishops among the Bishops,’ and after the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., the name ‘Metropolitan’ was given to the Bishops of these larger cities.

Finally, the prominence of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem brought added honor to such an extent that these Metropolitans were exalted above the other Metropolitans, and thus the name ‘Patriarch,’ or ‘Father-Ruler’ arose. It was not long until another development took place: among these five Patriarchs, there being an odd number, one must be in some sense the leader and the chief. And so, in the natural course of things, the leading place fell to the one who presided at the ancient capital of Rome, the head of the visible organization, now known as the Roman Catholic Church.

Tradition assigned to both Peter and Paul, the establishment of the church, and the Bishopric at Rome, and very early direct apostolic succession from Peter was claimed by the Roman Bishop. About the year 440 A.D., the then-Bishop of Rome, Leo I, gave the necessary doctrinal basis to this assumption of supremacy, by his interpretation of the famous passage in Matthew 16:18. He took this, as Roman

Catholicism has ever taken it, to assert and make permanent the primacy of Peter among the apostles, and therefore of all the successors of Peter. The territory and influence of Rome, added together with the old tradition of the city itself as the former proud mistress of the world, gave additional force to this development. It was not long until the prominence of Rome and Constantinople overshadowed the patriarchates with the claims of supremacy in the church, decidedly in Rome's favor.

Nothing was left then, don't you see, but for Gregory the Great, in 590 A.D., to consolidate the gains of the Roman sea, and gain the triple title, of 'Bishop of Rome, Primate of Italy, and Apostle of the West.' He succeeded in elevating the Episcopacy of Rome into the genuine Papacy of the church.

Gregory the Great, however, severely denounced the claim of John the Faster, who was then the patriarch of Constantinople, and who called himself the 'Universal Patriarch of the Pope,' and I say: Gregory the Great denounced that, and declared that the Bishop of Rome neither ought, nor can, assume such a title. This forever disposes all claims that Roman Catholics have made or can make, in favor of any Bishop of Rome being the Pope or Universal Father during the first six hundred years of the Christian era.

The chain of succession of the Popes cannot be consistently made, because Eusebius, who was the Bishop of Caesarea from 315 A.D. to 339 A.D. (known today as the father of Ecclesiastical or church history), made out the first links of the chains, and in his index, gives a chronological list of the Roman Bishops, later called Popes. And from this index, and the traditions of the fathers, five tables are made out, concerning the first five Bishops from Peter, and each one of them differs. It is noteworthy how utterly contradictory and irreconcilable are these supposed chains of succession. Hence, it is ridiculous and laughable for intelligent people to see splendid people and their leaders try to harmonize the successive lines of Popes from the apostle Peter to the present Pope.

The principles and practices of the Roman Catholic hierarchy began long after the days of Jesus Christ on earth, and long after the days of his apostles. They certainly have no foundation in the New Testament, for the churches of the New Testament were independent, self-governing, democratic bodies like the Baptist churches are today. Peter was no Pope, and there is no evidence in the New Testament that Jesus meant for him to be, or that He ever thought that he was. His teachings nowhere

indicate that he ever tried to lord over any church. He was prone to error, as any of the other apostles, and apparently more-so, judging from the record of his life as an apostle. Paul reproved him to his face once, because he acted very inconsistently, even as a Christian. You read about this in Galatians 2:11-15.

So, the claim of the Catholic Church, that it is the oldest denomination on earth, is a plain assumption, and against the facts of authentic church history. But, the Baptist denomination defies every effort to find satisfactory explanation of the origin of the principles and practices of their faith, this side of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Friends, what if the Baptists should teach and believe that all who were not members of the Baptist Church were lost, doomed, and damned? That is, that outside of the Baptist Church, there is no salvation.

What if the Baptist Church should teach and believe that the heads of Baptist churches could give non-Baptist countries to Baptist politicians, and compel all the citizens to support the Baptist churches and ministers, and even pay for their support out of political funds?

What if the Baptist churches taught and believed that all Baptists were Baptists first, and citizens of America second?

What if the Baptist churches demanded recognition and support for their churches and institutions from the state authorities and tax funds?

What if the Baptists organized themselves into a block of votes, and demanded preference above all others in political circles?

What if the Baptists had a history of bloody persecutions for fifteen hundred years, and never tolerated other religious bodies in countries where they dominated, and continued it until this very day?

What if the Baptists should insist on controlling major political parties, labor unions, supreme courts, and law making bodies?

What if the Baptists had enjoyed unchallenged control for twelve hundred years in countries like Spain and Portugal, where religious liberty was never known, and then come to America and preach religious liberty?

What if Baptists put themselves up as supreme and final in matters of religion, education, benevolence, culture, and great champions of civilization?

What if the rest of the world should look at Spain and Portugal, and see where for twelve hundred years, Baptists had exercised unbridled mastery in all things, and there find the finished fruit of Baptist doctrine?

This is Fred Phelps, Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the LORD willing, at this same time, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the LORD Jesus Christ, and grace be with all them that love our LORD Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen.