

The Relevance and Vitality of the Sect-Idea

(as illustrated in the Anabaptists)*

“AS concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” These words of the Jewish leaders in Rome to the apostle Paul are typical of the general attitude through the ages towards the sects. A “sect” is a group of persons whose religious teachings differ from those of an established or orthodox church from which they are distinct and separate. The word, however, is normally used in a derogatory sense, to describe those unorthodox in belief, whose practice is alien and offensive to the majority. Christians have been as prone as anyone to follow this usage, a strange tendency in view of *Acts* 28.22 quoted above, which reminds us that in the first century the Church itself was a sect. In recent years, however, it is clear that the sect-idea is being taken more seriously, and many more scholars recognize that as a phenomenon it is worthy of respect and study. Prominent among such scholars is the sociologist, Dr. Bryan Wilson, who wrote in *Religion and Secular Society* (1966): “The most individually influential and pervasive religious view of the world undoubtedly exists in sectarian movements”. His conclusion to the book is even more intriguing. “It may be, that in response to the growing institutionalism, impersonality, and bureaucracy of modern society, religion will find new functions to perform—but that, perhaps, would be not the religion which accepts the values of the new institutionalism, the religion of ecumenism, but the religion of the sects.”

The western nations today pride themselves on their tolerance. Providing they live in peace within the law of the land, the sects have liberty to indulge their special forms of worship and practice. Sometimes the pressure on the sects comes from another direction. There is a growing tendency for churches to amalgamate together, to reduce the number of churches and denominations thereby, and to regard this as praiseworthy and advantageous. Is this so? Is it better to have only one church in an area or locality, a united testimony to the Christian message, or are the Gospel and truth better served by diversity? The assumption made by many contemporary churchmen is that the ideal is one visible Church embracing all Christians, as in the medieval Church, or as in the territorial view of the Church much favoured in Reformation times. The idea of “One Church” is reckoned to carry with it the concept of one viable expression of that Church, in which differences are minimized. Bryan

* The prize-winning essay in the first Dr. Duncan Heriot Essay Competition, 1976, is here published in a shortened form.

Wilson suggests that this ecumenism is often the response of churches facing the threat to reduce them to the status of sects by the pressures of secularism. Should such a "reduction" really be feared? If the sectarian response produces vital and valid insights into the Gospel, could this not be a blessing in disguise?

"There is no new thing under the sun," quoth the Preacher, and the pressures of religious conflict in the sixteenth century which first gave prominence to the idea of territorialism are not utterly dissimilar to contemporary experience. The Protestant Reformers, facing a resurgent Catholicism, saw the need to present a united front. The Anabaptists represented a threat to this, and Protestantism, no less than the old Church, reacted with persecution of these inconvenient sects in their midst. Apparently these persecutions were successful, for, with a few exceptions, sixteenth-century Anabaptism in its various forms was put down. Their insights, however, were not eradicated so summarily. It may be that an examination of Anabaptism, and its highlighting of the sect-idea, could prove instructive to our own age.

Anabaptism and Sectarianism

If we define the sect-idea as the independence of the church or group from the state, coupled with the freedom of the individual from coercion in matters of conscience and religion, we see that the Anabaptists were its outstanding exponents. They believed, wrote G. H. Williams, "on principle in the separation of their own churches from the national or territorial state". Whatever the other differences between the Anabaptist groups, nearly all of them (Swiss and German evangelicals, Italian anti-trinitarians, Netherlandish Mennonites and Schwenkfeldian spirituals alike) were united in their opposition to coercion in the realm of conscience. There were exceptions to this, notably in the Münster affair, an aberration which gave rise to the widespread misunderstanding of the radical reformers which persisted until comparatively recent times.

Of course, not only Anabaptists held these views. Earlier, in the Middle Ages, there were those who made similar demands, folk like the Waldensians, the Franciscan spirituals, and various dissenting groups. In the sixteenth century, we find a man like Dr. Anthony Engelbrecht in Strassburg who argued for freedom of enquiry and discussion as a safeguard against a Protestant "popery". Even among the Reformers themselves there were those who sympathized deeply with the Anabaptist desire to pursue their religion without hindrance. Thus Matthew Zell in Strassburg declared from the pulpit that he agreed with the principal doctrine of the Anabaptists, i.e. that the government in matters of faith was not justified in using measures of violence. His wife, Catherine, welcomed religious exiles of all kinds to their house, and after her husband's death continued his wise and compassionate policy. In March 1557 she wrote a moving letter in which she explicitly defended "the poor Anabaptists" who "confess Christ with us on the main things in which we have parted from the

papacy. . . . He who does evil, him shall the government punish, but it shall not compel and govern faith. . . . It belongs to the heart and the conscience and not to the external man". Philip of Hesse was noteworthy in his mild attitude towards the Anabaptists for, despite pressures from Electoral Saxony, he refused to allow the death penalty to be applied to those whom he regarded as simply erring in faith. Moravia and Transylvania were among other places where radical reformers found tolerance and understanding from the authorities. Moravia in the sixteenth century was often called "the promised land" of the Anabaptists, while Transylvania gave asylum to the Hutterian Brethren from 1621 to 1767. In the Netherlands, a Catholic Spiritualist, Dirk Volkerts Coornhert, pleaded for "Christianity above confessional diversity", urged toleration for both Catholics and Mennonites, and may well have influenced William of Orange to give civil and religious liberty to the Mennonites in 1577. Thus the sect-idea of "liberty to be different" was and is widely held by those who could not be called sectarians. The principle, however, has a hollow ring unless sects are in practice allowed to flourish.

The existence of sects like the Anabaptists raises a number of questions which ought to be considered both by church historians and by Christians in general. The Christian who thinks seriously about his faith should reckon with the fact that, like the poor, the sects are always with us. It is not enough to ignore them or dismiss them with contempt. The sectarian, no less than the heretic, often emphasizes aspects of Gospel truth forgotten by the contemporary church. This, however, is purely negative. A more fundamental thought is whether the sect has a more positive role in the divine purpose.

The first question is whether the sectarian response is in itself a valid one. May the sect not provide an equally acceptable religious alternative to those responses represented by, say, the Catholic and Protestant movements? In the sixteenth century there were many who denied this. When the struggle between Protestantism and Catholicism subsided into an uneasy peace, a sort of compromise was found in the territorial conception of the Church, i.e. a given area takes the religion acceptable to the ruler of that area. As we have seen, there were those who were willing to give the sects a place in their society, but this willingness was not widespread. In modern times, the validity of the Anabaptist response is more commonly acknowledged, so that it is even called the "Fourth Reformation" alongside Lutheranism, Calvinism and Anglicanism. If this validity is accepted, two things follow. First, it emphasizes the responsibility of every man to make his own personal response to God, irrespective of the established religion of his country. Secondly, it presupposes the principle of toleration, the liberty of every man to worship and witness as he feels right. One of the earliest pleas for toleration that has come down to us was Balthasar Hubmaier's tract *Concerning Heretics and those who burn them*, written in 1524. Dietrich Philips wrote in *The Church of God* (c. 1560): "Thus must the true Christians here

be persecuted for the sake of truth and righteousness, but the Christians persecute no one on account of his faith". According to the Zürich court records of 1525-6, Felix Manz admitted teaching that those of other faiths should be left undisturbed in their practice. Hans Denck said in 1527: "Everyone should know that in matters of faith everyone should proceed as free, voluntary and uncompelled". This was something that the Magisterial Reformers, as well as the Roman Catholics, found horrifying and unacceptable. Thus Heinrich Bullinger of Zürich, in his polemic against the Swiss Brethren, *Der Widertöufferen Ursprung* (1560), tried to refute point by point the Anabaptist belief in freedom of conscience, and to defend the Zürich policy of persecution. Among modern scholars who have recognized the foremost place of Anabaptists in the history of religious liberty we may note Rufus M. Jones, Ernst Troeltsch, and Walther Köhler.

The second question concerns the limits of toleration. If the validity of the sectarian response be granted, is there any limit to the extent to which the individual is permitted to practise his faith? For example, should we have the right to worship and bear witness as long as another's right is not curtailed or infringed in any way? This limitation would clearly have been accepted by most Anabaptists. Thus Manz said that their ambition was "to bring together those who were willing to accept Christ, obey the Word, and follow in his footsteps, to unite with these by baptism, and to leave the rest in their present conviction". Kilian Aurbacher, in a letter to Bucer in 1534, goes further: "It is never right to compel one in matters of faith, whatever he may believe, be he Jew or Turk". It is not quite so simple as this, however. A critic may point to the events of Münster and ask how it was that these high-sounding sentiments were not put into operation there. In 1534, after Jan Matthys had been killed, he was succeeded in the leadership by Jan van Leyden, who soon after was proclaimed the "King of the New Zion". Any opposition to the new authority was brutally suppressed. Where now, ask the critics, are the noble sentiments? Is not Anabaptism like every other human institution, preaching liberty when in a minority, but denying it to others when in power? It must, however, be said that the events in Münster were largely the result of the juxtaposition of a few fanatics in authority with the pressure of severe siege conditions. We must affirm that one aberration cannot vitiate the testimony of the whole movement; the witness of Church history underlines that fact, for Christianity has had many aberrations.

A third question now arises. How do these sectarian insights fit in with the concept of absolute truth? If a doctrine is true, does this not mean that other doctrines must be false? Is there to be no limitation to the proclamation of false teaching? A case in point is the phenomenon of anti-trinitarianism which became widespread in the Reformation period. Its foremost proponents were the "Evangelical Rationalists", akin to the Anabaptists in their pacifism and their opposition to coercion in the realm of conscience, but dissimilar in

their attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. Among them were Michael Servetus, Laelius and Faustus Socinus, and Francis Dávid. In Poland and Transylvania this anti-trinitarian movement flourished and eventually became a Unitarian church. There were a few who were more positively Anabaptist and who were influenced in an anti-trinitarian direction, notably Ludwig Haetzer and Adam Pastor and possibly Hans Denck. Servetus paid for his anti-trinitarianism with his life in Calvin's Geneva, and there are those who would argue that in the interests of truth some kind of restriction is necessary in order to discourage unprofitable speculation. (Most, if not all, would doubtless today not regard execution as a part of that restriction.) When men in positions of power feel strongly about their convictions, be they religious or political, there is the constant temptation to impose them on others. This has been true in Rome and Geneva, in Moscow and Madrid. It is not easy when we hold power to permit others to follow what seems to us to be heresy, in the strong conviction that ultimately truth will prevail.

In his early days as a reformer, Luther spoke out strongly in favour of liberty of conscience and freedom to proclaim the Word by purely spiritual means. But this, as Troeltsch pointed out, is not the same as full religious toleration. Luther wished for freedom for the Word to exercise its spiritual influence and never doubted that it would finally triumph. Ultimately he had to resort to compulsory methods, as did other reformers. Even in Strassburg, Bucer and the others came reluctantly to the point when forcible measures were introduced to curb the growing power of the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists. A number of comments may be made: we note that, with all the goodwill in the world, if a church wishes to be united and have universal influence, it must use stronger methods than persuasion and preaching. Moreover, it may be argued that there is indeed such a thing as "absolute truth", but also that man has not the capacity to comprehend it fully. While, therefore, he may hold to his understanding of the truth with tenacity and confidence, he nevertheless must recognize that others may grasp aspects of that truth which have not been revealed to him, and that he must learn to defer to them. Finally, it is clear that the sectarian must be prepared to forgo a universal and united response to his proclamation of the Gospel. By his principles he is condemned always to be in a minority.

A fourth question raised by Anabaptism and Sectarianism is whether it is possible for divergent opinions to live together in harmony. In our modern secular society it is comparatively easy for minority beliefs and religions to dwell alongside each other, but it was another matter in sixteenth-century Europe. Strassburg was a notable example of a place where for some years Anabaptists were allowed to live peaceably alongside other religious groups, thanks to the tolerance and indeed interest in their ideas on the part of the reformers, especially Wolfgang Capito and Matthew Zell. In fact, Strassburg was the scene of at least six Anabaptist conferences. Capito was a warm friend of Michael

Sattler, and was deeply shocked by his martyrdom at Horb. Some of his views veered towards those of the Anabaptists, chiefly under the influence of Martin Cellarius. Martin Bucer was also kindly disposed towards the Anabaptists, and very successful in his dealings with them, rejecting force and compulsion and seeking to win them by argument and persuasion. Even when these methods failed, he simply called on the government to expel or imprison them; he never seems to have sanctioned the death penalty. Perhaps the most far-reaching example of peaceful co-existence of the time was to be found in Poland, in the Warsaw Confederation or Convention of 1573, i.e. the "Pax Dissidentium", which stated that "we who differ with regard to religion (*dissidentes de religione*) will keep the peace with one another, and will not for a different faith or a change of churches shed blood nor punish one another by confiscation of property, infamy, imprisonment or banishment, and will not in any way assist any magistrate or officer in such an act". When Henri of Valois became King of Poland he was required to sign this, as also was his successor, Stephen Báthory. Thus, even in the sixteenth century, widely differing Christian groups were able to live together, if only for comparatively short periods.

A fifth question raised by the whole Radical Reformation is whether the sectarian has the right to demand more than a restricted tolerance. Should he have, for instance, the liberty to proselytize without hindrance? The events in Strassburg to which reference has already been made are instructive here. We have noted the mild attitude of the Strassburg reformers and their desire to win back the Anabaptists by argument and discussion rather than by force. But what happened? When the radical reformers were unmolested, they demanded greater freedom of expression, sought constant confrontation with the magisterial reformers, and even began to influence some of the magistrates. Bucer and the other leaders were desperately afraid of chaos and anarchy if these radical teachers were allowed to go on unchecked, and who could blame them in view of Münster? In the end, Pilgram Marpeck was forced to leave Strassburg and Melchior Hofmann was imprisoned. On 12 April 1534 the council decreed that "stubborn and obnoxious Anabaptists" should leave the city. The following year they ordered the baptism of all infants within six weeks of birth. The period of magnanimity was at an end. Did the Anabaptists demand too much? Should they have restrained themselves and quietly contented themselves with bare tolerance? It is a difficult question, and one which can only be answered from within the situation. Could the Strassburg magisterial reformers have stood by and seen the quiet growth of movements which seemed to them to lead inevitably to anarchy? We can recall, for instance, that in Moravia in the late fifteen-fifties there was a proliferation of Hutterite sects when toleration was granted. Perhaps we may conclude that sectarians in a community are tolerable as long as they do not become too many or too aggressive.

The Contribution of Sects to Society

Sectarianism still makes a contribution to society; perhaps the historical impact of the Anabaptists and their sympathizers can teach us the value of the presence of tolerated sects in a community. First we may note the suggestion that sects are a safeguard against spiritual tyranny. Power and authority in church and state readily degenerate into the attitude of mind which regards the ordinary church member or citizen as little more than an ignorant child who has to be told what to do and believe and disciplined if he steps out of line. The presence of sects in a community calls in question this kind of dictatorship, however paternal and benevolent it may appear, and reminds the powers-that-be that the human mind cannot be put into a straitjacket.

Secondly, sectarianism challenges Christians and non-Christians alike to think through their beliefs and attitudes. It may be more comfortable to drift along lazily in a form of belief accepted by one's community, but creativity is stifled that way. The presence of dissent provokes thought. The principle of nonconformity, based on *Romans* 12.1, 2, has had its advocates in every age. Even the Middle Ages, often thought of as representing an undivided Christendom, had its tradition of religious dissent, e.g. the Spiritual Franciscans, the Waldenses, the Brethren of the Free Spirit. The Anabaptists were heir to this tradition, and every age since has had its nonconformists. The question arises whether nonconformity requires by its very nature a measure of opposition. When a sect is tolerated it gradually absorbs much of the culture of surrounding society. Unless it deliberately opts out of that society, as in the case of the Hutterite Bruderhofs or the Amish Mennonites, the tendency is for it to become indistinguishable from its environment. Take, for instance, the Dutch Mennonites. Due largely to the fact that since the early seventeenth century they have not been forced to live in separated or closed groups, but have lived and worked alongside other Christians, they have lost their nonconformity in the sense of antithesis to the pattern of life of these other Christians. Their way of life as regards dress, amusement or voting is much akin to that of their non-Mennonite neighbours. They have begun to practise what has been called "ethical nonconformity". This may be regarded as a natural and right progression, but it cannot be denied that the nonconformity is less obvious to the surrounding world, and it may be that each age requires its own particular brand of nonconformity to be developed. However that may be, it is quite clear that the presence of nonconformist sects is a catalyst to thought and discussion in a community, for the sectarian idea emphasizes the manysidedness of truth.

Thirdly, surprising though it may seem, it may be claimed that the presence of sects encourages tolerance. When there are such wide differences in understanding and interpreting the truth, are we not made aware that at best our viewpoint is but partial? How then can we be other than tolerant of others' points of view? Of course, there

must always be a tension between tolerance and conviction. It is not easy to be restrained and altruistic when our most cherished beliefs are being minimized or even rejected. However, when sects are freely tolerated in a community, there is surely more likelihood of an open-minded spirit of enquiry than when nonconformity is a despised and persecuted minority.

Fourthly, the value of sectarianism remains even in a secular culture. Again, this might appear surprising, for it might be thought that modern society has relegated religion and the Church to the periphery of life, and that now it is relatively immaterial what a man believes or how he worships. There is undoubtedly a changed situation in western civilization. Governments in mediaeval and reformation times were church orientated, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist or Anglican. During the last centuries a new type of government has gradually emerged—the secular, not aligned to any particular church or religion. The process began as an effect of the Renaissance and was even continuing when the Anabaptists were making their witness, and they themselves contributed to this trend. In their descendants we find large bodies of dissent forming, first in the Mennonites in the Netherlands, and then in England and America in the Independents and the Baptists. The logical outcome of this was the complete separation of Church and State in the United States of America, which owed not a little to Anabaptist thought. To that extent at least the Anabaptist ideal has triumphed.

More recent history has seen the development of a new kind of secularist state, that of governments not merely aloof from religious discussion but actively opposed to any form of religious expression. Has sectarianism something to say to such a situation? Surely the message is similar to that of the Anabaptists to the monolithic cultures of their own day, namely, that man as man has the right to think freely, to worship as he believes he should, and to practise his religion so long as his liberty is not made the bondage of others. Indeed, in the conflict between Marxist Communism and religion the insights of Anabaptism have a new and vital relevance, and it is significant that in Eastern Europe the sect-type of religion is faring at least as well as the church-type.

Fifthly and finally, we may say that sectarianism has value in preserving individualism. Troeltsch commented that "it is clear that everywhere individualism is being restricted, and that soon there will no longer be too much individualism, but too little. As political tendencies are becoming increasingly democratic, religion may once again provide a refuge for individualism". In the half century since these words were written, the restriction has become even more evident, even within the churches to a certain extent. In recent years there has been an increased emphasis upon the corporate nature of the Church. There has been a right and necessary swing away from Victorian individualism. As in all swings, however, there is the tendency to go too far, and it is vital sometimes to redress the

balance. Hence the value of the sect, where often the individual may find refuge and identity. He is not swallowed up in the large church or denomination. In reaction to the modern cult of "bigness", the small sect provides an opportunity and an environment for the expression of the individual interpretation and understanding of truth. It may thus become the cradle of new insights which would be still-born in the larger entity. The particular individual may outgrow and break away from the narrow confines of the sect, but those confines may be absolutely vital at that early stage of his development. The tremendous variety within the various groups that made up the Anabaptist movement exemplifies this. Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Denck, Michael Sattler, Melchior Hofmann, Menno Simons, Elisabeth Dirks, Joan Boucher—we could go on with a lengthy list of thoughtful and sincere men and women who found meaning and identity in widely diverse areas of the movement. There are choice spirits which cannot be contained within the boundaries of formal established religion, and the sects often provide a haven for such.

It is apparent, therefore, that the sect-idea has much to offer every age and generation, not least our own. It is surely imperative that we recognize this fact and do not join in the unthinking disparagement of sects which is still so common. We do not have to agree with all that a particular sect affirms to recognize its value, and its right to exist. In the mystery of God's providence and purpose sects have often been channels of divine revelation, and it behoves us to realize with Job that "these are but the outskirts of his ways . . . but the thunder of his power who can understand?" (*Job* 26.14, R.V.)

The Relation between Sect and Church

In his major work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Ernst Troeltsch has demonstrated that through history the Church-type and the Sect-type existed side by side, and, in a real sense, needed each other's insights. This implies that, despite their apparent conflict, both the Church-type and the Sect-type are valid expressions of the New Testament ideal. They complement each other, in fact, they need each other. This is not generally accepted, of course. Members of the formal churches regard sects as schismatic or plainly heretical, while adherents of the sects think of the churches as apostate. The Church, as Troeltsch points out, reckons that it possesses absolute truth and that its purpose is to be the Church of all the people. Therefore it is justifiable to use compulsion for the people's own good. All the nation must hear the message of salvation, and the force necessary for this end demands the co-operation of the State. The Sect, too, believes that it possesses absolute truth, but it also believes that this truth is beyond the reach of the masses and of the State. They demand external toleration, but within their own borders they practise a spiritual discipline of doctrine and morals. The truth will attain final consummation, but only at the Last Day.

It might be thought that because the sect is more or less self-

contained and independent, it is able to go on happily for its span of existence without reference to larger Christian groupings. Many sectarians do indeed think like this, and it is a natural reaction to the usual attitude of churchmen. If, however, we would have a more comprehensive view of the Gospel, it becomes obvious that we must take into account a wider spectrum of Christian belief. Let us note here two ways in which the sect-type and the church-type correlate.

First, H. L. Ellison in a foreword to Leonard Verduin's stimulating book, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, makes the pertinent comment that "we must keep a sense of balance. The (Anabaptist) movement would never have broken out like a flood had it not been for the 'official' Reformation, and it could never have succeeded in any measure without at least the tolerance of the leading Reformers". The sect in this case meant a "going further" by folk dissatisfied with the extent of the official Reformation. Thus the early Swiss Brethren, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, were originally disciples of Zwingli. Similarly we may note how Carlstadt and Zwilling went beyond Luther's reform in a more radical direction. Often, in the course of Christian history, the sect has built on the foundation laid by others who have not seen the need for the extreme to which the sectarians have felt compelled to go. As a result, new aspects of truth have been revealed.

Secondly, it is quite evident that sectarian insights do not give a complete or adequate representation of the whole Gospel, any more than the insights of those within the more formal churches. So, in the Reformation era, we may be grateful to Martin Luther for his grasp of the doctrine of justification which opened the flood-gates, to John Calvin for his sagacious handling of Scripture and shrewd systematic mind which renewed the springs of inspiration and created a strong church, to Thomas Cranmer for his rich liturgical understanding which gave us the serene flowing waters of the Book of Common Prayer, as well as to the Anabaptists for their courageous espousal of freedom and tolerance and the right of individual judgment, which, if they at times meandered into the marshes of strange fancy, at others led to the welling-up of ideas which have influenced history. What was needed in the sixteenth century, and is still needed in our own, is the willingness to learn from one another and to defer to others' points of view.

The End of the Matter

It is good to see that in recent years there has been a revival of respect for the sect-ideal. If we ourselves are called sectarian, let us not be unduly worried—we have an honourable lineage. Frequently sects have had an immense importance for the course of history. Sometimes they act as "catalysts", crystallizing social change in acute form. Sometimes they are the creative agencies in society, notably in their ideas of religious liberty and their break with the mediaeval "corpus christianum". Repeatedly misunderstood and maligned by

others, they have given hope, fellowship and a sense of security to men when other agencies failed them. We may add that for many they resolve what modern jargon calls the "crisis of identity", restoring to them a realization of their worth to God, the meaningful discovery that they have a place in his purpose. Wilson pertinently comments that sects represent "communities of love", exhibiting the qualities and weaknesses of people who are in love!

Finally we must emphasize that the role of the sect continues. G. H. Williams makes this point in his great book *The Radical Reformation*: "Again in our own times, when, in a new context at once secular and ecumenical, the European state churches are being disestablished, the large churchlike American denominations are being reorganized, and the younger churches of Asia and Africa are being challenged by renascent ethnic religions and the international religion of the proletariat, when, in short, the mission of the churches everywhere is being reconceived in a basically hostile or alienated environment, Christians of many denominations are finding themselves constitutionally and in certain other ways closer to the descendants of the despised sectaries of the Reformation era than to the classical defenders of a reformed 'corpus christianum'."

The sects may be "everywhere spoken against", but they are still alive, valid and relevant.

J. G. G. NORMAN.

PRIZE ESSAY: A REMINDER

The Committee of the Baptist Historical Society has decided to offer a prize of £50 for an essay in Baptist history.

The conditions of entry are as follows:

1. Essays may only be submitted by members of the Baptist Historical Society.
2. Entries should not exceed 10,000 words excluding footnote references.
3. Subjects may include any aspect of Baptist history before 1950.
4. The Judges shall normally be the President and Secretary of the Society together with the Editor of the *Baptist Quarterly* and any others whose assistance they shall seek.
5. The closing date for the entry of essays for the prize shall be 31st December, 1978.
6. The winning contribution shall, at the discretion of the Committee of the Baptist Historical Society, be published in the *Quarterly*.
7. The Judges' decisions concerning the suitability and quality of the entries shall be final.

All entries must reach the Secretary by 31st December, 1978:

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