

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

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ALIEN IMMERSION

J. W. PORTER (1863-1937)

While perhaps there is no difference of opinion among Baptists as to the meaning of the words, "Alien Immersion," it is well, for the sake of clearness, and likewise for the sake of this argument, that the phrase, "Alien Immersion," be defined. Alien immersion, then, is a baptism that is not administered by Baptist churches, but is alien to, different from, and not belonging to, Baptist churches. If this definition be correct, and it is believed that it will be generally accepted among Baptists, then the very name itself offers strong presumptive proof against its acceptance by our churches, and it should be renamed or rejected.

It is a closed question, among Baptists at least, that regular Baptist baptism is Bible baptism, and that it is the baptism commanded by Christ and practiced by His disciples. It is further held by Baptists that there is but one baptism taught in the New Testament (and one Lord, one faith, one baptism Ephesians 4:5), and that this one baptism is the identical baptism now administered by Baptist churches. It therefore necessarily follows that any baptism which is alien to, and different from, this baptism cannot be scriptural baptism. It would be as easy to demonstrate from the scriptures two faiths, or two Gods, as to demonstrate two baptisms. Things that are equal to the same thing, must be equal to each other, and things that are alien to each other cannot each be equal to the same thing. If alien baptism is scriptural baptism, then it is the only baptism, and, therefore is the only baptism that should be received by Baptist churches. This, of course, would take from Baptist churches the right or necessity of administering the rite of baptism. If Baptist baptism is identical with the one scriptural baptism,

then it is the only baptism that ought to be received, or administered by Baptist churches.

The attempt to classify baptism into regular and irregular, is both unscriptural and unreasonable. Baptism, in the very nature of the case, is scriptural or unscriptural, valid or invalid. It would be just as foolish to attempt to classify American dollars as regular or irregular. An American dollar, to be good must be regularly issued, and if irregularly issued is a counterfeit dollar, and hence utterly worthless. So, with baptism, it is scriptural and regular, or unscriptural, and, therefore, irregular.

Even the advocates of alien immersion freely admit that it is irregular, and that it tends to disorder. Why, then, should we tolerate a thing that is admittedly irregular and disorderly, and that, too, when we are commanded to do all things in a decent and orderly manner? "Let all things be done decently and in order," I Corinthians 14:40. Christ put Himself to considerable inconvenience, and walked a long way, to get regular Baptist baptism at the hands of the first Baptist preacher. If Baptist baptism is the best baptism, why content ourselves with an inferior article, or encourage others in so doing?

Baptists generally hold that baptism is a church ordinance, and therefore is to be administered by Baptist churches. Our practice also is in perfect conformity with our faith, as every candidate for baptism at our hands is voted upon, and if accepted, his or her baptism is authorized by the church. If baptism is a church ordinance, then the authority to administer it must be restricted to the church,

for if taken beyond the church, it ceases to be a church ordinance. If to the contrary, it is not a church ordinance, then all of our churches have long been engaged in a sinful practice of usurping authority, and should at once cease to exercise this authority, and never again, under any circumstances, authorize the baptism of anyone. It is, or it is not, a church ordinance. If it be a church ordinance let the churches alone exercise it; if it be not, let them cease to claim or practice it. Churches should not be held responsible for the preservation of an ordinance not controlled by them.

If the authority to baptize does not rest with the churches, with whom does it

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rest? If the authority to baptize has been committed to the preachers, then they alone should authorize and administer it, and in

turn the churches should cease to usurp the preachers' authority. Why should a pastor recommend a candidate to the church for baptism, if the pastor has the right to pass on the candidate's fitness for baptism?

If it be claimed that the ordinance of baptism has been committed to the individual Christian, then baptism becomes an individual ordinance, and can be administered by any Christian, man or woman, anywhere, and under all circumstances. Nor should the church or preacher take from the individual his rights in the premises. Surely Christ has committed the ordinance to some one, or some class, and if so let this one, or this class, exercise the authority given them. If it be claimed that Christ authorized baptism, but did not commit it to any one in particular, then no one can claim au-

thority to administer it, and the ordinance should be promptly abolished.

Thus it appears that the advocates of alien immersion are forced, by the logic of the situation, to the position that the conscience of the individual is the final test of the validity of baptism. Naturally enough, this is the usual argument that is offered to sustain the doctrine. Assuming then, for the sake of the argument, that the validity of baptism is to be determined by the conscience of the one to whom it is administered, it will readily appear that the argument not only proves too much for its advocates, but is it a clear case of *reductio absurdum*. For example, should a candidate for membership apply to a Baptist church and state that his conscience is satisfied with his baptism, whether that baptism was by sprinkling or pouring; whether administered for the remission of sins, or by a Mormon or an infidel. A notable example of this was recently afforded in the ordination of an alien immersionist who frankly stated in his examination, that he would receive a baptism by an infidel. Think of it! Col. Robert G. Ingersoll administering baptism for a Baptist church! Yet this is the inevitable logic of alien immersion. Another fair sample of the application of this deadly doctrine of conscience-baptism was afforded by a Baptist church in Boston, which recently received quite a number on their sprinkling for baptism. This naturally came about by substituting conscience for a command of Christ, and sentiment for divine authority.

Another fatal objection to receiving alien immersion is that to do so forces us to surrender the doctrine of restricted communion. We cannot consistently keep one from the Lord's table on account of not being baptized and then receive the same baptism when offered to our church. If this baptism is not sufficient to entitle him to the Lord's Supper it should not be sufficient to entitle him to full membership in the church of which the Lord's Supper is only a part. If he is entitled to the whole, he is evidently entitled to all the parts.

It will not suffice to say that we exclude them from the Lord's Supper on the ground that they are members of unscriptural churches, the fact that we receive their baptism is conclusive evidence that we deem their churches scriptural. If they are not scriptural churches, then they have no right to administer baptism

and we should therefore reject their baptism when offered us. Neither scripturally nor logically can we acknowledge their baptism and then deny them the Supper. It is a matter of fact, a large majority of alien immersionists are open communionists. No logically constructed mind can subscribe to the doctrine of restricted communion and alien immersion at one and the same time; to accept one, is to reject the other. Anything then that comes into direct conflict with an accepted Baptist doctrine must among Baptists at least, be rejected.

To admit that other churches differing from us in faith and polity are scriptural churches, as many alien immersionists do, leads to "confusion worse confounded." It forces us into conflict with another well established Baptist custom, that of ordaining ministers who come to us from other denominations. If they come to us from scriptural churches, then their ordinations are as valid as ours and it is both sinful and foolish for us to insist on ordaining them. So far as the literature of the subject extends there is not a single instance of a Baptist church sanctioning the ordination of a different denomination. We should at least be consistent and to be so we must be scriptural. If alien baptism is from heaven, then our churches should preach and practice it; if it be of man, we should uniformly reject it. A majority of the cases of alien immersion that are received by our churches are administered by ministers who have never been baptized. How can a man communicate that which he never possessed? We would not allow one of our own unbaptized brethren to administer baptism, then why permit an unbaptized member of another denomination to do for us that which we would not allow one of our own to do? Charity should begin at home and this particular species of it should not begin at home or abroad. Consistency and alien immersion are strangely inconsistent. It is further true, that a majority of Pedit-Baptist ministers who administer immersion, do not believe in it and even go so far as to preach against it, administering it only in extreme cases and then only to prevent the loss of a member. In such cases they perform that in which they do not believe, "and whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To accept such a baptism, is to become partakers of their sin. Christ never commanded anyone to preach one thing and practice another. Besides, if a Pedit-

Baptist or a regeneration-baptizer can baptize one person for our churches, they may baptize all persons for our churches and if they can scripturally baptize all who come to us then Baptist churches are not essential to the carrying out of the commission of Christ. If Baptist churches are not essential to the carrying out of the commission of Christ, then we have no scriptural authority for our existence and the sooner we cease to exist, the better for all concerned.

A far-fetched plea has been made in behalf of alien immersion in the case of the missionary. It is claimed that on the foreign field there is often no church near at hand to authorize the baptism of the candidate and that therefore the missionary must baptize without church authority. This at best, is special pleading but if admitted as true would not justify its acceptance in our country; and it is to some of our country men that this tract is especially addressed. As a matter of fact, however, the missionary has been ordained by his home church and his very ordination gave him the right to baptize, under proper conditions and in any case authorized by his church. That there has been some looseness in this connection on our foreign field, there is but little doubt, but this does not demonstrate the correctness of the proceeding. If necessary, the missionary may, in extreme cases be authorized by a Baptist church to receive and baptize a candidate into its fellowship. However, if a case should arise where there was no Baptist church to authorize baptism, then simply allow the candidate to remain unbaptized. The brethren who propose this hypothesis seem to proceed upon the idea that such a one would be lost, unless baptized. Such a candidate could well afford to wait, or like Christ, walk a long way to secure scriptural baptism. Hypothetical and exceptional cases should not, however, be allowed to operate against a well established scriptural rule. There is not a single baptism in the New Testament, when the administrator did not have authority to baptize and that authority given by God, Christ, or the church.

It is sometimes urged that if the validity of baptism, in any wise rests with the administrator, the person baptized, could never know whether his baptism was genuine. Were this true, which it is not, it still would not justify alien immersion. A baptism administered by Judas Iscariot was perfectly valid, as long as he

was acknowledged by Christ as His disciple. His official acts were clearly valid, until he was deprived of his apostleship. If one wishes to secure license to engage in business, he must apply to one who is legally authorized to issue license, for however honest he may be, or whatever price he may pay, his license if obtained from any other source, would be worthless. Ignorance, in spite of opportunity, is not a sufficient excuse in the realm of law or grace.

It is freely admitted by all that the question of alien immersion could not have arisen in New Testament times, as all the churches were of the same faith and order. Baptists believe that they are in full accord with New Testament teaching and that their churches have the same faith and polity, and are therefore identical with the churches of the New Testament times. If other churches are not in accord with New Testament teaching (if they are, we are not) then for us to accept their baptism would be to offer a premium on their departure from "*the faith which was once delivered to the saints,*" Jude 3.

The charge, that those who contend for Baptist baptism are trying to introduce a new test of fellowship, to say the least, lacks verisimilitude. The charge is seemingly brought for the specific purpose of diverting the issue, which the advocates of alien immersion cannot meet. So far as the information of the writer extends, no one in the recent agitation of the subject in the state has uttered a word or penned a line towards making the question a test of fellowship. If this be true, as the advocates of this strange doctrine admit, the Baptist baptism is always to be preferred, then should we not lift our voices in favor of that which is best and by all lawful means discourage the reception of that which is confessedly inferior? Strangely enough, some of those who claim to be opposed to alien immersion have written more in favor of its reception than have those who are its avowed advocates, thus placing themselves in the position of justifying in others what they would condemn in themselves. If these same say that alien immersion is wrong and that they are personally opposed to it, how can they justify and encourage it in others? If I believe in the integrity and sovereignty of Baptist baptism, what logical or moral right have I to defend others for practicing a different baptism, and one too, that

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Porter, John William (born Calloway, Fayette County, Tennessee, August 8, 1863; died Lexington, Kentucky, September 7, 1937). Attorney, pastor, author. Son of John Freeman and Martha Carolyn (Tharpe) Porter, he was educated at Cumberland University, receiving the LL.B. degree in 1882, and at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received the Th.G. degree in 1893. Porter married Lillian E. Thomas in July, 1891, by whom he had five children; three girls and two boys.

After practicing law, 1882-85, Porter was ordained to the Baptist ministry in 1890 and held pastorates at the Newdale Church in Canada, German-town and Colliersville Baptist churches in Tennessee, Olive Branch Church in Mississippi, Pewee Valley Church and First Baptist, Maysville Kentucky, and First Baptist Church Newport News, Virginia, after which he returned to Kentucky as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lexington for fourteen years. He was pastor for about three years of the Third Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, and for fourteen years of the Immanuel Baptist Church, Lexington.

Porter was a trustee of Southeastern Kentucky Baptist School, Hall-Moody Institute, and Georgetown College. For twelve years he was a member of the Foreign Mission Board, preached the annual sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention in 1915, and was moderator of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1913-14. He served as editor of the Western Recorder, 1905-19, and president of the Baptist Book Concern, Louisville. At one time president of the Anti-Saloon League of America, Porter was author of a number of books, including *Christian Science; Neither Scientific nor Christian; Assurance of Faith; The World's Debt to the Baptists' The Baptist's Debt to the World; Feminism; Evolution Menance; and Alien Immersion.*

my judgment and conscience condemn? There is neither right or reason in such a course of conduct, and those who pursue it, will sooner or later, consciously or otherwise, align themselves with the advocated of alien immersion.

Let us then preserve the ordinances blameless; let us if necessary, lose a few, or if needs be, many members, rather than to be thrown into helpless confusion and into an irregular and unscriptural practice.

The conviction grows with the writer that if Southern Baptists should ever conclude to accept alien immersion, this conclusion will constitute a sure prophecy of open communion and with unrestricted communion will come the disintegration of our churches and if possible, the failure of the Faith of our fathers - God Almighty forbid!