

**KENTUCKY BAPTISTS,  
THE SEMINARY  
AND  
“ALIEN IMMERSION”**

**BY**

**W. J. McGLOTHLIN, D. D.,  
LOUISVILLE, KY.**

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**1908.**

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The following paper was prepared by Prof. W. J. McGlothlin with the entire approval of the other members of the Faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He alone is responsible for the historical statements, but the Faculty assume full responsibility for his statement of the position of the Seminary. Dr. McGlothlin became so interested in the historical aspect of the topic discussed that he felt that Kentucky Baptists ought to have access to the information here presented especially as it is not easily accessible. And in view of current discussions among Kentucky Baptists our Faculty heartily approve of the publication of this pamphlet.

E. Y. MULLINS,

Dr. Broadus used to say that no question is properly understood until it is understood historically. We are prone to forget the past and believe that whatever is always has been just as it is. It is this fact which makes the study of history so helpful; an understanding of the past is necessary to the proper appreciation of our present position. The belief that some knowledge of the history of "alien immersion" in Kentucky would

help all parties to a better understanding of this controverted matter, led to the preparation of the following paper as a means to that end.

There are among Baptists three views on this subject of "alien immersion". One party object to "alien immersion" on doctrinal grounds and some of these make it a test of orthodoxy; another prefer rebaptism on grounds of regularity, order and expediency, but do not regard the question as one of orthodoxy or a reason for disturbing fellowship and harmony; a third party favor the reception of "alien immersions", but do not make it a test of fellowship. How have Kentucky Baptists and the Seminary stood on the question? In brief it may be said that all three views have been and are now represented among Kentucky Baptists, the third view probably prevailing until past the middle of the last century and the first and second probably predominating since that time. The Seminary as such has no position on the question, but the second view has predominated among its professors and probably among its trustees. But all professors have steadily held that it was a question to be settled by the individual conscience and the local church without incurring disabilities or ecclesiastical penalties, no matter what that decis-

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ion might be. The proof of these statements follows, though but a small part of the evidence in hand can be given in this paper.

### 1. The Practice of Kentucky Baptists.

Dr. John L. Waller, who was editor of the **Baptist Banner**, and later of the **Western Recorder**, who was the founder and editor of the **Western Baptist Review** and the **Christian Repository**, who assisted in the organization of the General Association and was for some years its Corresponding Secretary, who had travelled widely over the State, was known and honored as possibly no other man in the State, has the following to say concerning the attitude of Kentucky Baptists on the subject in his day:

“In the West [that is west of the Allegheny Mountains] the practice of our churches has not been uniform; and the opinions of brethren who have bestowed considerable attention upon the subject are discordant.”—**Western Baptist Review**, Vol. I., p. 367.

“Although conscious that we are sustained [in support of the validity of “alien immersion”] by the great majority of the Baptists, now and in times gone by; still we know that many, eminent for piety and learning, entertain opposite opinions.”—Vol. I., 372.

“In the bounds of our acquaintance, we know churches in correspondence with the same association, who act differently on this question—one receiving and others rejecting such baptism—and there is no discord and dispute on the subject. We know churches in the same vicinage, and whose members constantly intermingle, acting in opposition in the case, and yet the most perfect fellowship exists. This is as it should be everywhere. Less than a year ago, we were in company with almost a score of the most able Baptist ministers in Kentucky. This matter was the subject of free and friendly conversation. The company were about equally divided in sentiment. But no one thought it ought to disturb the kind feelings of brethren toward each other and we are sure that the brethren differing on this occasion as cordially esteem each other as the brethren agreeing. Brethren imbued with the spirit of Christ will ever esteem such burdens the least and the lightest they have to bear for one another.”—Vol. III., 268.

When the junior editor of the **Tennessee Baptist** declares that the churches of a large section are unanimous in opposition to Dr. Waller's position, he denies the accuracy of the statement and goes on to ask if that be true:

“Does it follow that we must surrender our convictions of truth at their bidding? Do they assume the attribute of infallibility? Why then this array? Is this the age, and are Baptists the people to demand blind and servile obedience on a question of this sort? We would rather be right than in a majority. We never go to the Church, but to ‘the book of God’s inspiration’, to learn our duty in religious matters. Men who boast of majorities, and felicitate themselves for being borne upon the opinions of the multitude, furnish very unmistakable evidence that they cannot ‘resist the sweet, seducing charms of popular applause’! We respect the feelings and the sentiments of our brethren, but they have never claimed to be the lords of our conscience, nor will we meanly cringe to them as our masters.”—Vol. III, 465.

“Now suppose it were true, as every intelligent man between the Arctic and the Antarctic circles knows it to be **untrue**, that all the Baptists, with only here and there a single and a solitary exception, repudiated most emphatically our sentiments on this question; does it follow that we must yield absolute submission or else be anathematized? Are we, like the Papists, to regard the Church as the only authorized expounder of Revelation? Are we re-

quired to eschew private judgment, and to learn the truth from the Church and not from the Bible?"—Vol. III., 465.

In reply to a series of communications in the **Tennessee Baptist** written by one "Fidus", of Muscle Shoals, Ala., he says:

"'Upon this question', he emphatically remarks, 'Baptists have been unanimous, during all ages of their history past!' We wholly and utterly deny this assertion. We demand even the smallest particle of proof to sustain it. The reasons inducing them to baptize anew had no reference to the administrator whatever, as every tyro in ecclesiastical history well knows; but solely to the subject, the mode, or the design of baptism. We challenge 'Fidus' to produce a solitary instance, beyond the days of his great-great-grandmother, in all Baptist history, where baptism was administered anew solely because the administrator was not a minister of our persuasion. He says that this was the universal practice. We demand his authority. Let him remember that mere assertion is not proof with men of sense. We could overwhelm him with counter authorities; but it is not necessary.

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"The man who states that for truth which he knows nothing about, com-

mits as great an outrage upon sound morals as if he were deliberately and wilfully to declare a falsehood.

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“What he says of our ‘ministerial ancestors’, so far at least as we can trace our ministerial genealogy, we **know** to be untrue—**utterly, palpably false!**”—Vol. III., 467.

These extracts are sufficient to show the belief of Dr. Waller as to the views of Kentucky and other Baptists on this question up to the middle of the last century. He quotes with approval, Vol. I., p. 372, this paragraph from Benedict’s history as to the view of the Baptists in the United States as a whole:

“Mr. Benedict, in his History of the Baptists, has aptly remarked: ‘All agree that it is an unadvisable measure, for a person to apply to unbaptized ministers to lead them into the water, but after they have been properly immersed on a profession of their faith, it is generally thought that it would be improper to immerse them a second time. It is difficult to conceive why they would not, in this case, come under the denomination of Ana-Baptists’ [that is re-baptizers].”—Vol. II., 473.

Dr. Graves himself later agrees with

Dr. Waller's estimate of the situation in Kentucky. In his introduction to Dayton's "The Immersions of Pedobaptists and Campbellites" he says, in 1858: "By far the largest majority—perhaps nine-tenths of the churches in the North—receive the immersions and ordinations of Pedobaptists and Campbellites as valid. \* \* \* Perhaps, the majority of the churches in Kentucky, Missouri and parts of South Carolina would today receive such acts as baptism." He says in a note to the above, with evident reference to the Baptist papers and leading Baptists in Kentucky: "The practice prevails to a larger extent in those States whose Baptist papers and leading men advocate the validity of such baptism."

This leads us to say that the Baptist press of Kentucky at this period not only refused to make the question one of orthodoxy or a ground of proscription, but was actually in favor of "alien immersion". During his career Dr. John L. Waller was editor of **The Baptist Banner** and **The Western Recorder**, and the founder and editor of **The Western Baptist Review** and **The Christian Repository**. He was frankly and avowedly in favor of "alien immersions" and during the brief career of **The Western Baptist Review** has three strong editorial articles in favor of the

validity of "alien immersions", June, 1846; March, 1848; August, 1848. He was not disposed to press his views upon others, nor to set himself up as the only standard of orthodoxy; but his publications frankly favored the reception of "alien immersions" as the more Biblical and logical practice.

After Dr. Waller's death the **Western Recorder** and **Christian Repository** passed into other hands but for a time they held the same position on the question of "alien immersion". Dr. J. R. Graves in a long editorial in the **Tennessee Baptist** of October 20, 1855, in answering the question, "Why Does Not the **Tennessee Baptist** and **Western Recorder** harmonize?" states as the second reason:

"The Recorder advocates the reception of all Pedobaptists and Campbellites, upon the immersions received in those human societies—which the Tennessee Baptist considers as a species of open communion (—and) to all intents and purposes, so far as the Campbellites are concerned, and this policy the Baptist conceives as fraught with confusion, evil, and ultimate ruin to our churches."

In a note to the same editorial he declares "Elder Sears [A. D. Sears] will receive Campbellites into his church upon their immersion." At the

date of this editorial the **Western Recorder** was edited by S. W. Lind, W. M. Pratt, A. W. LaRue, S. H. Ford, A. D. Sears and L. Fletcher. If the **Western Recorder** ever repudiated the charge of Dr. Graves, the fact is unknown to the writer, and it would be reasonable to suppose that all the editors were in favor of "alien immersion", as some of them are known to have been. But, moreover, the denomination in the State evidently approved the **Recorder's** course as the General Association which met that year (1855) with the Walnut Street church in Louisville passed resolutions "commending the **Western Recorder** and **Christian Repository** as being in every way worthy of the patronage of the Baptists in Kentucky". This policy continued. In the issue of October 15, 1856, the **Western Recorder** editorially declares:

"Most of the modern sects have attached far too much importance to the qualifications of the administrator. And this arises because there is in most men a disposition to elevate the shadows above the substance." Further on in the same editorial it is said: "While we think the brethren of the Red River Association [Hardshell Baptists] have gone far astray; and while we think they propagate doctrines, and inculcate principles, and enforce practices that we

consider opposed to the Word of God, still we would not reject immersion when administered to a believer, even by them. We would recognize it as valid baptism." The point then seems to be clear that Kentucky Baptists have always been divided on the subject.

## 2. Their Attitude in View of This Fact.

Dr. Waller was clear that it had not hitherto disturbed, and ought not then to disturb, the peace and harmony of the brotherhood, and that it ought to be no bar to fellowship. And in this position the Baptists of Kentucky supported him. He says:

"But our practice, although not uniform, has not been the cause of any serious misunderstanding."— Vol. I., 367.

"In past times it has caused no divisions, and but little discussion among the Baptists, and it is confidently hoped and believed that their good sense and their devotion to the real interests of Zion, will restrain even the most restless spirits from making it now a cause for dissension. Let everything but a pure conscience in the sight of God yield to the preservation of peace and harmony among brethren. It is good and pleasant for such to dwell together in unity."—Vol. I., 373.

“Where honest differences of opinion may exist, every consideration of religion prompts to kindness and forbearance. Bigotry alone can, in such cases, excite strife and disunion.”—Vol. III., 268.

He maintained with cogency and force that the question should be kept in the realm of fraternal discussion, so far as the public was concerned, and left to the individual churches to act upon each individual case as it arose and as seemed best to that church. Upon this subject he speaks with great clearness, and here again he seems to have represented the Kentucky Baptists of that time. He says:

“It has been left entirely to the churches to dispose of as the merits of the applicants seemed to demand; and where dissent has occurred at all, it has been confined to the bounds of the church where the case existed. And to the churches, in their independent capacities, it rightfully belongs. It can never be taken from them.”—Vol. I., 367.

“But it is a matter which all concur in declaring belongs to each church, without question or appeal—that it does not and ought not to involve matters of fellowship.”—Vol. I., 373.

“We have ever maintained, that the question submitted by our correspond-

ent should be left to the decision of the individual church, to be determined whenever a person, baptized as supposed above, presents himself for membership. . Associations certainly have nothing whatever to do with it. It is purely ecclesiastical, and associations have no jurisdiction in such cases. Our churches being independent and supreme, should not be molested in their adjudications upon such points. But unfortunately there are too many amongst us who have a disposition to disturb the peace of Zion—who will not admit in practice what they grant in theory—that the church is above the association, and responsible for her acts to no earthly tribunal.”—Vol. III., 268.

“We intimate that our investigations had convinced us that the most confident on either side were those the least informed respecting the matters in controversy. We press upon all concerned, not to let the question disturb the fellowship of brethren; that it ought to be left to each church, to be decided upon as a case might present; and that it did not belong to an association, and ought never to be brought into its deliberations, much less disturb its harmony.”—Vol. III., 461.

It cannot be successfully denied that Dr. Waller in his desire for peace and harmony among Baptists represented

the prevailing sentiment of his time in Kentucky. The denomination was divided on the question, but living in peace and working in harmony. The question did not come before associations, but was discussed and settled in the churches. Individuals with differing views lived in peace in the same church; churches differing in practice were in perfect fellowship in the same association. The Baptist press favored "alien immersion", but did not seek to impose its views upon the denomination or arouse strife and contention about the matter. On the contrary, it sought to help the brethren live together without friction and work together for the glory of God.

The disposition to proscribe is not a product of Kentucky. It has been imported into the State.

Shall we return to the spirit and attitude of our fathers, thus secure peace in Kentucky, and turn our attention to doing the Lord's work? Or shall we have unceasing controversy? It rests with the leaders of the proscribing faction to answer that question. For it can never be true that all Baptists in this State will submit to dictation and proscription on this subject. Peace is most desirable, but peace at such a price is too dear. Freedom to believe and practice as God shall give us to understand

his will is too valuable to the Kingdom of God, too much an essential Baptist doctrine, to be surrendered at the demand of any set of men. Soul liberty is worth more than peace. In any case, a thing cannot be cause for a crusade now when the whole Baptist press and the leading men of Kentucky favored it sixty years ago.

### **3. The Attitude of the Seminary.**

The Seminary as an institution or corporation has no position on this question. It is not mentioned in the fundamental articles which were drawn up by some of the wisest and best men of the denomination. No trustee or professor has ever been asked to declare his convictions on this subject as a condition of election, nor is it likely that any ever will be required to make such declaration. On the Board of Trustees both views have been and are now represented, and it is not known which predominates. Of the eighteen professors which the institution has had in its entire history, only four are known to have favored "alien immersion", and one of those was converted to the opposite view while a professor in the institution. No professor has ever insisted on "alien immersion", nor has any one who favored it been long in a

position where he was called upon to deal with the subject in his classes.

But while the influence of the professors has been so largely in opposition to the reception of "alien immersions", still every man who has ever been on the faculty has claimed the right of every individual and of every church to decide this question as seemed best without any charge of heresy or ecclesiastical disability. No professor has ever been a party to the imposition of any sort of penalty upon our brethren or to any sort of condemnation of Baptist individuals or churches for holding views different from ours on this point. No man who has ever been connected with this institution has ever supported the rank anti-baptistic heresy of associational censorship of the doctrines and practices of the churches. Some extracts from letters of professors and from other documents will make clear the consistent attitude of the Seminary from its beginning. It has not changed, but Kentucky Baptists have changed if a certain proscribing section can be regarded as representing Kentucky Baptists.

Jas. P. Boyce to J. R. Graves about the transfer of Prof. Williams to another chair. "Louisville, Ky., July 22, 1874. You allude to 'facts stated'

and 'guarantees given'. I only wish that brethren should understand that we placed the Seminary upon no other position than it has always occupied. As to the question of alien immersions, we were very particular in stating that upon such disputed points as that the Seminary could and ought to take no such position. . . . But I could not pledge them not to teach any principle favoring 'alien immersions' or what some call 'pulpit communion', because as I contended in my speech these are questions upon which the denomination is divided and upon which we cannot enforce particular views upon any one. Besides, I do not know what may be the opinions of professors who may hereafter be elected. And I certainly did not mean to pledge that Dr. Williams should not express his views if he should choose."

Letter of Dr. J. A. Broadus, published in **Journal and Messenger** and copied in **Biblical Recorder**: "I think it highly undesirable that persons previously immersed by Pedobaptists or Campbellites should be received as they stand into the Baptist Church. I think they ought to be baptized when received, for the sake of good order, and to prevent any troublesome questions from afterwards arising. I think that the candidate, even if satisfied with his previous im-

mersion as a baptism, ought to be willing to be baptized now, to satisfy the church and give no trouble hereafter, and that, if he is not willing [the church] can do without him. But I know that a great many Baptist churches in large portions of our country do receive such persons without baptizing them. So if I were a member of a church to which such a person applied, I should earnestly urge that he ought to be baptized, but if the church should decide to receive him without baptizing him, I should not feel bound to leave the church or make trouble on account of the decision."

In replying to an attack on two of the professors, in the **Baptist and Reflector** of Oct. 20, 1904, Dr. E. Y. Mullins makes the following statement: "In general our faculty holds that the question of receiving or not receiving alien immersions is one to be decided by the local church. We believe that it is a question which can safely be left to the operation of the principle of Baptist liberty and loyalty to the Scriptures, and that it should not be made a test of fellowship or Baptist orthodoxy. The faculty of the Seminary is not and never has been a unit on the subject of alien immersion, though a majority has always favored rebaptism on grounds of uniformity and regularity."

These extracts sufficiently set forth the position of the Seminary throughout its history. To sum up the situation: No Baptist confession of faith has ever spoken on this question; the Baptist denomination, north, south, east and west, is and has always been divided on it; the New Testament in the nature of the case does not deal with the question, because the conditions out of which it grows did not then exist; the denomination has differed and lived at peace except when and where the proscribing spirit has gone; the Seminary as a corporation has no position on the question, but the influence of all but three of the eighteen professors of its entire history has been in favor of regular baptism. At the same time, every professor has always stood and does now stand, for personal freedom and the authority of the churches in the matter. We do not believe a man is a heretic because he holds and practices this or that view as to "alien immersion"; we do not believe in proscription; we try to cultivate harmony and co-operation among all the brethren.