

De-Baptism and the 'I Am A Christian' Campaign

I wrote this in April 2009. Obviously, the particular issue and campaign have long passed, but some of the questions remain relevant.

In the last few weeks, I have received a couple of emails from Christian friends, asking me to sign up to the 'I Am A Christian' campaign.

It seems that this campaign, sponsored by Premier Christian Radio, is at least partly a response to the 'De-Baptism' campaign started by the National Secular Society. Their 'debaptism certificate' states:

"I ___ having been subjected to the Rite of Christian Baptism in infancy (before reaching an age of consent), hereby publicly revoke any implications of that Rite and renounce the Church that carried it out. In the name of human reason, I reject all its Creeds and all other such superstition in particular, the perfidious belief that any baby needs to be cleansed by Baptism of alleged ORIGINAL SIN, and the evil power of supposed demons. I wish to be excluded henceforth from enhanced claims of church membership numbers based on past baptismal statistics used, for example, for the purpose of securing legislative privilege."

As a Christian believer, I can find very little here to disagree with:-

1) I should also like to disassociate myself from the so-called 'baptism' that was carried out when I was a baby. My only meaningful baptism in water was the occasion some 20 years later when I, as a believer, expressed my desire to be symbolically identified with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ by total immersion in water. Some would be offended by this 're-baptism'. I simply assert that the ceremony in my infancy was not baptism at all in any New Testament sense of the word, and that my baptism as a believer was in simple obedience to the teaching of Jesus.

2) The National Secular Society (NSS) certificate speaks of renouncing the Church that carried out the infant 'baptism'. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that I do not want to be a 'member' of any organised 'church', as I am already a member of the only Church that matters - the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I became a member by spiritual new birth when I first put my trust in him. I have not 'joined' the organisational membership of any 'church', though I have been closely involved in Church life in several locations. Organisational membership is certainly not necessary.

I have even enquired about removing my name from any form of membership that might have resulted from my infant 'baptism' and teenage 'confirmation'. The reply from the diocesan office where I enquired stated: "I am not aware of any lists of membership of the sort that you suggest – the only thing I can think of is if your name is on the Electoral Roll of a Parish – these rolls are renewed every six years and you would have had to sign an application form." So it seems that 'infant baptism' and 'confirmation' do not make anyone a member of the C of E, anyway, so I am not a 'member' there, either!

3) The idea that baptism has anything to do with 'cleansing from Original Sin' and removal from 'the evil power of supposed demons' seems to me to have no basis in Scripture, so I can not support a practice that makes these claims.

4) Some of the historic Christian creeds have been valiant attempts to encapsulate sound teaching in a compact and memorable form, and as such are not bad. But real faith is not a collection of correct beliefs but a relationship of trust based on spiritual revelation of truth. Creeds are OK, but they don't go far enough.

5) Any suggestion that my infant 'baptism' should in any way be added to statistics to be "used, for example, for the purpose of securing legislative privilege" is totally unacceptable.

The NSS objects to religious influence over society. Their stated aim is: "The National Secular Society is the leading campaigning organisation defending our society from the demands of those who seek religious privilege. We campaign for a society in which everyone is free to practise their faith, change it, or not have one at all. Our beliefs or lack of them should neither be an advantage or a disadvantage." I agree. I find it hard to see how any Christian could disagree.

Premier Christian Radio have responded by campaigning to get 100,000 people to affirm their Christian faith:-

“Everyday Christians are finding it increasingly difficult to openly express their faith. The National Secular Society has encouraged 100,000 people to sign a certificate to “debaptise” themselves as part of their campaign to allow people to revoke their baptisms. We are asking....are there 100,000 people who are prepared to publicly stand up and declare that they are Christians? Premier’s “I am a Christian” campaign is asking you to take this opportunity to publicly affirm your faith and declare that Jesus is relevant to your everyday life. Make your declaration today and join together with thousands of other Christians around the world.”

At first sight, it might seem like a reasonable Christian ‘knee-jerk’ reaction to try to muster a similar number of those who are prepared to publicly identify themselves as Christian believers, but it seems like a mistake to me.

Surely much better to agree with the NSS where we can! After all, those who want to ‘de-baptise’ themselves will mostly be those who have no faith. Much better that they are encouraged to be truthful about their position.

The NSS takes a position that seeks to remove religious influence from society. I have been convinced for a long time that we would do much better to live in a truly secular society. In my opinion, the religious trappings of our society do more to hinder the growth of true faith than to help it.

Signing up to an online affirmation of faith seems like an attempt to assert Christian influence on society, just exactly what we do NOT need! I believe it to be an empty gesture which will only serve to confuse the picture.

History seems to indicate that the gospel flourishes best when society around it is secular, even anti-Christian. If we attempt to see society ‘Christianised’, we shall see the impact of the good news of Jesus minimised.

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First published on the ‘Just One Candle’ blog, 28 April 2009

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