

"HOLY BAPTISM"

A RECONSIDERATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF
HOLY BAPTISM IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH

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To
COLLEEN
and to
ROBIN AND BRYAN
for when they are older

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CHAPTER ONE.

THE ANTECEDENTS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

(a) GENTILE BACKGROUND.

There is general agreement among scholars that because Christianity was firmly rooted in the Old Testament, and because their language is basically that of the LXX the influence of the initiation rites of the Greek mystery cults on Christian Baptism, seems to be either negligible or minimal. A casual perusal of the initiation rites within the mystery cults reveals much that appears familiar in Christian baptismal theology, symbolism and practice. The careful instruction of the initiate, the use of the rite to admit neophytes into membership of the cult, the symbolism of dying and rising again are all to be found.

"In the rites of Cybele and Attis, for example, he (the initiate) underwent a kind of baptism in the blood of a bull (taurobolium) or a ram (criobolium) which was slain above him, and as a result felt himself 'reborn for ever'. The rites of Isis persuaded him that he had traversed the portals of death itself and had returned revived, protected by the goddess upon whom he had gazed face to face."(1)

However, although the mystery cults were widespread and powerful, and although they flourished at the time when Christianity was beginning to spread throughout the Mediterranean world, and Christians possibly even used their ideas as a point of contact, the influence of the cults on Christian baptism was small, for as Flemmington points out "analogy does not mean genealogy".(2) Thus, although there is much within the initiation rites of the mystery cults that is very interesting, we cannot digress to investigate them, for our theme is not 'Initiation Rites' but 'Christian Baptism'.

(1) J.N.D. Kelly : Early Christian Doctrines. 2nd Edition. 1960. p.7.

(2) W.F. Flemmington : The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism. (S.P.C.K.) 1964. Introduction, quoting J. Moffatt The First Five Centuries (1938) p.102.

(b) HEBREW BACKGROUND.

It must be remembered that in the Christian Church from the beginning people worshipped, baptism was performed, and the Eucharist celebrated. These took place from the inception of the Church, that is, before the New Testament was written. Thus while the New Testament is normative for the formulation of Christian doctrine, it cannot be considered the "sole source and rule for worship".(1) By the time the New Testament documents were written, the origins of many traditions had been taken for granted, and were accepted by many without further examination. This conclusion is supported by recent research where it is shown that the early Church leaned heavily on its Hebrew heritage and surroundings in the development of its worship and initiation rite. The chief influences of the Old Testament and Jewish background in the doctrine and practice of Christian initiation are to be found in circumcision and Proselyte Baptism.

(i) CIRCUMCISION.

The rite of circumcision was not exclusive to the Hebrews, but it is the Hebrew rite, and the Hebrew understanding of that rite, that is fundamental to our study.

The Old Testament tradition of the establishment of the rite of circumcision as a "seal of the Covenant made by God with Abraham and his seed (Genesis 17), and ... was from the time of Isaac performed upon every Hebrew boy when he was eight days old. (Genesis 21:4)" (2)

Every writes that :

"The evidence of the Old Testament suggests that the original age of circumcision was in childhood,

(1) W.D. Maxwell : Holy Baptism and Resurrection. Studia Liturgica Vol.1. p.176.

(2) J. Heron : Christian Initiation. Studia Liturgica. Vol.1. p.33

but that the rite had been transferred to infancy at an early stage in the development of what is distinctive in Hebrew religion. Among African and American peoples the movement has been in the other direction, towards the association of circumcision with other ordeals inflicted on potential fathers and warriors at the age of adolescence. These ordeals are often associated with rites to promote fertility, rites rejected by the Hebrew prophets and by those in Israel who clung to the tradition of the wilderness-wandering. It may be for this reason that initiation into the covenant became an infancy rite."(1)

While the origins of circumcision are of great importance, it is the significance of the rite and its relation to the covenant that is of first importance for our study.

"Circumcision was sometimes given a moral significance as a symbol of the humbling of the sinful pride of men; it was sometimes thought of as a sacrifice in which a part was offered to God in token of a total indebtedness; but its primary significance was entry into the covenant with God. The fact that a Hebrew boy was circumcised when he was only one week old showed that his entrance into the covenant was not conditional upon anything he had done, but solely upon the providential ordering of his life by God, who had caused him to be born of parents belonging to His holy people.

"Circumcision was thus the seal that God had elected this boy to be one of His people. It laid an obligation upon the boy, as soon as he reached the age of legal responsibility, to acknowledge and accept the duties which go with the privilege of membership of the holy people, by becoming a Bar Mitzvah, but at the same time it showed that God's election comes before man's response, indeed before there is any possibility of man's response. The calling of God comes first; man's response follows.

"Circumcision also reflects the subordinate status of women in the Old Testament. A woman's relationship to God as a member of His covenant people was always through a man - her father, her husband, or her son, for they alone had the covenant 'cut' in their flesh." (2)

(1) G. Every : The Baptismal Sacrifice. S.C.M.1959. p.13.

(2) J. Heron : op.cit. pp.33-34.

Cullman points out that circumcision was performed on both adults and infants. He holds that it is significant that in this regard Judaism experiences no difficulty. He writes :

"Here also, however, that other distinction has to be considered, which mutatis mutandis must as analogy be given weight when Christian baptismal doctrine is applied to children: the distinction between children born of Jewish parents and those who are taken over into the Jewish community with their proselyte parents."(1)

The vitality of Judaism in New Testament times is a fact not often given sufficient weight in the consideration of Jewish initiation rites. Jesus Himself said of the Pharisees that they "traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte." (Matthew 23:15) These proselytes were brought in from the Gentiles who, according to Jewish thought, had no succession to the covenant guaranteed by natural birth. The proselytes were usually adults, and on them adult circumcision was practiced. Thus, "Jewish circumcision is by its nature not bound up with natural birth. In fact, its meaning is reception into the divine covenant, which is available to all."(2) Because Circumcision signifies reception into the divine covenant, access to the rite is offered to children, who on the basis of their Jewish parentage are destined for this community. Access is however also offered to those who come in from the outside, the proselytes. For both the proselytes and the Jewish infants, circumcision has the same meaning, the only difference being that for the Jewish infants they are chosen on the basis of their birth as being divinely destined for circumcision, while the proselytes are chosen on the basis of faith, decision and instruction.

(1) O. Cullmann : Baptism in the New Testament. A.C.M.1958. p.56.

(2) O. Cullmann : op.cit. p.60.

It is important to note that in Jewish practice "the adult circumcision of the children of circumcised fathers was precluded, though adult circumcision did exist." (1) That is, Jews who were born Jews were never circumcised as adults.

A full understanding of the significance of the Jewish circumcision rite cannot be reached until consideration has been given to the concept of the covenant. This important subject will be given fuller consideration later. For the present it is necessary to stress for the modern mind, something that was taken for granted in Jewish thought and psychology, i.e. that the Covenant implies a community. The covenant with Abraham was not merely a personal agreement, but, after the instigation of the covenant, it involved a covenant people. The terms preserved for us in Genesis 17 are : "Behold My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you." (Genesis 17:4-8). The sign and the seal of this covenant was that "every male among you shall be circumcised." (Genesis 17:10). In the same way the Siniatic covenant was not a covenant with Moses, but it is a covenant made between God and His people, who are henceforth the people of the covenant community. Thus we find in Exodus 24:8 that "Moses took the blood, and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord God has made with you in accordance with all these words." By the time of the Siniatic covenant circumcision had become part of the tradition of Israel. But the significance of the rite of circumcision in both the covenant with Abraham and that at Sinai, was that it marked the entrance of the initiate into the covenant community. This is true whether the initiate entered the

(1) O. Cullmann : op.cit. p.61.

community by virtue of his birth and was circumcised on the eighth day, or if the initiate 'came into' the community from the outside as an adult proselyte.

(ii) JEWISH WASHINGS AND PROSELYTE BAPTISM.

The "Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics" in its article entitled "Baptism (Ethnic)", gives clear evidence that water is widely used in religious rites for purification purposes. There is also a tendency in many religions to place a special emphasis on one important and significant rite. Despite the relative shortage of water in Palestine, the Jews made frequent use of water for religious purification which bore both a moral and ritual significance. Thus a man who touched a corpse must regain ritual purity by washing before he could take part in worship. So too the High Priest must take a bath before the Day of Atonement, not for expiatory purposes, but for ritual purity.

"A report, very often repeated, tells how the High Priest Simeon, the son of Kamithos, could not perform his priestly duty on the Day of Atonement because on the previous evening, as darkness fell (i.e. when it was too late to take a bath before sunset), he had been struck by the spittle of an Arab and thereby had been made unclean." (1)

We must, however, take care that we do not impose modern concepts on ancient ideas, for the distinction between ritual and moral is far clearer to us than it was for the Jews. There are passages in the Old Testament where it appears that the significance of the washings is morally interpreted.

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good; ..." Isaiah 1:16

(1) J. Jeremias : Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries
S.C.M. 1960. p.25. quoting Oepke : Theol.
Wört. Vol.1. p.533.

Other passages carrying this moral significance are Psalm 51:7; Ezekiel 36:25; Zechariah 13:1.

In later Judaism and especially in certain Jewish sects, a far greater emphasis was laid on lustrations. Josephus described how the Essenes bathed daily in cold water before partaking of their common meal.(1) These Jewish usages of water for purification were perfectly natural among the Jews. But because they were not confined to one moment of a man's life, they are not strictly antecedents of Christian Baptism. However they did open the way for the rite of 'Proselyte baptism', which was an act performed once and for all, and was associated with a radical change in the life of the baptised.

Proselyte baptism was not administered to Jews, but to Gentiles who desired to become Jews. Before examining the administration and significance of this rite, we must first recognise and deal with a very real problem connected with proselyte baptism. As Jeremias says, our problem is that "the Old Testament knows nothing of a custom of subjecting a converted heathen to the rite of baptism. Even Philo and Josephus make no mention of proselyte baptism."(2) This silence, together with a silence in other rabbinic writings, has occasionally given rise to doubts whether proselyte baptism goes back as far as the early days of the Church.

Proselyte Baptism is referred to in the Sibylline Oracles, Book IV, which is usually dated about A.D.80. Another reference is to be found in Epictatus (ca. A.D.94), and another in the story of a distinguished lady of the name of Valeria who was baptised along with her female slaves some time before the Bar-Cochba Rebellion (A.D.135). Rabbinic references to proselyte baptism arise mainly in the dispute between the school of Shammai and Hillel.

(1) Jos., B.J., 2.8.5; para 129. Quote by Flenmington
op.cit. p.3.

(2) Jeremias: op.cit. p.24.

Strack-Billerbeck has concluded that by the first century A.D. proselyte baptism had become a recognized and generally acknowledged institution. Jeremias points out that the High Priest Simcon mentioned above was High Priest in the year 17 - 18 A.D. and adds "by that time accordingly the view of the Hillelites had won the day." (1) A later controversy, about A.D. 90 was between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Jehoshua and concerned the relative importance of circumcision and proselyte baptism. The significance of this dispute for our present discussion is that by A.D. 90 it is not the fact of proselyte baptism, but only its relative merit that is under dispute. Thus by A.D. 90 proselyte baptism is an established practice.

In the New Testament the impurity of the Gentiles is pre-supposed, i.e. Gentiles require the bath of proselyte baptism. This, taken together with the other considerations above leads Jeremias to say, "what we have said shows with certainty that proselyte baptism reaches back to pre-Christian times." (2) Heron accepts this conclusion (3), and the argument of Flemmington (4) leads to the same result.

Jeremias, as a final establishment of this result refers to a passage from the Testament of Levi 14.6, in which reference to proselyte baptism is made. He argues conclusively that the recent discoveries at Qumran date this passage at about 100 B.C. All doubts about the pre-Christian date of proselyte baptism are thus removed, and Jeremias ends his discussion thus:

"Consequently the silence of Philo and Josephus must be judged accidental. In fact nearly all scholars who in the last sixty years

(1) Jeremias: op.cit. p.25. See also Lampe : The Seal of the Spirit. p.24.

(2) Jeremias: op.cit. p.26.

(3) Heron : op.cit. p.34.

(4) Flemmington: op.cit. pp.4-7.

have concerned themselves with the date of the introduction of proselyte baptism have come to the conclusion that it came into practice in pre-Christian times."(1)

We are now in a position to turn to a consideration of the manner and meaning of proselyte baptism.

The rites of initiation for male and female converts to Judaism differed only in that all males were first circumcised, and then usually had to wait seven days before the rite was completed. The completion of the initiation rite for males, and the whole rite for women and girls was the same. All had to pass through the bath of purification, proselyte baptism. A fundamental doctrine of Jewish conversion theology involving a change of religion was contained in the proposition, "the proselyte in his conversion (to Judaism) is like a newborn child."(2) Other rabbinic passages emphasise the aspects of renewal and re-creation and the receipt of new life through the change of religion. Hence it was common practice for proselytes to adopt Jewish names to signify that they had begun a completely new life.(3) Confession of sins was a pre-requisite of the admission to the Jewish faith, and the Midrash and other rabbinic writings give clear evidence for this.(4) In the Sibylline Oracles, Book IV (a work strongly influenced by Jewish concepts, and

(1) This statement is too sweeping in its implications, and Beasley-Murray : "Baptism in the New Testament", whose work is more recent than that of Jeremias, is more cautious in his conclusion, but agrees that proselyte baptism was known at the beginning of the Christian era. (p.25)

(2) Quoted by Jeremias. op.cit. p.32.

(3) Jeremias. op.cit. p.34.

(4) Jeremias. op.cit. p.33, and footnote.

usually dated about A.D.80) there is a warning to the heathen to repent in view of the coming world catastrophe, and this is followed by the injunction "bathe your whole body in continually-flowing streams; stretch your hands to heaven and ask pardon for your former deeds." There follows then a promise that God will grant repentance and refrain from destroying them (1).

Heron describes the rite of proselyte baptism as follows:

"Removing their Gentile clothing they descended naked into the water. Standing with the water up to the waist (if men) or neck (if women), they were reminded by a Rabbi of the mighty acts of God in redeeming His people from slavery in Egypt, and of the obligations He had laid upon them in the covenant at Mount Sinai. The candidate then responded by saying: 'All that the Lord hath commanded I will do, and be obedient,' and then he dipped himself under the water. The 'stipulation' made by the Rabbi, the 'adstipulation' or reply made by the convert, and his immersing himself in the water were done three times. After the third immersion the candidate came up out of the water, put on new Jewish clothes, received a new Jewish name, and was legally regarded as an Israelite one day old. His heathen name, relationships and legal identity were regarded as dead - drowned in the water from which he had emerged newborn as a member of the people of Israel." (2)

There is disagreement among scholars on the matter of whether the tebilah, or purification bath was by washing or immersion, but Abrahams, giving evidence from a number of Rabbinic sources, points out that there must be no "separation" between the body and the water. There are a number of objects which could thus render the bath useless, and among them are certain types of headgear. The conclusion drawn is thus that proselyte baptism was by total immersion. (3)

(1) Quote by Flemmington. op.cit. p.5.

(2) Heron. op.cit. p.34.

(3) Flemmington. op.cit. p.8.

Proselyte baptism was undergone by men, women and children. However, because the majority of proselytes were women, some rabbis argued that the decisive moment in the incorporation of a convert into the people of Israel was baptism rather than circumcision. For the Jews, the children of the circumcised were received in the one act of circumcision. For proselytes, both adults and children, there was added a second act, the baptism of purification. A difference between reception on the basis of personal decision appears only in this purification rite stemming from Jewish purification regulations.

Proselyte baptism was usually self-administered although with the authority of and in the presence of administrant rabbis.(1) To this general rule there were two important exceptions, slaves and little children. Slaves were held by their master while in the water and so were baptized by him. The reason for this was that the Rabbis said that so complete was the death and renewal in baptism, that slaves who baptized themselves would bring to an end their slavery as part of their old condition, and they would emerge from the water as freeborn Israelites. In a footnote Heron points out that Paul frequently uses the phrase $\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma\ \Upsilon\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$ and suggests that it may reflect the indelible impression made on him when he found himself receiving from Ananias at Damascus the baptism of a slave.(2)

The other exception to self-administered baptism was the baptism of little children who were held by their parents and were thus baptized by them. Jeremias points to very similar regulations governing what would seem to be very different situations, i.e. the circumcision of male slaves, adult and infant, and the baptism of proselytes, adult and infant. In both the regulations are that adults

(1) R.E.O. White : The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation. p.62.

(2) Heron. op.cit. p.35.

and children already born, are to undergo the initiation rite immediately, i.e. on the first day. Thus adult male slaves are to be circumcised on the day of their purchase; and the male children of parents, father or mother, who are purchased with their parents, are also to be circumcised on the same day. Similarly proselytes who undergo the bath of purification must do so along with their children. It seems certain therefore that children of all ages, including infants, were baptised as proselytes. Children born after the initiation of their parents are to have the regulations applied as for Jewish children.

(c) JOHN THE BAPTIST.

John the Baptist, being as he was the forerunner who prepared the way for the Messiah, provides for us a link between the O.T. and Jewish practices, and the New Testament. John appears to belong to both the priestly and prophetic traditions of Israel. He was of a priestly family, and his water baptism is linked with the priestly purification. But in his dress and manner he followed the example of Elijah, and like the prophets he calls for repentance and reminds the Jews that Israelite nationality is not enough, for God is able to create for Himself a covenant people of His own. It was thus to Jews that John preached, and it was Jews that he baptised.

The preaching of John carried a strong eschatological note in the sense that he proclaimed that the Messianic Age was at hand. Associated with the advent of the Messianic Age was the need for repentance by the Jews, and the baptism he administered was a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." The arrival of the age to come had brought judgement near, and all men would be judged. The baptism was not to escape repentance or judgement, but was into repentance and judgement.

The distinctive elements of John's baptism are:

1. It was administered only once, and was thus different from the ceremonial purifications of the Jews and more akin to proselyte baptism. The ceremonial aspect of cleansing had receded into the background as John brings the prophetic moral appeal into the foreground.
2. Repentance was required, and the baptism was thus an initiatory rite to a new community within Judaism.
3. In contrast with proselyte baptism, John baptized Jews as well as Gentiles, and no longer was the baptism self-administered but John baptized them himself as one specially sent by God for that purpose.

In his preaching, however, John drew a contrast between his own baptism with water, and the baptism in Spirit and with fire of the "Mightier One" to come. Thus John saw his own work and baptism not as an end in itself, but as a preparation for a greater consummation that was expected shortly.

Dr. Wheeler Robinson claims that in the symbolism of the Old Testament, where a prophet performs a symbolic act, the "prophetic act is itself part of the will of Yahweh, to whose complete fulfilment it points; it brings that will nearer to its completion, not only as declaring it, but in some small degree as effecting it. It corresponds with the prophetic perfect of Hebrew syntax, by regarding the will of God as already fulfilled." (1) Flemmington uses this conclusion to claim for John's baptism in which the tebilah - the rite expressive of purification for Gentiles - was so adopted that it became a rite for Jews also. This rite is then endowed with prophetic symbolism, and Flemmington concludes:

(1) Cf. "The Old Testament Essays", ed D.C. Simpson (Charles Griffin, 1927.) pp.1-17. Quoted by Flemmington, op.cit. p.20.

"John's baptizing with water went farther than any symbolic action of an Old Testament prophet, in that what for the prophet was an isolated act, done by him alone, becomes for John a corporate act in which he called others to share..... Further as a Hebrew prophet saw his act not only as expressive, but as also in some way effective, of the divine purpose, so John summoned men to submit to baptism, convinced that thereby they became equipped, as it were, and made bold to face the Day of the Lord. The rite of baptism was realistically understood, so much so that those who had submitted to it could know that their repentance was accepted, their sins would be forgiven, their membership of the Messianic community was secure."(1)

John's baptism may thus be said to be an initiation rite into a new community whose great expectation was the coming of the Messiah, however imperfectly this may have been understood by initiates.

(d) JESUS AND BAPTISM.

In the Gospel narratives there is a close link between Jesus and John the Baptist. John saw himself as the precursor of the Messiah, though it is not clear to what extent he saw in Jesus the Coming One. It is also noticeable that Jesus stressed many of the ideas which were prominent in the preaching of John, ideas in which they seemed to share common pre-suppositions which were very different from those of contemporary Judaism. Both proclaimed the Kingdom of God as being other than a political realm; both placed little stress on the law, tradition and temple-worship; both claimed that physical descent from Abraham is no guarantee of divine favour; and both asserted that no man can lay claim to reward from God on his own merit, but all stems from God's free grace towards men.

(1) Flemmington. op.cit. p.22.

But the most indisputable link between Jesus and John, a link far more positive than the Lucan claim of physical relationship, is the fact that Jesus Himself accepted baptism at the hands of John. This baptism of Jesus by John is attested by each of the Synoptists. The Fourth Gospel, while not speaking of the baptism of Jesus, paints a picture of a strong link between Jesus and John. The story of the baptism of Jesus by John is not one likely to have been invented by the early Church, especially because it presented difficulties in the minds of some of the early Christians. The difficulty arose out of the fact that John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4, Lk 3:3), but the claim of Christians has always been that Jesus was the Lamb without blemish, the Man without sin. How then could He submit to such a baptism?

The Synoptists appear unaware of any such problem, but record that Jesus was baptized and that the result of this baptism was that He saw "the heavens opened (*σχιζομένων*) and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'" (Mk 1:10-11). According to Mark this experience was one of significance to Jesus only, as he tells us of no others who were aware of it, but Matthew saw this as something recognized by John and perhaps others, while Luke stresses the objective character of what happened by adding that the Spirit descended "in bodily form." (Lk 3:22). Because of these slight variations the details of the incident may be uncertain, but it is clear that it was an event of major importance in the life of Jesus. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus after His baptism has opened the door to an Adoptionist Christology, based largely on the D text where the form of the expression of the voice from heaven is, "Thou art my Son: today I have begotten Thee." This Christological conclusion is to be resisted. However, it is difficult to lay too much stress on the fact that for Jesus Himself, His mission was ushered

in by His baptism. In the moment of His baptism Jesus became overwhelmingly conscious of the Spirit of God coming upon Him, and thus He became convinced more than ever of His unique Messianic Sonship (1). His anointing by the Holy Spirit was for Him a new experience, and the result of this experience was that Jesus left His home in Nazareth and embarked on His work as Saviour of the world.

It is in the context of Jesus' work as Saviour that the problem of His acceptance of John's baptism can be resolved. In the preaching of John there was a revival of prophetic religion, from which Jesus could not exclude Himself as He could not separate Himself from those He came to save. In the baptism of John the way for the New Community of the Messiah was being prepared, and Jesus could not separate Himself from the community which was preparing itself to receive Him. Thus in His acceptance of John's baptism, we need not imply any consciousness of sin in Jesus, but rather that here Jesus is identifying Himself with sinful men in their need that He might deliver them, and identifying Himself with the new Messianic community, and committing Himself to his mission as redeeming Messiah.

There are two features in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan which mark His baptism as unique among those administered by John. His is the only baptism in which a baptism with water is associated in a most intimate way with an experience of "Holy Spirit", and with a unique sense of divine Sonship. Thus, what might have appeared to the casual observer as just another instance of John's baptism, is one where John's baptism is completely transcended in these two respects in the thought of Jesus. It can hardly be accidental that these two highly significant elements in the baptism of Jesus - possession by the Spirit, and the status of being sons of God - are closely associated with Christian baptism in Acts and the Epistles.

(1) Flemmington. op.cit. p.29.

Apart from this reference to the baptism of Jesus by John there is little or nothing about baptism in the rest of the Synoptic record. However, from the earliest days of the Church, baptism was the acknowledged rite of entry into the new community. This practice would be most satisfactorily explained if it could be shown that such a use of baptism depended on the authority of Jesus. It was long accepted that the famous passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel (Matt: 28:19-20) constituted such an authority, with supporting evidence given by Mark in Mark 16:16. However the Markan passage is now known to belong to the spurious ending, and textual evidence has cast serious doubts on the authenticity of the Matthean passage. Despite the doubtful authenticity of these passages it must be remarked that both are early, some scholars put them as early as A.D.85, and that both attest the authority of Jesus being the practice of baptism. Thus it must have been firmly believed by the early Church that Jesus approved of the rite. The Synoptists give us no further evidence, but in the Fourth Gospel there is a reference to the fact that "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples.)" (See Jn. 3:22-23; 4:1-3.) The assertion here is that Jesus and His disciples exercised a ministry concurrently with that of John, and that they administered water baptism, although it is asserted as a correction that Jesus Himself did not baptize, only His disciples. Because of the Synoptic silence in the matter of baptisms by Jesus' disciples, the reliability of this piece of Johannine tradition has been questioned. However, if it is recognized that this refers to an early Judean ministry of Jesus to which the Synoptists bear no witness, this tradition may well be accepted as being reliable. Further, when it is remembered that in His preaching Jesus carried on some of the themes of John, and in particular that he associated the Kingdom of God with repentance, and that He had Himself accepted baptism, it would be surprising had

His disciples not practiced baptism. It is also likely that many of Jesus' disciples had been disciples of John, which would increase the probability that the report of the baptisms administered by them is a reliable one.

There is one other important reference to baptism which must be considered under the present heading of "Jesus and Baptism". In Luke there occurs the saying of Jesus :

"I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how
I am constrained until it is accomplished."
(Lk. 12:50)

With this may be taken the words of Jesus to James and John recorded in Mark 10:38-39 :

"Are you able to drink the cup that I drink,
or to be baptized with the baptism with which
I am baptized?"

These passages are commonly given a metaphorical reference, but a closer examination of them may well prove rewarding for an understanding of the way in which Jesus regarded baptism. The authenticity of these sayings is not seriously questioned by most scholars. The Old Testament has many references in which "plunged into the waters" is a metaphor for suffering and sorrow. (e.g. Ps. 42:7; Ps. 69:2; Ps. 69:15; Ps. 124:4-5; Isa. 43:2. In none of these does the Septuagint contain βαπτίζω or its cognates.) Despite this, since the days of John the Baptist βάπτισμα had been given a special meaning for religious minds. It had come to mean a "spiritual purification a renewal of the whole nature preparatory to the entrance into the Kingdom of God." (1) If this is correct, it is possible that Jesus was looking upon His death as that which would inaugurate His fuller activity, unfettered by the

(1) E.F. Scott: The Kingdom and the Messiah (1911)
p.228-230. Quoted by Flemmington,
op.cit. p.32.

restrictions of the earthly ministry (1). Thus it was Jesus Himself who first forged the link between "baptism" and "death", which link plays such an important part in New Testament thought.

It is this link between "baptism" and "death" that makes us return now to Jesus' baptism by John. In His saving work which was inaugurated by His baptism, Jesus sees Himself as having "a baptism with which He must be baptized." At His baptism in the Jordan He was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His saving work, which He triumphantly accomplished in His death, resurrection and ascension, the benefits of which work became available to man in the mighty act of Pentecost. It is this link and the part played by it in the thought and work of Jesus that makes His baptism in the Jordan of vital importance for an adequate understanding of the meaning and significance of Christian Baptism in the process of man's salvation.

In all the antecedents to Christian baptism up to and including the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan, it is difficult to trace a direct link from them to Christian Baptism. They certainly provide a background which cannot be ignored, but nor must their importance be overestimated. It is particularly tempting to conclude that a strong link exists between the baptism of Jesus by John and Christian baptism, as does White (2) when he says "though we cannot share completely in this approach and experience, it remains true that our baptismal experience is modelled upon, and derives from that of Jesus." Beasley-Murray, another Baptist scholar, points out however that "No writer of the New Testament brings the baptism of Jesus into relation with Christian baptism."(3), and stresses that the work of

(1) Flemmington. op.cit. p.32.

(2) R.E.O. White. op.cit. p.109.

(3) G.R. Beasley-Murray. op.cit. p.64. His italics.

redemption is not accomplished in the baptism of Jesus, but that this baptism marked the inauguration of His Messianic ministry. Beasley-Murray thus concludes:

"The Apostolic theologians had enough historical sense to realise that the significance of Christian baptism is determined by the whole course of our Lord's messianic action, with emphasis on the death and resurrection in the past and the parousia in the future. From every point of view, accordingly, it seems fitting to view the foundation of Christian baptism as the total redemptive action which the baptism of Jesus set in motion."(1)

This does not mean that His baptism as Messiah, the representative of God and man, is unrelated to our baptism. We must neither neglect nor exaggerate its significance for Christian baptism.

It is however, in Jewish proselyte baptism that we find the closest links in language, concepts and administration with Christian baptism. Jeremias demonstrates conclusively the interdependence of the one on the other (2) and it is in the highest degree unlikely that the Jewish practice was dependant on Christian baptism, and therefore the dependance of Christian baptism on proselyte baptism is almost certain. In the light of this argument, Jeremias concludes further that Christian baptism corresponded to proselyte baptism in its treatment of infants, and that Christian children of every age, including infants were baptized.(3)

(1) *ibid.*

(2) J. Jeremias. *op.cit.* p.24 ft.

(3) *ibid.* p.39.

CHAPTER 2

BAPTISMAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

1. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Luke recounts for us in Acts that following the preaching of the apostles and the response in faith of the hearers, converts were baptised. (Acts 2:41, 8:38, 10:48) In most of these situations we are confronted with few problems, but when we come to the incident of the Philippian goaler (Acts 16:31-33) we are told that following his faith he and his household were baptised. In Corinth there is a similar event when the household of Crispus was baptized along with him following his conversion (Acts 18:8). There are other occasions in Acts where we are told of the baptism of the household when the householder has come to faith. Thus Cornelius (Acts 10:27) has "many people" with him, and all are baptised. Lydia too was baptized "with her household" when "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14-15). It is necessary for us to examine these passages (together with other similar passages) to discover the meaning of the 'household' and exactly who this included for early Christian baptismal practice.

Jeremias sees great significance in what Stauffer has called the 'ὄικος -formula' (1). Stauffer pointed out that in the Old Testament there are many occasions where the phrase 'he and his (whole) house' is used, and having examined these he concluded that there is a biblical 'ὄικος -formula' which "not only referred to the children in addition to the adults but had quite special reference to the children, and not least to any small children who might be present" (2). A study of the concept of family

(1) Jeremias. op.cit. p.19 ff.

(2) *ibid* p.20 citing E. Stauffer: 'Zur Kinderstaufe in der Urkirche' in Deutsches Pfarrerblatt 49, 1949, p.152 n.2. his italics.

solidarity in the Old Testament where the concept of the covenant was of fundamental importance (1), would lend weight to these arguments, so that we might accept Stauffer's conclusions for the Old Testament. However we cannot, without closer examination apply these conclusions to the baptism of households in the New Testament, especially because the early Church was aware of the radical new developments in the concept of the covenant that had taken place in Jesus Christ.

We turn now to the household baptisms in the New Testament without any attempt to place them in chronological order.

(i) In the story of Cornelius, we are informed that he was 'a devout man who feared God with all his household' (οὐκ παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 10:2). In the recounting of the incident to the apostles in Jerusalem Peter reported that Cornelius had received a message to send for Peter who would "declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκός σου) (Acts 11:14). Although we are not informed that the household all believed, we are told that "they" believed and were baptised. The repetition of the 'household' both before and after the conversion of Cornelius compels us to believe that 'they' were indeed those of his household, which, in accordance with accepted beliefs, was treated as a unit. However, it is important for us to note that the household of Cornelius thus described is not a gathering of his own family and slaves only, but included 'his kinsmen and close friends' (Acts 10:24). From these descriptions, together with their subsequent faith, speaking in tongues and baptism, we must conclude that the household of Cornelius consisted principally of adults, and that any infants or children present were included in the saving events.

(1) See later discussion on the Covenant.

(ii) When Lydia was converted she was baptised "with her household" (καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς) (Acts 16:15). We are given no details of Lydia other than her occupation. Significantly we are told that the household was hers, and therefore it is not likely that she was married at that time. She may have been a widow, but we are not told this, and therefore cannot assume that her family included infants. This conclusion would be supported by the implication that, were she a widow, she has been one for a sufficiently long period to establish her own business and household. Her household would therefore be her slaves, and although there may have been either young slaves or the children of the slaves present, it would seem clear that the baptism of her household referred mainly to adults. Jeremias points out the possibility that Lydia might have been a young widow with small children, or an older woman with grandchildren (1). The very extremes of the possibilities offered indicate the inconclusiveness of any argument for the presence of children in the household of Lydia at her baptism.

(iii) When the earthquake caused panic in Philippi and the jailer was converted by the preaching of Paul and Silas, we are told by Luke that Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου) (Acts 16:31). It is noteworthy that the jailer alone is told to believe (πίστευον - singular), but that as a result of his faith not only he would be saved, but his household as well. Paul and Silas then spoke "to him and to all that were in his house" (αὐτῷ ... σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 16:32). Thereafter the jailer washed the wounds of the missionaries and "was baptized at once, with all his family" (ἐβαπτίσθη [sing.] αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ ἅπαντες) (Acts 16:33). The incident concludes with the remarkable

(1) Jeremias: Origins of Infant Baptism. p.15.

statement that "he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God" (both ἡγάλλασατο and ἠεπιστευκὺς are sing).

Are we to interpret this story by saying that although all were baptised along with him, it was only the jailer who believed and rejoiced? This would make the salvation and baptism of the household dependant on the faith of the householder alone, as would appear to be so in the story of Lydia. This interpretation is supported by Cullmann who considers the solidarity of the family in the faith of the head of the family as of first importance.(1)

On the other hand, it is known that Paul and Silas spoke to the jailer and all his household, and therefore "all the household" (πανοικεῖ) could be included in both the rejoicing and believing recorded in verse 34.

Whatever our interpretation of this passage, it does not clarify for us who were included in the household. The jailer probably had wife, children and slaves, but to conclude with Stauffer that infants are especially referred to goes beyond the evidence, although there is no reason to believe that any children of the household were excluded.

(iv) When Crispus came to faith it is recorded that he "believed in the Lord, together with all his household." (σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 18:8). The reference to baptism in this verse is ambiguous for those who are baptised are "many of the Corinthians" and not necessarily the household of Crispus. When Paul refers to the incident in 1 Cor 1:14 he does not refer to the baptism of the household of Crispus, but only the baptism of Crispus himself. In his letter Paul is grateful that he baptised only a few, and therefore could hardly have omitted the household had they indeed been baptised along with Crispus.

(1) Cullmann. op.cit. p.53.

What is probable is that the household were included automatically in the faith and baptism of Crispus, and were thus received with him into the Church.

(v) In 1 Cor 1:16 Paul admits that he baptised "the household of Stephanas" (τὸν Στεφάνου οἶκον). Although this tells us nothing of this household, the instruction in 1 Cor 16:15-16 where the Corinthian Church is instructed to be subject to the household of Stephanas, and "such men", where the implication is that the household of Stephanas consists of adults, provided of course that it is the same 'household of Stephanas' to which reference is made.

What can we conclude from this examination? While the possibility of the presence of infants in any of the incidents is not excluded, there can be no doubt that the references are to the faith-responses of the adults involved, and particularly the faith-responses of the householder. The conclusion of Stauffer that infants are specifically included is not supported by a close examination of the New Testament evidence. What does appear to be clear is that all those who were under the authority of the householder through membership of his family or the larger household of slaves and possibly friends also, were included in what happened to him. They were regarded as sharers in his faith, his baptism, and his reception into the Church, whether they believed and were baptised along with him (as possibly with the Philippian jailer), or not (as apparently with Crispus). (1)

(1) In his discussion of the 'οἶκος -formula' Aland follows much of the same line of reasoning, but in greater detail, and concludes that "the elevation of this 'οἶκος -formula' to a theological status seems to me to be utterly unsatisfactory." See Aland: Did the Early Church Baptise Infants? pp.87-94. In his reply to Aland Jeremias agrees that the 'οἶκος -formula' may be overstated, but affirms that the 'οἶκος -formula' must include the whole family. (Jeremias: The origins of Infant Baptism pp.12-32 especially pp.20 and 25.)

It is therefore very difficult to reach any conclusion from the New Testament evidence of how the offspring of believers should be baptised. Apart from the missionary situation where adults came to faith and were baptized, and with them their households including the possibility of both infant and mature children, we are told nothing about what happened to later children. The New Testament is silent on the baptism of infant or adult children of believers who are already in the believing community. There is no record of the baptism of a second generation believer in the New Testament. If we are to rely on 1 Cor 7:14 it would appear that the children of believers, even if one parent is not a believer, are born in holiness. Does this mean that such children require no baptism either as infants or adults? Lack of New Testament evidence on baptismal practice makes it difficult if not impossible to decide the outcome of this issue.

However, lest it be thought that household baptisms are the only baptisms recorded in Acts, we must refer to other references therein to baptism, of which Flemmington says that despite the relative lateness of Acts "it does record with a considerable degree of faithfulness many of the beliefs and practices of pre-Pauline Christianity." (1) In our treatment of the Acts, as indeed of the rest of the New Testament, we shall have of necessity to be brief, but refer to the excellent treatment of these references by Flemmington (2) and Beasley-Murray (3). The Acts reflects a stage of development where baptismal theology had not advanced much beyond its primitive beginnings, but where baptisms were still carried out. In this early missionary situation of the Church baptism with water was the method

(1) W.F. Flemmington. *op.cit.* p.37.

(2) *ibid.* p.37 ff.

(3) G.R. Beasley-Murray. *op.cit.* p.93 ff.

of entry into the Church, but its precise theological significance is difficult to determine. At times baptism is simply mentioned (Acts 8:13, 36, 38; 16:15, 33; 18:8) as being administered to those who believed. Sometimes we are told that this baptism was "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or "into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16; 19:5), where, according to the Old Testament usage of such language, the words "into the name" implied that the baptised belonged to Jesus Christ and owed Him absolute allegiance. Baptism is associated with belief (Acts 18:8 and others), repentance (Acts 2:38), and the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Baptism is also related to the gift of the Holy Spirit, though the experiences of different groups varied. For some the gift of the Holy Spirit preceded baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:44-48), but for others baptism and the laying on of hands preceded the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:16-17; 9:5-6).(1)

Throughout Acts the really significant thing about baptism appears to be that it was regarded as a practical response to the apostolic preaching, and an embodiment of the gospel contained in that preaching. It conveyed to the baptised the idea of forgiveness of sins, acceptance into the community of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The believer's faith in response to the proclamation of the Gospel made his baptism possible, and, according to Flemmington, his "baptism" symbolised the Gospel of the Resurrection. The rite was there already given, a sacrament of "realized eschatology" that outwardly embodied the meaning and essence of the Gospel"(2). We might take issue with Flemmington on this point as this represents a more developed view than is found in Acts, and represents a Pauline rather than a pre-Pauline theology, for it is Paul who speaks of the incorporation of the believer into Christ by which he passed from this age into the age to come, thus realizing the future in the present (see Romans 6).

(1) For fuller discussion see chapter on "Baptism and the Spirit".

(2) W.F. Flemmington. op.cit. p.50.

Flemmington points out that some critics argue that certain facts give evidence that baptism was not an original practice of the Church (1). It is thus held that the injunction to his hearers by Peter in Acts 2:38 that they should be baptised, is the work of an editor. Further there is no evidence that the Apostles, the brethren of the Lord, the women, or the 120 present on the day of Pentecost were baptised. Nor is it claimed that Apollos, who knew only John's baptism, had to submit to Christian baptism. Against this we may say that the Apostles stood in a special relation to Jesus, and that they and the others who had seen and accompanied Him during His earthly mission, had less need for baptism into His name, as they felt they already belonged to Him. However, as Flemmington says, "Christian baptism may be viewed as the counterpart for the ordinary disciple of that "meeting" with the risen Christ which constituted the distinctive mark of the "apostle" and that to which he was "sent" to bear witness. Thus we may say that for the average convert baptism "symbolized" the Gospel of the Resurrection"(2).

Lack of precision and clarity on baptismal practices in Acts has led to much debate among scholars, but it seems that we must always remember very clearly that those were the days of the infancy of the Church, and that when men and women have passed through experiences in which the deepest yearnings and longings of the human heart are stirred and met in Jesus Christ, it is too much to expect the immediate appearance of a clear theological definition or a precise ecclesiastical practice. We may candidly admit inconsistencies and opposing tendencies, but in them all we must try to see those factors which were most powerful in influencing the development of the Church, and

(1) *ibid* p.45 ff.

(2) *ibid.* p.46.

there is no doubt that water baptism was one of those powerful influences which soon became accepted practice throughout the Church. It was however Paul who was the first one who developed a theology of baptism, and whose thinking must powerfully influence our own.

We must now turn to the thinking of Paul and the rest of the New Testament to discover what we can of early baptismal teaching. Thereafter we shall have to consider the evidences brought to light in recent research of what the early church baptismal practices were. However, although it may seem prejudicial to the development of our thought, it seems fitting to state, in agreement with Aland, that "the question of infant baptism is a problem of theology" in which historical considerations are useful but not conclusive for the establishing of doctrinal standards and ecclesiastical practices. Thus the meaning and the means of baptism are "ultimately a doctrinal decision"(1)

2. THE PAULINE EPISTLES

St. Paul never wrote what may be called a systematic theology, and, as most of what he did write arose out of practical problems encountered in the Church, we must avoid thinking that the amount of words he wrote on any particular subject bears a direct relation to its importance in his theology. For Paul baptism was a highly significant event in the experience of the Christian, and must be remembered as such. In Paul's writings the phrase "in Christ" ($\epsilon\chi\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$) stands out as one of special significance to him, for as Barclay says 'the phrase is not so much the essence of Paul's theology, as it is the summary of his whole religion.'(2) Paul claims that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:12), and that the

(1) K. Aland: Did the Early Church Baptize Infants? p.14.

(2) W. Barclay: The Mind of St. Paul. Collins 1958. p.121.

baptised have "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27) having died and risen with Christ (Rom 6:1-4). Hence, for Paul, who had himself received the baptism of a slave (1), it is in the moment of baptism that this incorporation into Christ takes place, and thereafter the baptised is "in Christ". Baptism is thus the moment when that which is significantly Christian really begins. It is a key moment and one of the Christian's cardinal important experiences.

Despite the lack of a systematic treatment of baptism by Paul, what he does say gives profound insight into his thought on the matter. We turn now to examine these references, following largely the line of thought of Flemmington.

In 1 Corinthians Paul is dealing with abuses that had arisen in the Church in Corinth, and among these abuses one that especially grieves him is that baptism, the very thing that should have united the Church, was an occasion for division and party strife (1 Cor 1:13-17). He therefore rejoices that he baptised only a few of his converts there, "for Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the Gospel." (1 Cor 1:17) However, Paul in 1 Cor 10:1-5 also warns the Church by pointing to the experience of Israel under Moses at the Red Sea. Although all Israel had shared a common experience and been "baptised into Moses", they in fact displeased God and perished in the desert. The Church is thus warned against a superstitious understanding of baptism as a guarantee that all will be well. It is only the working of the Holy Spirit that makes the external rite internally significant.

1 Cor 15:29 is a difficult reference to what was apparently a vicarious baptism for the dead. However Paul is here trying to find support for his argument on the

(1) See our discussion on this under heading "Proselyte Baptism". p. 11 & 12.

resurrection of the dead rather than indicating a significance of baptism.

However, in his letters Paul makes some very important positive statements about baptism and its consequences.

In 1 Cor 6:9-11 Paul draws a sharp contrast between the old life and the new, and it is the fact that they were washed (ἀπελούσασθε), that is, baptised, with the consequences of sanctification and justification that makes the difference.

In answer to the divisions of the Corinthian Church Paul states emphatically that Christians are all baptised into one body, and therefore baptism is the focal point of Christian unity (1 Cor 12:12-13). It is the Christian's membership of Christ's body in virtue of his baptism that ends all racial and social distinctions. Paul continues this thought in Gal 3:26-29 where he says that those who are baptised "into Christ have put on Christ", and have become heirs of the promises with Him. The baptised Christian is thus no longer limited to this age which is passing away, but his inheritance in the age to come is both secured and made real. Baptism is thus an experience of "realized eschatology" where the hope of the future is partly realized in present experience, but where the consummation of that hope is reserved for future fulfilment. In these two last-mentioned Corinthian passages Paul says quite clearly that Christian baptism is a baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11), for "by one Spirit we were all baptized" (1 Cor 12:13). Thus Christian baptism into Christ is also baptism by the Holy Spirit, and is thus a Spirit-baptism as well as a water baptism.

In his most systematic and carefully reasoned statement of the Christian Faith, the Letter to the Romans, Paul refers once more to the belief that baptism contains the essence of Christianity. In Rom 6:1-4 baptism is no

longer the putting on of a garment which is Christ, but it is a very dying and rising again with Christ in the immersion in and emergence from the waters of baptism. The Christian has died to sin (where the aorist ἀπεθόνημεν indicates the re-enactment for the believer of that which was achieved once for all in Jesus Christ), and therefore cannot continue living in sin. The physical actions of immersion in baptism symbolising death, burial and resurrection are deeply significant for the Christian, for through baptism the Christian gains freedom - not antinomian freedom to sin, but sanctifying freedom from sin. This death, to sin through baptism is also suggested by Gal 5:24.

The passage in Col 2:9-13 stresses again the new life of the Christian which comes to him through baptism. Colossians declares the majestic all sufficiency of Christ in whom the fullness (πλήρωμα) of God dwelt bodily (σωματικῶς). Thus to receive the circumcision of Christ, to be buried with Him in baptism and to be raised with Him is to do everything needful for salvation. The Complete victory of the Cross over sin makes possible the Christians' death to sin in baptism, which is an essential part of the meaning of baptism. Flemmington (1), Cullmann (2) and Hodges (3) are agreed that this bringing together here of circumcision and baptism implies that baptism is to the Christian what circumcision was to the Jew. This is an important consideration for paedo -baptists, and naturally Baptist scholars see that the rites of baptism and circumcision are to be interpreted here as contrasted rather than compared, and the issue of the controversy on this point is by no means certain.(4)

(1) W.F. Flemmington. op.cit. p.61 ff.

(2) O. Cullmann. op.cit. p.56 ff.

(3) W. Hodges: Baptism Tested by Scripture and History.
 Baton 1874. p.142.

(4) See fuller discussion p. 66.

3. THE REST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is not possible to make a detailed analysis of each reference and possible reference to baptism in the New Testament. What we shall do is indicate the major references and attempt a brief analysis of these passages.

In the Synoptic Gospels there is a pericope of the blessing of children by Jesus (Mark 10:13-16 parallels Matt 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17). Jeremias (1) examines these passages in detail and concludes that they contain indirect references to baptism which were used by the Church as authority for the practice of infant baptism. Aland disputes the validity of Jeremias' reasoning on this issue (2) and argues persuasively that *κωλύειν* cannot be regarded as a baptismal term in this context, although it is used in the baptismal liturgies. Viewed in its context it seems the most natural thing for Jesus to have said to the disciples for He was prepared to receive the children who were being brought to Him and the disciples were hindering them. The pericope is thus a doubtful authority for infant baptism, but does indicate the willingness of Jesus to receive children and bless them.

In the Fourth Gospel the interview between Jesus and Nicodemus refers to the necessity for rebirth (*γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν* Jn. 3:3), and this rebirth is explained by Jesus as a birth "of water and the Spirit" (*ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος* Jn. 3:5). Many commentators link the reference to water with Christian baptism, but this suffers from the disadvantage of having to read back into the teaching of Jesus the more developed teaching of the Church at the end of the first century when the Fourth Gospel was written. Odebury (3) however points out that in Jewish

(1) J. Jeremias: *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* pp. 48-55.

(2) K. Aland. *op.cit.* pp.95-99.

(3) H. Odebury: *The Fourth Gospel* 1929 pp.48-71 quoted by Flemmington. *op.cit.* p.86.

thought the water may refer to the generative principle of life, but while the value of this is that it makes clear that water refers to ordinary birth, there would appear to be no adequate reason why we should exclude any reference to Christian baptism in this passage. John is stating that water-baptism is linked with Spirit-baptism, as we have already seen in the teaching of Paul. Baptism by water is baptism into the death of Christ, that through incorporation into Him, His life and His Spirit are given to the baptised.

Another Johannine reference to baptism is to be found in 1 John 5:5-8. Part of the purpose of the letter was to controvert erroneous beliefs in the community to which he was writing. He affirms that Jesus was the Son of God, and then speaks of the witness to this of the Spirit, the water and the blood. In answer to the Docetists who denied the reality of Christ's death, John indicates that by the Spirit Christian baptism with water is inseparably linked with the blood-baptism of Christ on the Cross. However, it is necessary to introduce here a reference to an essay by F.C.N. Hicks (1) who pointed out that blood is not a reference merely to death, but speaks of the sacrificial giving of life in which death is an incidental. Life is the main focal point, for "the blood is the life" (Lev 17:14). Thus Christian baptism is the incorporation by the Spirit into the redeeming work of Christ in His whole incarnation-event, birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains two references to baptism. In the first, Heb 6:1-2, the point of the reference seems to be simply to assert that teaching on baptism formed an important part of the catechetical instruction of the early Church. The second reference in Hebrews

(1) F.C.N. Hicks: "The Eucharistic Sacrifice". See also his book "The Fullness of Sacrifice" S.P.C.K. 1959.

(Heb 10:19-22) forms part of the discussion on the High Priestly work of Jesus, and Christian baptism is seen primarily as a purification. Because this purification is linked with the saving work of Christ it is linked with His death, and is far more than an external cleansing.

The First Epistle of Peter also refers to baptism (1 Pet 3:18-21) and interprets baptism as a moral renewal which is accomplished not by human striving, but by the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. E.G. Selwyn (1) refers to arguments which regard the whole of 1 Peter as a catechetical discourse for candidates for baptism. These arguments are worthy of serious consideration, but for our purposes it is sufficient to say that whether we accept that 1 Peter is as a whole or only in part for the instruction of candidates for baptism, it can hardly be disputed that careful instruction before the baptism of converts became an important part of ecclesiastical practice very early in the history of the Christian Church.

The final passage in the New Testament to which we shall refer is Titus 3:4-7. The writer is speaking of the transformation wrought in human life following the saving initiative of God, who is both kind and merciful. This God of love has acted in Christ, and so His gifts are not won for us by our works, but we are saved "by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." (διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου) Here the washing of baptism is effective in regeneration and in the renewal in the Holy Spirit, thus water-baptism is an effective rite in the divine work of salvation, and is also baptism in the Holy Spirit, and depends for its efficacy on the love and action of God.(2)

(1) E.G. Selwyn: The First Epistle of St. Peter.
MacMillan 1961. p.18 ff.

(2) For fuller discussion on the difference in linguistic usage in this passage and Paul see Flemmington op.cit. pp.101-105.

To conclude this section of our discussion we can assert with reasonable confidence that baptism in the New Testament is associated with the response of the believer, sometimes the believer and his household, to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and God's offer of redemption in Him. Through baptism the believer is incorporated into Christ in the fulness of His incarnation event, and water-baptism is closely associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism with water was a rite which became part of ecclesiastical practice from the days of the apostles, and was the normal rite of admission into the Church. However the New Testament tells us nothing of the baptism of children of believers, whether infant or adult, subsequent to the baptism of the parents. Thus, unless the children were included with the baptism of the household, we have no New Testament evidence indicating when or whether they were baptised. We have no record in the New Testament of the baptism of second generation Christians, and much of the modern debate on baptism arises from a theological attempt to solve the problem of what to do with the children of Christian parents.

4. BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH FROM THE SUB-APOSTOLIC AGE TO AUGUSTINE.

The evidence for baptism in the writings of the early fathers and in certain inscriptions are examined in great detail by Jeremias and Aland (1), and the details of early writings are provided by Whitaker (2). It is quite clear from all these researches and debates that although

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- (1) J. Jeremias: Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries.
 K. Aland : Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?
 (A detailed criticism of Jeremias).
 J. Jeremias: The Origins of Infant Baptism (A reply
 to Aland).

- (2) E.C. Whitaker: Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy.

statements about baptism are made from the earliest times and are to be found in the Didache, the "Apology" of Aristides of Athens, the 'Apology' of Justin Martyr, and other writings, the first clear and unambiguous references to infant baptism are to be found in the writings of Tertullian (ca 200/6). After this time the references to infant baptism became frequent, and can be found in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome, Origen, Cyprian, to name but three of the earliest writers on infant baptism.

Before we discuss the references to infant baptism as found in the third century, we must refer to the sharp debate between Aland and Jeremias on what happened before that time. Jeremias does not dispute the contention that the baptismal references in the writings of the first two centuries refer principally to the baptism of believing adults. However, although Aland brings many criticisms against Jeremias, the foundations of Jeremias' arguments remain substantially unshaken. The foundations upon which Jeremias rests are:

1. That the 'ὅλκος-formula', though possibly overstated by Stauffer, points to the essential solidarity of the family under the householder, and therefore that when the householder was baptised, his whole family without exception would have been baptised with him.
2. That the Jewish proselyte baptism, from which the Christian Church borrowed heavily, specifically included children and infants, and therefore it is almost inconceivable that they should be excluded in Christian baptism.

In the details of his reply to Aland's criticism Jeremias returns time and again to these premises. A further fundamental Jewish practice which inevitably influences consideration of Christian baptism is circumcision. Despite the fact that Paul in 1 Cor 7:14 states that children who have at least one Christian parent are

born in holiness, Jeremias argues convincingly from the circumcision analogy, that these children were almost certainly baptised.(1)

The early writings make much of the conversion and the instruction of candidates for baptism, where obviously they must be adults. Yet, because of his basic premises, Jeremias is unwilling to allow that these admittedly essentially adult baptisms excluded children.

The writings of Tertullian and Origen are of great interest for our study at this point, and once again we find Aland and Jeremias drawing widely differing conclusions concerning the significance of these writings. Tertullian, writing in Carthage in the early years of the 3rd century, argued for the postponement of baptism so that children be baptised only 'when they are able to know Christ' (2). Tertullian, whom Aland describes as not a very systematic writer, asks "why is the age of innocence in such a hurry for the forgiveness of sins?"(3). His point seems to be that as an infant has not sinned there is no need for its baptism, which had the effect of washing away sins. Significantly Tertullian also advocated the postponement of the baptism of widows and virgins, possibly because of the temptations they might face, and thus commit serious sins after baptism. Aland adopts the view that Tertullian was trying to stop a new tendency which was gaining ground among the people of his day, the tendency being to baptise infants. He claims also that Tertullian had in mind in particular the delay of the baptism of the children of converts to Christianity,(4) although in other places he

(1) J. Jeremias: *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. pp.44-48.

(2) Tertullian : *De Baptismo* 18.5.

(3) *ibid.*

(4) Tertullian : *De Anima* 39.4.

seems to be referring to all children whether they be of catechumens or members of the community (1). In his reply to Aland, Jeremias asks penetratingly that, if this were a new tendency he was trying to stop, why did Tertullian not say so? This would have been a far more cogent and powerful argument than what Aland calls the 'tortuous argumentation' that godparents were burdened with an impossible responsibility (2). Jeremias concludes that Tertullian was arguing against an established practice with which he disagreed and was trying to have changed. However within 50 years the 67 bishops who were present at the Synod of Carthage agreed unanimously that baptism should take place on the second or third day (3). They accepted this as the usual practice of the church, and they knew of no other. This would indicate that in Carthage by the year 200 infant baptism was the universal practice, and despite the pleas of Tertullian, it remained so. Our conclusion could thus be stated that Tertullian was not so much trying to halt a trend as to change a custom.

In his writings Origen on at least four occasions speaks of the baptism of infants (4). In the Homilies on Leviticus Origen speaks of infant baptism as being given "according to the custom of the Church, to infants also." In the Commentary on Romans Origen declares that "the Church received from the apostles the tradition of baptising infants too."

Writing in Rome Hippolytus records in the Apostolic Tradition that children were baptised, even children who were not able to speak.(5) The writings of Hippolytus and

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- (1) Tertullian: De Baptismo. See Aland p.64.
 (2) Jeremias : Origins of Infant Baptism p.65.
 (3) Cyprian : De Lapsis. 9. Jeremias: Infant Baptism in First Four Centuries. p.85.
 (4) Origen : Homilies on Luke XIV on 2:22a; Homilies on Leviticus VIII 3 on 12:2; Commentary on Romans V9 on 6:5-7; Homilies on Joshua IX4 on 8:32. See Jeremias: Infant Baptism in First Four Centuries p.65.
 (5) See Jeremias: Infant Baptism in First Four Centuries p.74.

Origen may be taken as independent witnesses to the tradition of infant baptism in the early church as they were contemporaries, but Hippolytus wrote in Rome and Origen in Alexandria.

Aland raises the question of whether infant baptism was practiced as a universal rule, or as an infrequent exception to the rule of adult baptism. Jeremias believes that infant baptism was widely if not universally practiced and writes that "delay of baptism in the case of Christian children was wholly unknown in the primitive church."(1) This is an argument from silence and must be regarded with reservations. What can be said with certainty is that although Tertullian argued in favour of delaying baptism, the first recorded occasion in which Christian parents delayed the baptism of their children was recorded by Gregory of Nazianzus in the year 329/30.

The beginning of the third century of the Christian era is marked in Christian literature by an increase in the amount of literature which has been preserved for posterity. References to baptism thus increase greatly in number, and it is significant to note that for those who wrote at that time great emphasis was placed on the theological interpretation of baptism as being for the forgiveness of sins. The fundamental premise upon which Tertullian based his argument for the postponement of baptism was that baptism removed sins and that sins committed after baptism were more serious and more difficult to remove. Origen also believed that baptism was for the putting away of the defilement of sin, but he also believed that even a day old infant was not free from this defilement, and was therefore baptised (2). This belief thus expressed at the beginning of the third century grew as time passed, and may be seen

(1) *ibid.* p.56 his italics.

(2) Origen: *Hom. on Luke op.cit.* J. Jeremias: *Origins of Infant Baptism.* p.70.

in the writings of the fathers of the time.(1) By the beginning of the fourth century there was a widespread tendency to delay conversion to Christianity, if possible, to the last hour that the new convert might die "in albis"(2) Mothers delayed the baptism of their infants lest in the sins of youth they forfeit the unique gift of baptismal forgiveness. Gregory of Nazianzus records the first such postponement of baptism, and even Augustine of Hippo who was born in 354 was not baptised in infancy. His mother requested baptism for him during his serious illness some time between 360 and 370, but it was again postponed because of his recovery.

Many writers, including Jeremias, Aland and Pocknee, refer to this postponement of baptism in the Fourth Century as the "Crisis for Baptism". The crisis was overcome by the teaching of Augustine who developed the idea that sin for which man needed forgiveness was not merely actual sin which he committed, but also original sin in which he was born. As a result of his teaching the great significance of baptism became the rite for the removal of original sin, and therefore it was desirable as soon as possible after birth. The practice of "emergency" baptisms is closely connected with this concept of original sin, for the child who dies unbaptised dies in sin and is therefore excluded from heaven. Baptism is thus essential for entry into heaven. Baptism is thus clearly necessary for infants and must be performed as soon as possible, for the removal of original sin. This teaching of Augustine was widely accepted by the Church and became the accepted doctrine of the Church, and is still accepted by some sections of the Christian Church.(3).

(1) Cyprian et alia. see references J. Jeremias: *Infant Baptism in First Four Centuries.* p.15.

(2) J. Jeremias. *ibid.* p.87.

(3) For detailed discussion of the Baptismal teaching of Augustine see the unpublished doctoral dissertation of P.W. Marais: „Die Korrelasie van Doop en Geloof in die Kinderdoop, met spesiale verwysing na Augustinus" (University of SA. 1968).

CHAPTER 3

IS BAPTISM A SACRAMENT?

That the question of the sacramental nature of baptism is even raised represents a total break from traditional theology and has special reference to the final work of Karl Barth.(1) The traditional approach has consistently been from the view that Baptism, along with the Lord's Supper are the dominical sacraments. There have been differences of approach in interpretation of the nature and efficacy of the sacraments; there have been sharp controversies over the meanings of the signs and symbols used, and just what they conveyed to those who received the sacraments; there has been divergence on the number of sacraments so that in some Communion there are 7 sacraments, whereas in others there are only 2. However, until very recent times there has been general agreement that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments.

In the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches where the sacramental traditions are strongest, there is a strongly sacramental approach to Baptism.(2) However, even in those communions where the sacramental approach receives the least emphasis, such as in the Baptist church, there is still no questioning that Baptism is a sacrament.(3) We may therefore claim an almost universal support for the sacramental understanding of Baptism.

What do we mean by a sacrament? The answers to this question and the resulting debate could range far and wide

(1) Karl Barth: "Church Dogmatics" Vol IV, Part 4.
For an excellent summary of this work see
H. Hartwell: "Karl Barth on Baptism".
Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol 22, 1969,
p.10 ff.

(2) See O.C. Quick: The Christian Sacraments.
G.W.H. Lampe: The Seal of the Spirit et alia.

(3) See R.E.O. White: The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation.
N. Clark : An Approach to the Theology of the
Sacraments.

from "high" to "low" sacramental points of view, from ex opere operato understandings of the sacraments, to "signs that convey what they signify" to mere signs whose power and efficacy depend on the faith and obedience of celebrant, congregation and recipient.

It is not within the scope of this present work to examine either the development or the varieties of sacramental theology. However it is necessary to offer some kind of statement on what sacraments are before raising the question of the authority of the whole sacramental system, for Karl Barth directs his approach to baptism with the basic premise that there is no biblical foundation for sacramental theology.(1) For a brief statement on the sacraments we refer to an article by Prof. W.D. Maxwell, who wrote:-

"There could be no sacraments if our Lord had not risen and been glorified. The sacraments derive from Him and His redeeming works, and not only from His specific commands. They are effective because He is alive for evermore and as Great High Priest is minister of them. This makes the sacramental signs and symbols which convey what they signify.

"We can understand the sacraments therefore only in the full context of Christian belief. They presuppose the fall of man, our Lord's incarnation, atonement, resurrection and exaltation, and His abiding presence with the Holy Spirit in the Church.

"The living Lord acts personally as the chief minister of every sacrament, and our ministries derive from Him as Great High Priest. The sacraments of themselves have no power, nor is power inherent in them by virtue of a formula. Their power derives solely from Him, and is freely given through the Holy Spirit when we obediently do what He commands.

"In the sacraments we are united to the living Lord in His Church as His mystical body or as the bride is united to the bridegroom. Thus the sacraments can be enacted only within and by the Church which He indwells and chooses as agent and medium of His operation. The sacraments do not depend on faith, for the initiative and power are Christ's;

(1) Karl Barth. op.cit. pp.107 ff.

yet as they must be enacted within the fellowship of the faithful they cannot be separated from faith. They take place in the context of 'meeting' and become 'an involvement in salvation events'"(1)

This statement on the sacraments will not meet with universal approval, indeed there is no statement that we could offer which would meet with such a happy result. However it does indicate that the origin and power of the sacraments are to be found in Jesus Christ and the saving events in Him.(2)

The problem that now confronts us is not so much the normal problem of sacramental theology which would involve us with sacramental principles, the significance of the symbols used, the place of faith and the operation of grace in the sacraments, to some of which problems we will refer later. The problem posed by Karl Barth is the complete rejection of the sacramental approach to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Although in his final work Barth does not discuss the Lord's Supper, he makes it clear that his approach to Baptism and the Lord's Supper are of a piece. In his preface to "Church Dogmatics" Volume IV part 4 Barth states that he believes that the Reformers did not examine the concepts of the sacraments sufficiently closely, and hence did not remove the error which had found its way into the life of the Church.(3) Barth claims that the "decisive point" concerning the concept of sacrament is that "the New Testament does not use this concept to denote baptism."(4) In his analysis he points out that it

(1) W.D. Maxwell: "Holy Baptism and Resurrection." *Studia Liturgica* Vol 1 (1962) p.175.

(2) See also O.C. Quick: "The Christian Sacraments" pp.68-108 (Fontana 1964).

(3) Karl Barth. *op.cit.* preface ix. See also his discussion p.102 ff.

(4) *ibid* p.108.

was only in the second century that "Baptism and the Lord's Supper now (for the first time) began to be regarded as cultic representations of the act and revelation of God in the history of Jesus Christ, and consequently as the granting of a share in His grace. They thus began to be described and treated as mysteries."(1) Thus the telling point, in Barth's assessment, is that the mysteries of the Christian faith derive their theological significance, not from the New Testament, but from the Greek and Hellenistic mystery religions.(2)

It must be granted that the word "sacrament" is not a New Testament word, and it must also be acknowledged that the mystery religions probably influenced the development of Christian sacramental thinking, but to reject the whole concept of the sacramental activity of God is surely unjustified.

Barth begins his treatment of Baptism with a statement that he believes that Baptism is the foundation of the Christian life, and the thesis which sums up his understanding of the initiation to the Christian life, and introduces his final work, is:-

"A man's turning to faithfulness to God, and consequently to calling upon Him, is the work of this faithful God which, perfectly accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ, in virtue of the awakening, quickening and illuminating power of this history, becomes a new beginning of life as his baptism with the Holy Spirit.

"The first step of this life of faithfulness to God, the Christian life, is a man's baptism with water, which by his own decision is requested of the community and which is administered by the community, as the binding confession of his obedience, conversion and hope, made in prayer for God's grace, wherein he honours the freedom of this grace."(3)

(1) *ibid.* p.109.

(2) *ibid.* p.109.

(3) Barth. *op.cit.* p.2.

It is not our task here to give a summary of the argument which Barth follows, for such is the consistency of his thought, that once we grant him his major premise, the rest of his argument follows. There are indeed points of detail where we might wish to raise questions, but these would only slightly damage the structure of his argument. The foundation of Barth's approach, and hence the source of our major objection to his theology of Baptism, is his premise that the only visible sign through which God has acted in the world, is Jesus Christ. In Barth's thinking Jesus Christ alone in His own person, is a sacrament. This is a very high and exclusive concept of the sacraments. Barth rejects the signs and symbols that others accept as being the instruments and guarantee of divine activity. It is a fundamental principle of sacramental theology, and one which derives from the earliest times, that God does act through special signs and symbols. The first beginnings of this are to be found in the "Apology" of Justin Martyr, who wrote, concerning the symbols of the Eucharist, that this bread and wine, by virtue of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and of the prayers that are offered over the elements, are the "flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." (1) From this early beginning the use of sign and symbol have developed within the Christian Church. There have been wide divergences of opinion of how these signs become effective in the life of the recipient, but that God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, somehow conveys Himself through the signs is fundamental to any understanding of the sacraments. Great care has been exercised in trying to express this in doctrinal statements, and great controversy has arisen over this doctrine in the history of the Church, but on the effectiveness of the sacraments most are agreed. Popular

(1) Justin Martyr: "Apology", para 66. See P.F. Palmer: Sacraments and Worship" p.5. Justin claims that this was already the teaching of the Church and thus reaches beyond him to the very earliest days.

misunderstanding of the sacraments have sometimes tended to magic and superstition, but these signs convey what they signify, not because of a ritual that uses the correct verbal formula, or the correct attitudes or elements, although these have their importance, but because of the work and promises of God in Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, is the doer of what is done; He alone makes the signs effective. It is precisely at this level that Barth denies the doctrine of the sacraments, and because the signs are not effective, they cannot in any way convey anything to the recipient of the sacrament. The result of this reasoning is to define the sacraments out of existence, and call them purely human, liturgical and ethical responses, even though they are done in obedience to the command of God. We therefore affirm against Barth that the act of Baptism befits a change in us wrought by God who effectively works through the sign, rather than calling Baptism the first stage in an ethical life. That the Holy Spirit works in the individual to bring him to faith is not questioned, though to call this a Baptism is an unusual use of the term, and stands apart from almost all New Testament scholars and commentators, whose almost unanimous cry is that Baptism with water is Baptism with the Holy Spirit.(1) Further, to say that water Baptism is merely an ethical response strips it of the reality of its New Testament imagery as being a dying and rising with Christ, and an incorporation into Him, for this is now a human act and not a divine incorporation.

The sacraments require an ethical response in the life of the recipients, that is, the Christian Sacraments administered to men cannot be seen in isolation from daily life, but their consequences and demands should be normative for Christians. However, it is Barth's argument that Baptism is this ethical response, or at

(1) See later discussion, Chapter 7, pp.102 ff.

least the beginning of it. Thus, because Baptism is an ethical act, a purely human act, a submission in response and obedience to God, Baptism for Karl Barth must be adult baptism.

The major danger of this highly individualistic approach to Baptism is that of Pelagianism. Williams warns against "taking a too individualistic approach to the subject, leading to a Pelagian stress on what the candidate has to bring in the way of conscious understanding and personal faith." (1) Barth is aware of this problem and deals with it by pointing out "everything that can be done in the Church and theology is dangerous." (2) He warns against pride. However, on his premises that Baptism is not a sacrament or divine act, but purely a human and ethical response, while pride is not excluded, its dangers are minimised for the Baptism as such accomplishes nothing in the divine-human relationship. Its significance is merely liturgical and ethical. For those who regard Baptism as a sacrament for adults the dangers of Pelagianism are far greater for there may be a temptation to regard the faith-response of the individual as merit in God's sight.

Significantly Barth does not see any connection between the Old and New Covenants, especially with their initiation rites, and in his exposition of Col 2:12 rejects the linking of circumcision and baptism. (3) However, as we shall see in the next chapter the concept of the covenant and the community of the covenant is of vital importance to Christian theology, and especially the theology of Baptism. Barth's individualistic approach to Baptism leaves us with a very weak concept of the Community

(1) R.R. Williams (Bishop of Leicester): "Infant Baptism : Comprehensive or Selective." Theology 1970. pp.99-103.

(2) Barth. op.cit. p.192 ff.

(3) ibid. p.118.

of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. It is ever thus, that those who focus attention on the individual tend to lose sight of the significance of community and the care that the one must have for the other within the Christian community. The converse is also true, that one may be so concerned for the community that one forgets the significance of the individual and the necessity for his relationship with God. In Christian thinking both the individual and the community must have their full and rightful place.

Barth's approach to Baptism rests largely on his contention that baptism is not a sacrament, and not a means of grace and revelation.(1) If we allow this, most of his reasoning follows. However, if we allow this we are breaking with the entire history of the Church, and thus the argument which must make us take so great a step must be conclusive. This argument Barth does not provide. His argument rests heavily on the first generation missionary situation of the Church where most baptisms were of adults who were converted to the faith. However as the Church grew both in extent and age, so new problems were faced, and from very early in its history, as Barth himself acknowledges, from the second century, the sacramental principle grew both in ecclesiastical practice and theological expression.(2) Barth is content to criticise severely the traditions of the church, but rests heavily on Scripture, which in the last analysis is also part of that very tradition. Therefore we cannot allow that the Holy Spirit, who we believe was the inspiration of the Scriptures, was not at least able also to guide the Church into the truth in the establishment of the Sacraments.

(1) *ibid.* p.118.

(2) This finds its beginning in the writings of Justin Martyr c.150 and develops rapidly in the writings of the fathers, such as Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan.

At the end of his summary of Barth's theology of Baptism, Hartwell raises the following critical questions on Barth's position:- (1)

"Is the strict distinction between Baptism with the Holy Spirit as the exclusive work of God and water-baptism as the exclusive work of man justified, seeing that in the former Baptism man's co-operation is required in respect of the receiving and accepting of the Holy Spirit and that in the latter Baptism man cannot make his free responsible decision except by faith and thus only by God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit? Even if Barth's premise is accepted that faith must precede Baptism, man also needs faith to make the decision demanded by Barth as an integral part of Baptism and that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in man and thus God's work. And if this is true does Barth's denial of the sacramental nature of water-baptism and of its character as a means of grace hold good? Again, in the light of these questions, is there not a subjective aspect of Baptism with the Holy Spirit as well as an objective aspect of water-baptism and, if so, is it right to state with such exclusiveness that the former Baptism is the objective aspect, and the latter Baptism is the subjective aspect of the initiation of the Christian life? Again, is water-baptism really a purely human work, seeing that in it the baptising Christian community prays for the coming of the Holy Spirit that He may enlighten the Church and the person to be baptised and guide and strengthen them in their future life? Does not Barth's own teaching on prayer as one aspect of the meaning of Baptism contradict his view of Baptism as a purely human decision and act? Again, does the Church really play such an inferior part in Baptism as Barth attributes to it, inferior even to the part played by the person to be baptised? The latter, after all, is accepted in Baptism by, and received into the Church, the Body of Christ. Above all, does water-baptism really have its focus in a decision of the baptised so that infant Baptism becomes theologically untenable? Might it not be possible to justify on biblical grounds the concept of Christian Baptism as the sacrament of the Divine Fatherhood which embraces all God's children, including infants, and might not this aspect of Baptism express its foremost significance rather than the decision of the person to be baptised?"

(1) H. Hartwell. op.cit. p.28-29.

Although these objections can be applied to other Christian acts, dependent on grace, in our context they are weighty objections, and some of their implications will be discussed in later chapters. However, the outcome of the objections raised in our discussion, and also those of Williams and Hartwell, and especially our rejection of Barth's redefinition of sign and sacrament, lead us to the conclusion that Barth has not answered the problems raised by his own premises. We must therefore reject his basic premise and affirm the tradition of the Church in regarding Baptism as a sacrament.



CHAPTER 4

THE COVENANT.

The importance of the covenant for Biblical thought can be understood when it is perceived that the old Hebrew word for covenant, berith, was translated in the Septuagint and New Testament by the word διαθήκη, which in turn was rendered by Jerome in the Vulgate as testamentum. Thus the two major divisions of the Scriptures as the Old and New Testaments are more correctly understood as the Old and New Covenants. One of the problems facing Biblical scholars is that of finding a conceptual foundation which unites in itself all the essential meaning of the Scriptures, or at least which provides a concept by which the checkered historical career of the writings of the Scriptures may be seen to be of one tendency and type. Complete agreement among scholars is rare, but there is wide acceptance, despite criticisms, of the basic thesis of Walter Eichrodt in his "Theology of the Old Testament", the German edition of which began to appear in 1933. Eichrodt assumed that it was possible to find an inherent unity in the OT, and also, from the point of view of Biblical theology, to tie the OT inextricably to the New. He saw this in the "entry (EINBRUCH) and expansion (DURCHSETZUNG) of God's kingly rule in the world." (1) Eichrodt used categories which he took directly from the OT's thought and idiom rather than those from extraneous dogmatic structures, and envisaged the kingly rule of God as taking place in three realms (HAUPTKREISE), namely (1) God and People, (2) God and World and (3) God and Man. These three divisions then became the sub-titles for the three volumes of his "Old Testament Theology." Within this structure Eichrodt saw the

(1) Old Testament Theology. W. Eichrodt. 1:1 quoted by F.C. Prussner in "Transitions in Biblical Scholarship" ed J.C. Rylaarsdam essay "The Covenant of David and the Problem of Unity in OT Theology" by F.C. Prussner. p.28.

covenant idea as the central and unifying concept of the OT world of belief, and emphasized that "the concept of the covenant ... establishes from the first Israel's understanding of God." (1) However, as Prussner points out, "despite the impressiveness of his theological treatment of the idea of the covenant in all its conceptual and institutional ramifications", (2) there is general agreement among scholars that he makes his case only for the relationship "God and People." However, Eichrodt was able to show the fundamental importance of the concept of the covenant in any effort to get to the heart of Israel's faith. Prussner thinks that the weakness of Eichrodt's argument stems from the fact that Eichrodt was tied almost entirely to the Sinai covenant, and that the people saw themselves as being required to be the obedient People of God as He had delivered them from Egypt, and they had thereby experienced the grace of divine election. More recently scholars such as G.E. Wright and G. von Rad have faced the problem of the theological accommodation to the covenant faith which arose when Israel adopted the monarchy. At this stage in her history Israel was confronted with a "royal theology" emanating from the royal court in Jerusalem. von Rad attached very great significance to this new development and its influence on the Psalms, Deuteronomy and the Chronicles. He sees two great ~~climactic interventions~~ of Yahweh in the history of Israel as being determinative for her. The first was "in the complex of acts which we gathered together in the avowal made by the canonical saving history (that is, from Abraham to Joshua), the other was in the confirmation of David and his throne for all time." (3) Thus it is that scholars such as von Rad, Wright and Prussner see that alongside the covenant at Sinai which was fundamental in holding together the loose

(1) Eichrodt. op.cit. vol 1 p.6.

(2) Prussner. op.cit. p.20.

(3) von Rad: O.T. Theology vol 1 p.355 cited by Prussner. op.cit. p.30.

political federation of the tribes in the period of the judges, there must be seen the covenant with David, that he should be established for ever upon the throne (11 Sam 7¹⁶). Thus this royal covenant opened the way for the theological acceptance of the king in Jerusalem as signifying the kingship of Yahweh in Israel, and the devotion to Yahweh as expressed in the royal Psalms.

This scholarly debate on the concept of the covenant and its place in the history and religion of Israel indicates at least one thing very clearly, that there is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding in these days of what the ancient covenants were and what they implied for the people involved. We will not be so presumptuous here as to imply that we are about to clarify this debate and remove all doubt and error, but it is necessary, even if for our own thinking, to set down what these covenants were in general, and in particular what the Biblical covenants between Yahweh and His people were, and what was required of the people.

In the article on "Covenant" in "A Theological Word Book of the Bible" (1) J.O. Cobham points out that berith can mean "bond". Thus between men or tribes "a covenant means artificial brotherhood, and has no place where the natural brotherhood of which it is an imitation already subsists." Thus a covenant may be concluded between individuals (Gen. 21²⁷), between husband and wife (Malachi 2¹⁴), between tribes (1 Sam 11¹), between monarchs (1 Kings 20²⁴) and between a king and his people (11 Kings 11⁴). Buber calls the covenant between equals a "covenant of brotherhood", and that between non-equals a "royal covenant." The terms of the covenant are frequently reached by mutual consent, but are sometimes imposed by the stronger on the weaker party. Hillers (2) gives an

(1) ed Richardson: A Theological Word Book of the Bible
SCM cheap edition. Ninth impression 1967, pp.54-6.

(2) D.R. Hillers : The History of a Biblical Idea. p.28 ff.

interesting comparison of ancient covenants and shows how the six principal parts of typical treaties are to be found. These parts are (1) the preamble, (2) the historical prologue, (3) the stipulations, (4) the provisions for the deposit of the text and for its public reading, (5) a list of the divine witnesses to the treaty, and (6) blessings and curses. Individual treaties may vary from this outline, and the order may be different, even to the omission of one of the elements, but the basic pattern remains. The covenant thus creates rights and duties, but does not necessarily place the parties on an equal footing. The sealing of the covenant may take one of many forms. It may be forced on the vanquished by the victor, or sealed by gifts, a handshake or a meal.

The essential element of these covenants is the brotherhood or intimacy which is thereby produced. The covenanted parties are regarded as belonging together in a special way, and a breach of covenant is a serious matter.

When we come to consider Yahweh's berith with Israel we have a situation which is at once more complex and for us more important. It might be considered reasonable to expect that when Yahweh deals with His people and makes covenant with them, we will find the same kind of situation, terms and conditions holding for each covenant. This is in fact not so, and in the Old Testament we find that there are at least 5 occasions in which Yahweh makes berith with His people, and no two of them are the same.

We shall examine briefly these five covenants of Yahweh with His people that we may learn more of the nature of the covenant and its implications both for Yahweh and His people.

i. The Covenant with Noah.

In the Genesis story of the Flood (Gen. 6¹-9²⁸) we are told of the wickedness of the people, and how "the

Lord was sorry that he had made man" (Gen 6⁶). But "Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6⁸) for "Noah walked with God." (Gen 6⁹) We are not told what Noah actually did, but the story of the deliverance from the waters of flood are the consequence of God's favour upon him. When the waters of the flood receded, 'God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you ... that ... never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'" (Gen.9⁸⁻¹¹) The sign of the covenant is the "bow in the cloud" (Gen.9¹³). Hillers points out that "there is no obligation whatever laid on Noah and his descendants, expressed or implied. This is simply a unilateral promise of God and it makes no difference what Noah does." (1) The only one bound in this berith is Yahweh Himself.

ii. The Covenant with Abram.

In the story of Abram, after he had journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees and separated himself from Lot, we are told that "the Lord made a covenant with Abram" (Gen.15¹⁷), and as with the berith with Noah, that with Abram binds only God.

However in Genesis 17 when the covenant with Abram is confirmed, and Yahweh binds Himself with "an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen.17⁷), we find that an obligation is laid upon Abraham and his seed. "You shall keep my covenant ... every male among you shall be circumcised ... He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised ... So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male ... shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." (Gen.17⁹⁻¹⁴) This covenant binds Yahweh and Abraham and his descendants together, and in fact created a covenant community whose seal is circumcision. The uncircumcised are excluded from the covenant community.

(1) Hillers: op.cit. p.101.

We have already seen something of the meaning and significance of circumcision, but we see less than the truth and meaning of the rite if we separate it from the fact that it is the seal of the covenant, and it is the covenant promise of Yahweh which creates the community of the people of God.

iii. The Sinaitic Covenant.

The berith between Yahweh and His people on Mount Sinai, and whose details are contained in the "Book of the Covenant" Exodus 20-23, is considered by many to be the great and determinative covenant for the whole future relationship between Yahweh and His people. Eichrodt uses this covenant as the foundation upon which he tries to build a unified theology of the Old Testament, and although von Rad (1), Prussner (2) and others, have indicated the weakness of this argument, as already shown, there can be no disputing the central importance and significance of this covenant in the life and religion of Israel.

The written record of the acts purported to have taken place in the giving of the covenant came into being only about three centuries after the events. Scholars have debated whether the idea of the covenant was a later concept read back into the early history of Israel, yet as Hillers (3) has pointed out we have a people who have no pact with a human leader, yet they follow him, and after his death and the settlement in the Promised Land we have twelve tribes who live together in remarkable harmony before there was a king in Israel. This only becomes comprehensible when we see that underlying their whole relationship structure from a very early date, there is the covenant promise of Yahweh which holds them together.

(1) von Rad. op.cit.

(2) Prussner. op.cit.

(3) Hillers. op.cit. p.68

From the very start of their flight from Egypt they are made aware of the God who is with them, and whose Presence goes before them in a "pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night" (Ex.13²¹⁻²²).

Thus it was that when the Israelites arrived at Sinai and the preparations of Exodus 19 were made, "the ancient Abrahamitic Covenant was renewed, and the children of Israel were constituted a people"(1). In that Abrahamitic covenant Yahweh had committed Himself to be the God of Abraham and his seed, but Yahweh had made no demands in return, except that all the males of the covenant community had to be circumcised. At Sinai the situation is very different. Yahweh makes no promises, though these are implicit for He has already committed Himself to His people. The people are however presented with the moral and ethical demands of Yahweh and are required to submit and be obedient. "The relation that is being formalised is a lop-sided one, the two parties being by no means equal in strength or status. It is not thereby a mere edict. Neither party, not even the 'vassal' Israel, is purely passive. But the roles are very different. The treaty is not negotiated. The suzerain, or God simply offers his terms. The vassal's (Israel's) share is to decide whether this is for him, and if so, to swear."(2)

At Sinai the people are drawn together and for the first time in their communal or national experience, they are constituted a community. They knew of, and had shared in (by circumcision) the covenant made with Abraham. Now they themselves had to make their own response as individuals and as community, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do."(Exodus 24³). At every point salvation, the relationship with Yahweh, required

(1) H.F. Roellig: The God Who Cares. p.55.

(2) Hillers. op.cit. p.49. See also J.L. Scott: The Covenant in the Theology of Karl Barth. Scottish Journal of Theology 1964. p.190.

acceptance and surrender, not a passive state, "but a role of unbounded national and personal responsibility. God everywhere takes the first step; but Israel comes to know God, and Israel is saved, in the very act of hearing and obeying."(1)

For the first time there arises in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel the list of blessings and curses which will follow should Israel be faithful or unfaithful to the covenant to which she has sworn. (Lev.26¹⁻⁴⁶). It is also clearly stated that while Noah and Abraham might have been regarded as having merit with Yahweh because of their moral and religious rectitude, Yahweh's choice of Israel was through no merit on the part of Israel. "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers." (Deut.7⁶⁻¹¹) Here we find an early introduction to one of the deepest O.T. concepts of Yahweh, that He makes covenant and keeps covenant with His people, not because of their merit, but because of His love, His hesed for His people Israel.

"The Lord is God! He needeth not
The poor device of man." (2)

The wonder that the berith declares is that though these lines are true, Yahweh nevertheless chooses to commit Himself irrevocably to man. The berith of Yahweh is thus linked to His hesed, His unmerited love for His people.

iv. The Covenant with David.

The covenant of Sinai established the foundation for the religious and material life of Israel to the end of the period of the judges. In it Yahweh was

(1) S. Lawton: Truths that Compelled. p.63.

(2) J.G. Whittier: Hymn "Who fathoms the eternal thought?"

left free and sovereign and the people were brought together under Him. The judges were men and women raised up under the overall sovereignty of Yahweh to do His bidding in any emergency or time when such human leadership was necessary. The judges were not hereditary leaders, there was no royal court with all its institutions and implications, for Yahweh was the recognised ultimate authority and only king of His people. When Israel adopted an institutional monarchy, at least some of the people saw this as a threat to Yahweh's sovereignty, and one of the traditions records that Yahweh said to Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." (1 Sam. 8⁷)

Israel was then confronted with a distinct and novel religious form, a "royal theology which we know must have been fostered in the royal court of the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem." (1) The loose confederacy of Israel had to be provided with a theological basis on which they could build a new concept of their community as the people of God. Thus, in response to David's intention to build a temple, although he is stopped in his plans, David nevertheless receives from Yahweh the assurance that it is He, Yahweh, who took David and appointed him as 'prince over my people Israel'. Further, Yahweh promises David that "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." (See 2 Sam. 7¹⁻¹⁷) The significance which von Rad attaches to the Davidic covenant can be measured by the fact that he devotes an entire chapter to it and to its theological impact the Psalms, the Deuteronomic history work and the Chronicles history." (2) The covenant with David is inviolate in the sense that even wrongdoing cannot break it. Yahweh will be to the king as a Father, and like a father He will

(1) J. Jocz: The Covenant. p.30.

(2) Jocz : op.cit. p.30.

chastise him when he commits iniquity, but Yahweh will not take His steadfast love from him, as He had done with Saul. The oath of God will always stand. "There could not be any clearer evidence of the great gulf fixed between this and the intention of the Sinai covenant, where the stress is on Israel's responsibility."(1)

This covenant confirms the people as the People of Yahweh, who will never abandon them. But now they are in a sense a royal people for Him, for they are His under the king whom He has appointed and whom He will establish for ever.

v. The Promise of the New Covenant.

Although the promise of the New Covenant is also to be found in Ezekiel 16⁵⁹⁻⁶³, the locus classicus of the New Covenant is Jeremiah 31³¹⁻³⁴. This New Covenant has a number of important features, not least among which is that as far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is a covenant promised, not a covenant made. Despite the fact that this promised covenant is very important to Christians, we must try to understand it within its Old Testament context, in the thoughts and hopes of the prophet Jeremiah. The covenant will be made with the house of Israel as well as the house of Judah. Among the implications of this is that the house of Israel, which as far as subsequent history is concerned is already lost, is not yet lost and will be restored to its place in the renewed community. Paterson (2) sees that in this "religion bursts the bounds of nationality and takes on a universal aspect", but this new covenant is not a different covenant for the terms are still 'I will be your God and you shall be my people.'(3)

(1) Hillers: op.cit. p.112.

(2) Paterson: The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets. p.154.

(3) Scott: op.cit. p.192.

At the very heart of this promised new covenant lies the idea of the knowledge of God. In Hebrew usage the word "know" conveys far more than just intellectual knowledge, but has an intimate, emotional and inward content. Thus the law written within them, on the hearts of the people, implies this inward and intimate knowledge of the Lord which all the people will have.

Although the terms of the New Covenant appear binding on Yahweh alone, that He will be their God, this covenant will be based on the forgiveness of sins. This places upon the people the requirement of repentance. The verses preceding those containing the promise of the New Covenant are charged with a call for repentance and a return to the Lord. There could be no participation in the new order, and no peace with God until there had been a radical transformation in their ethical and religious life.(1)

Thus, as James (2) indicates, the new covenant meant that religion and the relationship with God would spring from a changed nature in the heart of man. He would know and do right. Fellowship with God would no longer depend on externals of law, but on the relationship of the heart established by the covenant, a relationship no longer dependant on intermediates, but immediate between men and God. The new covenant would be universal with all the people, they shall all know God in their personal experience, for they shall know the forgiveness of their sins.

The promised new covenant introduces a new concept in the covenant community. No longer shall the relationship between Yahweh and His people depend on obedience to law, which easily becomes a mere externality, but the

(1) James: Personalities of the O.T. p.327.

(2) James: op.cit. p.328.

relationship within the covenant shall be intimate and of the heart. The externalities of the covenant, the rites and rituals, circumcision and sacrifice, are not necessarily abolished. They may be changed, but now their meaning derives not from mere observance, but from the attitude of the heart which motivates them.

Before we leave the Old Testament concept of the covenant we need to draw together the central ideas. In doing this we shall draw heavily on an article by Prof E. Jones, (1) who speaks of the covenants with which we have dealt as "the unfolding covenant", in which the covenant established with Noah reaches its climax in the concept of the inner covenant. Thus the new covenant is not new in the sense that it represents a break with that which is past, but it is new in the sense that it is a new development and final fulfilment of that covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people that had begun so long before. The prophet Isaiah says that the people cannot return from the travail of Exile simply to "return and keep themselves in a cocoon of narrow nationalism. They must become a covenant to the rest of the world." (Isa.42⁶; 49⁸) Jones indicates five main characteristics of the use of berith:

- (a) The Covenant is always initiated by God, and is His gift to man who does not merit the gift.
- (b) The Covenant is a relation between unequals, and comes from the strength of God to the weakness of man. The covenant is not a contract and no man may give God notice that he is contracting out of any obligations to Him.
- (c) The covenant involves the community. Even where there is a covenant with an individual,

(1) Jones: The Greatest O.T. Words. p.107 ff.

it must be seen within the context of the community. There can be no private treaties with God, but the result of personal encounter with God must involve the community.

- (d) The covenant involves the whole personality. This emerges clearly when we see the deepening of the covenant from the written law of the Decalogue to the inner covenant of Jeremiah. The covenant is fixed by God, but man must accept it, and his response must be total. The old covenant reaches its fulfilment in the commitment of the total personality, rather than in obedience to external rules.
- (e) The covenant demands mission and involves mission by its very nature. The purpose of Yahweh's covenant with His chosen people is that through them all people might enter the same relationship. Yahweh has called the Hebrews into covenant with Himself, and given them as a covenant to the rest of the people (isa.49⁸)

THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE OF THE NEW COVENANT.

Although the term covenant is only rarely actually used in the Gospels, and then relatively infrequently in the rest of the New Testament, there can be no doubt that Jesus Himself and His followers from the first, saw that in Him the promise of the new covenant was being fulfilled before them. In the song of Zechariah we find an early reference during the life of Jesus, that in Him the covenant of Yahweh was being fulfilled. (Luke 1⁷²) Then, during the last meal with His disciples, Jesus applies to Himself the covenant promised by Jeremiah when He says, "This is my body," and "This is the New covenant in my blood." (Mk.14²²⁻²⁴; 1 Cor.11²²⁻²⁶). There is some doubt about the exact words Jesus used as the witnesses disagree, but there is no doubt that in Jesus the inner covenant became

personal, and that from then on those who believed in Him saw themselves as the New Israel, the people of the new covenant. Paul sees the Christians as belonging to an organic community constituted in Christ (1 Cor.12) who through the forgiveness of their sins has given new life to all who have believed in Him. The author of the letter to the Hebrews makes much of the covenant concept and how the old covenant had become obsolete (Heb.8¹³) because of man's inability to fulfil its requirements. Therefore God has provided a new and better covenant (Heb.8⁶⁻⁷) in Christ, and through this covenant our sin will be taken away when we respond in faith.(Heb.9 and 10)(1) For Barth the whole story of this Covenant is Jesus Christ. Without Him it could not be known. (2)

In this new covenant all the essential marks of the old covenant are fulfilled. It is the unmerited gift of God to man to save man in his weakness. By this new covenant the new community is established where the members of the community have the law of God written on their inward parts through the involvement and total commitment of their whole personality. By this commitment the people of the community of the new covenant have a unique love relationship with God and with each other, and where mission becomes a divine obligation. Dillistone maintains that it is only within the concept of the covenant that we are really able to understand the true nature and structure of the church, the divine society.(3) It is only when we have an adequate doctrine of the Church that we can hope to have a satisfactory doctrine of the Sacraments. It is not within our present compass to examine the doctrine of the Church, but it is hoped that in what has been said, and what remains to be said, it

(1) See J.F. McFadyen: "Israel's Messianic Hope",
Abingdon Bible Commentary. p.180.

(2) Scott. op.cit. p.192.

(3) F.W. Dillistone: The Structure of the Divine Society.

will be established that the concept of the Covenant Community is basic to our understanding of the Church. The heritage from the Greeks as handed down through what is called "Western civilization" has tended to lose the community idea, but in rural Africa where some fundamental concepts are remarkably akin to those of the biblical Hebrews, it is through the community that the individual finds his meaning and life. The rural African never thinks of himself as individual isolated from his tribe, but rather that through his tribe he finds himself. This kind of thinking is essential to a recovery of the biblical doctrine of the Church.

The problem that remains to us now is whether the initiation rites of the old and new covenants can in any way be equated. Initiation to the old covenant was by circumcision, or by circumcision and baptism, or baptism alone. Initiation into the new covenant in Jesus Christ is by faith through repentance and baptism. The only New Testament text which might allow us to equate circumcision and Christian baptism directly is Col.2¹⁰⁻¹², and must now turn to the problem of the correlation of the covenants and the exegesis of Col.2¹⁰⁻¹².

ARE THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS AND THEIR RITES RELATED?

Thus far in our considerations what we have done is consider some of the differences which appear in the covenants made between Yahweh and His people. We have spoken of "old" and "new" covenants, but the problem is whether the "new" replaces the "old" in a discontinuous sense, that is, that the "new" has no relation with the "old"; or whether the "new" fulfils the "old". If we incline towards the idea of fulfilment because Jesus said that he had not come to abolish but to fulfil the law and the prophets (Matt.5:17) we must return to the covenant idea and seek yet deeper meanings. Our problem is not simply even one of continuity between the covenants, but

the meaning and significance of circumcision and baptism within the covenants. Does baptism mean for the new covenant what circumcision did for the old?

There are those within the Christian tradition who follow the teaching of St. Augustine of Hippo who taught that because they were guilty of original sin, unbaptised infants came under judgement, even though this was mitigated to a minima poena.(1) There are however many Christian thinkers today who turn aside from the doctrine of original sin, although this in itself is a weighty consideration, but still argue in favour of infant baptism. Among these are scholars, such as Marcel (2), Callmann (3), Jocz (4), Kline (5), Small (6) and others. At the heart of their argument lies the concept of the covenant. We might even be so bold as to summon them in support of a statement such as: "There can be no infant baptism without a concept of continuity between the old and new covenants, and therefore a relation between circumcision and baptism." It is precisely at this point that the arguments of Baptist scholars such as Beasley-Murray (7), White (8) and Howard (9) become most serious, for it is their argument, brought with much skill and learning, that there is in fact a discontinuity between the old and new covenants, especially that the old is external and of law, and the new is internal and of grace. They might point in support of their arguments, to the tabular

(1) See Jocz: op.cit. p.181.

(2) P.C. Marcel: The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism.

(3) O. Cullmann: Baptism in the New Testament.

(4) Jocz: op.cit. pp.171-185.

(5) M.G. Kline: By Oath Consigned.

(6) D.H. Small: The Biblical Basis for Infant Baptism.

(7) G.R. Beasley-Murray: Baptism in the New Testament.

(8) R.E.O. White: The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation.

(9) J.K. Howard: New Testament Baptism.

comparison between the two covenants in the thought of Paul, as drawn up by Hillers (1):

<u>OLD COVENANT (SINAI)</u>	<u>NEW COVENANT</u>
written on tables of stone	written on human hearts
a written code	Spirit of the living God
kills	gives life
a dispensation of death	dispensation of Spirit
condemnation	righteousness
fading	permanent
veiled glory	direct view of God's glory.

There is obviously truth in these contentions, so they cannot be dismissed lightly. The real problem is whether this is the whole truth, and whether we have understood the fulness of the meaning of Yahweh's berith with His people.

In his small but convincingly reasoned work on the covenantal principle and its outworking on the initiation rites of circumcision and baptism, Prof Kline (2) argues that most scholars have in fact not comprehended the breadth and depth of the concept of the covenant. If we are to accept Kline's arguments, and if in accepting them we have a thesis on which to base a covenantal understanding of baptism, it is of the utmost importance that we now analyse his arguments.

Kline begins from the point of view we have already basically accepted that an understanding of covenant is essential to the understanding of the scriptures. He argues "that a relative harmony of law and gospel is achieved under the vault of the covenant concept in Reformed thought; in this setting law, like gospel, has a vivifying use, for law is here the obligation to covenant service that attends election to covenant

(1) D.R. Hillers: op.cit. p.183.

(2) M.G. Kline : op.cit.

privilege."(1) Kline is able to speak of law as obligation to service because from his analysis of the divine-human covenants in Scriptures he concludes that the covenants involve a "sanction-sealed commitment to maintain a particular relationship or follow a stipulated course of action. In general, then, a covenant may be defined as a relationship under sanctions."(2) Further, it is fundamental to Kline's position that a covenant of promise exists where God swears the oath of ratification, but that where man is summoned to swear the oath, we have a covenant of law. Kline does not limit his analysis of covenant to the five archetypal covenants we have analysed, but goes to the first chapters of Genesis, where, although the word "covenant" is missing, there is a relationship established between God and Adam. Here God sovereignly established a divine protectorate in which His suzerainty over his human servants took the form of law which included service obligations and dual sanctions.(3) Thus, encouraged by Paul's scheme of the two Adams, Kline sees the creation order as covenantal. In Paul's thought in Romans 5 Adam is "the figure" of Christ, meaning that Adam's representative status in God's pre-redemptive government of man is one with the second Adam's representative status in the redemptive administration of the kingdom. Therefore if Christ is understood in terms of a redemptive covenant, Adam must be seen in terms of pre-redemptive covenant, and the intertwining of these covenants in Paul's thought can be seen in both Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. In Romans 5 the Mosaic law is introduced between the representative heads of Adam and Christ that the offence of Adam and the subsequent reign of death may be aggravated (Rom.5:20). Paul's argument in Galatians 3 is a parallel to this pattern.

(1) *ibid.* p.13.

(2) *ibid.* p.27.

(3) *ibid.* p.27.

Thus, Kline argues, we have a covenant of law established with Adam in which promises and sanctions are present, and this was not made void by the promise of Genesis 3. "Herein is the depth of his redemptive wisdom revealed, that in the very process of securing for his chosen the covenant's blessing of life, God honours his original covenant of law in its abiding demand for obedience as the condition of life and with its curse of death for covenant breakers." (1) Thus Paul too argues that the law is not made void by the promise-faith principle. It is in Christ that the law and promise co-operate for the salvation of God's people, because although the people have broken covenant and the laws demands are not abrogated as the prerequisite of the promised blessings, it is through "the obedience of one that the many are made righteous unto eternal life." (2) Thus it is through Christ's obedience to the law that the many inherit the promises, which come to us by law. Thus, although the blessings are not inherited by law in the Galatians 3:18 sense, but by promise, they are not inherited at all except in Christ in whom they are joint-heirs. Thus there is no discontinuity between the old pre-redemptive covenant and the new redemptive covenant, for the latter does not substitute promise for law, but adds promise to law (3). The promises of the covenant are dependant on the obedience to law of a representative, and can therefore accommodate guaranteed promises (4). Thus it is that the covenant is a continuum from Adam to Christ in which God's suzerainty and purposes of salvation are being worked out among **His** People in a law covenant to which is added the promise of redemption in Jesus Christ.

(1) *ibid.* p.30.

(2) *ibid.* p.31 (his italics) see also Gal.3:18; Rom.5:18-21.

(3) *ibid.* p.31.

(4) *ibid.* p.35.

If we accept as established that the old and new covenants are a continuum, this does not necessarily and of itself mean that the initiation rites of the two covenants need be equated, that is that circumcision is to the old covenant what baptism is to the new. The only New Testament text which directly links circumcision and baptism is Colossians 2.10-12, and although certain scholars accept the link as thereby established, despite criticisms, we must acknowledge the arguments of those who would see in these verses not a link between baptism and circumcision, but in fact a contrast between them. The strength of their argument lies in the old covenant as being external and of the flesh, and therefore the oath-rite of the old covenant, circumcision, is the same. In contrast the new covenant is internal and of the Spirit, and therefore no mere inheritance of the flesh by accident of birth can make a man eligible to inherit the new covenant. He comes to this inwardly following on his own response of faith, and hence baptism must be for believers. Added to this objection is the fact that if, as is alleged, circumcision and baptism were regarded as equivalents, why did Paul not say so in his argument in Galatians, where it might have been most apposite for him to have said, "You have been baptised, and that for us is circumcision of the heart, and therefore circumcision of the flesh is unnecessary." However, there are major weaknesses in both arguments. In the first we have already established a continuity and not a discontinuity in the covenants, and therefore cannot allow the conclusion drawn on the supposition of discontinuity. The second argument is an argument from silence, which is always dangerous, and we may, also from silence, reply that Paul was trying to avoid for baptism the legalistic connotation that circumcision had for the Judaising party.

The inconclusiveness of these arguments is self-evident as scholars from the two sides remain unconvinced by the arguments offered by those who disagree with them. We must therefore return to the covenants and try to understand from them the significance of their initiation rites.

In the covenant with Abraham the oath-seal laid upon Abraham and his community on the same day, was that of circumcision, and the obligation was thereafter a permanent duty of the Abrahamic community. The sanctions of the oath-seal are contained in Genesis 17:14. By circumcision the covenant was cut, and was thus symbolised "the oath-curse by which the Abrahamic community confessed themselves under the judicial authority and more precisely under the sword of God Almighty." (1) After this circumcision is identified with the covenant (Gen. 17:9, 10, 13). Circumcision was in fact an oath of allegiance in which Yahweh is avowed as covenant Lord, and the people committed to Him in loyalty. Therefore, "circumcision ... was an act of consecration." (2) The knife-ritual signified both the consecration of the covenant and the curse by which the covenant breaker would be cut-off for unfaithfulness. In the knife ritual with Isaac the cutting was no longer to be partial, but total, in the cutting off of life. But, when the final hour came, the Lord Himself provided the sacrificial ram. Likewise in Christ He substituted Himself under the knife for sinners. Thus the circumcision of Christ was not merely His circumcision on the eighth day, but the circumcision of the cutting off of His "whole body of flesh through death" (Col. 1:22.) So it was that in union with Christ in His death, He who was representative sin-bearer, the Christian comes under judgement of death. But also in union with Christ we are raised from the dead, for death has no power over Him.

(1) *ibid.* p.42.

(2) *ibid.* p.44.

Therefore our dying with Christ is the putting off of the old man and the dominion of sin, and transformation to life in Him. This is in Colossians 2:11-12 and 3:5-9.(1) Thus the covenant is not a simple guarantee of blessing, but an acknowledgement of God's lordship, whose judgement has final verdict for blessing or curse on the human covenanter. Circumcision therefore signifies redemptive judgement under the redemptive law covenant in which through the Redeemer-Substitute there is "blessing-through-curse."(2)

However, we are still faced with the problem of whether the New Testament permits us "to interrupt baptism not exclusively as a sign of blessing, but, like circumcision, as a sign of Christ's redemptive judgement with its benedictions and maledictions alike."(3) It is important for us to note that in the covenant lawsuits which were then practiced, when a vassal broke a covenant with his suzerain, messengers were sent to warn the vassal of the consequences of this behaviour. It is as such a messenger that we must see John the Baptist. He is the bearer of judgement. Jesus Himself in the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33 ff and parallels) would encourage us to think that in the message of John, and in His own ministry, we have the divine ultimatum of judgement. The fact that both these messengers were killed as a sign of Israel's repudiation of God's lordship, whether or not Israel understood these actions in precisely these terms, is a declaration of the divine verdict against Israel. It is in the light of John's role as ultimatum messenger that his baptism can be understood as a symbolic trial by ordeal, threatening divine judgement. Those who came through the baptism ordeal were the remnant prepared to bear the ultimatum of the Great King. It was John himself who compared his baptism with water with the baptism

(1) *ibid.* p.47.

(2) *ibid.* P.49.

(3) *ibid.* p.50.

"with the Holy Spirit and with fire" of the One who was to come. The coming ordeal is made clear by John, and in His own baptism Jesus is doing more than identifying Himself with sinful men. In His baptism Jesus is undergoing a symbolic Christological act in which as Covenant servant He submitted Himself "to the judgement of the God of the covenant in the waters of baptism" and "was consecrating himself unto his sacrificial death in the judicial ordeal of the cross." (1) Because of his function as forerunner the baptism of John was not a perpetual sign, but a special sign bearing the divine ultimatum to the terminal generation. As Jesus passed through this baptism it meant to Him the passing under the curse of the knife in the same way as Abraham in Gen.15 had in circumcision passed under the curse of the knife. But in receiving the covenant sign the recipient consecrated himself by faith through ordeal to the Covenant Lord, and emerged assured that the curse had been removed and blessing given. John's baptism was the ordeal through which Israel must pass, for although circumcised she had no guarantee of inviolable privilege. "It was a sign of the divine ordeal in which the axe, laid to the roots of the unfruitful trees cursed by the Messiah, would cut them off. John's baptism was in effect a recircumcising." (2)

The baptism conducted by the disciples of Jesus shows a definite change in meaning from the earlier to the later ministry of Jesus. In the earlier baptism there is the symbol of judgement as under the Old Covenant, as with the baptism of John, but in the later baptism we have a sign of the New Covenant. (3) The change of meaning involves problems of scholarship which need not detain us here, but in baptismal practice of the early church the changed meaning is clearly seen.

(1) *ibid.* p.58.

(2) *ibid.* p.62.

(3) *ibid.* p.63. See also Beasley-Murray *op.cit.* p.67 ff.

There can be no doubt that the ordeal concept within Christian baptismal practice remained an essential part of early Christian thinking. In his writings Paul refers constantly to baptism as dying and rising with Christ, as being buried with Him, or as being crucified with Him. (cf. Rom.6:1-11; 1 Cor.15:12-22; Gal.3:27; Col.2:10-15). Peter too regarded baptism as of the Christian's judicial ordeal through the waters of baptism, likening it to the ordeal by flood of Noah (1 Pet.3:20-22). In the successful passage through the ordeal the people are accepted as the servant people of the covenant.

If we turn now to the vexed passage in Col.2:10-12 and try to find a more satisfactory exegesis, we find that the concept of the ordeal must influence our decision. In the "circumcision of Christ" of which Paul speaks, there can be no reference to His circumcision in the eighth day, for in this Christ was no different from Paul himself or any other Jew. The reference must be to Christ's "putting off the body of flesh" in the full circumcision of the cross. The Christians' identification with this circumcision, his own "circumcision not made with hands", is precisely his baptismal identification with Christ in His ordeal, and His resurrection victory. It is therefore faulty exegesis to try to contrast the external circumcision and hence the Old Covenant with the internal renewal by baptism in the New Covenant.

The continuity between the Old and New Covenants is of vital importance in Christian Theology, especially when it comes to interpret the meaning of baptism. The New Covenant's newness lies not in its negation of law, for obedience is still required for inheritance within the kingdom. Nor indeed is the Covenant of Redemption reduced to a guarantee of blessing. Jeremiah tells us a law will still be written, this time on the table of the heart rather than on tables of stone. It is a new covenant of law, in which the divine covenant of God to

man would be consummated in personal relationship of forgiveness and friendship. As in the Old Covenant, both blessing and curse are included in the New Covenant, and Paul warns that as the faithful (here the Gentiles) have been grafted on to the tree of the covenant, so the unfaithful (here the Israelites) will be broken off.

(Rom. 11:17-21 cf, also Jesus' words in John 15:1-8) Our interpretation of Christian baptism must therefore include the concept that it is a sign of the ordeal by which the Lord brings His servants to account, and is thus the New Covenant sign of consecration or discipleship.(1) The closeness of the correlation in meaning of circumcision and baptism is once again seen. "Both are confessional oath-signs of consecration to the Lord of the covenant and both signify his ultimate redemptive judgement with its potential of both condemnation and justification."(2) At the same time we must not oversimplify the complex meaning of baptism as a guarantee of salvation. The passing through the waters symbolises the passing through judgement which must be the way for every sinner, yet it does not prejudge the ultimate issue of his destiny. Baptism is a call to union with Christ in whom alone is promised a safe passage through the curse waters of the ordeal.(3)

In the administration of baptism it would appear self-evident that the baptism of adults by immersion will most eloquently express the ordeal of divine judgement as opposed to the sprinkling of infants. Despite this we must resist the practice for it neglects one of the most fundamental aspects of the covenant relation between God and His people, in that God has through His covenant established His divine lordship in an earthly community. It is the covenant community and not merely the covenanting individual where the emphasis must lie, else all that

(1) *ibid.* p.79.

(2) *ibid.* p.81.

(3) *ibid.* p.82.

would have been needed in the change from Old to New Covenant would have been from infant to adult believers circumcision. Within the covenant relationship between suzerain and vassal, the authority structure of the vassal community is not broken down, but, as can be seen from ancient treaties, the vassal community is bound to the suzerain through its authority structures. Therefore it becomes clear that an individual who enters covenant with God by personal confession is held responsible under the covenant for his subordinates. The biblical authority structure would most certainly include the authority of the householder over his household, and thus the New Covenant is administered in the community through its authority units. This does not presume that the children of believing parents are Christians by birth, but it means that the authority of the covenant Lord extends to the subordinates of disciples, and especially to their children.

The problematical reference in 1 Cor.7:14 to the holiness of children of whom only one parent is a believer can only refer to a holiness of status, which in biblical practice, would involve a dedicatory separation to God, in fact, an inclusion within the covenant community. Thus while holiness is a status given through covenant membership, as further argued in Rom.11:17 ff, we must not forget, as Beasley-Murray has done (1), that while the holiness of the branch is derived from the holiness of the root, the unbelieving branch will be broken off. Covenant status always demands covenant response and obedience. One conclusion that we may draw from this text is that in the Apostolic Church the administration of the New Covenant was closely linked with parental authority.

(1) Beasley-Murray. *op.cit.* pp.194-196. He also dismisses the idea of holiness of status with the unsupported plea that it is not characteristic of Paul or the New Testament generally.

When Jesus welcomed the children (Matt.19:13-15 and parallels) He was not, as some baptismal liturgies imply, sanctioning the rightness of infant baptism. He was however recognising the authority of the parents over their children to bring them to Him and place them under His authority.

The 'CIKOS-formula' of Stauffer in which he saw a reference to the baptism of children, and especially small children (1) thus gains support against its critics, not from a more detailed analysis of the use of the formula, but from a conceptual analysis of the authority structure of the household as accepted within the community of the New Covenant.

We may therefore conclude with Kline:

"It is therefore a matter of express scriptural teaching that the disciple of Christ is bound to bring those who are under his parental authority along with himself when he comes by oath under the higher authority of his covenant Suzerain. From this it follows that the Scriptures provide ample warrant for the administration of baptism to the children of confessing Christians, for baptism is the New Covenant rite whose precise significance is that of committal to Christ's authority and of incorporation within the domain of Christ's covenant lordship."(2)

The basis for the baptism of the children of believers is the covenantal authority of their parents over them. Their baptism is the sign of Christ's covenant lordship over them for blessing or curse, and by which they are consigned by oath to the Lord of redemptive judgement.(3)

What is needed in the liturgical administration of baptism is a rite in which the ordeal, the oath and its

(1) See Jeremias: *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries.* p.20 and footnote.

(2) Kline. *op.cit.* p.94.

(3) *ibid.* p.102.

consequences, and the victory of Christ for those who by faith are brought into union with Him, and through His victory are brought through curse to the abundant blessing of God. The role of the parents and of the community in bringing the child thus consigned by oath to the place of responding faith also needs to be given its due emphasis.

CHAPTER 5

GRACE.

We must now consider the problem of what we understand by the Christian Sacraments and how God works in and through them. Basic to the understanding of sacramental theology is the concept of the grace of God. We must therefore now try to discover the biblical concept of Grace, and from the insights we derive, work out a theology of the sacraments. We will then be in a better position to assess the position and status of baptism within the framework of the new covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF GRACE.

Neill asserts that "grace is very much a New Testament word. It does occur, of course, fairly often in the Old Testament, but without any depth of theological meaning." (1) The inadequacy of this statement is, however, soon recognised upon reading the work of Moffat (2) or of Torrance (3). In the New Testament we certainly have a new concept of grace, for grace is now clothed in flesh and blood and is "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6¹⁸, 1 Cor. 16²³, 11 Cor. 13¹⁴ etc), but to assert that the Old Testament concept of grace is "without any depth of theological meaning" is surely inadequate. But we are prejudging our conclusion, and must now turn to the scriptures and try to discover something of the concept of grace in the Old and New Testaments.

A. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

In the opening paragraph of his consideration of grace in the Old Testament, Torrance writes:

(1) S. Neill: Bible Words and Christian Meanings. p.54.

(2) J. Moffatt: Grace in the New Testament.

(3) T.F. Torrance: The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers.

"There is no one word for grace in the Old Testament as there is in the New, nor are the precise lineaments of New Testament thought manifest, but the substance of the doctrine is there. In fact there is no language that expresses so profoundly and so tenderly the unaccountable love of God as the Hebrew of the Old Testament. This is not thought of abstractly but in intensely personal terms as the active love of One who is the living and loving God of Israel. The dominant thought throughout is the amazing choice of Israel by God as grounded only in His free and unlimited love and as creating a community in fellowship with God who bestows Himself upon them as Father and Saviour for ever."(1)

Among the words used to express this unelicited and unaccountable love are ahab, hen, and hesed. The love of God is unconditioned except by His love and His will to love, and which cannot be enforced and cannot be claimed. In the LXX the translators wanted to avoid possible corruption of the Old Testament hen by Greek ideas of something physical and aesthetically pleasing as was connoted by charis.(2) When we come to the word hesed, upon which Torrance says recent research has cast a flood of new light (3), the emphasis is laid on the persistence and devotion of love. Hesed is the "fundamental relationship upon which the whole structure of Israelite society and religion rested. As such it embraces all social and personal relationships, but primarily it is a relationship between men and God which includes also men's relations with one another because they are all related to God in hesed."(4) Thus the covenant society is founded on hesed relation between man and God, for it is grounded on God's everlasting love and mercy. Snaith writes "that the true significance of the hesed of God is that it is "everlasting, determined and

(1) Torrance. op.cit. p.10.

(2) ibid. p.12.

(3) ibid. p.12.

(4) ibid. p.13.

unshakable. Wonderful as is his love for His covenant-people, His steady persistences in it is more wonderful still."(1)

Hesed is not necessarily associated with a definite bond in that it "can take place where there is no previous tie, but usually anticipates one and creates it."(2)

Hesed is also associated with promise, in that it is the act of kindness by which God chooses Israel and promises therewith blessing and salvation. Thus hesed is the self-giving of God to Israel, a promise which is confirmed by an oath and established in a definite covenant.(3)

"In this light hesed must be viewed as the great sacramental word of the Old Testament faith, while the covenant itself must be looked upon as sacramental pledge of God's unaccountable love. ... Ultimately, as Hosea and Jeremiah see it, it means the establishment of a new covenant, contrary to men's expectations, not one in which the divine command forms the basis of men's relations with God, but one in which the divine self-commitment invites men to approach God on the ground of His unaccountable but everlasting love."(4)

Thus, although the Old Testament does not, as indeed it cannot, contain the distinctive meaning that charis does in the New Testament, we have seen that here in the Old Testament there is a soaring concept of the unmerited love of God for His people. Here is the foundation upon which the distinctive New Testament meaning of charis can be built, and of one thing we may be assured, charis cannot be less than hesed and the other Old Testament words.

(1) N.H. Snaith: The Distinctive ideas of the Old Testament. p.102 quoted by Torrance. op.cit. p.14.

(2) Torrance. op.cit. p.14.

(3) *ibid.* p.15.

(4) *ibid.* p.16.

B. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The Greek word charis, translated "grace" in the New Testament, has a classical and Hellenistic usage which gives it a semi-physical connotation of that which is aesthetically pleasing. However in its New Testament usage as a technical word it is given an entirely new content of meaning. Grace is not a substance that can be handled (1), nor even so much is it a quality of God about which we can speak. "Charis refers to the being and action of God as revealed and actualised in Jesus Christ ... Grace is in fact identical with Jesus Christ in person and word and deed." (2) In the conclusion to his study of Grace, Moffat (3) implies the same content to the meaning of charis when he says that in the New Testament tradition God's contact with man is all of grace, which grace is expressed in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Thus it is that we find the often repeated phrase "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ", for, as the prologue to St. John's Gospel says, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (Jn. 1¹⁷)

In the Gospel narratives the use of charis in its special sense, as developed and used principally by St. Paul, is wanting. But in these narratives we encounter grace, not as a theological abstract, but in concrete manifestation. As Jesus meets with people in their needs and freely acts in love toward them, as He calls sinners or heals the sick or declares love and forgiveness, we do not have a picture of grace, but grace itself in action. Torrance enumerates two major emphases in the understanding of grace as found in the Gospels:

(1) Neill: op.cit. p.54.

(2) Torrance: op.cit. p.21.

(3) Moffatt : op.cit. pp.396 ff.

- (i) "God's love is bestowed spontaneously and freely, and is not evoked by anything in His creatures. Indeed God's love has all its reason within Himself. It is its own motive."(1) Therefore the need for anxiety by man on whether he merits God's grace disappears. The will of God for man's redemption is unconditional.
- (ii) "... Christ definitely identified the gracious and decisive movement of God for the redemption of men with His own person."(2) Thus His claim at Nazareth that the "acceptable year of the Lord" was being fulfilled in their ears (Luke 4:16-37) "Jesus deliberately confronted men with His own person as being identical with the Word of God."(3) Thus the grace of God in word and action is identified with Jesus Himself. This also makes clear that the initiative in man's salvation is absolutely with God, and that man is now able to approach God because in Christ He had committed Himself to them."

In its technical and theological meaning in the New Testament, charis is a word most fully developed and used by St. Paul. His traumatic conversion experience he saw as being utterly of grace, for as he said "by the grace of God I am what I am."(1 Cor.15:10) His confrontation with the crucified and resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road became normative for his thinking, and thus he thinks of Jesus Himself as God's unspeakable grace offered to helpless man. God is the one who offers this charis, but the person and act of Christ embody that charis.

In St. Paul's epistles charis has more to do with the act of divine intervention than with our receiving of it.(4) Charis is the presupposition of man's relationship with God and the sine qua non of Christian life. Because of his own almost unwilling conversion experience, Paul saw grace as being active in laying hold

(1) Torrance: op.cit. p.23.

(2) ibid. p.25.

(3) ibid. p.26.

(4) ibid. p.29.

of men in an act of forgiving and creative love. The results of the work of grace upon a human life were the "gifts and graces" to be found in that life thereafter. Paul saw his own work and ability as being entirely of grace.

Thus, to take a final reference from Torrance upon whom we have leaned heavily in this section:

"Grace in the New Testament is the basic and most characteristic element of the Christian Gospel. It is the breaking into the world of the ineffable love of God in a deed of absolutely decisive significance which cuts across the whole of human life and sets it on a new basis. That is actualised in the person of Jesus Christ, with which grace is inseparably associated and supremely exhibited on the Cross by which the believer is once and for all put in the right with God."(1)

II. THE THEOLOGY OF GRACE.

Now that we have analysed the biblical conception of grace we are in a position where we can ask some important questions and hope to get answers that will lead us in the right direction. If grace is the unmerited love of God and is identified with the person of Jesus Christ, how is grace mediated to man? The Old Testament definitely links berith and hesed with consequent ideas of a covenant community of grace; is this compatible with New Testament thinking, and if so what are the consequences for the Community of the New Covenant, and in particular for the rite of admission into the community? If grace is Jesus Christ, in what sense can we legitimately speak the mediation of grace, and in particular, of sacramental grace?

(1) *ibid.* p.34. In his treatment of grace in "Religious values of the Sacraments" 1928 p.66, Wotherspoon concludes that grace is an attribute of God, salvation itself, and divine power which can change human life. In the light of our discussion these would have to be qualified before being acceptable.

In the theological consideration of grace, with special reference to the working of grace in the sacraments, both Catholic and Protestant scholars are agreed in their conclusions that Grace is the divine initiative reaching out to unworthy man in his helpless condition. Thus, Thomas Aquinas writes, "Grace, because it is freely given, excludes the notion of something to which we have a right." (1) Although some precautions are taken by way of statements that grace is not a thing that can be handled, the impression remains that while not able to be handled, grace remains a substance that flows through certain means or channels. Part of our problem is one of language, for with abstract nouns such as "beauty" we are aware that they have no meaning except in relationship with descriptive words, here "beautiful things." However, grace is not thought of as an abstract noun describing nothing real. Grace is real, it works, it flows, it transforms - so runs our thinking. But if grace is a power like this, then we feel that we should be able to speak of it in terms of substance. A clue to a more meaningful understanding of grace is to be found in relationship concept of meaning for abstract nouns. Grace is Jesus Christ come in unmerited love to man to establish relationship with him. Therefore as we believe in the Personality of God as conceived in the Persons of the Trinity, Grace is Personal, and displays itself in personal relationships. (2) Thus, we can think meaningfully of grace in terms of growth, where it is not grace that is growing, but the personal relationship between God and man. There is also no need for us to speak of grace in simple terms as present or absent, or as present in differing amounts. Just as the personal relationship of human friendship may vary in depth between persons depending on whether the persons are casual acquaintances or intimate friends, so the

(1) Summa Theologiae 1a 2ae q III a 1 ad 2. Quoted by J. Daujat: The Theology of Grace p.59.

(2) P.T. Forsyth: The Church and the Sacraments. p.302. Wetherspoon: op.cit. pp.77 ff. pp.131 ff.

grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ and in friendship with Him, has its expression and outworking in personal relationship with Him. Thus we may say that the saint and the superficial Christian are not in possession of different amounts of grace, but that the grace-relationship with God is at different levels of intimacy.

A very real problem in the understanding of grace in the sacraments arises when considering whether the sacraments are valid and effective simply because they are done in response to the command and promise of God, and the worthiness or unworthiness, faith or lack of faith of the celebrant or recipients are of no account. Theologians of the Catholic or sacramental traditions tend to speak of "sacramental grace" to distinguish for thought between the operation of grace through and outside the sacraments, but are clear in their affirmations that "Sacramental grace is simply grace." (1) So also Daujat declares that the only difference between sacramental grace and grace received through any other channel is one of visible manifestation. There is no difference in nature between them. (2)

The problem of the understanding of sacramental grace arises when the sacraments are defined as visible signs that convey what they signify. God alone, who is the author of the sacraments, uses them as His instruments to produce grace in us, which grace is given ex opere operato through the sacraments. (3) The reason that grace is said to work ex opere operato through the sacraments seems to be that it is inconceivable that God should institute the sacraments through His Son, who is the New Covenant given to men, and by the sacraments covenant Himself to His people, and then fail to work when the sacraments are celebrated. This difficulty is increased when one hears

(1) Wotherspoon. op.cit. p.114. His italics.

(2) Daujat. op.cit. p.150.

(3) ibid. p.148.

that St. Paul speaks of a man receiving the Lord's Supper as judgement upon himself, (1 Cor.11:27-32) and that it is possible to receive the grace of God in vain (11 Cor.6:1). The history of the church also makes it clear that there are many who received the sacraments of baptism and communion, yet in whom there were apparently no fruits of grace. Daujat says that the grace is given in the sacraments ex opere operato and that its effectiveness in the life of the recipient depends on his "disposition to receive this sacramental grace", and evidences itself only in the bearing of more or less fruit.(1) Protestant thinkers, such as Wotherspoon, Baillie, Cullmann and others, try to retain the Reformation emphases that the human response of faith is necessary for the effective working of the sacraments in human life. Thus Baillie qualifies the ex opere operato doctrine by saying that while we must not forget that 'all is of God', "it seems better to say that sacraments operate through human faith."(2) Cullmann speaks in terms of the faith that is required in response to the action of God in the sacrament.(3) It seems clear that in both Catholic and Protestant tradition the sacraments are regarded as given by God, and that the sacramental symbols are not mere signs but convey what they signify, and therefore there must be at least a qualified doctrine of grace acting ex opere operato in the sacraments. On the other hand, we are most hesitant to say that human response is able to limit or negate the operation of the grace of God. We also do not want to say that the grace of God descends irresistably on a man and compels his response, with or without his acquiescence, and thus destroys the man's freedom and personality.

(1) *ibid.* p.148.

(2) D.M. Baillie: *The Theology of the Sacraments.* p.53. his italics.

(3) O. Cullmann : *Baptism in the N.T.* see p.31 and pp.47 ff.

Wotherspoon gives some valuable insight into our problem when he points out that the grace of God does not only work on a conscious level or on the level of the will. Indeed "God will not coerce ... and (this) is true of man regarded as will - but will is not the whole of man: he is also cognitive and emotional - we can have no scruple in conceiving of God as working on the will through that which in understanding and feeling conditions the will's action." (1) Further, we must understand that from the Christian point of view man is not free, for his freedom is already invaded by sin. Therefore if we think in terms of a divine invasion, it is an invasion "to emancipate and thereby to restore personality" for man is "what God enables him to be." "There is no return to innocence: but there may be a return to holiness."

Valuable as these insights are, we are still left with our problem: is man able to resist or negate the operation of sacramental grace? If so, can we speak of sacramental grace working ex opere operato? If not, does the human response of faith play no part in man's salvation? If a way out of this dilemma is to be found, the very fact that we have here reached an impasse compels us to seek deeper understanding elsewhere.

In our treatment of the concept of the covenant we saw how, as Kline pointed out, the covenant of God with man is not a promise and guarantee of blessing, but it is a "blessing-through-curse", and man's participation in the covenant, and his performing of the rite of initiation into the covenant, places him under judgement. In Christ this judgement is redemptive, but it contains inescapable elements of both benediction and malediction. (2)

(1) Wotherspoon: op.cit. p.104.

(2) See earlier arguments. Also Kline. op.cit. pp.47 ff.

The New Testament speaks uncomfortably clearly of the wrath of God, and however we may demythologise it and its consequences of punishment and hell, we must see the work of Christ in terms of judgement. It is certainly true that the purpose of the incarnation was not judgement (Jn.3:17), but it is also true that Jesus spoke in terms of judgement for those who do not believe (Jn.3:18-21) and who do not act in response to their belief (Matt.25:31-46). There are many references in the Gospel narratives to wrath, judgement and separation, so we will regard this as established. For the unconvinced we refer to passages such as Matthew 21:28-46; Matt.22:1-14; Matt.25:1-30; Mk.8:34-92; and others. No attempt is being made here to say that Jesus' mission was judgemental and not for the salvation of the world. However in His mission of salvation, the element of judgement on sin is inescapable, and is most clearly seen in the Cross itself.

What this argument leads us to is that the mission of Jesus is not an unmixed blessing. To the unbeliever it brings the warning of punishment and curse. But in our treatment of grace we saw that for the New Testament writers grace is Jesus Christ. We must therefore conclude that grace is not always a blessing, and the operation of grace within human life is not a guarantee of blessing, but is both a promise of blessing to the believer, and a warning of judgement to the unbeliever and the careless. Thus if we bring our interpretation of grace into line with our concept of the covenant, we may speak of sacramental grace working ex opere operato without fear; for no longer are we speaking in terms of guaranteed salvation or baptismal regeneration because God is covenanted to bless. The sacraments may indeed be to our judgement if we do not respond to them in faith, but the grace is given. It is this concept of covenant and grace which should make us act with caution in the administration of the sacraments, for to the unbeliever

we may be bringing the judgement of grace rather than the salvation of grace. However action with caution does not mean action with fear. The Covenant Community has always been the community under judgement (Amos.3:2), but it has become the community of God whose love and mercy have been expressed in the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus those who are within the community of the covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ by faith in Him, should have no hesitation in presenting their children for baptism in His name, for He who is mighty to judge is mightier to save.

CHAPTER 6

BAPTISM AND FAITH.

In his sermon 'Salvation by Faith' John Wesley said that faith is in Christ, and God through Christ. Faith is "not barely a speculative rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart." Further Christian Faith is "not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of His life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon Him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us....."(1) More than two hundred years have not altered that definition of faith for "Evangelical" Christians, for in his analysis of faith Beasley-Murray echoes the words of Wesley when he writes that "in the New Testament faith is no mere intellectual acceptance of a set of religious propositions."(2) Jesus Christ Himself is the object of faith, which calls forth a total response of the whole man to Him.

In his letter to the Romans Paul gives his own interpretation of Christian faith as the foundation of the whole exposition which follows. Paul writes that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith ... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν)." (Rom.1:16-17). Faith is the response of man to the proclamation of the gospel of God's saving act in Jesus Christ. Within this response of faith is a call for a man to place his full allegiance in Jesus Christ, to whom he owes fullest obedience and completest trust. Faith also involves not only a believing in the heart, but also

(1) J. Wesley: Forty Four Sermons. "Salvation by Faith" p.3.

(2) G.R. Beasley-Murray. op.cit. p.267.

a confession with the lips that Jesus is Lord (Rom.10:9), which is a grateful acknowledgement to the divine love, and a total surrender of the self, mind, heart, body and will, in obedience to Him who alone is able to give salvation. (Acts 4:12.)

This brief analysis of Christian Faith can be supported from many parts of the New Testament, and we do not wish here to contest the interpretation. However, lest it be thought that this theology of faith be adequate, it must be pointed out that if this be all that can be said about Christian faith, the danger of pietism remains, and there is little to be said against it. The problem with this interpretation is not that it is wrong in what it affirms, but that it is incomplete. We can certainly agree on the need for the total response of faith required in the individual, but we must see the individual not as an isolated being, but as part of the whole community to whom Christ is calling and through whom He is working. Thus, to refer to our earlier discussion on the covenant with its emphasis on the community, we may say that Christian faith is an individual response to the proclamation of the saving work of Christ, but it is also that which brings the believer together with other believers into the community of the New Covenant. Thus faith in any adequate Christian sense cannot be simply that which links the believer to God only, but it is that which, because it links the believer to God, also links him with the rest of the divine society. In fact it is through the divine society, the Church, that faith is brought to the individual, whether through proclamation, teaching, or the reading of the Scriptures. These are rightly the activities of the Church, and we may thus assert that extra ecclesiam nulla salus, not because salvation is the property of the Church which she may bestow on whomsoever she chooses, but because she is the chosen instrument of God through which the Holy Spirit

reaches men and women. We do therefore neither well nor wisely if we forget that along with the faith of the individual there is the community of the Faithful.

Before we can discuss the relation of faith to baptism, there is one more problem with which we must deal. It is the problem of the relationship between faith, works, and grace. This problem is almost as old as Christian tradition itself, for we find it dealt with as far back as in James 2:18-26. In the Letter of James the problem is that of whether in fact "faith" and "works" are opposites and mutually exclusive, and the writer concludes that not only are they not opposites but that faith must be expressed in works or action. However this does not solve all the problems, for we are left with the question of whether faith itself, because it is a human response, is not a work, and therefore we still have in effect a "salvation by works". Alternatively, we may say that faith is a gift given by the grace of God, and therefore we are not saved by our own work of faith, but by the divine gift of grace which made faith possible. We may restate the problem thus: Is faith dependent on grace, or grace dependent on faith? If the grace of God is made dependent on faith, we have in effect laid down a condition for the action of God, and thus are back in the legalism against which Paul fought as he felt it was a denial of the Gospel, for the action of God would depend first on man. The essence of the Christian Gospel is that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom.5:8) for "He first loved us" (1 Jn.4:19). We must therefore conclude that all is of God, the gift of His grace, even the human faith response is His gift. Thus Heron writes "the over-emphasis on faith, making it a condition of baptism, springs from a Pelagian view of human nature, which imagines that unregenerate man can choose whether to sin or not."(1)

(1) J. Heron: The Theology of Baptism. Scottish Journal of Theology 1955. p.44.

Thus the grace-gift of faith comes to us. We may refuse it, for this is the terrible responsibility of the freedom we have, but in the receiving of the gift there is no merit to us, for it is a gift.

Despite the language we have used here, it must not be thought that faith is a thing we have, a substance we can handle. Like grace, faith is seen in relationship with Christ, and in the subsequent acts of obedience. Thus faith is not either present or absent as an entity of matter, but is a relationship of trust and obedience which may grow in the heart of the believer and in the life of the believing community, and which shows itself as a motive to Christian action.(1)

In his analysis of the relationship between baptism and faith, Cullmann concludes:

- "(1) after Baptism, faith is demanded of all those baptised;
- (2) before Baptism, the declaration of faith is a sign of the divine will that Baptism take place, demanded from adults who individually come over from Judaism or heathenism, but in other cases lacking;
- (3) during the baptismal act, faith is demanded of the praying congregation."(2)

Beasley-Murray indicates a similar conclusion when he writes that "faith is needful before baptism, that Christ and His Gospel may be truly confessed in it; in baptism, to receive what God bestows; and after baptism in order to abide in the grace so freely given and to work out by that grace what God has wrought within."(3)

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- (1) The Concept of "Faith as Motive", which is not meant to exclude "Faith as Relationship", may be seen in such passages as Luke 7:36-50; 19:11-27; Mark 5:25-34; Matt.25:34-46; Luke 7:1-10; Hebrews 11.
 - (2) O. Cullmann: op.cit. p.55.
 - (3) Beasley-Murray: op.cit. p.274.

It is necessary that we should examine these conclusions that our understanding of the relation between baptism and faith might be clarified.

1. Faith after Baptism

In the New Testament baptism is set forth as the act by which the baptised is incorporated into saving acts of Jesus Christ, and also into the body of Christ. Faith is a condition of remaining within community of Christ's body, the Church, and therefore is a necessary requirement of all who have been baptised. Hebrews 6:6 and 10:26 point to the danger facing those who fall away from grace, and hence to the vital necessity for faith. We may refer also to our analysis of both grace and faith, and thus conclude that because baptism is our incorporation into Christ it marks a radical new beginning in the life of the baptised, a new beginning which must bear the fruits of a growth in grace and in faith. The new beginning is not a guarantee that all thus baptised will remain within the community, but both Paul and John deal harshly with those who disrupt the brotherhood and point to the requirement of Christ that Christians love one another. This is possible only within the community of faith, for through faith comes the strength to accomplish these things. Therefore, for those who would remain in Christ and His body, the Church, faith is demanded of all those baptised into Christ.

2. Faith before Baptism

In his treatment of "Baptism and Faith" Beasley-Murray (1) stresses the New Testament situation where the Apostolic church is beginning to fulfil its divinely appointed mission in the world. It is a fundamental premise of the New Testament that faith is vital in the process of man's salvation. Thus Paul writes: "God is

(1) G.R. Geasley-Murray: op.cit. pp.267-275.

one; and He will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith (ἐκ πίστεως) and the uncircumcised because of their faith (διὰ πίστεως)." (Rom.3:29) Thus Beasley-Murray concludes that "to deny the necessity of faith in the light of such statements is to make Paul's words meaningless and to nullify his preaching."(1) He also refers to some words of Nygren who wrote "It is not man's faith that gives the Gospel its power; quite the contrary, it is the power of the Gospel that makes it possible for one to believe." Thus the convert who comes for baptism receives through baptism the same gifts of grace as we received through faith.(2)

In the New Testament it is clear that for the majority faith is demanded of adult converts before they were baptised. In the situation where the head of a household is converted (Acts 16:15 & 33) it would appear that the faith and the influence of the householder was sufficient grounds for the baptism of the rest of the household.

Cullmann is surely justified in his assertion that the function of faith demanded in the case of the baptism of an adult is a "sign for the Church and a criterion to baptised adults of their being chosen."(3) The baptism of the convert is his incorporation into Christ and his perseverance within the community.

It is at this very point that much of the controversy over baptism finds its origin. That faith is demanded of adult converts is indisputable, but that a similar faith should be expected of infants is unreasonable, indeed impossible. The argument has then taken two lines; the one affirming that each individual is to be baptised on the grounds of his own faith, irrespective of household or parentage or association with the life of the Church; the

(1) *ibid.* p.269.

(2) *ibid.* p.272.

(3) O. Cullmann: *op.cit.* p.50.

other affirming that baptism is to be administered to the infants of believers on the strength of the faith of the parents (either or both) and the faith of the community. If we turn to the New Testament for a solution to the problem we are met with either silence or further difficulties. The New Testament is totally silent on the baptism of the adult children born to believing parents, and it would appear that 1 Cor.7:14, where such children are called "holy", would imply that the children of believers require no baptism. The difficulties that confront us in this problem is that the "household" formula so carefully worked out by Stauffer and so diligently defended by Jeremias (1) is by no means certain proof that infants were included in New Testament baptisms.(2)

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation my brother has written:

"When we baptise the infant child of Christian parents we effect nothing to alter his relationships with his parents or the Church, for his relationships with the Church are determined by his parents. Nor do we effect any change in these relationships when we baptise the adult children of Christian parents. In not baptising infant or adult children of Christian parents nothing is done to minimise the sacramental grace of Christian baptism, nor the historical and social cruciality of Christ in the history of salvation. Rather in not doing so we confirm the community-creating significance of the atonement which runs through history and society, binding men together in their corporate union with Christ. Unless we wish to introduce a baptismal legalism in the place of circumcision legalism (which cannot have been Paul's intention), then it is possible to accept that a child born to Christian parents without faith (in the sense of a maturer adult response) and without baptism is a member of that body with which Christ is so completely united that it bears his identity."(3)

(1) J. Jeremias: op.cit. p.20-23.

(2) See discussion under "Early Christian Baptismal Practice" - the "OIKOS-formula".

(3) B.S. Moore: "In Community In Christ" p.526.

This argument may be agreed to be a strictly logical development from the silence and difficulties in the New Testament on the baptism of the children of believers, but it is surely unacceptable because it assumes too strong a sense of family solidarity, and too weak a sense of the value of individual members of the family. In the English translation of his original German work Jeremias changed his point of view on the baptism of the infants of believers because he felt that to have no rite of incorporation was unacceptable.(1) Jeremias does not finally prove his case, but puts forward strong arguments in support. We could take this argument further and say that were no children of believers baptised, baptism would have remained applicable only to those who upon conversion from religious beliefs other than Christian, professed the faith. Thus baptism would retain its significance only in the missionary situation. Within the Christian community itself the practice would have soon died and become but a memory. That this is not so is clearly evident from the writings of the fathers, who, while they do not agree on when the children of believers should be baptised, are unanimous in their belief that they should be baptised. Thus we may say that the embarrassing "high sounding assertions"(2) made on the occasion of the baptism of the children of believers, whether infant or adult, are neither embarrassing nor mere sound, but indeed the incorporation of this individual into Christ and His Church.

We may conclude this discussion by repeating our earlier assertion that for adults, whether Converts to Christianity or simply those who have not been previously baptised, faith is required before baptism. For infants, faith is also required, but this time not of the individual baptised, but of the parents (or at least one of the parents) and of the Church.(3)

(1) J. Jeremias: op.cit. Preface and pp.44-48.

(2) B.S. Moore : op.cit. p.526.

(3) See later discussion "Baptism and the Church".

3. Faith during Baptism

A fundamental difference in presupposition makes Beasley-Murray and Cullmann make seemingly contradictory statements on the place of faith during the baptismal act, as was seen in their statements at the beginning of this discussion. For Beasley-Murray the baptism is necessarily a believer's baptism, and the place of faith for the believer during the act of baptism is to make him receptive to the gifts of God given during the act - his incorporation into Christ and his receiving of the Holy Spirit. If we grant his premise, what Beasley-Murray says is undoubtedly true for the adult receiving baptism. What is to be regretted in his treatment is that Beasley-Murray does not state with sufficient clarity or emphasis what is the role of the Church in believers' baptism. Certainly he does not ignore the necessity of the Church in the proclamation of the Gospel, but it would appear that what is most important is the faith of the believer. However, if we have allowed the concept of the covenant community to take hold of our thinking, we will neither exaggerate the faith of the individual nor neglect the vital importance of the Church of bringing him to faith, of praying for the new convert, and of sustaining and nourishing him in the faith. He is a believer in a community of believers.

Thus we must hear the important words of Cullmann when he says, "the faith of the congregation, though not to be represented as vicarious faith, does yet at the moment of the baptismal event belong to the act of Baptism This faith which has the person baptised as its object is in fact an indispensable element in the baptismal act."(1) Cullmann sees the importance of faith in those around confirmed in the healing miracles of Jesus where it is often the faith of parents or friends

(1) O. Cullmann: op.cit. p.54. His italics.

which is the important element in the miracle. See thus Mark 2:5; Matt.8:10; Mark 9:14; and also Matt.17:19 (where lack of faith prevents miracles).

Thus in the sacramental act of baptism through which the baptised is incorporated into Christ and His Church and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church also and at the same time receives the baptised into itself on the basis of some assurance, through the faith of the individual, his parents, or sponsors, that he will remain in fellowship with the community. The Church thus prays that it, and with it the individual added to it through baptism, will remain through faith in the union effected in baptism.

CHAPTER 7

BAPTISM AND THE SPIRIT.

In the New Testament the baptism of Jesus is closely associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus as Son and Servant of God in whom He was well pleased. (Matt.3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:21.) For Jesus the result of the descent of the Spirit upon Him was that He began His mission as Messiah.

For the New Testament writers Jesus is the one true Israel, the 'seed of Abraham' (Gal.3:16), the 'true vine' (Jn.15:1), and through Him alone is God's covenant with Israel being fulfilled. Through Him alone is God dealing with the world. Thus the new community of God which is established through the saving work of Jesus is called 'the body of Christ' (1 Cor.12:27), so intimate is the relationship between Christ and His church. He is the head of the Church, its Lord, its Master. He is the bridegroom and the Church is the bride. New Testament language is rich in its metaphors for the Church that the intimate link between Christ and His Church may be clearly seen.

Not only is the link between Christ and His Church one of the closest intimacy, but the link between the members of the community is close. It is an organic, living body, intimately related and mutually dependent (1 Cor.12:12-31). This intimacy and inter-dependence in the Church exists because all have received of the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4).

It is within this framework of thought that the New Testament writers speak of baptism. In baptism we "put on Christ" (Gal.3:27) and "put on the new nature" (Eph.4:24). This is no mere symbolic act, but is the means by which the Christian shares the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom.6:1-11), and is so intimately linked with Christ that he is henceforth a man "in Christ", sharing in the very life of Christ Himself.

This work of incorporation into Christ is and must be the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus Paul writes "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor.6:11), and also "for by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body" (1 Cor.12:13). Thus Beasley-Murray writes that "in the Acts and Epistles baptism is the supreme moment of the importation of the Spirit and of the work of the Spirit in the believer." (1) He continues that "what is incontestable from the New Testament point of view is the impossibility of dividing Christ and His gifts of grace from the Spirit whom He has given to His Church." (2) Himself a Baptist, Beasley-Murray criticises his denomination for their emphasis on baptism as a witness to "faith already embraced and an experience of the Spirit already known." (3) He states firmly that in baptism there is not a fresh experience of grace, but the experience of grace by the Spirit. (4) Beasley-Murray quotes with approval some words of Wheeler Robinson who wrote thus: "Baptism, in its New Testament context, is always a baptism of the Spirit." (5)

We may therefore assert with a degree of confidence that through baptism the baptised is incorporated into Christ and into His Spirit-filled community, and that Christian baptism is baptism for the reception of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38; John 3:5; 1 Cor.12:13).

However, although the above reflects the emphasis of New Testament teaching, we are not left without difficulties, for there are at least three passages in Acts where there seems to be a separation between baptism and

(1) G.R. Beasley-Murray: op.cit. p.275.

(2) ibid. p.275.

(3) ibid. p.277.

(4) ibid. p.277.

(5) ibid. p.277. Wheeler Robinson: Baptist Principles, 1938. p.77.

the gift of the Spirit. We must now turn to these passages and see whether the statements we have made need either modification or qualification.

The first of the references in Acts to the separation of baptism and the Holy Spirit occurs in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. In the narrative we are told that "while Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone forbid water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:44 & 47) Thereupon they were baptised "in the name of Jesus Christ." (v 48) Here baptism is an external sign of a reality already accomplished. However we must not press this story too far. The Church at that time was facing a crisis in the problem of the mission to the Gentiles and their inclusion in the Church. Despite their conversion to Jesus Christ and their newness of life in Him, the Jewish Christians were not easily able to abandon the Jewish principles by which they had been raised. It was very difficult for a Jew to receive a Gentile, and some clear indication from God was necessary before this could be done even within the Christian Church. At the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29) the problem of the inclusion of the Gentiles was discussed, and Peter used the story of Cornelius to indicate to the Church that those whom God had blessed, received, and given His Holy Spirit must be accepted by the Church. The difficulty of the admission of the Gentiles was not removed by the story or the Council, but this narrative remains as of cardinal significance in the Christian approach to this problem. It is not meant to be a story determinative for the doctrine of baptism, and we need not therefore qualify our earlier statements.

The second of the problematic passages in Acts in this connection again concerns the Gentile Mission, and is to be found in Acts 8:14 ff. Here we are told that on

hearing that Samaria had received the word of God, the apostles sent Peter and John to them, "who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus."

(Acts 8:15 & 16) Here, as with Cornelius but in reverse order, we have a clear separation between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. With Cornelius the Spirit was given before baptism, but in Samaria the baptism of those who had "received the word of God" was not accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. For the Samaritan believers this gift was only given when the apostles laid their hands on them. Can this incident be used as an apostolic precedent for the practice of baptism followed at a later date by the laying on of hands in "Confirmation" for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Lampe thinks not.⁽¹⁾ Lampe points out that the laying on of hands was frequently used in the Old Testament, and could be a sign of blessing (Gen.48:13-14), of identification (especially in the sacrificial ritual of offerer with victim) (Lev.3:8; 16:21), and so could be a sign used in the commissioning of one person to be the representative of another (Num.27:23). In the New Testament Jesus laid His hands on people as a sign and means of making contact with them, and of identifying Himself with them. A further New Testament use of the laying on of hands "in addition to its use in healing and blessing, is ... in the delegation of a particular office or the commissioning of men to do a particular task on behalf of some person or persons." (Acts 13:3) ⁽²⁾ In view of the age-long and mutual hostility between Jesus and Samaritans, the conversion of the Samaritans and their reception and acceptance into what was still a largely Jewish Christian community involved peculiar difficulties. Thus Lampe concludes that the gift of the Spirit was withheld, not to demonstrate a defective

(1) G.W.H. Lampe: The Seal of the Spirit. pp.69 ff.

(2) *ibid.* p.71.

baptism, but that the Samaritan Church might be given, through the laying on of apostolic hands, a "most certain sign of their genuine acceptance into the fellowship. The imposition of hands is then primarily a token of fellowship and solidarity; it is only secondarily an effective symbol of the gift of the Spirit; it becomes such a symbol solely in virtue of being a sign of incorporation into the Church of the Spirit." (1) Thus through this incident joy enters the Samaritan church, and we are meant to see through the incident how the Spirit of God breaks through the enmity and hostility of men and brings a new sense of unity and community. It is therefore reasonably certain that we are not meant to find here an entry for a doctrine of 'baptism and confirmation', or a theology that baptism is by itself an incomplete rite, whose completion is in the laying on of hands.

The third problematic incident in Acts where baptism and the Spirit are involved concerns the disciples at Ephesus, and is recorded in Acts 19:1-7. When Paul visited these disciples, despite the fact that they had believed in Christ, they had not received the Holy Spirit nor knew that He was available. Paul is astonished, and asks "Into what then were you baptised?" (v 3). This question of Paul's seems to imply that he believed that Christian baptism and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit belonged inalienably together. When the disciples replied that they had only received John's baptism, Paul explained this shortcoming to them, and they were then "baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus." (V5). It is at this point that the problem of this narrative arises, for it is recorded (V6) that the Holy Spirit was given to these disciples, not as a result of their Christian baptism, but only after Paul had laid hands on them. This presents us with a real difficulty to which

(1) *ibid.* p.70.

there is no easy solution. Was Christian baptism, at that time, always or usually accompanied by the laying on of hands? We have no evidence with which to answer this question, except to point to Paul's question to the Ephesian disciples. He did not ask them whether they had had hands laid on them, but asked only about their baptism. If the laying on of hands was not usually associated with baptism it is difficult to know why Paul laid hands on these disciples. Whatever the answer to this problem is, the indications seem to be that the baptismal rite included both the baptismal act with water and the laying on of hands, and that the result of the whole rite, which was regarded as a unity, was that the Holy Spirit was given.

We may thus return to our earlier affirmation and state that in the New Testament Christian baptism was regarded as an incorporation into Christ, in whom also was the Spirit and therefore it was a rite for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmation

In the above discussion we have hinted at a problem that was to become very large in later Christian thinking. We have reached the conclusion that in the New Testament baptism was a complete rite of initiation into the Spirit-filled community of Jesus Christ, and possibly included the laying on of hands, but certainly was believed to be accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christian baptism was a water rite by means of which the Spirit was given, and can thus be called Spirit baptism.

It seems hardly necessary to state that scholarship is by no means unanimous in reaching the above conclusion. There are many scholars, particularly those who feel they hold a brief for the practice of confirmation, who would see that in the above incidents we do in fact have established in the Acts the practice of the laying on of

apostolic hands in confirmation for the reception of the Holy Spirit. We must therefore turn again to the New Testament and discover what is taught there concerning the seal of the Spirit.

In ancient times both inside and outside the Old Testament the wearing of a mark or a brand served to identify the wearer with owner of the mark. Thus cattle, slaves and prisoners of war were branded with a mark of ownership to prevent desertion. Frequently devotees of a god wore the mark of their god to show themselves as slaves of their god. It is against this background that Paul's describing Christians as 'slaves of Christ' who are 'bought with a price' (1 Cor.6:20) is more easily understood. In the Old Testament we find the prophets wearing a mark (1 Kings 20:41; Isa.44:5; Zach.13:6) and the phylacteries worn by the Jews on forehead and hand are the mark of Him to whom they belong. These and other passages (e.g. Ezek.9:4-6) speak of the marks which are the seals of ownership by which the wearer is recognised.

St. Paul on three occasions speaks of the seal of the Spirit (2 Cor.1:22; Eph.1:13; 4:30). The seal is the mark placed upon the Christian by which he will be recognised and given his inheritance (Eph.1:13-14). What was this 'seal of the Spirit'? Lightfoot doubts whether this refers to baptism (1), but we might refer to the use of the seal in Romans 4:11 where the seal of circumcision given to Abraham was an outward sign and proof of a spiritual reality. For the Christian the ultimate spiritual reality is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the seal, the outward rite, by which He is given is baptism. Thus we might speak of baptism as the seal of the Spirit, for herein he receives the mark of his incorporation into Christ, and although this mark is not visible to human eyes, it will be recognised by God.(2 Tim.2:19) It is

(1) J.B. Lightfoot: Apostolic Fathers. pt.1. Vol.1.
p.226. n.9.

therefore highly improbable that Paul could speak of baptism as incorporation into Christ, and yet refer to some other rite, such as confirmation, as the seal of the Spirit.

What then are we to make of those events in Acts where there is a laying on of hands? Luke is apparently more concerned with giving a picture of the expanding church as it undertakes its Missionary task to the Gentiles, rather than with giving the details of initiation rites, by which converts were admitted to the Church.

In the events of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the disciples became aware, under the power of the Holy Spirit, that they were commissioned to create the community of God's Messiah. There is no record of the baptism of the apostles, but it would seem highly likely that, following the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the disciples would also have presented themselves for John's baptism. There is also no need for us to wonder that there was no laying on of hands on the day of Pentecost either for the apostles and those with them, or of the 3000 added that day. The proclamation by Peter of the kerygma was the result of and resulted in dramatic events in the Church. Although some scholars claim that the Spirit was given by the laying on of Apostolic hands, Peter in fact promised that those who turned to Jesus in repentance and faith, and submitted themselves to baptism would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

In the story of the laying on of hands in Samaria that we have already discussed, some scholars (Foakes-Jackson, Mason, Wirgman) have argued that despite their baptism by Philip, the Holy Spirit was not given, as the apostolic hands had not been laid upon them. For this and other occasions in the apostolic church "the assumption that only Apostles laid hands on the baptised is almost as difficult as it would be to suppose that only

Apostles administered Baptism. Twelve men could not be everywhere."(1) When Paul received the laying on of hands of Ananias there was a simple physical reason for the action - his blindness. Jesus had frequently touched those whom He healed, and if we read more into this incident we are surely going beyond the evidence. Argument has been put forward that this was Paul's ordination as a prophet (2) or that through Ananias the Lord was commissioning Paul as the "Apostle to the Gentiles." (Acts 9:15) Even this argument seems doubtful because the Church in Antioch laid hands on Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3) before they went out on the first missionary journey. It seems reasonable therefore to regard the gift of the Spirit that Paul received at the hands of Ananias was the gift of healing, and that his commissioning, or ordination, to the mission to the Gentiles was given at the hands of the Church in Antioch.

The story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) we have related how Philip, having brought knowledge and insight to the Ethiopian, witnessed his conversion. The Ethiopian requested baptism and Philip could see nothing to prevent this, so Philip baptised him. Dix (3) alleges that the idea of baptism without the baptism of the Holy Spirit was so unthinkable that he inserted a miracle to correct matters. The Western Text adds to verse 39 that the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch, and reads "And when they came up out of the water the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch and the angel of the Lord caught Philip away to Azotus." However in the Textus Receptus the Holy Spirit indeed is present after the baptism, but He removes Philip rather than enters the eunuch! However we must not be over hasty in believing

(1) H.J. Wotherspoon: op.cit. p.197.

(2) G. Dix: The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism. A & C Black. 1946. p.18.

(3) ibid. p.18.

that the eunuch did not receive the Holy Spirit at his baptism, for we are told that he went on his way rejoicing, and joy is one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. (Gal.5:22)

In his discussion of confirmation Wotherspoon "hazards a definition" of what is understood by confirmation.

"Confirmation is that which with express sign and with appropriate words may be done by the Church as part of the administration of Baptism or in sequence to that Sacrament, in witness to and in view of the dependence of the baptized on the Holy Spirit for grace and strength to bring forth the fruit of their union with Christ, and in order to their endowment with spiritual gifts for Christ's Service."(1)

Wotherspoon does not suppose that this definition will be unanimously accepted, for, as he points out there are those who regard baptism as a complete rite in itself through which the soul is "forgiven, regenerated and united to the Body of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit" and through which the soul is "actually and personally indwelt by the same Holy Spirit."(2) The trend of his argument would indicate that this is the position he would support. On the other hand there are those who believe that while baptism "bestows regeneration and forgiveness of sins, joins us to the Body of Christ and gives us a share of His Divine and Human Natures, all these gifts are to be thought of as actions from without, His personal indwelling being reserved for the moment of Confirmation."(3) Wotherspoon gives an impressive list of scholars who would support this view and comments that "this is weighty support - but the weight seems to be rather in the supporters than in the argument or the evidence adduced."(4)

(1) H.J. Wotherspoon: op.cit. p.186.

(2) ibid. p.199.

(3) ibid. p.199.

(4) ibid. p.200.

With this conclusion of Wotherspoon we are driven to agree by our own analysis above of both baptism and the laying on of hands in the New Testament. Baptism is regarded as the rite of admission into the Church, and through baptism the Holy Spirit is received. Christian baptism is not baptism of water only, but of water and the Spirit, and there is nothing in the New Testament which makes us look for something else as either the completion of the initiation rite or for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The history of confirmation would appear to begin only with Tertullian, for the earlier writings of the Fathers (the Didache, and Justin Martyr) are silent on the question, and any conclusions drawn would be guesses or arguments from silence. Tertullian is the first to describe that the newly baptised is "thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction." (1) and next "the hand is laid on in blessing, inviting and invoking the Holy Spirit." (2)

Both Lampe (3) and Pocknee (4) speak of the separation of baptism and confirmation in the West as a "disintegration" of the New Testament teaching. That there had indeed been a separation of these rites in the West is obvious both from a study of the writings of the Fathers and of the historical development of the Church to the present time. However in the Eastern churches there has been no separation of rite, and baptism, anointing (chrismation) and first communion follow each other as stages in one event on the same day, and this whether the baptised was an infant or an adult.

(1) Tertullian: De Baptismo C 7. E.C. Whitaker: Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy." p.8.

(2) Tertullian: De Baptismo C 8. Whitaker. op.cit. p.9.

(3) G.W.H. Lampe: op.cit. p.149 ff.

(4) C.E. Pocknee: The Rites of Christian Initiation. p.22.

In conclusion we may say that the New Testament regards baptism as a dramatic rite of incorporation into Christ and His Baptism of death and resurrection through which rite the Spirit is given to the baptised. There is one baptism and it is of water and Spirit. There is further no evidence of any other initiation rite or confirmation, although there is at times a laying on of hands. At times this laying on of hands appears to be part of the one rite of baptism, while at others it appears to be an ordination or commissioning of individuals by the Church to a special task in its Spirit-Mission to the world. Thus if we would recover what appears to be New Testament practice, Baptism (infant or adult) should be regarded as a complete rite, and should be followed later by a commissioning to task rather than confirmation.

CHAPTER 8

BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH TODAY.

The theology of Baptism to which we have given our attention in this work, is not a theology unrelated to the real life situations of ministers and priests in their own churches and parishes. That the doctrine remains problematical to many is seen in the fact that many churches are making denominational studies of the doctrine, that the men who must deal with the practical problems will be able to give a clearer lead to their people, and have solid foundations for their practices. Accordingly, in this chapter we shall turn to some of the publications and study documents produced by some of the Christian Churches. Fairly full statements will be made on these documents as being relevant to recent researches and investing with the doctrine of Baptism. Thereafter we shall refer to some of the problems which cause much agony and heartsearching to many pastors.

A. CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON BAPTISM.

1. The Methodist Church of S.A.

For many years the Methodist Church of S.A. was content to follow its tradition of infant baptism as it had received it from the Church of England at the hand of John Wesley.(1) However in more recent years two factors have caused this tradition to be questioned, the one is the general ferment in theological circles on the whole question of Baptism, and the other is the Pentecostal movement that is taking place in the life of the Methodist Church.

(1) For a study of early Methodist practice see
B.G. Holland: Baptism in Early Methodism.

The Conference of 1954 published in its Minutes a "Simple Statement on Baptism" in which the traditional approach was re-affirmed. The 1968 Conference re-affirmed this statement with the addition of a declaration that the Church "knows no doctrine of 're-baptism'". However, the unrest in the Church was beginning to show itself, and the question of Baptism was referred to a special Commission for study.(1) The Conference of 1969 retained the traditional position, but laid down certain conditions of membership for parents before their infants could be baptised.(2) At this Conference an unpublished study document was produced, and it was referred back to the study Commission as the Conference felt the document was inadequate. The 1970 and 1971 Conferences(3) re-affirmed and reprinted the "Simple Statement on Baptism" which appeared in the 1954 Minutes. However both these Conferences re-affirmed their belief in infant Baptism, but acknowledged that reform in Christian instruction might be needed. During 1972 a "Study of Baptism"(4) was circulated to Methodist ministers for their study, for discussion in Synod, and for reporting to Conference.

Some detail in this theological problem has been given here because the Methodist Church is my own denomination, and much of the discussion and many of the problems find their parallels in other denominations.

What is the basic content of this unpublished Methodist "Study on Baptism"? The document begins with the origins of the problems in the Methodist Church and continues with a brief survey of the history of baptismal theology up to and including the modern debate. There follows a section headed "Various Questions" in which the following questions receive consideration:

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- (1) Minutes of Conference 1968 p.63 para.10.
 - (2) Minutes of Conference 1969 p.67 para.12.
 - (3) Minutes of Conference 1970 p.60 para.10, 1971 p.62 para.10.
 - (4) Unpublished paper of the Methodist Church of S.A. entitled "A Study on Baptism" by the Sub-Commission on Doctrine.

What does baptism do?

Is Infant Baptism different from Adult Baptism?

What about Re-baptism?

What is Confirmation?

What is 'Receiving the Holy Spirit'?

The study document affirms the sacramental understanding of baptism, and hence rejects the possibility of re-baptisms. However in its consideration of adult baptism and confirmation, the pastoral problems of infant baptism are mentioned together with the lack of a public rite for solemnization of conversion, and the document gives a definite impression that its compilers favour adult baptism. However in the conclusions the document permits infant baptism provided the Christian community accepts and discharges its responsibilities to both parents and children.

The Synods reacted variously to the document, some favouring adult baptism, others advocating a stricter exercise of discipline by the church, coupled with criticisms of the document itself. The major critiques of the document are that it is inadequate in its study of faith, grace and the church, and that it almost disregards the covenant. The most serious criticism is that it states that "if doctrines are to be reliable guides for Church practice they must be based on Scripture, with ecclesiastical tradition serving only as a secondary guide", and then surprisingly goes on to state that "it is improper to argue that everything which rightly expressed the relationship between God and the Chosen People twenty centuries ago is necessarily a right expression of that relationship today. God is not so unreasonable as to ignore changes in human culture and community structure." These contradictory statements become the more confusing when it is noted that while some attention is given to the tradition of the Church,

there is no serious attempt made to deal with the biblical passages or concepts. In the light of the confusion of thought in this document, the varied reactions of the Synods of the Methodist Church are more easily understood.

The 1973 Conference once again re-affirmed its traditional stand, although the "Simple Statement on Baptism" previously minuted was referred to a Commission for possible revision. The major concern expressed was one of discipline in the baptism of infants. The "Study of Baptism" document was referred to the convenor of the Study Commission, the Rev. Dr. D.W. Bandy, for revision, expansion and possible publication in his own name.

2. THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

In 1953 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a "Special Commission on Baptism" to examine the doctrine afresh and stimulate "such thought and study throughout the Church as may lead to theological agreement and uniform practice." This task was undertaken with characteristic thoroughness by scholars and Presbyteries, and in 1958 a Study Document entitled "The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism (1)" was published. This is a very adequate study of baptism in which the greatest shortcoming is brevity, for it does not elaborate on some important issues that are raised.

The first section of the study is a very brief treatment of the antecedents of Christian Baptism. The study assumes too easily a continuity between the Old and New Covenants and their rites.(2) There is truth in the belief in this continuity, and it is to be regretted that

(1) "The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism": A Study document issued by The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland.

(2) *ibid.* p.11 and 45.

the concept of the covenant was not expanded to bring out how it is that because Baptism is objective fact, it cannot be obliterated, and therefore, for any man, "since he cannot undo his Baptism, it remains to become his judgement." (1) That this is so becomes clear, as we have seen, when the covenant is seen as blessing-through-curse (2), but unfortunately this study document does not bring this out. The section on the antecedents concludes with a brief but adequate statement on the work of John the Baptist.

The second section of the study is a consideration of "Baptism and the Salvation Events" and it is very clearly demonstrated that Christian Baptism is inseparably linked with the incarnation and saving work of Jesus Christ. It describes how the Baptism of Jesus is not merely His Baptism in the Jordan by John, but includes His suffering and death. Therefore in its Christian meaning, Baptism refers not merely to the rite but "also to the salvation events which give the rite its meaning and which are operative in the rite through the work of the Holy Spirit." (3) Another important truth that is presented is that "God is not bound by water Baptism" (4), and in the lives of those in whom God had worked before water baptism, such as Cornelius, the rite "acknowledged what God had done and included them into the apostolic fellowship", thus "Baptism by water is in the New Testament the normal means by which all, born in later days, are brought within the sphere of the One Baptism of Christ." (5)

Against those who might doubt that the practice of Baptism derives from Jesus Himself because of the questions of scholars concerning the ipsissima verba of Jesus in

(1) *ibid.* p.44.

(2) see earlier discussion p.71-73.

(3) Church of Scotland. p.17.

(4) *ibid.* p.19.

(5) *ibid.* p.19.

Matt.28:18 ff, the Scottish document does not doubt that Jesus did give some such command to His Church to administer Baptism. The trinitarian formula for baptism is implied in the New Testament use of phrases such as "into Jesus Christ", and the significance of the use of this formula is that the baptised is baptised into Christ's Kingdom, into discipleship, and into union with Christ.(1)

In the third and major section of the study there is an analysis of the significance of Baptism in the New Testament. The treatment does not follow the normal lines of exegetical scholarship, but is a study of the theological implications of the New Testament passages, and is done under the following headings:

- a. Baptism as Cleansing in the Blood of Christ.
- b. Baptism as Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection.
- c. Baptism as Regeneration.
- d. Baptism common to Christ and His Church.
- e. Baptism as the Seal of the Spirit.
- f. Baptism as a Sacrament of the Incarnation and the New Creation in Christ.

The reference to cleansing in Baptism is particularly significant in the missionary context of the New Testament, and must not be forgotten in any full analysis of the rite of Baptism. This cleansing is a symbolic representation of the work of the Grace of God which is Jesus Christ and is applicable to all those baptised, both adult and infant, for now this person is made clean.

(1) *ibid.* p.21.

The lengthy B section of this discussion emphasises the reality of the change that takes place in Baptism. This symbolic death and resurrection "is not merely symbolic. It is the act of transfer into the new age." (1) By our participation in Baptism in Christ's death and resurrection we are given an "effective sign and pledge of that ultimate resurrection." (2) Here is the initiation then of our life in Christ by which He also comes to dwell in us. In the treatment of the link between Baptism and the Lord's Supper it is not made sufficiently clear that the objective givenness of Baptism requires a faith-response, and the faith-response to that gift of God has as its fulfilment the participation in Holy Communion, where once more God gives Himself to His people through sacramental symbol.

Baptismal Regeneration, though treated here, is not adequately treated because the operation of grace and faith are not given their rightful place, and we are left with a degree of uncertainty in this matter. However, once we see, (with Torrance himself, who is the convenor of this study commission, in the work to which we have already made extensive reference (3)) that Grace is Jesus Christ who comes, as we have reasoned, in blessing and in judgement, and it is He who is given in Baptism, we can understand that here is given the status of Sonship. This ~~conveys~~ a guarantee of this person's acceptability to God, a guarantee of the availability of salvation to this person, but implies still the need for his own response to what God has done for him. Here is no finalised re-birth and inclusion in glory, but that inclusion in the new age of God, through the acceptance of which the promises of God made in Christ are made real. The other significant contribution here is a denial of

(1) *ibid.* p.26. Their italics.

(2) *ibid.* p.28.

(3) see pp.82 ff. above.

too heavy a leaning on Greek mystery cults for sacramental theology, (1) an affirmation of which was one of the factors which lead Barth to deny sacramental theology. (2)

In the consideration of the place of children in Baptism the Scottish divines stress the family solidarity which was so real in New Testament times, which makes it impossible to think that children, and even infants, were excluded from Baptism. The references to our Lord's acceptance of children are carefully examined and the following important statement is made:

"If the conditions of entrance into the Kingdom of God are at the same time being born of water and of the Spirit, and becoming like a little child, it is incredible that our Lord would have us refuse Baptism to those children whom even adult candidates for Baptism need to resemble in order to enter the Kingdom of God. It is "as little children" that all must be baptized, whatever their actual age." (3)

In the final section of the study where attention is given to the subject "towards a formulation of the Doctrine of Baptism", a proper emphasis is given to the fact that the Sacrament of Baptism introduces the baptised to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, and is not a mechanical act by which some "substance" such as grace is received as a gift. Because in Baptism one enters a relationship, we can speak of growth and response in meaningful ways. Here too, there is attention given to faith, where the rightful stress is laid on the faithfulness of God to keep His Word and Covenant, and where the faith of the people involved is only secondary. (4) The study closes with a timely warning not to confuse, nor to separate, the divine and human aspects of the sacrament. It is error here that has caused much misunderstanding and error in sacramental theology.

(1) Church of Scotland. op.cit. p.33.

(2) see pp.44 H. above.

(3) Church of Scotland. op.cit. p.50.

(4) ibid. p.58 ff. See also above p.94 H.

This Scottish study is an important document for those who would understand Baptismal theology. It is to be regretted that the concepts of grace and covenant were inadequately treated, because, it is my belief, here lies the key to a deeper understanding of the biblical teaching in Baptism.

3. THE CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF S.A.

A Commission in Christian Initiation was set up by the Episcopal Synod of the C.P.S.A. in April 1970. The report of this commission was presented to the Episcopal Synod of 1971, and laid before the Provincial Synod in 1973. The terms of reference of the Commission were "to examine the statement made by the Episcopal Synod in 1944, and in the light of the advice given by Lambeth 1968 to advise the Bishops how to bring this in line with modern practice." (1) The Lambeth Report to which reference is made expressed concern at the lack of a form in which laymen would be commissioned analagous to the ordination of clergy. They recommended as possible a line of experiment, the separation Confirmation and First Communion, in such a way that a baptised person of suitable age may be admitted to Holy Communion, after adequate instruction. Confirmation would then be the commissioning or confirmation of a person in or to a task in the Christian Society. An alternative experiment would be to Baptise and confirm simultaneously, with admission to Holy Communion to follow at an early age after appropriate instruction. The Bishop would then commission those who, yet later, made a responsible commitment.

After study the Commission concluded that a Sacrament of Christian Initiation, in which the present Sacraments

(1) C.P.S.A.: A Report on Christian Initiation, 1972.
p.1.

of Baptism and Confirmation should be re-united, should be instituted, and this should be known as Baptisma. This rite of Baptisma would be a rite of Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit, and would include the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. This could be administered by a bishop or a priest to either adults or infants of believing parents. Children thus initiated could receive Holy Communion as soon as their parents and parish priest agreed that they were ready. Training should be continuous through the Christian life. A special service in which Baptismal Vows and vocation could be affirmed should be applied to all adult Christians.(1)

To one who is not an Anglican it is clear that their Baptismal theology is made more complicated because of their view of Confirmation as a sacrament. In the Churches where the tradition is to have only two sacraments and whose Baptism is administered to infants, Baptism is the sacrament of initiation, and the "confirmation" that follows is meant to be a rite for the faith-response of the individual. Hence, for the C.P.S.A., it becomes necessary for them to use the term "Baptisma" to mean what other churches mean by "Baptism". This is clearly seen in their effort to re-unite the initiation rite, a rite which in other churches has always been one. The union of Baptism and Confirmation as Baptism, and the fact that administration may be delegated by the bishop to the parish priest, is by implication a threat to the position of the bishop, who will obviously have to delegate most Baptismas, and hence his representation of the whole church to the local church would be broken, and his entire office become almost redundant except as administrator.

(1) C.P.S.A.: op.cit. p.2.

The C.P.S.A. document also expresses the wide-felt concern at the results of the "indiscriminate administration of infant Baptism"(1) and recommends that Baptisma be only administered to believing adults or the infants of believers. A service for the dedication of infants could be devised for the use of those parents who desire it for their infants.

A relatively large amount of space is given by the C.P.S.A. Commission to the "Rites of Passage" in certain societies. An adequate critique of this treatment requires a special knowledge of anthropology. What is clear is that in certain tribal societies there are rites of passage in which cutting of hair or foreskin, or washing, are part of the ritual which imparts a new status or cleanness in the tribe. Because tribal society has a strong sense of unity, there is little doubt about who is "in" and who is "out" of the tribe, that is, it is clear who has become separated from the life of the society, and needs to be incorporated or re-incorporated. This study by the C.P.S.A. is of great interest for an interpretation of Baptism, and as an ad hominem justification of certain practices such as the Baptism of either adult believers or of the children of believers who are entering the Christian society by birth or belief. On the theological side this kind of thinking would require very careful definition of "Church" that it may be clear who is in the Church and thus qualifies for the administration of baptism to their infants, and who is outside the Church and for whom some other form of rite would be necessary. In general the Anglican concept of the Church has been bedevilled by the Church of England, which in popular thought is regarded as the "nation at prayer". Thus every Englishman is born not only into society, but also into Church. This equation

(1) *ibid.* p.4.

of society and the Church is unsatisfactory. The Church is a Society, as the C.P.S.A. document rightly stresses in many places.(1) What needs definition is how the society of the tribe or nation differs from the society of the Church.

A serious lack in this present C.P.S.A. document is the total omission of any biblical treatment or any real theological approach, apart from a rather brief "Working Definition of Baptism"(2). Part of the reason for this may be contained in their reference to the English Report "Christian Initiation 1971."(3) Appreciation is expressed for scholarship of the report, but although the South African Commission say they were unable to agree with all its theology and conclusions, no attempt is made to say what the English theology was, or why their conclusions differ.

Many members of the C.P.S.A. were dissatisfied with the report, and it was referred back to a reconstituted commission for further study.(4)

A study of these documents of the three Churches has been included to demonstrate that research is continuing in the Doctrine of Baptism. There are other documents of other churches available, and the discussions and conclusions are widespread and varied. It is my belief that no real progress will be made until the Biblical concepts are more fully understood, and thus far more attention should be given than has been given to studies on sacraments, grace, faith, covenant and indeed to the doctrine of the Church itself.

(1) *ibid.* p.23 and 24.

(2) *ibid.* p.11-13.

(3) *ibid.* p.2.

(4) Acknowledgement is made here to discussions with the Rev. Canon R.T. Verryn on the subject of the C.P.S.A. document.

B. PASTORAL PROBLEMS.

Many pastoral problems pose questions that are not merely pastoral, but have serious theological implications. This is particularly true of Baptism. In this section of our discussion we turn to the difficulties that are raised, not so much by academic scholarship, but by ministers and priests, involved in pastoral situations. Our task here will be to indicate the problems, some of the implications, and possible lines of thought towards solutions. The actual solutions will however have to be hammered out on the anvil of the life of the Church.

One of the pastoral problems that raises serious questions arises from the fact that, while there is an almost unquestioning administration of baptism to the infants of all parents who request Baptism, a relatively small percentage of the baptised come to faith or participate in the life of the Church. This poses the question - despite our theological affirmations of the positive action of God in Baptism, does anything really happen? If something does happen, why does it bear so little fruit? The hard facts of church life are that of those who are baptised as infants, only some appear for confirmation, and of the confirmants only a fraction participate in any way in the life of the Christian Community. This problem must make us clarify our theological thinking, and especially our theology of Church and Sacraments.

Another implication of the situation in the Church concerns its divisions. If the Church is a Covenant Community, as we have tried to show, but there is no visible sign of that Community, but only differences and denominations, just what do we mean when we speak of Baptism as being the incorporation of the baptised into Christ and the Church? Should the divided Church administer Baptism at all? The lack of unity of the

Church is a great disadvantage, but to say that the Church must in visible form be fully what Christ intended before it can function as His Community, is a counsel of perfection. The Church has never been what ideally it should be, for its saints are still sinners, but to say that she has never fulfilled her calling and ministry of reconciliation between God and His people, is manifestly untrue. Thus the Church must neither cease to strive, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become what she ought to be, nor must she cease to fulfil her task and calling in the world.

Some pastors have raised the question of discipline within the Church, and have advocated the Baptism only of adult believers or of the children of believing parents. This assumes too easily that it can be determined who is and who is not within the Community. In many situations it is easy to say whether a certain individual or family is inside or outside the life of the Church, but the boundary between them is by no means precisely defined. A definition of the boundary may regularise practice, but would introduce into the Christian Church a legalism which is foreign to the New Testament teachings. However, because of the great problems experienced in local Church situations, many ministers and priests are inclined to favour this imposition of discipline within the Church, despite its difficulties.

Two factors of modern life which adversely affect our Church life are the collapse of the life of the family, and a terrible and crippling apathy for the needs of others.

The collapse of the family with its resultant misery, divorce and loneliness, is a serious problem for the Church, for in this loss of family solidarity the whole concept of community and social solidarity is lost. The question must then be asked whether in this day and

age we can meaningfully speak of the Covenant Community or the solidarity of society. If the terms are rendered meaningless, we have but two choices. One is to abandon their use and to concentrate on the individual alone. This would have far-reaching theological implications, not only for Baptism, but for the whole Church. The other choice is to acknowledge the realities of society and its problems, and to try to teach and inculcate within the life of the Christian Community a new and deep sense of commitment to Christ and His Church. This would awaken a sense of involvement and caring within the community, and new life would flow through its veins.

The concomittent problem of the above collapse of a sense of solidarity is the growth of apathy. It is tragically often only too true that modern congregations are appallingly careless of those they have received in Baptism. Is this what Bonhoeffer would call an administration of 'cheap grace'? It seems that what is needed here, as above, is a new sense of caring, so that within the life of the Christian Community it does not become a question of legal definition to determine who is inside and who is outside the Community. Each person's position would be determined by his own attitude, relationships and responsibility within the Community. This represents a long road of struggle and instruction for the Church, but within the eternal dimensions of her life, no road can be rejected because it seems either long or hard.

However, to return to a more hopeful note, we may ask whether it is more meaningful to the individual and/or the community to baptise the children of believers as adults or infants. The solution to this problem will be determined by a comparative evaluation of the community and the individual. If, as some believe, the individual is of greater importance than the community, though not separated from it, the response of the individual to the

working of Grace must take priority. Thus Baptism will be administered, as in the Baptist Church, to those who have come to personal faith. This will be a special type of believers Baptism. We refer to this as a special type of believers Baptism to distinguish it from the New Testament believers Baptism where the believers were usually those who were coming in to the Christian Community from outside, and not as in the usual modern situation, those who have grown up in the community and come to a personal faith. On the other hand, where the concept of the Covenant Community dominates thinking, the individual, while not devalued or despised, is seen first and foremost as a member of the community where there are strong mutual responsibilities, baptism will normally be of the infants of believing parents. The Community thus undertakes for the support and instruction of both parents and children, that they may "become and even remain Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to their life's end." (1) If we are right in our consideration of the Covenant Community, then Infant Baptism must be the norm for the Christian Church, and the Church will then undertake and discharge its responsibilities to all those baptised into Christ, that they might come to the full response of faith, and participation in the Community.

The final problem that we shall consider, though not the final problem that could be raised here, is one of the liturgical administration of Baptism. Apart from the questions of immersion, pouring or sprinkling, it must be admitted that many baptismal liturgies give the impression of some rather sentimental ceremony of blessing, rather than the dynamic victory of God being brought to the baptised. This was not ever thus, for in some ancient Churches the Baptistry stood apart from the

(1) Methodist Baptismal Liturgy.

liturgical centre, and after Baptism the newly baptised and the whole congregation moved in triumphant procession from the Baptistry to the Church. Some sense of this triumphant procession is retained in those Churches where the font stands at the entrance to the Church. What is needed is not merely a full restoration in visible form in the liturgy of the significance of Baptismal symbolism, but the words spoken need a greater ring of the victory of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the sense of the oneness in Christ of the New Community(1). One suggestion that has been made is to stop the practice of private baptisms, or simply including baptism as a part of a service of worship, but to have **special** Baptismal services as occasion demands, and in these services to give full weight to the wonder of what we believe to be happening in this sacrament of Initiation.

(1) See W.D. Maxwell: Holy Baptism and Resurrection.
 Studia Liturgica 1962. p.181.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION.

This study has helped us to perceive the significance of Christian Baptism as it arose from its antecedents, and yet differed decisively from them in meaning and significance. We have seen how Baptism grew from the New Testament situation into the life of the Early Church. We have considered the sacramental nature of Baptism, that here, while the Community is visibly active, in this holy sacrament, God is the doer of what is done. It is by Him, whose Grace is seen in Jesus Christ, that we are brought to new life within the Community of His Covenant and what He can do for adults, He can do for infants as well. However, it is good for us to remember that His presence is also for our judgement, and that there therefore remains upon us as individuals and as Community the requirement of faith and faithfulness. We have seen how it is that the Holy Spirit is given in Baptism, and we believe it is through His indwelling presence and power that we are able to come into the Family of God and enjoy that fellowship with Him, which is salvation.

We have also seen that, despite many centuries of thought and study, no final doctrinal definition of Baptism is yet achieved, and that the Churches are still giving this serious attention.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that this study, while not definitive or final, will make some contribution to an understanding of the wonder of the activity of God in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

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