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# Why does the Church Baptize? The Eschatological Aspect of the Rite of Baptism

by E. R. Rodgers

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## THE NATURE OF THE QUESTION

I want to pose the question, 'Why does the Church Baptize?' The precise character of the issue that I raise will be sufficiently indicated by three quotations.

First from F. F. Bruce:

'The contrast of the words of John the Baptist between his own baptism in water and the Coming One's baptism with the Holy Spirit might have prepared us for the discontinuance of baptism in water when once the gift of the Spirit was bestowed'.<sup>1</sup>

Then from Johannes Schneider:

'That the early Church baptized at all presents something of a problem . . . If the Messiah was to baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit, then it would seem to follow that Spirit-baptism should have taken the place of water-baptism in the early Church'.<sup>2</sup>

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Finally from Karl Barth:

'Why did the primitive community have to be a community of the baptized and a baptizing community? Was this necessary? Could it not be content with the baptism of the Holy Spirit which it had either received or was expecting, with its faith in Jesus Christ and all that this included by way of gifts and obligations?'<sup>3</sup>

So the question is, now that the Holy Spirit has been given, why does the Church continue to administer the rite of baptism?

Now there are those who would at once assert that such a question is based on a misunderstanding. All three quotations assume that when John the Baptist spoke of baptism in the Holy Spirit he was referring to some purely spiritual experience. These objectors, however, would contend that this is not so for, apart from a few manifestly metaphorical usages, the word baptism and its cognates carry the necessary meaning of a rite involving the use of water. Accordingly, when John spoke of 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' he was pointing to a baptism that would be

<sup>1</sup> *New Testament History* (1969), 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Baptism and Church in the New Testament* (1957), 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Church Dogmatics* IV 4 (1969), 46.

not merely in water but in Spirit as well. The distinction of such a baptism from other baptismal rites would consist in this that it would be the means or the occasion of the reception of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

On this understanding there is no problem with regard to why the Church baptizes. It does so because this is essential for the fulfilment of its God-given responsibility. Those whom it baptizes thereby receive the Holy Spirit and so become Christians. It is claimed then that baptism in the Holy Spirit is Christian baptism in contrast with John's baptism which was merely a baptism in water.

It may in turn be replied that this is far from being a necessary or natural understanding of the Baptist's words, 'I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:8). That it is possible and preferable to regard them as presenting a contrast between a water rite and a Messianic outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17) J. D. G. Dunn<sup>5</sup> has sufficiently shown. Apart from a considerable variety of figurative meanings found in contemporary secular literature, the New Testament itself clearly uses the concept of baptism figuratively (*e.g.* in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50).<sup>6</sup> That the phrase 'to baptize in the Holy Spirit' is to be taken figuratively is supported by the consideration that it was 'the Coming One' who was to baptize in the Holy Spirit and only in a most strained fashion could it be said that Christ had himself administered a rite of baptism that conferred the Holy Spirit. On the contrary what the New Testament presents as the fulfilment of John's prediction is the outpouring of the Spirit upon the waiting disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5, 2:1-4). 'The event,' says I. H. Marshall, 'was a purely spiritual baptism. There is no mention of any baptism with water at this point. For the event stands in deliberate contrast with Johannine water baptism'<sup>7</sup> (*Cf.* Acts 11:14ff.). Of this spiritual baptism it is distinctly asserted that Christ is the agent (see Acts 2:33). The Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of John's words.

#### WHY DID 'BAPTISM' PERSIST AFTER PENTECOST?

If then there are reasonable grounds for regarding John's statement as presenting a simple contrast between water and Spirit as the media of the baptisms administered by John and Jesus respectively and, more especially, if baptism in the Spirit by the ascended Christ is seen as the climax of

<sup>4</sup> See, *e.g.*, O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1950), 10f.

<sup>5</sup> *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (1970), 18-22.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of baptismal terminology in the New Testament see D. W. B. Robinson, 'Towards a Definition of Baptism', *The Reformed Theological Review*, 34 (1975), 1-15.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Significance of Pentecost', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 30 (1977), 353.

John's water-baptism, we are brought back to our question, why did the Church continue to baptize? Why wasn't the rite entirely superseded?

A short, and sufficient, answer is that the Church baptizes because Christ, its acknowledged Lord, laid the requirement upon it (Matt. 28:19f.).<sup>8</sup> This raises the vexed question of the dominical authority of the so-called Great Commission for it has to be acknowledged that many scholars do not accept it as strictly historical. However, that issue need not be debated here for the fact that baptism has been practised in the Church 'always, everywhere and by all'<sup>9</sup> makes it virtually certain that the content, if not the form, of the Commission derives ultimately from the Lord and Head of the Church.<sup>10</sup>

But this gives rise to a further question. Since it may be assumed that baptism is not a mere arbitrary touchstone of obedience we may ask why Christ required the Church to baptize. What is the significance of the rite?

Any attempt to answer that question must take into account the fact that the background and basis of Christian baptism was provided by the baptism of John the Baptist.<sup>11</sup> Our Lord submitted himself to John's baptism and, according to the Gospel of John, administered an analogous baptism (3:22, 26) through his disciples (4:2). So it seems inevitable that when, in obedience to Christ, the Church baptized it would understand what it was doing in terms of the significance of John's baptism.

However, there are not a few scholars<sup>12</sup> who make not John's baptism but Jesus' submission to it the basis of Christian baptism. At his baptism he received the Holy Spirit and this is taken as a paradigm of Christian baptism which is seen as the cause or the occasion of the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel accounts do not support this view.<sup>13</sup> Most clearly in Luke

<sup>8</sup> Cf. K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 50ff., D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments* (1964), 41f.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 50. The statement is not absolutely accurate as the position of such groups as the Quakers indicates. Moreover there are those who question whether baptism was practised in the very earliest days of the Church. See e.g. references in R. E. O. White *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation* (1960), 131-134. However, the contention is in the main supported by the evidence.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the issue see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), 77-88.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, in his Institutes IV, XV, 7, 8, 18, completely identified the two baptisms and almost all other writers on Christian baptism have at least recognized a strong connection. See, e.g., G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (1951), 20; K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 70, 85f.; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol.1 (1952), 39; H. Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church* (1937), 80.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., W. F. Flemington, O. Cullmann, G. W. H. Lampe, K. Barth and R. E. O. White.

<sup>13</sup> See discussion in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, 45-67, and J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, 23-37.

(3:21f.) but also in the other Gospels (Mark 1:9ff., Matthew 3:16f.) Christ's baptism and the descent of the Spirit upon him are presented as separate events. Jesus had been baptized and was praying when the Spirit came upon Him. It is probably significant that the New Testament draws no line of connection between the baptism of Christians and that of their Lord. It does not speak, for instance, of following Christ through the waters of baptism. Moreover it is to be noted that his reception of the Spirit is not pointed to as a fulfilment of John's prediction. Indeed it is not called a baptism of the Spirit but an anointing (Acts 10:38, Luke 4:18). There is no suggestion of an analogy between his experience and ours. The baptism of the Sinless One, thereby identifying himself with sinners, was necessarily unique.

So then if Christian baptism is to be seen as in direct succession to the Baptist's rite, taking over where he left off, we ought to be able to deduce something of its significance from that of John's baptism.

#### WHAT, THEN, WAS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM?

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All four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles refer to the ministry of John the Baptist (*e.g.* Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18; Acts 10:37). He is presented as the predicted fore-runner of the 'Coming One', the Messiah (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76, 7:27, *cf.* Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3). He is the one sent 'to prepare the way of the Lord' and to declare the imminence of the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2). His description as 'the Baptist' or 'the Baptiser' suggests that baptising was his distinctive activity.

The baptism that he administered to those who responded to his preaching is described as a 'baptism of repentance' (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24, 19:4; *cf.* Matt. 3:2, 8), that is, a baptism characterized by or expressive of repentance. In it the candidates confessed that they were sinners (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5) who had turned back to God in order that they might be ready when the Kingdom came. In Mark (1:4) and Luke (3:3) it is further specified that John's baptism was 'for the forgiveness of sins'. There is debate whether forgiveness was offered there and then to the truly penitent or they were merely assured of a forgiveness to be declared at Messiah's judgement when he established his Kingdom.<sup>14</sup> Since the gift of God's forgiveness was the supreme gift expected of the Messianic times<sup>15</sup> and since Jesus' opponents accused him of blasphemy

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<sup>14</sup> See G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.*, 22; R. E. O. White, *op. cit.*, 85; J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, 17; K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 57f. for discussion.

<sup>15</sup> N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (1963), 75.

when he pronounced present forgiveness on a man and there is no hint of any such censure on John: it seems preferable to regard forgiveness as presented as the goal of repentance-baptism, something to be pronounced by the Messiah when he sets up his judgement.

Another feature of John's reported preaching that requires closer attention was his prediction of a Messianic baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophets had spoken of a future outpouring of the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> As Lampe says, 'A general outpouring of the Spirit of Yahweh was an important part of Israel's eschatological hope.'<sup>17</sup> He goes on to assert a little later, 'For the outpouring of the Spirit in the times of the end, the coming of the Messiah had to be awaited. A general bestowal of the Spirit had long been associated with the Messiah, who was to be pre-eminently the bearer of God's Spirit.'<sup>18</sup> This probably needs some modification.

The Old Testament says nothing of a Messianic outpouring of the Spirit and the passages that Lampe cites from the intertestamental<sup>19</sup> and rabbinic<sup>20</sup> literature give but dubious support to such an idea. Some slight support may be found in the material from Qumran.<sup>21</sup>

The position appears to be this. There is in the Old Testament a promise of a coming Messiah and of an outpouring of the Spirit. It is not definitely stated that the Messiah will pour out the Spirit but the Spirit is said to rest upon him (Isaiah 11:2, 61:1). As Dunn comments, '... the step of fusing the two thoughts, of an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit and a Spirit-anointed Messiah, was hardly a very great one and was bound to be made sooner or later.'<sup>22</sup> He makes the further plausible suggestion that John, perhaps influenced by Qumran teaching, may have taken the final step.<sup>23</sup>

It is perhaps surprising that in the intertestamental period and so in the time immediately before John there are only meagre indications of an expectation that the Spirit was to be poured out. However, this almost total eclipse of the Old Testament promises may be explained by the prevailing legalism of that era when the Spirit's gift of prophetic inspiration was also stifled and the people longed for a clear prophetic

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Numbers 11:28; Isaiah 32:15, 44:3ff.; Ezekiel 11:19, 18:31, 36:26f.; cf. Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Ezekiel 37:14, 39:29 and Joel 2:28-32.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 29f.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Enoch 62:2; Pss. of Sol. 17:42; Test. of Levi 18:7.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. Rabbah, 2.

<sup>21</sup> See J. D. G. Dunn, 'Spirit-and-Fire Baptism', *Novum Testamentum*, 14 (1972), 88-92 for a discussion of the evidence.

<sup>22</sup> 'Spirit-and-Fire Baptism', 91.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lampe, *op. cit.*, 31.

voice again to be heard.<sup>24</sup> What is not surprising is that the promise of the Spirit should be revived by one who was a 'prophet, and more than a prophet' (Matthew 11:9; cf. Luke 1:15ff.). Coming 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' as the divinely appointed forerunner John made the Messiah's baptism in the Spirit the eschatological climax for which his water-baptism was but a preparation.

Because of John's previously noted emphasis on judgement many hold that for him the Messianic baptism was to be a fiery visitation of judgement. This is based on the reading in Matthew (3:11) and Luke (3:16), 'He shall baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.'<sup>19</sup> Since the word translated Spirit may be either wind or breath, John's intended reference could have been either to the fiery breath of the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 4:4, 11:4) or the wind of judgement which would sweep the chaff away to be burned. After Pentecost the early Church found another significance in the Baptist's words and interpreted the saying as referring to a gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

However it is not necessary to argue the alternatives for it may be contended that John had in mind on the one hand the Messianic outpouring of the Spirit in salvation and on the other the destroying fire of judgement on the unrepentant.<sup>25</sup> Whatever decision be reached on this issue what is clear is that John's message was through and through eschatological. The coming Kingdom and the One who would introduce it dominated his ministry and message.

That ministry is admirably summed up by Karl Barth,

'What John and those baptized by him in the Jordan had in view was the future which John proclaimed to be directly imminent; the coming kingdom, the coming judgement, the coming grace of God in the form of remission of sins, the 'mightier' than John who was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit . . . The human act (baptism) was performed in expectation of the act of God which was approaching the present, which was about to enter it, which was already at the door, but which was only at the door.'<sup>26</sup>

It may be asserted, then, that the eschatological orientation of John's baptism is unmistakable. It was a preparation for and promise of eschatological realities. This was its primary significance.

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<sup>24</sup> See 1 Maccabees 4:46, 14:41.

<sup>25</sup> For detailed discussion see C. H. Scobie *John the Baptist* (1964), 67-73; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (1959), 48-51; E. Schweizer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI (1968), 398ff.; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, 35-39; J. D. G. Dunn, 'Spirit-and-Fire Baptism', 81-92.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, 69f. Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.*, 21, 27, 31, 32; J. K. Howard, *New Testament Baptism* (1970), 24; J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 8-22.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL RITE

Now if, as has been argued, Christian baptism is to be understood in the light of John's baptism and as in some considerable sense its continuation (*cf.* Acts 2:38) it would follow that it too should be seen as an eschatological rite. To maintain this is to make no novel assertion. For example, Lampe writing of post-pentecostal water-baptism, says, 'It is still an eschatological rite, for it looks forward to the final redemption which is still to come at the Lord's return in glory . . .'<sup>27</sup>

However, although many acknowledge an eschatological aspect of Christian water-baptism it is not easy to say how this is to be understood. For consider the situation.

After Jesus was baptized the Spirit came upon him and anointed him for his ministry (Mark 1:10f.; Luke 3:21f.; 4:18f.). He was thereby revealed as the predicted 'Coming One' who was to baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). From that point John began to fade into the background (John 3:22-30) and the new age began to dawn (Mark 1:14f.). Our Lord's public ministry in the power of the Spirit showed that the kingdom of God had arrived (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20) if still in veiled and provisional form (Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 17:20f.). In the person of the King, the anointed bearer of the Spirit, the kingdom had come near.

When, subsequently to his death and resurrection, the ascended Christ made his disciples the sharers of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) it was apparent that the Kingdom had come in power (Mark 9:1).<sup>28</sup> With the outpouring of

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<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, 33. *Cf.* E. Schweizer, 'Dying and Rising with Christ', *New Testament Studies*, 14 (1967), 4: 'Despite all differences Christian baptism stands historically and theologically in close relation to the rite of John. This is especially true for the eschatological connotation.' On the other hand N. Clark in *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* (1956), 12, says that Jesus by his baptism, which Clark sees as the basis and model of Christian baptism, 'gave the death blow to Johannine baptism. For in John's rite the essential significance . . . was eschatological and in Jesus the eschaton had drawn near.' It must be allowed that Lampe would not entirely disagree with Clark for his attitude is to some extent ambivalent. Though, under the influence of biblical evidence, he holds to an eschatological element in Christian baptism his central conviction is that through baptism 'the Spirit is actually bestowed' (*op. cit.*, 33). This means that for him too eschatology has been realized; it has been fulfilled in the present (47ff.). Baptism has become a sacrament that conveys the Spirit here and now. The result is that Lampe, in my view, has difficulty in demonstrating a continuing eschatological element in baptism. It may be remarked that Clark for his part makes a significant concession when he writes with respect of what he takes to be early statements in the New Testament (*op. cit.*, 22), 'There remains a tendency to look back to Johannine baptism and see Christian baptism in terms of simple eschatological fulfilment; to interpret the new in terms of the old rather than emphasize the deep transformation of the old in the new.'

<sup>28</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (1969), 208; J. D. G. Dunn, 'Spirit and Kingdom', *The Expository Times*, 82 (1970), 40.



the Spirit the 'last days' (Acts 2:17) had arrived and it might therefore seem that any rite pointing on to an eschatological consummation was no longer appropriate. In the light of fulfilment what further need was there for prediction and promise? Nevertheless the rite of water-baptism persisted and if its significance was not radically transformed, as some suggest,<sup>29</sup> we have to ask in what sense it can be said still to be essentially eschatological in significance.

The solution I want to suggest to that problem is in terms of the familiar distinction between an 'inaugurated' and a fully 'realized' eschatology.

220 There is a growing consensus among New Testament scholars that in practically every strand of New Testament teaching a future or realistic eschatology is found side by side with a seemingly contradictory present or realized eschatology.<sup>30</sup> It is widely accepted, for instance, that Jesus taught that the kingdom of God had already arrived (*e.g.* in Matthew 12:28) but that he also taught that the kingdom had not yet fully come for his disciples were to pray for its coming (Matthew 6:10). The New Age for which God's people looked had indeed been inaugurated but it was not yet fully realized for, much to their disappointment, the old age — this present evil age — had not yet passed away. This remains true and hence we are called to live in what has been called 'the overlap of the ages', belonging simultaneously to this age and the age to come.

#### 'ALREADY BUT NOT YET'

In the New Testament presentation of life in this period of 'inaugurated eschatology' there runs a present-future tension which has been summed up in the phrase 'already but not yet'.<sup>31</sup>

J. D. G. Dunn has shown that in the New Testament passages that present the present-future tension the Holy Spirit uniformly has a significant role, indeed an essential role. He points out that it is the Spirit who enables the Christian to experience the future Kingdom in the present. He says,

'In short, the present-future tension is a function of the Spirit; the Spirit himself is the part now enjoyed of the whole yet-to be realized; the Spirit

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<sup>29</sup> *E.g.*, N. Clark. See footnote 27.

<sup>30</sup> See G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (1964/1974), 3-42, and especially 38, note 161.

<sup>31</sup> For a useful brief summary of relevant New Testament material see J. D. G. Dunn, 'Spirit and Kingdom', *The Expository Times* 82 (1970), 36-40.

operates the process leading to perfection, the fulfilled Now which works for the consummated Yet to be . . . The Spirit one might say is the *present*-ness of the coming Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

Two passages are particularly important in this connection.

The first is Ephesians 1:13 and 14.

In it the way in which salvation is experienced is presented. The process is like this:

We hear the word of truth, the good news of salvation.

We respond by trusting in Christ.

We are sealed, or marked as belonging to God, by the promised Holy Spirit, that is, by his presence in our lives.

The description of the Spirit as 'the promised Holy Spirit' points to that promised outpouring of the Spirit which is designated 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' the promise of which was to as many as God should call (Acts 2:39; cf. Galatians 3:14). Every believer can be said to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The believer's possession of the Holy Spirit is further indicated by the description of the Spirit as 'the guarantee of our inheritance' (R.S.V.). The word translated 'guarantee' (ἄρραβών) was used commercially for an amount paid as a pledge to show that the purchaser was in earnest (hence the word in K.J.V.) and so to seal a bargain or contract. It would be akin to our down-payment. Lampe comments,

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'The Spirit is the token first instalment of the ultimate total redemption, the assurance and partial fulfilment of the consummation, the salvation of the whole man. Hence in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, the Spirit is the seal which marks the convert for future redemption, that is, it is the sign of a man being the property, as it were, of God and recognized as His own.'<sup>33</sup>

It is Dunn who emphasizes the connection between 'the guarantee of the inheritance' and the Kingdom of God, writing,

'The Spirit is . . . the first instalment and foretaste of the Kingdom for 'the inheritance is the Kingdom of God'. It is important to remember at this point that . . . as 'first instalment' or 'down-payment' the ἄρραβών is part of and the same as the whole. The Spirit not only guarantees the full inheritance; he is himself the beginning and first part of that inheritance.'<sup>34</sup>

By the Spirit then the Kingdom has already come but only in a partial way. However Ephesians 1:14 goes on to indicate that the process is to be

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> 'Baptisma in the New Testament', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 5 (1952), 171.

<sup>34</sup> 'Spirit and Kingdom', 36. Cf. W. Foerster, κληρονόμος, TDNT III, 782. In 4 out of 5 occurrences of κληρονομέω in Paul the object is βασιλεία. Within Ephesians, 5:5 should be noted. Cf. Matthew 25:34.

completed. Our present possession of the Spirit is the pledge that we shall inherit the Kingdom, 'until the day when God completes the redemption of what he has paid for as his own'.

The other passage, in which Paul spells out much the same truths in greater detail, is Romans 8.

He refers to Christians as those who have the first fruits of the Spirit (vs.24). They have received the Spirit (vs.15). Indeed the Spirit is the *sine qua non* of the Christian life for the one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (vs.9; cf. vs.2). By the Spirit we become children of God and so his heirs, joint-heirs with Christ (vv.14-17). So here too Paul is pointing to a future inheritance of the Kingdom. In the present the Spirit makes real the life of Christ in the believer (vv.9f.) and in the future he will raise our mortal bodies to share in the full life of the Kingdom (vs.11; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-56). Present suffering with Christ will mean future glory with him (vv.17f.).

However to return to the description of Christians, as those 'who have the first fruits (ἀπαρχή) of the Spirit we may note its basic similarity to the concept of the 'first instalment' of the Spirit. The first fruits were a first instalment of the harvest offered as a token to God in acknowledgment that all the harvest was His. As the first fruits the Spirit had come into the believer's life to make the Kingdom a present reality. But there is to be a future fulness of manifestation when those who now have the first fruits of the Spirit will, like Christ during his incarnation, be given the Spirit without measure (John 3:34) and the Kingdom will have fully come.

Now after this indication of some of the dimensions of 'inaugurated eschatology' a summarizing statement by Dunn will serve to bring us back to our question concerning baptism. He says,

'In terms of the present-future tension in the Kingdom concept we might put it this way: the presence of the Spirit is the 'already' of the Kingdom; the inadequacy of man's recognition of the Spirit's presence and submission to him explains the 'not yet' of the Kingdom.'<sup>35</sup>

I want, however, to take issue with the suggestion in the second part of that statement, namely that the delay in the full establishment of the Kingdom is due to our spiritual failure. In some measure that is true but it is far from the total explanation. The fact is that the redeemed man is still a creature of flesh and blood and 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:5). His body has not yet been changed into a 'spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15:44) and this continuance of flesh

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<sup>35</sup> 'Spirit and Kingdom', 38.

and blood means that there must be a 'not yet' of the Kingdom. Only at the coming of Christ will all be so transformed that they can inherit the kingdom of God.

Then this further point may be made. There is the suggestion in Scripture that God allows this age to run on and man to continue in the flesh, that is as a creature of flesh and blood, so that men and women may have opportunity to repent and be ready for the reckoning when He fully establishes His kingdom (Romans 2:3-6; 2 Peter 3:9-15; 1 Peter 3:20; Revelation 2:21, 6:10f.; *cf.* 7:3). Before the end comes the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14; 28:19f.; Mark 13:10). In essence the message is still 'Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand' (Luke 24:46f.; Acts 2:38; 3:18ff.; 5:31; 10:42f.; *cf.* 11:18; 17:30f.; 20:21; 26:18-20). The basic Biblical idea of repentance is a turning to God. On the one hand therefore it involves turning from whatever has occupied God's place and on the other an orienting of the life towards God. So repentance involves faith.

Scripture teaches that when men and women genuinely repent or believe they receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 11:16ff.; Galatians 3:2, 14; Ephesians 1:13). They are baptized in the Spirit and it may be said of them that they are already in the Kingdom. To that extent the Kingdom has come.

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However as I have been insisting it is part of the paradoxical presentation of eschatology in the New Testament that there is a sense in which it has also to be said that they have not yet inherited the kingdom of God. The kingdom has not yet been fully realized.

#### WATER-BAPTISM AS THE 'NOT YET' OF THE KINGDOM

Insofar, then, as eschatology has not yet been fully realized it is proper that these converts, though they have already been baptized in the Spirit, should also be baptized in water. Water-baptism remains relevant as an eschatological rite looking on to a kingdom yet to be manifested. Baptism in the Spirit is the 'already' of eschatology; baptism in water its 'not yet'.

Now furthermore it may well be that the distinction which, as we saw earlier, can be made in John the Baptist's message between a baptism of Spirit and a baptism of fire, the one relating to salvation and the other to judgement is relevant at this point. The baptism of the Spirit which came on the day of Pentecost initiated the day of grace and opened the door of salvation to all who would respond to God's call to repent (Acts 2:38f.). However in John's preaching that call to repentance was motivated by a realization that there was to be a baptism of fire when, at the ushering in of the Kingdom, Messiah sets up his judgement (note Matthew 3:7;

Malachi 3:2f.). Then the useless trees (Matthew 3:10) and the chaff (Matthew 3:11) are to be burned.

This element still underlies Christian preaching. Judgement is coming. Accordingly men and women are still being called to repent and be baptized. The Kingdom of God which has already come in grace is yet to come in judgement.

A partial parallel may be drawn from the ministry of our Lord as presented in Luke's Gospel. In chapter 3 the Baptist's warning of Messiah's coming judgement is recorded (see especially vv.7ff. and 17). However, when in chapter 4 Christ outlines the nature of his ministry largely in terms of a quotation from Isaiah 61, he presents it as a mission of grace.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor:

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

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The point at which Christ stopped has often been remarked as significant, for the passage in Isaiah goes on to speak of 'the day of vengeance of our God'. At his first advent Christ came not to judge but to save the world. However according to Luke's total presentation the Baptist was not wrong in seeing Christ in the role of judge for he is presented as such in a parable in Luke 19 (vv.11-27).<sup>36</sup> Where John was mistaken was in the time when our Lord would exercise the role of judge. According to the parable in Luke 19 it would be after he had returned from a far country, having received kingly power or a kingdom (vv.12 and 15). It is at his second advent that he is to come as judge.<sup>37</sup> Because of this, in Luke the commission of the risen Christ to his disciples is that 'repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations'.<sup>38</sup>

In such a setting of realistic eschatology water-baptism is entirely appropriate. The rite looks forward to the consummation in the full coming of the kingdom and in the light of that coming calls those who witness the rite to repentance. It marks those who submit to it as members of the community that both expects and is committed to the establishment of the kingdom in fulness of manifestation.<sup>39</sup> By it believers are visibly linked with the people of God (Acts 2:41) and profess that they are numbered among those who look for the Saviour who will change the

<sup>36</sup> Cf. 10:8-16, 11:29-32 for the theme of judgement.

<sup>37</sup> See Acts 10:40ff., 17:31 where the risen Christ is designated the judge.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Acts 10:40ff., noting the connection between judgement and forgiveness.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 200ff.

bodies of their present humble condition that they might be fashioned in the likeness of His glorified body (Philippians 3:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:44). Water-baptism is appropriate to the flesh and blood, the natural, that cannot inherit the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50) but it looks on to and holds out the promise of that transformation through which a new humanity inhabiting a new heaven and a new earth will be brought in.<sup>40</sup>

If then baptism as administered by the Church relates primarily to promise, anticipation and warning, rather than to eschatological fulfilment this could explain why it 'was an institution to which Paul could sit pretty loose'.<sup>41</sup> Apparently he did not regard baptism as an essential part of his role and was willing to leave its administration to others (see 1 Corinthians 1:13-17). What was essential for Paul was a believing response to the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21). This, it could be argued, brought baptism in the Spirit and incorporation in the Church which is the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12f.). By baptism in water the professed believer is identified with the local Christian fellowship, or, as C. K. Barrett<sup>42</sup> might be summarized, with that preliminary and provisional community which is the sign but not the realization of the new humanity. However, by the very act of baptizing the Church proclaims to the world and to itself that God's purpose of grace and judgement is moving on to fulfilment. Baptism constitutes on the one hand a call to repentance and on the other a call to service and a message of hope.

Just as every time the Church celebrates the memorial supper of her Lord she holds in prospect his return<sup>43</sup> so every time she baptizes a believer she looks on to the consummation of this age, warns sinners of coming judgement, prays for the Kingdom to come<sup>44</sup> and reminds herself of Christ's promise to be with her to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19f.).

That, even by itself, might provide adequate justification for the Church's practice of baptism.

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<sup>40</sup> See the splendid chapter 'The Man to Come' in C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (1962).

<sup>41</sup> C. K. Barrett, *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 40f., says that the eucharistic prayers of *Didache* 9 and 10 'show that an eschatological mood filled the congregation at these meals. Besides thanks for the gifts given in Jesus, their chief content is the petition for eschatological fulfilment, "Remember, Lord, thy Church to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it . . . Let (the Lord) come, and let this world pass away."' See also G. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (1971), especially 152f.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. K. Barth, *op. cit.*, 77f. His stimulating treatment, however, apparently takes eschatology to be fully realized in Christian experience.