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PRESENT-DAY IMPLICATIONS OF WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM AND MISSIONARY BAPTISM

J. CAMERON FRASER

William Cunningham (1805-61) was a good friend of Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878). According to John Macleod (1872-1948) in his *Scottish Theology*, each considered the other 'the foremost Reformed divine of their day'.¹ However, one area of disagreement between Cunningham and Hodge would have been over the status of baptised children. Hodge held that since God's covenant promise 'is not only to parents, but to their seed, children are by the command of God to be treated and regarded as of the number of the elect, until they give undeniable evidence to the contrary'.² This differed only slightly from the view known as presumptive regeneration associated with the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and thought to go back at least to Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75) and the First Helvetic Confession of 1536.³ Whereas Kuyper and others taught that baptised children should be presumed to be regenerate until and unless they proved otherwise, Hodge based the presumption on the doctrine of election rather than regeneration. Thus, a child might be presumed to be elect, but not yet necessarily regenerate. In either case, the child was presumed to be a child of God until proven otherwise.

Both presumptive election and presumptive regeneration seek to make the same judgement of the state of baptised children as is made of professing believers. We cannot read the hearts of believers but can and must only take their outward profession as evidence of election and regeneration. The same judgement of charity is applied to their children. This results from understanding the meaning of baptism as applying equally to believers and their children.

As noted in a previous article, Cunningham disagreed. He believed that the biblical and confessional model was of adult (or believers') baptism and that infant baptism, while defensible in its own right, was a modification of adult baptism. Believers' baptism is not necessarily of adults, but this is how Cunningham described it.

¹ John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in relation to Church History* (Edinburgh: Knox Press and Banner of Truth reprint, 1974), pp. 269-71.

² Charles Hodge, 'The Church Membership of Infants', *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 30, No. 2 (April, 1858), 375-76.

³ See John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), p. 54, n. 30.

Among critics of Cunningham, John Murray conceded that he might have been right that biblical adult baptism is ‘*that* from which mainly and principally we should form our conception of what baptism is and means and was intended to accomplish.’ But, says Murray, when Cunningham says that ‘it is adult baptism alone which embodies and brings out the full idea of the ordinance [...] there does not appear to be good warrant for such discrimination.’⁴ Robert Letham goes further in charging Cunningham’s baptismal theology with being hardly distinguishable from a credobaptist one. Cunningham was, in Letham’s view ‘wrong; totally, monumentally wrong’.⁵

It does seem to me that if we are to attribute the same significance to infant baptism as to believers’ baptism, the most logical approach is that of presumptive election (as in Hodge) or presumptive regeneration (as in Kuyper). This is because the New Testament language encourages us to believe that its recipients are born again, except where that is clearly not the case, as with Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-24). Indeed, some language, such as ‘baptism now saves you’ (1 Pet. 3:21) seems to point in the direction of baptismal regeneration.⁶

Lewis Bevens Schenck in *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* claims that presumptive regeneration was the view of John Calvin as well as of Presbyterian orthodoxy. He blames the revivalist preaching of the Great Awakening for a shift in emphasis from the nurture of covenant children to an approach that treated them as unbelievers

⁴ John Murray, *Christian Baptism* p. 88, n. 55.

⁵ Robert A. Letham, ‘Book Review: *The People’s Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, Iain D. Campbell & Malcolm Maclean, eds., Mentor, 2011.’, in *Foundations*: 61 (Autumn 2011), 75.

⁶ As I said in my previous article, the point surely is as Anthony Lane and others (with slight variations) note: repentance, faith, baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit all belong together in the New Testament understanding of receiving salvation. Thus, those passages that appear to give to the act of baptism a redemptive or regenerating significance are to be understood in the context of the whole. The various other elements are present as well. See e.g. Anthony N. S. Lane, ‘The Dual Practice View’, in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. by David F. Wright, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), p. 144.

in need of conversion.⁷ Others claim that Calvin taught a form of baptismal regeneration.⁸

Some (by no means all) who have grown up with presumptive regeneration or election and then come into contact with more conversion-oriented evangelical teaching (perhaps especially through the influence of the charismatic movement) discover that they were never truly born again in the first place and undergo a conversion experience, bringing them into a 'personal relationship with Jesus'. One consequence of this can be a rejection of their infant baptism as a meaningless formality, a desire to be rebaptised and then to have their own children dedicated rather than baptised. Then there are church planters and other pastors of a more evangelistic nature who find infant baptism as traditionally understood to be a barrier to new converts and other Christians who think of infant baptism as implying baptismal regeneration, and thus reject it. At least in the context in which I minister, with a strong background of presumptive regeneration (although no longer officially called such), there has been a growing movement among some church planters in particular to permit baby dedication in place of baptism. Can Cunningham help us here?

The truth is that there are a variety of confusing interpretations of infant baptism among those who practice it. These range from baptismal regeneration, presumptive regeneration, presumptive election, covenant baptism⁹ (which can include any of the previous views, but can also mean simply that the covenant sign of baptism, corresponding to the Old Testament sign of circumcision is applied to the believer's children because they are partakers of the covenant of grace made with Abraham and renewed in Christ) to what has been described (usually critically) as 'baby baptism with water'. Believers' baptism, by way of contrast, can seem much simpler and more straightforward. Baptists sometimes assume that those who practice infant baptism believe that the ceremony automati-

⁷ Lewis Bevens Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003 reprint, originally published by Yale University Press, 1940), chaps. II & III. For a critical review of Shenk, see Kenneth Stewart in 'Book Reviews', *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, 30/2, pp. 125-26.

⁸ For a helpful refutation of this, as well as that Calvin taught presumptive regeneration, see James J. Cassidy, 'Calvin on Baptism: Baptismal Regeneration or the Duplex Loquendi Modus?' in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church. Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin*, ed. by Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), pp. 534-54.

⁹ Some Reformed Baptists also describe their view (discussed later) as 'covenant baptism', but with a different meaning.

cally means recipients are born again. This is true of the Roman Catholic ritual, although regeneration thus conferred may subsequently be lost. It is also true, at least in the wording if not the practice of Lutheran and Anglican ceremonies. Reformed theology generally rejects such a view, but sometimes struggles to explain the difference. This essay will argue that a view closer to Cunningham's will help clear up misunderstandings between fellow-believers, and further, that a dual practice of infant baptism and baby dedication will promote the unity of Christ's church. I arrive at this conclusion by a consideration of the following evidence.

THE CIRCUMCISION-BAPTISM ANALOGY

There are Baptists who would agree with Letham's assessment of Cunningham, while finding his argument for infant baptism unconvincing. As noted in the previous article, this argument (brief as it is) follows traditional lines of covenant continuity and federal holiness. However, Cunningham makes no explicit mention of what lies at the heart of the covenant continuity argument, the circumcision-baptism analogy (Gen. 17; Col. 2:10). This seems curious, especially as Ulrich Zwingli, the subject of Cunningham's essay, 'Zwingli and the Sacraments', is credited with having developed this argument that became a staple of the Reformed defence of infant baptism.¹⁰

An original approach to the circumcision-baptism analogy is offered in Meredith Kline's *By Oath Consigned*, based on his research into extra-biblical suzerainty treaties. Kline sees circumcision and baptism as involving both malediction and consecration, covenant curse as well as covenant blessing. There are some difficulties with this approach, not least that Scripture nowhere speaks of circumcision and baptism in this way, although as Kline points out, it does speak metaphorically of 'a baptism of fire' (Luke 12:50 cf. Matt. 3:11). The argument depends on reading extra-biblical examples into the biblical text. For instance, in stating that baptism is a form of water ordeal, Kline appeals for support of this concept to Qumranic and Ugaritic texts, although he also references Israel's Red Sea ordeal and the Noahic deluge (1 Cor. 12:2, 1 Pet. 3:21), as well as

¹⁰ Jack W. Cottrell, 'Zwingli's Covenant Theology and the Reformed Doctrine of Baptism', Evangelical Theological Society Papers, 38th Annual Conference 1986. Cottrell notes the influence of Augustine's theology, but fails to mention his use of the circumcision-baptism analogy, although he does recognize that Zwingli's use of the analogy was not new. (According to David Wright, the use of the analogy was discussed in the time of Cyprian at a council of African bishops in 253. See David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2007), pp. 29-31.)

Israel's passing through the Jordan River to inherit the land of Canaan.¹¹ However, debatable as Kline's approach may be, it is a reminder that all biblical covenants have two sides, blessing to those who obey and curses on those who disobey. To quote Sinclair Ferguson:

The redemptive covenants of Scripture all have this structure. Given to people already under the curse, they offer the blessing of salvation to those who trust and obey. If people spurn the covenant in unbelief and disobedience, the curse remains. This is the pattern with Noah (Gen. 5:29; 6:13; 8:21), with Abraham (Gen. 15:7-21) and also with Moses (Ex. 6:2-8; 34:10-18; Deut. 28-30). The pattern finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He enters into humanity's accursed situation and bears the divine anathema so that the blessing promised to Abraham might come to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:13-14; cf. the cry of dereliction Mk. 15:34).¹²

In general, Baptists have rejected the circumcision-baptism analogy, as did Karl Barth (1886-1986), the father of neo-orthodoxy in the Reformed tradition. In *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, Barth dismissed circumcision as belonging to the nation of Israel and charged infant baptism with being linked to the 'Constantinian' state-church concept in Europe.¹³ Paul Jewett (1919-91) saw Barth as anticipating his own argument in *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*.¹⁴ Jewett nevertheless acknowledges that Old Testament circumcision also 'becomes a symbol of renewal and cleansing of heart' (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:29), and in discussing Colossians 2:11-13 he states,

To experience the circumcision of Christ in the putting off of the body of the flesh, is the same as being buried with him and being raised with him through faith. If this be true, the only conclusion we can reach is that the two signs, as outward rites, symbolize the same inner reality in Paul's thinking. Thus circumcision may fairly be said to be the Old Testament counterpart to baptism.¹⁵

¹¹ Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 55-62.

¹² Sinclair B. Ferguson, 'Infant Baptist View', in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. by David F. Wright, p. 98.

¹³ Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1959). However, in what proved to be his final word on the subject several years later, Barth did recognize the force of Calvin's use of the analogy, but not without qualification. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1970) IV.4, Fragment, 195-96.

¹⁴ Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 92.

¹⁵ Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, pp. 86, 89.

An earlier monogram by Jewett, *Infant Baptism and Confirmation*¹⁶ provided a scholarly basis for David Kingdon's 1973 book, *Children of Abraham*, in which he states regarding circumcision-baptism,

The analogy does in fact exist, but it is the nature of it which is in question. The covenant with Abraham included promises that his physical seed would be multiplied and given a land. In the New Testament this is seen as a spiritual seed and a spiritual inheritance [...] The abrogation of the principle "thee and thy seed" is seen in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) where possession of inward spiritual life is required.¹⁷

Kingdon's popular work represents a resurgence of Reformed Baptist thinking that accepts the unity (as well as the diversity) of the old and new covenants and claims to be in continuity with the London Baptist Confession of 1689. In recent years, there have been a plethora of similar publications, among the most helpful of which are collections of essays in *Believer's (sic) Baptism* (edited by Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright)¹⁸ and *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage* (edited by Richard Barcellos).¹⁹ The point being made is that in the heightened spirituality of the new covenant, it is those circumcised in heart (i.e. the regenerate) who are the true children of Abraham (Gal. 3:26-28 etc.).

HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM

Paedobaptists regularly point out that the difficulty with this line of reasoning is that it is humanly impossible to guarantee the regenerate church membership claimed by Baptists as the New Testament norm.²⁰ There are examples of professed believers falling away (Acts 8:18-24; 1 Tim. 1:20), as

¹⁶ Paul King Jewett, *Infant Baptism and Confirmation* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1960).

¹⁷ David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham* (Hayward Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1973), p. 6. Wright does allude to the *Epistle of Barnabas*' assertion that the counterpart of circumcision in the flesh is circumcision of the ears and heart by the Holy Spirit (Barn. 9:1-9; 10:11) but it was not associated with baptism; Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, p. 53.

¹⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007).

¹⁹ *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. by Richard Barcellos (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

²⁰ See e.g. pp. 272-85 of 'The Polemics of Anabaptism from the Reformation Onward' in Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003). It was when he began to see that the new covenant includes warnings of apostasy (Heb. 10:28-30) that Strawbridge's study

well as warnings about that possibility (John 15:2, 6; Rom. 11:13-21; Heb. 6:4-6; 9:13-20). However, what the New Testament pattern indicates is the missionary baptism of professed believers. It is possible to acknowledge this while still affirming that the model of at least four out of twelve missionary baptisms in the New Testament is of converts and their households, remembering Cunningham's point that if paedobaptists were more in the habit of witnessing adult baptism (as happens in missionary situations), they would have less difficulty understanding baptism's significance. Household baptism is generally a second line of reasoning in paedobaptist polemic, but I agree with Ken Stewart that it should be the primary one.²¹

The German scholar Joachim Jeremias did extensive research into what he called the 'oikos-formula', from the Greek term for 'household'. He also researched the origins of proselyte baptism, whereby Gentile converts to Judaism would be both circumcised and baptised along with their families, although children born subsequently were not baptised. Jeremias first held this to be the case with Christian converts (i.e. children born after the parents' conversion were not baptised), but later changed his position.²²

Jeremias' fellow-countryman Kurt Aland replied to Jeremias, questioning his claims as to the antiquity of infant baptism. Aland devoted a chapter to the 'oikos-formula', arguing that,

the data that can be gathered from the New Testament seem to me in no way to justify the confidence with which the existence of infant baptism in New Testament times, or even quite generally of the baptism of children, is derived nowadays from the "oikos-formula". I would even contest whether we have any right to talk about an "oikos-formula" in the New Testament.²³

Jeremias replied to Aland's reply, with *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, in which he states:

of the issue 'took a decisive turn' in his movement from a Reformed Baptist to a paedobaptist position (p. 4).

²¹ Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), p. 135.

²² Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 43-58.

²³ Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* Translated with an introduction by G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 91. Beasley-Murray offers an extended discussion of household baptisms in *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 312-20. He also finds 'no clear trace of influence' from proselyte baptism 'on the interpretation of baptism in the New Testament' (p. 330).

The house in the narrower sense includes [...] the father of the family, the mother of the family and the children of every age; in the wider sense the relations living in the house were also reckoned in, but not the servants without further comment. It is natural to conclude from this that the references to the 'whole' household are intended in the first place to include the children. We do not assert that in each case children were, in fact, actually present. But we do mean that Paul and Luke could under no circumstances have used the phrase, 'a household' or 'his whole family' were baptized, if they had wished to say that only adults had been baptized.²⁴

Meredith Kline takes 'household' in the broader sense of including servants and suggest that 'if it could be shown that servants were received into the church on the basis of the authority principle, it would follow a *fortiori* that the continuity with the Old Testament practice included infants too.' He continues, 'But what has to be determined is whether the household subordinates who were involved, of whatever variety, were received and baptized on the basis of personal conviction and confession or because they belonged to the household of the one who confessed the Christian faith.' Then Kline makes the remarkable (for a paedobaptist) concession, 'And that is where certainty does not appear attainable.'²⁵

Of the biblical examples of household baptisms, the one that provides the most support for a paedobaptist interpretation is of the Philippian jailer's baptism recorded in Acts 16:31-34. The NIV records that following his baptism, along with that of his household, 'He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family' (Acts 16:34b). The ESV, on the other hand, has 'And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God', placing the emphasis on the fact that *he* believed, and *they* rejoiced along with him. This is closer to a literal translation than the NIV. However, F. F. Bruce in his commentary on Acts notes, 'Here the adverb [*panoike*, "with his entire household"] may be taken grammatically with either *egalliasato* ["he rejoiced"] or *pepisteukos* ["he having believed"]; in sense it probably goes with both.'²⁶ Bruce

²⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 12.

²⁵ Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 97. On the related question of the baptism of infants born into Christian households, Wright observes that the evidence 'will sustain the confidence of neither a Jeremias nor of an Aland' ('The Origin of Infant Baptism-Child Believers' Baptism', in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, p. 20.)

²⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). Quoted by Bruce Ware, 'Believers' Baptism View', in *Baptism: Three Views*, p. 32.

Ware, in offering the Baptist perspective in *Baptism: Three Views*, notes that if Bruce is correct that the household phrase goes both with believing and rejoicing, 'we have strong reason to dismiss the notion that the jailer's household included infants.'²⁷ He continues,

What makes the most sense here is that (the) offer of salvation is given to the jailer specifically while also including his house (Acts 16:31). Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord specifically to the jailer but included with him were all that were in the house (Acts 16:32). Then the jailer was baptized (single verb), he along with all his family (Acts 16:33). Finally, he rejoiced and believed in God, along with his entire household (Acts 16:34)²⁸

In support of this interpretation, Ware points to a parallel situation in Acts 18:8 which states that 'Crispus ... believed ... together with his entire household.'²⁹

This suggests to me the wisdom of Kline's concession that 'certainty does not appear attainable' as to whether members of households in Acts were baptised on the basis of the head of the household's faith or their own. Likewise, J. I. Packer notes that infant baptism is a practice that the New Testament 'neither illustrates nor prescribes nor forbids'.³⁰ But surely we can at least agree with Sinclair Ferguson when he says, 'God deals with families (Ps. 68:6)' and comments,

This [...] is further exhibited in the way in which Paul's letters include children as "saints" and exhorts them to fulfill specifically covenantal responsibilities: "Obey your parents in the Lord for that is right (Eph. 1:1, 6:1-3; cf. Col. 1:2; 3:20)." Paul's appeal to the Mosaic covenant in the Ephesian context implies that the same dynamic which grounded the relationship of parents and children in the old continues in the new.³¹

²⁷ Bruce Ware, 'Believers' Baptism View', in *Baptism: Three Views*, p. 32.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. Not surprisingly, Ware also rejects the view that 'the promise is for you and for your children' in Acts 2:39 is relevant to infant baptism. However, it is difficult to think that Jews hearing that for the first time, with their Old Testament covenant background, would not have interpreted it in a paedobaptist fashion. See Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning, 'Unto You and Your Children', in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* ed. by Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), pp. 49-69.

³⁰ J. I. Packer, 'Baptism', in *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), p. 214.

³¹ Ferguson, 'Infant Baptist View', in *Baptism: Three Views*, pp. 106-07. See also Douglas Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism-God's Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000) and his essay,

Later, after quoting the Westminster Larger Catechism's answer to the question 'How is our baptism to be improved?' (Q & A 167) and noting that the principles of Ephesians 6:1-4 'apply to every aspect of parental responsibility and children's experience,' Ferguson adds:

None of this should be misunderstood as implying that paedobaptists believe their children do not need to 'be converted'. True, many children from Christian families cannot remember a decisive 'conversion' moment, but conversion should not be reduced to a moment of psychological crisis. It is simply shorthand for the faith and repentance which marks the continuance as well as the beginning of the Christian life. The gospel sign of baptism – whether received in infancy or in later years on profession of faith – calls us all to this lifelong conversion.³²

David Wright provides post-apostolic evidence from the so-called *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 220 AD) of instructions for baptism that placed 'the little children' first 'with a distinction between those who can speak for themselves, who shall indeed do so, and those who cannot, for whom the parents or other family members will speak.'³³ However, 'It is not until the early years of the fifth century [...] that we encounter the first evidence of how parents or others did speak for the children.' They were asked 'Does he/she believe?' to which the reply was given 'He/she believes.'³⁴ Augustine explains this in terms of baptism being the sacrament of faith, such that 'a child is made a believer (*fidelem*), though not yet by that faith (*fides*) which resides in the will of those believing, nevertheless already by the sacrament of that faith.'³⁵

Wright notes that 'If one adopts the reading of the evidence given by Joachim Jeremias [...] then one must believe that in the early fifth century infant baptism was all but universal for the children of Christians.' Yet, Wright claims (contrary to Jeremias's later opinion), 'a great deal of

'Baptism and Children: Their Place in the Old and New Testaments', in *The Case for Covenant Infant Baptism*, ed. by Gregg Strawbridge, pp. 286-302.

³² Ferguson, 'Infant Baptism View', pp. 110-11.

³³ Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism? An Enquiry at the End of Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 39.

³⁴ Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?*, pp. 41-42. Cf. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21:12-18; P. F. Bradshaw, M. E. Johnson and L. E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 88-95.

³⁵ Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?*, p. 51. Wright references Susan A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire*, Vol 2 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), p. 349.

hard evidence in the fourth and early fifth centuries that the offspring of Christian parents [...] were not baptized as babies.³⁶ Household baptism was missionary baptism.

Cunningham believed that children 'whether baptized or not, should be treated and dealt with in all respects as [...] unregenerate, still needing to be born again.'³⁷ Kingdon expresses himself similarly: 'Believers' children are privileged children because they are within the sphere of the preaching and nurture of the church, but they are not made Christian children by privilege, but by true conversion of the word of God through the belief of the truth.'³⁸ This is the opposite of presumptive regeneration. A mediating position is offered by Dr. J. Douma, responding to both Kuyper and Kingdon that:

our children are Christian children. By the call of God (and not their own 'Christianity') they are separated from the children of this world. But they must accordingly behave as children of God. That does not come by itself; and *with* Kingdon we are against all false security. We heartily agree with him that one should not presume that our children are regenerate, for such a presumption cultivates that false security [...]. But it does not cultivate false security when we say, as opposed to Kingdon, 'You are a Christian child', and then add with Kingdon, 'Repent and believe the gospel.' For conversion and faith are daily matters, a calling for our adults as well as our children.³⁹

Although almost certainly less than what Douma intended to mean, Anthony Lane notes that we may speak of Christian children in the same way as we talk of Jewish, Muslim or Hindu children.⁴⁰ At the very least, the children of believers are members of Christian households, with all the privileges and responsibilities entailed.

INFANT BAPTISM AND BABY DEDICATION

Based on historical research, David Wright suggests that early church practice allowed for various forms of baby dedication, as well as infant baptism.⁴¹ In what was to be Wright's last literary work, published post-

³⁶ Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?*, pp. 42-43.

³⁷ Ferguson, 'Infant Baptism View', pp. 110-11.

³⁸ Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*, p. 99.

³⁹ Dr. J. Douma, *Infant Baptism and Regeneration*, a booklet based on a series of articles in *De Reformatie*, Kampen, the Netherlands, October 1976, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Anthony N. S. Lane, 'Dual-Practice View', in Wright, *Baptism: Three Views*, p. 169.

⁴¹ Wright, 'Infant Dedication in the Early Church', in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, pp. 116-38.

humously and already quoted, *Baptism: Three Views*, Anthony Lane also takes this position, as well as agreeing with Wright that the historical and biblical evidence supports a dual-practice approach to baptism. The other two contributors to this volume, Bruce Ware and Sinclair Ferguson, are dismissive of it, considering it incoherent and naïve, as well as historically and biblically questionable. The arguments for and against can be read in the responses and counter-responses to Lane's essay, but given the New Testament emphasis on church unity (John 17:21; Eph. 4:4), I find it difficult to argue with his conclusion:

The New Testament practice of baptism was converts' baptism, the immediate baptism of those who come to faith as part of their initial response to the gospel. This needs to be modified for children born into a Christian home, either into infant baptism or into baptism at a later date. The New Testament evidence for how such children were treated is not unambiguous. Both approaches can be defended on biblical grounds. No grounds exist for insisting on one way to the exclusion of the other. The policy of accepting diversity is the only policy for which the first four centuries of the church provide any clear evidence.⁴²

On dedication, Lane observes:

Many churches observe some sort of dedication ceremony after the birth of the child. This is followed by a period of Christian nurture [...] If all goes well, it concludes with the grown-up child making a personal public profession of faith in baptism. In other churches the newborn baby is baptized. This is followed by a period of Christian nurture [...] If all goes well, it concludes with a personal public profession of faith [...] which may or may not be called confirmation.⁴³

Likewise, David Wright opines:

The attractiveness of recent attempts to bridge 'the waters that divide' is that they penetrate behind divergent practice and dare to claim that both administrations of baptism can be embraced within one theological framework

⁴² Lane, 'Dual-Practice Baptist View', p. 169. Peter J. Leithart offers an alternative (somewhat speculative) interpretation of the evidence, according to which covenantal infant baptism was apostolic practice and teaching, the first generation of biblically literate Jewish believers were all but wiped out in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and succeeding generations of baptismal rituals were influenced by Greek mystery religions. 'Infant Baptism in History: An Unfinished Tragicomedy', in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. by Gregg Strawbridge, pp. 246-62.

⁴³ Lane, 'Dual Practice Baptism View', p. 163.

with little remainder. The one baptises believers' babies and nurtures them within the community of faith until they profess that faith responsibly for themselves. The other dedicates or gives thanks for believers' babies and nurtures them within the community of faith until in baptism they respond to the gospel in their own profession. For both categories of baptismal subjects the prospective perspective is critical, both from an early acknowledgement of a child as God's gift to be reared in and to faith, and from the later time of responsible decision, which is not so much an arrival as a fresh point of departure.⁴⁴

Reformed Baptists generally, as well as paedobaptists, reject infant dedication as a poor substitute for infant baptism, without clear biblical warrant. The modern practice is thought to have developed in conjunction with the Sunday School movement and 'the natural Christian instinct of parents who did not agree with the biblical doctrine of infant baptism but desired to have a corresponding rite for their children.'⁴⁵ Biblical support, it is suggested, can be found in the examples of Hannah bringing Samuel to the temple (1 Sam. 1:24), Mary and Joseph in bringing the infant Jesus to the temple (Luke 2:22) and the mothers bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed (Luke 18:15 uses the word 'babies').⁴⁶

Paedobaptists point out that baby dedication focuses on the faith of the parents at the expense of the grace and promises of God in baptism. A common argument is that there is no better picture of the unmerited grace of God than a helpless infant incapable of doing anything to merit divine favour.⁴⁷ This would be a powerful and convincing argument,

⁴⁴ David F. Wright, 'Scripture and Evangelical Diversity', in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, p. 269. See also David F. Wright, 'Infant Dedication in the Early Church', in *Baptism in the New Testament and the Church, Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honor of R.E.O. White*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Suppl. Ser. 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) pp. 352-78.

⁴⁵ Brian G. Najapfour, *Child Dedication Considered Historically, Theologically, and Pastorally* (Caledonia, MI: Biblical Spirituality Press, 2014), p. 33.

⁴⁶ Najapfour, himself a former Baptist, exegetes these passages referenced and finds that they do not provide adequate biblical support for child dedication. However, while not mandated in Scripture, 'it can serve to bind the dedicators to honoring the Lord' (p. 30). Najapfour hopes to 'encourage those who practice baby dedication to consider the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism' (p. 34).

⁴⁷ See e.g. J. Douma, 'Do we not point out to the Reformed Baptists what for them, too, is the heart of the gospel when we criticize their rejection of infant baptism?' (*Infant Baptism and Regeneration*, p. 36.) John Stott notes that Articles 25, 27 & 28 of the 39 Articles of the Church of England 'all begin with the statement that a sacrament is a sign not of what we do or are, but of what God

except that it is nowhere used in the New Testament in connection with baptism. Rather, the stress is on the faith of the believer responding to God's offer of salvation. Besides, the faith of the baptized believer is no less a sovereign gift of grace.⁴⁸

To be sure, infant baptism involves not *first* our dedicating our children to God, but claiming his covenant promises as the one initiating the relationship so established. However, there is a fair amount of support for seeing dedication as 'the second' part of baptism.⁴⁹ For instance, the baptismal vows of the Presbyterian Church in America (influenced more by J. H. Thornwell's Southern Presbyterian view than by Hodge's in the north)⁵⁰ ask three questions, the last of which is: 'Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavour to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?'⁵¹ Likewise, Archibald Alexander of Princeton (1772-1851) spoke of parents 'about to dedicate [their children] to God in holy baptism' praying

has done or does' (John Stott and J. Alec Motyer, *The Anglican Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2008), p. 7.)

⁴⁸ Wright, in making this point, also notes that since paedobaptist churches also baptise believers on profession of faith, 'these churches cannot afford to incorporate in their theology of baptism any elements that are applicable only to babies' ('Baptism and the Evangelical Divide', in *Baptism in Historical Perspective*, p. 294.)

⁴⁹ This terminology is taken from the Rev. Ken Koeman's (1942-2018) answer to a letter in the Q & A page of *The Banner* (the denominational magazine of the Christian Reformed Church) in August 18, 1997: 'Dedication is the second half of baptism. Baptism is God speaking to the child, promising him or her the blessings of the covenant, promises claimed and treasured by the parents. Dedication is the response of the parents, placing the child into the hands of God and promising to train him or her in the gospel [...] But without baptism, dedication loses the solid foundation of God's promises that gives it substance and purpose. It's like a wedding in which only the bride gives the ring.'

⁵⁰ Hodge and Thornwell differed publicly about whether baptized children should be subject to church discipline. Hodge considered Thornwell's position (that a profession of faith was the indispensable condition of church discipline) meant 'abandoning the ground to the Independents and Anabaptists.' 'The General Assembly', in *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 31, No. 3 (1859), 604. Quoted in Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant*, p. 99.

⁵¹ *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Decatur, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk, Sixth edition, 2017) p. 165.

earnestly ‘that they might be baptized with the Holy Ghost.’⁵² Alexander goes on to speak of this as a form of baptismal regeneration, language Cunningham would have clearly rejected, but the point is that Alexander understood baptism as at least in part a form of dedication.

To quote another authority from the past, Richard Baxter, whose overall defence of infant baptism J. I. Packer describes as speaking for the Puritan movement in general,⁵³ states:

I have oft shewed that *If our Childrens part in the Covenant of Grace upon their Parents dedication of them to God and so their Church-membership, were but yielded, the rest (whether they should actually be Baptized with Water) would be much less cause of our distance and alienation, than on both sides it is usually judged. Yea, if the Anabaptists would but say, [I Dedicate this Child to God, as far as he hath given me power, and heartily desire that God may be his Father, Christ his Saviour, and the Holy Spirit his Sanctifier]: And did ever any of you prove this to be a sin? And we are ready on our part to profess that [Infant- Baptism will save none at age, that confess not to the same holy Covenant].*⁵⁴

At the same time, Packer says of Baxter’s own position, ‘As in other legal agreements, so in God’s covenant, parents are entitled to pledge their children as well as themselves. The child’s right to baptism has thus a double foundation: his parentage, the fact that he is a child of professing Christians which makes him eligible for it, and his parents’ actual decision to dedicate him to God, which makes it his due.’⁵⁵

Packer himself adopts a position much like that of Lane above: ‘the Christian nurture of baptist and paedobaptist children will be similar: dedicated to God in infancy, either by baptism or by a dedication rite (which some will see as a dry baptism), they will then be brought up to live for the Lord and led to publicly professing faith on their own account in confirmation of baptism (which some will see as a wet confirmation).’⁵⁶

⁵² Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978 reprint. First published 1844), pp. 12-13.

⁵³ ‘In the Baptist controversy, his fellow-Puritans regarded him as a champion of their cause’ (J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2013), p. 285.)

⁵⁴ Richard Baxter, *Rich. Baxter’s review of the state of christian Infants etc.* (London: Nevil Simons, 1676), p. 4. I do not mean to suggest that all Puritans would have agreed with this.

⁵⁵ Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man*, p. 280.

⁵⁶ J. I. Packer, ‘Baptism’, in *Concise Theology*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), pp. 215-6.

There are in fact denominations that, at least in theory, allow for dual practice of infant baptism and baby dedication,⁵⁷ and interestingly, there appears to be a move in this direction among some in the present Free Church of Scotland.⁵⁸ It might be argued that this is a logical development of Cunningham's view, adapted to accommodate those who remain unconvinced of infant baptism. At the very least, to repeat the conclusion of my previous article, I would suggest that it is only on Cunningham's understanding of infant baptism, rather than presumptive election or regeneration, that progress can be made in recognizing the unity among evangelical Christians of the church's "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ For some (not all) examples, see Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), p. 136. See also Donald Bridge and David Phipers, *The Waters that Divide: Two Views on Baptism Explored* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 199-200.

⁵⁸ Donald Macleod (who called Cunningham 'Scotland's greatest theologian'), has expressed strong opposition to 'a growing demand for Baptist style Services of Dedication for Infants' in the Free Church of Scotland <www.donaldmacleod.org.uk/dm/should-presbyterians-have-dedication-services/> [Accessed 18 June 2018]. Macleod, in my view, is ably refuted by David Robertson <<https://theweeflea.com/tag/infant-dedication>> [Accessed 18 June 2018].

⁵⁹ Donald Macleod expresses a common view when, after acknowledging that the debate between Baptists and paedobaptists is not about fundamentals, he continues, 'There is no doubt that it is difficult to have the two points of view co-existing in one church or denomination, but that is a practical, not a theological, difficulty.' ('Christian Baptism', in *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor imprint of Christian Focus, second edition, 2010), p. 229.) I agree with Macleod when he later states that 'the children of our Baptist friends are as much covenant-children as our own. The fact of their not being baptised does not mean they are not covenant-children. It means only that the sign of the covenant is not put upon them.' (p. 235). Macleod references Presbyterians and Anglicans preaching in Baptist churches, but is this enough? Baptists and paedobaptists also work happily together in para-church organizations, agreeing to differ on the issue of baptisms. But para-church organizations, with their limited statements of faith, are a testimony to the failure of the organized church to achieve the structural unity and witness that Jesus prayed for in John 17:21.