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**BAPTISM**  
**AND**  
**CHURCH**  
  
**IN**  
**THE**  
**NEW**  
**TESTAMENT**

*Johannes Schneider*

**BAPTISM AND CHURCH  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

BAPTISM AND CHURCH  
IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

by

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The lecture which is here translated was delivered by Professor Johannes Schneider in Treysa in October, 1955. It deals with matters more fully treated in the same author's *Taufe in der Neuen Testament* (Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1952) which is, like the present work, an important contribution to the current discussion of the theology and practice of baptism. Professor Schneider is a distinguished New Testament scholar, well known in Germany and the United States. That he is a Baptist gives special importance to his treatment of the subject, since, in spite of their name and practice, Baptists have all too often left the discussion of the meaning of baptism to those of other Christian traditions than their own.

The fact that the line of argument here presented will be new to many Baptists—and to some, perhaps, at first somewhat unexpected and uncongenial—makes it the more desirable that what is urged be pondered. The lecture deals with the background and origin of New Testament baptism, making reference to some of the new material provided by the recently discovered Dead Sea Scrolls. It also provides a careful and closely-knit interpretation of the evidence found in the Gospels, Acts and the Pauline letters. Taken as a whole, the lecture is a valuable complementary study to the late Dr. Wheeler Robinson's *Baptist Principles*, which has for the past forty years been the most thoughtful and authoritative statement of the case for believers' baptism.

The works by Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann, to which Professor Schneider refers, have already been translated into English. Barth's *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism* and Cullmann's *Baptism in*

*the New Testament* have both been published by the Student Christian Movement Press Ltd. For the quotations from the "Manual of Discipline" of the Khirbet Qumran community I have made use of the translation in Millar Burrows' *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Secker & Warburg, 1956). For the biblical references I have used the English Revised Version, drawing where it seemed necessary on the marginal readings. I have added an index of the chief biblical passages referred to in the lecture.

I am grateful to Professor Schneider and to the J. G. Oncken Verlag, Kassel, for permission to translate this lecture.

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# I

## THE PROBLEM OF BAPTISM

It is an unfortunate fact that in the matter of baptism Christendom has neither an agreed outlook nor an agreed practice. Since the appearance of Karl Barth's lecture "The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism" a number of questions are once more being asked: What is baptism? What place has it in the plan of salvation? In what form and to whom should it be administered? The question of baptism has become of ecumenical significance. It is a welcome sign that, in spite of the deep differences which exist, there is now so earnest an attempt rightly to understand baptism and that the representatives of different confessions carry on their discussions not only with deep conviction but with the intention of arriving at a common standpoint.

The discussion about baptism resolves itself in the end into the question: Which baptism is scriptural, infant baptism or believers' baptism? A baptism which requires faith and the personal confession of faith, or a baptism which omits faith on the part of the candidate and postpones confession of faith to a later time? All confessions agree that baptism is not an end in itself. Those who regard it as a sacrament do not completely separate it from faith. The real issue is what is the place of baptism in the scheme of salvation.

The present position is complicated by the fact that certain outstanding New Testament scholars are convinced that infant baptism is not to be understood as a later departure by the Church, but that on the contrary traces of its practice by the early Church are to be

**found in the New Testament. What is asserted is that the statements in the New Testament which refer to the baptism of adults relate to the missionary situation of the first Christian generation. As soon as Christian congregations had been formed, however, it became necessary for them to receive into the Church immediately after their birth the children of Christian parents. Further, in connection with the conversion of whole families from Judaism or paganism, if the father of the house was baptised, then all the members, including the children of whatever age, were baptised at the same time. This followed (it is suggested) from the idea of family solidarity common in the ancient world and from the fact that a decision by the father of the house was binding on the whole family. To understand the references to baptism in the New Testament, one must free oneself from modern individualistic notions. Already in the time of the Apostles Christian parents must have recognised that their children shared in all the blessings of the Christian community, including baptism. Since they were made holy by a Christian father and a Christian mother, nothing stood in the way of their reception into the Church.**

**The question of infant baptism or believers' baptism turns immediately on how the relationship of faith and baptism is defined. Must faith precede baptism, or is it conceivable that faith follows baptism? The radical opponents of infant baptism declare: As unconscious children have not yet faith and therefore cannot make confession of it, no one has the right to baptise them. Infant baptism is unscriptural. On the other hand, the defenders of infant baptism assert: Just because children have as yet no faith, baptism administered to them**

is the grandest testimony to the prevenient grace of God. For the grace of God is greater than the saving faith of any individual. Before a man can of himself come to decision, he is received into God's covenant of grace. The baptism of unconscious infants testifies to the all-embracing activity of grace, operating apart from any human agency and reaching the child even when it is incapable of action on its own. Therefore baptism is to be regarded as the most perfect expression of the Christian doctrine of grace.

Such an interpretation of baptism cannot, however, avoid the question : What happens if no saving faith appears in those baptised as children, or if such faith is later repudiated ? Even if—in accordance with the practice of certain churches—confession of faith is put off until confirmation, experience teaches that this is no guarantee that the baptised person takes his confession seriously and proves himself a living member of the Body of Christ. The Strasbourg Reformer, Capito, declared : “ Infant baptism is the reception of a future believer into the Kingdom of God.” One must ask, however : Can the practice of the Church be regarded as satisfactory, if the inner connection of faith and baptism, necessary for salvation, is in many cases rendered uncertain ? Has the Church the right to incorporate into the Body of Christ by a sacramental act persons whom Christ cannot recognise as members of His Body, because when they have grown up they refuse to confess Him and subject themselves to His Lordship ? Are conscious and decided unbelievers, who were once baptised as children, members of the Body of Christ ? Appeal to the grace of God, which is indeed active in baptism, is insufficient. If a man disregards the saving grace of God, which, according

to the Gospel, must be laid hold of by faith, such grace loses its significance. Very often as a result of infant baptism something is declared to be effected which in fact does not prove to be the case. The only real way out of this difficulty is to interpret baptism in terms of sacred magic, that is, to regard it as objectively conveying salvation. But thereby the way to a really biblical doctrine of baptism is excluded.

In a recent article in the *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie*, under the title "Infant Baptism in the light of Reformed Convictions," R. Weber made the following important remarks: "We can put the question what is really maintained by the custom of infant baptism thus—is it faith or superstition? Is it the command of the King or a surrender to the popular psychology of the crowd, which moves quickly from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify'? I am thinking of the crowds of parents and godparents whose promise of a Christian up-bringing is, according to church order, the basis of infant baptism—the crowd of folk who often know less of the Church than millions of heathen. What would happen if the Church one day took her own rules seriously? Does infant baptism express the biblical truth that we are saved through faith alone, by grace alone, by Christ alone? The theologians of our Church have constantly busied themselves with this question, right down to the present time. They have not come so far to an agreed evangelical doctrine of baptism. This is not because the Lutheran or Calvinist tradition prevents it, but for quite other reasons. The change from scriptural to mass-baptism has faced the theologians with a vexatious 'dogmatic difficulty'; they have—like Odysseus—to negotiate a narrow passage between two monsters. There lies on one side the

Scylla of rationalistic symbolism—baptism only a figure—and, on the other side, the Charybdis of sacred magic (which is how one must describe the Roman Catholic attitude)—baptism effective simply through the outward act. Already in Augustine we find the two ways of understanding baptism in incompatible juxtaposition. The first, one may say, is a special danger to the Reformed theologian, the second to the Lutheran. And *all* theologians—from Luther to Barth—in so far as they have recognised these dangers and have avoided them, have shown themselves critical of infant baptism, some even sharply rejecting it.”

Luther tried to defend infant baptism by many different arguments, but he also spoke as follows in a sermon for the third Sunday after Epiphany on Matthew viii, 1 ff. : “Without personal faith no one should be baptised. Where we cannot be sure that young children are themselves believers and themselves have faith, my advice and judgment are that it is better to delay, and even better that we baptise no more children, so that we do not with such foolery and tricks make a mockery of or outrage the blessed majesty of God.”

To quote R. Weber once more : “It must seriously be asked whether, by emphasising with such zeal and acuteness the objective element in the sacrament of baptism, we have not spread a view that is unevangelical, one that obscures the doctrine of justification by a doctrine of grace which really reflects notions of sacred magic. Such an obscuring has the characteristic consequence that the two most important scriptural passages dealing with the nature of baptism—Romans vi and Titus iii—find no place in our baptismal liturgy, while in their stead appears a reference to the blessing

of the children, inserted for polemical reasons.”

According to the witness of the New Testament, there is only one kind of redeeming grace, namely, the gracious deed of God on the cross at Golgotha. And the electing grace of God is received by those who are chosen for salvation by the eternal purpose of God and are called through the preaching of the Word. Apart from faith there can be no appropriation of salvation. To baptism by itself, that is, baptism which is not preceded by faith, the promise is not given.

Two tendencies have shown themselves in the New Testament scholarship of the past decade.

The one maintains that the New Testament knows nothing of infant baptism. H. Windisch has declared that infant baptism represents the decay of apostolic Christianity, while Adolf Schlatter has said that infant baptism in the form we have it is “unbelieving and sinful.” A representative of the more recent theology, H. Schlier, has set forth the following points regarding the relationship of faith and baptism in the New Testament: 1. Faith leads naturally and necessarily to baptism. 2. Faith is the condition of baptism. 3. The central thing which faith is related to is “efficacious baptism.”

The other tendency in New Testament criticism is represented by A. Oepke, Joachim Jeremias, Oscar Cullmann, E. Stauffer and Paul Althaus. It asserts that in all probability infant baptism was practised in the early days of Christianity, indeed that certain passages in the New Testament clearly prove this: the baptism of households in Acts, 1 Corinthians vii, 14, and above all the analogies provided by proselyte baptism.

Regarding the passages in Acts we shall speak later.

About the origins of proselyte baptism we know very little. As a result there is no clear proof that proselyte baptism was administered to unconscious infants in the New Testament period. The documentary evidence comes from later times. No convincing proof that the proselyte baptism of unconscious infants provides the model for a baptism of children in early Christianity has, in my opinion, been produced. Therefore all the deductions which have been drawn from proselyte baptism regarding the baptismal practice of the early Church rest on insecure foundations. Inferences based on indirect evidence from a later period are no certain proof.

Whatever attitude one adopts on this matter, however, the difficult fact remains that we hear nothing about infant baptism in the early Church until the time of Irenaeus. It is first clearly attested by Irenaeus towards the end of the second century. The general practice of the baptism of unconscious children established itself relatively slowly and not without opposition. Even Jerome said: "It is impossible for the body to receive the secret of baptism, if the soul has not first accepted the truth about faith."

In view of this one is bound to ask the following questions: Why was the early Church silent until the end of the second century regarding the baptism of unconscious children? And why was infant baptism still contested in the second and third centuries, if it was already known in early Christianity? These things suggest that infant baptism was not practised originally.

## II

### THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Within Judaism washing and dipping in water played an important role. Ritual purity was restored when a man bathed himself and washed the clothes, furniture or goods with which he had been in contact during a time of impurity. Leviticus, chapters xiv-xvi, indicates the cases in which impurity can be done away with by cleansing baths. In 2 Kings v, 24, it is recorded of Naaman that on the advice of the prophet he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan so that his body might be healed of leprosy. In the Law immersion is prescribed for the first and seventh day of cleansing in the case of this disease.

Similarly bathing served as a preparation for sacred rites. At the great atonement festivals the High Priest cleansed himself by immersion before putting on the sacred garments. Moreover, after he had carried out the purification of the sanctuary, of the burnt-offering and of the congregation, he had to bathe his flesh in the holy place (Leviticus xvi, 4, 26). In the Mishnah (Tractate Yoma) even more exact details are given of the bathing prescribed for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. Five washings and ten *kiddushim* (ritual washings of the feet and hands) were required of him.

Passages in all three of the Gospels provide evidence of what the Pharisees did to avoid levitical uncleanness by dipping the hands in clean water, washing the vessels used for the preparation and serving of food, and bathing before meals. When Luke (xi, 38) reports that Jesus sat down at meat in the house of a Pharisee without having washed Himself—using in this

connection the word *ἐβαπτίσθη* — it is to be presumed that it was a complete bath that the Pharisee was thinking of. In any case, in the time of Jesus such baths were well known and involved the immersion of the whole body.

In the prophetic writings acts of cleansing are given a deeper religious and ethical significance. Isaiah i, 16, contains the prophet's exhortation : " Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." In Ezekiel xxxvi, 25, the prophet makes known the divine promise : " And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." The restoration of Israel is to begin with a cultic ceremony of consecration, carried out by God Himself. Through the water which He sprinkles a new beginning is instituted for the whole people. The cleansing with pure water is accompanied by the communication of divine power. God gives a new heart and a new spirit to a people freed from all uncleanness and idolatry, so that they may be able to walk according to His statutes and carry out His commandments. The preliminary conditions needed for the reformation of Israel are cleansing by the water which blots out sins and sanctification by the divine spirit. The prophet Zechariah also brings into relation with purifying water the deliverance from sin which God purposes and which consists in the putting away of idolatry, false prophecy and every kind of defilement : " In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." (Zechariah xiii, 1.)

What is promised by Ezekiel to the whole people is sought personally by the devout worshipper in Psalm li, 2, 7: "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." It is quite clear that the cleansing sought from God serves to blot out the guilt of sin. The poet uses terms of expression which derive from the cultic ritual. He is not thinking of earthly water, though here again the connection between washing and doing away with sin is perceived. The object of God's activity is a new dedication of his life to God on the part of the worshipper.

The prophetic writings show that ideas of cultic washings had taken on a deeper significance within Judaism. The object was no longer ritual purity, but a deliverance from sin which would include the whole personality. Thereby in principle those insights were gained that became clear and normative for the later period up to the time of John's baptism. Inner purity was seen as the condition of a life well-pleasing to God. His purpose at the end of the age is the realisation of the ideal of a people of God, truly consecrated to Him and fully carrying out His will.

What the prophets anticipated would come in the time of the Messiah, single groups in later Judaism sought to obtain by a strict fulfilment of the Law. With an eye to the coming end of the age, late Judaism was full of attempts to bring into existence the true congregation of God. This was the real aim of the Pharisee movement and of groups separated from the general body of the Jewish people, such as the "New Covenant Community" in Damascus and the sect of Khirbet Qumran, of which the newly discovered Dead

Sea Scrolls provide a picture. These groups represent an even more rigorous legalism than that demanded by the Pharisees. Intensive study of the Law led to a way of life completely taken up with the fulfilment of God's will. The community of Khirbet Qumran, which had its chief centre in the Jordan valley at the north-west corner of the Dead Sea, took with complete seriousness the exact carrying out of the minutiae of the Law and the priestly ideal of purity. It claimed to be a "holy planting," the "congregation of the divine counsel," the "true covenant of God," the "holy house of Israel," the "holy of holies in God's temple." Purifying baths had significance in the ritual of the Khirbet Qumran community. All who were received into the community had to submit to these, after a two year testing and after confession of sin and the taking of solemn vows. The washings and bathings which were the regular duty of the members of the congregation not only served to maintain ritual purity and holiness, but also had power to do away with sin. The members of the community were "pure through sanctifying," by means of "water of cleansing," which washed away impurity. According to the *Manual of Discipline* in the so-called "Sect Document" (III, 7-9), a holy spirit secures that the adherent to the community is "cleansed from all his iniquities." "In an upright and humble spirit his sin will be atoned, and in the submission of his soul to all the statutes of God his flesh will be cleansed, that he may be sprinkled with water for impurity and sanctify himself with water of cleanness." The result, which will be attained at the end of all things, is participation in the coming Kingdom of God.

The community of Khirbet Qumran stood in close

relation to the sect of the Essenes, whom we know chiefly from Josephus and Philo. The fact that the new documents were found in the neighbourhood of the chief colonies of the Essenes could mean that the two groups were identical. It is more likely, however, that they had a common origin and later separated. Though they have many similar features, in many important particulars they differ. Like the community of Khirbet Qumran, the Essenes practised washings and bathings to obtain or recover ritual purity. Josephus reports that each day before the common meal they took a bath in cold water, the men clothed in white aprons, the women in white dresses.

It has been suggested that John the Baptist stood in some relation to the Essenes or to the community of Khirbet Qumran, even if the nature of this cannot be exactly determined. Geographical proximity gives ground for such a possibility. Khirbet Qumran is only two or three hours' distance from the place where John the Baptist baptised at the southern ford of the Jordan near Jericho. The Baptist's earnest call for repentance, his appearance in the wilderness, his ascetic manner of life, his opposition to the Jewish cult and the ruling classes, all make it conceivable that he stood near to these separatist groups within the Jewish people; it is even possible that he came out from among them. Supposing this assumption correct, however, it is still certain that John the Baptist set himself apart from these groups. For John was a thoroughly independent personality. He was no zealot for the Law, but a prophet. The exact and minute carrying out of the Law was not his aim. All that he demanded was the bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance. Turning to God must lead to a

way of life in conformity with God's will. But it is not said that the penitent must undertake an intensive study of the Torah and subject himself to a casuistical application of the Law. All that was asked of him was that he fulfil in his own station the basic demands of the divine will. John the Baptist, therefore, does not belong to the line of the Pharisees, who were legalists, but to that of the prophets with their eschatological emphasis. He takes up the thoughts which meet us in Isaiah and Ezekiel, and makes them more compelling by reason of his conviction of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. It is in the light of this that he demands radical repentance and a consequent holiness of life.

John was the first to initiate a real baptism-movement. The tradition preserved by Matthew (iii, 5) declares: "Then went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan; and they were baptised of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." Among the Essenes—and in the same way among the community of Khirbet Qumran—baptism forms a constituent part of the way of life within a fellowship which is fenced off from the rest of the people and regards itself as the true congregation of God. John the Baptist, on the other hand, directed his message to the whole people. His task was to prepare a people for the Lord. If the nation as a whole rejects the divine requirement, then there remains a "holy remnant," which will be converted, thus escaping God's condemnation and ready to share in His kingly rule. John the Baptist had no intention of founding a new Jewish "sect"; nor, so far as we know, did he form a closed "congregation" of baptised persons, nor provide for their continuing

life any fixed organisation. This was because his message was of the immediate coming of the Kingdom of God. All he did was to gather about himself a group of disciples, who then, it is true, formed the nucleus of the later "baptist" communities, about whose ultimate fate we have only meagre information. From all this it follows that John the Baptist, however close his contacts with the Essenes may have been, belonged to Israel's succession of prophets. Only the fact that he attached such importance to baptism links him with the "community of the New Covenant," which lived in the Jordan valley near the Dead Sea.

Without question John laid considerable emphasis on baptism. A turning to God and confession of sin precede it. Baptism itself is not a ritual bath of cleansing. Nor, since it is dependent on the readiness of the candidate to repent, is it a sacrament of salvation working objectively. At the same time it has eschatological power, doing away with sin in preparation for the breaking-in of the kingly rule of God. Something unrepeatable takes place, expressed and completed once for all in baptism, but the One who is responsible for the decisive happening is God Himself, who grants in baptism the forgiveness of sins.

John's baptism is a pre-messianic act, however. That limits it, as the Baptist himself was aware. It took place before the Day of Salvation, although it stood in direct relation to the latter. It pointed, therefore, beyond itself. If the reign of God is at hand, then the Messiah also is near, the One sent by God to bring in the Day of Salvation. What was of decisive importance for John was recognition of Jesus as the Messiah—and of that he became certain through the divine revelation when he baptised Jesus—recognition that Jesus of Nazareth was God's promised Messiah, His baptism

to be understood as consecration to Messiahship and appointment for messianic office. For at His baptism Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, that is, with the power which remained continuously His and qualified Him for messianic acts. The Messiah was to institute a baptism at the Day of Salvation which His arrival heralded but it was to be a baptism not with water but with the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is the gift which accompanies the Day of Salvation.

It is to be noted that the baptism of Jesus was linked with the outpouring of the Spirit. When He had not as yet received the divine approval of His Messiahship, Jesus submitted Himself to pre-messianic baptism. But as soon as He had received the Holy Spirit, His task became not water-baptism, but baptism with the Holy Spirit. This accords fully with the plan of salvation. Therefore Jesus did not Himself continue John's baptism or the movement which it had called into being, though for a short time at the beginning of His ministry He allowed water-baptism to be administered by His disciples. Thereafter He devoted Himself completely to His work as Messiah. In connection with this, one thing is particularly noteworthy. The Gospels do not record that Jesus actually transmitted the Holy Spirit to those who believed on Him and on His proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Only in John's gospel (iii, 5, 6, 34) do we find suggestions of this kind. But John vii, 39, says: "The Spirit was not yet given," and the situation of the disciples as set forth in the farewell discourse in the Fourth Gospel is that the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, had not yet come to them. Moreover, in John xx, 22, the word of Jesus after His resurrection occurs: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." According to Acts ii, 4, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred first at Pentecost in fulfilment of the

promise given by Jesus to the disciples (Acts i, 5, 8).

John's baptism can hardly be connected with proselyte baptism. The beginnings of proselyte baptism may well stretch back into pre-Christian times, but it only gained real importance in the first century A.D. and did not secure general recognition until the second century after Christ. Clearly it is related to the missionary propaganda of Pharisaic Judaism. It was a ritual act of purification for Gentiles who wished to profess the Jewish faith and to be fully united with the Jewish community. It is therefore to be seen as basically the carrying out of the Jewish ceremonies for the purification of heathen living in a state of complete uncleanness. Proselyte baptism is mentioned neither in the Old Testament nor in the apocryphal writings of late Judaism, neither in Philo nor Josephus. Evidence for it is found in Epictetus, the Sibylline Oracles, the Mishnah and the Talmud. It took place through immersion and was carried out, without a baptiser, by the candidate himself, in the presence of witnesses. It had no sacramental significance. Nowhere is it stated that it mediated the forgiveness of sins. Only in the Sibylline Oracles (4, 165ff.) is it accompanied by a prayer for the forgiveness of sins. It was therefore simply an act of ritual cleansing which bestowed on heathen men and women, who had been converted to the God of Israel, the status of holiness necessary for acceptance into God's covenant and people. In the case of male proselytes it was accompanied by circumcision.

Proselyte baptism did not decisively influence the baptismal practice of the early Christians. At all events the New Testament gives no ground for seeing a connection between the two types of baptism. Early Christian baptism is linked to John's baptism, even

though it goes beyond the latter so far as meaning is concerned. It is unlike John's baptism in that it is no longer a pre-messianic happening but is related to the Messiah, to Christ Jesus. That proselyte baptism did not influence early Christian baptism is further proved by the fact that the latter did not originate in the circle of the Jewish diaspora and that in the first instance it was not intended for heathens but for Jews who had come to faith in Christ. When the early Christians appealed to the command of the Risen Christ, they clearly recognised that early Christian baptism was by its very nature different from the other baptisms and represented something new, whatever connections it may have had with already existing practices. The rite of baptism was no original creation of Christians. From this point of view, it belonged to the great baptism-movement which rose in the Jordan valley. But the special character of early Christian baptism is not thereby understood. Though from the standpoint of comparative religion it is related to a significant tradition of baptisms, it is in its nature so different that it really represents the beginning of a new tradition.

What characterised proselyte baptism also characterised the secret initiation rites and purifying baths of the hellenistic cults. In terms of comparative religion they furnish a number of parallels to early Christian baptism, but these contribute nothing to its real understanding. If Paul—and perhaps before him early Gentile Christianity—took over ideas and practices from the Mystery Religions, he did not, however, make baptism a sacred mystery of the kind found in the cults; rather, he deepened the essentially Christian character of baptism by relating it to the redemptive acts of the death and resurrection of Christ.

### III

## EARLY CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

### 1. The Basic References

That the early Church baptised at all presents something of a problem ; for the historical Jesus — apart from the first period of His public ministry, when, as we have already noted, He allowed His disciples to baptise — neither Himself baptised, nor gave the disciples instructions about it. If the Messiah was to baptise 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. Yet that Church, immediately it was constituted by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, baptised with water. Appeal was made to the command of the Risen Christ. That was, in its view, the decisive thing which determined and justified its action. Baptism is, that is to say, the practice ordained by Christ, by which those of all nations won for the message of salvation and believing in Christ are made disciples and received into the community of the New Covenant. It is “the inescapable condition for entry into the Church and participation in salvation” (Bultmann).

Early Christian baptism, however, although carried out in the same manner as John’s baptism, was no repetition of it. The early Church did not directly take over John’s baptism. Rather, when the command to baptise came from the Risen Lord, the Church returned to the baptismal practice used by the disciples on the instructions of the earthly Jesus (John iii, 22 ; iv 1, 2), at the same time clearly giving it a new meaning in the light of the resurrection appearances of Christ and the events of Pentecost. What we have here is a

continuity of practice, broken only temporarily.

The question of the relationship of water-baptism to Spirit-baptism is therefore to be answered not by saying that Spirit-baptism came in place of water-baptism, but that the two were linked together. The promise that in the messianic Day of Salvation the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit found its fulfilment in that the gift of the Spirit followed directly upon baptism. If baptism was the act of incorporation of believers into the Christian community, the receiving of the Spirit, which came customarily through the laying-on of hands, was the endowment of the baptised with the eschatological gift which enabled them to realise in the course of their earthly existence the new life which they received through baptism. The passages in Acts (viii, 14-17 ; x, 44-48), where the receiving of the Spirit precedes baptism, testify to the inseparable connection between the two. The granting of the Spirit before baptism (Acts x, 44-48) indicates that baptism should be administered. "A baptism which does not convey the Spirit is no right baptism and must be completed by the receiving of the Spirit." (Bultmann).

Since John's baptism as a pre-messianic baptism was not linked with the gift of the Spirit, it was in the time of the Apostles rejected. It was inadequate, although it corresponded to the mode of baptism employed by the early Christians. The mode of baptism is not the decisive thing, but the meaning. At the same time, the manner in which baptism is carried out is not a matter of indifference so far as the expression and understanding of its significance are concerned. So it is said of Apollos that he knew only the baptism of John (Acts xviii, 25). That he expounded the teaching of Jesus rightly and with glowing

enthusiasm did not do away with a defect in the baptism he had already received. The same thing was true of the disciples in Ephesus. They also acknowledged Jesus, but answered the question of Paul: "Into what then were ye baptised?" by saying "Into John's baptism" (Acts xix, 3). Only when they had been baptised into the name of Jesus had they received the baptism valid for membership of Christ's community, and on the ground of this they received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hands of the Apostle. Paul alludes to the inner connection — necessary for salvation — of baptism and the receiving of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians xii, 13. In 2 Corinthians i, 22 and Ephesians i, 13; iv, 30, the communication of the Spirit is the divine seal placed upon the baptised. Titus iii, 5 describes baptism as "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The close connection of baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit also finds expression in John iii, 5, where it is said that water and Spirit together bring about regeneration. The early Christians asserted the difference in character between the baptism they practised and that of John by making clear that the Holy Spirit is received directly in connection with Christian baptism. Baptism without the gift of the Spirit is not Christian baptism in the full sense.

The other characteristic which distinguished early Christian baptism from every other kind of baptism — that of the sects of later Judaism as well as that of John — was that it was baptism into the name of Jesus or in His name: in later times, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This meant that the name of the Lord Jesus was spoken over the candidate. Thereby he became Christ's and was placed

under the authority of the One who was henceforth his Lord. Baptism also made those who had faith in Christ His possession by incorporating them into the messianic community. Thereafter He claimed them entirely. Baptism is therefore the enrolment of the candidate by the Lord Jesus Christ. As one baptised in the name of Jesus he belongs henceforward to Christ. Baptism into any other name — which Paul in 1 Corinthians i, 12-14 recognised as a theoretical possibility — would have been completely meaningless ; it would not have been Christian baptism. For the Christian community there was only one Name, which is above every other name : only one Lord, who stands above all other lords.

Like John's baptism, early Christian baptism was an act which brought deliverance from sin. It is not to be regarded as a symbol, nor as an action which sets forth, however clearly, the inward experience of salvation. It is carried out indeed in obedience of faith, but it is not sufficient to regard it as merely an act of obedience. If it is the inescapable condition for entry into Christ's saved community, then faith in Jesus Christ and confession of Him are the essential requisites for its administration. That finds clear expression in Acts viii, 36-38. The incident there described was clearly typical of the procedure adopted by the early Church. After the official of Queen Candace had heard the message of salvation, he desired baptism. But before Philip agreed to baptise him, he asked the Ethiopian whether he had faith. Only after the assurance had been given : "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," was he baptised by Philip. The preaching of the message of salvation, acceptance of the same by faith, a personal profession of faith, the administration

of baptism by a baptiser authorised by God — these things follow one another. Baptism comes immediately after conversion. Only in later times did instruction precede baptism.

But what is the effect of baptism? To the one who has become a believer in Christ and has been placed under the power of His name, it gives cleansing from sin. This does not take place through the mere declaration of the forgiveness of sins, but because the formerly sinful life is blotted out by something really done by God. The rite of baptism — a rite involving the total immersion of the candidate — is naturally a sign, powerful in its symbolism; but the agent in the act itself is God, who looses the believer in Christ, who receives baptism, from his former condition of being ruled by sin and places him in a new life-context, that of Christ's saved community. Only as one delivered from sin can he really have and share in redemption and in the gifts of the eschatological-messianic Day of Salvation. Baptism results in the forgiveness of sins, as Acts ii, 38, states explicitly. According to Acts xxii, 16, Paul was commanded: "Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name." In 1 Corinthians vi, 11, after Paul has described the heathen past of the Corinthians, he makes clear that the believers in Christ have been washed clean in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. It cannot be doubted that Paul is here thinking of baptism. As the bath of cleansing from sin, baptism is the bath of regeneration (Titus iii, 5). Consequently a soteriological significance belongs to baptism. In Ephesians v, 26, baptism is set in relation to the redemptive work of Christ, in the sense that it is Christ Himself who in baptism realises the results of that redemptive work for

the believer. The self-sacrifice of Christ on the Cross took place that the community might be sanctified. Cleansing "by the washing of water with the word" precedes, however, this sanctification. That is : baptism, in which Christ is active as the agent, sets forth that cleansing from sin which is fundamental. The cleansing from sin, however, is accomplished in virtue of the word, namely, the word by which Christ in the baptism promises forgiveness to the believer. In 1 Peter iii, 21, saving power is attributed to baptism. It saves in virtue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This does not depend on an outward cultic and ritual cleansing but on "an appeal to God for a clear conscience." This appeal receives a favourable hearing in that God in baptism provides a cleansing which reaches the innermost parts, freeing the conscience from guilt. Doubtless baptism is alluded to in the phrase in 2 Peter (i, 9), "the cleansing from old sins." The letter to the Hebrews links the cleansing of the heart from a consciousness of guilt with the cleansing of the body in a bath of pure water. Baptism effects the total and complete cleansing of a person so that he now has free access to Christ the High Priest "in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews x, 22).

These passages show that in baptism something decisive is accomplished by God and Christ. Baptism is a redemptive event. If faith is regarded as the acceptance of salvation, baptism must be regarded as the appropriation of salvation. Baptism is the act which, by freeing from sin, provides the basis for the new life of the believer in Christ and at the same time the foundation for his claim to membership in the saved community of the New Covenant.

## 2. THE SPECIAL TESTIMONY OF PAUL

These ideas are essential for an understanding of early Christian baptism. Paul deepened them by setting baptism more emphatically and consistently than did the first Christians, in relation to Christ's death and resurrection, on which events salvation is based. Paul laid hold of the thought of deliverance from sin in so radical a fashion that he speaks of the crucifixion of our "body of sin" (Romans vi, 6). Baptism not only gives the certainty that we have the forgiveness of sins; rather, it effects the death of "our old man" and the creation of "our new man," free from the power and pretensions of sin (Romans vi, 7). By doing this it provides the basis for a person's existence in accord with the will of God. On the ground of their baptism, believers in Christ can henceforth regard themselves as "dead unto sin" and "alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Romans vi, 11). Since they have been baptised into Christ, they will live with Him in time and eternity. As they are free from the dominion of sin, they are also free from the final grip of death (Romans vi, 8, 9). The new man who rises after being buried in baptism is free from domination by any evil power.

This is the true state of affairs as effected by baptism. But it is only guaranteed if Christians accept the ethical obligation to place their members no longer at the service of sin, but — "as alive from the dead" — at the service of God (Romans vi, 12, 13). Sin will no longer have dominion over them only if they resist the attacks of sin and the enticement of sinful lusts. The "Code of Conduct," which reckons with the concrete reality of the earthly existence of those who have been baptised, is an essential part of Paul's baptismal teach-

ing. In order to exclude any false sense of security, the Apostle issues the reminder: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians x, 12). The example of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, who had themselves received a kind of baptism, provides a warning. The Apostle is aware that the baptised are subject to temptation. He has a clear understanding of the realities of a life in which there can be no complete sinlessness. But with this knowledge of things, he remains, however, quite confident: "God... will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians x, 13).

We turn back, however, to the statements of Paul in Romans vi, 1-11, where the Apostle gives the primary indication of how he interpreted baptism.

In Romans vi, 3, Paul defines more closely the statement that Christians at baptism become Christ's by saying that they are baptised into His death. This means: believers in Christ through becoming His in baptism are united not only with the living Lord in His glorified form, but also with the redemptive experience on Golgotha. They participate in His death. As those who have died with Christ they are buried with Him in His death. The death of Christ is the grave in which the old man perishes. But as Christ rose from the grave to newness of life, so also we rise with Him to share in His glory. Through the power of God there rises from the grave of Christ the new man, destined to walk in newness of life. According to Romans vi, the secret of baptism is dying and rising with Christ. Paul sets out this profound interpretation of baptism in verse 5 in the sentence: "If we have

become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection.” Here Paul uses an even stronger expression for our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. He declares that in the mysterious happening, which is accomplished in baptism, we are brought into a direct organic relationship with the redemptive acts there portrayed, namely, the realities of the death and resurrection of Christ, which are actually present for us in the baptism. When Paul speaks of the “likeness” of the death and resurrection of Christ, he intends it to be understood that the saving significance, actuality and uniqueness of the redemptive acts remain unquestioned (cf. Romans vi, 9, 10). At the same time the death and resurrection of Christ are saving realities, eternally valid, whose continuing power proves itself operative in baptism.

All this means that baptism establishes the closest relation between the believer and that on which salvation is based. What is assented to and laid hold of by faith, becomes for us in baptism this once in our whole existence an apprehended reality. Baptism makes the power of the death and resurrection of Christ effective for us in the accomplishment of the saving process. It is the divine mystery of redemption, placing our being on a new foundation.

The importance of baptism as the basis of the Christian’s existence is also set forth in Colossians ii, 11-14.

Here again it is emphasised that in baptism we share directly in the act of redemption and are most closely linked with the death and resurrection of Christ. We are buried with Christ, we rise with Him and are “quickenened together with Him.” By comparing

**baptism with circumcision and contrasting Jewish circumcision with the circumcision of Christ, Paul makes clear in a particularly vivid way the result produced by baptism. In Jewish circumcision only that part of the flesh is taken away which symbolises heathen impurity, whereas in the circumcision of Christ the whole body of flesh is destroyed. Thereby in a mystical but real manner the believer is incorporated into Christ, the One who died and rose for us; his former existence, doomed by the flesh and by sin, is put away and a new creation is put in its place. Through the process which finds its ratification in baptism, the believer in Christ is transplanted from slavery to the powers which have till then bound him, into freedom from sin, so that as a baptised person his life is "hid with Christ in God" (Colossians iii, 3). The obligation to right conduct is derived from baptism in the letter to the Colossians as well. As those dead and risen with Christ, Christians have the task of setting their affections no longer on earthly things, but on those that are above. It is the special testimony of Colossians that deliverance from sin means deliverance from evil spiritual powers.**

**What, however, gives its peculiar character to the passage Colossians ii, 11-14 — and one that goes beyond the references in Romans vi — is the fact that it stands in a framework distinguished by the words "in Christ." Paul starts from the assertion in Colossians ii, 10, that believers in Christ, who is the head of all principality and power, possess the fullness of salvation. He then goes on to say that in Him — that is, in His realm of salvation and grace — they have experienced what became their lot in baptism. What occurs at baptism is thereby taken out of the earthly and secular sphere and is set in the realm of redemption predestined**

through Christ. The cultic act takes place "in Christ. The outward and visible happening is not thereby deprived of value, but the decisive thing is the mystery of baptism into the actual fact of Christ's redemptive work. According to Paul, only in this way does one come to an understanding of what happens in baptism which is really adequate to its true character.

The language of the baptism-mystery appears again in Ephesians ii, 4-6, though baptism is not there expressly mentioned. The Apostle maintains that God has "quickened us together with Christ," that He has "raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." At this point the Letter to the Ephesians goes beyond the earlier Pauline writings by the assertion that believers are already in the heavenly world in Christ and have their real existence there. But this conception is similar to the thought in Colossians iii, 3, that Christians have in Christ a life "hid with Christ." It is noticeable that in this context the Apostle does not speak of the dying of the believer with Christ. Nowhere in Ephesians is this alluded to. What is significant in Ephesians is that — as in Colossians — all the stages in the baptism-mystery — quickening with Christ, rising with Him and being set in heavenly places — occur "in Christ." This is the thought which governs the reference: what happens in baptism is a redemptive happening in Christ's realm of redemption. The actual setting of baptism as carried out in the earthly realm makes such an interpretation possible, but there stands behind it a great depth of meaning related to the happening itself.

The conceptions characteristic of Colossians and Ephesians are absent from 2 Timothy (ii, 11). There, what Paul sets out at length in Romans vi, is summarised in one sentence: "If we died with Him, we shall

also live with Him.” There is here no explicit reference to baptism, but it cannot be doubted that there is an allusion to baptism in these words.

Another aspect of the Pauline understanding of baptism occurs in Galatians iii, 26. Here Paul declares : “Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised in (or into) Christ did put on Christ.” The references to faith and baptism go hand in hand. Here also they are given content by the baptism-mystery. For it is the happening wrought by God in baptism, not the outward act, which it is the main intention of the Apostle to characterise. By the naming of the name of Jesus over him, the candidate becomes Christ’s and this Paul interprets as signifying an inner union with Christ. Just as the initiates in the mystery-cults put on the garments of the deity as a sign that he belonged to the deity, so the believers who have by faith become children of God are clothed with Christ as with a garment. Thenceforth the believer is no more in the sinful realm of the world, but in the all-pervading holy realm of Christ.

Paul also deepened the conception that baptism is the divinely appointed means of entry into the community of the redeemed. Incorporation into the Body of Christ takes place through baptism. This idea also is a part of the baptism-mystery as understood by Paul. In 1 Corinthians xii, 13, the Apostle declares : “For in one Spirit were we all (by means of baptism) baptised into one body.” When he goes on to say that we “have all been made to drink into one Spirit,” he is not thinking of the Lord’s Supper, but of the bestowal of the Spirit which was conjoined with baptism. One can of course interpret 1 Corinthians xii, 13, differently. Since there is no explicit reference to Christ’s body, it is

possible to render the verse : " In the realm of the one Spirit, we have all been by baptism united into one body, so that we now form one organism with different members as a result of the manifold gifts of the Spirit. In this organism worldly differences are transcended." In that case what is said in 1 Corinthians xii, 13 would correspond with the passage in Galatians where, in connection with his declaration that all believers have in baptism put on Christ, Paul says : " There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be neither male nor female ; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus " (Galatians iii, 28). 1 Corinthians xii, 13 must then be interpreted as follows: Through the power of the Holy Spirit, baptism unites the many believers, separated by earthly circumstances, race, social position, sex, into a new organic structure, in which the only differences are those which come from different spiritual gifts. Baptism makes of Christ's community a body.

But since Paul follows the sentence in 1 Corinthians xii, 12 : " For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body," with the words : " So also is Christ," a more likely interpretation is that Paul, when speaking of the body, has in mind not only the idea of an organism, but is thinking of the Body of Christ, whose members are the believers. If this interpretation is right, then verse 13 means that through baptism believers are incorporated into " the already existing Body of Christ " (Percy).

All this means that Paul has a deeper understanding of baptism than is found elsewhere in the early Church, since it is set in relation to his theology and brought into connection with the fundamental act of redemp-

tion. Acts does not relate baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ, to fellowship in death and life with Christ, to regeneration (John iii, 5 ; Titus iii, 5), or to incorporation into the Body of Christ. Where Paul agrees with the first Christian community is in the close binding of baptism with deliverance from sin and the bestowal of the Spirit. The communication of the Spirit, however, does not seem to be so closely linked with baptism by Paul as is the case in the Acts of the Apostles. In spite of this, however, it is never completely separated by Paul from what takes place at baptism. This is shown by 1 Corinthians vi, 11 and 1 Corinthians xii, 13, and even more significantly in the fact that in Romans the references to how Christians should "walk . . . after the Spirit" (Romans viii, 4f.) come after the statements about baptism in Romans vi. According to Paul it is also essential that baptism be in the name of Jesus, that is, accompanied by the mention and invocation of His name. That the outward form of baptism is immersion is a matter of course. There was no other form of baptism in the early Church.

The real profundity of the Pauline interpretation of baptism lies in the fact that Paul understood the power of the baptism-mystery. For the essence of baptism lies not in the outward and visible rite but in the divine secret which has its foundation in the redemptive acts which provide reason for baptism. By linking baptism with the redemptive process itself, that is, with the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul perceived its deepest meaning. It must, therefore, be said that it was Paul who, as a result of the theological understanding given him, provided the determinative interpretation of baptism.

## IV

### FAITH AND BAPTISM

According to the New Testament, baptism presupposes and requires faith. Fundamental is the sentence : "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mark xvi, 16). Salvation — that is, deliverance in the eschatological sense — is bound up with faith and the baptism which follows upon it. That is the order laid down by God.

First comes the proclamation of the message of salvation which has as its content Christ and the salvation effected by His redemptive work. Faith is the act of obedience by which a person decides for Christ and salvation. But this decision is, in the final analysis, the gift of divine grace so that it must be understood as the calling and ratification of divine election. On the ground of a faith that relates itself to the saving and redemptive work of Christ, God justifies the sinner and makes him a child of God.

The relationship in which faith and baptism stand is shown particularly clearly in the Acts of the Apostles. At the end of Peter's speech at Pentecost, Acts ii, 41 says : "They then that received his word (in faith) were baptised." Acts viii, 12 reports : "But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women." In the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip (Acts viii, 26-40), the Ethiopian official receives baptism after he has made — following the preaching of the message of salvation — the confession : "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts viii, 37, 38). To his question : "What must I do to be

saved?" the Philippian gaoler receives the answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus." After the word of the Lord had been spoken to him and to all that were in his house, he "was baptised, he and all his, immediately" (Acts xvi, 33). The chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, Crispus, "believed with all his house." At the same time many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed. Thereupon they were baptised (Acts xviii, 8).

The question is debated how the references in Acts which report the baptism of whole households are to be understood. In these passages some have found proofs — more or less convincing — that already in the earliest period infant baptism was practised. In favour of this are family solidarity, the authority possessed by the head of the household, the example of proselyte baptism and the *pericope* regarding the blessing of the children, from the last of which Joachim Jeremias has drawn the conclusion that "in Rome at the time of the composition of Mark's gospel the children of Christian parents were baptised." Against this view the following considerations can be urged: 1. The word of Jesus in connection with the blessing of the children has nothing to do with baptism; it relates quite generally to still innocent children "of whom is the Kingdom of God." 2. The passages which deal with the baptisms of unconscious infants at proselyte baptism come from a very much later period; they are not, therefore, conclusive for the practice of the early Church. But even if proselyte baptism had already in the time of Jesus and the Apostles considerable importance, faith in Christ is so central that the connection between early Christianity and proselyte baptism cannot have been as close as Jeremias suggests.

In spite of many formal characteristics in common, proselyte baptism and Christian baptism are so different in their nature that one is not justified in transferring, without more ado, to Christian baptism ideas that were determinative for proselyte baptism. It has further to be pointed out that the carrying out of the baptism itself without a baptiser, as was the case with proselyte baptism, made it something quite different from Christian baptism. 3. Without exception, the places in Acts where the baptism of whole households is spoken of, clearly establish the fact that the baptised had already heard and accepted the word of God.

The situation described in Acts xvi, 31-33 is as follows: To the question, "What must I do to be saved?" the Philippian gaoler receives the answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." This sentence could be understood to mean that it depended on the faith of this man alone. If he believed on Christ Jesus, then the salvation of his family is thereby and at the same time secured. That would mean that the decision of the father of the household carried with it the decision of all those in the house, without their having themselves made it. That this was not the case is shown by the verses that follow. In verse 32 it is expressly said that Paul and Silas "spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house." All of them, therefore, heard the message of salvation. It follows that they were all of an age at which they could themselves consciously decide to accept the word that was preached. After this has been made clear, it is said that the gaoler and all his dependents were baptised.

The other reference (Acts xviii, 8) is to be understood in the same way. Before the baptism is spoken of, two statements are made. The first is: "Crispus,

the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house." The second runs: "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptised."

Both these passages, therefore, preserve the order witnessed to elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles: Preaching of the message of salvation — Faith in Christ — Baptism. And it is expressly said that those who were baptised had already heard and accepted the word of God. Acts xvi, 33 and xviii, 8 exclude the possibility that there were infants among those baptised. Naturally there may have been children in these households, but only such as were of an age to be able to hear the preaching, accept it for themselves and come to faith in Christ.

The only reference that is not quite so clear is Acts xvi, 15, where the conversion of the seller of purple, Lydia, is recounted. Here the record given by Acts is unusually brief. Two points are made: 1. The Lord opened Lydia's heart so that she "gave heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul"; and 2. she and her household were baptised. There is no explicit mention of her faith or the faith of her companions. One must, however, seriously ask: Could it have happened otherwise with Lydia and her "household" than in the case of the Philippian gaoler and Crispus? Such a possibility is excluded. What we have in Acts xvi, 14-15 is a very compressed account of the whole incident. The testimony of Acts taken as a whole clearly emphasises the view that those only were baptised who had first heard the message of salvation and had become believers in Christ. Moreover, there can be no certainty that there were unconscious infants in Lydia's household. Karl Barth is right when he speaks of the "thin thread" on which must hang any

argument for infant baptism based on this passage, He goes on: "One thinks, however, of the sequence that is invariably kept even in these narratives — the preaching of the Word, faith, baptism — and wonders whether one really wants to hold to this thread." What is true of these references to baptism in Acts is true also of 1 Corinthians i, 16 where Paul speaks of baptising the "household" of Stephanas.

Oscar Cullmann thinks that infant baptism is compatible with the New Testament teaching as to the nature and intention of baptism. But even he has to agree that it must remain doubtful whether there actually were small children in these households. Ethelbert Stauffer refers to the household formula which occurs in the ritual language of the Old Testament — especially that relating to circumcision. He is right in saying that the household formula includes small children, but he has to admit that it cannot with certainty be said that there were infants in the households of Stephanas, Lydia or the Philippian gaoler. Arguments for infant baptism in the New Testament rest, therefore, on very insecure foundations.

Nor is there any reference to infant baptism in 1 Corinthians vii, 14. If the practice had already existed in the time of Paul, the Apostle would not have neglected such a point for his argument. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians vii, 14: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the (Christian) brother; else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." With these words the Apostle dispels the concern of the Corinthians that in a mixed marriage the un-Christian partner by reason of his or her heathen nature defiles the Christian partner. This is not the case; on the contrary, the

power of the holiness possessed by the Christian partner is so strong that the heathen partner shares in it. Such a marriage, even though a mixed marriage, has the character of a Christian union. The proof thereof is in the children. They are looked upon not as heathen but as Christian children. They are "holy" even if only one of the partners is a Christian. The question raised by 1 Corinthians vii, 14 is this. Has this passage anything to do with infant baptism or has it to do with a different set of circumstances?

Cullmann believes that 1 Corinthians vii, 14 must be understood in the light of proselyte baptism, in which only the children of converts were baptised, not those born after their parents had changed their religion. On this account he comes to the conclusion that a later baptism of such children, when they have come to years of discretion, is "directly excluded" by 1 Corinthians vii, 14. Holiness "purely by reason of birth" is sufficient in these cases. He thinks that an "idea of collective holiness" is here presupposed, "in the sense of a reception into the Body of Christ which follows not upon a personal decision but upon birth from Christian parents, who have received baptism." From this a direct line leads to infant baptism, "but none to a baptism based on a later decision of those sons and daughters who were born in a Christian home."

But the remarks of Cullmann present us with an impossible line of argument. What is true of the children must also be true of the heathen partners in mixed marriages, since they also are described as "holy." From the Christian partners they acquire the same character of holiness as the children. Then they also must have been received into the Body of Christ

without a personal decision. The consequence of the "idea of collective holiness" suggested by Cullmann would be that the Body of Christ had in it members whom Paul expressly calls "unbelievers." But that is an idea which Paul would have found quite impossible.

What Paul is saying is that the heathen partner in a mixed marriage occupies a different position from that he would occupy in a purely heathen marriage. And the children of such a mixed marriage are not to be regarded as in exactly the same position as heathen children. They are children who are firmly related to the realm of redemption of their Christian father or Christian mother, because the latter's sanctifying power is stronger than the power of unholiness coming from the heathen partner of the mixed marriage. But they are not thereby members of the Church and the Body of Christ. And finally: Paul always most clearly emphasised that incorporation into the Body of Christ — on the ground of faith and the demonstration of faith — takes place through baptism. Could he on this one occasion have thought otherwise? That is impossible. The unbelieving partner in a marriage, although "sanctified" by the Christian husband or the Christian wife, must become a believer if he or she wants to belong to the Christian congregation. In the same way "holy" children must believe and receive baptism, if they are really to become members of the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians vii, 14 does not, therefore, exclude later baptism; it requires it.

## V

### BAPTISM AND CHURCH

The question of baptism stands in the closest relation to the question of the Church (*Gemeinde*)\* Naturally one can say that the evidence of the New Testament, particularly that of Acts relates to a missionary situation. In such a situation it was inevitable that those who came over to the Christian Church from Judaism or paganism should come to faith prior to baptism and be required to make confession of that faith. But is it right to recognise already in the earliest period a church-situation which, on analogy with proselyte baptism, provides room for the possibility of baptising the unconscious children of Christian parents or of giving up all claim that they be baptised ?

Such a view is impossible. For the question of baptism will be decided not by a theory, which, though historically possible, is not sufficiently confirmed by the sources, but by the question of the nature of the Church. Does the Church of Jesus Christ consist of persons who believe, have been baptised and are filled with the Holy Spirit, having already heard Christ's message of salvation ? Or is she the Church of the baptised, who prior to their baptism have neither understood the message of salvation nor confessed their faith, so that this Church — as indeed is in fact now the case — consists in part of believing Christians and in part of unbelievers, who in spite of a baptism administered to them in childhood fail to confess Christ as their Lord and Saviour ? Or, to put it in New Testa-

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\* The English word "Church" has to do duty for the two German words *Gemeinde* and *Kirche*. The former is a more satisfactory equivalent for the Greek *ecclesia*.

ment terms : Is it conceivable that the Body of Christ, into which, according to the teaching of the Church, men are incorporated by baptism (infant baptism), embraces believers and unbelievers ? To distinguish between Church and Body of Christ by suggesting that the two do not coincide is unbiblical. According to the evidence of the New Testament, the Church and the Body of Christ are identical. It follows that only those can belong to the Body of Christ — and therefore also to the visible Church — who believe, have been baptised, stand in a vital relationship with Christ, have received the Holy Spirit, confess Christ as their Lord and Saviour and know themselves as under obligation to walk in newness of life. That is true also of the children of Christian households. In spite of their “sanctification” they must tread the path of personal decision and the obedience of faith. They can only be received into Christ’s Church, if they have undergone baptism on profession of their faith. The reversal of the order Faith-Baptism contradicts the order of the New Covenant, which is not something temporary or related only to a “missionary situation,” but is laid down by God and valid for every age and situation. The faith which precedes baptism is necessary for salvation in a “church-situation” as well. For only a baptism which follows faith and the personal confession of faith is surety for membership in the Body of Christ. Baptism is only meaningful if administered to persons who have faith in Christ. The baptism of unconscious infants, on the contrary, is irreconcilable with the New Testament conception of the Body of Christ, since it leaves open the question of personal decision and the real confession of faith.

One can certainly advance important and theologic-

ally-based arguments for infant baptism. The most impressive is the Catholic teaching that, quite independently of a person's faith, the sacrament of baptism does away with original sin, so that the child, having been made a partaker of sacramental grace, is received into the *corpus Christi* and thereby participates in a human nature ransomed and renewed by Christ. But the New Testament knows nothing of this kind of sacramentalism. Equally foreign to the New Testament is the idea that a profession of faith by god-parents can serve, if faith is absent on the part of the candidate. In their teaching and practice of baptism the churches have adopted a number of extra-biblical elements, which have obscured the meaning and nature of baptism. In the history of the Church, infant baptism has been the means used for the "conversion" of whole nations. Though in a more restricted measure, this is still the case to-day. But a superficial "Christianity," whether it employ forcible means or depend on a mere traditional piety, represents a misunderstanding of the Risen Lord's command regarding baptism. The saving work of Christ is effectual for the whole world. Salvation is, however, granted only to those who lay hold of it by faith. For the message of salvation brings deliverance as the power of God only to those who believe (Romans i, 16 ; iii, 22). Therefore, the Church of Jesus consists only of those in whom the saving purpose of God — directed though it be to all mankind — finds realisation. The object of God's operation, directed towards the saving of the world, is the community gathered *out* of all peoples and nations, which has faith in Christ, confesses Him as Lord and is united to Him. As a result, baptism, which implies entry into the community and which makes the candidates members of the Body of

Christ, can only be administered to those whom God has chosen and called and who have obeyed His call. The baptism which corresponds to the nature of the Church is the baptism of believers, not infant baptism.

Infant baptism leads inevitably to a church embracing the whole community (*Volkskirche*), which in spite of all the safeguards it creates for itself (religious instruction, confirmation) and all compromise solutions (inner fellowships, based on participation in the Lord's Supper, etc.), is far from being the *ecclesia* of God in the New Testament sense. The secularising process, which appears in ever more radical forms, shows that a growing number of those who have been "baptised" repudiate any connection with the Gospel and with Christ. A church embracing the whole community is an illusion, which can only maintain itself when one adopts an unbiblical sacramental notion or the idea of the Church as an institution (*Heilsanstalt*), but does not really understand it as in any decisive sense the fellowship of believers and those called to be saints. Even if one were prepared to agree that the baptism of the children of believing parents can be theologically defended — though this does not correspond to the nature of the New Covenant community — only a relatively small part of the *Volkskirche* could thereby be regarded as the Church of Jesus Christ. A justification of the *Volkskirche*, as it exists today, could not be undertaken in this way, for the repudiation of Christianity by wide circles brings the very idea of such a church sharply in question. It is a contradiction in itself when, judging the situation realistically, one regards the *Volkskirche* as a church for the people and appeals to its baptised members — in so far as they belong to the "unsaved" — as unbelievers, making them the

object of missions and evangelism. For, according to the teaching of the Church, one is dealing with "baptised Christians," who have been instructed in the Gospel and have solemnly confessed their faith at confirmation! If the Church took such matters really seriously, she could hardly direct missions to her own members!

Progress depends on decision between *Volkskirche* and fellowship of believers. But the question of baptism then enters a new stage, for it raises the issue whether the present order in the *Volkskirche* — first baptism, then faith or, on the other hand, unbelief — can be maintained.

In the order Faith-Baptism, which we have seen to be the only valid, meaningful and divinely-willed order, not only in a missionary situation but in a church situation, is it not possible to admit infant baptism and believers' baptism side by side so that in the same church — Free Church or Brethren Assembly — according to one's own understanding there can be a choice between the one or the other kind of baptism? That cannot be, because infant baptism excludes believers' baptism and *vice-versa*, and because one cannot represent in the same fellowship two different ideas of the Church.

If one accepts Faith-Baptism as the only order corresponding to the nature of the Church, then the point in time at which baptism is carried out is not a matter of indifference. It is not a matter of some kind of temporal scheme, but of principle. For if faith precedes baptism, baptism can only be administered when a conscious turning to Christ is evident and a confession of faith has been uttered.

Likewise the form of baptism is not unimportant.

**If the question, “What is baptism?” is answered in the sense understood by the early Church, then it cannot be administered by sprinkling, but only by immersion. Otherwise, the act and its meaning fall apart, and there is no basis for the understanding of baptism set forth by Paul. Moreover, the baptism-mystery is bound up with the characteristic form of early Christian baptism.**

**The result of all this is that the question of baptism cannot be separated from the question of the Church. It is indissolubly bound up with it. Indeed one has to say that the question of the Church has precedence over the question of baptism.**

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