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EDITORIAL—THE POLITY REPORT.

AFTER prolonged investigation by some thirty ministers and laymen constituting the Polity Commission, the Report of their findings has been issued, and remitted by the B.U. Council to the Associations for consideration at their forthcoming Assemblies. Upon the views then expressed, the Council will, in November, formulate definite proposals for submission to the 1944 Assembly. It is important, therefore, that every minister should acquaint himself with the contents of the Report, and should encourage his deacons and church members to consider a document which has a vital bearing on future denominational policy.

We can here indicate only some of the chief recommendations:—

Candidates for the Ministry.—Suggestions are made concerning the reception, training, and probationary courses of candidates for the ministry and, arising from these, is the question of closer co-operation between the colleges. In this connection it may be mentioned that another Committee has before it the proposal that all candidates, whether for college training or for the B.U. examination, should, before making application, receive the approval of their local Associations.

into people's eyes and blind them to the real needs of the times. The great thing is the remedy. The diagnosis is important; but we all know well how, when the doctor has told us what is the matter, we are immediately better, and the more incomprehensible the word he uses the better we are. Yes, but only for an hour! After the diagnosis comes the medicine, and the weariness of the uphill road. So it is with men and with society. There's a lot of evil to be got rid of, to be fought and overcome. The good, every bit of it, has to be achieved. For this men have to be called to the battle, and they have to be willing to take up the weapons and to use them. Now, original sin is no battle cry; it can easily become a pillow for a weary head, and an excuse for the lazy. It can, indeed, seem to shift the responsibility for all our *malaise* upon God. You can be sure that everybody will try to shift it on to somebody else. And when Hitler is dead there'll be a vacancy.

As I see it, there never was a time when individual and personal responsibility needed to be stressed more. All the best.

Ever yours,

ARTHUR DAKIN.

THE CHURCH AND THE CHILD.

"WHY don't you baptise children, the same as other churches?" asked a Lambeth woman of her Baptist friend. "Oh, there's not much difference," replied her friend, "only we give 'em a dry christening!" This example of Cockney humour is, we suspect, not isolated as an expression of the vague understanding our people have of the significance of the Dedication service and the estimate of the child implied therein. Yet as this is their point of departure from the other great communions of the Church, Baptists can least afford to be ill-informed on the matter.

There can be little doubt that the importance of infant baptism in the early Church was due to the prevalent notions on original sin. The Fathers were unwilling to observe the reticence of the New Testament writers on the subject. Their speculations led them to believe that a child was a fully constituted sinner, responsible for its sinful state, and so liable to the penalty of eternal damnation. This remarkable conclusion was founded upon Paul's statement in Romans 5: 12, where "all sinned" was construed as "all sinned at one time in Adam." When this interpretation was objected to on the ground of the voluntary nature of sin, Augustine replied that the wills of all

actively co-operated with that of Adam in his transgression, hence all were equally guilty. It was not to be wondered at that Gregory of Nyassa suggested that this inborn sin was removed by baptism; nor were the consequences of his contention to be wondered at. By the time of the Council of Trent it was held that justification was not by faith, but by the infused grace imparted at baptism; penance and the priestly absolution sufficed to safeguard the recipient in later years. Apart from mitigating the condition of deceased unbaptised children, Catholic theology has not essentially departed from this position.

This historical background ought not to be forgotten by Baptists, if only so that they might point their Paedo-Baptist friends to the hole of the pit whence they were digged. For clearly infant sprinkling on the Augustinian basis has a magical flavour. But our point is that any sacrament which confers grace *ex opere operato* (i.e. purely by virtue of its administration and apart from faith in the recipient) is magical. Since infant baptism is usually conceived of in this way, it is difficult to see how the charge can be avoided by those who practice it.

How, then, do our Free Church fellow-believers interpret the rite? Many of them, uncomfortably conscious that there is little difference between the giving of grace that regenerates and that which inclines to the faith that regenerates, have frankly given up the idea that there is any effect wrought on the child by sprinkling. The value of the rite is that it signifies the dedication of the child by its parents, and that in later years, when the religious instruction of the child begins, that act may be made the basis of appeal to the child. All ideas of the ceremony being the means of absolving the guilt of the infant, or of making it a child of God or an heir of the kingdom, are dismissed. Such candour we applaud, but we wonder why the "baptismal" rite is preserved at all. Others would go further and regard the service as a *means* (not sign) of the child's dedication to God. Both these interpretations are rejected by a third and growing class who accept the position never abandoned by orthodox Presbyterians (who, by the way, still vigorously defend Augustine's views of sin)—i.e., that infant baptism is the means whereby a child is claimed by the Church as a member of its communion and of the Kingdom of God. This sacerdotal view of the ceremony finds its latest exponent in Dr. J. H. Whale.

In his book on "Christian Doctrine" Dr. Whale finds himself in the same difficulty as other Protestants when comparing

the Eucharist with baptism (of infants). He unhesitatingly affirms that a sacrament is of no avail apart from faith; yet he advances the opinion that "nothing illustrates the Christian doctrine of the Sacraments so unambiguously as the Sacrament of Baptism." The reconciliation between these two apparently contradictory positions is effected by the proposition that the faith exercised in "baptism" is that of the Church (page 166). To most of us such a solution subverts, not illustrates, the fundamental significance of a sacrament. It implies that saving faith can be exercised by one on behalf of another. It endorses what the Congregational Commission of 1933 calls "the sub-Christian practice" referred to in 1 Cor., 15: 29—viz., that a living believer may be baptised in the stead of a deceased unbaptised person, with the intent of transferring the efficacy of the rite to the latter. The implications of this principle are boundless. And all for the sake of perpetuating a rite which has nothing in common with the spirit of the New Testament!

It becomes evident that Baptists need to be clear not only as to the significance of their dedicatory service, but as to the theological background assumed by it. In the limits of this article, statement will of necessity take the place of argument.

First, whether or not we hold to the reality of "original sin" in the child, few will be prepared to maintain that that concept includes guilt. Paul, in Rom. 5: 13, lays down that sin is not "reckoned" when there is no law—i.e., when it is not realised that deeds committed are wrong, then legally there is no offence, though Paul was sure that "sin" was present (they all died from Adam to Moses!). The only beings without law are children, for the "heathen" have the law of conscience. That Paul believed children to have within them the principle of sin appears from Rom. 7: 9: "I was alive once without the law"—i.e., as a child, "but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." If we cannot translate the term "*anaxao*" "spring to life *again*," then at least we may infer that it implies that sin was no invader from without, but a dormant principle operating from within; and Paul still calls it "sin"! But certainly the positive and negative effects of such sin are fully covered in the principle revealed in "Christ died for all." There is no warrant in Scripture for Limbo.

Is an infant naturally a "child of God"? Two complementary ideas are involved here—viz., fatherhood and sonship. Many hold that God's Fatherhood has never been interrupted despite

the rupture of the relationship on man's part; yet others affirm that man is always a child of God, at least ideally, whatever his moral condition. This reasoning appears to ignore that "Fatherhood," as applied to God, is a metaphor which represents a *moral* relationship between Himself and His creatures, not a natural one. The infant is *constituted* for sonship, but only attains it through regeneration, the Spirit's response to conscious faith (Gal. 3: 26: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.") A father without sons is as difficult to conceive as a moral relationship between two persons which is one-sided.

This inclines us to the view that children enter (=become members of) the Kingdom of God in the same way that they enter His family—by faith. Dr. Wheeler Robinson has suggested ("Doctrine of Man," p. 145) that the Johannine concept of eternal life is the parallel to the Synoptic presentation of the Kingdom of God; whether his suggestion be adopted, or the former be regarded as an integral part of the latter, on either count an unconscious entrance into that kingdom is inconceivable. When Jesus said of children "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," He surely referred to the qualities of the child-mind, trustfulness, sincerity, receptiveness, etc., and not to their supposed status in that kingdom. In this connection "Except a man be born again . . ." is a principle admitting of no exception.

In view of the foregoing, what is the purpose of our dedication service? Not, to be sure, to secure a pardon for the imagined guilt of the child, nor to procure its entrance into the family and kingdom of God, nor even to gain some supernatural grace that will materially assist its later decision for Christ. It is rather a setting apart of a *child* by its parents for the "nurture and admonition of the Lord," a setting apart of *themselves* to the task of making it a disciple in its tender years, and a united seeking by the *assembled congregation* of the blessing of God on the infant.

This definition will not satisfy those who regard the child as "dedicated" to the Lord in a similar fashion as e.g., the Temple furniture of the Old Covenant was dedicated. In truth, the idea is a reversal to Old Testament ideas of personality, as is shown by the examples of "dedication" that are adduced—viz., Samuel by Hannah and Jesus by Mary. The peculiar relation of the Jew to Jehovah, the external conception of the Kingdom consequent upon it, and the parental absolutism that was considered natural

under it, have been superseded in the Revelation in Christ. Hannah, e.g., when she "lent" Samuel to the Lord, did no less than make him a *Nazarite priest for life*, a servant of the Temple all his days. Such an act has nothing in common with that of the modern mother in our dedication service. So also when Jesus was brought to the Temple by Mary; it was in recognition of the fact that the first-born son belonged to the Lord, and required to be "ransomed" from the necessity of being consecrated to the service of God and the sanctuary. Do we desire to take our people back to the observance of Levitical legislation in this age of the Spirit? No more than we desire to be in bondage to the Galatianising heresy of Catholicism or any of its emulators.

Our service, then, is a fitting introduction of a child to the community of believers in Christ. It is a practical remembrance of an unchanging invitation: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." If it is true that none is brought to Him in vain, that intercession for another avails with the Father, and that He often uses the interceders for the accomplishment of their prayers, then it has a value by us immeasurable and is not lightly to be esteemed.

G. R. BEASLEY MURRAY.

FIXED THEOLOGIES.

IF one were asked to define the attitude of present-day Baptists to theology, it would seem to be on the whole true that they have inherited a deep suspicion of the value of credal formulas to which has been added, under the stress of modern confusion and the rise of new faiths, a longing for more theological definiteness. The latter appears difficult to get without that precise formulation of beliefs as a test of church membership, from which Baptists, both by tradition and instinct, are averse; on the other hand, the decline of Calvinistic theology has left a vagueness which is a definite weakness when we are confronted with the attractive humanism of a man like Julian Huxley or a clear-cut system of beliefs such as that of Marxian Communism. A new, and perhaps more subtle, enemy has appeared in that revival of mysticism divorced from history, which claims the right of immediate access to God, and has no use for a specific Mediator, not even Christ Himself. Aldous Huxley's latest biography of Father Joseph, and the novels of Charles Morgan, both seem to tend in this direction, and both are dangerous in that their sincerity and religious