

IV

BAPTISM—THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE

IN contrast to the relatively meagre amount of information which the New Testament has to give with regard to the performance of the actual rite of baptism, when we turn to consider the question of what baptism means, in what lies its spiritual significance, we find a wealth of material on which to draw. The underlying reason for this situation, as we have previously indicated, lies in the fact that generally the New Testament is not so much concerned with *how* a thing is done, providing it is done 'decently and in order', but rather with the spiritual meaning of the act itself. We will look in vain for magical concepts in the New Testament; there is no *ex opere operato* efficacy given to the sacraments of the infant Church. It is probably true to say that there is scarcely a book in the New Testament which does not have some contribution to make to the overall theology of baptism, and thus the meaning of baptism becomes such a wide subject with so many ramifications that our treatment of it will be, perforce, brief and incomplete. It is our purpose, however, to endeavour to establish the main lines of approach to the subject in the New Testament, and before we enter on this it will be well to outline the changes in situation effected by one's entry into the new covenant.

Paul is insistent that entry into the covenant blessings of Christ is solely upon the ground of faith (Gal. 3.6-9; Rom. 3.28, etc.) — as with Abraham so with all who follow after him. Furthermore, this faith, this way of life which is characterised by committal and obedience, is a faith that justifies. Of

Abraham it could be said, 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness'. In the same way the Christian is declared right, justified, on the ground of his faith (Rom. 3.26). Entry into the new covenant implies not only justification, however, but a new relationship, the covenant is not simply forensic but intensely personal. This, indeed, even lies behind the essentially legal concept of justification, it is not merely the divine act of acquittal by which a man, on the ground of his faith, receives the verdict of 'not guilty' at the tribunal of God, but it is an act which involves his restoration to his rightful place in society. For the one who believes in Jesus, there is not only a judicial declaration of God that he is right, an objective and in a sense almost impersonal act, but also, through the radical change in his very existence, he is brought into a new and living relationship with his Lord. 'Old things have passed away, behold the new has come' wrote Paul (2 Cor. 5.11). Thus regenerated the Christian stands as a new man in Christ, living in close union and communion with Him. Further this new relationship is sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is the pledge of adoptive sonship in the divine family of God (Rom. 8.14-16), the sealing into the new covenant relationship, marking the Christian as God's property, and the 'earnest', the 'advance payment' of his ultimate inheritance (2 Cor. 1.21, 22; 5.5; Eph. 1.13; 14).

With these facts in mind we must now turn to a consideration of the New Testament doctrine of baptism to see in this sacrament a repetition in dramatic form of these events in the life of the believer. Like all New Testament theology, the basis of baptism is Christocentric, it is deeply rooted in His Person and Work, nor, indeed, may it be properly understood apart from this relationship. W. F. Flemington has well written, 'baptism symbolised the Gospel of the Resurrection . . . (it) outwardly embodied the meaning and essence of the Gospel'.¹ Indeed, we may say that what happened on the Cross and at the Resurrection is symbolically re-enacted in the Christian's life in his baptism. This approach to baptism is not merely to be found in the epistles of the New Testament, although naturally it is to these that we turn for a consideration of the developed

doctrine, but we find it implicit and explicit in the Acts. From the very beginning Christian baptism was presented as a baptism for the remission of sins, arising out of repentance and faith, and thus intimately linked with justification and regeneration; it was associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promised seal of the new covenant and the source of the believer's life in Christ; and it was a baptism 'into Christ' with all that was implied in the phrase both in relation to Christ and in relation to His Church (cf. Acts 2.38; 8.14-17; 19.4-6; 22.16, etc.). We may reduce this to three main lines of approach, and we shall consider the doctrinal teaching concerning baptism in the New Testament as it is related to it as the rite of entry into the new covenant, as it is the rite of justification, and as it is the rite of union with Christ. These aspects will serve as our headings for study.

It is also important to remember as we come to study the meaning of the symbolism underlying baptism that in the New Testament we will search in vain for evidence of the magical way in which so many view the sacraments today. The New Testament concepts are devoid of any superstition, and the Hellenistic concepts of the mystery religions are lacking. Unquestionably the sacraments displayed reality. Baptism was not merely a symbol it was an event, it was the act of incorporation into Christ; the Lord's Supper was not merely the remembrance of a sacrifice, it was its dramatic re-presentation, but this real efficacy was dependent entirely on moral and spiritual conditions. Part of the reason for this lack of magical concepts lies in the fact that the sacraments are grounded firmly in the historical Jesus, a real man who had submitted to the baptism of His Passion for our sakes. Baptism and the eucharist were, for the early Church, not mystical rites, but the symbolic re-enactment of historical events, events into which they themselves had entered.²

Baptism as Initiation

The ordinances of the old covenant were, as we saw at the beginning of this study, ordinances of promise. They pointed

forward to a fulfilment that would be both beyond and outside themselves, but which they nonetheless adumbrated. Through the failure of Israel the covenant could never be fulfilled in the natural order of events, it would require an eschatological fulfilment. This fulfilment was reached in the coming of the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, and the establishment of the new covenant in and through Him, an event foreshadowed, as we saw, in His own baptism. Thus for the New Testament writers the Last Day had dawned, the Messianic Age had arrived, and by an act of His free grace, Christ has incorporated those of faith into the new Messianic community, the Church of God. In the old covenant circumcision stood as the sign and seal of reception into the covenant, but now, with the advent of the new in Christ, 'there was a need for an act of naturalisation into the kingdom of God, such was baptism . . . it was a public life committal and confession of the yoke of Christ'.³ Thus in the same way that circumcision had marked reception into the covenant of Israel, so baptism marks the reception into the covenant blessings of Christ and His Church, as Calvin puts it, 'baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted into the fellowship of the Church'.⁴

There has been a tendency in the Evangelical wing of the Church to reduce the sacraments to mere symbols. They are more than this; they are the physical representation of spiritual reality. Thus, while a man is incorporated into Christ through the obedience of faith, it is his baptism which is the effective sign of his reception of Christ's saving work. It is for this reason that baptism can be spoken of as initiation into Christ, for as Paul makes clear the one who is 'baptised into Christ' can be said to have 'put on Christ' (Gal. 3.27). The New Testament Church knew of no other way in which the spiritual status of the believer could be represented and thus to be baptised was to be visibly sealed into the company of Christ's Church, in relation to which his faith had already placed him. Baptism can therefore be seen as the covenant seal 'prepared for by late Jewish baptismal practice, stimulated by the baptism of John, and made necessary by the missionary command of the Risen Lord'.⁵ It stands as the testimony that we who were once

'strangers and foreigners' are now sheltering under God's covenant with us in Christ, by whose grace we have become 'household men of God' (Eph. 2.19). It was for this reason that the early Church spoke of baptism as a spiritual circumcision, and it is interesting to note that the Old Testament passages which were used by the rabbis to expound proselyte baptism were taken over by the Church as foreshadowing Christian baptism (cf. 1 Cor. 10.1, 2; 1 Peter 3.20, 21).⁶ Thus, for the Church, the 'sacrament of baptism came to take the place of circumcision which was the sign and seal of the old covenant'.⁷ Christian baptism is thus to be understood as the complete fulfilment of the old rite of physical circumcision. Just as the new covenant has completely fulfilled the old by giving it an entirely new dimension through its completion in Christ, the 'one seed' of Abraham to whom the promises pointed, so also baptism is the fulfilment of circumcision. It is the new 'circumcision without hands' (Col. 2.11) to which the old circumcision, that made 'with hands' pointed forward (Eph. 2.11).

The relationship between circumcision and baptism is most clearly expounded at Colossians 2.11-15. The church at Colossae was being troubled by the appearance of a syncretistic philosophy, no doubt in essence closely related to what was later to become Gnosticism, although at Colossae it was strongly coloured by Judaistic ideas. The situation is well summed up by Visser t'Hooft as he writes, 'they (the Colossians) feel the need for guarantees concerning their status in the universe in addition to assurance concerning their personal salvation. So they add to their individual gospel a cosmic gospel, but they take the materials for the second from a religious philosophy which is based on presuppositions which have nothing to do with those of the revelation in Christ'.⁸ What then was Paul's approach to this situation? It was simply the proclamation of the Cosmic Christ, the One who is all and in all, in whom the *pleroma* of God resides, and into whom they have been baptised. If the Colossians had only remembered their baptism and what it implied they would have been delivered from the plausible sophistries of these 'spiritual confidence tricksters', as one writer has called them. What then did their baptism mean? It

was primarily a participation in the circumcision of Christ. This was not a reference to His circumcision as an infant under the regulations of the old covenant, but rather it spoke of His death, for this was the moment when He 'stripped off the body of flesh', that supreme act 'of which His literal circumcision was at best a token anticipation'.⁹

It must be remembered in this connexion that even in the Old Testament the symbolic nature of circumcision was constantly emphasised. Circumcision was simply the outward mark of a man dedicated to God, without the inward dedication the outward sign was utterly valueless, and it certainly did not make him an Israelite in the real sense of that word. Indeed, those Old Testament writers with a heightened spiritual perception had applied the underlying ideas and thought of circumcision to the lips (Exodus 6.12), to the heart (Lev. 26.41; Ezek. 44.7-9), and other members of the body (cf. Deut. 10.16; Jer. 4.4, etc.). Writes Barclay, 'Circumcision was the badge of a person dedicated to God, but the dedication lay not in the circumcision of the flesh, but in the excision from life of everything which was against the will of God'.¹⁰ Furthermore as Cullmann rightly emphasises, 'the very fact that long before the birth of the Messiah the heathen are invited to unite themselves with the covenant of promise proves that circumcision is not, even in practice, bound to the fleshly principle'.¹¹ We may thus be quite certain that in reaching the conclusion that circumcision by its very nature was not bound up with natural birth we are in accord with the general trend of Scripture, as Cullmann goes on to say, 'in fact, its meaning is reception into the divine covenant, which is open to all'.¹² The external sign standing alone meant nothing, even as baptism standing alone can mean nothing, both are only endowed with meaning when they are associated with the faith of the recipients. On the other hand, 'for the Israelite of earlier days, however, the circumcision of the heart could not be regarded as a substitute for literal circumcision'.¹³ Equally, let it be remembered, entry into the new covenant would have been unthinkable for the early Church without baptism, for it stands as the outward and visible sign of that inward circumcision of the heart which is our response

to the grace of God. It thus stands in place of the literal circumcision of the old Israel and like it it is the seal and sign of the covenant. The death of Christ which has effected that inward cleansing and spiritual renewal which the prophets saw was essential, and yet at the same time was impossible under the old covenant (cf. Jer. 31.31ff.; Ezek. 36.25ff., etc.), was the reality to which the ordinances of the old era pointed forward. They thus stand superseded by the coming of the perfect and are fulfilled in the ordinances of the new.

These same ideas are also expressed at Philippians 3.3, although here the connexion with baptism is not so evident. The underlying idea, however, the essential concept, remains the same. Circumcision of the heart through faith in Christ renders true worship possible, bringing the faithful into the covenant blessings of Christ. The same line of thought is also to be found at Ephesians 2.11ff. and here the very remarkable similarities between Paul's vocabulary and that of Jewish proselyte baptism make it highly probable that baptism was in the apostle's mind as he wrote this section. This also highlights the dominant theme of the close parallel between entry into the old covenant and entry into the new. In all these arguments it is important to bear in mind the distinction which Paul consistently makes, and which is a leading thought throughout his writings, between the old Israel, the literal nation, the 'Israel after the flesh' and the New Israel founded in the death and resurrection of Christ. There is ample justification for the use of the expression 'New Israel' even though it is not to be found in the New Testament. The transference of Old Testament titles and concepts to the Church, which belonged originally to the people of Israel, is one of the striking features of the apostolic writings. Such passages as 1 Cor. 11.25; 2 Cor. 3.6ff.; Gal. 6.16; Titus 2.14; 1 Pet. 2.9f., and many others all point to the fact that in the Church the long history of salvation has reached its goal and the old promises have found their fulfilment. This community of the new covenant, which includes all the faithful, whether Jews or Gentiles, represents the true circumcision and is the true inheritor of the Abrahamic blessings (cf. Phil. 3.3; Rom. 2.25-29; 4.1-4, 12, 13; Gal. 3.29, etc.). Thus the one baptised into

Christ has been baptised into a spiritual unity with all others in Christ, into the blessings of the new covenant and has been made an inheritor of the blessings of Abraham (Gal. 3.26-29). Thus it is that there can be in fact only one baptism, that baptism by which we are all baptised into the One Body, the Church of Christ (Eph. 4.5).

It is worth noting at this point that outside the New Testament in the various writings of the sub-apostolic fathers that there are many references to baptism as a spiritual circumcision. The earliest complete exposition along these lines is to be found in Justin Martyr (about AD 150). He points out in the course of a long and rambling argument that the old circumcision has been fulfilled in Christ and now He Himself is ready to circumcise all who come to Him with this new and spiritual circumcision set forth in the sign of baptism.¹⁴ However, as Cullmann has pointed out, 'the understanding of Christian baptism as a fulfilment and thus a repeal of Jewish circumcision is not just a theological foundling, appearing only at a late date after the Apologist Justin; nor is it a supplement designed to support Christian baptism',¹⁵ rather it is a concept rooted deeply and firmly in the New Testament itself, made explicit in those verses which we have been considering, and implicit in many other places in the New Testament. We are therefore on sure ground when we assert that baptism is the rite of initiation into the New Covenant. It demonstrates that spiritual circumcision of the heart by which, not a small piece of flesh is removed, but the whole body of flesh, with all that is implied in the concept of flesh in the New Testament,¹⁶ thus releasing the believer into the new world of the kingdom of God. All those who are baptised into Christ are incorporated into Him as the new high-priestly race and brought into the blessings of the new covenant founded through the fulfilment of His baptism at Calvary. In the sacrament of Christian baptism we share in the death of Christ through which we enter into the community of the covenant people of God. Baptism is thus to be understood as the sacrament of entry into the redeemed community, a people of God visibly manifested in the local church which stands as the reflection of the Church universal. Through

the one baptism (Eph. 4.5) we are made members of the One Body, the Church of the living God (Gal. 3.28; 1 Cor. 12.13), and by extension members also of its local expression. To be baptised into Christ is to be baptised into that fellowship where 'all are one in Christ Jesus'.

It is thus evident that baptism must be an unrepeatable sign, just as circumcision could not be repeated, for entry into the old covenant could only occur once, and similiary entry into Christ can only be effected once. Deliberate apostacy after the 'enlightenment' of baptism meant the 'crucifying afresh of the Son of God' for which there was no place of repentance (Heb. 6.4-8). From the moment of his baptism the Christian is expected to live out the implications of this act of incorporation into Christ, just as the circumcised Israelite was expected to make good his circumcision by a life of loyal obedience within the covenant.

Baptism as Justification

The relationship of baptism to justification and the finished work of Christ was one aspect of this sacrament which came to be neglected very early in the history of the Church. The evident and marked failure to interpret baptism in the light of the believer's justification was due essentially to the early departure from the New Testament concepts of faith and grace, with which was associated a distorted idea of justification itself. These distortions were, to a great extent, bound up with the conflicts over the possibility of the forgiveness of post-baptismal sins, which in their turn had arisen out of misunderstandings of the meaning of Hebrews 6.4-8 and 10.26-29. Eventually these departures from the faith became crystallised in the mechanistic concepts of Roman dogma.¹⁷ In the New Testament however baptism is consistently linked with the believer's new position in Christ and related to the remission of sins which it accompanies. This signification was stressed from the very beginning (cf. Acts 2.38, etc.), and unlike John's baptism which was also described as being 'for the remission of sins', baptism into Christ was the fulfilment. It was a baptism that looked back to a real historical event; it was dependent upon a genuine

historical committal; and it was associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of the life of God within the believer and the evidence of justification and regeneration. John's baptism was certainly a seal of salvation in view of the coming judgment, but it did not impart forgiveness, it meant rather that the one baptised could receive forgiveness at the advent of the Messiah and would thus escape the judgment associated with His coming and the arrival of the kingdom of God.¹⁸ On the other hand Christian baptism points back, it is the sign that the one baptised *has* received forgiveness because the Messiah has come, the kingdom of God has arrived. Indeed, so important is this aspect of baptism that, as Bromiley has pointed out, 'in the early Church forgiveness was always regarded as the primary effect of baptism. Indeed for many of the Fathers "baptised" and "cleansed" were almost synonymous terms'.¹⁹

This association of baptism with cleansing and the forgiveness of sins leads automatically to its connexion with the gift of the Spirit, for the one is the necessary corollary of the other. At the same time, however, it must be noted that there may be baptism without the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit may come without baptism (cf. Acts 8.14-17; 10.44-48; 19.1-7). Nonetheless, baptism is to be considered in the light of a 'sealing', so that Paul could write, 'having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise' (Eph. 1.13). As Lampe has pointed out this sealing may be viewed both as authentication and appropriation.²⁰ The sealing of the Spirit and the obedience of faith are intimately related. We may say that as baptism authenticates the faith, so the gift of the Spirit authenticates both the faith and the baptism and points on to their eschatological fulfilment in the kingdom of God. We noted earlier that baptism effects incorporation into the Body of Christ; now we can say that this incorporation is 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sign that the Christian is branded into Christ's possession as His peculiar treasure (Titus 2.14; 1 Peter 2.9); it is the guarantee of our status and the ratification of our faith and hope. The validity of the external seal of baptism is guaranteed by the inner seal of God's anointing 'who has also sealed us and given

us the "down payment" (*arrhabōn*) of the Spirit in our hearts' (2 Cor. 1.21, 22). Baptism thus stands as the outward sign of the inward sealing of the Spirit that we are the children of God, and this clearly links baptism with the old covenant rite of circumcision, and is fully in accord with the New Testament concepts of the covenant. It is interesting to note in this connexion that in later Judaism circumcision was distinctly called a 'seal' (cf. Jubilees 15.26, etc.), it was the sign of the covenant upon the Israelite, and the uncircumcised was 'unsealed', he did not bear the stamp of God's ownership. It is clearly these ideas which underlie the concepts of the New Testament where they are now applied to the new covenant established in Christ.

It must however be constantly borne in mind that salvation and baptism are not inseparable — baptism does not possess in itself a saving efficacy (1 Cor. 10.1ff.; Jude 5, etc.). Salvation rests upon the sovereignty of God and nothing else, He alone knows who are His, although there must, naturally, be the human response to the divine imperative. This was something that was lost sight of very early in the history of the Church and a position came to be adopted, which has remained characteristic of the viewpoint epitomised in Roman Catholicism, that without baptism there is no salvation.²¹ Nonetheless, throughout the New Testament, baptism is viewed, in a very real sense, as the personal assignment and conscious appropriation of the Gospel. Thus baptism may be thought of in terms of washing, not in any crude literalistic sense, but as it demonstrates in dramatic symbol the inward cleansing and renewal accomplished through the death of Christ. Thus at Ephesians 5.25, 26 Paul can speak of the 'washing (*loutron*) of water with the word (or saying (*rhēma*))' and on this E. F. Scott comments, 'the ceremony itself meant nothing apart from the "word" or confession which gave expression to a vital faith'.²² The baptismal washing by itself effects nothing, it is faith which effects what baptism signifies. Again at Titus 3.5 we have the words, 'according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing (*loutron*) of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit'. These are words which are strongly reminiscent of John 3.5 which itself almost certainly has a

baptismal background, referring either to John's baptism or less likely, proselyte baptism, as a sign of repentance. In both cases the words reflect the terminology of the Jewish *tebilah*, but it is a terminology which has now been put to a specifically Christian use. It confronts us with the important implication that in baptism we are brought into the sphere of the redemptive work of Christ. But it must be emphasised that as Micklem has pointed out, 'the efficacy of baptism is not in water, but in washing',²³ a washing which is a spiritual event dependent upon faith.

Baptism is, nonetheless, for the Christian a critical experience. It is quite clear that in these verses which we have been considering the overall context closely links baptism with justification, and we may see the sacrament as the symbolic mediation of justification-regeneration and the gift of the Spirit, the two great benefits resulting from the redemptive act of God in Christ. In this respect it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that in the apostolic Church, and in some cases even later, baptism was an event which followed so closely upon conversion that they were, in fact, virtually inseparable, and, as we have previously noted, it is thus that they are treated in the New Testament. In this way baptism comes to possess something of a dynamic force which has been largely lost today. Furthermore, even if we allow for some lapse of time for instruction between conversion and baptism, it would still be true to say that in the New Testament baptism is considered as marking the beginning of Christian experience.

The close link between baptism, justification and the gift of the Spirit is again clearly demonstrated at 1 Corinthians 6.11, which Moffatt renders, 'you washed yourselves clean, you were consecrated, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God'. In this translation the force of the Middle Voice is well brought out — *apelousasthe*, 'you got yourselves washed' — and this immediately calls to mind the similar words at Acts 22.16 where Paul is commanded by Ananias, 'Get up, get yourself baptised and your sins washed away'. Once again the verb is in the Middle Voice reflecting the underlying Jewish ideas that baptism is an active participation

and not, as is so often stated, a passive submission. Among the Jews baptism always appears to have been self-administered and while Christian baptism is administered by another (as was the baptism of John) it still holds to the idea of the ordinance as a deliberate and self-conscious act. In Scripture a man comes to baptism, he is not brought; he actively enters into its washing, rather than passively submitting. We must also note at 1 Corinthians 6.11 the fact that each of the three verbs is in the aorist tense suggesting a once for all event and also implying that each is linked to the same event, which, in this context, is clearly the event of baptism. We must therefore conclude that this unified act of conversion — baptism is the act in which the believer received the gifts of justification and forgiveness because his sins had been removed, and sanctification through the operation of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that baptism is symbolic of that cleansing process by which the sins of the one who has committed himself to God in Christ have been removed, and through which he enters upon the new life in Christ. In this relationship he stands justified on the grounds of his faith, as one against whom no charge may be levelled. Baptism is thus a picture of a saving event, a matter which is made clear at 1 Peter 3.18–22. The Christian has passed through the element of judgment, through the very storm of wrath itself, and emerges unscathed, secure in Christ, just as Noah passed through the Flood, secure in the ark, and by this means reached the new world. Thus it was that the Lord said, 'Now is the judgment of this world' (John 12.31); that which was thought of in terms exclusively of the Last Day is a present reality, because in the person of Christ those last days have come; the Future Age has been inaugurated, and in recognising the present fact of judgment the believer reaches out to the present fact of deliverance. Through the paradox of the Cross of Christ, the place where God is met both in judgment and deliverance, the Christian enters the new world of the kingdom of God to share in the life of the Future Age. His baptism is the sign and type of this critical event. There is a constant need for this aspect of baptism to be emphasised, demonstrating the close link between

baptism and the remission of sins. Our baptism shows, as did both Jewish proselyte baptism and the baptism of John, that a process of cleansing has taken place, a cleansing resultant upon justification and regeneration, not, as we have emphasised, in any crude literalistic sense, but because the Christian can now make 'the answer of a clean conscience towards God' (1 Pet. 3.21).²⁵

Baptism thus stands as the sacrament of justification, it is the symbol that we have received the new human righteousness which is valid before God, arising out of our faith in Christ. Baptism therefore stands as the sign of what Christ has done, once and for all, on our behalf. Throughout the New Testament the symbolism of baptism is consistently Christocentric, all the benefits which are ascribed to it, or spring from it are derived from, or mediated through, Christ our Redeemer. Baptism is the sign of the redemptive work of Christ, of His total work of mediation on our behalf. It is the sign of our salvation, marking us with the name of Jesus, placing us under the sign of the Cross, and sealing us into the Covenant. It is the death of Christ upon the Cross which is the great presupposition which underlies baptism. It is here also that we may observe the close association of this aspect of baptism and its significance as a spiritual circumcision, but as the symbol of regeneration, baptism is not only the sacrament of an historical event, it is also an eschatological sacrament. Baptism not only looks back to the finished work of Christ, but it also looks forward to the ultimate fulfilment of that work when the Lord is revealed in power and glory as both Judge and Saviour. The sealing of the Spirit which is displayed in baptism is a sealing in hope, it is a sealing 'unto the day of redemption' (Eph. 4.30). The ordinance, however, is related to the whole Christ, not merely to the Atonement, but also to the Incarnation, the Christian is not merely saved through the death of Christ but also through His life (Rom. 5.10). Through our justification and regeneration we are brought to share in the new humanity of Christ, through union with Him. We thus reach the conclusion that our Lord is not simply the Effector of our salvation, He has not merely acted on our behalf as though He were standing apart from us, He *is* our salvation. The disobedience of Adam was reversed in the obedience of

Christ (Rom. 5.19), and in Him God re-creates us in the Last Adam, in whom everything has been accomplished for us. Christ is our salvation, we are saved because we are incorporated in Him.²⁶ 'Thus through His humanity, in which we share, it is given us to participate in union with God'.²⁷ We must therefore now move on to a consideration of the sacrament of baptism as it relates to, and symbolises the union of the Christian with his Lord.

Baptism as Union²⁸

It was remarked in an earlier part of the discussion that the phrase 'into Christ' (*eis Christon*) was an expression which implied, among other things, a sense of union, of the vital and spiritual link between the one baptised and his Lord. This aspect was especially emphasised by Paul in his development of the doctrine of baptism, and for its fullest statement we must turn to Romans 6. This passage together with Colossians 2, in which similar ideas are expressed, have so often been used for championing certain views about the mode of baptism that at times the deep spiritual significance of Paul's words has tended to become lost. In both these passages the thought of union is indissolubly linked with the complete identification of the believer with the events of the Passion of Christ. In this respect we should recall how He Himself spoke of His approaching death as a baptism (Luke 12.20, etc.), to which His baptism by John pointed forward. Thus this linking together of baptism and death by the Lord gives the ground for the Pauline connection of the baptism of the believer with participation in Christ's death and resurrection. In fact, it is implicit in the whole of the New Testament teaching on baptism, that 'baptism into Christ means baptism into His death and resurrection'.²⁹ The baptism of Jesus pointed forward to His Passion, our baptism points back to it, and thus we become sharers in Christ's baptism which was in a very real sense representative. It is worth noting at this point that the very fact that Christ Himself spoke of His baptism in these terms makes nonsense of the view of those who maintain that the linking of baptism with death and resurrection is

a secondary Pauline addition to baptismal theology. From the very beginning, and indeed inherent in the Jewish *tebilah* from which Christian baptism ultimately sprung, baptism was considered as being a symbolic death, out of which the newly baptised person arose into a new life, whether that life was considered a union with Christ or an entry into the covenants of Israel. To suggest, as some repeatedly do, that the ceremony of baptism does not reflect the symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection, is not merely to be over literal in the interpretation of symbolism, but also it reflects an inadequate understanding of the New Testament theology of baptism and its historical backgrounds.

In the symbolic act of baptism the believer enters into the death of Christ, and in a real sense that death becomes his death; and he enters into the resurrection of Christ, and that resurrection becomes his resurrection. This was well expressed by Cyril of Jerusalem, 'Christ was actually crucified and actually buried, and truly rose again; and all these things have been vouchsafed to us, that we, communicating in His sufferings by initiation, might gain salvation in reality'.³⁰ Similarly Haldane could comment, 'the believer is one with Christ as truly as he was one with Adam — he dies with Christ as truly as he dies with Adam . . . His obedience is as truly theirs as if they had yielded it, and His death as if they had suffered it'.³¹ It is through the death of Christ that the new covenant has been opened, 'the sprinkling of the blood of Christ seals that covenant with His people to which baptism admits them'.³² In his baptism the Christian realises for himself this death which was both the representative sacrifice for sin and the ratification of the new covenant. That death for Christ was sealed in burial, for 'burial is only death sealed and made certain',³³ and for the Christian in the apostolic era it was sealed in the momentary immersion in the baptismal waters. Death, however, was not the end, Christ came forth triumphant, raised 'by the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6.4), and thus became the first fruits of the new race, the new humanity founded in the Last Adam. Thus, by an identification with these saving events, by virtue of his union with Christ, the Christian dies to all that the old

environment holds and becomes alive unto God. The baptism of the Christian, involving as it did in the early Church immersion and emmersion, is a 'token burial in which the old order of living comes to an end, to be replaced by the new order of life-in-Christ'.³⁴ As Wingren puts it, 'he who is baptised dies with Christ and is raised with Him. Christ's death and resurrection did not take place that Christ might be unique in these respects, but, on the contrary, they took place that all who belong to Him might share in the same experience and so gather around Him, the firstborn of many brethren'.³⁵ Thus says Paul, 'He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead' (Col. 1.18) and we have been predestinated to be conformed to this image (Rom. 8.29).

Baptism into Christ may thus be seen as a dramatic representation of the events of Easter. It is possible however, that there is a further analogy, especially in the argument of Romans 6. In view of Paul's statement at Romans 6.5 it may be that we should see here a reference to that idea contained in the Lord's words about the 'corn of wheat' (John 12.24). Paul was certainly aware of numerous of our Lord's sayings and it may well be that he had knowledge of that tradition which contained these words of Christ. Jesus was clearly speaking of Himself when He used these words recorded in John and He was equally clearly thinking in terms of His approaching Passion and the glorious renewal of Easter Day. Furthermore, these were events which took place at the time of Passover. This was the Spring Festival which also marked that decisive event of Israel's history when the thralldom of Egypt's slavery gave place to the new era of freedom under God. The Passover-Exodus motif may be traced throughout the New Testament³⁶ and it is possible that thoughts of this symbolism may underlie Paul's argument at this point. Like the corn Christ has died, thus marking the end of the old era. Now, in the bursting forth of the new life of a new spring of Easter, Christ heralds the dawn of the new era to be consummated at the ultimate *eschaton*, when He who shall come will come. With this re-enactment of Israel's history in terms of the One, the true Remnant, the Perfect Servant, the Christian is identified through his baptism. He has entered into the new Passover, for 'Christ our Passover has been slain for us' (1 Cor.

5.7). He has entered into the first fruits of the new Pentecost, experienced in the Messianic unction of the Spirit. Now, in the interim, with the old era completed, he lives out the Festival of the New Grain (cf. 1 Cor. 5.8) awaiting the ultimate Feast of Tabernacles, the ingathering of all things at the harvest of the Last Day. Thus writes Paul, 'if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection' (Rom. 6.5). It is worth noting, in this respect, that elsewhere Paul has linked Christian baptism with the Exodus tradition (1 Cor. 10.2), and these passages together also emphasise the importance of baptism in relation to initiation into the new community. Baptism signifies the beginning of the New Exodus in Christ and denotes incorporation into the new redeemed community He has brought into being.³⁷

God has given to the Christian His own life, and he is a son of God by adoption; he shares in the life of the Future Age which has already dawned in the person of Jesus Christ, and thus the Christian is able to walk in 'newness of life'. This identification with Christ means far more than merely sharing the benefits of His death and resurrection, however, for because of the gift of this new life, our identification with Christ becomes a sharing in His real humanity, with all its saving and sanctifying power. The Christian is thus identified with the totality of the great redemptive act that culminated in the death, resurrection and glorification of the Lord. We enter into the fullness of His baptism for mankind, and thus, as the Spirit descended upon Him as the Representative Man, so in our baptism into Christ we share in this Unction, the source of our life in Christ which He has extended to the new Messianic community incorporated into Him.

Baptism is thus the place where man and Christ are bound together. It is this sharing in these events which was in Paul's mind as he writes elsewhere, 'I have been crucified with Christ . . . and the life I am now living I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2.20). It was not his own life but the life of Christ within him which was his continuing experience. He was dead to the old world, but in Christ he was alive to the new, and this, in fact, is one of the leading ideas in Paul's thought and is basic to his whole theology

(cf. Col. 3.3; Gal. 5.24; Rom. 8.15, etc.). It is here in fact that the words of our Lord find their fulfilment; it is here that in losing our lives for Christ's sake we find them; for in baptism we die to live, we enter in symbol into a death which has already been conquered and rise into a new life already won on our behalf by Him who is the 'Last Adam, the life-giving spirit' (1 Cor. 15.45). This is the 'one baptism', the sign of our participation in His baptism by which we enter into the new humanity of which He is the Head. Like the Jewish proselyte the Christian dies to his old existence and is raised into a new life. This is a life lived in the anticipation of his own resurrection at the appearing of the glory of the Lord, by virtue of his present participation in the resurrection life of Christ. Thus writes Paul again, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1.27), and this in fact is the pledge of the Holy Spirit, the foretaste and seal of the end time yet to be fully consummated, although already present in the fact that Christ stands as the firstborn from the dead.

This spiritual baptism, this sharing in the baptism of Christ, is demonstrated in the sacrament of our baptism in water. Baptised into Christ we put on Christ (Col. 2.12), and henceforth live in union with Him and experience the daily cleansing and renewal which that brings. As Barth has said, 'the man who emerges from the water is not the same man who entered it. One man dies and another is born . . . Baptism bears witness to us of the death of Christ, where the radical and inexorable claim of God upon men triumphed. He that is baptised is drawn into the sphere of this event . . . We then encounter the power of the resurrection. By the creation of the new man, the truth of the redemption which Christ effected is made known; by our existence in Him our existence in Adam is manifestly dissolved'.³⁸ Baptism thus incorporates us into Christ, binding us in a life-sharing union with Him.

The admission into the new covenant, which had been ratified by the death of Christ, and demonstrated in our baptism, is but the beginning. Justification and the reception of the divine forgiveness of sins is the objective result of this new covenant relationship, but this is to be followed by the subjective working out of the covenant life in word and deed. This comes by our

own sharing in the events of the Passion and by our breaking out into the new life of Christ by our union with Him. 'For as many of you were baptised into Christ have put on Christ', wrote Paul (Gal. 3.27) and thus we are one with Him — He in us and about us, we in Him — and this oneness, this vital and vitalising union, is made manifest in our baptism. It must be emphasised here, however, that all this is rooted and grounded in a real historical Jesus. It is very easy to turn baptism into a timeless mystery divorced from historical realities and from the obedience of our Lord, and we need to be constantly aware that our baptism is a sharing in His baptism. 'Baptism is the sacrament in which we put off the old humanity and put on the new humanity of Christ, and so share in His birth, His baptism, His life, His death and His resurrection, all of which He undertook for our sins'.³⁹

What is symbolised, however, must also be realised, the reality of the event must be present in personal experience, the real significance of baptism must be a genuine part of the total life of the Christian. The baptised person is a risen person because God accounts him such (Rom. 6.6–8, etc.), but henceforth this must be a demonstrably true event; he must show himself to be living the resurrection life of Christ in an ethical sense (Rom. 6.11–13). Baptism is thus an event which points both forward and backward; backward to the work of God in Christ that has released the power of the new life, and forward to the life of faith lived in that power. More than this, however, baptism demands a willingness to share in the sufferings of Christ. His baptism at Jordan pointed on to His suffering and death, but it also pointed to His identification with sinful humanity, and as we are one with Him, remembering how He set Himself in our situation and suffered on the cross for us, so we are to share in this ministry in the world, one with Christ and yet also one with the world, bringing to it that ministry of reconciliation which it so desperately needs. The Church of God, as the Body of Christ, is in a very real sense the mediator of Christ's presence and ministry to the post-Easter world.

It thus becomes clear that the new life, which our baptism has symbolically mediated to us, cannot be lived in isolation, it

can only be lived out in the fellowship of the Church of Christ, His Body, into which our baptism has incorporated us. Baptism can thus never be looked upon as a merely individual act, for it relates to the whole life of the covenant community, the Church of God. Indeed, we would go further and say that this union with Christ can only genuinely exist within the community of the redeemed, in this joint union of the Body of Christ with Him who is its Head. Being united with Christ also means being united with one another, and thus it is that the sin of schism and division is viewed with such gravity in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 3.17, etc.). Though we are many yet we are one body in Christ (Rom. 12.5; 1 Cor. 10.17, etc.), and our baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is an expression of the unity of the Church of Christ. The practical consequences of this vital and important fact need to be carefully considered by the Church today. Thus, being all baptised into Christ, we are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.27, 28), and for this reason Paul can write of one Body, one Spirit, one Lord and one Baptism (Eph. 4.4, 5). It thus becomes evident, as Barth has written, that 'in principle baptism cannot be celebrated as a private act . . . it can only be celebrated within the framework of the public worship of God'.⁴⁰ There is another fundamental reason for this, namely, that baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is part of the Church's proclamation; that is to say it belongs to the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ, demonstrating in dramatic form the total deliverance effected in and through Jesus Christ. From this it becomes evident that to relegate the ordinance to a purely individual act, having no bearing upon the Church as a whole and its total life, is to make nonsense of the symbolism which underlies the act.

Each of the three aspects of the doctrinal significance of baptism with which we have been concerned in this discussion is not only related to the past and the present, but also points on to the future. Baptism, as we have already indicated, is, in common with the eucharist, an eschatological sacrament. The entry of the Christian into the new covenant resultant upon his justification, and the continuing covenant life, lived in union with Christ, which is his progressive sanctification, are both

firmly grounded in the ongoing hope of the Church to be consummated at the end of the age. The symbolism of baptism remains therefore incomplete, for the ultimate fulfilment of all that is involved in the sacrament of baptism will be at the Parousia of Christ. It is to this event, when the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father and with the holy angels, to gather His elect from every nation and establish His rule, that the whole life and activity of the Church should be directed.

We may conclude this brief survey of the biblical doctrine of baptism in the words of the Westminster Confession, and say that it is that sacrament 'ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church, but also to be unto him the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration and the remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life'.⁴¹ Underlying the sacrament of baptism we may see the initiation into the covenant community through justification; we may see the progressive sanctification of the believer through the work and sealing of the Holy Spirit and his union with Christ, together with a concomitant moral implication and obligation; and beyond it all we may see the eschatological intention, the hoped for glorification and the ultimate completion of all these things at the Parousia of the Lord. The words of the old Scots ballad may fittingly summarise much of what we have said with regard to this sacrament,

Christ baptiséd was by John in Jordan's flood,
 For to fulfil for us all righteousness,
 And our Baptism endowed with sanctitude,
 And great virtue to wash our sinfulness,
 To drown the Death, and Hell for to oppress,
 When God's word with water joinéd be
 Through Faith, to give us life eternally.

Our baptism is a token and a sign,
 That our old Adam should drownéd be and die,
 And buried in the death of Christ our King,
 To rise with Him to life eternally;

That is, we should our sin aye mortify,
 Resisting vice, live holy, just and true,
 And through the Spirit, daily our life renew.⁴²

It is now possible to give some theological justification to the use of the word 'sacrament'. At the beginning of our study it was stated that the word would be used in a descriptive sense alone. On the other hand, as a result of a long tradition, it will be conceded that, almost inevitably, the word does carry theological overtones. If, in company with Thomas Aquinas, we define a sacrament as a sign which commemorates a past fact, which manifests a present effect and which announces a future good,⁴³ it will be seen that baptism fulfils each of these criteria. It points back to the historical fact of Christ's baptism on our behalf; it manifests to all the spiritual realities of being incorporated into Christ and His Church and it points on to the ultimate fulfilment at 'the day of redemption'. For these reasons it is surely better to utilise the term sacrament for both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for it is a term which, when used carefully, conveys something of the inner realities of these corporate acts of the Church.

NOTES

1. W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (1948) p. 50.
2. This is worked out in detail, although in the present writer's opinion considerably overstated, by J. A. T. Robinson, 'The One Baptism' in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, (1962).
3. P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, (1917) pp. 187f.
4. J. Calvin, *Institutes* iv. 15.1.
5. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 160.
6. Such apostolic authority for analogies from the Old Testament is far removed from the sweeping statement of Cyprian to the effect that wherever water is mentioned in Holy Scripture baptism is predicated (*Epistle* 18.8)!
7. *Baptism in the New Testament*, Report of the Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland (1955) p. 13.
8. Visser t'Hooft, *No Other Name*, (1963) p. 58.
9. F. F. Bruce, Commentary on Colossians in *NLC*, (1957) p. 234.
10. W. Barclay, The Letter to the Colossians in the *Daily Study Bible*, (1961) p. 167.
11. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, (ET 1950) p. 60. It was, of course, precisely at this point that the Jews made their mistake in relating

circumcision to a purely national covenant when in point of fact it related to the supra-national covenant of grace.

12. *Ibid.* p. 61.
13. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.* p. 234.
14. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 114.
15. O. Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 56.
16. It needs to be constantly borne in mind that in the Pauline argument 'flesh' (*sarx*) is viewed as a principle in opposition to the concept of 'spirit' (*pneuma*). It reflects the rebellious mind of man, the point from which Sin (again thought of as a principle) operates in human experience, as 'spirit' reflects the seat of God's operations in renewing the whole man, mind and body. To think of these terms in pseudo-anatomical ways is to miss the direction and force of Paul's arguments and misunderstand the overall psychological viewpoint of the New Testament. It is important to recognise especially the fact that 'flesh' in these psychological terms and 'body' (*sōma*) are not equivalent terms at all.
17. This shift in thought can be seen as early as Tertullian, who thinks of the baptismal water and the Spirit as a unity conferring grace in the sacrament. Such a confounding of the work of the Spirit in man and the external rite eventually led to the concept that baptism was the causative act inducing regeneration, and the efficacy of baptism came to depend, not on faith, but upon a materialisation of grace in the water (cf. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 5, 6, 7, 10, *De Anima* 5ff., etc.).
18. In the phrase, 'for the forgiveness of sins', the word 'for' (*eis*) expresses purpose, i.e. 'with a view to'.
19. G. W. Bromiley, *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers*, (1953) p. 171.
20. See G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, (1951) pp. 3ff. and also R. E. O. White, *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, (1960) p. 203 and pp. 352ff. The latter believes that the use of the aorist of *sphragizein* at Eph. 1.13 etc. refers to the Spirit being the 'divine seal upon baptism' (from the regular use of the aorist tense in connexion with the reception of the Spirit in baptism). W. F. Flemington (*op. cit.* pp. 66ff.) proposes baptism as the seal, as circumcision was the seal of the old covenant. It seems to the present writer that there is a sense in which both viewpoints are correct, for the inner sealing of the Spirit marking the Christian as divine property, is set forth in the visible seal of baptism. (See also O. Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 46, and G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 7-18 for a discussion of the background ideas.) It might be added that while appreciating that not all will accept a direct link between the sealing of the Spirit and baptism, it seems to the present writer that the general tenor of Paul's theology would point to this being the case. For a full discussion of the matter see G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* in which the present writer considers the case has been proved.
21. Cf. for instance *Clementine Homilies*, 13.21.3.
22. E. F. Scott, Commentary on Ephesians etc. in *MNTC*, (1930) *ad loc.* For a fuller discussion of the meaning of *loutron* here and at Titus 3.5 see Appendix II.
23. N. Micklem, *Christian Worship*, (1963) p. 245.
24. It should be noted that sanctification may be considered as an immediate product of justification, what may be termed imputed holiness, and as

- a process, a working out of our salvation through God working in us. This is well illustrated by a comparison of Heb. 10.10 ('we have been sanctified' *hēgiasmenoi esmen*) with 10.14 ('those who are being sanctified' *tois hagiāzomenous*).
25. In passing we should note that the reference to the 'washing with pure water' at Hebrews 10.22 has often been referred to baptism and probably rightly so. The primary context is that of Jewish liturgical phraseology associated with the old covenant rituals and the ceremonial washings of the priests before entering the holy place (cf. Lev. 8.6ff.; Exod. 29.21; 30.19ff.). Nonetheless, it is very likely that the original readers of the epistle would have regarded baptism as the antitype of these washings, since baptism, like the levitical washings, was a symbol of inward purity. Calvin (*Commentary on Hebrews ad loc.*) saw in this a reference to the Holy Spirit.
 26. This was worked out in detail by Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.18.6f.; 21.10; 22.4; 5.1.1; 21.2; etc.
 27. *Baptism in the Early Church*, Report of the Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland (1956) p. 13.
 28. See also the slightly fuller discussion in the present writer's paper, '“Into Christ”: A Study of the Pauline Concept of Baptismal Union' *ExT*, (1968) *LXXIX*, 5 (Feb.) pp. 147ff.
 29. N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, (1956) p. 24.
 30. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. Lect.* 20.5.
 31. R. Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (1958 edn.) p. 244.
 32. W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *Romans*, in *ICC*, (1902) pp. 156f.
 33. *Ibid.* p. 157.
 34. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans in TNTC*, (1963) p. 138.
 35. G. Wingren, *The Living Word*, (στ 1960) p. 153.
 36. As has recently been done by R. E. Nixon (*The Exodus in the New Testament*, 1963). See also the present writer's discussions as 'Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel' *SJT*, (1967) 20. 3. pp. 329ff. and 'Christ our Passover', *EQ* (1969) xli. 2.97 ff.
 37. See further H. Sahlin, 'The New Exodus of Salvation according to St. Paul', in *The Root of the Vine* (ed. A. Fridrichsen) (1953) pp. 87ff. and W. L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (1939) pp. 87f.
 38. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (στ 1953 edn.) pp. 193f.
 39. *Baptism in the Early Church*, Report of the Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland (1956) p. 34.
 40. K. Barth, *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*, (1948) p. 32.
 41. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Article xxviii.
 42. From *Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (16th cent.) with the spelling modernised.
 43. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Tot. Theol.* iii, 60.3.