

NEW  
TESTAMENT  
BAPTISM

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## *Preface*

IN view of the numerous studies of baptism that have been published in recent years it would seem that the appearance of yet another volume on the subject requires some explanation. In point of fact few books dealing with New Testament baptism have come from those who believe that the theology of baptism requires it to be a responsible act. The standard work from this point of view is Dr. G. R. Beasley-Murray's *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962) which is unlikely to be superseded for a good time to come. The present study can in no sense rival his scholarly treatment, nor does it make any claim to be an original contribution to present debate. Rather it sets out to provide a shorter and more introductory study of baptism in the New Testament for which there does seem to be some need. It is the author's hope and prayer that this slim volume will go some way to fill this need and be used to promote a deeper awareness among Christians of all confessions of the centrality and importance of being baptised into Christ.

It is a pleasure to record my grateful thanks and appreciation for the valuable criticisms and help given by both Professor F. F. Bruce of Manchester and Mr. G. C. D. Howley of London at varying stages of the book's progress. I am also grateful to them both as editors of the *Evangelical Quarterly* and *The Witness* respectively, and also to the Rev. Dr. C. L. Mitton, the editor of *The Expository Times*, for permission to utilize material which originally appeared in their journals. Finally I am happy to record my sincere thanks to my father, who willingly

spent several hours of a recent holiday in the arduous task of proof-reading, and to my wife for her continuing encouragement and her valuable help in preparing the index.

J.K.H.

## List of Abbreviations

STANDARD abbreviations have been used for the books of the Bible, and they, together with other abbreviations in common use, are omitted from this list.

### LITERATURE

- CGT* Cambridge Greek Testament (Old Series)  
*CGTC* Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (New Series)  
*EGT* Expositor's Greek Testament (London)  
*EQ* Evangelical Quarterly  
*ExT* Expository Times  
*ICC* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh)  
*JTS* Journal of Theological Studies  
*LXX* Septuagint Version  
*MNTC* Moffatt New Testament Commentaries  
*NEB* New English Bible (New Testament, 1961)  
*NLC* New London Commentary on the New Testament  
*NTS* New Testament Studies (Cambridge)  
*PGC* Penguin Gospel Commentaries (London)  
*SB* H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament etc.* (1922ff.)  
*SyTh* Scottish Journal of Theology  
*TB* Babylonian Talmud  
*TWNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ET as *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, i (1964), ii (1965), iii (1966), iv (1967))  
*VT* *Vetus Testamentum* (Leyden)

### GENERAL

- ad loc.* at the appropriate place  
cf. compare  
Ed. Editor  
edn. edition  
ET English Translation

<i>ff.</i> or <i>f.</i>	and the following verse(s), page(s), etc.
<i>nd.</i>	no date
<i>op. cit.</i>	in the work quoted
<i>s.v.</i>	under the heading of

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

THE centrality of baptism in the life and thought of the Christian Church is a matter which few would wish to dispute. F. J. Foakes-Jackson could well write, 'it is an unquestionable fact that from the very first baptism was considered absolutely necessary for every person who entered the Christian Community'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, at the same time, it is also an unquestionable fact that this sacrament has been for many years a storm centre of theological controversy and, indeed, remains so to this day. There can be little doubt that one of the factors which has produced this unfortunate situation has been the desire of Christians of various traditions to prove that their view of baptism is the one which, *par excellence*, is true to the New Testament. Now it goes without saying that any approach to the study of Christian doctrine in its formative biblical matrix should be guided by honest exegesis of the biblical text. Such a statement may well appear axiomatic, yet it has been one of the regrettable features of Church history that the biblical text has very often been subjected to interpretations which were largely dependent upon emotional judgments and partisan loyalties. Indeed, it has to be conceded that it is almost an impossibility for us to come to the study of the New Testament with a genuinely open mind for our thoughts are already conditioned by our own traditions and backgrounds as well as nearly two thousand years of biblical interpretation. We tend, all too often, to come to the study of the data of the New Testament with preconceived ideas fitting the Biblical record to the particular theory or concept which we then claim is derived from it.

Erroneous exegesis of this nature is most commonly to be met in the fields of eschatology and ecclesiology, and it is into this latter category that we must place the doctrine of the sacraments, and baptism in particular. As Clark has remarked, 'it is indeed strange that the practice of enunciating a broad and general definition of a "sacrament" and from it "reading off" a Christian doctrine of the sacraments should for so long have passed virtually unchallenged'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, as we have already pointed out, it will prove no easy task to undertake a study of baptism purely from the biblical material, for with the best will in the world the bias of the writer will inevitably show through his arguments from time to time. This, however, is the task which we have set ourselves; we shall attempt to elucidate the data provided by the New Testament and endeavour to see what conclusions may be drawn from them. Thus, unlike the majority of studies in baptism, we are deliberately limiting ourselves to one period only of the Church's history, namely the Apostolic Age, although from time to time we shall make reference to the writings of the sub-apostolic Fathers. In confining our attention to the New Testament we are endeavouring to understand what baptism meant to the original first-century readers of these writings. This will necessitate that we pay some attention to the historical backgrounds and antecedents of Christian baptism. It is important to remember that for the Bible to speak meaningfully to us in our own situation we must first attempt to discover and to understand how it spoke to those to whom it was originally written.

Having outlined the general scope of our study we must now turn our attention to a brief and general consideration of the inter-relationships of the sacraments. It will be as well, at this juncture, to remind ourselves that there is no value in defining a sacrament according to our own theological or ecclesiastical presuppositions, and accordingly we shall not make any attempt to define the term which will, in fact, be used simply as descriptive without any theological or other connotation, although at a later stage of the discussion some definition in theological terms may be attempted. Throughout this study then the term 'sacrament' will simply denote the New Testament ordinances of

baptism and the Lord's Supper, together with the related Old Testament rites of circumcision and the Passover. We now turn to a preliminary study in which it is our task to see baptism in relation to the sacraments in general and to the covenant of grace.

### **The Covenant of Grace**

From an examination of the relevant passages in the New Testament it would seem that the writers viewed the new covenant established in and through Jesus Christ as completely abrogating that old covenant which related specifically to the national privileges of Israel. This does not mean that God has cast away His people, far from it,<sup>3</sup> but it does mean that in Christ a new worshipping community has been established. In the setting up of this New Israel the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, and the promises to his descendants, have been extended to include all mankind. From the advent of the Christ onwards the kingdom of God could no longer be looked upon as the prerogative of an isolated racial group, if indeed it ever could have been really seen in such a light. It had been given to those who would produce its fruit, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus when dealing with the Roman centurion who had demonstrated such a remarkable faith, the Lord could say,

'many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness' (Matt. 8.11, 12. cf. also 21.43).

It is not our purpose to pursue a detailed comparison between the old and new covenants, but we do need to establish the general principles.

In the first place it must be said that the coming of Christ effected something new; the new covenant which He established was something new and radical; as Barclay has said, 'with the coming of Jesus Christ something totally new has happened. Into life there has come something which did not exist before,

and which without Him could not exist; that something is not something which emerged from the human situation; it is something which has entered life from outside; from God'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, at the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that there exists between old and new a real sense of continuity: the new cannot be divorced from the old. There is an apparent paradox here which is resolved in the person of Christ. All that the old contained is fulfilled in Him and this fulfilment gives birth to the new.

The new covenant in Christ was foretold by the prophets who only too well recognised the limitations of the old (see Jer. 31.31-34, and cf. Heb. 9.8-13; 10.11-18, etc.). They looked forward to that better covenant in which men's hearts would be changed and in which they would be able to worship God acceptably. They looked forward to that 'inward circumcision of the heart' which could be effected only through a spiritual renewal, through the gift of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, the old itself contained the seed of the new, for it was Christ Himself who was the ultimate fulfilment of the covenant that God made with Abraham and the means whereby its blessings were extended to all men (Gal. 3.14). Abraham was declared to be the father of the faithful (cf. Rom. 4.11, 12; Gal. 3.7, 29) and the New Testament makes it very clear that this fatherhood was not limited to his physical descendants. He was 'not only the father of his believing children, who were circumcised, but of all, in every nation, who walk in the steps of his faith. Believing Gentiles are said to be grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive tree (Rom. 11.24); and to be Abraham's seed (Gal. 3.29)'.<sup>5</sup> The Gentile thus stands, in Christ, within this original covenant of grace, and in this connexion it is important to note that both the Abrahamic and new covenants were effected through the same Mediator (Acts 4.12; 10.43; 15.10, 11; Gal. 3.16, etc.), and in both cases the ground of entry was the same, namely, that of faith.

The absolute necessity of faith in respect of the old covenant could lead Paul to say,

'For not all descendants of Israel are truly Israel, nor because they are Abraham's offspring are they all his true children' (Rom. 9.7 NEB).

Our Lord Himself also confirmed this viewpoint in His own denial of the validity of the claim of the unbelieving Jews by whom He was confronted to be the seed of Abraham (John 8.39, cf. also Luke 3.8). Furthermore, we should note that at 1 Corinthians 10.1-4 Paul ascribes to the community of the old covenant the very same conditions which are essential for the sacraments of the new. The newly released people of Israel marked the beginning of their new national life in an act of baptism, in their wanderings in the desert they shared in Christ through the spiritual food and drink of which they all partook, and which, says Paul, is to be considered essentially comparable to the Christian eucharist.

Much of the confusion which has centred around this whole subject has arisen out of a failure to distinguish between the covenant made with Abraham, which was a covenant of grace and based on faith, and the purely national covenant made with the people at Sinai, a covenant centred in the Law and dependent upon the condition of the personal obedience of the people. In point of fact this legal covenant was never an integral part of the primary purpose of God; it was incidental, its purpose was subordinate to the redemptive plan inherent in the Abrahamic covenant. Thus Paul can say that not only was the legal covenant of Sinai a temporary measure awaiting the fulfilment of the promise in Christ (Gal. 3.19), but moreover that it was an 'intrusion'<sup>6</sup> into the main stream of God's purposes (Rom. 5.20). The covenant of grace, made initially with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ, is an eternal covenant, whereas, on the other hand, that of Sinai was extraneous, exceptional and temporary. It is this purely legal covenant which has been totally abrogated by Christ, and in its place stands the covenant which is supra-national, faith-centred and of grace, the completion of those things for which the earlier covenant with Abraham stood. Thus, the continuity which exists between these two is a continuity of completion. Now in Christ we see the plan revealed. Christ is the substance, the reality of the covenant of promise to Abraham, which now becomes the covenant of fulfilment in the new covenant in Christ.

The Abrahamic covenant of grace continues, but in a far

deeper and richer sense. In Christ, the 'one Seed' to whom the promise pertained and with whom the covenant was made, a new wealth of blessing, far beyond anything that Abraham could have envisaged, has been opened to all who stand within this new covenant. It is pertinent to notice here that wherever the covenant in Christ is denominated 'new' in the New Testament it stands in contrast, not with the Abrahamic covenant, but with that made at Sinai (cf. 2 Cor. 3.6; Gal. 4.24ff.; Heb. 9.15; etc.). There is thus only the one spiritual covenant, but, as it were, in two parts, for Abraham a covenant of promise, for us a covenant of fulfilment, but in both aspects centred in Christ. Thus the faithful of the old (Abrahamic) covenant are conjoined with us of the new to form one covenant community, the Church of God, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it,

'with us in mind God had made some better provision, so that only in company with us should they reach perfection' (Heb. 11.40).

The covenant with Abraham and the new covenant sealed in the blood of Christ stand as two aspects of the one redemptive covenant of grace, that one-sided disposition of grace in which God has acted toward rebellious man.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Ordinances of the Old and New Eras**

Notwithstanding this very real sense of continuity which exists between the old and the new, the new community of the Christian Church did not use the ordinances of the old order. There was naturally an interim period before the young Church gained full self-consciousness. In this period, when both from the inside and the outside it would be viewed as little more than a new sect within the fold of Judaism, Jewish Christians continued with the old rites. At the same time, however, we should note that as early as AD 48 (the probable date of Galatians) Paul was insisting on the rejection of circumcision, reminding his readers that they had been baptised into Christ. Circumcision and the Passover were indissolubly linked with the old Israel

and its national structure. The new covenant had been established in the death of a new Paschal Lamb, so that Paul could write, 'our Passover, the Messiah, has been sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5.7). This was a death which effected release, not from the mere despotism of an earthly ruler, but from the thralldom of the cosmic powers of evil (Eph. 2.1-3), a release from the closed circle of sin and death, bringing us into the new world, the new covenant, the new community, the kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup> In this new community circumcision of the flesh is replaced by a spiritual circumcision which is demonstrated in the new sacrament of baptism, yet, and it is important to notice this, both are the seal of a righteousness which is by faith (Rom. 4.11; Col. 2.11). We may digress here a moment and note that in the context of Romans chapter 4 the sign of circumcision, that sign which in the Jewish mind marked Israel as the distinct and separate people of God, pointed beyond Israel to the ultimate inclusion of the Gentiles within the covenant community. Circumcision was 'nothing more than a ratification of Abraham's faith. Faith was the real motive power; and as it is applied to the present condition of things Abraham's faith in the promise has its counterpart in the Christian's faith in the fulfilment of the promise (i.e. in Christ). Thus a new division was made. The true descendants of Abraham were not so much those who imitated his circumcision (i.e. all Jews whether believing or not), but those who imitated his faith (i.e. believing Jews and believing Gentiles)'.<sup>9</sup>

It is thus possible to say that both circumcision and the Passover pointed forward as types of the new covenant. They demonstrated the entry into, and the continuity of the covenant life, both in respect of the individual and of the community as a whole. In their place stand baptism and the Lord's Supper. As circumcision demonstrated that entry had been made into the blessings and the community of the Abrahamic covenant, so baptism is the rite of entry into the new covenant and the community of that covenant. Consequently it is not to be considered that baptism can ever be a purely personal act, as some erroneously imagine, for it relates to the corporate life of the new community and it cannot be divorced from it. While, therefore,

it is true that isolated cases of individual baptisms occur in the New Testament (the case of the Ethiopian eunuch immediately springs to mind), it is also true that the theology of the New Testament consistently points to baptism as the seal of entry into the new redeemed community. This is a matter which will occupy us at a later stage of the discussion. Similarly, just as the Passover demonstrated the continuing life of the covenant in the experience of the people, especially in the memory of the mighty act of the deliverance from Egypt, so also the Lord's Supper is to be seen as the demonstration of the continuance of the covenant life in the Church, as the memorial of the greatest of the mighty acts of a saving God in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

### **The Ordinances as Proclamation**

An examination of the New Testament soon reveals that the Christian ordinances are not simply signs relating to the covenant of grace. Rather the evidence of the apostolic teaching suggests that they were primarily a proclamation, dramatic in form, of those saving events which lay at the heart of the covenant. Thus we may say that for the early Church the ordinances were not considered primarily as sacramental observances which were 'means of grace', although without question that aspect was present especially in the developed ideas of Paul, but rather their primary significance lay in their demonstration of the historical action of God in the redemptive work of Christ. Once again we may note the point of contact between the old and the new in so far as the ordinances of the old covenant related to a similar work of God in relation to Israel. We cannot isolate the ordinances from their historical context; they are actions which demonstrate real historical events, or rather, they demonstrate the one event, the 'unitary unique event, the "Christ-event"'.<sup>10</sup> In so doing they proclaim, in dramatic form, the truth of the Gospel. Thus at 1 Cor. 11.26 Paul can say that in the Lord's Supper 'you proclaim the Lord's death'. This verb 'proclaim' (*katangellō*) is the common word for preaching the saving events of the work of Christ (cf. Acts

4.2; 13.5; 1 Cor. 9.14; Col. 1.28; etc.). For this reason there is an indissoluble union between the Word and the sacraments, between the Word preached and the Word acted, both of which present to the world that Word who is the fulness of God's self-disclosure.<sup>11</sup>

We can never escape from the evidence that the Christianity of the New Testament was firmly grounded in the Jewish sense of *Heilsgeschichte*, of salvation- or saving-history. To those of the first century history was the arena in which God acted, and the message which the apostles proclaimed was one which was not only firmly grounded in the events of the historical revelation of God in Christ, but was consistently related to them, for the apostles had been witnesses of these things, these real events which made up the 'one event', the climax of salvation-history. In the same way both baptism and the Lord's Supper, as integral parts of this apostolic missionary preaching, were not merely grounded in this historical event, not merely related to it, but rather they stood as its proclamatory signs, announcing the reality of the good news of Jesus Christ as it was related to both the individual and corporate aspects of the life of the new community. As part of the Gospel proclamation the ordinances are founded in, dependent on, and, indeed, derive their whole meaning from the work of God in Christ. As J. S. Whale has put it, the 'heart of the sacraments is divine Action not divine Substance'.<sup>12</sup>

With these preliminary observations in mind we must now turn to a discussion of baptism in more detail. As we have already indicated we shall attempt to consider this ordinance in the light of its historical background, we shall endeavour to discover what the New Testament has to teach with regard to the actual rite itself and its mode of administration, and then we shall turn to examine the spiritual significance which underlies the performance of this simple act. The right apprehension of its spiritual meaning will ultimately depend upon a true orientation of the sacrament to the Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology of the New Testament, for baptism, and for that matter the Lord's Supper also, cannot be treated in isolation, but only in their relation to the full life of the Church of God.

At this point we need also to sound a word of caution. It is, in spite of the many efforts which have been made through the long history of the Church, a manifest impossibility to project ourselves back into the *milieu* of the first century. In the words of Warren Carr, we are faced with the 'assured impossibility of recapturing the New Testament Church without abolishing the form and institution of the Church as it now is'.<sup>13</sup> Yet having said this it is also true that the New Testament must remain our guide and basic authority as we seek to align our Church practice and its theological basis.

## NOTES

1. F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The History of the Christian Church to AD 461*, (1914) p. 230.
2. N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, (1956) p. 71.
3. For a valuable discussion of this problem see H. L. Ellison, *The Mystery of Israel*, (1966).
4. W. Barclay, *Many Witnesses, One Lord*, (1963) p. 110.
5. R. Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (1958 edn.) p. 175. In the same vein E. Earle Ellis can write, 'As the imagery of the olive tree in Romans 11 shows, for Paul there is only one Israel into which the Gentiles are ingrafted'. (*Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, (1957) p. 137.)
6. The verb *pareiserchomai* translated simply by 'enter' in the AV is more literally rendered 'enter in alongside'. The idea contained in the verb is brought out by translating it as 'intrude' or 'slip in'. Paul is thus saying of the Law that it does not, nor indeed can it, play a decisive part in the plan of God. Its function was to act as a subsidiary factor revealing the extent of man's sin. It was never intended to act as a means of justification, which both in Old and New Testaments is always on the ground of faith. In regard to the inter-relationships of these covenants it cannot be over-emphasised that 'the Abrahamic Covenant stands in continuity with the New Covenant (*kainē diathēkē*); the *palaiā diathēkē* (Old Covenant) of Sinai stands in contrast' (E. Earle Ellis, *op. cit.* p. 130).
7. For a fuller discussion of this whole subject see the monograph of J. Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, (1954). See also R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, (1938) pp. 100ff. E. Earle Ellis, *op. cit.* pp. 136ff., and the comments of the present writer in *Among the Prophets*, (1967) pp. 116ff.
8. There is evidence in the rabbinic commentaries on Exodus that the death of the paschal lamb was thought, even in the old covenant, to have atoning significance. As the present writer has remarked in another context, 'there seem to be no adequate grounds for rejecting the idea that in fact the whole Passover ritual is part of that dominant biblical theme, the idea of redemption through blood' ('Passover and Eucharist

- in the Fourth Gospel', *SyTh.* (1967) 20. 3 (Sept.), pp. 329ff.). See further H. J. Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, (ET 1961) pp. 141-149, and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, (1955<sup>2</sup>) pp. 102ff.
9. W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *Romans (ICC)*, (1902) p. 107.
  10. The phrase is that of E. Stauffer (*New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 157).
  11. This idea is well developed by K. Barth, (*Prayer and Preaching*, (ET 1964) pp. 74-79).
  12. J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, (1957 edn.) p. 157.
  13. W. Carr, *Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church*, (1964) p. 176.

## II

# BAPTISM—THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WHEN the early Christians baptised their converts they were not introducing an entirely new practice, but were simply transferring a rite which was well known to the ancient world of the first century to a specifically Christian use. The origins of baptism are obscure, and the New Testament gives us little help in this direction. The earliest Gospel record opens with baptism as an already established fact in presenting us with the picture of John baptising in the river Jordan (Mark 1.4). Nor, on the other hand, is there any information in the Old Testament and the apocryphal writings of the inter-testamental period with respect to the origin of the practice. To discover the origins of baptism it would seem that we must turn to the pagan lustrations of Zoroastrianism and the Middle Eastern mystery religions. It certainly seems possible that baptism arose, in part at least, from the rites of the mystery religions, but it must be emphasised that this is but a possibility for which there is no final proof.

These mystery religions were one of the outstanding features of the Hellenistic world, and although originally tribal religions, in their new form they soon began to exert a considerable influence upon the life and thought of the time; an influence far beyond anything they might have possessed in their original form. The aim of these religions was to provide the initiate with salvation (*sôtêria*), not merely a physical salvation from the evil forces which were believed to inhabit the world, but also an eschatological salvation, an immortality of blessedness in the

life beyond. For this reason the various deities, Isis, Serpapis, Mithra and many others, were frequently called 'saviour's' (*sōter*, *sōteira*). 'Admission into the community was by a rite of initiation, taking the form of a solemn consecration. . . . The actual initiation was preceded by various acts of purification. There were fastings, lustrations, and baptisms. After these preliminaries . . . (came) the vision of the deity'.<sup>1</sup> Such baptisms were to be considered as primarily washings, their purpose was to remove the ritual impurities of the material world and the defilement of the old life.<sup>2</sup> It is of importance to stress this fact that the cleansing of the initiate was ritual rather than moral, and the Jewish philosopher Philo could make the caustic comment, that 'they remove dirt from their bodies by baths and means of purification, but they neither desire nor seek to wash away the passions of their souls by which life is soiled'.<sup>3</sup> The function of these washings was thus to prepare the initiate for communion with the god; by them he was made ritually pure in much the same way as the Levitical washings of the Old Testament made the priest ritually pure and able to carry out the service of God. But, as the writer to the Hebrews was never tired of pointing out, they did not effect any inward cleansing, they had no moral value.

Clearly great care must be exercised in any attempt to derive Jewish and Christian baptism from these pagan rites, and in this respect we must emphasise that it is with the rite as a rite that we are concerned at the moment, and not with the underlying concepts and doctrines. This is especially so with regard to the Mithraic *taurobolium*, a sort of baptism of blood which some have sought to link, with little justification let it be added, with Christian baptism. The initiate, in this ceremony, stood in a covered trench and a bull was ritually sacrificed above him so that he was drenched with the blood. As the bull was the symbol of life, this baptism had, it was believed, an unlimited effectiveness, bringing to the recipient both regeneration and purification. Such concepts are far from the ideas which underlie baptism in the New Testament, yet it must be admitted that they became common to many Christians as the years went by. Through the corruptions of a popularised Christianity, Christian

to the practice was the lack of biblical support which could be adduced for it. To overcome this deficiency the rabbis went to great lengths to obtain a scriptural backing for this innovation into Judaism, and their exegetical gymnastics make fascinating reading. The rabbinic arguments were, however, based upon the flimsiest of evidence on the one hand, and a wealth of pre-suppositions on the other. The Hillelite rabbis<sup>9</sup> consistently related baptismal practice to the experiences of the wilderness generation. The two verses which were vital to their interpretation were Numbers 15.14 and Exodus 24.8. The former reads,

‘If a stranger is staying with you, or anyone is among you in any of your generations, and he wishes to offer an offering by fire, an acceptable odour to the Lord, he shall do as you do’.

The important words for rabbinical exegesis were, ‘he shall do as you do’, and this was taken to mean that the Gentile should be received into the covenant relationship on exactly the same grounds as the one who was an Israelite, born into the covenant. Further, from the fact that the text speaks of ‘any of your generations’ this principle was considered to be applicable equally in any period of Jewish history.

This being established they next appealed to the words in Exodus,

‘Moses took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words”.’

Here the rabbis made the assumption that Israel had already been baptised before they entered the covenant, a baptism which, they maintained, had taken place at the Red Sea. The operative words in this verse were, ‘Moses took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people’, from which it was argued, by a process of placing the cart before the horse, that ‘it is valid traditional teaching that there is no sprinkling (i.e. sacrifice) without baptism’,<sup>10</sup> a baptism which we have seen was con-

veniently assumed to have taken place at the crossing of the Red Sea. The argument could thus be concluded by saying that 'your fathers were not received into the covenant except through circumcision, the baptismal bath and the sprinkling of blood, so therefore they (i.e. the proselytes) are not to be received except through circumcision, the baptismal bath and the sprinkling of blood'.<sup>11</sup> These are, of course, the three essentials of *milah*, *tebilah* and sacrifice. The Hillelite rabbis thus argued that as 'the Jews passed from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea into Canaan, so the Gentile passed from heathenism through baptism into the "promised land"'.<sup>12</sup> The importance of this argument from our point of view lies in the fact that these concepts were clearly known to Paul, himself educated as a Hillelite rabbi, for the established exegetical tradition of the rabbis by which they derived the baptism of proselytes from the Exodus tradition was applied by Paul to Christian baptism at 1 Corinthians 10.1ff. where he compares the Christian rite with baptism 'into Moses in the sea'.

We must now turn to a consideration of the actual rite of Jewish proselyte baptism and its symbolism. It was a baptism of total immersion,<sup>13</sup> the candidate was stripped, after having both his hair and nails cut, and before three witnesses, who were designated the 'fathers of the baptism', he made a fresh confession of his sins and his new faith. Thereupon he totally immersed himself in the water<sup>14</sup> while at the same time two 'disciples of the wise' stood by and recited some of the 'light' and 'heavy' precepts of the Law, to the keeping of which the newly baptised proselyte had now committed himself.<sup>15</sup> This act was regarded as effecting a complete reversal of the proselyte's character, he was described as having been 'born anew' through the baptismal rite, becoming thus as a 'child of one day'. Thus the rabbis said, 'the proselyte in his conversion is as a newborn child',<sup>16</sup> living now in a state of 'holiness' (in this sense ritual purity rather than moral integrity). He was no longer an unclean Gentile for he had been 'brought near'<sup>17</sup> and indeed his sins, which had been confessed, were forgiven — 'bathe the whole body in ever flowing streams, reach your hands to heaven praying forgiveness for these things that you have done'.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the use of the type of terminology associated with proselyte baptism it needs to be remembered that the rite was primarily legalistic, it did not really contain any thought of ethical death and resurrection. The aim of these washings was the attainment of ritual purity, the removal of cultic uncleanness, and thus the rabbinical statements are often little more than examples of rhetorical imagery. At the same time, however, it does seem to be the case that from the moment of his baptism the proselyte was to regard himself as a new and changed person in respect of his old environment, his old habits, his old associates and associations. Indeed, so radical was this change envisaged, and so remorseless the applied logic of the rabbis, that it was possible in theory, but only in theory, for a man thus baptised to marry his own mother or sister. The emphasis of proselyte baptism was thus upon the complete reversal of the old order and the renewal of the life of the initiate under the covenant. It was an emphasis upon the fact that the initiate into Judaism stood as though restored to a new life, but, at the same time, in spite of this regenerative aspect, proselyte baptism was, as we have already noted, a purificatory washing in its primary aspect which made no real moral demands. Underlying the rite was also this great tragedy, that baptism admitted the Gentile not into a covenant of freedom, but into the tyranny of the *halachōth*, into submission to the burdensome yoke of rabbinism, a yoke which continually grew more cumbersome with the constant addition of futile regulations and stipulations.<sup>19</sup>

### Essene Baptism

Within Judaism itself the practice of baptism became extended to include Jews as well as Gentiles. Such was the undoubted practice of the many and varied baptismal sects which arose within Judaism during the second century BC and later, largely as a protest at the increasing worldliness and Hellenisation of Jewish society. These sects have generally been grouped together under the broad title of 'Essenes', although there is, in fact, no evidence that they were an homogeneous group.<sup>20</sup> In

their outlook they were essentially monastic, practising a life of rigid discipline and asceticism, and almost certainly considering themselves as the true Israel within Israel, the 'Godly Remnant' of the prophets. Both Josephus and Philo<sup>21</sup> have given some account of the beliefs and practices of these people, but since 1947 there has come to light the large collection of literature which belonged to the Community of Qumran, known the world over as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Community of Khirbet Qumran appears to have been in the main at least, a priestly group, living in semi-monastic retirement. The suggestion has been made that they were originally the followers of the legitimate Zadokite priesthood who seceded from the Temple at the time of the deposition and subsequent murder of Onias III, the last Zadokite high priest, by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The actual movement to Qumran, however, does not seem to have been earlier than about 110 BC<sup>22</sup> in the reign of John Hyrcanus when Hellenising policies were again becoming official. It is clear that they were opposed to the Temple and the sacrificial cultus on both historical grounds and on principle, regarding them as defiled and illegitimate. The primary emphasis of their teaching was eschatological, and they considered themselves as the preparers of the way for the coming Messiah, seeing their mission in terms of Isaiah 40.3,

'Prepare a way for the Lord,  
Clear a path for him.'

Their retiring into the desert was, they believed, the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, they were the 'voice crying in the wilderness' and their baptism was thus an act of preparation, an initiation into the faithful remnant, the godly few who were awaiting the promised deliverance of God. As Gloege has put it, 'Qumran considered itself the vanguard of the last things'.<sup>23</sup>

It may be noted in passing that it would seem that the 'dawn of the new age would be marked, in Qumran expectation, by the appearance of a worthy prophet, a worthy priest and a worthy king'.<sup>24</sup> These personages would be the great prophet to whom reference is made at Deuteronomy 18.15ff., together

with a dual Messiah, the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. It was possibly the possession of some of these features by John the Baptist, he was both Levite and prophet, which led the Levitical deputation to ask whether he might not be this eschatological figure (John 1.19ff.). There is clearly a superficial resemblance between this view of a double, or even threefold, Messiah, and the views of the early Church, as Bruce has said, 'the Qumran Community and the early Christians shared the view that in the days of fulfilment of all that the Old Testament prophets had said there would arise a great prophet, a great captain and ruler, and a great priest. But these three figures remain distinct in Qumran expectation, whereas the early Church saw them unified in the person of Christ'.<sup>25</sup>

The great stress which these people laid upon a life of uprightness and moral integrity while awaiting the 'turning again of their captivity', a stress reminiscent in many ways of the prophetic writings, was reflected in their baptismal teaching. They were insistent that the actual baptismal rite did nothing, it was incapable of effecting any change in the person baptised. It was, in fact, to be viewed merely as a sign of an inward change of disposition. This may be illustrated from the writings of the Community; thus with reference to those who would rely on outward forms and ceremonies to cleanse from sin they said,

'he cannot be cleared by mere ceremonies of atonement, nor cleansed by any waters of ablution, nor sanctified by immersion in lakes or rivers, nor purified by any bath. Unclean, unclean he remains so long as he rejects the government of God and refuses the discipline of communion with him. . . . Only by a spirit of uprightness and humility can his sin be atoned. Only by the submission of his soul to all the ordinances of God can his flesh be made clean. Only thus can it really be sprinkled with waters of ablution. Only thus can it be really sanctified by waters of sanctification'.<sup>26</sup>

Again, speaking of the obligation of holiness on those who had been admitted to the Community they said,

'No one is to go into water in order to attain the purity of holy men. For men cannot be purified except they repent of their evil'.<sup>27</sup>

The Qumran Covenanters thus recognised, in accordance with prophetic teaching (cf. Isa. 4.2-6; Ezek. 36.25ff.; Jer. 32.8; etc.), that outer cleansing, a ritual purification, was insufficient to meet the demands of God. It was only as one was fit by life to become one of 'God's elect' that baptism took place. Baptism thus had to *follow* a sincere repentance if it was to be in any sense effective. To purify the 'flesh'<sup>28</sup> without first repenting was utterly useless for ultimately salvation comes through the spirit and thus requires inner purity. A moral cleanliness was therefore essential if a person was to be in a fit state to welcome the Day of the Messiah, and such cleansing they believed could only be really effected through the working of the Spirit of God active in the Community. Indeed the baptism of water into the fellowship of the Community was to be seen as a preliminary to the Messianic baptism of the Spirit 'in the end of days' when 'like waters of purification God will sprinkle upon him (i.e. mankind) the spirit of truth',<sup>29</sup> and here also we see the link with the teaching of John the Baptist (cf. also John 3.4-7). The Qumran Community was thus 'a radical Messianic repentance movement',<sup>30</sup> and this moral emphasis which was such an important feature of their teaching, the recognition for a clean life, not merely on the part of the Gentile proselyte, but also for the Jew, goes far beyond the standards set in the regular proselyte baptism, and paves the way for the baptism of John.

### **The Baptism of John**

It may now be seen that when the Herald of the Christ appeared upon the banks of the Jordan, baptising those who came to him, the significance of his actions would be well appreciated by his contemporaries. In common with the standard practice of the regular Jewish baptism and the baptism of the Qumran Community and other 'Essene' groups, the baptism of John was by immersion,<sup>31</sup> and again, like those of Qumran, he laid great stress upon the ethical requirements of baptism. John was thus not introducing a new rite, bringing into being a special act, rather he brought a new emphasis. His message was clear, 'Repent and be baptised for the kingdom of

God is at hand'. His baptism was 'the first scene in the divine drama of redemption',<sup>32</sup> and like the Qumran Community he saw his mission in terms of Isaiah 40.3,

'The voice of him who cries in the desert,  
Prepare the way of the Lord,  
in the desert clear a path for our God.'

His baptism was an act of prophetic symbolism conveying the urgency of the situation and the need for an immediate preparation on the part of the people, a preparation which demanded a thoroughgoing ethical and moral cleansing. Thus 'without a shadow of euphemism, without an accent of subservience, without a tremor of hesitation, he rebuked the taxgatherers for their extortionateness, the soldiers for their violence, unfairness and discontent; the wealthy Sadducees and stately Pharisees for a formalism and falsity which made them vipers of a viperous brood. The whole people he warned that their cherished privileges were worse than valueless if, without repentance, they regarded them as a protection against the wrath to come'.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible that John's ideas of baptism were, at least in part, derived from some such group as the Qumran Community,<sup>34</sup> and it may be of significance that, as we have had occasion to note, they also saw themselves as the fulfilment of the voice in the desert, considering that they were the 'preparers of the way' for the coming King by their obedience to the Law. But their preparation was conceived in narrow and legalistic terms, in a rigid and entirely self-centred way. John's preparation was not that of a sect of confirmed bigots, it was a preparation which was for the whole nation, and indeed, for the whole world. The Gentile was not excluded (cf. Luke 3.14), for the baptism of John was a baptism into the new and true people of God who were awaiting the advent of the One who would be endowed with the Messianic Unction and Himself able to baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. The wideness of John's vision was such that the 'previous boundaries of the people of the covenant are absolutely of no consequence'.<sup>35</sup> It was a universal baptism by which John sought to gather together

the people of God of the last days before the final judgment which he believed was imminent. The essentially new factor in John's baptism was the extent of the moral and ethical demands it made on its recipients. Proselyte baptism as we have seen, was primarily considered in the light of a ceremonial washing by which the defilement of the old life was removed. Essene baptism, it is true, made genuine moral demands, but the obligations were entirely confined to the sect, there was no thought of an outgoing call, for the recipient of Essene baptism lived out his life in the spiritually rarified atmosphere of a religious community. Against all this we set the baptism of John, it was not a ceremonial washing, it did not merely demand that moral cleansing should be its preliminary condition, but it went far beyond this and demanded that a clean and holy life, lived in the world and in the expectation of the immediate appearance of the kingdom of God, should be its outcome (cf. Luke 3.7-14).

John's baptism thus came as a challenge to both Jew and Gentile to prepare for this eschatological event. It stood both as an act of purification and the seal of the inner moral cleansing in readiness for the separation, the winnowing, of the approaching crisis. Says Bultmann, 'whoever submitted himself to it, and to the obligations of repentance bound up with it, purified himself for the coming Kingdom of God, and belonged to the company of those who would escape the day of wrath and judgment'.<sup>36</sup> No doubt to many it recalled the words of the prophet that there would be a time when,

'a fountain shall be opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness' (Zech. 13.1),

or again they would think of the words of Ezekiel,

'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you' (Ezek. 36.25ff.).

In a sense the baptism of John was an amplification of the teaching of the prophets with their continual insistence upon

the ethical demands of a righteous God. In this respect it is important to emphasise that, whatever may have been its immediate precursors, the baptism of John was thoroughly rooted in the Old Testament. His preaching pointed to the immediate fulfilment of the prophetic hopes in the bringing about of a new Exodus for the people of God.<sup>37</sup> It may well have been the case that John saw his ministry as the fulfilling of such passages as those already quoted and others such as Isaiah 1.15-17 where there is a close link between an act of washing and those moral requirements that would make it effective. (Other Old Testament parallels may be found at Jer. 2.22; 4.14; Psa. 51.7.) In the same way his pointing to the One who would baptise 'in Holy Spirit' (Mark 1.8) is to be seen, to some extent at least, as a realisation of those ancient promises that God's Spirit would be poured out in the last days upon His restored people (e.g. Ezek. 36.27, which links this with the cleansing washing of water, Isa. 44.3; Joel 2.28). John asserted that entry into the true covenant community, the true Israel, was not on racial grounds but upon the fulfilment of certain ethical requirements involving repentance as their prerequisite.<sup>38</sup> In view of the prevailing ideas among the Jewish people it was not surprising that John was asked by what right he treated Jews in this way (John 1.29) for they considered themselves already fit for the kingdom of God and the Messianic Age. They failed to realise that 'without an acknowledgment of one's personal uncleanness and without a change of mind there is no sharing in the Messianic promises'.<sup>39</sup>

The baptism of John, however, was not merely ethical, it was, as we have already noted, strongly eschatological. It was a baptism related to the end time, it looked towards the coming of the kingdom of God and the establishment of the new covenant of the prophetic hope. This eschatological intention was emphasised by the fact that it was in the wilderness where John was baptising, for the wilderness was the place from which the last things were to commence. Here in the desert was the place where Israel was to be reborn and to be betrothed to God in a never to be ended engagement (Hos. 2.14-23). This expectation would be fulfilled but in a way not envisaged by John, for

out of his baptism of the Messiah a new and spiritual Israel would be founded from the true remnant of the old Israel. 'The expectations of the cleansing and purifying of a renewed people of God, ready for the new covenant, the constituting of the faithful Remnant to await the advent of the Messiah, and the preparation for the final judgment by which the elect should be winnowed out from the *massa perditionis* of the ungodly and gathered into God's storehouse — all these eschatological visions of the prophets are set forth visibly in the symbolism of John's rite of baptism'.<sup>40</sup> Like the prophets John looked forward to the coming crisis as the Day of Reckoning, the day when accounts would be finally settled, for to John, as it was to his predecessors, the Day of the Messiah was the Day of the Lord, and 'who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?' (Mal. 3.2).

The situation was thus critical, men were being faced in this rite of baptism with the great *Either-Or* — the choice was either repentance and water baptism, or else the fiery baptism of judgment at the coming of the Messiah. The fact that the coming of the kingdom of God was not quite as John had envisaged it, and indeed left him in doubt (Matt. 11.2-6), is quite beside the point. The final winnowing, the ultimate *eschaton*, the revelation of the glory and the judgment of the Son of Man is yet to be; but in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth the time of fulfilment dawned, the future age broke into the present age and the prophetic hopes were realised. At the same time in the baptism of John the separation of the true Israel from the mass of Jewry was begun, a separation made complete by the final division in the people caused by Christ.

The insistence upon repentance and a life consistent with the confession of sin were the prime characteristics of the baptism of John, and in this we see the foundations of the later arising Christian baptism. John's baptism pointed forward, it was a 'baptism of repentance for the remission of sins', and as Tertullian pointed out<sup>41</sup> this phrase clearly points forward to a *future* remission, the advent of God's forgiveness in Christ. The preparation was realised as we have seen in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, in Him the kingdom of God became actual

in the world of men, and through Him the power of the kingdom of God was being exerted in an entirely new way. In Jesus the Christ God was about to create a new race of men, a new community in which the ideals and aspirations of Israel would be fulfilled. The end of John's baptism, in so far as its significance was concerned, thus came with the baptism of Jesus at his hands. John's baptism was primarily a preparation for the coming Christ, it prefigured the establishment of the new covenant in and through Him, but now He had come, the days were accomplished, the kingdom of God had drawn nigh. As G. W. H. Lampe puts it, "The great event which changed Johannine into Christian baptism was . . . the Baptism of Jesus regarded first, as both the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel imply, as the foreshadowing and symbolical summing up of His mission as Son and Servant of God, of His death, resurrection and ascension and of the New Covenant to be inaugurated in these events, and, secondly, as an event which prefigured and made possible the Pentecostal fulfilment of the ancient hope of a universal outpouring of the Spirit upon the people of God'.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly we must now turn to a brief account and consideration of the baptism of Jesus Himself, without which this brief survey of the backgrounds to Christian baptism would be incomplete.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Baptism of the Lord**

The submission of the Lord to the baptism of John was an event which was not without its difficulties for the early Church, and, superficially at least, it is certainly paradoxical that the one who is consistently presented as sinless in the New Testament records should have made this voluntary submission to a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. This bewilderment is reflected in the various emendations to the story found in some of the apocryphal gospels. The 'Gospel of the Hebrews' as quoted by Jerome<sup>44</sup> produces the following,

'Behold the mother of the Lord and his brethren said unto him,  
'John the Baptist baptiseth unto the remission of sins, let us go

and be baptised of him". But he said unto them, "Wherein have I sinned that I should be baptised of him? Unless perhaps this very thing that I have said is a sin of ignorance".'

It is also clear from Matthew's account of the baptism that John himself was unable to comprehend the need for the Messiah's baptism (Matt. 3.15), but the answer that Jesus gives is sufficient to silence his questionings. The purpose of his baptism, explained Jesus, was 'to fulfil all righteousness' (*plērōsai pasan dikaiosunēn*),<sup>45</sup> and since it is possible to trace through the Gospel records His self-identification with the Servant of Yahweh of the Isaianic prophecy, it is highly probable that here in His baptism it was this picture that was before Him. The Servant was called to a mission which 'comprised three things: he must obey, he must witness, he must suffer. By so doing he would be carrying out God's redemptive purposes for Israel and the world'.<sup>46</sup> The Servant arose out of Israel, embodying all that Israel should have been, but beyond this lies the inescapable fact that the mission of the Servant could only be accomplished through suffering. It is here that the mission of the Lord becomes so obviously identifiable with that of the Servant. The righteous Servant would make many righteous and bear their iniquities (Isa. 53.11). Jesus, identified with this Servant of Yahweh, takes His stand with the people, identifying Himself with them and their repentance shown in their obedience to the baptism of John, and through His sinlessness fulfilling that which they could not. By identifying Himself with the faithful few of Israel Jesus stands as the Representative Man whose obedience unto death fulfils the lack of human obedience and thus mediates to man the divine forgiveness, forming in Himself a new community of the faithful. Such an identification was thus essential; Jesus had to be fully representative of the people, like the Servant He had to be numbered with the transgressors before seeing the fruit of His labours (Isa. 53.11ff.). This sacrificial motif is made more explicit by John who speaks of the 'Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world' (John 1.29) in the context of the baptism and the descent of the Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

The mission of the Servant which was to be fulfilled by Christ

is confirmed by the voice from heaven. Thus, in addition to His own subjective consciousness of His calling, there comes an objective pronouncement, the significance of which would have been well understood by the onlookers. Before discussing this, however, it is important to look at the event in the light of the concepts of contemporary Judaism. In Jewish thought God had gradually become completely 'wholly-other'; He was the Transcendent One whose very name was too holy to be mentioned and the prophetic consciousness of the immanence of God had been almost totally lost. God had been placed further and further away from human affairs so that in most cases He only took part in transactions with humans through intermediaries such as angels. Indeed, the growth of angelology in Judaism is paralleled by the development of ideas of God's 'wholly-otherness'. The angels formed a vital bridge of mediation between a transcendent God and His universe which would otherwise have been difficult to construct.<sup>48</sup> For the same reason there was also a tendency to personalise the attributes of God such as His wisdom and glory (*shekhinah*). Such an attitude towards God, taken in conjunction with the silence of the voice of prophecy, meant that in effect God no longer had direct dealings with His people; His voice was no longer heard directly, His revelation to man was complete in the Torah and it was here, through the interpretations of the rabbis, that God's voice was to be heard. It was said, however, that the holiest rabbis were allowed to hear the faint echo of God's voice as the *Bath Qol*, the 'daughter of a voice', but it was no longer the clear pronouncement that the prophets had heard.

It is thus not surprising that the Jews looked back with a sense of yearning and regret for the days of old, nor is it also surprising that they looked forward to a time when the voice of God would be heard again. Jewish hope could be expressed in the words of Isaiah 64.1 — 'O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down'. This was something that they believed would happen at the Last Day, the Day of the Messiah, when God's full and final deliverance would be seen. These are hopes which run through the apocalyptic literature, and may indeed be also found in the canonical prophets. When the Messiah came,

'The heavens shall be opened . . . with the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac . . . and the Spirit of Understanding shall rest upon him' (Test. Levi 18).

Or again,

'And the heavens shall be opened to him, to pour out the Spirit, even the blessing of the Father' (Test. Judah 24.2).

The baptism of Jesus would thus have been seen as a definite Messianic anointing, an event of genuine eschatological significance marking the beginning of the End.

The words of the heavenly voice, which came to the Lord, marked Jesus out as both Messianic Son and Suffering Servant. It is well noted by Cranfield that 'the voice does not proclaim Jesus' newly established status of sonship consequent upon his installation as Messiah; rather it confirms his already existing filial consciousness of being the Son of God, that is at the same time a confirmation of his Servant vocation'.<sup>49</sup> The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the public pronouncement and confirmation that Jesus is King-Messiah (cf. Acts 10.38), an announcement made in words that echo the divine decree from the old royal ceremonial (Psa. 2.7). Further, this anointing of the Spirit emphasises the eschatological nature of the baptism. The pouring out of the Spirit was to be the mark of the last days (Joel 2.28-32, etc.), but at this point it was only upon the One, the Representative Man, the Last Adam. The prophecy concerning the Servant that 'I shall put my Spirit upon him' (Isa. 42.1) had been fulfilled, but the general outpouring of the last days was reserved for the future, when through the suffering of the Servant and His vindication as Lord and Messiah, the new community would be inaugurated which would share in the Messianic unction.

The way of the Messiah was to be the way of humiliation, as we have already seen; the allusion to Isaiah 42.1 in the words of the voice from heaven demonstrate that His mission is only to be accomplished through suffering. The baptism thus marks the end of the long period of preparation and deepening experience,

and marks the beginning of His ministry, that way which was to lead to the full expression of His baptism at the hands of John in the baptism of His Passion. As Lampe has put it, the 'role of Servant which He undertakes at His Baptism is fulfilled, not in the Jordan, but at Calvary'.<sup>50</sup> Standing thus the Lord is to be seen as the true Remnant of Israel, the fulfilment of all that Israel should have been. Thus in Himself He, at one and the same time, both fulfils and brings to an end the old Israel with its national structure, and establishes the New Israel through the blood of the new covenant, foreshadowed in His baptism. This act was thus related to His dying and rising again, it pointed to the fact that the new covenant which He had come to establish and through which the new people of God would be created must be sealed in Messianic blood. It is significant that Jesus Himself speaks of His Passion in terms of His baptism. At Mark 10.38 the context speaks strongly of the Servant idea, and His death is 'the baptism that I am baptised with'. Again at Luke 12.50 the same thought is implicit in the words of the Lord. These are no accidental metaphors, the Evangelists make it clear that from the moment of His baptism Jesus was only too well aware of how His mission would end. Time and again He uses phraseology which demonstrates how He linked His task with that of the Suffering Servant, as the fulfilment of whom He had been shown forth by the banks of Jordan. As the Servant then His life, death and resurrection were representative, and, as we shall see later in this study, the Church's baptism unites it to His passion and resurrection, shown forth in His baptism. The scene by the Jordan is thus the setting for the whole Gospel story. Here the new covenant is shown in anticipation, entry into which, upon the basis of Christ's representative death and resurrection, is shown in our baptism, a baptism not merely for the forgiveness of sins, to which, unlike the anticipatory baptism of John, it can look back, but one with which is associated the Messianic gift of the Spirit. This gift was again prefigured in the baptism of Jesus, and through it the Risen Lord continues to impart His life to His Church, the new community of the new humanity, expressing also the unity of all in the redemptive act of Christ.<sup>51</sup>

## NOTES

1. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, (ET 1960) p. 187. See also the monumental volume of F. Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, (ET 1911).
2. Cf. Livy 39.5 where Dionysian baptism is called a 'pure washing'. Note also Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.23, Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.11, etc.
3. Philo, *De Cherubim* 95.
4. Cf. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 5, etc. By the time of Hippolytus such pagan influences were well marked (see S. Angus, *Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World* (1929) pp. 150ff.). On the other hand there is also the possibility that the mysteries might be in debt (without acknowledgment) to Christianity, a situation by no means impossible. It would certainly seem, for instance, that the sacral baptisms of blood associated with the worship of Attis and Mithras were post-Christian, and may even have been instituted by way of rivalry to Christianity.
5. For a further discussion of the origins of baptism see *TWNT*, i. pp. 530ff. (s.v. *baptō* etc.) and also J. Thomas, *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (1935). He sees Jewish practice as ultimately derived, not from Greek ideas, but Persian. He believes that Zoroastrian influences were very strong on the development of Jewish concepts in general and on the derivation of baptism in particular.
6. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, (ET 1960) p. 24. While recognising that not all share in this judgment (e.g. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), it would seem to the present writer that the onus of proof rests with those who do not derive Christian baptism historically from the Jewish parallels.
7. See *SB* i. pp. 102ff. Jeremias also amasses an impressive list of authorities for this view (*op. cit.* p. 29n.) A. Oepke also notes that 'it is hardly conceivable that the Jewish ritual should be adopted at a time when baptism had become an established religious practice in Christianity. . . . Proselyte baptism must have preceded Christian baptism', (*TWNT*, i. p. 535).
8. *Yebhamoth* 47ab, and note also 46a.
9. Rabbinical Judaism at this time was divided into two main schools of thought, namely the 'School of Hillel' and the 'School of Shammai'. These were the last and best known of the five pairs of great teachers and flourished at the end of the first century BC during the reign of Herod the Great. Hillel was noted for his humility and leniency and believed in expressing the larger intent of Scripture rather than being bound to merely literal and limited applications, the viewpoint of Shammai. The latter formed an admirable counterpart to Hillel, he represented the more conservative tradition, tended to be somewhat rigid in his decisions and rigorous in his exclusivism. Numerous stories are told illustrating the different viewpoints of the two great teachers (see *ṭṭ* *Shabbath* 31a and f.). Paul's teacher Gamaliel was the leading Hillelite rabbi of the day and it was the Hillelite interpretation of the Law which became the basis for normative Judaism.
10. *Yebhamoth* 46b.
11. *Kerithot* 9a.

12. N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* (1956) p. 10.
13. For further details see A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (1908) pp. 745ff., also I. Abrahams, 'How Did the Jews Baptise?' *JTS* (1910) II. pp. 609ff., and the more recent study of T. F. Torrance, 'Proselyte Baptism', *NTS*, (1954) I. 2. pp. 150ff.
14. It seems clear that Jewish baptism was self-administered, being in the nature of a 'purificatory bath'. Was this perhaps in Paul's mind when he speaks of the *loutron palingenesias* (Titus 3.5)? The Old Testament background seems to be Isa. 1.16. Cf. also Sib. Orac. 3.592ff., and note *TWNT*, i. pp. 545f. (s.v. *baptistēs*).
15. *Yebhamoth* 47f.
16. *Yebhamoth* 48b. and cf. also 22a and 98a. There is a full discussion of this terminology in G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (1927) pp. 334f.
17. There is a very clear and close similarity between Jewish and Christian terminology. John 3.5 is especially reminiscent of Jewish baptismal expressions. See J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* p. 36 for further correspondences which provide strong evidence for the rich Jewish heritage of early Christianity.
18. Sib. Orac. 4.165-167. G. W. H. Lampe, (*The Seal of the Spirit*, (1951) p. 24) regards this as a doubtful allusion to baptism but see J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* pp. 33ff.
19. G. Gloege, (*The Day of His Coming*, (ET 1963) p. 95) has remarked that 'the burden consisted in the fact that the Torah was understood as a collection of individual stipulations'. There were understood to be 613 separate commands, 248 positive and 365 negative; there were the difficult (heavy) and easy (light) commands and so forth. These were amplified and applied to every situation of life by the oral tradition. It is small wonder that Christ censured the legalism of the Pharisees! On the other hand, as Professor F. F. Bruce has remarked to the present writer, where religion is conceived in terms of law such a development is inevitable. While the rank and file, like Peter, found the system to be a yoke which neither they nor their fathers could bear, there was an even greater danger in the spiritual realm for those who, like Paul and the rich young ruler, succeeded, by infinite painstaking, in keeping the whole and were tempted to think that thus they had fulfilled all God's requirements.
20. Hegesippus gives a list of seven sects within Judaism of which the Essenes were only one (quoted in Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 4.22.7). We should no doubt view the Essenes not as a single sharply defined group, but as a broad movement of various local forms, but all holding certain attitudes and views in common.
21. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.5.9, 18.1.5, *Bell.* 2.129, etc. and Philo, *Quod Omn. Pro.* 12.13.
22. The literature on the Qumran Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls is now immense. Probably the best introduction to the subject is F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1961). While not all scholars would agree with the dating we have given, all would connect the movement with the pronounced separatist tendencies to be seen in the period of the Hasmonean monarchy.
23. G. Gloege, *op. cit.* p. 92.

24. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*, (1960) p. 55. See also L. H. Silberman, 'The Two Messiahs in the Manual of Discipline', *VT* (1955) 5. pp. 77ff. and *SB* i. pp. 12ff. on the Zadokite Document. This expectation does not seem to have been confined to Qumran but appears elsewhere in the apocalyptic literature, cf. e.g. Test. Levi 8.12ff., Test. Benjamin 9.2, etc.
25. F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1961) p. 79
26. Manual of Discipline 3.4ff. (All quotations from the Qumran Texts are from T. H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect*, (1957).
27. Manual of Discipline 5.13.
28. Like the prophets and earlier teachers in Judaism the Qumran Sectaries believed that sin polluted the flesh in the same way that 'unclean' objects would. There is thus a certain element of ritual cleansing involved in these washings (see Zadokite Document 10.10-13).
29. Manual of Discipline 4.20, 21.
30. G. Gloege, *op. cit.* p. 87.
31. We may note two suggestive references, the *anabainōn* of Mark 1.10 and Matt. 3.16 and the *hodata polla hēn ekei* of John 3.23.
32. G. B. Caird, St. Luke in *PGC*, (1963) p. 70.
33. F. W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, (1892 edn.) pp. 52f.
34. See further on this M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1956) pp. 328ff., H. H. Rowley, 'The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect' in *New Testament Essays* (Ed. A. J. B. Higgins), (1959) pp. 218ff. (Cf. his earlier essay 'Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John' (1940) now published in *From Moses to Qumran*, (1963) pp. 211ff.), and also J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community' (1957) now in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, (1962).
35. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 23.
36. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, (ET 1958 edn.) p. 26.
37. On this H. Sahlin can write, 'the baptism of John was a sacramental representation of the historical Exodus of Israel and, at the same time, an introduction to the New Exodus of salvation'. ('The New Exodus of Salvation according to St. Paul' in *The Root of the Vine* (Ed. A. Fridrichsen) (1953) p. 89). This may be something of an overstatement but it points to the important fact that the concept of the Exodus has moulded the thought of the New Testament writers in their understanding of the work of Christ to a very great extent.
38. Thus John's baptism is called *baptisma metanoias* (Mark 1.4, etc.). Note also Josephus' estimate, John was 'a good man who taught the Jews to cultivate virtue through justice towards each other and piety towards God, and so come together for baptism (*baptismō(i) sumienai*). Immersion would be acceptable to God only if they made use of it, not for the remission of some sins only, but to purify the body when the soul was already pure through righteousness' (*Ant.* 18.5.2).
39. J. Warns, *Baptism*, (ET 1957) p. 19.
40. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 31f.
41. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 10.
42. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* p. 33.

43. On the Baptism of John see further W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism*, (1948) pp. 3-24, and G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 19-32.
44. Jerome, *Dial. against Pelagius* 3.2 (in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, (1958 edn.) p. 6).
45. The word *dikaïosunē* has a wide range of meaning from 'justice' to thoughts of moral integrity. In this context the idea seems to be, not merely 'what is right', but 'all that God requires' (so ΝΕΒ). Thus 'in presenting himself for baptism, Jesus emphasises as his task . . . right conduct which he will fulfil and which will be pleasing to God' (*TWNT* ii. p. 198). There is thus an emphasis on relationships, on that which will follow the will of God and be pleasing and acceptable to Him. This in no way negates our argument, since it was simply this failure of Israel to do what God required of them that necessitated the ministry of the Servant to fulfil their lack.
46. A. T. Hanson, *The Church of the Servant*, (1962) p. 27. For a full discussion of the Servant prophecies see C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah*, (1956) and the less technical and shorter study of H. L. Ellison, *The Servant of Jehovah*, (nd).
47. For a fuller discussion of this see the present writer's article 'Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel' *SYTh.*, (1967) 20. 3. pp. 329ff.
48. See further on this development D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, (1964) pp. 235ff.
49. C. E. B. Cranfield, St. Mark in *CGTC*, (1963) p. 55.
50. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* p. 38. Note also that John saw his ministry as associated with the Servant (John 1.23, etc.).
51. The concept that the baptism of Jesus was a representative and universal baptism with which our own baptism unites us is worked out by O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, (1950) pp. 23ff., and also by J. A. T. Robinson, 'The One Baptism' in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, (1962) pp. 158ff. On the baptism of the Lord see further W. F. Flemington, *op. cit.* pp. 25ff., and G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 33-45. See also the writer's study, 'The Baptism of Jesus and its Present Significance' *EQ* (1967) xxxix 3. (July) pp. 131ff.

### III

## BAPTISM—THE NEW TESTAMENT RITE

OUR examination of the various forms of pre-Christian baptism has revealed the way in which they made the preparation for the Christian rite, and, at the same time, it also demonstrates that we cannot treat New Testament baptism as an isolated phenomenon. At this stage in our study we must turn our attention to the information which we can derive from the New Testament with respect to the actual practice of this rite in apostolic times. Having briefly discussed the matter of administration, without which a study of baptism in the New Testament would be incomplete, we will be able to move on to the much more important matter of the underlying theology of this ordinance.

It soon becomes evident that, in point of fact, the pages of the New Testament provide us with very little information, and we find no definite or explicit teaching concerning the actual mode of baptism. This accords with the general trend of the New Testament to ignore matters of practice, since, quite apart from other reasons, what was generally known to all did not require to be written down. This is a fact which almost certainly applies to other areas of the New Testament where a silence upon various issues can be, for us, somewhat tantalising (cf. the 'you know' of 2 Thess. 2.6).<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, however, there is a more important reason for the omission of practical details from the New Testament. In a day when outward forms are often considered of greater importance than spiritual vitality, we will do well to note that the consistent emphasis of the New

Testament is upon inner spiritual meanings and not upon outward rites. There is another possible reason for the paucity of data relating to sacramental practice, namely, that the early Church tended to follow the Jewish example of not setting down in writing detailed accounts of the various ordinances of worship. These were regarded, and in some senses one would judge rightly so, as 'holy things reserved for the holy', and in adopting this practice the early Christians also believed that they were obeying the command of the Lord Himself, who had said, 'Do not throw your pearls in front of swine' (Matt. 7.6). Letters and documents could be intercepted and lost, and as a result those matters regarded as sacred could be exposed to the public view, the gaze of the ungodly. Thus Basil could write, 'the apostles and fathers who from the beginning gave prescription concerning the Church guarded the dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence'.<sup>2</sup> One must be very careful of pressing this too far, but, nevertheless, it does seem that there was a genuine reluctance on the part of the early Christians to set down the actual modes of observance of the sacraments, a reluctance which was partly responsible for the levelling of such grave charges against the Church as incest and cannibalism by their pagan contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of this paucity of information it is possible, nonetheless, to arrive at certain conclusions with regard to apostolic practice, and it is to the derivation of these conclusions from the data with which the New Testament provides us that we must now turn our attention. We shall endeavour to discover what is said concerning the recipients of baptism in those early days; concerning what instruction was given to baptismal candidates; and concerning the formula and mode of baptism itself.

### **The Recipients of Baptism**

The picture which emerges from the Acts of the Apostles is that of a zealous missionary-minded Church, confronting the hostile world in which the Christians found themselves with the message concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man whom they

claimed was the Anointed of God. His coming had brought a crisis into the world, a crisis which all men must recognise and in recognising must reach decision. The apostolic proclamation of the Gospel concluded with the threefold imperative; with that command which arose automatically out of the presentation of the good news with which they confronted their contemporaries. In the first place there was the summons to repent, to make that change in the whole direction and tenor of life which would bring about a reorientation towards God. Then there came the summons to a total life commitment to the 'man of God's choosing', Jesus, whom God had made both Lord and Messiah. Finally there came the summons to be baptised, to show publicly the reality of the new convert's membership of the new Messianic community, established in and through Jesus Christ, and, at the same time, demonstrating that the person had been sealed into this community through the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2.37, 38, 41; 8.12, 13, 35, 36; 10.44; 11.14, 15, etc.). This is the sequence of events which characterised the whole of the early Church's mission as recorded in the Acts, and there is no evidence that any were baptised without first demonstrating both repentance and faith. We may conclude from the available evidence, and we are on firm ground in so doing, that throughout the apostolic period the two essential prerequisites of baptism were repentance and faith, the emphasis is that 'they that gladly received his word were baptised' (Acts 2.41). Gregory Dix has well pointed out<sup>4</sup> that initiation into the Church throughout the New Testament period is thought of solely in terms of a conscious response to the Gospel; the implications of this will emerge later.

Men thus heard the message, they were brought face to face with the crisis and its inherent challenge, and they committed themselves to God in Christ, confessing their new faith and their new found remission of sins in the symbolic act of baptism. All the available evidence of the New Testament points to the fact that without faith baptism is invalid, for without the 'word of faith' of the proclamation itself baptism degenerates into little more than a magical rite. Baptism thus marked the beginning of the new life within the Christian community, and

in this respect it is significant to note that the primary act of faith and committal together with the confession of that act in baptism are never treated in the New Testament as separable events. Throughout this early period baptism followed directly upon the initial confession of faith, as F. F. Bruce has written, 'faith in Christ and baptism were, indeed, not so much two distinct experiences as parts of one whole; faith in Christ was an essential element in baptism, for without it the application of water, even accompanied by the appropriate words, would not have been baptism'.<sup>5</sup> This is clearly demonstrated in the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, even without the later interpolation (Acts 8.35-38), and the witness of Acts 2.37-42 is also suggestive of the unity of faith and baptism in a virtually single event at this early stage.

One of the implications which arises out of this discussion is that it was not the practice of the early Church to baptise infants, since repentance and faith were considered as preceding and not following baptism. The present writer remains convinced that such was indeed the practice of the New Testament Church, and that infant baptism was a later arising rite, and one which, in Gregory Dix's words, must always be viewed as an 'abnormality, wholly incomplete by itself'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand it must be conceded that there is more than one side to the question. Although we have no wish to be drawn into a controversy which has, over the years, been characterised by a lack of Christian charity and an overabundance of bitterness, nonetheless, in a study of this nature, some discussion of Paedo-baptism is indicated. The matter will accordingly occupy us in a later chapter together with the related problem of household baptism. At this point we must emphasise that the New Testament consistently places the emphasis upon the central meaning of baptism, and the various peripheral issues are virtually ignored. It is to these central issues that we should direct our attention, and as we do so other matters will tend to fall into their rightful place. It is, in fact, as G. W. Bromiley has remarked, 'unfortunate that in post-Reformation theology the disruptive and seemingly interminable Paedo-baptist controversies have blocked the way to advance along these more

interesting lines',<sup>7</sup> namely of baptismal theology, which, we might add, are also more scriptural lines. Nonetheless, we may say that 'it seems clear that the New Testament theology of baptism, apart from any other consideration, implies "re-sponsible" baptism'.<sup>8</sup>

We may thus conclude this section by saying that the evidence of the New Testament is overwhelmingly in favour of the view that the recipients of baptism in the early Church were those who had been brought face to face with the crisis of the Gospel and had made their own response to it in faith. Such a situation, we believe, was also wholly consistent with what we shall seek to show was the apostolic doctrine of baptism. Throughout the New Testament the references to baptism 'assume that its recipients are adults, and that the dispositions required in them are those of conscious and deliberate renunciation of sin and idols, and of personal faith and allegiance to Christ'.<sup>9</sup>

### **Pre-Baptismal Instruction**

At the very beginning of the Church's mission the new converts, who were largely Jews and proselytes, did not receive a distinct course of pre-baptismal instruction. It was not long, however, before it came to be recognised that such instruction was both necessary and desirable, especially for those who had been brought into the Church from Gentile paganism. There are strands of evidence in the pages of the New Testament for such pre-baptismal catechising, even though, as we have already noted, in the earliest phase conversion and baptism formed virtually a unitary experience. At his baptism the convert would make a confession of his faith in the words which he had been taught. The earliest baptismal confession was probably the simple statement, 'Jesus is Lord' (cf. Rom. 10.9, 10, etc.), a statement which in the early days was considered sufficient, and indeed, is one with far-reaching implications. However, even in the apostolic era, there seems to be evidence for the elaboration of such simple statements into something approaching a more definite credal formula. The formation of such creeds, it is clear, was naturally controlled to some extent

by the apologetic needs of the Church in different places, but, at the same time, they were also statements of the universal faith held by all Christians everywhere.

The New Testament contains many examples of such credal affirmations, nearly all of which possess a rudimentary rhythm and may often be set out in stanzas. It is well known that verse-form is a standard aid to the memory and in addition it was a common practice in the early Church to incorporate doctrinal statements into the hymns, which from the beginning formed a basic element of Christian worship. Thus Stauffer notes, 'many confessions were hymn-like, and many hymns were creed-like',<sup>10</sup> and it is not always easy or even possible to be certain which is which. Among the New Testament examples which may be adduced, the 'Faithful Sayings' of the Pastoral Epistles stand out together with such passages as 1 Timothy 3.16, and 1 Peter 3.18-22 which are obvious confessional statements, and credal passages such as 1 Corinthians 15.3-5 and Philippians 2.6-11 to note but two.<sup>11</sup> In this connexion it is worth noting that even the apostolic missionary preaching, the *kerygma*, was of a fixed form which may be recovered from the Acts and the epistles, a discovery which we owe to the researches of C. H. Dodd.<sup>12</sup> The new convert having committed such material to memory would be expected to reproduce it when making his confession of faith at his baptism.

The earliest recorded confession of this nature is that of the interpolation of Acts 8.37, in which the confession was simply one of Christ's deity. Such statements were eventually amplified into definite triadic formulae, and ultimately into full credal affirmations. At all stages in the development of the early Church, however, baptism was the outstanding occasion on which such confessions of faith were made. Indeed, form-critical analysis has made it abundantly clear that the occasion of baptism forms the primary source and the basic setting for the New Testament confessional formulae. In this regard we may note especially the use of what may well have been expressions taken from a primitive baptismal liturgy at 1 Corinthians 6.11 and Hebrews 6.4, and the probable use of baptismal hymns at Romans 8.29f. and Ephesians 5.14. It is also worth

noting that 1 Peter 1.3 to 4.11 has been viewed, with some justification, as consisting of an Easter baptismal liturgy. Such confessions naturally involved not only 'the answer of a good conscience' (1 Pet. 3.21),<sup>13</sup> but also the affirmation of belief rooted in the foundation *credo*, 'Jesus is Lord'.

Apart from such credal teaching relating to the basic issues of the faith, there also seems to have been instruction in other matters. The reference to such elementary Christian teaching at Hebrews 6.1, 2, where 'washings' (*baptismōn*) almost certainly includes baptism proper as the fulfilment in the new order of the old Levitical washings, indicates that this teaching was developed along three main lines. There was first of all a basic instruction in Christian ethics, the major concern of the apostolic *didache*, then there was instruction in the sacraments themselves, and finally there was teaching concerning eschatology (cf. also 1 Cor. 11.2, 16; Heb. 5.12, etc.). This teaching would also have been of a catechetical nature. Daube is probably right when he considers this mode of instruction as one of the most important contributions of Judaism to early Christianity,<sup>14</sup> since, as Stauffer remarks, catechismal formulae 'as an aid to memory were indispensable'.<sup>15</sup>

This same approach is to be found in the immediate post-apostolic writings. For example the *Didache* (known also as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) provided a course of moral and ethical exhortation based on the 'Two Ways' — the way of life and the way of death — and which followed the same three lines as the New Testament teaching, namely, ethics, the sacraments, and the last things. It is likely that the teaching of the 'Two Ways' was taken over essentially from the instructions relating to Jewish proselyte baptism, but in its new Christian context the teaching is extended to include the confession of sins, and the renunciation of the old life, on the one hand, and the confession of Jesus as Lord, together with the demands of a new loyalty and allegiance, on the other. As we hope to show later, these are things which are symbolised in the baptismal act.<sup>16</sup> Such courses of instruction, together with confessional and credal statements, formed the basis of the teaching of the new convert before his baptism. Indeed it seems possible that the

creed had its fixed place within the liturgy of the Church within New Testament times, if not from the very beginning.<sup>17</sup>

The actual period of instruction for the baptismal candidate seems to have varied considerably, no doubt according to local conditions and prevailing circumstances. In the very earliest phase baptism followed directly on conversion but as time went on the two became separated by varying intervals. In some cases it was only for a matter of three months,<sup>18</sup> but by the time we reach the third century it had become necessary for a longer probationary period, and Hippolytus writes, 'let a catechumen be instructed for three years'.<sup>19</sup> These references, however, belong to a more developed period of the Christian Faith than that which we are considering. Indeed, by this time, there was a marked and obvious departure from the simplicity which was such a feature of the Church of the New Testament. There can be little doubt, however, that by the end of the first century, and most probably for some considerable time before, baptism had become the major occasion for the giving of a careful instruction in the Christian Faith. This fact, together with the common association of the gift of the Holy Spirit with baptism, led to the baptismal candidate being described as 'enlightened', a term perhaps originally borrowed from the mystery religions.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Baptismal Formula**

The well-known words of the Matthean formula (Matt. 28.19) command baptism into the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but when we turn to consider the actual practice of the early Church we find no evidence in either the Acts or the epistles that such a trinitarian formula was ever used. Some critics have suggested that this is simply because such formulae belong to a later period of the Church's history. It is consequently alleged that the closing verses of Matthew's gospel cannot be considered as a genuine saying of Jesus. The words 'into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' are in fact an anachronism and could not belong to such an early stage of the Church's development before the doctrine of the Trinity had been formulated. It is thus commonly

asserted that these words cannot be earlier than the second century, and further evidence for this viewpoint is found in the fact that when Eusebius quotes this passage he frequently omits the trinitarian statement altogether or else uses phraseology which differs from the words of the Gospel as we have them. On the other hand it should be noted that the trinitarian formula is to be found in all the extant manuscripts, a circumstance which would be unlikely in the event of these words being a later addition.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it should also be noted that from the very beginning of the Church's mission a triadic scheme was inherent in the proclamation even though it was not yet a formulated doctrine, nor indeed would be for many years to come.<sup>22</sup>

It is, however, interesting to note that the early Church, in point of fact, did not pay any great regard to these words as a *basis* of baptism. As Davies has remarked, 'the early Fathers rested the institution of baptism not so much on the logion at the end of Matthew as upon the baptism of Christ Himself'.<sup>23</sup> The earliest evidence for the use of the Matthean words as a baptismal formula is to be found in the *Didache*, a Jewish-Christian document written about AD 135 or earlier and to which reference has already been made. The instruction is given, 'Baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (i.e. running) water'.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, however, we need to remember that 'the community must have been aware that in baptising it was fulfilling the intention of the Lord. Quite irrespective of the ceaseless critical objections to Matthew 28.18-20 and Mark 16.16, we may conclude from the very existence and significance of the apostolate that there was knowledge of a missionary command, or many such commands, of the risen Lord, and that in accordance with the new situation this command was understood as a command to baptise'.<sup>25</sup> It would seem, however, that at Matthew 28.16 our Lord was not primarily concerned with providing instruction about the actual words of a baptismal service. Indeed this is most unlikely. Rather it would appear that He was underlining the nature of this new Christian baptism as distinct from all other baptisms of the time. Christian baptism was into a unique threefold relationship to God, a matter that we shall return to later.

Apart from these words at the close of Matthew's Gospel there is little evidence in the New Testament for a genuine baptismal formula, although there can be little doubt, as we have already seen, that the act of baptism was a moment of confession. The interpolated verse at Acts 8.37 clearly mirrors the practice of the early Church and is suggestive that there was a distinctive pattern in the rite of baptism. The earliest confession was 'Jesus is Lord', but these were words which formed the response of the candidate in his baptism rather than being an actual formula of baptism. The use of *rhēma* (the 'saying', not as AV the 'word') at Ephesians 5.26 in relation to the washing of baptism is also suggestive that there was a definite stereotyped word-pattern in the rite of baptism, but opinion is divided as to whether the reference is to a pattern of confession, a statement of a simple creed, or to an actual baptismal formula.<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking throughout the New Testament baptism is spoken of as being 'into Christ' (*eis Christon*) (Gal. 3.27, etc.), thus indicating the essential union established in baptism between the believer and Christ, and also the believer's incorporation into the Body of Christ. The two aspects are somewhat difficult to separate, since in some ways they are interdependent, but in the context of Romans 6 it is the thought of union which is uppermost, whereas the predominant thought in Galatians 3 is that of incorporation into the Church.<sup>27</sup> As F. F. Bruce has written, 'the person baptised *eis to onoma tou kuriou Iēsou* bears public testimony that he has become Christ's property',<sup>28</sup> in Bultmann's phrase, he is 'stamped as the property of the Kyrios'.<sup>29</sup> Like Israel of old in her relationship to God, the Christian has become united to Christ in a suzerain-vassal relationship and, because of this, he is also incorporated into the covenant community of those similarly related to Christ, and these relationships are symbolised in baptism.

The thought of relationship is also inherent in the Trinitarian formula of Matthew. The command is to baptise 'into the name (*eis to onoma*) of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. The expression *eis to onoma* does not convey the thought of 'on the authority of', a meaning which has often been given these words but which, in point of fact, is strictly an exegetically

untenable interpretation. Rather the idea conveyed is 'in relation to', and the phrase almost certainly has a background in the similar baptismal expressions of rabbinical Judaism.<sup>30</sup> There is little to indicate that this expression, which has become the accepted baptismal formula of the Church, and, let us add, with good reason, was ever intended so to become. Rather it would seem that the phrase designated Christian baptism as distinct from other forms. It demonstrated the character of this new baptism, shewing in graphic form that the Christian was one upon whom the worthy name had been called (James 2.7) in an entirely new way far beyond the experience of the old Israel. The new covenant was a totally new relationship with God. There was also implied in this expression that the one baptised had taken upon himself the obligations and duties which were inherent in this new relationship, so that the phrase also expresses intention, as it did within the cultic framework of Judaism. The situation was somewhat similar to that which characterised that of the baptism of the Jewish proselyte. Baptism initiated him into the covenant community of Israel and the proselyte took upon himself the 'yoke of the Torah'; in the same way the Christian takes upon himself the 'yoke of Christ' (cf. Matt. 11.29) and demonstrates this acceptance in his baptism. Thus the one who is baptised 'into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' has entered the sphere of an entirely new relationship with God. He knows God as Father in the unique way which Christ, the Son, came to reveal. Further, the knowledge of this revelation is made actual in real experience by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In one sense it could almost be said that Romans 8 provides a commentary on the reality of baptism into the Triune Name.

We may note that similar expressions served to designate other baptisms, to which the evidence of Acts 19.3 and 1 Corinthians 1.13 gives witness. The latter example is, of course, not a reference to an actual baptism but an example of Pauline sarcasm, but the example holds. Baptism in the early Church was thus 'into Christ', and this was the essential feature; it was a baptism into union with Christ Himself and, at the same time, into the corporate fellowship of all those who make up the Body

of Christ. The actual baptismal formula was a secondary matter and is thus virtually ignored. There is thus little information as far as the New Testament is concerned with regard to the actual form of words which were used at the baptismal ceremony, nor, indeed, from the data available, can we even assert that a standard form existed among all the churches of the first-century world. On the other hand, as we have tried to show, there is suggestive evidence that such forms did exist.<sup>31</sup>

### The Mode of Baptism

We are confronted by a similar indefiniteness when we come to consider the mode of baptism in apostolic times as we were in our discussion of the actual form of words used in the baptismal service. However, we can say that the weight of evidence points to a baptism by immersion, since, quite apart from other considerations, Christian baptism followed the practice of the Jewish *tebilah*. Immersion is also suggested in such passages as Acts 8.38, 39 together with the use of the Middle Voice at Acts 22.16; 1 Corinthians 6.11 and 10.2. Paul is commanded, 'Get yourself baptised', the Corinthians are described as those who 'got yourselves washed', and there is a close parallel here to the Jewish use of the phrase 'to take the baptismal bath'.<sup>32</sup> Those who have strongly maintained that immersion is the *only* valid mode of baptism have made much of the meaning of the verb *baptizein*, the usual verb in the New Testament to describe the act of baptising, and the intensive form of *baptein*, a word meaning originally 'to dip' or 'to dye'. This latter verb occurs on only three occasions in the New Testament, and in one of these (Rev. 19.13) it is a doubtful reading, the better attested reading being the verb *rhantizein* (to sprinkle). Neither in this case, nor in the other two instances of the verb's use (Luke 16.24; John 13.26), does the word bear any relation to baptism, nor indeed, in these instances, is there any suggestion or implication of immersion.

The intensive form of the verb is the one used in the New Testament to describe the act of baptising and it occurs on 76 occasions, but, unlike *baptein*, it is a rare word in the LXX, the

first-century BC Greek translation of the Old Testament. It occurs there on only four occasions. It is used in a literal sense implying immersion at 2 Kings 5.14 where it is descriptive of the bathing of Naaman in the Jordan, and similarly at Judith 12.7 where it is used of the heroine's bath. In a metaphorical sense the verb appears at Isaiah 21.4 ('lawlessness overwhelms me', *hē anomia me baptizei*) (cf. Mark 10.38f. and Luke 12.50 for similar metaphorical usage in the New Testament, though here the references also relate to the real baptism of Jesus), and it is used in relation to ceremonial washing at Ecclesiasticus 31.25 ('he that bathes himself after touching the dead', *baptizomenos apo nekrou*). Among the classical writers the word is used in an equally wide sense. They used *baptizein* to describe the sinking of a ship, the drawing of water or wine by dipping one vessel into another, of bathing, and, in a metaphorical sense, of a person being overwhelmed by questions or debt, in addition to the more general usage of dipping or dyeing in any manner.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that in this latter usage the verb soon ceased to be expressive of mode.

In the New Testament also, although the verb generally implies immersion, it need not necessarily do so. For example at Luke 11.38 it is used of the Pharisaic practice of washing the hands before meals. The Pharisee in question 'wondered that he (Jesus) had not washed (*ebaptisthē*) before dinner' and such a washing would not have been by immersing the hands in water, but rather by having water poured over them. In any case it would only have referred to a partial ablution. This is illustrated by the parallel passage at Mark 7.4 where the verb *rhantizein*, meaning 'to sprinkle' is used instead of *baptizein*. Indeed, even where the verb is used specifically of baptism, it cannot be maintained that in every case it implies or even suggests a literal immersion (cf. Matt. 3.11; Luke 12.50; 1 Cor. 10.1, 2). We have made this point, not because we are suggesting that immersion is not the proper mode of baptism, but in order to illustrate the dangers of that mode of exegesis which demands that a word can have but one meaning, and that, very often, one which fits in with preconceived doctrinal assumptions.

There are two important nouns derived from the verb, one,

*baptismos*, is essentially equivalent to the classical *baptisis*, and generally signifies a 'washing', usually one that is ceremonial or ritual (cf. Heb. 9.10, etc.). On the other hand *baptisma* is a genuine technical word, distinctively Christian in its origin, and reserved for baptism, whether literal or symbolical. It is unknown in the LXX, nor is it to be found in any of the classical writers, as one would expect from its Christian origin, and, being a purely technical word designating the rite of baptism, care must be exercised in drawing any conclusions from it as to the method of performing the rite. It always has to be remembered that the meaning of a word is dependent upon its usage and not its etymology, a matter not always sufficiently understood. In passing, the incident of the baptising of Cornelius and his household at Acts 10 is worthy of note. Taking v. 45 in conjunction with vv. 47 and 48 the suggestion is strong that here we are dealing with a case of baptism by affusion (note the apparent implication that water was brought). There seems little doubt that affusion baptism was practised in New Testament times, often perhaps, in association with immersion, and symbolising the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12.13; Acts 2.17; Titus 3.6). In this respect it is interesting to note that the earliest mode of baptism attested by Christian art seems to have been affusion with the candidate standing in the water. On the other hand, there is no evidence that sprinkling was ever an apostolic practice, indeed, the evidence all points to it being a late introduction. There are references to the sprinkling of blood in the New Testament (cf. especially Heb. 9.19; 10.22, etc.), but the word is never used in a baptismal context.

In spite of the seeming inconclusiveness of the argument to this point, we are, however, able to say that the overall evidence of the New Testament and the early Church writings leads us to the conclusion that baptism was generally and characteristically administered by immersion. The earliest actual account of the administration of baptism is to be found in the *Didache*,

'Concerning baptism, this is the way you shall baptise. Having first recited all these things (i.e. the course of instruction in the 'Two Ways' to which we have already alluded), baptise into the

name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (i.e. flowing) water. If there is no flowing water, then baptise in other water, and if you are unable to use cold then use warm. But if you have neither, then pour water upon the head three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>34</sup>

Immersion was thus considered the regular mode of baptism, but, as Bruce has remarked, 'there is a spirit of eminent reasonableness here. The meaning of baptism is much more important than the form'.<sup>35</sup> It is unfortunate that so many of the protagonists in the baptismal controversy forgot this vital fact. It is also true that in immersion, baptism receives its greatest significance, a matter with which the great majority would be prepared to agree. Just as the Jewish proselyte cut himself off from all his past life and associations, just as all contact with his previous environment was severed on his entry into the covenant of Israel, and this severance was demonstrated in the washing of baptism, so also, for the Christian, baptism stands as the external sign that he has finished with the old world and has entered the new world in Christ. He is baptised 'into Christ', into union with the risen Lord and into the fellowship of His Church, and this must imply a complete revocation of all his past connexions. These are aspects of baptism which we shall be discussing in relation to the doctrine of baptism.

Suffice it to say in summary that while 'we have no precise information about the exact rite of Christian baptism in the New Testament . . . certainly it is total immersion that supplies the ordinance with its most vivid representation'.<sup>36</sup> In this connexion it is interesting to note that immersion remained the general rule in Western Christendom until mediaeval times. As late as the thirteenth century we find Thomas Aquinas writing of immersion as being a plainer setting forth of the burial of Christ and for this reason being a practice 'more general and more commendable'.<sup>37</sup> In 1311 the Council of Ravenna allowed a choice between immersion and affusion, and it was not until much later that the practice of sprinkling became such a widespread pattern of baptism. Immersion remains the accepted mode of the Orthodox and Coptic Churches, as it is also of the

Roman Catholic Ambrosian rite of Milan, as well as being the normal method among the various Free churches with 'baptist' principles, the Baptists themselves, the Christian Brethren, the Pentecostal Churches and so forth.

In spite of the paucity of evidence with regard to practical details in the New Testament we may, nonetheless, arrive at the following conclusions. In the first place baptism was regarded as the normal and necessary corollary of repentance and faith in Christ; a man believed and then he was baptised into Christ and His Church. Then, regardless of whatever formula may have been used, the essential nature of the baptism was that it was 'into Christ', and further, the normal mode was by immersion. On the other hand, and this is something which needs emphasis, it is not on these peripheral matters that the New Testament lays its major emphasis. The vital thing in baptism is not so much the outward rite, but what that rite symbolises in the life of the believer, and it is to the significance of baptism and its underlying theology that we must now turn our attention.

## NOTES

1. This viewpoint has certain implications with regard to the Reformed doctrine of the 'sufficiency of Scripture', a matter to which the writer's attention was drawn by Professor F. F. Bruce. Our answer to the problem will depend to the extent to which we regard Scripture as sufficient. It would seem to the writer that on matters of practice the New Testament gives little direction and what is of importance is the extent to which our church practice is true to the *theology* of the New Testament. To take one example, our celebration of the Lord's Supper today, whatever our ecclesiastical tradition, is a far different thing from the simple fellowship meals of the primitive Church. Yet, as Kurt Aland points out, 'the Church claims, and surely with right, that what she does in a new time and in a new way is a legitimate performance of what took place in early times in another way' (*Did the Early Church Baptise Infants?*, (ET 1963) p. 114), provided that it can be shown that what is being done is faithful to the spirit of the New Testament and does not run contrary to its theological principles.
2. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 27.
3. J. Jeremias (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, (ET 1955) ch. 3) probably goes too far in his suggestion that there was a definite esoteric teaching in the early Church reserved for the full initiate (the *teleioi*). Such esoteric teaching seems to be a feature of third-century Christianity rather than first, and was almost certainly a borrowing from the practices of

- the mystery religions. By the time of Augustine it was a well established practice and baptismal candidates were not allowed to be present at the final stages of the eucharist. In the same way certain things were taught them only in the last few weeks before their baptism, e.g. only those baptised were supposed to be allowed to use the Lord's Prayer (cf. Augustine, *De Symbolo*, 1.16). The reason for this latter practice seems to have been that as baptism marked the reception of the Spirit it was not right that candidates should speak of 'our Father' until they had received the Holy Spirit by which 'we cry Abba, Father'.
4. G. Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in relation to Baptism*, (1946) pp. 30ff.
  5. F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Romans in *TNTC*, (1963) p. 136.
  6. G. Dix, *op. cit.* p. 33.
  7. G. W. Bromiley, *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers*, (1953) p. 33.
  8. F. F. Bruce, Personal Communication, (1964).
  9. N. P. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin*, (1927) p. 550.
  10. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 237.
  11. For a discussion of the early creeds and confessions and their development see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, (1950) pp. 1-29, and also the interesting discussion as Essay II in E. G. Selwyn, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, (1946).
  12. See the original essay of C. H. Dodd, 'The Framework of the Gospel Narrative', *ExT.*, (1932) xliii, pp. 396ff. and his full discussion in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, (1963 edn. = 1936).
  13. This expression (*suneidēseōs agathēs eperōtēma*) has been taken to mean 'an appeal to God for a clear conscience' thus expressing the fact that baptism is not a cleansing process itself but rather the ratification in symbol of God's forgiveness and inner cleansing (see *TWNT*, ii, p. 688 s.v. *eperōtēma*, and also E. G. Selwyn, *op. cit. ad loc.*). On the other hand the verb *eperōtaō* is used of a judicial examination (cf. Matt. 27.11; Mark 14.60; 15.2, 4; John 9.23; Acts 5.27) and thus the 'answer' could well signify the catechumen's affirmation of faith, and this seems to be more in line with the context.
  14. D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, (1956) pp. 106ff.
  15. E. Stauffer, *op. cit.* p. 236.
  16. Other possible references to this type of pre-baptismal teaching in the New Testament may underlie 2 Thess. 2.15; Rom. 16.17 and 1 Cor. 4.17. Also of significance with its reference to the double bondage is Rom. 6.15-18.
  17. Some see in 1 Cor. 11.26 a reference to a credal affirmation on the part of the gathered church at the Lord's Supper, but the present writer is of the opinion that the reference to proclaiming the Lord's death relates to the total symbolism of the Christian eucharist.
  18. *Clementine Recognitions*, 3.67, *Clementine Homilies*, 11.35.
  19. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 17.
  20. Two New Testament references should be especially noted. In the first place we have at Ephesians 5.14 the words,  
'Awake, O sleeper,  
Rise from the dead,  
And Christ shall give you light.'

- E. K. Simpson notes, 'the wording may well be that of a primitive Christian baptismal hymn . . . the very rhythm of the three *stichoi* is of a type associated in the Greek memory with religious initiation' (Commentary on Ephesians in *NLC*, (1957) p. 122n.). Secondly the express use of 'enlightened' at Hebrews 6.4 in what is almost certainly a baptismal context should be noted. (Cf. also Eph. 1.18 and also Justin, *Apol.* 1.61.12f., 65.1 as well as the Johannine teaching on Christ as light.)
21. For a fuller treatment of this disputed passage see P. W. Evans, *The Sacraments in the New Testament*, (1954) and also the standard commentaries *ad loc.* A good example of the somewhat cavalier treatment the passage has received from some critics is the remark of R. Bultmann who calls it, 'the legendary account in Matthew 28.19' (*Jesus and the Word*, (ET 1958) p. 111). Such judgments are largely subjective in nature, based on preconceived ideas, rather than evidence of true scientific criticism.
  22. Cf. Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2.33ff.), and note the various triadic formulae, e.g. 1 Cor. 12.4ff.; 2 Cor. 1.21; 13.13; 1 Pet. 1.2; etc.
  23. J. G. Davies, *The Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments*, (1954) p. 97.
  24. *Didache* 7. The fact that this formula first appears in a document with such an obviously Jewish background would seem to militate against the view that 'while the trinitarian formula was appropriate to Gentiles turning to the true God from idols, baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus as Messiah was sufficient in the case of Jews or Samaritans, who had no need to profess monotheism' (F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (1952) p. 187n.). The fact that the Gentile Galatians were baptised *eis Christon* also is suggestive that at this stage the trinitarian formula was not used for either Jews or Gentiles. It is interesting to note that the idea that baptism into the name of Christ refers mainly to Jews goes back at least as far as Cyprian (cf. *Epistle* 72.17).
  25. *TWNT* i. p. 539 (s.v. *baptō*, etc.).
  26. See the fuller discussion of this verse together with Titus 3.5 in Appendix II.
  27. On the other hand to say with R. Bultmann, 'in Christ . . . is primarily an ecclesiological formula' (*Theology of the New Testament*, (ET 1952) i. p. 311) is going much too far.
  28. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 187. He makes the suggestion that these words could have been used as a baptismal formula.
  29. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, i. p. 137.
  30. See *SB* i. pp. 1054ff. Had the phrase been intended to imply authority it would have been more likely rendered *en onomati* or *en tō(i) onomati*. (Cf. Acts 3.6 where the healing is carried out on the authority of Jesus, and Acts 10.48 in relation to baptism).
  31. Mention should be made of O. Cullmann's attempt to find a primitive formula in the use of *kōluein* in relation to baptism (*Baptism in the New Testament*, (ET 1950) pp. 71ff.). To the mind of the present writer Cullmann has not proved conclusively that the word did have a liturgical use in a ritual question as to whether there were factors which would prevent the candidate's baptism, and accordingly a verdict of 'not proven' would be returned. K. Aland (*Did the Early Church Baptise Infants?*, (ET 1963) p. 96) gives the most optimistic assessment of Cullmann's view

- the writer considers possible, and even this goes beyond what he would care to assert.
32. The construction appears to be a genuine Jewish-Hellenistic production and is certainly non-classical. See Judith 12.7 where *ebaptizō* translates *tabhal* which in the Qol means to 'dip oneself', 'to take the baptismal bath'.
  33. Cf. Plato, *Euthydemus* 227D, *Symposium* 176B, Plutarch, *Alexis* 76, Polybius, *Histories* 2.51.6 etc.
  34. *Didache* 7. In the third century Tertullian believed (*De Bapt.* 4) that ideally baptism should take place in a sea or in a pool.
  35. F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, (1958) p. 191.
  36. *Baptism in the New Testament*, Report of the Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland (1955) p. 46.
  37. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Tot. Theol.* iii. 66.7. It would be an interesting and profitable exercise to examine in detail the question of whether the New Testament teaching on baptism would be genuinely satisfied by any other mode except immersion, and this, after all, is the really important question.

## 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

### **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'.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup>

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'.<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup> 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'.<sup>8</sup> 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'.<sup>9</sup>

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'.<sup>10</sup> 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'.<sup>11</sup> 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'.<sup>12</sup> 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'.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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',<sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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'.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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'.<sup>22</sup> 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',<sup>23</sup> 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 — *apelousthe*, '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.<sup>24</sup>

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).<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 'Thus through His humanity, in which we share, it is given us to participate in union with God'.<sup>27</sup> 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 Union<sup>28</sup>**

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'.<sup>29</sup> 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'.<sup>30</sup> 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'.<sup>31</sup> 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'.<sup>32</sup> 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',<sup>33</sup> 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'.<sup>34</sup> 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'.<sup>35</sup> 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 Testament<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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'.<sup>38</sup> 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'.<sup>39</sup>

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'.<sup>40</sup> 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'.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

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,<sup>43</sup> 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' *SJTh*, (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.

## V

# THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

THE position of infants in respect to baptism is a matter about which controversy has raged for centuries, and the debate shows little sign of abating, as evidenced by the recent spate of literature on the subject. It is not the purpose of the present study of baptism to be polemical, and there can be no question but that it has been one of the outstanding, and at the same time regrettable, features of the Paedo-baptist controversy that it has been dominated by partisan loyalties, emotional judgments and by a wealth of thoroughly unchristian bad feeling. Nevertheless, some discussion of the problem seems unavoidable in a study of this nature, and as far as possible we shall endeavour to treat the matter objectively and allow the evidence to speak for itself. Having said this, however, one must immediately qualify the statement with the admission that there are no such things as uninterpreted facts and it is inevitable that the bias of the writer will show through the arguments to some extent.

The problem itself may be simply stated. The call of the Gospel is a call to repentance and faith; it involves the presentation of the crisis which the Lord brought into the world and it confronts men and women with the challenge to decision. Clearly such a message can only be directed to those of such an age as to be able to understand. The New Testament picture is one of responsible men and women accepting the challenge and demonstrating their new faith in the symbolic act of baptism. As we have attempted to show in an earlier part of this study, repentance and faith were consistently presented as the prerequisites of baptism. The question thus arises that if, in fact, these two elements are the basic pre-baptismal require-

ments in the New Testament, should not the child wait until such time as he is able to make his own personal response to the grace of God in Christ before being baptised? Further, we must ask whether it is possible to predicate of the unconscious infant the deep spiritual significance of baptism.

At the same time, however, it has constantly to be borne in mind that the New Testament arose out of a predominantly missionary situation, a situation in which the place of adults was naturally prominent. Even within this situation, it should be noted, the children of believing parents were considered to have a special position with relation to God, they were 'holy' (1 Cor. 7.14). In this regard it is to be remembered that baptism is constantly considered in the light of circumcision and entry into the covenant. Further, as we noted in the discussion of this point, circumcision was but an empty and meaningless ritual unless it was accompanied by the display of faith at a later age, for it was faith then, as it is now, which was the essential requirement for the covenant blessings. The point at issue thus becomes the temporal position of faith, and this involves the question as to the nature of baptism itself. If faith may normally be subsequent to baptism then we are led to the implication that baptism is an effecting agent and the one baptised is simply a passive recipient. On the other hand, when faith precedes baptism the rite becomes more in the nature of a sign and the one baptised may be seen as an active participant. Before considering these doctrinal issues, however, we must look firstly at the historical background of the controversy in order to see what evidence may be gleaned from the New Testament and the practice of the early Church for the early establishment of the rite of infant baptism.

### **The Evidence of History**

From the outset it is important to bear in mind the close relationship between Christian baptism and the earlier arising Jewish proselyte baptism. In the latter there can be little doubt that infants were baptised with their parents.<sup>1</sup> The child was baptised without its consent on the principle that it is possible

to act on the behalf of another and apart from their knowledge or consent provided that any such action is in order to confer benefit. It has to be remembered though, that such a baptism was essentially provisional. The personal and subjective relationship of the infant to the covenant must wait for his own decision. His baptism as an infant merely placed him in an objective relation to the community. When the child, on his own consent, became a member of the synagogue at the age of 13 years, the father became free of the burden of his son's sins. It is highly probable that ultimately the practice of infant baptism within the Church was derived from these Jewish parallels, and not, as Warns has suggested,<sup>2</sup> from pagan practices. His derivation of infant baptism from the Roman custom of purification at which the *prae-nomen* was given to the child (for boys at nine days and girls at eight days old), and from the concepts of the mystery religions, is ingenious, but to the present writer, totally unconvincing.

As far as the New Testament is concerned all examples of baptism were clearly of those who were of such an age as to comprehend the significance of the act; the characteristic statement of the Acts is, 'they believed and were baptised'. There are no examples where it may be stated unequivocally that children or infants were baptised, and in this respect the arguments from the references to household baptism are not in the least conclusive. There are several of these references to 'households' (Acts 16.5, 33; 18.8, (also note 11.4), and 1 Cor. 1.16), and it is just possible, and in the opinion of the present writer it cannot be stated more positively than that, that the expression has a Jewish cultic background.<sup>3</sup> Certainly it is worth noting the many references in the Old Testament to households (e.g. Gen. 45.18; 46.7; 1 Sam. 1.21; 22.16, etc.), and in these cases it seems clear that infants were included in the general term. From this background Jeremias concludes that in the New Testament also the expression would almost certainly have included small children as well as others, and he writes, 'Paul and Luke could under no circumstances have applied the *oikso* formula if they had wished to say that only adults were baptised'.<sup>4</sup>

Another factor to be taken into account in this respect is the concept of the solidarity of the family in the ancient world, a factor which applied especially to the Jewish cultural background. The conversion of the father as head of the house meant in most cases, although not always (cf. 1 Cor. 7.12), that the rest of the family followed him. The accounts of conversions at Acts 16.14ff., 30ff., etc., clearly show that the conversion of the head of the house led to a change on the part of each member, and the evidence is impressive that it 'was normal for the ancient mind to regard the faith of the father of the household as decisive'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it seems to be going beyond the evidence to draw the conclusion from this that Cullmann does, namely, that 'from these passages we can at all events draw this conclusion concerning the doctrine of baptism, that there also the solidarity of the family in baptism is the decisive consideration, and not the individual decision of a single member'.<sup>6</sup> There is a great danger of reading too much into these passages, for it is abundantly clear that each case of household baptism followed the proclamation of the Gospel and the reception of the word of the Good News by faith. Furthermore, it is not just a matter of question-begging to raise the whole issue of age in respect to the household. A Roman household would consist not only in the family but also the slaves who would all be of an age to make personal decisions. It would certainly seem most likely to be the case with Lydia that her household consisted simply of her slaves and employees. In no case is it suggested that little children were in view. Indeed, even in the case of the Philippian jailor, it is highly likely that any children he may have had would have been quite grown up at the time of his conversion, if, as is most probable, he was a retired veteran from the Roman army.

The use of such a term as 'household' may be, indeed, inexplicit and somewhat vague, but there are no really convincing reasons for suggesting that these examples varied at all from the normative pattern of New Testament baptisms which involved the prior expression of repentance and faith on the part of the recipients. The remarks of K. Aland form a necessary

corrective to some of the over-zealous interpretations given to these passages, 'nowhere in connection with the *oikos*-passages in the New Testament is a child or an infant expressly named, let alone its baptism; and nowhere is any allusion made to any such baptism — a plain datum which we are in danger of forgetting when observing the confident assurance with which the existence of these infants is presupposed in the discussions about the '*oikos*-formula'.<sup>7</sup>

One further point may also be raised in respect of the solidarity of the family. This is that the family solidarity outside the Church cannot be considered identical to that within the Church. Incorporation into Christ produces a new solidarity within a new community. This transcends the planes of natural community through the establishment of the new family. It is surely this point that our Lord Himself makes when He identifies His own family as those who perform the will of God (Mark 3.31-35). Throughout the New Testament the emphasis is placed solidly upon the reality of the corporate, family fellowship of the Church to the exclusion of the bonds of natural family. Indeed, we may note again how the Lord Himself speaks of a break of natural family solidarity in regard to an individual response to His claims (e.g. Mark 10.29, 30, etc.). The New Testament stress is on the corporate nature of the Church and corporate responsibility within this community. In relation to Christ natural ties lose their significance, although, as we shall note later, there is a sense in which the children of believing parents can be said to enjoy a definite relationship to the Church.

There are two other sections of the New Testament from which the practice of infant baptism has been derived, namely, the incident of the Blessing of the Children in the Synoptic Gospels, a consideration of which we shall leave to later in this discussion, and the statement of Paul concerning children at 1 Corinthians 7.14. This verse occurs in the larger context of the problem of mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians. It is quite clear from the fact that Paul can speak of the children as 'holy' (*hagia*) that he regards them as being in a unique relationship to the covenant, simply because they

have been born to Christian parents, but there is absolutely no evidence that we may argue from this, by a process of extrapolation as it were, that these children of believing parents were baptised. The whole point of the passage is to demonstrate that there is no ground for the separation of the believing partner from the unbeliever in a mixed marriage, for the faith of the believer 'sanctifies' (*hēgiastai*) the unbeliever. Although there are clearly certain differences between the position of the child of Christian parents and the unbelieving partner in a marriage, it is also clear that there must be a point of comparison. Warns rightly says, 'if two things or persons are compared with each other they must in some point be alike, else one proves nothing through the comparison. But the resemblance between the unbelieving husbands and the children mentioned consists in this, that both did not belong to the assembly and were not baptised'.<sup>8</sup> Even Oscar Cullmann, a strong advocate of infant baptism and its New Testament basis, remarks that, 'according to 1 Cor. 7.14 the holiness of the children there envisaged is already guaranteed without their being baptised'.<sup>9</sup> The conclusion of Jeremias is even more explicit, 'we must accordingly be content with the conclusion that 1 Cor. 7.14 bears no reference to baptism'.<sup>10</sup>

It is the opinion of the present writer that infant baptism, like much of our present-day church practice, must first be put into the New Testament before it can be taken out. We would conclude our discussion thus far in the words of Robert Nelson, who wrote, 'that the New Testament says nothing explicitly about the baptising of little children is incontestable'.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest writings outside the New Testament have equally nothing conclusive to say on this subject. It is not our purpose to enter into any great detail, but it may certainly be said that there is no explicit reference to the baptism of infants before Tertullian. The statement of Justin Martyr (about AD 150) that he could name 'many, both men and women, who were disciplined from childhood to Christ (*ek paidōn emathēteuthēsan tō(i) Christō(i)*) remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years; and I boast I could produce such from every race of men',<sup>12</sup> is not in any way a conclusive argument demonstrating the existence of

infant baptism before AD 90. Although Justin uses the verb *mathēteuō* (to disciple), which seems to be derived ultimately from Matthew 28.19, as an equivalent to *baptizō* (to baptise) elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> the most natural explanation of the phrase we have quoted would seem to be that these people had been instructed in the Christian faith from an early age, and had been brought up as members of a Christian family. The most that can be said is that the expression is very ambiguous, and, taken in conjunction with the silence of other writings of this age concerning the baptism of infants, it would be foolish to build a case for the practice on this statement. Furthermore, the clear references to pre-baptismal instruction, periods of probation and the like in the writings of the sub-apostolic era and later seem to presuppose an adult baptism being the general practice rather than that of infants.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest definite reference to the baptism of infants is not found until Tertullian, that is at the turn of the second and third centuries. In his work on baptism he argues that the baptism of little children (*parvuli*) lays too great a responsibility upon the sponsors, and therefore, except in cases of emergency (*si non tamen necesse est*) the practice is to be discountenanced. He goes on to ask the pertinent question, 'why does the age of innocence need to be in such a hurry to receive the forgiveness of sins?' Therefore, he argues, 'let them come when they are older . . . they may become Christians when they can know Christ'.<sup>15</sup> According to Jeremias<sup>16</sup> the importance of this section is that Tertullian is not contesting the principle of infant baptism but only its expediency, and then only as it relates to the children of pagan parents, since in another work (*De Anima* 39.3-40.1) he advocates the baptising of children of Christian parents. Thus, according to Jeremias, the quarrel was not so much with the practice of infant baptism *per se*, but rather with those who wished to extend it beyond the bounds of the Christian family. It seems, however, to the present writer, that Jeremias has been carried away with his enthusiasm for his crusade to prove a first-century origin for infant baptism. A careful study of Tertullian's writings does not seem to warrant the conclusions that he has drawn from them. Indeed, in

Tertullian's account of the actual rite of baptism it is clear that he has adults in view, especially as he speaks of an interrogation of the recipient before three witnesses, and the confession of faith 'made with the mouth', and the ordering of the service.<sup>17</sup> It would seem therefore that Tertullian's arguments would point to the fact that infant baptism was not, at this time, a universal practice, although, on the other hand, J. Warns is a little too strong in his emphatic conclusion that 'his (i.e. Tertullian's) protest is the plainest proof that infant baptism was not regarded as an apostolic usage'.<sup>18</sup> It is, however, possible that 'in Tertullian's tract *De Baptismo* . . . we catch a glimpse of the very beginnings of infant baptism in Carthage and Africa'.<sup>19</sup>

From Tertullian onwards references to infant baptism become increasingly frequent, but it is with the early period that we are concerned, and from the evidence available we are forced to the conclusion that the argument from history would point to the practice being a late introduction, for which the evidence before about AD 220 is scanty, ambiguous and unreliable.<sup>20</sup> It is not so much with the historical evidence, however, that we are concerned. The real problem is whether infant baptism may be doctrinally justified from the New Testament, even though the practice was a later introduction into the life of the Church. Much, if not most, of our church practice today has little in common with the practice of the Church of the first century, and yet we believe that these innovations and differences are not in conflict with the theology of the New Testament. The important question, therefore, with regard to infant baptism is not so much whether we can discover a first-century origin for it, but rather whether it may be justified on the grounds of the overall theology of the New Testament.

### **Doctrinal Considerations**

In our consideration of the doctrinal position of infant baptism it is important to remember that we must base our conclusions not on a series of isolated texts, but upon the whole tenor of the apostolic argument concerning the nature of

baptism. The root of the problem lies in the question of the temporal position of faith and in the relation of the spiritual significance of baptism to the unconscious infant. Again, in this respect, we must emphasise that the New Testament indicates the character and meaning of baptism without any great concern over its method of administration. Therefore, if infant baptism can be shown to be in accord with the New Testament theology of baptism then there should be no hesitation about its practice, regardless of the historical questions. On the other hand, if it does not accord with the New Testament theology of baptism then it must, equally emphatically, be rejected.

What we have attempted to demonstrate to be the New Testament position with regard to baptism is affirmed by Barth as he writes, baptism is 'in every case the indispensable answer to an unavoidable question by a man who has come to faith. It answers the question concerning the divine certainty and the divine authority of the word which the man has already heard, which in faith he has already laid hold of, and to which he has replied in the affirmative'.<sup>21</sup> It is abundantly clear that such a position can never be posited of an infant, for he cannot, of his own accord, make a definite response to the call of God. Consequently the baptism of such an infant is an act performed without the willingness or readiness of the party concerned, and thus it cannot, from any point of view, be called an act of faith-obedience. Yet this is what baptism was in every recorded case in the New Testament. Some have attempted to overcome this obvious doctrinal obstacle to infant baptism by calling baptism a passive experience. For example, Stauffer has maintained that 'the whole ritual is neither an active performance, nor a sacramental activity of the person to be baptised, but rather a passive experience'.<sup>22</sup> We suggest however that the conscious act of union of the believer with Christ can hardly be called a passive experience. Indeed, one cannot escape from the conviction that the consistent and clear emphasis of the New Testament is that baptism is to be viewed as an act of obedience and faith, and that the one baptised was an *active* partner in this rite, having taken his stand upon the promises of God in Christ.

This active partnership is further demonstrated by the constant use of the Middle Voice, a matter which has already been discussed. The command was couched in such terms as, 'wash yourself', 'get yourself baptised', expressions which surely demand a sense of active participation. Baptism as the sign of a renunciation of the past, of an entry into a new life, of justification and regeneration, can have little meaning for the unconscious and innocent child. Indeed, we would assert, that viewed in this light, baptism can only have genuine meaning as applied to one of understanding. Cullmann agrees that 'the distinctive element in the baptismal act of the primitive church at first consisted in the relation of that act to the individual who now dies and rises again with Christ'.<sup>23</sup> This is the aspect of baptism which we considered earlier in relation to the text of Romans 6 and Colossians 2, and this, we suggest, is the crucial point of the whole argument. In the New Testament the evidence is overwhelming that baptism is an act in which the believer consciously enters into the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is never considered as effecting something on or in a passive recipient. Barth makes the point abundantly clear as he writes, 'neither by exegesis nor from the nature of the case can it be established that the baptised person can be a merely passive instrument (*Behandelter*). Rather it may be shown by exegesis and from the nature of the case that in this action the baptised is an active partner. . . . In the sphere of the New Testament one is not brought to baptism; one comes to baptism'.<sup>24</sup> Cullmann rightly points out that anyone who regards this interpretation as correct 'will have difficulty in defending infant baptism'.<sup>25</sup>

In the New Testament baptism is viewed not as an effecting agent but as an effective sign, a view which became, regrettably, less prominent over the years until eventually the figure was mistaken for the reality. It was not long before references were being made to the baptised person being born again in the waters. But nowhere in the New Testament can there be found evidence from which it may be asserted that water baptism *per se* is a causative or generative means by which the blessings of God in Christ are imparted and received. To apply baptism

to the unconscious infant is to assert that the act is capable of inducing some change in the infant's life, and such concepts will inevitably lead to the *ex opere operato* position of the Roman rite. Of this situation Forsyth has said that it is one in which 'things moral, things possible and true only for the adult experience were transferred to the unconscious child and thus became magic'.<sup>26</sup> As Dinkler well remarks, when the 'sacramental meaning is no longer exclusively dependent on the faith of the participant but attains a quality in itself as a magically operative rite . . . (and) faith in Christ is no longer the only *conditio sine qua non* but is seen as an outcome of baptism . . . infant baptism had its dogmatic justification'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, we may trace in the underlying ideas a complete misconception of original sin. Stemming from the ideas inherent in the writings of Augustine which came to full flower in mediæval thought, we may trace the concept that baptism is essential for the washing away of the sin inherited from Adam. Such mechanistic and deterministic ideas destroy the whole basis of human freedom, and, indeed, to think of the new-born infant in terms of 'sin' at all is surely question-begging to say the least.

It is our conviction that a general consideration of the New Testament teaching and an appreciation of the general tenor of its doctrine will demonstrate that the practice of infant baptism involves the adoption of a position which cannot be squared with the meaning and significance of baptism as the New Testament presents it. For infant baptism to be meaningful in any sense of the word it must be given a position and power unrecognised by the apostolic teaching, and, indeed, contrary to the basis of historic Protestantism which has ever denied 'that grace is ever conferred *ex opere operato*, without corresponding faith on the part of the recipient'.<sup>28</sup> In conclusion we may restate the New Testament view of baptism with the following quotation: 'the rites of initiation mark the passage of the convert into this new world. It is assumed in all the New Testament language about the rites that the convert receives them with a lively faith and a renunciation of the old world . . . they are the focus of a creative action of God whereby a man is made one with Christ in His death and resurrection, cleansed

from his sin, admitted into the fellowship of the Ecclesia which is Christ's body, given the adoption of sonship to the Father, and sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption'.<sup>29</sup> The theology of the New Testament is thus, we believe, against the baptism of infants, in the words of a recent American author it 'disfavour[s] infant baptism with considerable inflexibility'.<sup>30</sup> In this respect it cannot be over-emphasised that those who find something of value in infant baptism to which they wish to hold, should be prepared to acknowledge, as some indeed do, that the New Testament theology of baptism, which implies a real and genuine faith on the part of the one baptised, cannot be imposed on a rite which in the very nature of the case implies no such thing. We must therefore look for some other means of demonstrating the inclusion of the Christian family in its entirety within the covenant relationship.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting at this point that there are certain practical issues involved in this for those churches that follow 'baptist' principles. The question that has to be considered is whether those Christians who have been baptised as infants, and who regard that baptism as valid and sufficient, are to be made to submit to a further baptism as a precondition of church membership. In this respect it is well to remember the 'one baptism' of Ephesians 4.5 and the fact that the only case of anabaptism in the New Testament (Acts 19.1-7) was of those who had been previously baptised in John's baptism, *not* Christian baptism. Further, the issue on that occasion was the reception of the Holy Spirit rather than the ordinance of baptism *per se*. On the other hand it is clearly a different situation if someone baptised in infancy comes to desire 'responsible baptism' as a matter of personal conviction. This whole question is one which must be adequately faced and answered for it is of vital importance in the present ecumenical dialogues.<sup>32</sup>

### **Is There an Alternative?**

If baptism is an act which involves concepts which are inapplicable to the infant, it is clear that there should be some other means of demonstrating the fact that the child of Christian

parents has a place within the fellowship of the Church until such time as it is able to make his or her own response to the Gospel. Does the New Testament offer any guidance in this matter? It is our belief that it does. The account of the blessing of the children in the Synoptic tradition (Matt. 19.13-15; Mark 10.13-16; Luke 18.15-17) has often been used to adduce support for Paedo-baptism, and indeed, it has thus been used from quite early times. It is our contention, however, that to be properly understood these verses must be placed within their primary historical setting. Quite clearly the actual incident had nothing whatever to do with the sacrament of baptism, it concerned an act of blessing and prayer. It seems likely that the event took place on the eve of the Feast of the Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and in bringing their children to Jesus the parents were following an accepted custom. On such days of fast the parents would bring their children to the rabbis and elders of the synagogue in order that they might receive their blessing. As the Babylonian Talmud puts it, they were brought to the rabbis 'for them to bless them, and pray for them, that one day they might attain to the knowledge of the Torah and good works'.<sup>33</sup> The primary background is thus clear; Jesus, in His position as a rabbi, takes the children and blesses them in accordance with the accepted custom, and in so doing emphasises that only those who are like little children in their smallness and humility before God can hope to enter His kingdom. This then is the primary *Sitz im Leben* (life-setting), but over against this we must look for the secondary setting, the setting in the life of the early Church, which led to the story being recorded, remembered and eventually set down. It would appear that the early Christians believed the story possessed a real value in relation to the life and problems of the first-century Church. On the other hand the view that it was so remembered because it gave the practice of infant baptism the sanction of the Lord seems, to us, to be insupportable. We certainly believe that it possessed a relation to the children of believing parents and their position in the fellowship of the Church, but not with respect to baptism. Rather, the incident portrays a practice which was to be continued in the life of the Church, namely, the

bringing of the children to the elders of the local congregation in order that they might receive their blessing and the prayers of the assembled company that they might grow up into the Faith. It is our suggestion that this may well have been the practice of the early Church at the beginning, but later, through the pressure of a popular movement, it became bound up with, and inseparable from, the rite of baptism. It seems possible that such a practice would provide a more biblical alternative to infant baptism and at the same time it might well be a better practice to emulate. This would allow baptism to be reserved for those able to come themselves as a responsible act rather than being brought as infants.<sup>34</sup>

## NOTES

1. Cf. *SB*, i, pp. 110ff.
2. J. Warns, *Baptism*, (ET 1956) pp. 73ff.
3. See E. Stauffer, 'Zur Kindertaufe in der Urkirche' *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*, (1949) 49. pp. 153ff. who makes much of this point.
4. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, (ET 1960) pp. 21f.
5. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* p. 22. The same situation still obtains to some extent among primitive communities in Africa, as the writer can testify, and no doubt elsewhere.
6. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, (ET 1950) p. 45.
7. K. Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptise Infants?*, (ET 1963) p. 94.
8. J. Warns, *op. cit.* p. 61. Note also the comment by K. Barth, *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*, (ET 1948) p. 43.
9. O. Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 61.
10. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* p. 45.
11. R. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, (1951) p. 129.
12. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1. 15.6.
13. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 39.2. The expression is also thus used by his contemporary Melito of Sardis and other early Fathers.
14. In passing it is worth noting the interesting variant of the text of Acts 2.39. The Western text (D d Aug.) reads, 'to us and our children' (*hēmin . . . hēmōn*) instead of 'to you and your children' (*humīn . . . humōn*). The reference is to the extension of the covenant, but the suggestion of Jeremias (*op. cit.* p. 72) that the redaction came naturally because the 'baptism of Christian children was taken for granted' is surely a case of the wish being father to the thought.
15. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 18.3-6.
16. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* pp. 81ff.

17. Cf. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 4.1, *De Corona Militis* 3.2ff., *De Baptismo* 6. For a full and careful discussion of the evidence see K. Aland, *op. cit.* pp. 61ff. His suggestion as to what might have happened had Tertullian remained in fellowship with Rome would make a good discussion point (p. 69n.).
18. J. Warns, *op. cit.* p. 79. In point of fact Warns is as biased in his interpretation of Tertullian in one way as Jeremias is in the other.
19. K. Aland, *op. cit.* p. 69.
20. It is interesting to note the comments of a Roman Catholic theologian on this situation. Rudolf Peil (*A Handbook of the Liturgy*, (ET 1960) p. 253) writes, 'there is indeed some evidence that the children of Christian parents were sometimes baptised in infancy even during the second and third centuries, it is nevertheless true to say that in the early centuries of the Church adult baptism was the rule'.
21. K. Barth, *op. cit.* p. 42.
22. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 162.
23. O. Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 23.
24. K. Barth, *op. cit.* pp. 41f.
25. O. Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 24.
26. P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, (1917) p. 182.
27. E. Dinkler in *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, (revised edn. 1962) p. 89 (*s.v.* Baptism). Attempts to overcome this major problem have been many. The Lutheran concept of an infant faith induced by prevenient grace can only be termed 'a desperate expedient' (thus G. H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, (1959) p. 52). The view of some of the Reformed Churches is little better with concepts of presumptive regeneration and vicarious faith. Such views do not do justice to the evidence of the New Testament, and are designed to bolster up a practice which the Reformers, for reasons of expediency or because they saw something of value in the practice, were unwilling to drop.
28. J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, (1957 edn.) p. 156.
29. Church of England Report, *Baptism and Confirmation*, (1959) p. 9.
30. W. Carr, *Baptism; Conscience and Clue for the Church*, (1964) p. 176.
31. N. P. Williams, (*Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin*, (1927) p. 552) can write that in 'the author's view the argument a *praxis ecclesiae* is the only, but also sufficient ground, for affirming the legitimacy and laudability of Paedo-baptism'. To rest one's case, however, upon the basis of what has always been done is little better than a policy of despair, and we might contrast these words with those of another Anglican (C. E. Pocknee, *The Parson's Handbook*, (1965) p. 120), 'the idea that all infants must receive baptism... has done immense harm... such indiscriminate baptism rests on no Scriptural warrant or authority'. He at least is aware of the problem.
32. The writer is indebted to Professor F. F. Bruce for drawing his attention to this practical matter.
33. *Sopherim* 18.5. Although the authorities for this practice are late there seems to be no valid reason to suppose that they do not reflect a much earlier practice. It would surely be conceded that these rabbinical sources reflect a long oral tradition.
34. It is the present writer's belief that K. Aland's answer to the problem

of infant baptism (*op. cit.* pp. 112ff.) falls down on two counts, firstly on his apparent view that baptism as an act has saving efficacy (p. 113), and secondly, on his peculiar view of faith in the context of baptism (p. 115) in which he seems overmuch influenced by Luther.

## VI

# CONCLUSIONS

AT the beginning of this study we emphasised the vital and important place that baptism occupied in the life and thought of the early Church. It is our conviction that the Church of today must recapture something of this emphasis for the revitalisation of its spiritual life. Our study has been an attempt to assess and come to some understanding of the data with which the New Testament, the foundation of the life and faith of the early Church, supplies us. In the light of this evidence which we have gleaned from our sources; in the light of the teaching which we have derived from the New Testament, and which must surely remain the basis of the life and practice of the Church in this century as much as it was in the early days; in the light of all this, we say, we must reassess our own understanding and practice of baptism. We must ask ourselves whether the practice of baptism in our own church tradition is fundamentally true to the theology of the New Testament. We must ask ourselves whether this sacrament is as central to the life and thought, and especially the out-going message, of our churches today as it was in the first century. The churches of the Reformation have always insisted, and we believe rightly so, that the principles of Holy Scripture must represent the norm, the standard of the Church's life and conduct in any age; but can we say that this is true of our baptismal practice? There have been some welcome signs in recent years of a rethinking of fundamental presuppositions. There has been a realisation on the part of many churches that 'hitherto existing practices are unsatisfactory. The motives for the new orientation vary from church to church. . . . But common to them all is the deep

concern for a clearer understanding of the real meaning of baptism and for a truer expression of it in church life'.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the questions which relate to baptism in this day we believe that the most important is to ascertain whether in fact our administration of the sacrament is such that it may become the basic event of our experience as Christian people, as members of the new community, and, indeed, as members of Christ Himself. In fact, are we able to say that our Christian life and experience has arisen out of this foundation experience of being baptised into Christ, this sacrament in which our spiritual incorporation into Christ becomes actualised to sense-experience and visible to the Church and the world? Is the nature of our commitment in this act of baptism being adequately expressed within the context of the life of worship, witness and work of our own churches? It has been well said that we 'must understand anew the implications of the fact that we have been baptised, that, as Christ came to minister, so must all Christians become ministers of His saving purpose according to the particular gift of the Spirit which each has received, as messengers of the hope revealed in Christ'.<sup>2</sup> The oneness of the Church of Christ, the co-equality of all believers in their Lord, the sharing of all in the gifts of the Spirit which each member is to express in the work, worship and witness of the Church, these are some of the practical corollaries which arise out of the 'one baptism' and which demand to be understood and expressed afresh.

It has been our prayerful hope that this study in New Testament baptism may prove of help in answering these and other questions which urgently confront our churches today. It is our conviction that only from an honest re-examination of the New Testament, and a willingness to conform humbly to its spirit, that there can arise a genuine unity of the Church of Christ.

#### NOTES

1. L. Vischer, *Ye Are Baptised*, (ET 1964) p. 7. That such welcome reassessments are going on is evidenced by the words of C. E. Pocknee (*The Parson's Handbook*, (1965) p. 119), 'it is now realised that much of our (i.e. Anglican) present theology and practice is based on late mediæval misconceptions, and there can be no satisfactory revision of the rites of

Baptism and Confirmation in the Book of Common Prayer until these matters are resolved'.

2. World Council of Churches, *The Evanston Report*, (1954) Section VI p. 162.

## APPENDIX I

### THE ABSENCE OF BAPTISM IN THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES

THE absence of any reference to baptism from the time of John's baptism until the infant Church begins her ministry as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles when we meet the rite in a distinctively Christian setting, has occasioned considerable discussion, and has often been regarded as one of the problems of the New Testament. There are in fact two references which would indicate that our Lord countenanced baptism in the early stages of the ministry, one of these (John 3.22f.) would suggest that Jesus Himself administered baptism, an impression which is later corrected (John 4.2) by the statement that it was the disciples who administered the rite. Both these references belong to the pre-Galilean stage of the Lord's ministry, a period which is not mentioned by the Synoptic writers who leave us with the impression that Jesus returned to Galilee immediately after the baptism and the temptation in the wilderness. In view of the fact that John 3.26 seems to suggest that at some stage of the ministry Jesus was associated with John the Baptist, and also the further fact that it was from the circle of the Baptist's disciples that He drew many of His own followers, it would seem very probable that the baptism which is in view in these two references is the baptism of John, the baptism to repentance in view of the coming Messiah.

This view is given further weight if we accept the reading of John 1.30 proposed by C. H. Dodd,<sup>1</sup>

'There is a man in my following who has taken precedence of me, because he is, and always has been, essentially my superior'.

It would seem possible, at any rate, that at this very early stage in the ministry of the Lord when He might have been seen as a follower of the Baptist, His mission was in fact somewhat similar to that of John himself. As Dodd puts it, 'he was acting as his own forerunner. His time . . . was not yet come. When, however, the Jewish authorities began to take note of his proceedings and when (immediately afterwards possibly) the work of the forerunner was forcibly cut short, the hour struck'.<sup>2</sup> It was then that Jesus went to Galilee proclaiming that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God had arrived (Mark 1.14). This would mark the beginning of the Galilean ministry which all the records show to have been the real commencement of the ministry of Jesus the Messiah.

These two instances in John's Gospel are the only references to any baptism being connected with the Lord Himself, or with His disciples, throughout the three years of His ministry. Accordingly, we must therefore conclude that either our Lord did not baptise other than at a preparatory stage of the ministry, or else that the Gospel writers, for some reason, do not mention it. If our Lord did countenance baptism, and we do have the two Johannine references to lend some support to this, it makes it much easier to understand how baptism took its place as the normal rite of entry into the new community immediately after the events of Pentecost. It is true of course that we have the missionary command of the Lord with which baptism was associated (Matt. 28.19), and as Stauffer has remarked this is something which must be taken seriously,<sup>3</sup> but the missionary command is in a post-Easter context, immediately preceding Pentecost.

The only baptism that appears, therefore, in the context of the Gospels is the baptism of John, a preparatory rite which in turn only appears at the very beginning of the narratives, before the actual ministry has commenced. There is also a theological motive which may be discerned underlying this absence of baptism from the Gospels. Throughout the Gospels the baptism of Jesus Himself is consistently related to His death, it was viewed as a prefigurement of the saving events of the Passion, and His death and resurrection fulfilled all that which His

baptism had foreshadowed (Luke 12.50; Mark 10.38; Matt 20.22). These were the events which formed the basis for the establishment of the new community and for the baptism which marked entrance into that community, a baptism which was associated with the Messianic gift of the Spirit on all men, not only Him who was the Representative Man. As Lampe has written, it is 'as clearly implied in the Synoptists as it is explicitly affirmed by the Fourth Gospel that before the saving work of Jesus was completed, He "spoke of the Spirit which they that believed on Him *were to receive*; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified". It is for the same reason that we are told that Jesus Himself did not baptise, until in His death He "baptised" all men'.<sup>4</sup>

Those who would be followers of Christ were also to be sharers in His death and resurrection, that baptism which He undertook for us, and this sharing is symbolically portrayed in the sacrament of Christian baptism. It is thus clear, that, as Clark has put it, 'Christian baptism remained an impossibility until in death Jesus had fulfilled his baptism for all men'.<sup>5</sup> For the Apostles the baptism of John was fulfilled in the outpouring of Pentecost, but for the Church founded by their word the new rite of Christian baptism provided in a single act the fulfilment of John's baptism by their Lord and the gift of the Spirit which this fulfilment had made possible. Thus, the Gospel writers remained silent about any baptism during the Lord's ministry until, His purposes fulfilled, the Risen Lord commands His disciples to go into all the world, to make disciples and to baptise with a baptism which entered into the fulfilment of His own baptism in the events of Easter.

#### NOTES

1. C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, (1963) pp. 217f.
2. *Ibid.* p. 293.
3. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 160.
4. G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, (1950) p. 41.
5. N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, (1956) p. 18.

## APPENDIX II

### THE BAPTISMAL CONTEXT OF *LOUTRON* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE word *loutron*, rendered 'washing' in the AV, occurs on only two occasions in the New Testament, at Ephesians 5.26, and Titus 3.5. As E. K. Simpson has rightly pointed out the translation 'washing' or 'water for washing' conveys the correct sense of the word,<sup>1</sup> a sense, moreover, which is well attested in the classical writers. To translate the word as 'laver' cannot be substantiated, since throughout the LXX *laver* was translated by *loutēr*. From this some have denied that there is any reference to baptism in either of the two verses where *loutron* occurs in the New Testament, and it is said that they must be considered as references to a spiritual washing, which Ephesians 5.26 demonstrates as taking place through the word of God (in this sense as equivalent to Scripture). On the other hand, nowhere in the New Testament is the word of God considered as a washing agent. In this respect the allusion at John 15.3 clearly bears no relation to the word of God in the sense of Scripture, nor does John 17.17. At times John 3.5 has been used to back this interpretation, but here, not only is there no mention of the word of God, but the basic reference, we believe, is to baptism, either the baptism of John as seems most likely, or less probably, proselyte baptism, as symbolising the repentance which is a prerequisite of the activity of the Spirit of God.

Taking firstly Ephesians 5.26 we note that the phrase *tō(i) loutrō(i) tou hudatos en rhēmati* conveys a slightly different sense to that usually given in the English versions, for the definite articles associated with both 'washing' and 'water' would seem to place a special emphasis upon them, singling them out, as it

were, for especial note, whereas there is no article with the difficult word *rhēma*, leaving it essentially indefinite. With regard to *rhēma* it is well to note that the essential meaning is that of the spoken word, a 'saying', and on the few occasions on which the word is used by Paul it nearly always seems to refer to the proclamation of the apostolic Gospel, that technically called the *kerygma*. This is seen clearly at Romans 10.8, 17, and elsewhere, and it is clear that the word in these contexts does not indicate the word of God in the sense of Scripture, for which, indeed, *rhēma* would hardly be appropriate. This would also seem to be the meaning at Ephesians 6.17, where the 'sword of the Spirit' is the 'utterance of God', that proclamation by which the Holy Spirit brings defeat to the enemy by bringing deliverance to those held captive in the thralldom of sin and death. In our present context however the use of the word remains somewhat indefinite, it simply refers to something which is spoken, and taken thus there seem to be no valid grounds for denying a reference to a baptismal formula. In view of this, Simpson's remark that 'Chrysostom's identification of the term with the baptismal formula savours of the sacerdotalism of his age'<sup>2</sup> seems to us to be a little unjust. Perhaps more in keeping with Pauline usage would be to see in the word a reference to the word of faith, the confession of the mouth (Rom. 10.8-10), for which baptism would provide the supreme opportunity.

Furthermore, it is important to note the use in this verse of the aorist participles — 'sanctify' (*hagiasē(i)*) — 'cleansed' (*katharisas*) — which indicate definite and distinctive events, just as Christ gave Himself for the Church in a single act of giving (again the aorist, *paredōken*) so the sanctifying and cleansing of the Church itself is a single and definite event. The use of the aorist makes it clear that the 'washing', the 'bath', is one which occurred once and required no repetition, and such would certainly apply to baptism, which, as we have pointed out in the body of the present study, is the unrepeatable sign of a spiritual cleansing. Indeed, we suggest, it would have taken little imagination for the original readers to have inserted the word 'baptismal' before 'water' in this verse.

Turning now to Titus 3.5 we should note the close similarity

between the phraseology used here by Paul and that of the Jewish *tebilah*, observing also the similarity in thought at John 3.5; 1 Corinthians 6.11, as well as the verse in Ephesians we have been considering. Once again we must note the use of the aorist tenses; at Titus 3.5, 'saved' (*esōsen*), at 1 Corinthians 6.11, 'washed' (*apelousasthe*); which speak of a completed act requiring no repetition. Furthermore, we should observe the close relationship between the activity of the Holy Spirit on the one hand, and the water or the cleansing and washing on the other. The outward application of water symbolises the inner cleansing which effects regeneration,<sup>3</sup> which is resultant upon the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, and thus Paul can be commanded, 'Get yourself baptised and your sins washed away' (Acts 22.16). Here, at Titus 3.5, the 'renewing of the Holy Spirit' 'specifies the resultant renovation accompanying the regeneration',<sup>4</sup> and thus we see that the deliverance of God 'is made ours through the outward seal of baptism; in vital experience it comes through the inner quickening of the Spirit'.<sup>5</sup> The close association of baptism with the work of the Holy Spirit has already been considered, and once again we believe they are brought together in close proximity in this verse.

In view of the foregoing discussion there would seem to be no real reason for denying a baptismal context to the word *loutron* in either of the two instances in which it occurs. It is our conviction that the 'washing' of Ephesians 5.26 and Titus 3.5 is the washing of baptism, not as an act which is efficacious in itself, but as the seal of a justifying faith. The use of the aorist tenses in the associated verbs make it clear that in neither case is a continual cleansing in view, but rather a single act of cleansing or washing from which the Christian emerges sanctified, fit to be presented to his Lord; such is the sacrament of baptism.

## NOTES

1. E. K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (1954) pp. 114ff.
2. E. K. Simpson, Commentary on Ephesians in *NLC*, (1957) p. 131n.
3. Regeneration (*palingenesia*) signifies 'new birth' in the classics (cf. Plutarch, *Phil.* 2.998C), but usually in the sense of the Stoic philosophers as relating to the periodic restitution of the material world. Here it is a personal restitution which is in view by which a man is restored to his correct relationship to God.
4. D. Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles in *TNTC*, (1957) p. 205.
5. A. M. Stibbs, Titus in *The New Bible Commentary*, (1953) p. 1082.

## APPENDIX III

### BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD I CORINTHIANS 15.29

IN view of the great amount of discussion which has centred around the phrase 'baptised for the dead' at 1 Corinthians 15.29 it has been felt worthwhile making some mention of it in a study of baptism in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The large number of different interpretations which have been given this verse is evidence of the difficulty it has occasioned in the minds of most exegetes. Some of these have never really attempted to come to grips with the basic problem, as for example the view that we may see here a reference, albeit oblique, to the baptism of Paul into the place of the martyred Stephen, an interpretation which is not merely highly improbable, but one which, we believe, does not even have the merit of being intrinsically true. Robertson and Plummer have made the suggestion that there are, in fact, only three possible approaches to the matter.<sup>2</sup> This suggestion, we believe, clears the way towards finding a possible satisfactory solution to the problem. The phrase may be interpreted as being a reference to normal Christian baptism, as a reference to an abnormal vicarious baptism, or as a reference to the baptism of friends or relatives of a dying Christian as the result of his or her testimony. To these three lines of approach we must add a series of criteria of interpretation which Findlay<sup>3</sup> has suggested must be observed if our efforts to come to a meaning are to have any validity. These may be noted as follows, firstly, the expression 'those who have been baptised' (*hoi baptizomenoi*) must clearly refer to the recipients of Christian baptism, secondly, the phrase 'for the dead' (*huper tōn nekron*) points to a class of dead, presumably Christian, who had an interest in or connexion with the living. Finally, in view of the

'we also' (*kai hēmeis*) of v. 30, this particular action, whatever it may have been, must have been one with which Paul and his colleagues could have been associated. This final criterion of interpretation, it must be conceded, is certainly the weakest, indeed, it could be argued that it is a complete *non sequitur*, since v. 30 bears no specific relationship to v. 29, apart from the loose connexion that both are concerned with the preposterous results of denying the resurrection.

The view that the phrase under consideration bears a reference to normal Christian baptism is one that has found considerable support, although there are certain grave obstacles in the way of its acceptance. We may subdivide this interpretation into two groups; firstly, there are those who simply rearrange the punctuation so that the verse reads, 'Else what shall they do who are baptised? It is for corpses if the dead do not rise'. This view was originally popularised by the late Sir Robert Anderson<sup>4</sup> and was, and is, accepted by many. The theological truth which is involved is unquestionable, baptism can never be divorced from Christ and its whole significance is dependent upon the fact of His resurrection, but it is difficult to see how this verse can bear this meaning. Two major points allow us to question the validity of the exegesis, in the first place, to translate the phrase, *huper tōn nekrōn* as, 'for dead persons' or 'for corpses' is to ignore the definite article before *nekrōn*, an article which makes these particular dead people a specific group. As Parry remarks, 'the article with *nekrōn* and the simple reference to *autōn* . . . alike prevent us from taking the words to be merely equal to death, in relation to death'.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, to translate *huper* by 'in the interests of' or 'with an interest in' is a doubtful expedient, and a meaning for which we have been unable to find any classical parallel.

Somewhat akin to this view, although allowing full weight to the definite article, is that which proposes an ellipsis within the phrase of *tēs anastaseōs* before *tōn nekrōn*, but this is open to similar objections, especially as it requires the same meaning for *huper* as the previous suggestion. As Morris writes, this interpretation of the phrase 'involves a very questionable meaning for *huper*, and an inexplicable ellipsis'.<sup>6</sup>

Recognising the problems associated with the type of interpretation we have been discussing, many expositors have seen here a reference to some form of vicarious baptism. Parry, for example, states unequivocally, 'the plain and necessary sense of the words implies the existence of a practice of vicarious baptism at Corinth, presumably on behalf of believers who had died before they were baptised'.<sup>7</sup> This is a view with which many commentators would concur, but nevertheless, we believe it to be open to objections just as serious as those associated with the first view which we examined. Of these objections the theological outweigh the exegetical, for a vicarious baptism of this nature borders upon magic. The practice which is imagined in this interpretation has generally been regarded as affording evidence of Hellenistic influences at work in the Corinthian church, but on the other hand, Stauffer has argued that such a practice could be derived from the late Jewish idea of praying for the dead (cf. 2 Macc. 12.40, etc.).<sup>8</sup> The premises of Stauffer's argument are difficult to accept for two very important reasons. Firstly, such a practice of praying for the dead would be the first step towards a doctrine of Purgatory, for which no evidence can be found in the pages of the New Testament, which demonstrate that the apostolic teaching was 'after death, the judgment'. In the second place, it involves a complete misconception of the purpose of baptism. A practice of vicarious baptism involves an interpretation of baptism as a purely passive act, which, as we have sought to show in our earlier discussion of this matter, is quite undemonstrable from the New Testament, which, in every case, views baptism as an act of faith-obedience. Furthermore, such a practice would be to suggest that baptism is able to confer something, an idea, which although common from the second century onwards, is not to be found in the New Testament. To make the suggestion that not only did Paul not condemn such a practice, but, in fact, tacitly endorse it, is, especially in view of the rest of the letter, totally incredible to the present writer.

From the historical point of view this interpretation is also difficult to support. It seems extremely unlikely that such a practice as vicarious baptism would have arisen *de novo*, as it

were, in one isolated instance. There is no evidence that it was practised elsewhere apart from some *late* heretical sects, who, more than likely, derived their practice from a misunderstanding of the very text under discussion. From the exegetical standpoint we may note that this line of interpretation falls down on the second and third of Findlay's criteria.

This brings us to a consideration of the third suggestion, namely, that the phrase 'baptised for the dead' refers to the baptism of those who had been close to a departed Christian; a baptism as a result of his testimony to them and in order to be reunited at the resurrection. This view has recently been developed by M. Raeder<sup>9</sup> who has shown that in this phrase *huper* has the final sense, 'for the sake of' or 'because of', a sense well attested by classical examples.<sup>10</sup> Further, as Findlay agrees, *hoi nekroi* must be dead Christians, and we may accordingly translate as, 'Else what shall they do who are baptised for the sake of the dead?' This translation is given further weight if we accept the suggestion of Robertson and Plummer<sup>11</sup> to the effect that in this context *poiēsousin* could have the sense of 'gain' or 'profit', which would provide us with a final reading of, 'Else what shall they gain from it, they who are baptised for the sake of the dead, if the dead do not rise?' We are thus presented with a far more credible situation. Those in question were baptised not in order to remedy some imaginary deficiency on the part of the dead, but in order to be reunited with them at the resurrection. No doubt they would have been Gentile pagans, a class of which the Corinthian church seemed to have been largely made up, who through the testimony of a departed loved one, and in order to be certain of meeting them again, became Christians and were baptised. This suggestion also fits much better into the whole context of the chapter, and as Jeremias has shown,<sup>12</sup> with whom the writer is happy to find himself in substantial agreement on this issue, this particular verse marks a return to the apologetic of the earlier part of the chapter, broken by the excursus of vv. 20-28. Our thorny verse, thus, does not, as some commentators have maintained, mark an abrupt change in the apostle's thought.

Seen in this light, this verse represents the summation of the

apostle's argument concerning the reality of the Christian hope of the resurrection of the body, as opposed to the vague and pagan notion of the immortality of the soul. He has already shown that if Christ has not risen then the faith of the Christian is vanity, if Christ has not risen then those who have died 'in Christ' have perished, the Christian's hope is removed, and, furthermore, those who have been baptised for the sake of those who have died in Christ, in the hope of being reunited with them, are more hopeless and wretched than the rest. Viewed thus, this admittedly somewhat obscure verse becomes the coping stone of Paul's argument concerning the absurdity of denying the resurrection of the body.

## NOTES

1. For a slightly fuller discussion of this verse see the present writer's article, 'Baptism for the Dead — 1 Cor. 15.29', *EQ*, (1965) **xxvii**. 3. (July) pp. 137ff.
2. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, 1 Corinthians in *ICC*, (1929) *ad loc.*
3. G. G. Findlay, 1 Corinthians in *EGT*, (1900) **ii**. *ad loc.*
4. Sir Robert Anderson, *The Bible or the Church*, (nd. ca. 1909) p. 234. G. W. H. Lampe, (*The Seal of the Spirit*, (1951) p. 94) expresses a similar viewpoint.
5. R. St. J. Parry, 1 Corinthians in *CGT*, (1926) *ad loc.*
6. L. Morris, 1 Corinthians in *TNTC*, (1958) p. 219.
7. R. St. J. Parry, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*
8. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 299n.
9. M. Raeder, 'Vikariataufe in 1 Cor. 15.29?' *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, (1955) **46**. pp. 258ff.
10. Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 15.660, 665, etc., Appolonius Rhodius 3.701, etc.
11. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*
12. J. Jeremias, 'Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15.29)' *NTS*, (1955-56) **2**. pp. 151ff.

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