

concerned, but which were not so important in a past age. Only when we sit down first and listen to the men of the past talking among themselves, minding their own business; listen to their questions; glimpse a little of their proportions; do we find that, after all, there are some clues, some things written for our examples.

One day in the last century, two old men sat together on a park bench in the city of Birmingham. The one was a Methodist supernumerary (I have the story from his grandson). The other was John Henry Cardinal Newman. They talked about what the church is and who be thereof. Newman took the other's umbrella and poked in the dust a circle on the ground and said, "I think you have to get the circumference right." The old Methodist took his umbrella back and poked a single hole in the center and said, "Ah, we think that you must begin with the center, and if you get that right the circumference will look after itself." Well, it is an apocryphal and perhaps implausible tale but it may have a truth about Protestantism, and perhaps about Methodism too. It may be that the Church is more like a ray of light than a box with tidy edges. I suspect that every ecclesiology at some point blurs those edges, that eschatology interrupts every attempt to define and guard the Christian circumference. The Reformers were surely right in returning to the center, of beginning *Coram Deo*, with God who is revealed in the Incarnate Son, hidden in his humiliation and suffering but risen and exalted—and hidden after another fashion until the appearance of his glory. When John Knox was dying his wife asked him what passage she should read to him from Holy Scripture. "You know," he said, "the place where my soul first cast its anchor." She turned to John 17, to the theme of Christ's priestly office, his intercession for his Church and for his world. In the end, more fundamental than the question, What is the Church and who be thereof? is the theme "Of the Love of Christ for His Church." Somewhere there too the ecumenical movement must learn to cast the anchor of its hope.

5

Baptism and the Family of God

ROBERT E. CUSHMAN

Present-day Confusion

The promptness with which baptism in the name of Jesus¹ assumed a central place in the worship of the primitive Church is a historical fact that the average Protestant Christian today is, I fear, about equally unprepared to take in or, unhappily, to trouble himself about. It seems evident that for hosts of Protestant people—both lay and clerical, at least in the American churches—baptism survives as a solemn but nearly unintelligible rite persisting by the inertia of unassailable, because immemorial, tradition. Excluding the Baptists—for whom "believer's baptism" is ordinarily the visible sign of grace unto repentance on the one hand and public profession of faith on the other—evangelical churchmen as I know them scarcely conceal mild embarrassment in their practice of adult

¹ See Acts 2:38; 19:5; I Cor. 1:13. Cf. W.F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1948), p. 38.

as well as infant baptism and fumble conspicuously when pressed for a coherent rationale of the sacrament as such.

Whatever their notion of baptism in the economy of adult salvation, a good many Methodist ministers covertly if not openly adopt the view that infant baptism signifies only a kind of dedication. An unusually candid if theologically naïve instance is provided us in a very recent issue of *The Christian Advocate* (U. S. A.) by the Reverend Harrison R. Thompson of Pomona, California.² In Thompson's view there is no impoverishment of infant baptism in regarding it as "dedication" of the child to God on the part of committed parents. He insists, however, that the parents must be faithful and "active" church members, devoted to the proper nurture of the child. Such a view, he thinks, is constructive and avoids all the imponderables respecting the child's capacity for faith or receptivity of regenerating grace. In point of fact, Thompson sees baptism primarily from the side of the nurture offered by the community and hardly at all from that of the divine gracious activity.

Thompson's disregard of God's gracious act in baptism is corrected by F. Ernest Stoeffler in a companion article of the same issue.³ He supports the tradition of infant baptism by appeal to the views of John Wesley, which he finds significantly reflected in *A Treatise on Baptism* published by Wesley in 1756, a work commonly regarded as a dependent revision of one published by Wesley's father, Samuel, in 1700.⁴ Stoeffler argues that John Wesley's views on infant baptism must be seen as lying within the tradition of Puritan "covenant theology," an important feature of which is that children of Christian parents are quite as truly inheritors of the new covenant as were Hebrew children inheritors of the old. As circumcision was a sign and seal of the inclusion of the children of the old covenant, so baptism is the appropriate sign and initia-

² "Infant Baptism: Dedication" (May 24, 1962), vol. IV, no. 11, pp. 11-12.

³ "Infant Baptism: Entry into Covenant," pp. 10-11.

⁴ Vide *A Treatise on Baptism* in *Works*, London, 1830, Third Edit., X, 188 f. For the provenance of this document and likely dependence upon Samuel Wesley's *A Short Discourse of Baptism*, 1700, see *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, edited by W. F. Swift (June, 1960), XXXII, pp. 121-24.

tory rite for the inheritors of the new.⁵ Stoeffler urges renewed consideration for the view that by baptism the child becomes part of the new Israel and is ingrafted as a member into the Body of Christ. He thinks he sees the indication that Wesley believed that on attaining the age of discretion the youth "must consciously assume the conditions of the covenant."⁶ Thus the objective grace that began its work in infant baptism fulfills its work in conversion and commitment of riper years. Regeneration is a process, and Stoeffler thus believes he finds the basis for Wesley's insistence upon the "new birth" over and beyond the grace of infant baptism.

Whether Stoeffler's thesis can in fact be vindicated depends upon more careful marshalling and assessment of a mass of evidence than his short article permitted or than can be achieved in this chapter. The available documents plainly show that Wesley retained infant baptism in the economy of redemption. In the *Treatise on Baptism* he reproduced his father's assertion that baptism is "the washing away the guilt of original sin" and that, therefore, infants "are proper subjects of baptism."⁷ In both the *Treatise* and *Thoughts upon Infant Baptism* baptism is, indeed, seen to be the Christian analogue to circumcision, whereby the individual is admitted to or inherits the new covenant, but there is, perhaps, insufficient evidence that Wesley shows direct dependence upon the elaborate covenantal theology of such representative Puritan divines as John Owen⁸ or William Strong.⁹ On the contrary, one has the impression that the covenantal theory is embraced within a composite of catholic ingredients of wider provenance.

Adverting again to the present-day uncertainty in Methodism regarding the meaning and role of the sacrament of baptism, it

⁵ Cf. J. Wesley, *Thoughts upon Infant-Baptism Extracted from a Late Writer*, Bristol, 1751. This document, which is a brief summation of W. Wall's *The History of Infant Baptism*, does indeed set forth the covenantal viewpoint in this form and provides ample basis for Wesley's expressed notion of infant baptism as "the circumcision of Christ," the sign of the new covenant.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷ *Works*, X, 190, 193.

⁸ *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* (London: 1689), pp. 3, 7.

⁹ *A Discourse of the Two Covenants* (London: 1678), chap. IV.

is obviously attributable to many historical factors. In America it is first of all attributable to theological indifference that has greatly prevailed among churchmen during the present century. To this must be added the fact that Methodism of the advancing nineteenth-century American frontier was fervently evangelistic, soundly practical, complacently moralistic, and innocent, if not contemptuous, of niceties of ecclesiological doctrine. A third factor is the triumph, in various forms, of the anthropocentric and basically Pelagian theology of the Enlightenment during the nineteenth century. Fourthly, one must refer to large elements of uncertainty and, perhaps, ambiguity in the express utterances as well as exasperating silences of John Wesley himself regarding the meaning of baptism and its significance—especially in relation to the implications of the Revival for the conception of both church and sacrament. To my knowledge this obscurity was not really much clarified by Wesley's theological succession, even by Richard Watson. In the fifth place, it is probably necessary to say, in the light of two hundred years of scientific biblical scholarship, that the problem of baptism faced by Protestantism today is attributable to the manifest uncertainty surrounding the genesis of Christian baptism as it suddenly takes its assured place in the Christian cultus during the transition period between the earthly ministry of Jesus and the post-Pentecostal emergence of the Church and its worship. In this chapter I propose to consider only the two final and, apparently, remotely related factors. We shall look first to the Wesleyan tradition regarding the sacrament.

Wesley on Baptism

Eric Gallagher, in a series of articles in *The Irish Christian Advocate*, entitled "The Methodist Doctrine of Baptism,"¹⁰ has reviewed Wesley's writings on the subject and concurs with W. F. Flemington in the general view that, while Wesley never renounced "baptismal regeneration," and on occasions assumed it, yet his explicit teaching that the grace of baptism could be and was fre-

¹⁰ August 4-25, 1950.

quently lost introduced ambiguity regarding the nature and role of the sacrament for succeeding Methodist people.

If one attends Wesley's direct utterances—especially the sermons "Marks of the New Birth" and "The New Birth"—he finds a number of points plainly asserted: (1) First, that baptism and the "new birth" are not one and the same thing. (2) Second, that in the doctrine of the Church of England baptism is not identified with the new birth. (3) Third, that baptism is an outward sign that signifies but is "distinct from regeneration, the thing signified." (4) Fourth, nevertheless, the "church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy, are at the same time born again; and that it is allowed that the whole office for the baptism of infants proceeds upon this supposition" even though the manner of God's work escapes us. (5) Fifth, that baptism is to be understood as "the circumcision of Christ," but that, once baptized, one is not necessarily now a child of God.¹¹ (6) And finally, that the plain empirical fact is that apart from "new birth" and its marks in sanctification of life, baptized or unbaptized, men remain children of the devil and will perish everlastingly.

For Wesley the mark of the new birth from above is holiness, the renewed image of God in man; namely, as he wrote in "Marks of the New Birth," "the whole mind that was in Christ Jesus." It is the "birth from above," he said in "The New Birth," "*figured out by baptism*, which is the beginning of that total regeneration without which no man shall see the Lord." (Italics mine.) In Wesley's sermon at Oxford in 1733 on "Circumcision of the Heart" he said "that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God, is not *outward circumcision, or baptism*, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it. . . ." (Italics mine.)

What, then, is so far apparent is that baptism may be the instrument of washing away of original sin and forgiveness of the same

¹¹ In the *Treatise on Baptism*, regeneration is not only expressly affirmed but the baptized is "grafted into the body of Christ's Church." *Works*, X, 192.

in the case of infants, yet it does not constitute more than a beginning of the process of regeneration, which requires the "new birth" and sanctification to complete. The forgiveness of original sin does not exclude the likelihood of actual sin, and as Wesley encountered actual men, including himself, in their actual bondage to sin, he found the way of release to be the new birth—"true, living, Christian faith"; namely, "a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God."¹²

The crux of the matter seems to be that from personal experience and clear-eyed observation Wesley, the realist, recognized that, however valid baptismal regeneration was, sin nevertheless reigned, even though it was also true that God remained.

Furthermore, the experience of the Revival induced Wesley somewhat to subordinate sacramental grace in baptism to the moment of converting or justifying grace, with two consequences: First, to accent more emphatically the difference between the cleansing grace of infant baptism and the justifying grace of conversion and assurance, or "new birth"—a distinction, however, that had been explicit with Wesley since 1733. Second, and derivatively, to make a sharper distinction between the "new birth" of the adult Christian, the thing signified, and the baptismal rite; that is, the sign. Whereas Wesley in the *Treatise on Baptism* could speak of it as "the ordinary instrument of our justification," to which God hath tied us but not tied himself, his sermonic utterances increasingly disclosed a tendency sharply to distinguish form and substance, the sign and the reality. The reality is the "new birth" which, seemingly, tends to become loosely associated with its sign, indeed almost to the point of dissociation. For the clear distinction he made between sign and thing signified Wesley found full authority in both Westminster and Anglican "catechisms." The sign is juxtaposed to the thing signified as an "external" contrasted with an "internal" change wrought by God in the soul. The clinching empirical fact of the Revival was that Wesley witnessed case

¹² "Awake Thou That Sleepest."

after case of such internal change independent of and antecedent to the baptismal rite. On the other hand, he saw gross, even if baptized, sinners inwardly transformed.

All this does not mean that Wesley felt called upon, as in fact he never did, to deny the regenerative efficacy of infant baptism. On the contrary, he felt himself called upon to assert only the plain fact that the baptized often lived as if unregenerate and that the question was not whether baptized persons, as he put it, had once received the Holy Spirit, but whether they were *now*, in point of fact, temples of it. In sum, whatever may be the efficacy of baptism for voiding original sin, experience proved that baptism, as the sign, was not regularly—certainly not in the case of children—effectual for bringing forth the thing signified. It might be, and Wesley evidently believed it was, the beginning of the regenerative process and, in God's sovereign mercy, an effectual means of grace; but evidently Wesley also early believed that without "the circumcision of the heart" or the "new birth," the regenerative process did not have its fulfillment.

In entertaining these positions, however, Wesley was sensible of no incongruity between his own view and that of the "Homily on Prayer and Sacrament," which defined sacrament as "a visible sign of an invisible grace, that is to say, that setteth out to the eyes, and other outward senses, the inward working of God's free mercy, and doth, as it were, seal in our hearts the promises of God." In both the *Treatise* and the *Thoughts upon Infant-Baptism*, baptism is described as the "seal" of the promises of the new covenant in Christ. In the *Treatise*, as edited by Wesley, it is even declared that in baptism "we are regenerated or born again" and made the children of God by adoption, yet the virtue of baptism is not "the outward washing" but "the inward grace." It may, however, be questioned whether Wesley's view is in complete accord with the 25th *Article* on the sacraments wherein it is declared that they "be not only badges, or tokens of Christian men's profession: but rather they be certain *sure* witnesses and *effectual* signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, *by which* he doth work invisibly in

us. . . ."¹³ Of this Wesley would not deny what is affirmed, but he would, I think, caution against what is implied; namely, that the efficacy of grace in infant baptism suffices unto salvation.

To understand this demurrer we must make reference to Wesley's anthropology and to his pervasive view that grace can be and is resisted and that until it is decisively embraced, or until grace effectually triumphs in the "new birth," the grace of baptism need not and will not be effectual unto salvation. This is most thoroughly spelled out in the sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption." There Wesley speaks of "the heathen, baptized or unbaptized," signifying thereby that the baptized are heathen still if the love of God is not yet "the ruling principle" of the soul. This position is quite consistent with the statement concerning the efficacy of infant baptism in the *Treatise*, which reads: "Herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, *unless we quench* the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness." (Italics mine.) But Wesley accepted the fact that the "infused" grace of baptism can be and is resisted, and often almost to the point of quenching the Spirit, as in the case of the "natural man" (nearly but not quite asleep to God) who is portrayed in "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption."

Here, then, it may be, are the reasons why Wesley affirmed, on the one hand, that baptism—by which he principally intended infant baptism—is the outward sign of a real infusion of regenerative grace, while, on the other, he could hold that baptism was regularly not adequate unto salvation. It is adequate in principle but not in fact, because the adult becomes, though not necessarily, resistant to grace and at length must cease to resist.¹⁴ But to cease is not a human act but another effectual work of grace, the grace of justification or the "new birth." Accordingly it appears evident that

¹³ Cf. Thomas Rogers, *Doctrine and Religion Professed in the Realm of England* (London: 1629), p. 142. Italics mine.

¹⁴ For a treatment of Wesley's doctrine of freedom as the power to resist grace, see the author's essay "Salvation for All" in *Methodism*, edited by William Anderson (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1947).

in Wesley's mind the grace of justification and, eventually that of sanctification, does not negate but perfects the grace of baptism.

In the order of God's nurturing and redeeming work, therefore, the grace of baptism comes first and is the "seal" or earnest of further promises under the covenant of Christ. Wesley seems to have held that the further promises—since actual sin actually intervenes—are to be fulfilled in the grace of justification, although it is to be admitted that this is not quite explicitly declared. If this construction is sound, then, in the logic of the matter adult baptism was for Wesley far from a normality and becomes, after justification, something of a superfluity, although permissible. While admittedly Wesley did not clarify these matters, it would be entirely erroneous to suppose that his increasing stress upon justifying grace after 1738 in any way makes void the grace of baptism. Rather, on the whole, it presumes it. While justifying grace tends to depress the role of infant baptism in the economy of salvation, yet it is pervasively plain that Wesley viewed infant baptism as the inaugural influence of grace upon the life of the child, incorporating it within the community of faith and nurture.

The tenor of Wesley's utterances reveals, then, that infant baptism entails a first work of grace, a "means" God himself enjoins by the institution of Christ. As a work of grace it is effectual, but not necessarily or invariably unto salvation. The autobiographical statement in the *Journal* under the famous dateline Wednesday, May 24, 1738, offers Wesley's personal testimony on this point. He wrote: "I believe, till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism. . . ." He then proceeded to describe a state of soul quite comparable to that "second" condition of man—in fear of God under the law—set forth in his later sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption." Thus, we have primary evidence: (1) First, that Wesley affirmed a real efficacy of grace in infant baptism (supported by Christian nurture); (2) second, that a falling off from this grace was experienced in his own youthful years.

Once again, the explanation of this is a practical one; namely,

the power of sin or the tendency thereto remaining in the human soul in which God does not yet fully reign. Accordingly "the circumcision of the heart," or "new birth," or justifying grace, must complete what is begun in baptismal regeneration. All this was for Wesley, quite objectively, the work of God, and in virtue of the freedom of man to resist grace, it is just as possible for the grace of baptism to be attenuated or "quenched" as for the justified adult sinner to fall from grace. Neither baptism nor justification, however, is for this reason depreciated. Both display God's search for the sinner, but the Calvinistic doctrine of "perseverance" is rejected or inapplicable save to those sanctified ones of whose identity Wesley disclaimed any knowledge.

Finally, for Wesley, the sacrament of baptism was always a "sign" and never a cause of an invisible grace. Since the connection between "sign" and thing signified is never a necessary one—in virtue both of God's freedom and of human freedom of resistance—the grace of the sacrament is not *ex opere operato*, though it is more nearly so in infant baptism than in adult baptism. Wesley does not doubt that in the sacrament God truly works, yet it is all but certain that Wesley's own mind is represented in the words of the *Treatise on Baptism*; namely, that God has appointed infant baptism as the "ordinary means" of inaugurating human regeneration, but also, that while God has tied us to this means, he has in no wise tied himself. Wesley is regularly opposed to any domestication of sovereign grace, and God's freedom over his grace makes way for its "surprising" manifestations which actually broke forth in the multifarious phenomena of the Revival.

Now, having clarified these issues, we still have to ask of Wesley, what is baptism? Why does it signify the washing away of sin, regeneration, or justification? What is the inherent connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins? In answer to these questions Wesley is no more helpful than the great tradition in which he stands, and yet the contemporary churchman is pressing for answers to just these questions, and upon adequate answer to them the recovery of the significance of baptism greatly depends.

Baptism of the Elect One

Throughout the history of the Church we may, I think, discern a deep-lying but stubbornly resilient tension, if not contradiction, between the sacraments conceived as "means of grace" and the free working of God of which the sacraments are acknowledged to be "signs" and sentinels. The recurrent problem seems to be that the human mind is prone to exchange the sentinel or sign for the work of God and, being already in command of the sign, by a shift of perspective, comes into assured possession of that work itself. Herein is to be found the perennial temptation of man; namely, to make his salvation manageable, predictable, and within his own hierarchic keeping and reach. To be sure, the phrase "means of grace" may be employed in either of two ways. It may signify God's designated and ordinary way of acting redemptively or, and by a subtle shift of emphasis, it may denote the *organon* man presumes to have in his keeping of doing such things as afford him assured access to the divine favor.

Sacerdotal religion of all varieties takes its rise and flourishes by addiction to the second mode of interpretation. Always it is but a shift of the eye and a sleighting glance of the mind that turns the sacrament from a sentinel, alerting men to the present divine activity, into a sacred agency through which the divine activity is first confidently expected to evince itself and, then, again, is gradually and unobtrusively regarded as induced. The onset of this mentality is always accompanied *pari passu* with the idea of a priestly caste especially qualified to be custodian of the sacred agency. Somewhere, sometime, perhaps in the age of Cyprian, this transformation ripened in the Christian church. With Augustine it was, seemingly, fully established, as indicated in these propositions from Augustine's *Enchiridion*: First, *all* who attain to the grace of baptism die thereby to sin. Second, they are "thereby alive by being reborn in the baptismal font. . . . There is no one who does not die to sin in baptism." Third, "infants die to original sin only." Fourth, adults die both to original sin and to additional

actual sins. By the time of Augustine baptism had become the assured means of *regeneratio*, as, in Justin Martyr, it was already on the way to becoming so.¹⁵

Wesley's problem with the sacrament, and perhaps our own, has something to do with this development. Wesley might have seized upon Augustine's distinction between the efficacy of infant baptism as voiding original sin and adult baptism as affording remission of both kinds, original and actual, but there is limited evidence of any such awareness on Wesley's part, and scant evidence of direct or intentional dependency. As for the process by which the sacrament is imperceptibly but decisively transformed from a sign and sentinel of the divine activity into an instrumentality of it so as to confer grace *ex opere operato*—a view which no less an Anglican than Thomas Rogers repudiated as Papistry¹⁶—we are well advised to turn to the New Testament for criteria of evaluation.

So we come at length to ask the question, what is the meaning and role of baptism as a crucial moment of both life and worship in the primitive Church? In what follows I shall be propounding a thesis, rather irresponsibly, for others to confirm or to refute.

To me it has always been a striking fact that Jesus was baptized but did not himself baptize, John's anachronistic and contradictory testimony notwithstanding.¹⁷ Correspondingly, it is remarkable that the first preaching of the Word by Peter on the Day of Pentecost issues in the exhortation to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus unto the remission of sins and was followed, on the part of those who received the Word, with prompt compliance. (See Acts 2:38, 41.) Next it seems to me of importance that baptism was expressly "in the name of Jesus" and none other, as Paul insisted. (See I Cor. 1:13. Cf. Acts 2:38; 19:5.) Finally, it is significant that according to the record of Acts baptism in the name of

¹⁵ See Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 61. In Justin's famous account of baptism it is possible perhaps to see the subtle process by which the *sentinel* of grace is being transformed into the *instrument* of regeneration and illumination. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Black, Ltd., 1960), p. 194.

¹⁶ See Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Vide John 4:1-2. Cf. Flemington, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Jesus, conspicuously in two places, follows upon the impartation of the Holy Spirit—in the case of Paul himself (10:18) and in that of Cornelius and his household (10:47-48). To summarize, why, then, did Jesus not baptize? Why, after his death and resurrection, was baptism for the remission of sins promptly proclaimed? Why was baptism explicitly in his name? And, finally, was baptism the unexceptionable agency of the forgiveness of sins, or was it, in fact, an agency at all?

In answer to the question, why did Jesus not baptize? I venture the proposition that Jesus did not baptize because all that baptism really signified was in process of being summed up, literally epitomized, in his ministry as the Elect One, the true Israel of God, and that until his ministry was perfected in total submission to the Father, further baptisms, like those of John, were neither appropriate nor possible.

To unpack the implications of this proposition, I begin by accepting the tradition of Mark that Jesus did not inaugurate his public ministry until John was delivered up (Mark 1:14). Next, we are to credit the tradition not only that Jesus accepted baptism at the hand of John, but that, in the midst thereof, Jesus became aware of his singular and unique mission and ministry. Further, that his singular election was determined and crystallized *in its distinctive form* by the meaning of the baptism he was undergoing as he apprehended it in a moment of overpowering illumination or revelation. Yet, again, we are to agree with Carl H. Kraeling that the distinguishing circumstances of John's baptism, that singles it out from "all the other ablutionary rites of later Judaism is its eschatological context, its association with a proclamation of the coming day of judgment."¹⁸ Likewise, we are to accept Kraeling's carefully derived conclusion regarding the meaning of John's baptism; namely,

that the water of baptism represents and symbolizes the fiery torrent of judgment, and that the individual by voluntarily immersing himself in

¹⁸ *John the Baptist* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 113-14.

the water enacts in advance before God his willing submission to the divine judgment which the river of fire will perform. John's baptism would, therefore, be a rite symbolic of the acceptance of the judgment which he proclaimed."¹⁹

This provides us with material for the next step. It is this that Jesus understood in one luminous moment, that his election to Sonship was indissolubly united with acceptance of total submission to God's will. Further, that on behalf of wayward Israel he must accept in his own person God's judgment; that is, God's annihilation of all sin. On its negative side, acceptance of judgment entails refinement and suffering; on its positive side, it is entire obedience to the rule of God. Henceforth, as is symbolized in the Wilderness sojourn, the existence of the elect one, the faithful Israel, is existence in temptation. In every case the form of temptation is disposition to claim the prerogatives rather than to accept the heavy responsibilities of election. This was the perennial form of old Israel's temptation to which it recurrently succumbed. H. H. Rowley has shown that Israel's election was election for service.²⁰ In the Elect One both the election and its attendant temptation are recapitulated to issue, however, in victory over temptation. This is the ministry of Christ issuing in the victory of the cross and the vindication of the resurrection.

Thus, our Lord takes upon himself in his ministry the *peirasmos*, the eschatological tribulation, the judgment of God upon man's rebellious waywardness, and, in "fulfilling all righteousness" in his own life,²¹ through entire submission to God and entire service-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18. Cf. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1950), p. 10. See also Ebelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, translated by John Marsh (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1955), p. 23. "John's Baptism is an eschatological covenant sign. For John is the herald of the imminent universal conflagration."

²⁰ *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 43, 45-46.

²¹ Matt. 3:15 may represent a pericope that combines the author's apologetic improvisation with an authentic word of Jesus, though not necessarily in original context.

ability to men, actualizes in his own person the two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets. In the power of this initial victory over *peirasmos* our Lord enters upon his public ministry with no word of doom, but with the "good news" that the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is already at the door, and with the call to repent and believe it, indeed, to receive it. Jesus' initial proclamation presupposes his own private Christology. It is the divine disclosure that his election is his own appropriation of the *peirasmos*, the tribulation of the final judgment, or all that is really implicated in baptism as John preached it.

It is because Israel after the flesh did not receive the *euangelion*, although the publicans and the harlots did, that the *peirasmos*, the tribulation of judgment, loomed up as the inescapable prospect and awful destiny of the Elect One. In this context and with this background, we can better comprehend two inexpugnable words of Jesus to his disciples. On the one hand, his word in the Lukan pericope, set in a late context: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations [*peirasmoi*]" (Luke 22:28). It plainly suggests that the vocation of the Elect One was service to God in continuing trial and testing of fidelity to his calling that now must be perfected. Secondly, there is the authentic word, now made perhaps more intelligible, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50.)

W. F. Flemington has properly adjudged a hidden but profound significance in this word he calls "indubitably authentic."²² He regards it as a veiled allusion to Jesus' death, signifying "the inauguration of that wider 'ministry' to which he looked forward, as surely as his baptism in the Jordan was the prelude to his ministry in Palestine."²³

This is almost the point, but not quite. The truth seems to be

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 31. Cf. D. M. Baillie's favorable evaluation of Flemington's thesis in *The Theology of the Sacraments* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 75. Cullmann is to be cited as sharing the general standpoint of Flemington's thesis regarding the authenticity of the Pauline view of baptism as "participation in the Cross of Christ." Cf. *Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 14-15 *et al.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

that Jesus' ministry (*diakonia*) was baptism (*baptismos*) or was summed up in it; that is, it was the acceptance of the judgment of God upon sin and, or what is its obverse side, entire obedience to the Father's will. Baptism, thus, became the symbol of all that was overtly expounded in the substance of Jesus' ministry and was consummated in the cross. Baptism is, perhaps, the distinctive form or vehicle of the messianic consciousness of Jesus. But baptism points not directly to the cross but to the ministry which is fulfilled in the cross. If acceptance and obedience entailed rejection and death, then this also was an inherent part of the ministry; that is, part of the vocation of the elect of God. If this is so, we are not far from the conception of the vicarious sacrifice. This added dimension is suggested by the fact that baptism always meant to Jesus death to self-will in preferment of God's will—the subordination of prerogative and privilege to radical obedience in service. His death would, then, mean the last full measure of devotion and self-surrender. In yet a further sense, it is the acceptance of judgment, God's judgment of death upon sin, and through such acceptance Jesus' baptism would be accomplished or perfected.

Several deeply embedded traditions of the gospel account become luminous on this hypothesis. The first is the pericope of Mark 10:35-40 prefaced by the request of the sons of Zebedee for special preferment in the age to come. Jesus' reply indicates that the condition of pre-eminence is capability of sharing "the cup" he was about to drink and "the baptism" he was about to undergo. Here both cup and baptism are evidently paralleled in Jesus' thought. Mark made no other reference to baptism subsequent to his account of Jesus' baptism by John (1:9). Now it reappears, not as a past event but as a present expectation, indeed the present tense indicates it to be a present reality going on to accomplishment, as in Luke 12:50.

Certain deductions are permissible: (1) That the passage is, although an authentic word of Jesus, also a *post eventu* explanation of the two sacraments of the early Christian cultus. (2) That the earliest gospel plainly understands the baptism of Christ to have

been a continuing process fulfilled in his death of perfect obedience and, thus, perfecting his ministry. (3) That baptism and ministry are inseparably united so that the meaning of the one illuminates the significance of the other. (4) That the condition of inheriting the privileges of the new age is participation with Christ in his baptism, which is to say, his ministry of perfect obedience. (5) That baptism implies repentance and entire submission to the divine judgment upon sin but also, and positively, perfect obedience. It is entrance into the Kingdom. Thus it entails remission of sins but also points to newness of life as the vocation and destiny of the penitent. (6) Finally, however, the passage suggests that Christian baptism is shaped and determined in its meaning by the positive content with which the ministry of Christ unto death irrevocably imbues it. Consequently it must, henceforth, always be "in the name of Jesus" and none other. Both the baptism which John practiced and the rule of God which it heralded were realized in the ministry of Jesus.

In reference to the second tradition to be mentioned, we agree with the views of Carl H. Kraeling that the passages (Mark 9:9-13 and Matt. 11:7-15) are important witnesses to the very great significance which Jesus attached to the person of John the Baptist—"a prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9). This estimation could hardly have been accorded without hesitancy and reserve by the early Church, jealous, as it was, of the supremacy of the Lord Jesus. But it is not only, as both Kraeling and R. Otto agree,²⁴ that John was for Jesus the divinely authorized herald of the last days; more than that, *in John's baptism there was prefigured for Jesus the essential meaning of the ministry of the elect of God*. It signified the rule of God, the Kingdom, not considered as time and place, but as the fulfillment of the election of Israel—the election which, we may say, Jesus both received and espoused in his baptism. In baptism submission to God's judgment and, *eo ipso*, God's will became the paradigmatic form of

²⁴ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 145. Cf. Otto, *The Kingdom of God*, etc. (London, 1951), p. 109.

election, and therewith of Jesus' own ministry (*diakonia*). Its rationale is definitely summarized in Luke 22:24-29—cognate with Mark 10:41-45—where supremacy is, paradoxically, equated with uttermost service. Baptism becomes the emblem of election and the symbol of total service or ministry that is to be shared by Jesus' disciples.

Finally, there is the famous *lutron* passage of Mark 10:45 that concludes Jesus' exaltation of *diakonia* and his reply to the sons of Zebedee: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Recognizing that dispute over this passage is voluminous, I observe only that, in the fact of rejection by the leaders of Israel, Jesus must view his ministry as an offering made to God, since it was not presently appropriated by men. It was an offering the Father had it in his power to use for the ultimate fulfillment of his purpose.

It may be argued that the enpersonalization of worship is what distinguishes Old-Testament from New-Testament service of God. The Old Testament looks forward to sacrifice, not of goats and bulls, but of "a broken and a contrite heart" (Ps. 51:17). Isaiah exhorted his people, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord" (1:11). "Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes" (1:16). Jeremiah looked to the day of a "new covenant" when, "saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (31:33).

With transcendent and mysterious clarity, we may believe, Jesus saw that baptism means sacrifice, the entire dedication to God, not of any surrogates, but just exactly of the self. How God would use it in his unsearchable wisdom for man's salvation remained hidden in his secret councils, but in the light of man's rebellious waywardness, baptism must come to mean what Jesus did "once, when he offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27). Baptism became, then, the fulfillment—that is, the enpersonalization of worship and, at the same time, the fulfillment of the two great commandments: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, but so that, in such love, the

neighbor is not excluded but embraced. At the least, the *lutron* of Mark 10:45 signifies that, in total commitment to the Father, the largest possible benefit to God's people is assured.

In the foregoing exposition I have offered the reasons why Jesus did not baptize. It was because all that baptism really signified was in agonizing process of being epitomized by realization in Jesus' own ministry as the elect of God. Until his ministry—that is, his baptism—was accomplished it could not properly be offered to others. It had first of all, as the Lukan saying has it, to be accomplished (12:50).

Further, we are now possessed of better explanation as to why baptism in the early Church was promptly and exclusively offered and accepted in Jesus' name. The heart of it is that *John's Baptism had been fulfilled*; that is, actualized and perfected in the ministry of Jesus unto death. Further, death was overthrown in resurrection. Baptism was no longer, therefore, merely perfect obedience unto death; the total submission to the judgment of God upon sin had issued in the overwhelming triumph of the resurrection. For the early Church, then, baptism quickly symbolized the passage to life through the way of perfect obedience unto death. Before long its sign undoubtedly came to be the cross, the symbol of perfect obedience and also of life through death. The sign of the cross in baptism is known to Tertullian, and according to Augustine, baptism and the cross are always conjoined.²⁵ As baptism signified the way to life through death, it followed that the believer who bore Jesus' name must follow in the same way. In this sense, it may be, the earliest Christians were called followers of *the way*.²⁶ In this perspective the rationale of baptism and its inseparable connection with the name of Jesus is rather plainly suggested in the exhortation: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34b). To do this was to

²⁵ *Temp. Ser.* 101. *Semper enim cruci baptismus jungitur.*

²⁶ *Vide* Acts 16:17; 18:26; 19:9, 23. Also John 10:1; 14:4, 6. Justin Martyr still speaks of baptism "in the name of Jesus" but also of the trinitarian formula as if in his own day the latter were superseding the former. *First Apol.*, 6.

accept baptism in Jesus' name, a thing self-evident in the early Church.

While the problem remains complex, it is now more apparent why baptism for remission of sins was promptly proclaimed as the burden of early Christian proclamation. To repent and to be baptized are coimplicates if not surrogates one of the other. To participate with Jesus in his baptism was to identify oneself with his perfect obedience and self-offering to God. This plainly meant to die to sin and, proleptically, to be united to Christ in his victory over both sin and death. Baptism, therefore, quickly becomes the inaugural moment of Christian worship; namely, self-offering to God which, by the same token, carries with it forgiveness of sins. Paul then, in the famous passage (Rom. 6:1-7), simply spells out what was only implied, so far as our records go, in the baptismal rite. One can readily share the view of W. F. Flemington that "what St. Paul has to say about baptism represents no innovation, but rather the filling out of ideas already implicit in primitive Christian teaching."²⁷

Now we come to face the final question, Was baptism the unexceptionable agency of the forgiveness of sins, or was it an agency at all? Our problem becomes a good deal more complex. Let us begin with the question of agency. Justin Martyr speaks of "conversion" antecedent to baptism and even refers to baptism as "dedication," presumably of self.²⁸ Both the "conversion" of Paul and that of Cornelius and his household precede baptism. Plainly, also, this was the observation of Wesley in the ferment of the Revival, and Isaac Ambrose had early taught him the reality of the fact.²⁹

Are we not faced with the likelihood that the Holy Spirit, the cleansing and renewing power of God, "bloweth where it listeth" so that none know, as John declared, "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth" and that "so is every one that is born of the

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁸ *First Apol.*, 65.

²⁹ Isaac Ambrose, whose principal works Wesley republished, taught that the "new birth" may through God's Spirit come before, with, and after baptism. Cf. *First Things or the Doctrine of Regeneration* (Glasgow, 1737), pp. 18-19.

Spirit" (3:8)? Evidently, if we are to speak of agency in baptism or apart from it, we always intend the agency of God, and, too, the transformation of existence from alienation to reconciliation, accomplished by God's Spirit, is not restricted to a specified number of *bona fide* vehicles. This seems to be the hard lesson that Peter learned first at Joppa and then at Caesarea, which lesson also suggests that formalization of thought had already gone a long way before he got there. A fundamental, a dialectical tension pervades all Paul's teaching; namely, between "sacrament" and Spirit of Christ.

Nevertheless, there is a sense, perhaps many, in which baptism is agency. In the first place, it is historical agency in that above all it is the ministry of Jesus Christ fulfilled in perfect obedience unto death and vindicated in the resurrection from the dead. In it God acted for the establishment of his rulership and for man's salvation. In it, furthermore, God continues to act and, through its distinctive power, recalls the erring and restores them to community with himself.

Secondly, baptism is agency in so far as its reenactment is recapitulation of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ in a personal existence, but recapitulation is not real without the *intercession* of the Holy Spirit. To say that the Spirit is given in baptism is to say that without the Spirit baptism is merely a rite and not a recapitulation of Christ's ministry.

But, thirdly, baptism is agency in the further sense that recurring baptism in the usage of the Church is a continuing proclamation by the Church of the nature and ground of its own existence. The ground and nature of its own existence is baptism; that is, the perfected and exalted ministry of Christ. In baptism the Church signifies its intent to incorporate either infants or adults into the ground of its own existence; it embraces the individual within the ministry of Christ, which is its own essence. Nevertheless, it does this only in entire dependency of its life upon Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In each of the three cases, then, baptism is agency only through

the overruling divine activity of the Spirit. In no case, including the case of Jesus' baptism—*i.e.*, his ministry unto death—is baptism agency in the sense that its being or efficacy can be referred simply to its historical form or resident potency. Therefore, it is never possible to say that its reenactment conveys grace; this would be to domesticate grace. It is only possible to say that grace *has been* conferred in baptism or that grace *may be* conferred in baptism—but never that baptism *will* convey grace. Thus, we can say of the first baptism, "grace and truth *came* by Jesus Christ." Of the second, we can say the ministry of Christ *has been* recapitulated in baptism of believers. Thirdly, we can say that the Church *has* exercised its intent to embrace infants or adults within the ground of its existence effectually. We cannot say, however, that baptism in any of the three modes *will*—that is, *ex opere operato*—necessarily manifest such efficacy. In the case of Christ, this would be to affirm that his ministry is reproducible and thus to deny his divinity. In the other cases, it would be to put the keys of the Kingdom within the keeping of the Church. But God is sovereign over his Spirit as well as over his Word.

It follows that baptism is agency when God makes it such. It also follows that baptism was not and is not the unexceptionable agency of the forgiveness of sins. Here, of course, I speak not of baptism of Christ but of baptism in his name. Nevertheless, it remains true that in God's sovereign freedom baptism may be a "means of grace" either to children or to adults. It may be a means of regeneration in so far as, in the showing forth of its essence, in baptism, God makes this expression of the Church's ministry a vehicle of his forgiving and renewing power. Nevertheless, if the Church is conformed to the mind of Christ the agency of the sacrament is not to be "grasped" so that the Church accounts itself on an equality with God (Phil. 2:6). On the contrary, in the sacraments the Church empties itself of all pretense so that through these instrumentalities the Holy Spirit of God may be all in all. When that is so the sacrament may be, in God's freedom, a true sign or sentinel of his regenerating power.

Baptism and the Church

As a fourth division and something of an addendum to this chapter, it is now to be admitted that nothing has been said explicitly about one half of its conjunctive title. My assigned topic was "Baptism and the Family of God." By this somewhat quaint phrase those who composed the title doubtless intended to signify the Church. It is a phrase which had some currency in early seventeenth-century Puritan literature and is actually instanced, to my knowledge, in the writings of William Perkins. Perhaps its peculiar provenance is the "covenant theology" of Witsins, Ames, Perkins, and their successors. Frankly, I have not had opportunity to trace its lineage. The term does not occur in the New Testament so far as I am aware, but supposing it may serve as satisfactory surrogate for the Church, the relation of baptism to the Church can be stated in terms consequential of the foregoing analysis.

If baptism in the primary sense *is* Jesus' own baptism, his ministry of perfect obedience unto death, his vicarious acceptance of God's judgment upon sin, and his glorious resurrection, then, plainly, in this primary sense baptism *was* and *is* constitutive of the Church. Baptism is the condition *sine qua non* of the Church, the new Israel or people of God, and only those who are somehow united to Christ in the fullness of his ministry—that is, his baptism—are constitutive members of his body.

Thus, in the second sense, baptism is recapitulated in the lives of believers but as a derivative and altogether dependent reality, dependent in both of two ways, first, upon the full perfect and sufficient sacrifice of Christ and, second, realized by the inner working of the Holy Spirit. In this second or derived form baptism is extension and perpetuation in time of the ministry of Christ. And this is the visible Church. In this way we might venture to say that in the community of believers so constituted there is realization of the eschatological reality; namely, re-established community 'twixt God and men, or reconciliation. Through baptism, first in the ministry of Christ, then through its recapitulation in the lives of men, the will of God comes to be acknowledged and done on

earth as it is in heaven. In this revised form the Church becomes the eschatological community in time.

A caution is always in order, however, in view of the perpetual existence of the Church in temptation—the temptation to transform a divine event into a manageable agency. While the words realization, recapitulation, and participation are, with respect to baptism, decisively important, they cannot be spoken nor their reality anticipated save in deference to the antecedent or prevenient activity of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, baptism in the derivative sense is always something that, strictly speaking, the Church *observes* or *acknowledges* as done, not something it does. Its temptation is always that of supposing that by being in possession of the “sign” it is *eo ipso* in command of the “reality.” For this there is no warrant, as I believe Wesley perceived, and accordingly he veers away from a sacerdotal ecclesiology.

A third consequent respecting baptism is this. Since the meaning of baptism is rendered explicit in the ministry of Christ, baptism replaces forever the sacrifice of “goats and bulls” as the author of Hebrews so clearly understands. The sacrifice of the Temple is superseded and henceforth becomes the wholly enpersonalized sacrifice of “a broken and a contrite heart” open now to larger, and logically if not actually, total obedience. This is justification that looks toward sanctification.

Finally, then, the question presses very hard: not *what* but *when* is baptism? The answer is when God makes it so, and while it might be in the baptism of the infant, preventing grace is, as Wesley divined, not ordinarily so far effectual as that justifying grace is not also a necessity in the process of redemption.

6

Confirmation and the Lay Membership of the Church

HERBERT J. COOK

A

The People of God exists by God's choice, not by man's desire. The claim of the Church of Christ to be the “elect race,” therefore, makes entry into the Church an acknowledgment of God's work rather than an expression of man's decision. The outward sign of entry into the Church is baptism, in which the new member is presented and the grace of God claimed and proclaimed for him. The analogy between Christian baptism and the initiation of the People of God in the Old Testament was perceived by Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians:

You should understand, my brothers, that our ancestors were all under the pillar of cloud, and all of them passed through the Red Sea; and so they all received baptism into the fellowship of Moses in the cloud and sea. . . . And yet, most of them were not accepted by God, for the desert was strewn with their corpses. (I Cor. 10:1-5.) [Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New English Bible.]