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The Church of Scotland

**INTERIM REPORT**

OF THE

**SPECIAL COMMISSION ON BAPTISM**

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MAY 1959

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# REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION

THE Commission wishes to thank Presbyteries for their very helpful and encouraging comments. Many have contained valuable suggestions for the formulation of the doctrine of Baptism. Others have drawn attention to practical matters upon which the Assembly will ultimately require to pass judgement. Almost all have expressed a growing appreciation of the work of the Commission and the lines along which its thought is developing.

For various reasons it has not proved possible to have a draft statement of the doctrine of Baptism ready in time for submission to this Assembly. Certain Presbyteries, however, asked that the Commission should bring its historical survey up to the present time, and this has been done in the following pages. The Commission hopes that the Church will find this both interesting and helpful, for many of the men with whom this survey deals are still remembered among us, and continue to exercise an influence upon the life and teaching of the Church. From this review of the recent past the Commission believes that we can trace the elements of strength in each of the traditions that have now come together in the life of our national Church, and at the same time see the influences which have, at various points, tended to lead us in mistaken directions.

Another thing which the Commission has done in this year's Report is to give a statement expressing as fairly as possible the position of the Baptist Churches, and focusing attention on the points at which we disagree with them. This also has been done in response to the request of several Presbyteries.

The Commission has not thought it necessary to provide any further consideration of the other major position apart from our own, viz. that of the Roman Catholic Church. Its official teaching was dealt with in the 1957 Report, on the basis of the writings of Thomas Aquinas and the decisions of the Council of Trent.

One further point is worth mentioning. In the Introduction to last year's Report the Commission mentioned that the draft statement of the doctrine of Baptism will, if approved by the Assembly, be sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. Some Presbyteries have asked that the draft statement should be sent down to Presbyteries for discussion before being sent down under the Barrier Act. With this suggestion the Commission is in hearty agreement. The sole purpose of mentioning the Barrier Act last year was to make it clear that time must elapse before the preparation of popular statements for the use of parents and young people. Such statements can only be produced *after* the Church has officially declared its mind upon the doctrine.

The Commission again commends the book, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*, which has been published by the Saint Andrew Press, and hopes that the Church will find it useful as a guide to the understanding of the Biblical teaching which must be the foundation of all our doctrine.

With this year's Report the Commission has completed its preliminary task—the study of the Biblical doctrine, and the study of the doctrine and practice in the history of the Church. It hopes to be in a position to submit a draft statement of the doctrine of Baptism to next year's General Assembly. It will greatly help the Commission in essaying this difficult task if Presbyteries will let it have their comments and suggestions by the earliest possible date.

## II. BAPTISM IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 1843-1959

### 1. THE MODERN TRADITION

The problems and tensions which were carried over into this period from the preceding one were summarized in the Epilogue to the 1958 Report under the following three heads: A. The contradiction between Federal Theology and the Gospel of Grace. B. The divorce of the Atonement from the Incarnation. C. The separation of the Church Visible from the Church Invisible.

The Calvin Translation Society, which was founded in 1843, by issuing new translations of Calvin's works, stirred up in all branches of the Church an understanding of Christ and the Gospel akin to that of the Scots Reformers. This led to an increasingly evangelistic and missionary outlook which helped to undermine the rationalistic tendencies of the Federal Theology, with its doctrine that Christ died for the elect only, on the one hand, and the "moralism" of the Moderates, on the other. Thus within the divided witness of the Church a new unity in the Gospel began to be forged.

Both in Scotland and on the Continent an increasing tendency towards subjectivism in theology and philosophy had been noticeable since the middle of the seventeenth century. Although the rationalism of the Federal Theology may be interpreted as a reaction against this, it served only to provoke a more vehement pietistic reaction which found the essence of Protestant Christianity in the individual's "immediate" experience of the divine, and in the cult of religious moralism. This formed the dominant spiritual climate of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which saw the great flowering of theological and philosophical subjectivism all over Europe.

Within this spiritual climate several factors which influenced the understanding of Baptism may be noted.

#### (A) THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL

The origins of this movement may be traced to the latter part of the eighteenth century. The evangelistic urgency which it inspired gave rise to the modern Foreign Mission enterprise. Thereby the Church was incalculably enriched, but some difficulties with regard to Baptism were accentuated. Some people preserved the insight of the Reformers that the preaching of the Word is the living action of Christ within the Church, convincing and converting men. Others tended to understand preaching primarily as instruction of the mind and heart, by the help of which men might come to an inward spiritual experience. The latter looked on the sacraments as quite unimportant, or merely as acts through which the converted give outward expression to their inward spiritual condition. Thus they lost the Reformed understanding of the sacraments as *acts of God* which are both *declaratory* of the Gospel and *instrumental* in its application.

#### (B) THE RISE OF LIBERALISM

Liberalism represents the emergence, within the Churches of the Reformation, of the humanist spirit of the Renaissance, with its stress upon the autonomy of the reason, the freedom of the will, and the self-sufficiency of the conscience. This meant the dominance of rational and ethical categories, and the subordination of Christianity to "Religion" and morality. The importance of theology was minimized, education and culture were substituted for the Gospel of salvation, and the Church came to be regarded

largely as a social institution. Consequently the sacraments were acknowledged only for their value in popular education, as the outward, ritual and symbolic draping of spiritual truths. This is the origin of the idea, still widespread, that Baptism is but the picturesque presentation of a vague conception of the divine Fatherhood.

Liberalism, however, made important contributions to the life of the Church. (1) It rediscovered the concept of the Kingdom of God, though it was unable properly to interpret its full Biblical significance. (2) It focused attention on the historical Jesus, though its own categories proved inadequate for the understanding of Him. (3) Above all, Liberal scholars led the way in the field of Biblical study. All of these have a direct bearing upon the recovery of the Biblical doctrine of Baptism.

#### (C) THE HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE BIBLE

Of all the movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this has the most far-reaching importance where Baptism is concerned. It initiated the most exhaustive scientific research into the Christian documents that has ever been undertaken. At first this operated largely with rationalistic and subjectivist presuppositions, and led to a presentation of Jesus and the Gospel in terms of nineteenth-century idealism and subjectivism, but the more rigorously scientific the study has become the more has it been driven to interpret the New Testament in the light of its own inherent unity, and this has led to an exegesis in which theological understanding is controlled by rigorous attention to the language and text. Through these studies the Church has been brought back inescapably to Christ Himself, as He gives Himself to us through revelation, and to a doctrine of the Church and sacraments governed by what He has done for us, and is still doing for us, in uniting us to Himself.

#### (D) THE REVIVAL OF WORSHIP

The renewal of interest in worship shown by the re-publication of John Knox's *Book of Common Order* in 1840, led to the production of many Service Books. Unlike much of the liturgical revival in England, this was not a movement of romantic self-expression. The emphasis was laid on the primacy of God's action to which we respond in praise and prayer, though it must be admitted that the movement did not escape the prevailing subjectivism, as many of the hymns of the period clearly show. The reappropriation of the Church's rich inheritance in Knox's *Book of Common Order*, and in the *Westminster Directory* helped to restore the sacraments to their proper place in the worship of the Church. The sacraments were again seen as means of grace through which, in their union with the Word preached, Christ acts upon His people to heal and renew them, and to lift them up in Himself into fellowship with the divine life and love. It must, however, be admitted that this revival of worship was not able to free itself altogether from the false Roman conception of indwelling grace, which had come back into the Church through pietistic influences. Consequently these Service Books occasionally speak of inward grace as something *channelled* through the sacraments, as do also some of the hymns of the period.

#### (E) THE CONTINUING TRADITION

Throughout the nineteenth century the Church continued to be schooled in the catechetical teaching of the Westminster divines, while doctrinal instruction in the colleges and divinity halls was still given in the tradition of scholastic Calvinism. As time went on this Calvinism was corrected to some extent by the renewed study of Calvin himself and of the Bible,

and the Westminster teaching on the sacraments was re-examined in the light of the teaching of John Knox, Robert Bruce, and indeed Thomas Boston. Thus the old Presbyterian tradition continued to have a strong influence until the beginning of this century. The combination of this continuing tradition with the movements and tendencies noted above provided distinct variations in the general tradition of the Church.

## 2. THE SECESSION AND U.P. TRADITION

### (A) THE ORIGINAL SECESSION TESTIMONY

The *Original Secession Testimony* of 1827 and 1842 continued to be normative for this branch of the Church until its eventual re-union. The teaching about the sacraments in the *Testimony* has two chief characteristics. (1) "The primary end of the sacraments is, the confirmation on the part of God of His grant to us of all the blessings of His covenant; whereas the primary end of social vowing, is the confirmation on our part of our allegiance to Him, and our joint adherence to His cause" (II. xvii. iii. 2). (2) "Both the sacraments of the New Testament represent and seal Christ, and all the benefits of the covenant of grace to believers" (II. xviii. ii.). That is to say, the sacraments have to do with *God's act* and are *His* confirmation rather than our act of adherence, and they are directly related to Christ. Although this is true of both sacraments, "Baptism is more especially the sign and seal of the remission of our sins, and the acceptance of our persons, through the blood and righteousness of Christ, and of the regeneration of our hearts by His Holy Spirit" (*ib.*). The *Testimony* then adds "to assert that Baptism with water is regeneration, or remission of sins, is to confound the sign with the things signified by it; that though an external means of salvation, and on that account not to be unnecessarily omitted, yet it is not essential to salvation;—that not only those who profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, but also the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized;—that Baptism is rightly administered by sprinkling; and that, from the nature of the ordinance, it should be dispensed in public, and in connection with the administration of the Word" (*ib.*).

In justification of the Baptism of infants the *Testimony* cites and expounds the passages from the Gospels and the Epistles discussed in the Commission's 1955 Report and in the volume, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*. In justification of the rite of sprinkling it points out that this mode of Baptism is greatly favoured by the analogy of the sprinkling of blood used in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where "our Lord's blood, not only in allusion to the type, but probably with an express reference to the mode of Christian Baptism, is called 'the blood of sprinkling'" (*ib.*). The whole intention of the *Testimony* was to keep the Church close to the teaching of the Westminster standards; but it becomes clear that the actual practice of Baptism left much to be desired, for in the "Act for Renewing the Covenants" acknowledgment is made "that we have not duly made use of the sacraments, as seals of the covenant of grace and of the promises therein made to us in Christ. In offering our children to the Lord in Baptism, we have not been suitably affected with our own and our children's defilement by original guilt and corruption; we have not duly considered and esteemed the free love and grace of God, which has opened to us, and to our seed, a fountain for sin and uncleanness; nor been duly concerned that they might be regenerated and united to Christ."

## (B) PRINCIPAL DAVID S. CAIRNS

The following passage from the unpublished papers of the late Principal D. S. Cairns, D.D., is noteworthy :—

“ Here above all, we have the example of Jesus Himself, who, we are told, when children were brought to Him, took them in His arms and blessed them, and said ‘ Of such is the Kingdom of God.’ Here we have indubitable history. If He did this with His human body of flesh and blood, ought not the Christian Church which is His body, to do it too ? But if Baptism means the communication of the Holy Spirit, can we think of such a gift being communicated to a child, who as yet can neither speak nor think nor believe ? We cannot do so, certainly, if we subjectivize the gift of the Spirit, and interpret it as meaning simply our human knowledge of God. But if it be an objective reality, why should one not think of it as being given to a child in answer to the prayer of its parents and the Christian community to which it is admitted ? The germs of the direst temptations and sins are present in the youngest child. Why should we be compelled to believe that God’s Spirit may not, also, be waiting from the first in the unfolding consciousness for its full appropriation ? The contrary view seems to me logically to imply that the child must normally grow up away from God and that prayer for infant children cannot avail.”

## (C) CHURCH PRACTICE

In *Presbyterian Forms of Service*, issued by the U.P. Church in 1891, the address insists that “ This ordinance is the sign and seal not of anything man can accomplish, but of what *God alone* can do.” Similarly, in the second order it is declared that “ the washing with water in the name of the Holy Trinity is at once a sign of grace, a pledge of grace, and a means of grace.” It is because the proper stress is laid upon God’s act of grace that children so baptized “ are recognized by Baptism as members of the visible Church.” Four reasons are given for the Baptism of children : God declares that children are included in His Covenant ; our Lord Jesus Christ says that they are of the Kingdom of Heaven ; the Apostle Peter testifies that the promise is not only to believers but also to their children ; the Apostle Paul testifies that the children of believers are holy unto the Lord.”

What the Baptism of children means is well summed up in the following prayer :

“ Almighty and most merciful Father, who claimest the children as Thy heritage, and who hast established an everlasting covenant with Thy people and with their offspring, we beseech Thee graciously to receive and bless this little child, whom his parents now dedicate to Thee. As we, in Thy name, baptize him with the Baptism of water, do Thou, in the fulness of Thy grace, endow him with the gift of Thy Holy Spirit. Accept him for Thine own possession ; set upon him the consecrating seal of Thy Covenant ; and evermore endue him with Thy heavenly grace ; that to his life’s end he may glorify Thee in his body and spirit, which Thou hast redeemed through Jesus Christ.”

It is noteworthy that while the element of union with Christ is clearly taught, the actual content or the thing signified in Baptism is regarded as an inward experience rather than as the objective fact which has already taken place in Christ. The focusing of attention upon the subjective rather than the objective element makes Baptism attain its meaning in a present endowment of the Spirit leading to an experienced new birth in the future. This stress upon the new birth is a prominent feature of the baptismal

teaching in this tradition. "We are all born inclined by nature to evil. In order to be saved we need, by Divine grace, to obtain regeneration, faith, repentance. Hence our Lord Jesus Christ has said, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. The water of Baptism symbolizes the Divine grace which blots out our sins; but that grace, if it is to be efficacious in us, must ever be received with the faith which the Holy Spirit imparts; for, as the Apostle Peter reminds us, the Baptism which saves is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (Order for the Baptism of Adults).

### 3. THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION

After 1843 the Free Church sought to renew its theology and to build up its life by a fresh study of its classical sources. These were found not so much in the writings of the Reformers as in those of the scholastic Calvinists of the Westminster period and the Federal theologians on the Continent. This tended to raise in an acute form the tensions which the eighteenth century had failed to resolve. Thus a reassertion of hyper-Calvinism and predestinationism clashed with the moralism and semi-Pelagianism that had grown out of the notion of the Covenant as a contract—*i.e.*, there was a renewed conflict between those who maintained irresistible grace and particular election on the one hand, and those who believed in a strictly conditional offer of the Gospel requiring active human co-operation for the efficacy of grace on the other. This revived Federalism, however, could only lead to the same moralism and semi-Pelagianism as before. These in turn became a seed-bed for Liberalism. It is these internal tensions that are the ultimate reason for the independent survival of splinter Churches stemming from the Disruption.

The effect of the tension between hyper-Calvinism and moralism upon the doctrine of Baptism is reflected in the Service Books produced as recently as in the early years of this century. Meanwhile the development of Biblical research had opened up the way for a critical reconsideration of the difficulties inherent in Federalism. During the decades of Liberal ascendancy, Biblical studies tended towards a superficially symbolic and moralistic understanding of the sacraments, but the profounder and more scientific Biblical teaching of great scholars like James Denney, H. A. A. Kennedy, and William Manson radically altered the picture, and laid a basis for a deeper appreciation of Biblical and Reformed doctrine.

#### (A) ANDREW A. BONAR

Andrew A. Bonar may be chosen as representative of the group of strong evangelicals in the Free Church. His pamphlet, *A Brief View of the Strength Opened up and Applied*, was published in October 1844.

His approach has the almost inevitable tendency to make adult Baptism the norm, and to direct attention towards the cognitive aspect of it, stressing the need for active human co-operation in order that grace may be effective. Infant Baptism becomes hard to interpret, and there is an unresolved tension between adult and infant Baptism in Bonar's exposition.

Baptism is the sign and seal of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection—a union which is claimed by all who believe. The water of Baptism signifies the blood of Christ, and the baptized person's union with the water represents his spiritual union with Christ, whose blood cleanses the soul, as water cleanses the body (pp. 4, 9).

The blood is the life of the Substitute taken for us, and it is through the death of Christ that the Wrath of God is quenched, and all the blessings

are made ours. It is the reality of these blessings which is attested by Baptism, and also the reality of God's willingness to give an all-sufficient righteousness freely, through union with Christ in His death (p. 10 f.). "See, says God, this is what you need and I freely give; and that you need it and that I give it freely, behold the seal of the King" (p. 11).

All who belong to Christ have a right to receive Baptism, but a man must be a believer in heart, and not merely a baptized man, if he is to be saved. It is not from his Baptism that he receives salvation. All Baptism does is that it attests the willingness of God to save.

The Lord gives the sign and seal of Baptism to all who belong to Himself, because He loves them personally; but He also gives it to the children of believing parents, for the love He bears the parents. Ever since Abraham got the seal of circumcision, it has been a principle that the infants of believing parents are to be offered whatever their parents obtained (p. 13). Hence Peter can say, "The promise is unto you and to your children." There is no argument used against the fitness of infant Baptism which might not have been used to dissuade Jewish parents from circumcising their children (p. 12).

Bonar observes that doubts concerning infant Baptism are based on a wrong comparison of this sacrament with the Lord's Supper. The Supper does require faith in the recipients, but in Baptism "the Lord Himself brings forward the blessing. . . . The Lord is He who is active in this sacrament; the baptized one is wholly recipient. The sign and seal of Baptism are meant to declare the Lord's feelings towards the individual, and surely He may do so towards an infant as much as towards an aged person" (p. 14).

What does the Lord do for the child? "These swaddling bands wrap a sinner. . . . The child new-born has a depraved heart and will manifest self-will and ungodliness very soon." Nevertheless the Lord comes forward to the little child of His believing servants bringing blessing (p. 16 f.). He does not say He will take away its original sin, or regenerate its soul. In tens of thousands of cases it is clear that this has not happened in Baptism. Yet it may happen. "The Lord may do it indeed in the case of some, bending the twig towards Himself in that solemn hour; and He might be expected to do it far oftener, if the number of believing parents was greater" (p. 17).

What He always does is to show the child His goodwill by specially selecting it to receive the sacrament. He declares that His scheme of salvation is so free that it can reach to this child. "He can save it—though it cannot utter thanks, though it cannot even requite Him by one conscious smile of gratitude" (p. 18). He shows a particular readiness to bless that child and He keeps a special eye on it ever after (p. 19). "If one of these baptized ones die in infancy, rest your sorrowful souls on Him who expressed such desire towards your child. What could He mean by showing it all this kindness, and then quickly taking it away? Surely He meant to give it heaven before it could refuse" (p. 19).

#### (B) JAMES BANNERMAN

The Free Church, in seeking to be as faithful as possible to the Westminster Standards, produced theologians of great power such as William Cunningham, James Bannerman, Robert S. Candlish, James S. Candlish, and John Macpherson, whose teaching was set forth not only in works for theologians but also in the famous *Handbooks for Bible Classes* which had a widespread influence. They were opposed both to Tractarian views of sacramental grace and to Socinian and Baptist views of faith. There was, however, a difference among the theologians themselves which helps us

to see the difficulties involved. A comparison of the teaching of James Bannerman and James S. Candlish will bring this out.

In *The Church of Christ* (1868) Bannerman worked out a general definition of the sacramental principle, and then sought to apply it to the two Gospel sacraments. This had the advantage of treating Baptism as a sacrament in the full sense, like the Lord's Supper, but it meant that the exposition of Baptism, notably as applied to infants, had to be squared with an abstract definition already laid down. This proved so difficult that some modification of it was required in its application to infants—a weakness frankly admitted by Bannerman. This represents a direct departure from the teaching of John Knox and his *Book of Common Order* (cf. 1958 Report, p. 12 ff.).

Bannerman describes Baptism under four aspects:—

(i) Baptism “is a positive institution of Christ in His Church,” and cannot therefore be regarded as dispensable or indifferent (*op. cit.*, vol. ii., p. 42 f.).

(ii) Baptism “is an external and sensible sign of an internal grace, a spiritual truth embodied in outward action” (p. 44 f.). The contrast between inner and outer, invisible and visible, is made much wider than in the teaching of the Reformers. Together with this goes a tendency to speak of “sacramental grace” and of “indwelling grace” which is too close to the Roman conception; but in order to avoid any *ex opere operato* conception of its efficacy, sacramental grace is expounded only in *cognitive* terms—*i.e.*, as instruction, representation of truth, confirmation, assurance, &c. Within this way of speaking the old teaching is set forth.

(iii) Baptism is “a seal of a federal transaction between two parties in the ordinance” (p. 46).

(iv) Baptism “is a means for confirming the faith of the believer and adding to the grace which he possessed before” (p. 49). The real importance of these words comes out in the explication: “If the believer's part of the transaction be the embodiment in the outward sign of the spiritual act whereby he dedicates himself to Christ,—and if Christ's part of the transaction be the giving of Himself and His grace to the believer *in return*, then it is plain that the ordinance, so understood, must be a divinely instituted means of grace to the parties who rightly partake of it” (p. 49). This being the case, it is very difficult to apply Baptism to infants with the same meaning, for, as Bannerman puts it, Baptism is “a seal of more than the covenant generally; it is a seal of the covenant in its appropriation by the believer to himself personally in the ordinance” (p. 107). This can be extended to infants only on a severely forensic interpretation of Baptism, which Bannerman carries through in three main contentions: (a) “Baptism in the case of all infants baptized gives to them an interest in the Church of Christ as its members” (p. 112). “Baptism does not constitute him a member of the kingdom of heaven, but it brings him to the very door, and bids him there knock and it shall be opened unto him” (p. 113). (b) “Baptism, in the case of all infants baptized, gives them a right of property in the covenant of grace; which may in after life, by means of their personal faith, be supplemented by a right of possession” (p. 113 f.). Baptism is thus the charter or title to property in Christ, but “in itself it is incomplete and inadequate to put him into personal possession of his heritage” (p. 114). (c) “There seems to be reason for inferring that, in the case of infants regenerated in infancy, Baptism is ordinarily connected with that regeneration” (p. 117). This refers for the most part to those predestined to salvation who die before emerging from infancy. In their case the saving change in their natures is intimately connected with Baptism.

Three comments may be made on the teaching of Bannerman :—

(i) The ordinance of Baptism is represented as a purely forensic, judicial transaction between two contracting parties, in which on the promise of God certain rights are made over *in return* for certain prescribed responses.

(ii) The spiritual content of Baptism is in all cases an experience in the soul or nature of the baptized—in the case of adults this is prior to Baptism, in the case of infants it usually follows it, though it may in some instances be concomitant with it. Baptism is not viewed as the objective reality which has once and for all taken place in Christ. What has taken place in Christ is only the ground upon which the conditional offer of grace is made in the ordinance of Baptism.

(iii) The grace given in Baptism is not thought of as wholly identical with the person and work of Christ towards us and on our behalf, but as something conditioned by the reciprocal action of those to whom it is directed. Bannerman takes great pains to attack the notion of the efficacy of the sacraments found in Roman and Tractarian theology, on the ground that the Church cannot dispense divine grace, for that would mean that it could control it. His own view, however, is open to the same charge since, in effect, he makes the operation of divine grace depend on human response, and so gives to man implicit control over grace. (This was precisely the criticism of Richard Baxter made by Fraser of Brea, and of the Jesuit Molina made by the Reformed theologians on the Continent.) Bannerman's error is in effect that he denies the freedom and sovereignty and unconditional nature of God's grace. The Federal theologians had sought to extricate themselves from this charge by insisting on the absolute nature of predestination, for only those who were elected so to do co-operated savingly with divine grace. This, however, involved the untenable cleavage between the unconditional covenant of redemption and a conditional covenant of grace. The root of the trouble lay in the false Mediæval notions of grace still lurking in the Church. These notions later came under heavy attack from James Denney, H. A. A. Kennedy, and John Oman.

#### (c) JAMES S. CANDLISH

A striking contrast to Bannerman's teaching is found in the widely influential work of James S. Candlish of Glasgow. This is found in his Bible Class Handbook on *The Sacraments* and in a collection of his lectures posthumously issued in 1899 under the title *The Christian Salvation*. In Candlish's thinking the abstract Federal idea is replaced by a more Biblical conception of the covenant will of God the Father. He wills to adopt us as His children in and through the person and work of His Son. Candlish consequently develops a fuller and stronger doctrine of the Church as the fellowship of those who are united to Christ as His Body. He insists that there is only "one Church which in different aspects is invisible and visible." The sacraments are therefore related directly to Christ and His Church through the Spirit, and a personal relation of union and communion takes the place of a merely forensic relation. The sacraments are not expounded, as in Bannerman, in terms of a general sacramental principle, but as the two Gospel sacraments in terms of their relation to Christ and His work. Candlish objects to the teaching of Cunningham and Bannerman that adult Baptism must be adopted as the norm and infant Baptism expounded as an abnormal modification of it, and so he returns to the teaching of the Reformers and of the Early Church. We may summarize his teaching as follows :—

#### (i) Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The sacraments "represent Christ and His work of salvation not merely objectively in itself, but subjectively in its application to the believer. . . .

This application has two parts or sides, one in which man is *passive* or *acted upon* by God's Spirit, and the other in which *being acted upon* he acts also himself. These two aspects are presented to us in the two sacraments of the New Testament respectively, and serve to explain their leading differences. In Baptism, as in circumcision, we have an outward action in which the subject is passive—he is washed in water; in the Lord's Supper, as in the Passover, we have one in which the subject is necessarily active—he eats and drinks. The former, therefore, approximately represents that moment or stage in spiritual life in which the soul is simply acted upon by the Spirit, which is distinctively called regeneration; the latter, that in which the soul is active, which is repentance, faith, and the new life. These two are different in some important respects, and together they give a complete view of the way in which we are made partakers of Christ and His benefits" (*The Christian Salvation*, p. 140 ff.).

## (ii) The meaning of Baptism

The general significance apparent in the action of washing with water is the cleansing of the soul from sin. This Candlish expounds under four heads: (a) "Baptism teaches that all who are out of Christ are morally and spiritually unclean by reason of sin" (*The Sacraments*, p. 54). (b) "Baptism teaches that just as washing cleanses the body, so God in Christ cleanses the soul by the Holy Spirit" (*op. cit.*, p. 55). (c) "Baptism teaches that this cleansing is only to be attained through fellowship with the death of Christ" (*ib.*). The relation of Baptism to the death of Christ, Candlish sees to be grounded upon God's sending of His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, that He might condemn sin in the flesh. "So truly was He in the likeness of sinful flesh that He underwent that Baptism at the hands of John that was a testimony of the need of cleansing; and by the bloody Baptism of His death He was freed from the sin of the world that He bore, so that rising from the dead, He became a quickening Spirit to give new life to all who enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. Our Lord's words speaking of His sufferings unto death as a Baptism (Mark x. 38 f.; Luke xii. 50) and Paul's saying that our Baptism represents our being buried with Christ show that this figure of descending into death with Christ and rising again with Him is also intended in the sacrament; and thus it is that it suggests the idea of our ingrafting into Christ emphasised in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. We can only have the washing of regeneration by dying with Christ; as on the other hand, if He wash us not we have no part with Him" (John xiii. 8) (*op. cit.*, p. 56). (d) "Baptism teaches that by this process of death with Christ and new birth, we become His as our Lord and God. We are baptized unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: we are sanctified to Him as a people specially His own. . . . He is thus a God to us as the Three-One Jehovah: in the person of the Father, over us, as our Father in Heaven; in the person of the Son, with us, as our brother and leader; in the person of the Holy Ghost, in us, as the principle of our new life" (*ib.*). To this Candlish adds two important statements: (1) There is one Baptism, by which we are incorporated not into any local or sectional Church only, but into the one holy Catholic Church of Christ. Baptism is the great symbol of the unity of the Church of Christ under her one head. (2) The things signified by Baptism are the great fundamental truths of the Gospel (*op. cit.*, p. 57).

## (iii) The Efficacy of Baptism

Baptism "is a token of the great and precious *objective truth*, that the whole of that complete deliverance from sin, and eternal life are in Christ Jesus" (*op. cit.*, p. 60). Baptism is certainly related to Christian experience

but when we remember the fulness of its meaning and its grounding in the whole objective work of Christ, we see that the experience appropriate to it is one that covers the whole of the Christian life, and this is what is meant by regeneration in its wide and comprehensive Biblical sense (*ib.*). Candlish points out that "the theory that assigns a direct and causal efficacy to the outward rite has often led to a restriction of the meaning of it, so as to make this theory more consistent with experience" (*The Christian Salvation*, p. 150). By returning to an interpretation of Baptism in terms of *its objective reality in Christ Himself*, and therefore in terms of the fulness of the Gospel of what God has already done for us in Christ, Candlish does not assert that Baptism has any efficacy other than that which has already been accomplished in Christ, and does not therefore speak of "sacramental grace" as something other than, or in addition to, the objective reality of our salvation in Christ. In this way Candlish delivers Baptism from the narrow and restricted meaning given to it by Romanists, Federalists, and others who define its significance by what they believe it can effect within the child at the moment of its administration.

At the same time Candlish recovers the true meaning of the term "exhibit" as used by the Reformers and the Westminster divines: it denotes "not merely showing but bestowing or applying" (*The Sacraments*, p. 39; *The Christian Salvation*, p. 150 f.).

Again, because the efficacy of grace is not separable from Christ Himself, Candlish does not fall into the net of semi-Pelagianism. Christ actually fulfils what He promises, since He who gives the pledge is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who cannot lie or deceive. Faith is required, but "it is the work of God's Spirit and not of our own free will to apply to us the benefits purchased by Christ" (*The Christian Salvation*, p. 152). Thus the sovereignty of God's grace is remarkably represented in Baptism, in which we are passive subjects (*ib.*, p. 142). Baptism also requires and demands obedience and holy resolve on our part, but "this aspect of Baptism, though real and important, is in its nature posterior and subordinate to the other. It is first and chiefly a pledge or token *on the part of God in Christ to us*; and only secondarily, though not less really, a pledge or token on our part of our allegiance to God" (*The Sacraments*, p. 62 f.).

#### (iv) Infant Baptism

According to Candlish, objection to infant Baptism "rests upon the erroneous assumption that Baptism is a sign and seal of the personal salvation of those who receive it" (*op. cit.*, p. 67). His defence of infant Baptism can be summarized thus: (a) "There is nothing symbolized in it of which infants are not capable. It represents that part of the application of redemption in which man is passive, namely, regeneration, and not that in which he is active, namely, faith and repentance. Now infants are capable of regeneration" (*The Christian Salvation*, p. 163). This does not, of course, mean that Candlish taught what is commonly known as "baptismal regeneration"—*viz.*, that the act of baptizing causes regeneration through conferring sacramental grace. Candlish's essentially Biblical understanding makes such a notion impossible for him (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 169 ff.). (b) "God's Covenant with His people ever included children as well as themselves; and He has given special promises that if parents, believing in Christ and walking with God in Him, faithfully and prayerfully bring up their children, they too will be regenerated by the Spirit (Prov. xxii. 6; Is. xlv. 3: 5; Eph. vi. 4)" (*ib.*). Such promises are not to be so interpreted as though they limited the sovereign and free grace of God, who has mercy on whom He will. (c) "He reaffirms the statement of the *Westminster Confession* that "the efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is ministered."

## (D) THE TENSION BETWEEN REFORMATION AND FEDERAL THEOLOGY

Candlish's understanding of Baptism can be fairly summed up by saying that it is the sacrament of God's Fatherly *adoption* of us into sonship in and through Jesus Christ. In this he was influenced by his father, Principal R. S. Candlish of New College, Edinburgh, who had sought to formulate a better doctrine of adoption because, as he declared, the statements on this subject in the *Westminster Confession* and Catechisms were "by no means satisfactory" (*The Fatherhood of God*, 5th edit., p. 194).

As Thomas Boston, more than a century earlier, working within the framework of the Federal Theology, had sought to restore to its full place the whole concept of union with Christ, so R. S. Candlish, also working within the forensic thought of the Federal scheme, sought to recover the Biblical teaching of adoption into a filial relation with the Father through participation in the incarnate sonship of the eternal Son. This involved restoring the doctrine of the Incarnation to a central place in theology which it had lost in the forensic scheme.

Christ was God's Son not only in His divine nature but also in His human nature, which He assumed for us, and in which He lived out a life of perfect obedience to the Father. By being given to share in His human nature, we are brought into a sonship which is the essence and goal of the Christian life. This sharing in Christ's sonship involves a close analogical relation between our new birth in Christ and His miraculous birth into our humanity. By His birth a new humanity was born, in which, through the operation of the Spirit, we are given to share.

R. S. Candlish was attacked by Professor Crawford of the University Faculty in Edinburgh, who taught that there is a universal Fatherhood of God and a universal sonship prior to "evangelical sonship." Crawford had no difficulty in finding support for his arguments in the writings of William Cunningham (1805-1861) who had already attacked Calvin because, in his teaching on the Lord's Supper, he had sought to show "a real influence exerted by Christ's human nature upon the souls of believers" (Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, p. 240). As a Federal theologian, committed to a purely forensic conception of atonement and justification, Cunningham was unable to acknowledge the saving significance of the humanity of Christ, and therefore the intrinsic importance of union with Christ in His human nature. All that a Federal theologian can consistently bring himself to say is that "in union with God's own Son as a public person in His office as Mediator, an honorary standing of sonship that is inadmissible is conferred on those for whom the way to this rank is opened in their acceptance as they are justified by the Blood of Christ and who are prepared for the life of sons by their New Birth and the sealing by the Spirit of the Son" (John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, p. 274).

Here is exposed the contradiction between the post-Westminster Calvinism, with its severely abstract and forensic categories, and the Calvinistic teaching of the Scottish Reformers. The same contradiction lies at the root of the present-day confusion in our Church with regard to Baptism. Nowhere is this clearer than in the work of the great James Denney. He abandoned the abstract schematism of the Federal theology with its impersonal conception of grace and unbiblical doctrine of a limited atonement, and gave the doctrine of the person and work of Christ paramount place once again. Under Ritschlian influence he replaced the abstract legal relationship by a moral one, and failed to appreciate the old doctrine of Robert Bruce (cf. his *Sermons on the Sacraments*) which was being reaffirmed by his colleague J. S. Candlish. In his commentary on Romans vi., Denney insists that "the requirements of the passage demand the idea of an actual union to, or incorporation in, Christ," and so, on

exegetical grounds, regrets the Federal interpretation which construes it in purely judicial terms (cf. 1958 Report, p. 60). When he came to work this out in relation to the sacraments, Denney frankly admitted that he was perplexed (*The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 314 ff.). His only way out was to give it a purely cognitive interpretation based upon the text, "Reckon yourselves dead unto sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." "Apart from this self-reckoning, which when real is simply faith's identification of itself with the Saviour, all this about union with the death and resurrection of Christ in Baptism is meaningless" (*ib.*, p. 317). In this interpretation Denney completely reversed the meaning of the Apostle, who commanded us to reckon ourselves to be dead in Christ and alive again because already and objectively we are so, in Christ, through what Christ has done on our behalf after assuming us into Himself. In contradiction to this Denney made the meaning of death and resurrection rest upon the subjective act of self-reckoning. This was precisely what Candlish had sought to show could not be done.

Denney was rightly concerned to teach a doctrine of Baptism that would give faith its full and proper place. "Baptism and faith are but the outside and inside of the same thing" (*The Death of Christ*, p. 185; *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 316). What he was unable to do was to find a way of stating St Paul's doctrine of union with Christ in Baptism which leaves full room for faith. The reason for this failure may well lie in the fact that under the influence of the Ritschlian theology Denney was still conceiving faith in intellectual and moral terms. Precisely at this point Denney's greatest pupil, the late William Manson, differed from his teacher, and took the side of Calvin, Bruce, the Candlishes, and H. R. Mackintosh.

#### (E) CHURCH PRACTICE

There can be little doubt that for many ministers, at least towards the end of the nineteenth and in the first decades of the twentieth centuries, Baptism was little more than "a visible sermon," whose real purpose was to be an *educational pledge* on the part of the parents and the congregation. The idea that Baptism is essentially an ordinance of the Gospel was in abeyance, but there was an attempt to recover a fuller and more adequate understanding of Baptism in view of Socinian and Baptist attacks upon it. An example of this is the tract on *Infant Baptism* by James Lumsden, published by the Free Presbytery of Arbroath in 1856. This shows the influence of the Catechisms of Geneva and Heidelberg as well as the Westminster ones, and also that of Calvin's *Institutes* and of Robert Bruce's *Sermons on the Sacraments* which Cunningham had recently republished.

Baptism was regarded by Lumsden not only as signing and sealing but as actually applying Christ and His benefits to the child. This is done not only through the parents but directly through the work of the Spirit in the life and growth of the child after Baptism. In accordance with the requirements of the Federal Theology, the evangelical offer in Baptism is regarded as made only "conditionally" and "hypothetically."

The persistence of this latter element made a somewhat superficial view of the sacrament inevitable. This may be seen in the first Service Books issued in the Free Church under the convenership of Dr D. Bannerman, the son of Professor James Bannerman: *A New Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1898) and *Directory and Forms for Public Worship* (1909). These books lay the emphasis not so much on the divine action in Baptism as on the act of the parents in presenting and dedicating the child, and the act of the congregation in receiving him into membership of the Church. The prayers in these books are better than their formal

statements of doctrine, and show the Father-child relationship prevailing over the abstract Federal relationship—an indication that the worshipping and praying Church is often better than its theology.

In the *Book of Common Order, 1928*, issued by the U.F. Church under the convenership of Dr Millar Patrick, who stood in the tradition of the younger Bannerman, there is a still closer approximation to the classical Service Books of the Church of Scotland. Baptism is the divine ordinance which declares to us that God our Father, who has redeemed us by the sacrifice of Christ, is also the God and Father of our children. It is only in the prayers that God's direct action towards the child is mentioned. Elsewhere, instead of speaking directly of the relation of the child to Christ and His work, it says that the children belong, with us who believe, to the membership of the Church through the covenant made in Christ, and confirmed to us by God in this sacrament, which is a sign and seal of our cleansing, of our ingrafting into Christ, and of our welcome in the household of God.

In the order for the administration of Holy Baptism to adults, washing and engrafting and regeneration are applied directly to the baptized, but this is interpreted as a mutual act in which God grants him assurance in the sacrament while *he seals* his covenant with God. Thus none of the teaching of James Candlish seems to have been carried over into the form of administration of Baptism. It should be remembered, however, that this Service Book was a product of the Liberal reaction after the First World War, when Reformed theology was at its lowest ebb in Scotland. Nevertheless the Reformed and evangelical theology of the Free Church continued to exercise a wide influence through the teaching of men like H. R. Mackintosh, and this eventually bore fruit in more adequate doctrine such as we see in the late D. M. Baillie's *Theology of the Sacraments* (1957).

#### 4. THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRADITION

The general tendencies in the Established Church are not so easy to describe, but three distinct lines of tradition are discernible: (1) A strong core of the old evangelical tradition remained. This combined the evangelical and sacramental emphases and developed more and more in a Biblical direction. Among its most notable men may be mentioned Daniel Dewar and William Milligan. (2) There was a revival of Westminster Calvinism tending, as in the eighteenth century, to break into two strands—a hyper-Calvinism and a modified Calvinism—each showing a strong strand of rationalism. In this tradition Baptism was given a severely cognitive interpretation corresponding to a highly intellectualist conception of faith. (3) There was also, after the Disruption, a considerable revival of High Church Calvinism. The movement appears to have two main emphases: a return to Calvin's emphasis upon the sovereignty of the divine Word and Act, calling forth man's response in gratitude and praise, and a view of the means of grace, more Augustinian and Mediæval than Reformed, under the influence of the Tractarians and of the Church historians. There resulted from this a strong Calvinist tradition, consciously depending on Knox's *Book of Common Order* and the *Westminster Directory*, with a more adequate doctrine of Baptism and an evangelical view of the *act of God* closely akin to the Secession and U.P. tradition. Unfortunately it operated with a conception of grace as something that can be channelled through the ordinances of the Church, but it largely avoided the semi-Pelagianism of the Federal Theology as well as the "baptismal regeneration" of the Tractarians.

## (A) PRINCIPAL DEWAR

Principal Dewar of Aberdeen represents the more evangelical tradition. His teaching is found in the third volume of his *Elements of Systematic Divinity* (1866). For Dewar, Baptism is essentially "the rite that accompanies the exhibition of the blessings of the Gospel and is an authoritative sign on the part of God" (p. 266). He did not work with a general conception of what is sacramental and then seek to apply it to the two evangelical ordinances. He dealt directly with Baptism and the Lord's Supper as presented in the Biblical teaching. In discussing the history of the doctrine, Dewar offers an interpretation of the teaching of Augustine, citing two important passages with which he is in agreement: "The washing of regeneration is indeed common to all who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; but the grace of regeneration, of which these are the sacraments or signs, by which the members of Christ's body are regenerated with their head, is not common to all; for heretics and false brethren, in the communion of the Catholic name, have the same Baptism as ourselves" (*Enarr. in Ps.*, lxxvii.). "It is clearly shown that the sacrament of Baptism is one thing, and the conversion of the heart another. Nor, if one of these be wanting, are we to conclude that the other is also wanting; because there may be Baptism without conversion, while in the malefactor on the cross, without doubt there was conversion without Baptism. Baptism may exist where conversion of heart is not, and conversion of heart may be where Baptism is not" (*De Bap.* iv. 25).

Dewar connects Baptism in the Biblical and Reformed manner with the covenant, although the forensic interpretation is not to the fore. By nature and design Baptism is a seal on God's part of the blessing of the Gospel in cleansing and regeneration, but "it is the truth of God, and not Baptism, which is the instrumental cause of regeneration" (p. 228 f.). "Viewed as this divine pledge of the truth and love of God, it implies that the blessings exhibited will be really communicated to all who sincerely lay hold of the covenant."

The nature and design of Baptism is then expounded under five heads:—

- (i) "Baptism is designed as an emblem to be significant of the purification by the blood and the Spirit of Christ" (p. 230).
- (ii) "Baptism is designed as a public badge of the Christian profession" (p. 231).
- (iii) "Baptism is designed to represent our union with Christ" (Galatians iii. 27; Romans vi. 4-6, p. 232).
- (iv) "Baptism when administered to infants, is designed to show that they are capable of being subjects of Christ's Kingdom, and of partaking of its blessings" (*ib.*).
- (v) "It is forcibly calculated to teach that the salvation of man is altogether of grace" (p. 234).

Dewar's teaching, though never very profound, performed a valuable service in seeking a better Biblical basis for the traditional teaching, and in modifying its hard judicial character. This was carried further by William Milligan, whose careful exegesis of the New Testament brought him much nearer a proper emphasis upon the grace of God in Christ Jesus. He taught that the ground of our confidence is found directly in the divine revelation, and in God's great acts of mercy towards us, and "not in any process of reasoning on our part or any exercise of feeling by which we respond to the great acts of God's mercy towards us." This is the very truth that the sacraments are designed to inculcate. "In them, according

to the teaching of the New Testament and of the Standards of the Scottish Church, Christ comes to us as much as we to Him. In them He is by His own appointment 'represented, sealed, applied to believers.' They are channels of His grace so that, when we seek for assurance of salvation, we are to find it in what He does for us, and not in any inward persuasion of our own that we have accepted Him. Such a persuasion enthusiastic or presumptuous persons easily find, and are too frequently puffed up; the modest miss, and are too frequently thrown into despair. Christ Himself is with and in His sacraments, to make them not only a sign but a seal to us of 'ingrafting into Christ, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit, of adoption and resurrection unto eternal life'" (*Larger Catechism*, Q. 165) (*The Ascension of our Lord*, p. 348).

#### (B) THOMAS J. CRAWFORD

For the Federal and rational tradition we cite as representative Professor Thomas J. Crawford of Edinburgh University, the opponent of Principal R. S. Candlish. For him Baptism is the sacramental representation of God's paternal kindness, which is extended to us only on the conditions, limitations, and requirements of the Federal contract. Here once again we have the legalism and the limitation of the sovereignty of grace against which the Reformed evangelical tradition in the Church has consistently protested. An example of Crawford's position is the following: "It is true that all persons who make a credible profession of Christianity are entitled to the sacraments, in the judgment of the visible Church. And in regard to Baptism, the infants of professed believers share in this respect in the outward privileges of their parents. But whether they be entitled to the sacraments in the judgment of the Head of the Church is altogether a different question. If He does not recognize them as being already, or as destined ultimately to become, sincere believers, then they have no real interest, either present or prospective, in the covenant of grace. And accordingly the sacraments, though in due form administered to them, are, like seals attached to a blank sheet of parchment, of no significance and validity whatsoever" (*The Fatherhood of God*, p. 261).

Crawford's view of Baptism has two very unfortunate implications: (a) It makes the mercy of the visible Church much wider than the mercy of Christ, and (b) it makes the real content of Baptism what we ultimately put into it, for everything depends upon the fact that we fill in the blank parchment. Both of these are very far removed from the Good News of the Gospel.

Crawford has another side to his teaching which he draws from the baptismal prayer in the *Westminster Directory*. This leads him to expound Baptism as essentially "of the nature of a prayer that God would have respect unto that covenant which is sealed by it in behalf of the child to whom it is administered" (p. 263). The idea that Baptism is to be regarded as an act of prayer goes right back to the catechisms of Craig and Calvin. In this light, Crawford gives Baptism a more adequate interpretation. "What is it that is done when a person is baptized? One of Christ's ministers, acting by His authority, in the presence and with the concurrence of a Christian assemblage, applies to the baptized person the appointed seal of the evangelical promises, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The three persons of the Godhead are here solemnly invoked to confer on the recipient of the ordinance the blessings represented by it; and, apart from such invocations, the accompanying *action*, whereby the appointed token of the covenant is applied, is nothing less than a *symbolic prayer*. Hence in baptizing a person we are virtually praying that God would confer upon him the spiritual blessings of which his Baptism is significant. . . . It is much to be regretted that the extreme jealousy

felt among us of anything like the notion of an *opus operatum* in this sacrament should have disposed many to fall into the opposite error of wellnigh denying any efficacy to Baptism, as a means of imparting spiritual benefits to those who receive it, and of regarding it in no higher light than that of a mere form of admission into the visible Church. The prevalence of such low views of the efficacy of Baptism is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of its proving efficacious" (p. 263 f.). The real reason why people were so liable to fall into such poor views of the sacrament is that they had been taught by theologians like Crawford that its efficacy depended on themselves, and on their views of it, or what they put into it—all in strange contradiction to the baptismal prayer itself.

Crawford's teaching, in a more evangelical and acceptable form, is found in W. P. Paterson (*The Rule of Faith*, p. 275 ff.). Paterson's discussion reveals that one of the inherent weaknesses of Protestant scholasticism was that it tended to form its doctrine in reaction to the sacramental doctrine of Rome. Hence "it affirmed the efficacy of the sacraments to be conditioned by the spiritual state of the recipient" (p. 277). The question how this can be applied to infant Baptism, Paterson answers by interpreting the Reformed view that children are to be baptized because they are within the covenant in such a way as to suggest that "the faith of the Church or of the parents might be vicariously accepted as a ground of blessing" (*ib.*). But is not this a form of the Roman doctrine of 'implicit faith'? The true view is that infants are baptized on the ground of Christ's own faith and faithfulness. It is He, and He alone, not the Church nor the parents, who stands in for the child in a vicarious relationship.

#### (C) WOTHERSPOON AND KIRKPATRICK

The High Church Calvinist movement is well represented by *A Manual of Church Doctrine*, by H. J. Witherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, the teaching of which we now summarize:—

##### (i) What a sacrament is

Witherspoon and Kirkpatrick work with the Westminster definition of the sacraments, but they relate it to the *fulfilled* covenant in Christ, that is they relate it directly to the *Incarnation*. The sacraments are ordinances appointed for the application of redemption by the Spirit of Christ. "The sacraments result from the fact that salvation operates by Incarnation; and they import that our relation to Christ is a vital relation, embracing our whole nature, bodily as well as spiritual" (p. 26).

##### (ii) Christ is the Minister

"The true Minister of the sacraments is Christ—*i.e.*, the action in each sacrament is proper to Christ alone. None but He can wash away sin, or can give the Holy Spirit, or instil life. It is proper to Himself to show His own death for us. He alone can give Himself for our food. The commissioned Ministry acts in His Name and on His behalf; as the Baptist was nothing but only a Voice, so they are but a hand by which the Lord from Heaven carries out His proper work among us. The Ministry has the *authority* to minister: the *power* is in Christ" (p. 34).

##### (iii) The necessity of faith

Witherspoon and Kirkpatrick join with the whole Scottish tradition in repudiating anything like an *ex opere operato* conception of sacramental efficacy. The sacraments are not effective by the mere fact of their having been performed. "Except to faith they are nothing, and except to the spiritual man they are little. . . . Faith is thrown entirely upon Him"

—*i.e.*, the Holy Spirit—“to find anything at all in sacraments. They are nothing in the world except what He makes them; they contain nothing unless what is by Him imported into them. The soul coming to the sacraments is *compelled* to look through their apparatus of ‘sensible sign’ (as one looks through, and not at, the glass of a window) to Christ and His benefits, and to the operation of the Holy Ghost as He follows Christ’s word” (p. 36). “To come without faith to a sacrament is not to come to the sacrament, but only to come in a bodily way to the outward part of the sacrament. In such a case, the spiritual part is there, and is offered—in a sense (so far as the divine faithfulness is involved) is bestowed, BUT IT IS NOT RECEIVED—the spiritual in the man is not accessible to the spiritual in the sacrament” (p. 37).

#### (iv) What Baptism is

As a sacrament, Baptism “has two parts, an outward and visible sign and a corresponding operation of grace. It signifies and seals; but it also *applies* what it signifies. The outward part of this sacrament is washing with water in the Name of the Holy Trinity (*Conf. of Faith*, xxviii. 2). The inward part is ‘engrafting’ into Christ, regeneration, remission of sins, and giving up unto God (*Conf. of Faith*, xxviii. 1; *L. Cat.*, 165; *Directory*, ‘Exhortation’). It is not merely for the admission of the person baptized into the visible Church: Baptism is ‘into Christ’ (*Conf. of Faith*, xxviii. 1). Baptism has efficacy (*Conf. of Faith*, xxviii. 6). It not only ‘offers,’ but in it the Holy Ghost really ‘exhibits’ (*i.e.*, applies) and confers the promised grace” (*ib.*) (p. 39 f.).

#### (v) Baptism is the act of God

“In Baptism the baptized person does nothing, but only surrenders himself to a Divine operation. True, he comes with confession of faith, renunciation of hindrance, and promise of fidelity. But these are not parts of Baptism; they are conditions of Baptism—steps in the way to it. In Baptism itself the baptized is passive; so much so that the Scripture compares it to the act of dying, as the extreme instance of passive yielding into God’s hands; or even compares it to the burial of the dead (Rom. vi. 3-5; Col. ii. 12). When, therefore, Scripture speaks of this or that as done in Baptism, it is the act of God of which it speaks, not the subsequent response of man to that act. On the Divine side all is real and complete. God does for us whatever is needful for our being put into a state of grace. Of that we can speak confidently. There is not Yea and Nay with God (II. Cor. i. 20). The contents attributed to Baptism are all of them acts of God: *He* engrafts; *He* regenerates; *He* remits sin; *He* calls and ‘engages’ us to be the Lord’s. God does it, and it is done. But nothing is asserted as to our acceptance or use of this grace, nor of our answer to this calling. We ought in answer to repent, to believe, to turn to God with all our heart, to hold to Christ and to grow up into Him. But Baptism does not ensure our doing of any of these things. It only calls for them and makes them possible. No one speaks of baptismal repentance or of baptismal conversion, for repenting and turning to God are actions which God gives us to do, not things that God does for us. Grace may be received in vain. What is grafted may wither. What is generated may not come to birth. What is born may die. The forgiven may go on to sin. The son may prove prodigal and go from his father’s house. Yet the grafting, the generating, the birth, the adoption took place. What, then, we say of Baptism and its effect we do not say of man’s response to grace, which is uncertain, but of God’s grace, which is sure. Much is true of Baptism which may not be true of each baptized person” (p. 40 ff.).

(vi) Baptism and *change of status*

“ The comparisons used in Scripture to explain the operations of Baptism are such as engrafting (Rom. xi. 17-19), building (I. Pet. ii. 5 ; I. Cor. iii. 9), adoption (Gal. iv. 5 ; Eph. i. 5), or naturalization ” (Eph. ii. 12-13 ; Phil. iii. 20) (p. 42 f.). For Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick the one idea behind all these comparisons is ‘ change of status,’ and this change of status involves “ a new birth : and the act of God in according it is compared to an act of spiritual generation ” (John iii. 5 ; Tit. iii. 5) (p. 45). By this term ‘ generation ’ Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick refer to the generating of response on our part to the great redemptive acts. It is a response which derives from the grace of God ; for without His grace we can do nothing at all. It refers to the divine ‘ calling and election ’ or the action of God’s Spirit upon the soul, bringing and enabling it to respond. This is what, in the old Augustinian terminology, was known as ‘ prevenient grace.’ In Baptism, therefore, the child is introduced “ into the sphere of the Spirit’s grace and operation ” which constitutes for him a “ real opportunity.”

## (vii) The subjects of Baptism

Children are the ideal subjects of Baptism. “ Our Lord has taught us (Matt. xix. 14) that the little child is the ideal citizen of that Kingdom—‘ of such ’ it consists ; and it receives them, for in seal of His words Christ took children into His arms and blessed them—and they were blessed. So far from the children being required to depart until they shall become adult sinners, our Lord taught that the adult must become as the little child in order to come into the Kingdom. It was in the course of the invitation to Baptism (Acts ii. 39) that St Peter said ‘ the promise is unto you and to your children.’

“ . . . In the child there is no resistance. . . . In the Baptism of an adult there must always be present a certain fear lest ‘ he have neither part nor lot in that matter ’ (Acts viii. 21)—God alone knows the heart ; but in the Baptism of a little child, thanksgiving may be unshadowed, confident. For we know what God has therein done. The rest is still uncertain—we cannot foresee whether this soul will ‘ work out its salvation ’ or ‘ make its calling and election sure ’ ; but we have good hope of it through grace ” (p. 47 ff.).

## (viii) The sequel of Baptism

“ Baptism is a complete sacrament : on God’s side it ensures to the baptized ‘ all things that pertain to life and godliness.’ But it calls for our response—‘ a covenant is not of one ’ ; on our side we must own and embrace its gift and obligation. While this is true in all cases, it is of course the more obviously necessary where Baptism has been received in infancy. The relation constituted by Baptism then requires to be completed, on the part of the baptized, by conscious acceptance of its status ; and, on the part of the Church, by . . . examination and preparation . . . , and that formal act by which full consequence is given to the earlier act of their admission into His flock. At this stage of the Christian Life we should not only look forward to the Lord’s Table and all that participation therein implies, but should first and foremost look back to Baptism, and desire to perfect what concerns that, by the open confession of Christ before God and man, and by securing from the Church recognition and confirmation in the place which Baptism bestows ” (p. 55 f.).

## (D) CHURCH PRACTICE

The Service Books produced in the early part of the nineteenth century, before and after the Disruption, embodying the current teaching of the

Church, all reflect the rationalized form of Federal theology held by the moderate Churchmen. But in 1861 Robert Lee of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, published his *Prayers for Social and Public Worship*, which was mildly liturgical in form, and embodied the outlook of the broad-Churchmen. In seeking a more liturgical form Lee went back to the prayers of the *Westminster Directory*, and thus reintroduced, not only in form but in content, elements of a more adequate doctrine. The 4th edition of Lee's book, called *The Order of Public Worship and the Administration of the Sacraments*, in its order for Baptism heavily depends upon John Knox's *Book of Common Order*, which had been regularly used until 1647, and which inspired the reconstitution of worship in the restored Presbyterianism of 1690. Lee reintroduced into the service the question put by Knox: "Do you here present this child to be baptized, desiring that he may be engrafted into the mystical body of Jesus Christ?"

The Church Service Society in *Euchologion* (1867) introduced still more of the teaching and language of Knox into the baptismal service. The second edition of this book, however, despite its new title, *A Book of Common Order* (1869), conformed less to Knox's pattern and more to that of the *Westminster Directory*. The question put at Baptism was altered to read: "Do you present this child to God in the holy sacrament of Baptism?" and one form of instruction ran as follows: "This sacrament thus instituted is a holy sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of our ingrafting into Christ and union with Him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption and life eternal. This element of water representeth both the blood of Christ, which taketh away all the guilt of sin, and the power of the Holy Ghost in regenerating and sanctifying our corrupt nature. And as by Baptism we are solemnly received into the Church, we are taught, and acknowledge thereby, that all men are born in sin, and must be cleansed by Christ's blood and Spirit if they would be accepted of God and admitted to His heavenly kingdom. The Baptism of water cannot of itself effect that which it signifies, but as it is a sign appointed by divine wisdom to show us our need of heavenly cleansing, so it is also a seal whereby God confirms to all who are baptized His promise to bestow it; assuring them thereby of His goodwill and love, ingrafting them into the body of Christ, receiving them into His household, and giving them a covenant right to look to Him as their Father, and to expect through faith all the blessings of salvation." These words, drawn from the old language of the Reformation and Westminster documents, represent a remarkable combination of those two traditions that belong to the foundation and substance of the whole Church of Scotland. The teaching and the form contained in this order for the administration of Baptism remained substantially the same for the remaining editions, but it is worth noting that, in spite of the introduction of certain 'Anglican' elements in the sixth edition (against the protests of Sprott, Leishman, and others), the conception of grace as something that can be channelled through the ordinances of the Church tended to disappear, and is much less evident than in the writings of some of the theologians, in the Free Church as well as in the Church of Scotland.

Altogether the *Euchologion* or *A Book of Common Order* went through ten editions and sold over twenty thousand copies within fifty years, which indicates the measure of its use and influence in the Church of Scotland. This may also explain why the Church itself was so late in producing its own Service Book, *Prayers for Divine Service*, authorized by the General Assembly in 1923. Along with the *Book of Common Order*, 1928, of the United Free Church, this reflects the influence of the more superficial liberal theology of the post-war period. While the language of the *Larger Catechism* describing Baptism is carried over in the preamble, and the language of the *Directory of Public Worship* is reflected in the prayers, the

emphasis falls upon Baptism as an act of dedication—*i.e.*, upon an *act of man* towards God rather than upon God's seal of His own act of love and grace towards man. The Apostles' Creed is used, as it had been in both the Reformation and Westminster traditions (until it tended to be dropped out during the period of Episcopalian predominance in the late seventeenth century). The part of the service closest to the Reformation tradition is found in the prayer after Baptism: "We give Thee most hearty thanks and praise, most merciful Father, that Thou hast been pleased to receive *this child* into Thy Church; and we beseech Thee that *he*, being ingrafted into Christ the true Vine, may receive out of His fulness and evermore abide in Him. Like the Holy Child, may he grow in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. Suffer him not at any time to fall away from Thee, but grant that, being brought up with faithful Christian training, he may embrace Christ as his Saviour, and that with true and earnest faith he may take upon himself the vows now taken in his name, and come to His holy Table. Grant that he may witness a good confession, that he may be of use to Thy Church and in the world, and that, persevering unto the end, he may obtain the full victory of faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

## 5. THE REUNITED CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

During the last four hundred years the Church has again and again turned back to the teaching of the Reformers and to that of the Westminster Standards when seeking to clarify its mind and build itself up in the faith. This clearly happened when Presbyterianism was restored in 1690, but it also happened during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the last hundred years exhaustive study has been given to doctrine and worship in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. This was done at a time of unparalleled activity in historical and Biblical studies. The result was to drive the Church, in all its branches, steadily back upon the basic doctrines. This has been even more marked since the reunion of 1929. The coming together of the different branches of the Church has led to a searching of their various traditions, an examination of them in the light of Biblical studies, and a bringing together of their permanent contributions in the light of the Reformed Faith. The result is that the Church of Scotland is growing steadily in its fresh understanding of the historic doctrines of the faith, and of the place of worship and mission in the redeemed life of the people of God.

In the *Book of Common Order* (1940) we see a gathering together of the various strands of our Scottish tradition: the theological teaching of men like J. S. Candlish and H. R. Mackintosh from the Free Church side, the theological emphasis upon worship of men like H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick from the Established Church, the Christological emphases of the Secession tradition, the missionary orientation of men in each part of the divided Church, and not least the Biblical theology of men like William Milligan, A. B. Davidson, James Denney, H. A. A. Kennedy, and William Manson.

While forward steps have been taken in the sphere of worship, the old tensions (*a*) between the Christological theology of our Reformers and the forensic tendencies of the Westminster divines, and (*b*) between hyper-Calvinists and semi-Pelagian moralists, are still with us. The most clearly marked division is that between those who value the richness of our Reformation tradition and those who still retain the attitudes of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. Many of the latter have not themselves had the Biblical, doctrinal, and catechetical teaching of earlier times;

they are more concerned with "religion" than with the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and are more interested in Church organizations than in prayer and public worship. Yet this situation is changing. There are to-day signs of a real hunger for Biblical teaching, for doctrinal substance, for informed worship, and for instructed evangelism. As a result of this the old tensions are again appearing, and it is unfortunate that the only tools which many people have with which to interpret what is set before them are superficial humanistic and moralistic ideas derived from the Renaissance rather than from the Reformation.

It is in this setting that the sacraments have come under inquiry. James Denney once said, "Both the sacraments are forms into which we may put as much of the Gospel as they will carry, and St Paul, for his part, practically puts the whole of his Gospel into each" (*The Death of Christ*, p. 137). It is in the sacraments that worship, doctrine, action, and evangelism all converge. It is therefore natural that the tensions in Scottish Church history should be so acute at this focal point. This means that the problems raised for us to-day by the sacraments can only be answered through a deeper understanding of the Gospel, for it is in the Gospel, and not in themselves that the sacraments have their meaning. It is in Christ that the sacraments have their substance. Only through the evangelical doctrines of Christ's Incarnation and Atonement can we resolve our tensions, and set forth a true and faithful doctrine of Baptism adequate to guide our worship, instruction, and evangelism.

### III. THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND BAPTIST TEACHING

The Declaration of Principle in the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland states the basis of that union to be:—

- "(1) That the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty to interpret and administer His Laws.
- (2) That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again in the third day.'
- (3) That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelization of the world."

(Quoted in H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, p. 90 f.)

Like the Church of Scotland, the Baptists look to Scripture for the supreme rule of faith and life, and speak of "the supremacy of the New Testament in all matters of the Church's faith" (H. Cook, *What Baptists Stand For*, p. 13). This Commission has already given careful study to the relevant Biblical material. For the detailed discussion reference should be made to the revised form of the Commission's 1955 Report, now published under the title, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*.

A second point arising from paragraph (1) of the Declaration quoted above must be noted. This relates to the liberty of each Church. Baptists hold to "the principle of the freedom of the individual Church under

Christ" (Reply to the Lambeth Appeal by Baptist Union, 1926. Printed in H. Cook, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-181). The Baptist Union, through its Assembly, could come to a majority decision, but this would not be binding upon the individual Churches that make up the Union. There is no single universally binding expression of the Baptist standpoint. Indeed the act of "Baptism by immersion takes the place amongst Baptists of a formal Creed" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Baptist Principles*, p. 29). Thus, while Baptist literature is immense and in some ways repetitive (Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, p. 8), it also contains a great variety of opinions, not a few of which are at variance with one another. Some instances of this may be noted :

While paragraph (2) of the Declaration refers to immersion, and some would hold this to be essential, it was in fact affusion which was practised by the first English Baptists, and "anyone who thinks that Baptists then or now are primarily contending for the mode of immersion, does not really know what their faith is" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Life and Faith*, p. 4).

Some Baptists practise "closed" Church membership and "closed" communion, others practise "open" membership and "open" communion, and others again "closed" membership but "open" communion, so that people may be welcomed to sit at the Lord's Table who would be refused membership in the Church (H. Wheeler Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 119 f.; E. A. Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, p. 74).

Yet again there have been differences in the practice of Baptist Churches with regard to the infants and young children of their members. There has been an "increasing introduction of 'Dedication Services' in connexion with the Church" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Life and Faith*, p. 89). Thus, having deprived the children of believers of what we regard as their Biblical due of Baptism, many Baptists have come to replace this with services "at which infants are presented, the duties, privileges and responsibilities of parents emphasized, and the prayers of the Church offered for children and parents" (Reply to Lambeth Appeal). Other Baptists deny that there is any Biblical warrant for this practice, and assert that "a child cannot be dedicated to God's service until the child is old enough to dedicate itself" (Stalker).

Beyond these and other divergencies of view there is, of course, a very substantial agreement among Baptists; and we can acknowledge also an area of agreement with the Church of Scotland. We could not find serious fault with such a statement as this, as far as it goes :—

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, or dipped, a sign of our entrance into the covenant of grace, and ingrafting into the body of Christ, which is His Church; and of remission of sin in the blood of Christ, and of our fellowship in His death and resurrection, and of our living, or rising to newness of life.

(Article xxviii., *The Doctrine of Baptism*. Baptist World Alliance, 1951, reaffirming the Baptist Articles of 1678.)

The influence of the *Westminster Confession*, to which this statement approximates closely, was widespread, especially amongst the Particular Baptists, and often, except where congregational independence, or believer's Baptism were involved, Baptist variations from it were "mainly verbal" (E. A. Payne, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 f., 64). Nevertheless certain very fundamental differences are present. It is not to be supposed that we are in general agreement, *e.g.*, about the significance of the Baptism of adults, differing

only as to whether sufficient grounds can be adduced for extending Baptism to include infants. The nature of our divergence is more serious.

### 1. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

While their teaching and practice as regards Baptism have given the Baptists their name, it is in fact not upon the nature of Baptism but upon the nature of the Church that their fundamental difference from the Church of Scotland and other branches of the Catholic Church rests. This is clearly recognized by leading Baptists. "Baptism is not in fact primary; it is always derivative, and depends for its meaning on the conception of the Church which lies behind it" (H. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 13). Cook also quotes the remark of W. T. Whitley: "The distinctive feature about the Baptists is their doctrine of the Church" (*ib.*). "Believers' Baptism . . . carries with it an unmistakable definition of the Church to which it is the door of entrance" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Baptist Principles*, p. 25).

In reply to the Lambeth Appeal the Baptist Union said: "We believe in the Catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded" (Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 178). The same point is made by Wheeler Robinson: "The Church is a spiritual society composed of converted men who acknowledge the supreme Lordship of Christ" (*Baptist Principles*, p. 25); and by Cook himself: "The Church is a society of believers and of believers only, and entrance into it is conditioned by the free acceptance of God's grace in Christ" (*What Baptists Believe*, p. 39).

This view of the Church is defended on the ground that, just as Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant to take the place of the Old, so He created a New Israel, to supersede the one which had been rejected, and this New Israel was to be gathered upon a totally different principle from that upon which the Old Israel had been established. Men and women were no longer to be numbered in the *ecclesia* of God because of birth into a particular nation to which the promises of the covenant had been given. They now became members of the *ecclesia* solely by virtue of their personal faith in Jesus Christ, and their individual response to His call. Jesus' saying about the rock upon which His Church is to be built refers to this establishment of the Church upon a new principle, whereby it is the community of those only who have personal faith in Him (cf. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 38).

It is often claimed by Baptists that there is an adumbration of this view of the Church in the Old Testament conception of the remnant, which is held to denote the company of true believers within the covenant people, sealed with the sign of circumcision (cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Life and Faith*, p. 12 f.). In this way the Baptists not only identify the Church with the remnant, but they turn the remnant into a *visible institution*, which is never done either in the Old Testament or the New Testament. In other words, the Baptists conceive it as "their duty to create a visible Church of perfect purity" (cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Baptist Principles*, p. 7): and this is done, not by defining the Church primarily by reference to Christ, and the sign of Baptism which He has given to seal the proclamation of what He has done, but rather by defining it with reference to those who claim to be born again, and to Baptism as the outward expression of this experience. In the Reformed tradition the Church is defined by a double reference. This is primarily to Christ and what He has done antecedent to our faith and experience, and secondarily to the faithful appropriation of the Gospel by believers. The Church is therefore recognized as having a double frontier, marked out by the two sacraments: Baptism being the sacramental sign and seal of what Christ has once and for all done for the Church, grounding it in Himself, and the Lord's Supper being the sacramental sign and seal of all who faithfully and continually

have communion with Him. Moreover the Reformed Church also acknowledges that there is still another reference by which the Church is to be defined, namely election. Therefore the Church has a third frontier, known only to God, and it is this frontier which defines what the Bible calls the remnant. In Baptist doctrine, however, there is a strong tendency to make believer's Baptism the sole frontier of the perfect visible Church, to be recognized by God and men, though they would not go so far as to say that Baptism is necessary for salvation.

## 2. THE REJECTION OF INFANT BAPTISM

This follows, not primarily as a deduction from the evidence of the New Testament, though this is adduced in its support, but chiefly as a consequence of the doctrine of the Church as restricted to the community of believers. Infants cannot belong to the Church, as so defined, though Baptists claim for them a place in what they call "the Christian community" (H. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 42). Undoubtedly the Lord welcomed children and encouraged them to come, but He nowhere suggested that they were already by His reception of them made members of His Church, nor did He urge that they should be baptized. Hence to give them Baptism is to violate the inward coherence of the Gospel principle, and to make a sacrament of grace into something that savours of magic (H. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 44). The New Covenant, unlike the Old Covenant, leaves the children outside. A pamphlet which had a large circulation in Scotland in the middle of last century asserted that children have no claim to religious ordinances, whether they have believing parents or not. A child of a savage, an idolater, a Muhammedan, or an infidel has as much right to Baptism as the child of the holiest man in the world (*The Origin, Claims and Antiquity of The Baptists*). The Reply to the Lambeth Appeal states: "In our judgement, the Baptism of infants incapable of offering a personal confession of faith subverts the conception of the Church as the fellowship of believers. We recognize that those of whom Jesus said, 'of such is the kingdom of heaven' belong to God and no rite is needed to bring them into relation with Him" (Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 179). Other Baptists would add that the Gospel incident does not prove that children should be baptized, but rather that 'His kingdom is wider than His Church.' For the Commission's view of the correct interpretation of this passage reference should be made to *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*, p. 48 f.

## 3. SOME COMMENTS

The nature of the Church, as defined by the Baptists, necessarily excludes the Baptism of infants, but we cannot agree that this conception of the Church is in the Scriptures.

The New Testament does not separate the Church of the Old Testament from the Church of the New Testament, but regards the Church, whether "in the wilderness" (Aets vii. 38), or under the New Testament, as essentially the same Church of God. The difference made by Jesus was not a difference of foundation principles, but a fulfilment of what had hitherto been implicit. We cannot regard as Biblically adequate any interpretation which seems to drive a wedge between Old and New Testaments, making the former a repository of superseded ideas, and treating the Old Covenant and its sacraments as irrelevant for the understanding of the New Covenant (cf. *Westminster Confession*, xxvii. 5; *Scots Confession*, v.; xvi.).

The Church in the New Testament is the fulfilment in Jesus Christ of the Church in the Old Testament—a more comprehensive fulfilment in that now the Gentiles also can become children of Abraham. But if the children of the covenant people, who were embraced by the Old Covenant,

are now to be excluded, and to be regarded as on a level with the children of unbelievers, the New Covenant would thereby be made less comprehensive than the Old, and the grace of God in it would be more restricted than in the Old.

We are bound to be suspicious of the claim to scriptural authority for any doctrine which makes Baptism less significant than circumcision. It can mean no less. The son of Jewish parents was at birth in a different relationship to God from the children of Gentiles. Of this difference his circumcision was the seal. It is no less true that when God to-day sends a child into the home of believing people, that child, from the first, stands in a different relation to God from the child of pagans. Both children are born into a world in which Jesus has already been incarnate, crucified, and raised from the dead, but they do not stand in precisely the same relation towards these great events, since the one child is linked up, through his believing parents, with this divine action and all that flows from it, in a way that is not true of the other child. The Biblical emphasis on family unity, expressed in the Old Testament by circumcision, and in the New Testament by infant Baptism, is set aside by the Baptists, for whom all relationships are reduced to terms of the individual and his conscious acts of cognition and volition.

With this emphasis upon rational self-consciousness, which characterizes the Baptist approach, and the definition of the Church in a way which necessarily excludes those who are not yet of an age to exercise such self-consciousness, original sin becomes a very difficult problem. Baptists often deny original guilt, and interpret original sin as an infection of evil picked up by the child after its birth. If original sin is taken seriously and the fiction of sin without guilt is repudiated, then the problem is acute. This has been well put by the Rev. G. J. M. Pearce in a recent number of *The Baptist Times* :—

“ If, accepting the doctrine of original sin, we believe that a child born into a sinful race is involved in its doom ; and if as Baptists, we also believe that salvation depends on God’s grace received through personal faith, how do we regard the spiritual status of the child in the interval between his birth and his regeneration in Christ ? He is born into the world of sin and death, and not yet born again. If we take original sin seriously, he is in deadly peril ; but that we do not really believe.

Perhaps the solution of the problem is that the grace of God working through Christian training in home, Sunday School, and public worship, counteracts the effects of original sin and predisposes him to personal faith. But it cannot reverse God’s judgement, and it implies, moreover, that a child can receive some of the blessings of the Divine covenant through the faith of others rather than his own. Must we, after all, revise or abandon the doctrine of original sin ? It fits in well with infant Baptism, but it makes difficulties for Baptists. Could it be that infant Baptism, for all its errors, points to truth we have not noticed, or have neglected ? ”

(*The Baptist Times*, Aug. 28, 1958.)

In answer to this frank statement, three things may be said :—

(i) Baptists, who allow that original sin infects children right from birth, or even immediately after it, long before they have come to the age of responsibility or discretion, and who yet deny that God’s grace can operate effectively towards them until they become “ adult sinners,” and can fully understand and personally appropriate it, are in the strange position of making God’s grace less effective than original sin.

(ii) It is Christ Himself who stands in for the child. This is the real meaning of grace. He loved him, and died for him, and made him His own before the child was able to commit himself to Christ. It is therefore through "the faith of Jesus Christ" alone that God's blessings are bestowed upon the child; it is therefore the faith or faithfulness of Christ alone which stands in any vicarious relation to the child, not the faith or faithfulness of the parents or of the Church.

(iii) Baptism is the sacrament of what Christ has already done for the child, antecedent to the rise of his faith, or to any possibility of response on his part, and hence Baptism is the seal He has attached to His Word, which declares and bestows His grace. It is not the seal of the subsequent experience of the receiver. It is precisely by making Baptism a sacrament of conscious inward experience rather than a sacrament of the Gospel that the Baptists create such insuperable problems for themselves.

#### 4. THE NATURE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

If the Baptist claims as regards the nature of the Church and the part of the children of believers in it are un-scriptural, it is also open to question whether in fact the ceremony of adult Baptism, as used by Baptists, is wholly true to Biblical doctrine, or whether the atmosphere of rationalism and intellectualism which connects the Baptists with the Renaissance even more than with the Reformation, has not produced here also a shift of emphasis.

Part of the contribution of John the Baptist was that he made Baptism something *done to people*, in contrast to previous Baptisms which had been *done by them*; and it is this which is the starting-point of New Testament Baptism. For Baptists, however, the emphasis remains largely pre-Johannine—concerned with Baptism still as something *done by the baptized*, though other aspects may at times be mentioned. It can on occasion go so far as to become self-Baptism, as in the case of the se-baptist John Smyth in 1609 (H. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 94), but even where it does not reach to such extravagances, the stress is continually laid upon the human act, the human faith, the human centre of the rite.

The heads of instruction in the significance of the ordinance of Baptism given in the *Minister's Manual* are very illuminating. It is to be explained as:—

- “(a) An act of obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles :
- (b) A distinctive act in which the believer openly confesses his faith in God, and his desire to give his life in the service of Christ who gave Himself for him :
- (c) An act in which he joins himself to the company of all who, receiving God's grace in Christ have submitted themselves to His will :
- (d) An imitation of Christ, Who, though He knew no sin, yet in Baptism made Himself one with them who sought to do the will of God, and was buried in the waters of the Jordan :
- (e) The declaration, according with New Testament precept and practice, that the believer enters into new gifts of grace, since Baptism in water is an outward and visible sign and seal of the inward and invisible grace of Baptism into Jesus Christ :
- (f) A declaration in symbol, for a believer's Baptism by immersion, tells a story, that the candidate, being buried with Christ, has put away the life of sin and selfishness, renouncing 'the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all the covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh,' and has risen

being born anew through God's regenerating power, to the life that is hidden with Christ in God, to keep His will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life."

(*A Minister's Manual*, arranged by M. F. Aubrey, with the co-operation in the 2nd edition of Dr F. Townley Lord and Dr Hugh Martin, p. 29 f.)

Explained in these terms, Baptism has become an almost completely man-centred act, in which the significant thing is what the believer does to make visible and external certain internal decisions and experiences of his own. No doubt for many Baptists this does not exhaust the meaning of the rite, and they would vehemently maintain that there is another side to it; yet this emphasis keeps occurring in Baptist literature, as such statements as the following indicate: "As we set forth His death in the Lord's Supper, so we should set forth our death, in and with Him, in the Act of Baptism" (F. B. Meyer, *Seven Reasons for Believer's Baptism*, p. 10 f.). "Baptism expresses . . . the believer's acceptance of all that is involved in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. . . . The believer personally identifies himself with Christ. . . . Baptism is the door by which the believer enters the Church, the society of those who have already pledged themselves. . . . The candidate is sustained by the prayers of those who count him as one of themselves" (H. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 72 f.).

The man-centred emphasis is clear. Baptism under such conditions may well be a very solemn season of self-dedication, but is it in fact New Testament Baptism? We can hardly think so.

H. Wheeler Robinson has clearly recognized the difference in emphasis. After noting that the common element in Presbyterian, Anglican, and other interpretations is passivity—"it is throughout something done to, nothing done by the baptized"—he proceeds to contrast the Baptist position as "not simply a new phase of this succession of interpretations; it stands outside of them all as *the only Baptism which is strictly and primarily an ethical act on the part of the baptized*" (*Life and Faith*, p. 83). This may be an accurate statement of the Baptist rite as understood by many Baptists, but it is not an accurate description of Baptism as it appears in Scripture. It has indeed connexions with the New Testament sacrament, but it now appears, stripped of its New Testament significance, and transformed into an act of personal devotion and dedication in which it is the believer's thoughts, emotions and intentions which are the significant things. It may still be a sign of what man renders to God; it has ceased to be a seal of what God has bestowed upon man. The rite has lost its essential Christocentric character, and the action of Christ in the sacrament has disappeared.

## 5. REDEMPTION AND SALVATION

When thoughtful Baptists probe behind their disagreements with the other evangelical Churches in regard to believer's Baptism, they frequently have recourse to a sharp distinction between *redemption* and *salvation*. While *redemption* is held to refer to what has already taken place once for all, in the finished work of Christ, *salvation* is held to refer to the saving experience of the individual who appropriates redemption as it is offered to him in the preaching of the Gospel. It is only by this appropriation—*i.e.*, in personal decision, regeneration, or conversion—that a man is really saved, and only then does redemption become real and true for him.

*Redemption* thus refers to the objective work of Christ, and *salvation* refers to the subjective truth in the individual's experience of Christ. While redemption is proclaimed as a finished work, salvation is regarded as conditional upon personal experience in conversion. With this radical distinction, Baptism comes to be regarded, not as the sign and seal of

the Gospel of redemption, but as the sacramental or symbolic expression of the individual's own state as a saved, or converted person.

It is difficult for us in the Church of Scotland to blame the Baptists for adopting this unbiblical distinction between redemption and salvation, for it derives from the false distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace in our own Federal Theology. When the doctrine of election was given up, the truth of salvation was found, not in the objective reality of the act of God in Christ, but in the subjective experience of conversion. At the same time the Biblical idea of a covenant was replaced by the idea of a mutual contract, voluntarily entered into by two parties. This led to the preaching of salvation as conditioned by man's act, and ultimately dependent upon him. This error of the Baptists drives us back upon the Biblical teaching that Baptism is a sacrament of the Gospel, a sign and seal of God's saving act in Jesus Christ, which is already completed *in Christ* (not only from the side of God towards man, but also from the side of man towards God), and which is freely offered to men in the Gospel.

## 6. THE NATURE OF REGENERATION

In line with the last distinction, Baptists tend either to speak of two regenerations—regeneration (*palingenesia*) which took place in Christ, and the regeneration which takes place in the experience of the believer—or else, and this is the more common case, to limit regeneration to the subjective experience of the believer, in whose nature and personality it is interpreted basically as a moral and psychological event. In other words regeneration is held to be a subjective state of inward moral renewal.

This view derives from the mediæval Roman subjectivism out of which the Anabaptist movement originally sprang, but whereas in Roman piety this regeneration was thought of as operating through sacramental grace, giving something in addition to what Christ had already done once and for all on our behalf, in Baptist and Arminian teaching it is thought of as taking place through conversion. It is at this point that the sharpest difference between the Biblical teaching of the Reformed Church and the teaching of the Baptists is most apparent. For the Reformed Church, regeneration is the renewal of our humanity in Christ, in which we are given to share, so that *in Christ* we are new creatures. For Baptists, regeneration is that new and additional experience which each individual must have *in himself* before he is saved. The result is that in the Baptist Church the focus of attention is not so much upon the mighty acts of our salvation in Christ as upon the individual's *experience* of conversion—*i.e.*, upon an all-important experience of dying and rising again in the likeness of Christ. This is the experimental "truth" that is made so prominent by the rigid emphasis upon believer's Baptism.

## 7. THE MEANING OF A SACRAMENT

Again in line with their origins in mediæval Roman piety, Baptists lay great stress upon a distinction between the inward and the outward experience; but whereas in Romanism the focus of attention by the masses was upon the outward sacramental institution, and thus upon a false objectivity, for mediæval mystics, Anabaptists, and modern Baptists, the emphasis is upon the inwardness or spirituality of religious experience. It is essentially in reaction to the false objectivity that the Baptist view of the sacrament arises, for it is regarded as the outward expression, or symbol, of an inward moral and spiritual state. In the nature of the case, Baptism as the outward seal of inward conversion is not regarded as valid unless there actually is that subjective experience of conversion. This inward experience is regarded as the 'truth' or 'reality' of Baptism. This was the very view which Luther and Calvin opposed in their doctrine

of justification by grace alone in Christ, but which came, through the renaissance stress upon the autonomy of the human reason in the individual, and through Anabaptist 'spirituality' so to infect Protestantism that in the nineteenth century it became the great boast of neo-Protestantism that truth is found in the religious personality, in religious *inwardness*, and *immediacy*. The Baptist Church thus enshrines, more than any other Church, the great error of modernism, which finds the truth of salvation in the religious subject himself, and which identifies the Holy Spirit with man's own spiritual experiences. This modernist and subjectivist theory is constantly being inhibited by the fact that Baptists are in intention Biblical Christians; but in the great Baptists, like Wheeler Robinson, we see most clearly how this absorption of the Christological reality in the subjective experience results in the identification of the inward moral and spiritual states of the believer with what is called the pneumatological. It is this denial of the objective reality of the Holy Spirit as meaning for us anything more than our subjective knowledge of God that makes it so difficult for them to appreciate the gift of the Holy Spirit promised and sealed to infants at their Baptism (cf. D. S. Cairns, *sup.*, p. 7). It is not surprising that believer's Baptism, which entails this subjectivizing of the Holy Spirit, is essentially a modern phenomenon (first found in 1140 A.D. See 1957 Report, p. 7), for it is bound up with the "modern" outlook of renaissance and "spiritualistic" man. It is just because it has such deep roots in this modern subjectivism that it is so hard to show those who maintain it what the Biblical conception of the *Gospel of salvation, of new birth in Christ, and of justification by faith* really is.

#### 8. THE PLACE OF DECISION

Although the New Testament nowhere speaks of decision, it does call us to repent and follow Christ, and summons us to the obedience of faith. Baptists and Arminians have seized upon this element of 'decision,' and have so stressed it that everything, in fact ultimately the full reality of salvation, depends upon it. This is again essentially a modernist emphasis, and it is directly out of it that there has arisen the idea that we are saved through existential decision, and self-understanding—an idea which is menacing the very foundations of the Gospel in our generation.

In the teaching of the New Testament, the great decision has already been taken by God in Jesus Christ, for in Christ God has already laid hold upon us, while the account and response which sinful man is called to give to the Holy God has already been rendered in the obedient life and death of Jesus Christ, so that He wholly stands in for us through His vicarious life and death. The Gospel announces to us this amazing Good News, and calls upon us to throw in our lot with Christ in thankfulness, joy, and obedience. This call for decision is a call to rely upon the prior decision which Christ has already taken, and which is announced to us as a finished work in the Word of the Gospel. There is nothing that we can do, by decision, or faith, or repentance, or obedience which can add one iota to the finished work of Christ. Therefore we are not called to faith and decision in such a way that everything ultimately depends upon our faith and our decision, for this would mean that faith and decision become, in the last analysis, saving acts, or 'works' of salvation. Nowhere in the New Testament is faith, or decision, spoken of as that which constitutes a man a forgiven being, or a Christian. If it were, we could only 'believe in' Christ with the ulterior motive of using belief to save ourselves. This is the opposite of the Gospel. It is precisely because the Gospel announces to us the Good News that Christ has already intervened on our behalf, and has already given to God an account in our stead, with which God is well pleased, that we can really believe and are free to make a true

and sincere decision without the ulterior motive of using it as a 'saving work.' No doubt this is difficult for the natural man to understand, as St Paul found, and as, centuries later, Luther found, when they were accused of antinomianism because they preached the Gospel of justification by grace alone. The case is not one whit different when we use the modern language of decision. Here the memorable words of the late H. R. Mac-kintosh are in place: "Unless your preaching has a suspicion of antinomianism about it, you can be sure it is not the Gospel."

All this means that Baptism is not the sacrament of man's decision, but the sacrament of the saving decision which Christ has already made on our behalf, and which is announced to us in the word of the Gospel. It is for this reason that Baptism is administered as a seal to the word of promise in the Gospel, as a seal to the Good News announced in the *kerugma*, and never as a seal to the response or to the decision of man. This is the Biblical doctrine of Baptism, which Baptists greatly misrepresent when they insist that Baptism is the outward sign of the decision of the believer, or the outward symbol of the inward and spiritual state of his soul. While we cannot but welcome the evangelical zeal of our Baptist brethren, their call for sincere Christian decision and commitment, and their summons to men and women to repentance and conversion, we cannot agree that Baptism is the sacrament given to be the sign of man's act, or man's decision, or man's spiritual experience. We cannot do this because we really believe in the Good News announced to us in the New Testament, and sealed to us in Baptism, that the whole of our salvation depends upon Jesus Christ, and that it is in Him alone that we are new creatures. Therefore we do not look within ourselves—into our own subjective experience—to find the truth of our salvation. We do not even look to our own faith and decision, but in faith look away from ourselves to Jesus Christ, who is both the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

*In name of the Commission,*

THOMAS F. TORRANCE, *Convener.*

JOHN HERON, *Secretary.*

## PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive the Interim Report, which completes the preliminary work of the Commission, and thank its members, and especially the Convener and the Secretary for their diligence.

2. The General Assembly instruct that a copy of the Interim Report be sent to all ministers and Presbytery elders, and copies as may be desired to the four Theological Colleges. The General Assembly also direct that sufficient copies of the Interim Report be made available for sale through the Church of Scotland Bookshops.

3. The General Assembly instruct Presbyteries to appoint a day for special conference upon the Interim Report, and to send their comments and suggestions to the Secretary of the Commission by 30th November 1959.

4. The General Assembly commend the Commission to the guidance of Almighty God in their further labours.



