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The Church of Scotland

**REPORT**

**OF THE**

**SPECIAL COMMISSION ON BAPTISM**

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**MAY 1960**

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## CONTENTS

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	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	3
1. Reports from Presbyteries . . . . .	3
2. Baptism cannot be isolated . . . . .	3
3. Primary Emphases . . . . .	3
4. The Subordinate Standards . . . . .	4
5. The Language of the Church . . . . .	5
6. The Judgment of the Presbyteries . . . . .	6
7. Practical Questions . . . . .	6
PART I. THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM . . . . .	7
1. Baptism and the Gospel . . . . .	7
2. Tho Baptism of the Individual . . . . .	8
3. Baptism as the Source of New Relationships . . . . .	9
4. Baptism and Faith . . . . .	10
5. Baptism--in Time and for Eternity . . . . .	10
6. The Administration of Baptism . . . . .	11
Appendix to Part I-- The Biblical Doctrine and Traditional Terminology . . . . .	11
PART II. A FORM OF INSTRUCTION ABOUT BAPTISM . . . . .	12
What is Baptism ? . . . . .	12
Who Acts in Baptism ? . . . . .	13
What Happens in Baptism ? . . . . .	13
What is the Relation of Baptism to the Church ? . . . . .	13
To Whom should Baptism be Administered ? . . . . .	14
What is the Right Use of Baptism ? . . . . .	14
Why do we call Baptism a Sacrament or Means of Grace ? . . . . .	15

# REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. REPORTS FROM PRESBYTERIES

The Commission wishes to thank the General Assembly for sending its Interim Reports down to Presbyteries year by year for their discussion and comment. This has been an invaluable help to the Commission, whose remit included "the stimulation and guidance of such study throughout the Church as may lead to the attainment of a common mind." The reports from the Presbyteries have shown a steady growth towards a common mind in the Church. Of the fifty-six Presbyteries whose comments on last year's Interim Report have been received by the Commission, only three have been much out of line with the rest. This has been most encouraging to the Commission which has done its best to profit from the volume of discussion in the Church, and to take account of the many valuable suggestions made to it.

In preparing this Report the Commission has acceded to requests from Presbyteries in three chief respects :—

- (a) It has presented a preliminary draft of the Doctrinal Statement for discussion by the Presbyteries before it is sent down, if the Assembly so determine, under the Barrier Act.
- (b) It has taken into account, as far as it could, many points which Presbyteries have asked to be included in the Statement, though this has meant that the latter has had to be longer than the Commission had intended.
- (c) It has also prepared for consideration by the Assembly and Presbyteries "A Form of Instruction about Baptism" such as might, if approved by the Church, be put into the hands of Ministers, Elders, and teachers to guide them in their teaching and work.

### 2. BAPTISM CANNOT BE ISOLATED

Perhaps the chief difficulty in the way of giving a brief statement on Baptism is that it cannot be isolated from the whole proclamation of the Gospel, or from other specific doctrines such as those of the Lord's Supper and the Church. Many Presbyteries have again and again asked the Commission to prepare a statement on the doctrine of the Church. To do so would be to go beyond its remit, but the Commission has tried to help these Presbyteries by including as much as possible on the doctrine of the Church in the relevant sections of its statement of the doctrine of Baptism. At the same time the Commission wishes to state its conviction that the Church as a whole needs to have a deeper understanding of the doctrines of Christ and His Church, of the Atonement, and of the Lord's Supper, if a common mind on Baptism is to be firmly grounded.

### 3. PRIMARY EMPHASES

The history of the doctrine of Baptism has shown to the Commission that certain changes in emphasis have, in the past, contributed to serious misunderstandings of Baptism, and have brought difficulty and confusion into its administration in the life of the Church. The changes that took

place in the history of the Church of Scotland since the Reformation and the problems they created were carefully noted in the Interim Reports of 1958 and 1959. In the present Report the Commission wishes to direct the attention of the Church to the primary emphases found in the New Testament and in the teaching of the Reformers.

- (a) Baptism is essentially an evangelical sacrament. It is part of the preaching of the Gospel. The primary thing about Baptism is its direct relation to Christ, for in Baptism Christ is personally and immediately present and active, through His Word and Spirit, bringing us into union with Himself.
- (b) Major stress has to be laid upon God's prevenient act of Grace and Election *in Christ* and His finished work—not upon some election behind the back of Christ and mediated through an institutional covenant, but upon Christ as Himself the Elect One, in whom alone we are loved and adopted by God as His Children through union with Christ.
- (c) Because emphasis is laid upon the finished work of Christ, Baptism tells us that we cannot do anything to save ourselves; but because the work of Christ is identical with His Person, Baptism tells us that Christ comes to each of us personally to take us into His hands and to ask of us trust and love. Therefore faith and a personal relationship to Christ are indispensable as belonging to the heart of the Baptismal relationship.

#### 4. THE SUBORDINATE STANDARDS

In the course of its work the Commission examined the teaching of the Church's Subordinate Standards (Westminster Confession, Catechisms, Directory, &c.) in the light of the Church's Primary Standard (The Holy Scriptures), and came to the following conclusions:—

- (a) The basic teaching of the Subordinate Standards is in accord with that of Holy Scripture, but the Subordinate Standards make use of certain unbiblical forms of thought and expression and these are misleading.
- (b) The teaching of the Scots Confession of 1560 and of the Reformation Catechisms is closer to the New Testament than that of the Westminster Standards.

Some difficult features about the Subordinate Standards may be noted:—

(i) They put forward a fixed notion of a "Sacrament" which is carefully defined, and then bring their conception of Baptism and the Lord's Supper into accord with it. The New Testament, however, nowhere speaks of "Sacraments," but only of Baptism and the Lord's Supper which it relates directly to Christ.

(ii) They speak of Baptism as a "means of grace," and so bring "grace" into the pragmatic realm of means and ends, where a result is to be achieved or an end attained. This implies a notion of "grace" as something that can be administered, and of Baptism as an institutional means of its administration. The New Testament, however, never relates Baptism to grace, and never thinks of grace or Baptism in terms of "means."

(iii) They speak of a sacrament as an outward and sensible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and so import into it a dualism which is absent from the teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Apart from the wrong notion of "grace" involved, this false dualism contributed to the separation of Baptism from immediate relation to Christ, and its

interpretation as a sacrament of entry into the visible society of the Church only.

(iv) Since the later Standards tend to think of Baptism as a means of grace under the administration of a visible institution, practical and legal rules for its administration become the chief concern rather than its evangelical doctrine and spiritual content.

(v) In the Westminster Standards the notion of Covenant has been changed to mean a contract into which two parties voluntarily enter on terms of mutuality. This was a serious departure from the Biblical notion of the Covenant of Grace, and led to a legalistic conception of the Sacrament, as well as to a false emphasis upon man's own act in salvation.

(vi) In the Reformation Standards connexion with Christ was central, and the sacraments were related immediately to union with Him, whereas in the Westminster Standards union with Christ was made to follow a forensic relation of justification, and was thought of in terms of infused sanctification. This contributed further to making Baptism into a legal transaction, leading to a moralistic notion of the Christian life. Failure to give union with Christ its central place impaired the doctrine of the Church. In the Shorter Catechism, for example, there is no question on the Church, and no separate place is given to the Holy Spirit.

(vii) In the Federal Theology, to which all the later Standards adhered, the Covenant was divided up. This led to a cleavage between Christ and the Church. In this way Baptism tended to lose its evangelical content and to be reduced to being the badge of the visible community.

(viii) The Westminster Standards were interpreted in such a way as to teach a doctrine of limited atonement, so that the privileges of the Gospel were regarded as restricted to members of the Covenant. This seriously inhibited the ministry of the Gospel to the heathen, or to those born outside the Covenant relationship. It also had its effect on Baptism which came to be regarded, not as part of the proclamation of the Gospel, but as the seal of the rights of the privileged only.

(ix) In the Scots Confession, Christ was held to be the Head of the Elect, and so election was thought of only as through Him, and through union with Him. In the later Standards an abstract doctrine of predestination was developed, and this took precedence over relation to Christ. The effect of this was to take the heart out of the sacraments, making them ultimately meaningless to many people.

(x) In none of the Subordinate Standards is adequate place given to the history of salvation, or to the whole historical life and ministry of Christ. This made it difficult to give Baptism its proper relation to the historical Jesus, or to see it in the light of His own Baptism in the Jordan and on the Cross, as is done in the New Testament itself.

## 5. THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH

The Church has two languages. Its *primary language* comes from the Bible. This is the permanent or stable language of the Church, and persists through all the changes and chances of history. Its *secondary language* comes from its tradition and is found in the Subordinate Standards of the Church, and also in the changing habits of thought and expression which are shaped by popular piety and habits of speech. This language constantly needs to be corrected and reformed by the Word of God.

The Commission is convinced that any account of Baptism that is to be of lasting value must be mainly in the primary and permanent language of the Church, but that in teaching and instruction use must also be made of the secondary language in order to speak directly to the questions that are in people's minds.

Therefore, in view of the requests of the Presbyteries, the Commission has resolved to set before the Church two different documents :—

(a) *A Doctrinal Statement*

In this document we seek to give a straightforward account of the doctrine of Baptism *in the Biblical way and in Biblical language*. In it we do not use the terms “sacrament,” “means of grace,” &c., except in the Appendix.

This we regard as the *primary statement*, which can stand by itself, and is intended to direct attention back to the Bible.

(b) *A Form of Instruction about Baptism*

In this document we set out in the form of questions and answers an account of Baptism in the secondary and changing language of the Church. This is intended to deal with questions and problems which arise out of traditional habits of thinking, and which are in people’s minds to-day.

This document is meant to serve as a manual of instruction, to be placed in the hands of Ministers, Elders, teachers, and others for their use and guidance.

## 6. THE JUDGMENT OF THE PRESBYTERIES

In sending these two different documents to the Presbyteries in draft form, the Commission is acceding to their specific request. The Commission will be greatly helped in its final work if Presbyteries can give their considered comments on the following questions :—

(a) *Content*

Is the *Doctrinal Statement* a faithful account of the Biblical teaching ?

This is the fundamental document, and its statements should be carefully sifted. All criticisms and suggestions will be welcomed and given the fullest consideration by the Commission.

(b) *Form*

Do the Presbyteries agree with this twofold form of presentation—namely, a *Doctrinal Statement* in the Biblical and primary language of the Church and a supplementary *Form of Instruction about Baptism* dealing with the chief questions and difficulties ?

(c) *Method*

Do the Presbyteries consider that this is a good way in which to guide the instruction of people, or is there a better way ?

Are there any other important questions that need to be considered in such a document ?

## 7. PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

Practical questions of law, administration, or liturgy do not strictly fall within the remit of the Commission, but they cannot be avoided altogether. Accordingly the Commission proposes to submit to the General Assembly next year the following :—

- (a) Suggestions which, if the Assembly so desire, may be passed to the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion regarding a revised preamble for the Orders for the Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism, and regarding the revision of the orders themselves,

- (b) Suggestions which, if the Assembly so desire, may be passed to the Committee on Religious Instruction of Youth, regarding the preparation of material for instructing the young about Baptism.
- (c) Proposals for the revision of the Act of Assembly, 1951, anent the Admission of Infants to Baptism arising out of the decisions of the Church regarding the doctrine of Baptism.

## PART I.—THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

### I. BAPTISM AND THE GOSPEL

Throughout the New Testament, Baptism is inseparably united to the preaching of the Gospel—the proclamation of the mighty acts of God for the salvation of men. The central fact about Baptism is its connexion with Christ and His whole saving work—His Birth, Baptism, Ministry, Sufferings, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

#### (a) *The Baptism of John*

All the Evangelists, when speaking of the beginning of the Gospel, direct us to John the Baptist who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord.

(i) John stood on the boundary between the Old Testament and the New Testament, proclaiming that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand, and that the Covenant promises made to Abraham were about to be fulfilled.

(ii) In his ministry the preaching of the Kingdom and Baptism were united. He sealed his preaching by a Baptism unto repentance for the remission of sins. John's preaching and Baptism looked for their fulfilment to the Messiah who would come to judge and redeem His people.

(iii) John was sent to baptize with water, but the Coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and thus fulfil the Messianic promise of the last days, when God would pour out His Spirit and inaugurate the new age. The meaning of John's Baptism did not lie in itself but in the One to whom he pointed—the Lamb of God who was to bear the sins of the world.

#### (b) *The Baptism of Jesus*

(i) Jesus submitted Himself to John's Baptism. Taking His place among those who came to be baptized by John, He humbled Himself and identified Himself with sinners in obedience to His Father's will that He should thus make righteousness available for "the many."

(ii) At the Baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended upon Him, and He heard the voice of the Father saying, "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." In this He was acknowledged as the anointed Son and the suffering Servant predicted in the Old Testament.

(iii) Jesus interpreted His whole life and ministry thereafter as the Baptism with which He was being baptized, and identified its fulfilment with His passion and death upon the Cross. As this end drew near He spoke of Himself as the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many, and in the Last Supper solemnly inaugurated the New Covenant in His Blood for the remission of sins. Thus "my Baptism" and "my Cup" both speak of His sacrificial life and death into which He was consecrated at the Jordan. In His death the complete solidarity of the one Righteous One with sinners, to which His Baptism by John pointed, was fulfilled.

(iv) At Jordan Jesus was consecrated by the anointing of the Spirit to be the King of the Messianic Kingdom. This was fulfilled with power in His resurrection, when the Father exalted Him as His Beloved Son and gave Him all power in heaven and earth. With this power He commissioned the Church and sent it forth to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them. (Matt. xxviii. 19 f.)

(c) *The Baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost*

(i) When Jesus lived on earth the life of an obedient Son, and died in sacrifice upon the Cross, it was not for His own sake but for ours. He did it for us men and for our salvation. In our humanity He received the Baptism meant for sinners. In our humanity He received the divine judgment upon sin. In our humanity He made atonement, and in our humanity rose again from the dead. When He died and rose again for us, we died and rose again in Him.

The New Testament relates this specifically to the Church as His Body. When Christ rose again that third day, the new Temple was raised up, the Church was built: and ever since then living stones have been built into it.

(ii) Jesus was baptized in the Jordan not for His own sake but for ours. In Him our humanity was anointed by the Spirit and consecrated in sonship to God. Thus the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost is the counterpart of the anointing of Christ by the Spirit at the Jordan. The same Spirit who descended upon Christ at the Baptism to abide with Him has, ever since Pentecost, been poured out upon the Church, and dwells in it as the Body of Christ. In this Baptism which is common to Christ and His Church we are given to share, so that in Christ we are consecrated for sonship to God and for mission to the world.

(iii) As Jesus was consecrated in His Baptism as Servant, and then had to endure His passion in a mission of obedience, so we also are consecrated in Baptism to a new life in Christ, and then have to fulfil it in a life of obedience, faith, service, and suffering witness for Christ's sake.

## 2. THE BAPTISM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The Baptism of the individual, in water and the Spirit, presupposes and rests upon the One Baptism of Christ and His Church.

(a) The Baptism of Jesus meant that He was consecrated as the Messiah; and that He, the Righteous One, became one with us, taking upon Himself our unrighteousness. Our Baptism means that we become one with Him, sharing in His righteousness, and that we are consecrated as members of the Messianic People.

(b) Because we are united to Christ, and are members of His Body, what happened to Him as the Head of the Body has happened to us also who are members of the Body. In Baptism it is Christ Himself who acts, and who unites us with Himself, so that we participate in His birth and life and death and resurrection. In Him we are born again; in Him we are clothed with a new obedience; in Him we are dead to sin; in Him we rise to newness of life and look for the resurrection of the body.

(c) Baptism, then, is not what the individual does, but what God has already done in Christ, and through His Spirit continues to do in and to the individual. "Not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit poured upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Tit. iii. 5-7.)

*We are baptized.* It is done to us in the Name of God, and we receive

it passively, for we cannot add to Christ's finished work. We must receive it "as little children," whatever our age may be, and as little children enter into His Kingdom of Grace. What is done to us is that we are ingrafted into Christ. We are therefore no longer our own, but must live a life of faith and love in Him.

(d) As the Baptism of Jesus included in itself all that was to follow, and was accomplished only in His death and resurrection, so our Baptism anticipates our entire life, death, and resurrection.

Through Baptism we are discipled into Christ, and are therefore summoned to a life of discipleship, in obedience to Him who has gone ahead of us, but who calls us to confess His Name while we wait for His return.

Baptism stands therefore at the very beginning of our life in Christ, as the source of all that follows upon earth, and as the pledge of what will be fulfilled and revealed in the Day of the Resurrection, when Christ will come again, and we shall see Him face to face, and be like Him.

### 3. BAPTISM AS THE SOURCE OF NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Baptism brings us into new relationships.

#### (a) *Baptism relates us to God as children to a Father*

(i) The mission of Jesus took place within the Covenant God made with Abraham, for He is the Seed of Abraham, the Heir of the Old Covenant who brings it to its fulfilment in the New. The Church of Jesus Christ, baptized into His Name, is the people of the New Covenant—the New Israel, and to it belong in Christ all the promises of the Old Covenant and of the New Covenant. "The promise is to you and to your children." (Acts ii. 39.)

(ii) In the New Covenant established in Jesus Christ, God wills to be the Father of all men, providing a means of its fulfilment in the sacrificial life and death of the Mediator. Thus God adopts us and our children to be His own, and through His Spirit makes us brothers and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, that we, like Him, may cry "Abba, Father."

(iii) The sign of the Covenant in the old form was Circumcision, which was a seal of promise. With the New Covenant a new sign was given, which was the seal of the fulfilment of the promise. This sign was Baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The outward form which the New Covenant takes is the community of the baptized: the inward form is the communion of the Spirit.

Into this inheritance we are initiated in Baptism. In continual renewal of our participation in it we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

#### (b) *Baptism relates us to Christ as members of His Body*

(i) Through the Spirit given in Baptism we participate in Jesus Christ. We share in His birth from above, His obedient life, His saving death and triumphant resurrection. We are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God.

(ii) Participation is twofold: Christ identifies Himself with us, and through the Spirit we are so united to Him that we become members of His Body. Our union with Him depends upon and grows out of His union with us.

(iii) Our participation in Christ is not confined to the moment when the rite is administered. In Baptism we are grafted into Christ that we may begin to grow in spiritual union with Him, through feeding on Him by the power of His Word and Spirit.

(iv) This participation is not a solitary event in separation from the fellowship of the Church. Through Baptism we are placed within the fellowship which the Church has with Him. Christ dwells in the baptized fellowship gathered into His Name. In and through this fellowship the life of the baptized is nourished and fashioned by the life of Christ.

#### 4. BAPTISM AND FAITH

Baptism and faith belong inseparably together.

(a) Baptism unites us with Christ in His faithfulness and obedience to the Father. In Christ, God has bound Himself to us and us to Himself before ever we can bind ourselves to Him. As an act done to us, Baptism tells us that it is not upon our faith, or our own faithfulness, that we rely, but upon Christ alone, and upon His faithfulness. Therefore Baptism lays down the solid and unshakeable foundation on which we are summoned to build our faith, and are given genuine freedom to believe and make our own personal decision for Christ.

(b) God's election or decision for man and man's response or decision for God are related to one another only through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Through Baptism into Him we are initiated into the new life of sonship in which we are committed to God, and in which we commit ourselves fully to God, relying utterly on His faithfulness. Therefore Baptism covenants us to a life of faith and obedience to the Father in Jesus Christ, and requires faith and obedience of us as long as we live. The necessity of faith for the baptized is in no way set aside or diminished by Baptism, but on the contrary is made even more urgent. Baptism does not bear fruit apart from faith, since to be without faith would be to repudiate God by refusing to rely on His faithfulness in Christ.

(c) The New Testament teaches us that faith is the gift of the Spirit, but it also teaches us that it is through faith that we may continue to receive the Spirit. Baptism is our initiation into a mutual relation of the Spirit and faith. In Baptism we are given the Spirit and are opened to new life and faith, but only through this faith may we enter into possession of the new life.

(d) The baptized are made free to love and trust God, and to find in that love and trust the way to grow continually in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that the baptized lead a sinless life. That would be to confuse Baptism and its future fulfilment. Rather do they lead a life of penitence and ever-renewed forgiveness, of watching and prayer and waiting upon God.

#### 5. BAPTISM—IN TIME AND FOR ETERNITY

In Baptism we are united to Christ, and become heirs of all the promises of God. Thus Baptism embraces the whole of life.

(a) In Baptism we are severed from the old stock of unregenerate human nature and grafted into Christ in order to share in His new human nature; we are translated out of the bondage and dominion of guilt and placed under the lordship of the crucified and risen Christ; we are cut off from the inheritance of the old Adam and become instead joint-heirs with Christ, the King and Head of the new creation. From being children of darkness and citizens of the world we are made children of light and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven in which sin is forgiven and grace abounds.

(b) In Baptism we are buried with Christ in His death, and our life in sin has found its judgment and its end. Therefore Baptism is administered once and only once, as an irrevocable seal of that finished work of Christ which sets our life on a wholly new foundation.

(c) From this new beginning Baptism looks forward to the End. We are sealed as the property of Christ, as members of the Covenant people, unto the day of redemption. For us, then, the final judgment has already been anticipated in justification, since we have received, in the gift of the Spirit, the earnest and pledge of resurrection into the New Creation.

(d) Baptism rests upon the finished work of Christ, and therefore our Baptism cannot be annulled by sin, but remains as the pledge of God's forgiveness for all who seek it by faith. By looking back to their Baptism as the seal and pledge of their salvation the children of the Church grow up to call God Father, to confess Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore when they come to years of understanding and responsibility and desire to draw near to the Lord's Table, they are to be admitted on the profession of their faith and with the prayer that the God of all grace, who gave them His Spirit in their Baptism, may establish them in His Covenant and confirm them by the same Spirit that nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ at His Table they may serve Him faithfully and joyfully in His Church and be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 6. THE ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM

Baptism is to be administered in a form which accords with its Biblical institution and meaning.

(a) Baptism is to be administered with water in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to accompany and seal the preaching of the Gospel.

(b) Baptism is to be administered only within the life and discipline of the Church. The Baptism of the individual presupposes the one Baptism common to Christ and His Church, and therefore takes place only within the fellowship of the baptized membership of the Church, where Christ acts and rules through the proclamation of His Word, and gives communion with Himself in His Body and Blood.

(c) Because Baptism is conjoined to the preaching of the Word in the authoritative commission of Christ to His Apostles, only those who are lawfully ordained to preach the Word are authorized to administer Baptism.

(d) Because in Baptism God has bound Himself to us and us to Himself before we could bind ourselves to Him, and because we receive it passively "as little children," it is appropriate to people of all ages. The subjects of Baptism are therefore children born of parents within the Church, to whom the promise belongs, or else those who have responded to the offer of salvation in Christ and (with their children) seek baptismal incorporation into the people of God upon profession of faith.

(e) Because Baptism is bound up not only with preaching but with teaching, it is to be administered only where there is provision, promise, and assurance that the baptized will be brought up in the family of God and instructed in the faith.

## APPENDIX TO PART I.

### THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE AND TRADITIONAL TERMINOLOGY

(a) The word "Sacrament," as it is now used, is not found in the New Testament. Very early in the history of the Church it was used to translate *MUSTERION* as referring to the union of God and man in Christ, and as referring to the union between Christ and His Church. Strictly speaking there is only one "Mystery" or "Sacrament"—namely, "God manifest in the flesh." (I Tim. iii. 16; Eph. i. 9. iii. 3-9, 32; Col. i. 27.)

Because Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the appointed ordinances through which we are made to share in that "mystery of Christ and His Church," they too came to be called "Mysteries" or "Sacraments." A "Sacrament" in this sense is the sign or veil through which, while still on earth, we partake of the mystery of Christ.

(b) In the New Testament "grace" is never related to Baptism or to the Lord's Supper, and is only once associated with the Spirit (Heb. x. 29). Early in the history of the Church "grace" came to be regarded as a divine potency or quality that could be transferred and infused into men through the agency of the Spirit. When this "grace" was thought of as channelled through the Church, the sacraments were regarded as the institutional means for its administration and distribution to the people.

The Reformers rejected this notion of institutional "grace," but they continued to apply the expression "means of grace" to Baptism because in this ordinance Christ has appointed an external action on the part of the Church to be the instrumental means through which He fulfils a specific spiritual purpose. Nevertheless history reveals that the habit of thinking of Baptism as a "means of grace" drags it down into the pragmatic realm of means and ends, and so tends to bring back the old error, and to cause administrative questions, rather than the Gospel, to be uppermost in men's minds.

It is to be admitted that when considered as a "means," Baptism has no spiritual efficacy in itself. It must not be regarded as infusing "grace." Baptism is a sacrament of the Gospel. It is immediately related to Christ, who is personally present and active in it through His Word and Spirit. He who appointed and ordered it is Christ, who has all power on earth, as in heaven. Therefore we believe that what is done by us on earth, in fulfilment of His command and in reliance on His promise, is done also by Him on earth as in Heaven.

(c) Baptism and the Lord's Supper were spoken of by Augustine and the Reformers as God's "Visible Words," for He has put His Word not only into the Scriptures but also into the action of the sacraments, that through them He may communicate Himself visibly to us. As in the Incarnation God took hold of our human nature in order to redeem and remake it, so in Baptism He takes hold of each of us in order to draw us within His redeeming and recreating power. As in the Incarnation God adapted Himself to our creaturely existence in order to lift us up to share in His divine life and love, so in Baptism God condescends in His grace to make Himself accessible to us in our frailty and weakness. In Baptism He comes to us under the sign of water, appointed by Him to represent His cleansing and quickening power, and sanctified by Him as the instrument of His saving operation in which He adopts us into His family and Kingdom.

## PART II.—A FORM OF INSTRUCTION ABOUT BAPTISM

### WHAT IS BAPTISM ?

1. Baptism is an ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church, and is part of its proclamation of the Gospel.
2. The warrant to baptize is St Matthew xxviii. 18 ff.
3. Baptism derives from our Lord's own Baptism by John in the Jordan, in which He identified Himself with sinners.
4. Baptism is an action-sign in which we share in His Baptism and so have part in Him and in all His saving work for us.

5. Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel are bound together and offer the same salvation.

6. Baptism follows upon the Word as its appointed ratification, and is the instrument of its application to a named individual.

7. Baptism is distinctive in that in it God seals this salvation and new life to the individual in an unrepeatable and irrevocable way.

#### WHO ACTS IN BAPTISM ?

1. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—acts in Baptism, taking the initiative, seeking to draw us into a personal relationship with Himself.

As the Father who has poured out His love upon us by giving us His Son, He adopts us into sonship and makes us members of His family.

As the Son who has united Himself to us and has given His obedient life and death in sacrifice for our sins, He reconciles us to the Father.

As the Spirit who has been poured out upon the Church, He unites us to Christ as members of His Body, so that we may share in His sanctified and risen life.

2. In Baptism God uses the service of men. When the Church baptizes, it acts only as His earthly instrument, knowing that God will acknowledge and bless its action as His own.

3. Since it is God Himself who acts in Baptism, confirming His Word and sealing His work of salvation, the effective act in Baptism is not to be explained by what men do in it but only by what God does.

4. Baptism does not add anything new to the finished work of Christ, but makes us share in the fruit of that finished work.

5. It is not the performance of the ritual, or the worthiness of those taking part, but the action of God Himself which gives Baptism its power.

6. Because God stands by His own act and will not fail it, Baptism cannot be understood only as a symbolical illustration of the saving love of God in Christ. In it God really does what He signifies.

7. God's action in Baptism is not limited to the time of its administration, but avails for the whole life of the baptized.

#### WHAT HAPPENS IN BAPTISM ?

1. Through Baptism we are grafted into Christ, who once and for all united Himself to us when He became man.

2. Through this union we share in His life and all He has done for us.

3. Through His birth we have a new birth and are made members of the new humanity.

4. Through His obedient life and death our sins are forgiven and we are clothed with a new righteousness.

5. Through His resurrection and triumph over the powers of darkness we are freed from the dominion of evil.

6. Through His ascension the Kingdom of Heaven is opened for us, and we wait for His coming again to fulfil in us the new creation.

7. Through sharing in His Spirit we are made members of His Body and are admitted into the visible fellowship of His Church.

#### WHAT IS THE RELATION OF BAPTISM TO THE CHURCH ?

1. Baptism is Christ's gift to the Church. The same Spirit who descended upon Christ at His Baptism was poured out upon the Church at Pentecost and continually dwells in it as the bond of union and communion between the members and the Head.

2. Baptism has its proper place in the midst of the worshipping people of God, where the mighty acts of Christ are proclaimed, and where, through the Word, the Spirit is effectively at work. Thus Baptism includes an act

of thanksgiving on the part of the Church for God's gift of new life, an act of prayer for the preservation and sanctification of the baptized, and an act of confession of faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper mark out the covenanted sphere of union and communion with God. Baptism sets up the outer frontier of the Church, distinguishing it from the world as the community of those who are named with the Name of Christ and are made to share in His triumph over all the powers of darkness. Therefore Baptism marks out that area in the world where the Kingdom of Heaven is opened to believers, and where all who enter in may, through the Lord's Supper, feed upon Christ and grow up into Him.

4. Because the preaching of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are bound together in the authoritative commission of Christ to His Apostles, only those who are lawfully ordained to preach the Word are authorised to administer Baptism or the Lord's Supper. The ministry alone has the authority to baptize; Christ alone has the power to make it effective through His Word and Spirit.

5. Because Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as seals of the Word, are nothing in themselves, apart from the Word, they are to be administered only where the Word is proclaimed, where teaching in the truth of the ordinances is given, and where, under the discipline of the Church, the sanctity of Baptism and Holy Communion, as initiation into the family of Christ and provision for its feeding and growth in Him, is carefully guarded and preserved.

#### TO WHOM SHOULD BAPTISM BE ADMINISTERED ?

1. St Peter, on the day of Pentecost, called all men to repent and be baptized saying, "the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him" (Acts ii. 39 R.S.V.). Thus both children and adults may receive Baptism.

2. By "children" are meant the seed of the faithful. Such children receive Baptism as the children of the Chosen People had received Circumcision, to ratify their membership of God's People. The faithful are those who are in such an effective relationship with Christ that their home is truly part of the Church, and one in which the children will be trained in Christian ways.

3. By "adults" are meant those who, being outwith God's people, are called by God to Himself through the preaching of the Gospel, who repent, and seek to be adopted into God's family.

4. In their reception of Baptism adults and children have this in common that neither of them can do what Christ has done, and that each of them can only receive passively—*i.e.*, as little children.

#### WHAT IS THE RIGHT USE OF BAPTISM ?

1. Because Baptism is the seal of what God has done for us in Christ, it implies responsibility as well as privilege.

2. Baptism does not make faith unnecessary, nor is it faith's reward. It summons the baptized to lifelong faith in God who, in His faithfulness, will not go back upon His promises.

3. For those baptized as infants this means that when they come to years of understanding they are to acknowledge their Baptism, own its obligations, and claim the inheritance it conferred upon them by coming to the Lord's Table.

4. Baptism does not make us sinless but calls us to a life of discipleship, to fight the battle of the Spirit against the flesh, and daily to repent of our sins.

5. Baptism makes us members of a new community where we are to live no longer unto ourselves but unto Him who loved us, and to love one another. It calls us to bear the reproach of Christ, to engage joyfully in His service, and to manifest His works in the midst of the world.

6. In Baptism we are sealed unto the day of redemption as members of the pilgrim people of God who look for the day when Christ will come again to judge and renew the earth.

7. While Baptism does not allow the baptized to fall into despair, it does not allow the baptized any carnal security regarding his state of salvation. What is given may be refused ; what is grafted may wither ; what is generated may never grow.

8. When Baptism is repudiated it becomes a sign of judgment to the unrepentant. The seal which identifies him as a soldier of Christ then serves to convict him as a deserter, although it still avails for him if he turns again and in conversion becomes as a little child, finding refuge in the name of Jesus Christ sealed upon him at Baptism.

#### WHY DO WE CALL BAPTISM A SACRAMENT OR MEANS OF GRACE ?

1. In the New Testament the union of God and man in Christ, and the union of Christ and His Church are described by the Greek word *MUSTERION* (English : mystery). When the New Testament came to be translated into Latin, this word was rendered by *SACRAMENTUM* (English : sacrament). Because Baptism was an appointed ordinance through which we are made to share in the union of Christ and His Church, it also came to be called a "mystery" or, more commonly in the West, a "sacrament."

2. Baptism is called a "means of grace" because it is an external action appointed by Christ in the Church which He uses to unite us to Himself, in order that He may fulfil in us the promise of His Grace. Because He who appointed it has all power on earth as in Heaven, we believe that what is done by us on earth, in reliance on His promise, is done also by Him on earth as in Heaven.

3. Baptism is also called a "Visible Word" of God, for He has put His Gospel not only in the Scriptures but also in the action of the sacraments, that through them He may visibly communicate Himself to us. In Baptism Jesus Christ comes to us under the sign of water, appointed by Him to represent His cleansing and quickening power in a way that we can easily understand, so that we may be assured that He really does what the sign represents.

*In name of the Commission,*

THOMAS F. TORRANCE, *Convener.*  
JOHN HERON, *Secretary.*

*Deliverance of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland  
on the foregoing Report.*

At Edinburgh, the thirtieth day of May, One thousand nine hundred and sixty years,—

1. The General Assembly receive the Report 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 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 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 Report, and to send their detailed comments as to its content, form, and method to the Secretary of the Commission by 15th December 1960.

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

J. B. LONGMUIR,  
*Cl. Eccl. Scot.*



