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Church and Child in the New Testament

1. The importance of the Child to the Church

THE ancient world generally had a low estimate of children. "There was lacking a knowledge of the limits of an instructor, respect for the growing personality and a really deep love for the child—even in later times" (Oepke, *TWNT*. v, 641). Judaism was little better than the pagan world in this respect. In the eyes of Jewish teachers, to talk to a child was a waste of time! "Morning sleep, midday wine, the chatter of children and staying in resorts where common people meet bring a man out of the world" (Rabbi Dosa b. Archinos).

Yet this attitude to children did not include the idea that children were unfitted for worship. In Egypt, Greece and Rome children were present from infancy with their parents in celebrations of the cult. Indeed, children frequently performed priestly functions, especially on occasions of dire need, since it was believed that the divinity would most readily listen to them. According to Oepke, in many Greek cults the priestly functions were exclusively given to children, so that the purity of the servants of the deity might be guaranteed (*op cit.*, p. 643).

This did not hold good among the Jews, for whom it was not characteristic to think of children as without sin. Nevertheless the Old Testament narratives and prescriptions show that children were present with their families and tribes at worship from birth on. The same was true of later Judaism.

The New Testament writings yield meagre information concerning the place of children in the Church. One thing, however, stands with striking clarity in the Gospels, namely the warmth of Jesus towards children. One has but to recall His sayings concerning children: to such belongs the kingdom of heaven; only they who receive the kingdom of God as a child will enter it; whoever humbles himself as a child is the greatest in the kingdom; to receive a child is to receive Him; to cause one to stumble is to incur fearful judgment; their angels behold the face of the Father in heaven. Such utterances reveal a new estimate of the importance to God of children and consequently of the importance they should have to the people of God.

We do well to remember that children are not a peculiar species of humanity, as it were, only developing towards becoming real people. "The child is not on the way to becoming man, but is a man in the full sense, only in the manner of childlike existence"

(G. Bohne, *RGG*. 3, c.1289). The child is important to God as a child, not because he will develop later into an adult. The Church accordingly is under obligation to take seriously the place of the child in its life and worship. The great and dismaying confusion concerning the place of the child in the Church and its relation to God is in no small measure but the reflection of the Church's confusion in its thought about man's relation to God generally, about the significance of redemption for mankind as a whole, and the relation of Christ to the Church and the world. We are far from clear about these themes and our lack of clarity is reflected in our uncertainty as to the child's relation to God and the Church.

2. The Children of the Church

In the Old Testament Israel as a nation is the people of God; to be born into it was to become a member of the chosen people and to share its destiny. The covenant of God with Abraham was an everlasting covenant, extending to all its descendants (Gen. 17 : 7ff.). At Sinai the whole people were included under the covenant (Ex. 24 : 8) and it was assured to them "to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7 : 9). According to Deut. 29 : 10ff. the entire people stood before the Lord to enter into covenant with Him, the heads of tribes, elders and officers, all the men of Israel, the little ones, wives, and sojourners in the camp, that *all* might enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord. This both emphasises the inclusiveness of the covenant and illustrates how children were present at solemn religious assemblies. Circumcision was administered to all males in infancy as a sign of membership in the covenant people and of lifelong obligation to keep the covenant.

What is the position of the child under the New Covenant in the New Israel? Adherents of the so-called covenant theology assure us that the position is essentially unchanged. Marcel states, "Seeing that the Church is one under both Testaments, if children were members of the Church of Israel under the theocracy, they are also—unless the contrary is proved to us from the texts and writings of the New Testament—still today members of the Christian Church which, in accordance with the promise, is the continuation of the Church of Israel" (*Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, p. 121.) The Church of Scotland Report on Baptism of May, 1958 cites a statement of John Knox : "He has promised that He will be a God to us and the God of our children unto the thousandth generation . . . instructing us thereby that our children belong to Him by covenant and therefore ought not to be defrauded of those holy signs and badges whereby His children are known from infidels and pagans" (p. 13).

New Testament scholars experience difficulty in tracing this kind of covenant theology in the Epistles. Attempts have been made, however, to support the identity of relation of child to Church in

both covenants by stressing the peculiar significance of the term "house" in the Bible. Stauffer, in his investigation of the use of "house" in the Old Testament, concluded that the oft-repeated phrase "he and his (whole) house" was a cultic formula, that it was particularly used in relation to circumcision, and that it was carried over with its traditional associations into the early Church, above all in its accounts of the conversion and baptism of households. "In the concept *oikos*, the *oikos*-formula 'he and his (whole) house', and the terms *panoikia* and *panoiki*, the Greek Bible has in view not simply the children in addition to the adults, but the children quite especially, and not least any little children who might be present" (cited by Jeremias, *Kindertaufe*, pp. 24f.). Jeremias attempted to strengthen this view by adducing further evidence from the Old and New Testaments. He considers that it is rendered more certain by the regulative position of the head of a house in ancient society and by the consciousness of the primitive Church that they were living in the last days; in face of the impending last judgement "a dividing up of families coming over to the company of the saved, purely on the ground of age, is utterly improbable" (*ibid.*, p. 28).

Not all Biblical scholars have been impressed by these ideas. The argument as to the so-called *oikos*-formula was vigorously criticised by K. Aland (*Did the Early Church baptize infants?*, p. 87ff.). Jeremias wrote a reply to him, defending his position, but admitting that Aland had demonstrated the incorrectness of speaking of an *oikos*-formula, and he substituted for it the term "the *oikos*-phrase" (*Nochmals: die Anfänge der Kindertaufe*, p. 16). His position, however, has been subjected to a still more searching criticism by Peter Weigand, in a lengthy article devoted to an examination of the use of the Biblical terms for "house" (*Novum Testamentum*, Vol. VI, 1963). He concluded that Stauffer's assertion of a profane and ritual use of the *oikos*-formula was unfounded, that "house" did not especially relate to children (its significance is varied and has to be determined by the context), and that the phrase "he and his house" cannot bear the burden that Jeremias seeks to lay on it.

The failure of this attempted demonstration of the primitive practice of infant baptism, however, should not blind us to elements of truth in the contentions of these scholars. Let us admit that Jeremias and his friends have exaggerated the solidarity of the family in early times, especially the regulative position of the father in matters of religion, on whose faith, it is said, the whole family would be baptized, and let us grant that the consciousness of living in the last days could intensify a sense of *division* within the family as well as *unity*: nevertheless it remains that family solidarity was an important factor in New Testament times; the decision of a father in relation to the Gospel would commonly affect the whole family; and although 1 Cor. 7 : 12ff. and Lk. 12 : 51ff. do reflect

the tragic experience of the Gospel's bringing the sword of division into families, it remains true that we do read in Acts of the conversion of households and we know that the early Churches were house-Churches. This last mentioned fact suggests not only that Churches often met in the houses of well-to-do members, but that converted families often formed the nuclei of new churches, and their worship was distinctly "homely" (in the British meaning of the term!). The modern concept of "family church" suits the primitive Christian communities better than their modern counterparts.

In considering the place of the family in the early Church, much discussion has been made of 1 Cor. 7 : 14, for it is one of the rare passages of the New Testament that relate parents and children to the Church. "The unbelieving husband is consecrated in the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated in the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are consecrated (holy)." This contrast between holy and unclean goes back to the Levitical code (cf. Lev. 10 : 10). Israel as the people of God is a holy nation (Ex. 19 : 5f.) and so belongs to God; in Levitical terms, Israel is clean and the rest of the world is unclean. The Church appropriated the term "holy" for itself (in 1 Pt. 2 : 9 the language of Ex. 19 : 6 is applied to the Church), but the New Testament writers speak of its consecration as deriving from its union with Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1 : 30) and did not commonly express its thought of holiness in ritual categories. This passage is an exception. Billerbeck is perhaps right in suggesting that the idea of clean and unclean children reflects Jewish proselyte language. (The Jews distinguished between proselytes' children who were begotten and born "in holiness", i.e. after the entry of the parents into Jewry, and those not begotten and born "in holiness", i.e. before the parents' conversion.) For some time I resisted this idea, chiefly because of the far-reaching deductions that Jeremias drew from it concerning the relations between proselyte baptism and primitive Christian baptism, but once more it is needful to distinguish between valid and invalid references. It is possible that Paul's terminology did, in fact, have its origin in this distinction between the holy children of the convert to Judaism and unholy children, but if so its use by Paul was more general than in Judaism and closer to the Biblical tradition. Pagans entering the Church forsook the "unclean" world and participated in the consecration of the people of God, so becoming "holy"; on the principle of a part sanctifying the whole (applied by Paul in Rom. 11 : 16 to unbelieving Israel) the members of their families were similarly separated and "holy". The principle operated even where but a single parent was converted, so that the unbelieving partner as well as the children shared in this "holiness". This is far beyond that which Judaism was prepared to recognise; but it was also on a

different plane from Paul's usual thought about sanctification in Christ, as e.g. in 1 Cor. 6 : 11, where the sanctified man is washed and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God". I do not believe that Paul would have attributed consecration in that sense to the unbelieving partner of a Christian or to their children. But it is evident that he did consider them (the unbelieving partner and the children) as sustaining a relation to Christ and the Church, in virtue of the Christian parent, that marked the family off from the uncleanness of the world.

Clearly, Paul's concepts in this passage are not characteristic of the modern Church, nor do they represent even his most characteristic utterances. The Church is here set over against the world as the sphere of holiness, so that all who come within its orbit are clean—its families, and not simply its members—while all who stand without it in the world are unclean—men, women and children. In justice it ought to be recognised that Paul also takes it for granted that within the family where there is a Christian parent the power of Christian holiness will be felt, for he goes on to raise the question whether the unconverted spouse might not become converted. But the Levitical category is present and prior to this consideration.

What are we to say of the pertinence of Paul's statements to us? I would make the following observations. First, if we are concerned to understand the New Testament teaching on children, we ought not to dismiss this passage as irrelevant, because it happens to be strange to us. If it reflects the conviction of the Apostle to the Gentiles, we can be certain that it faithfully reflected the attitude of the entire Jewish Christian community of Palestine, and therefore of the whole Apostolate. Secondly, it is a mode of representing the importance of being within the sphere of the Church, even for those who are not actually members of the Church. Thirdly, it vividly illustrates the early Church's attitude to the unitary nature of the family in its relation to Christ and the Church; for if 1 Cor. 7 : 14 applies to a family where only one parent is Christian, how much more would Paul affirm the like of a family where both parents are the Lord's and they bring up their children within the Church's corporate life and worship?

Here I would recall D. M. Baillie's passionate argument for infant baptism, when he asked whether the children of Christians are to be regarded as having a place in the Church or viewed as outsiders, whether they are children of wrath or children of God, whether they are Christian children or little pagans; he urged that it is God's will that our children should experience God's grace as children, and that they should be regarded as part of the Church, the entrance to which is by baptism (*Theology of Sacraments*, pp. 80-82). Naturally we also believe it to be God's will that children should grow up in the knowledge of the love of God from their earliest days and therefore in the bosom of the Church. But I trust

it will be seen that the oppositions posed by Baillie between insiders and outsiders, little Christians and little pagans, could not apply to Paul's view of the relation to the Church of the families of believers. Baillie has made the mistake, as so many have, of imagining that only those children come within the sphere of the Church's blessing who have been baptized as infants, but that is true neither for the Apostolic Church nor for the experience of our own Churches through the years.

That children were present at the worship of the Church in New Testament times is clear from passages in the Epistles addressed to them—and we recall that the Letters were intended to be read to the Churches gathered for worship. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for that is well pleasing in the Lord," writes Paul in the Letter to the Colossians (cf. Eph. 6 : 1). The qualifying phrase "in the Lord" is remarkable; the NEB renders it "(that) is the Christian way"; it suggests that the children addressed have begun to walk in that way and to live "in the Lord" (though admittedly it could simply represent the Christian path of duty set before the children). The language would be particularly suitable for children who were either catechumens or full members of the Church. The duty of bringing up children to be truly Christian is reflected in the directions given in the Pastorals concerning the sort of men who should take office in the Church: they should be "men who are blameless, married only once, whose children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate" (Tit. 1 : 6, cf. 1 Tim. 3 : 4, 5 : 4). This is an example to be followed by the whole Church, in bringing up children in the Christian way, early to confess Christ.

3. Children and God

Two related questions are constantly raised here. Are children without sin or are they "children of wrath"? Are they redeemed, or do they need to be converted?

From Augustine and Pelagius onward the former point has been vigorously debated. If sin be taken, as Tennant insisted it should, to relate to wrong acts for which a man is personally culpable, then little children cannot be said to be sinful, for they cannot be held responsible for what they are. This may account for such Rabbinic expressions as "blameless as a child one day old" (Gerim 2 : 6), or "as a child one year old, who has not yet tasted the savour of sin" (Yoma, 22b, cited by Jeremias). The Apostolic Fathers allude on various occasions to the purity of little children, "who do not know the wickedness that destroys the life of men" (*Herm. Mand.*, II : 1). Aland thinks that the New Testament writers reflect the same estimate of children, but the evidence is uncertain. Above all, Paul's teaching on the universal spread of sin and death consequent on Adam's sin forbade his taking the optimistic view manifest in Barnabas and Hermas. Rom. 5 : 12-21 is a strong expression of the

corporate wrong in which the whole race, including its infant members, is involved. This, be it noted, is different from the later Church teaching concerning the defilement of birth, such as that enunciated by Origen, who even deduced from Lk. 2 : 22 that Jesus was afflicted with this stain and needed cleansing, and who saw in this condition the necessity for infant baptism. No, Paul saw the whole race of Adam corrupted and in need of such a deliverance as only the Second Adam could bring. "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5 : 18).

The race, then, that was perverted by the first Man has been redeemed by the second Man. In what sense "redeemed"? An increasing number of voices affirm, "In every way. The race has been redeemed by Christ; it should be informed of this fact and rejoice in it". Walter Harrelson, one of our most thoughtful Biblical theologians, writes, "Children in the Church belong to Christ at birth, precisely because they belong to the human race which in Jesus Christ has been redeemed from its bondage to sin, death and decay. Children outside the church also belong to Christ at birth, regardless of whether their parents are Christians. But children in the church are being shaped to discern the truth of their lives. They live in connection with those who affirm this truth and who seek to display it in the totality of their existence in the world—the new world which Christ has redeemed" ("Children in the Church", *Foundations*, Vol. VI, 1963, p. 142). On this view neither children in the Church nor children outside the Church are "lost"; that can only be in the sense that they have not laid hold on the truth of the Gospel.

Here it is plainly seen that our view of the relation of children to God depends on our prior understanding of the relation of mankind to God. This particular view, framed as it is to take account of the truth of universal redemption in Christ, is not adequate to the whole teaching of the New Testament. It is necessary to distinguish varied aspects of the relation of Christ to the universe. First, the doctrine of the Logos presumes that Christ sustains a vital relation to the totality of existence, so that Paul may write (or cite!) "In Him all things cohere" (Col. 1 : 17). Secondly, by his incarnation the divine Son assumed solidarity with all mankind. By uniting his view of Christ as the Second Adam with the doctrine of representation Paul was able to view the death of Christ for all men as the death of all men (2 Cor. 5 : 14); in Christ the representative Man the race as a totality is reconciled to God. Thirdly, the Christ who died and rose for all has given the Spirit for all, and they that are united in Him through that Spirit form another solidarity, which Paul terms the Body of Christ; it is when men are united to Christ through the Spirit in the Body that the death and resurrection that was *for* them becomes effective *in* them. Reconciliation,

justification, redemption, salvation—whatever the term employed—is in Christ; in Him it has all happened and it is in union with Him that it is known, experienced and appropriated. This is the significance of faith- or conversion-baptism: to turn to Christ and be baptized in his name is to put on Christ (Gal. 3 : 27), to receive his Spirit (Acts 2 : 38), to participate in his death and resurrection (Col. 2 : 11-12) and be incorporated into his Body (1 Cor. 12 : 13). The fact that the Church, the whole of mankind and the entire universe all stand under the Lordship of Christ the Redeemer does not justify a lack of differentiation in their relation to Christ the Redeemer, as the day of judgment will make plain.

What, then, do we say of the particular relation of children to God in Christ? Popular sentiment—and we all share in it!—takes it for granted that all children are “saved”, ignoring that the New Testament doctrine of salvation is not simply the negative remission of guilt of sin but life in Christ, new life by the Spirit, resurrection life in the new creation; and no infants are born into *that*. This the historic Churches have realised and accordingly they baptize their infants to give them part in the new order of the kingdom; and this is why we are compelled to reject infant baptism, for we do not believe that God gave baptism to be a miracle-working rite on unconscious subjects.

In my judgment we must have the candour to admit that the Bible gives us too little data to enable us to define with precision the relation of children to God, just as it has given us too little information to state with confidence how the parents of most of them—the pagans who have never heard the Gospel—stand in relation to God. The assurance of those who think they have all the answers disintegrates under examination. Naturally we do not have to be silent on this issue. We know of a certainty that God's love is directed towards all children, in this world and the next (the idea of babes a span long in hell is a slander on God). They belong to a race that is not only fallen but redeemed. In Paul's thought, they are in solidarity not only with Adam but with the Last Adam; they are born into a world subject to sin and death, but the world is subject also to the renewing power of the Man who died and rose for them. In their early childhood all that Christ has wrought for them, and which is theirs potentially, has yet to be appropriated by them. Our embarrassment is our inability to describe their position in that interim. If we reject the belief of earlier generations that little children are blameworthy for their condition as children of Adam, we should nevertheless be cautious in assuming that they are in that solidarity with Christ which the New Testament calls salvation. Some indeed are prepared to affirm, with doubtful support from Rom. 7 : 9, that children are in that solidarity with Christ until they fall out of it through their sin; but this is a dubious speculation. No, it seems to me wiser to admit the limits of our

knowledge. We gladly recognise that God is gracious towards all children and, in the language of 1 Tim. 2 : 4, He wills that they all should be "saved and come to the knowledge of the truth". But that presupposes a "turning" to Him, a "conversion". Thus even the so-called "holy" children, who live among the people of God, where the powers of the new age are known, and who participate in worship and are the objects of prayer and ministry, need that "turning" to receive the life of the age to come. For them and for all who will gather with them the Church provides Christian nurture and instruction. To this we now turn.

4. The Care of Children by the Church

The saying of Jesus, "Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mk. 10 : 14, NEB), suggests a question of immense significance to us: Is the Church rightly viewed as the Church of adults? Do children have a place in it? If so, of what sort?

Jeremias makes an interesting suggestion as to the setting of these words: Jewish parents used to make their children participate in the fast of the Day of Atonement, and in the evening bring them to the elders "that they might bless them, strengthen them (through exhortation) and pray for them, that they might attain at length a knowledge of the Torah and to good works" (Soph. 18 : 5; cited Jeremias, *Kindertaufe*, p. 61). Jeremias thinks that the disciples objected to the parents putting Jesus on the level of the scribes. It is a plausible suggestion, though (unlike Jeremias) I would think that to "receive the kingdom of God" as a little child, as Jesus said we should, means primarily to receive the good news of the kingdom; to receive that on the Day of Atonement, in the ready faith of a child, makes perfect sense.

Lohmeyer made the further observation that the saying concerning the children recalls the great invitation of Mt. 11 : 28ff. : "Come unto me . . . take my yoke upon you and learn of me . . ."; for the primitive Church, he suggested, that would mean that the exalted Lord calls the children, not to draw near on one occasion only, but to begin a continuing relationship with Him (*Ev. des Markus*, p. 205). It is a fascinating thought that Jesus wanted the children to come to Him, learn of Him and take His yoke upon them. That is to be enrolled in the school of Christ as his young disciples.

Whatever may have been the precise context and connotation of these words it seems clear from them that children may as truly belong to Christ as any adult, that therefore they have part in his Church, and that it is the Church's bounden duty constantly to bring its little ones to Him that they may learn of Him and receive his blessing.

Reference has been made to the instructions directed to children in the Church in Col. 3 : 29, Eph. 6 : 1-3; whether they were baptized or under instruction prior to baptism cannot be known. The earliest reference to an apparent participation of children in the catechumenate is 1 Clem. 21 : 6ff. : "Let our children be partakers of the instruction which is in Christ; let them learn how lowliness of mind prevaileth with God, what power chaste love hath with God, how the fear of Him is good and great and saveth all them that walk therein in a pure mind with holiness" (Lightfoot's translation). It can hardly be doubted, however, that this instruction is much older than Clement. Judaism had a long history of instruction of its children in the essentials of religion, and it did not begin with birds, bees and flowers, but with the Book of Leviticus. It was a living tradition still in the period of the primitive Church. At that time the instruction of proselytes was firmly established, and it is likely that the earliest Christian instruction of Gentile converts adapted much of its material. How soon the systematisation of instruction for converts in the Church took place it is impossible to say, but that such instruction existed from the beginning is seen in Acts 2 : 42 : the converts of the day of Pentecost continued "in the instruction of the apostles and in the fellowship"; Christian discipleship was a following in the way of Jesus, which had to be taught. Much of the material in our Gospels, above all its teaching, was the precipitate of this oral instruction. In the primitive period of missionary activity instruction will have *followed* baptism; later it was placed before and after baptism, but in due course it came to be almost entirely a pre-baptismal affair. By the opening of the third century A.D. the catechumenate was a rigorous school of faith, generally lasting three years, to which baptism formed a tremendous climax. Its abolition after the Constantinian settlement, when the masses swept into the Church and infant baptism became the accepted practice, was of untold loss to the Church; it was not the least gain of the Reformation that it recovered for the Church the instruction of its children (for a review of the subject see P. Lestringant, *Le Ministère Catéchétique de l'Église*, 1945; G. E. Phillips, *The Transmission of the Faith*, 1946).

What is to be our attitude to the catechumenate? Surely it ought to be treated with utmost seriousness. Ideally the Sunday School ought to form the counterpart to it, but we would be quite unrealistic if we imagined that it met the case. That the Sunday School *could*, and that it *should* supply a satisfactory all-round course of Christian instruction constitutes a tremendous challenge to those responsible for its organisation and its written materials. Such instruction should include not only exposition of Scripture but connected expositions of Christian doctrine and ethics. In churches that do not possess an appointed Christian educationalist, I cannot see how the pastor can avoid assuming this responsibility. Its

relation to baptism will vary with individuals, according to age and religious experience, but I would plead for the weight to be placed on post-baptismal instruction and for it to cover a prolonged period and not simply a few classes. A minister might well forsake some of his other tasks to attend to this supremely important one.

This raises a related matter. At what age should baptism be administered, and when should the baptized join the Church? Whatever the answer to the former question, the time for joining the Church, is surely baptism; there is no theological or Scriptural justification or even practical necessity for postponing Church-membership after that event. To be baptized to Christ is to be baptized to his Body; and to be accepted by Christ into *his* Church, but not by the local church in which one is baptized, is preposterous.

The hesitation to accept the baptized into Church membership at once applies mainly to the young. Then ought the young to be baptized? How young or how old should they be? The American journal *Religious Education* recently canvassed experts from many Christian denominations and the Jews on their views about "The Proper Age for a Declaration of Faith" (Vol. LVIII, 1963, pp. 411ff.). As might be expected, the widest divergence of judgment was manifested, ranging from an estimate of the "proper age" as of 4-5 years to 18 years. The reasons for the divergence were tolerably clear. On the one hand some urged that choice included alternatives, including knowledge of other denominations and faiths; that put the time of decision comparatively late. More important was the difference in the concepts of Church and Church membership: is the Church to be viewed as a sacramental fellowship, in which its members draw strength for life, or is it the army of the Lord in which soldiers enlist? The Roman Catholics came down heavily for the former view, and interestingly it was a Lutheran who plumped for the latter.

If we appeal to our Baptist source book, the New Testament, it must surely be said that the opposition is unreal. The Church is both the family of God, depending wholly on redeeming grace for life in this world, and a militant force that wrestles not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers.

However dangerous it may be, the word of Jesus about the children must be taken seriously; and faith must never be equated with the knowledge that can pass examinations on Christian doctrine. Jesus said that to enter the kingdom we must "receive the kingdom as a child", i.e., we must receive the good news of the kingdom as a child receives it. That has the corollary that a child who receives the good news of the kingdom should take its place among the people of the kingdom, not of course as an adult member, but as a child member. Baptism is faith in Christ coming to overt expression; there is no theological bar to a child with faith being baptized, and in a secularist world that is loaded against a life of

faith in God there is much to be said for taking the yoke of Christ in early days.

There is no "proper age for a declaration of faith", if by that is meant a standard age at which to be baptized and join the Church. The age for a declaration of faith is the time when one has a faith to declare, and that varies immensely. How to discern true faith is a difficulty, requiring discernment on the part of a minister. But every minister knows that this is not a difficulty confined to the young convert; it applies to all stages of adolescence and to adults, who are much more capable of giving right answers with wrong motives than children are. Where there is a continuing catechetical class the difficulty need not be overwhelming; doubtful cases can be postponed till there is confidence as to their fitness for baptism—and they will continue to attend the class after baptism.

The secret appears to me to lie in the catechumenate or, in modern terms, in an adequate system of Christian education. It is to be hoped that our churches will at all times be faced with the counterpart of the Philippian Jailor who, confronted with the good news, wants to go the whole way in immediate response. We should look out for him and be prepared to receive him. But it is our bounden duty to try to prevent our children from finding themselves in his position—in middle life and in an earthquake before they decide for Christ. Warren Carr is right in affirming, "A child's baptism ought not mark the final event of his Christian education. Instead it should be an interruption of the Christian education so that the child may respond, personally and accountably, to God's grace which has been presupposed throughout the process. This interruption has to be consciously perceived. Grace, already given in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, needs to be symbolised in an event that may be continuously remembered by the child. Baptism is the event and Christian education provides the memory and recall that is necessary" (*Baptism*, p. 182).

Our aim is "the perpetuation of the Church", as Godfrey Phillips put it, the building up of the Body of Christ in those who experience his redeeming grace. To bring our children into that experience, that they may grow up into Christ in His Body, and participate in its ministry of reconciliation in the world, is an aim worthy of our greatest efforts.

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Epworth Baptists. Among a number of documents concerning the Isle of Axholme deposited at the Lincolnshire Archives office is the Epworth Baptist book. It is believed to be the earliest surviving record of a dissenting community whose origins can be seen in the archidiaconal books of 1623, 1631, and 1635. The book is described as "at once register, minute book and estate memoranda book". It covers the period 1673-1818 and provides "much evidence, of a date, considerably earlier than has been expected of the organisation of the Lincolnshire Baptist congregations" including the appointment of "travelling ministers" supported by the contributions of the congregations and serving a wider area than Axholme. For fuller details see p. 54, *Archivists' Report 8* (22nd March, 1956-23rd March, 1957), Lincolnshire Archives Committee, Exchequer Gate, Lincoln.