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# Faith and Conversion : A Study in the Context of the Covenantal Significance of Baptism

J. M. PATHRAPANKAL

'Be converted, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand . . . Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins' (Matt. 3:2-6). It is in these words that the Synoptics introduce the mission of John the Baptist, who preached a 'baptism of conversion for the remission of sins' (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). On the day of Pentecost, Peter refers to the need of conversion and baptism. To the question of the multitude, 'What shall we do?', Peter answers, 'Be converted and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:37-38).

On the other hand, there are passages in the New Testament which insist on the necessity of faith as the condition for baptism. The conclusion of Mark, although it is not attested by some of the ancient MSS, emphasizes the necessity of faith and baptism for salvation. 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19). In the Acts we have corresponding texts: 'But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the Kingdom of God . . . they were baptized' (Acts 8:12). 'The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized . . .' (Acts 16:14 f.). 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved . . . and he was baptized at once' (Acts 16:29-34). 'Many Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized' (Acts 18:18). We find the same succession in the Epistles also: 'In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized in Christ have put on Christ' (Gal. 3:26 f.). 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph. 4:5).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Duplacy, 'Salvation by faith and baptism in the N.T.' in *Baptism in the New Testament, A Symposium*. London, 1964, pp. 115-158.

How are we to understand the relation between faith and conversion as related to baptism? It is almost a commonplace to explain conversion and faith as interrelated and to insist on the necessity of both of them for baptism. But there exists a certain obscurity and ambiguity as to how these concepts are related to each other, and in which context they have their origin and expression, especially in their relation to baptism. Moreover, the technical term '*Metanoia*', used by the N.T. writers for expressing the concept of conversion needs closer analysis in order to see its relation to both faith and baptism.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to bring to light these points on the basis of a study of these concepts against their Biblical background.

## 1. THE CONCEPTS OF FAITH AND CONVERSION IN THE BIBLE

The concepts of faith and conversion constitute the leading theme in the Bible, so much so that we may look for the characteristic content of Biblical revelation in these concepts. They are watchwords of the Biblical message both in the O.T. and in the N.T. In order to see the wealth of meaning that is contained in these concepts we have to analyse them from their philological as well as thematic points of view.

### (a) *Semantic and thematic development of the concept of faith*

The technical terms for 'to believe' and 'faith', rendered *pisteuein* and *pistis* in the N.T., have a long history of semantic development. The first thing we may note is that these words have their origin in a Hebrew verb which as such does not have anything to do with 'to believe' and 'faith'. It is true that words expressing faith, trust and confidence in Yahweh are spread out through the O.T. in a variety of verbal stems. But there is one verbal stem which, although from the point of view of frequency has only a fourth place in the O.T., from a theological point of view occupies a very important place. It is the verb *he'emin*, the Hiph'il of the Qal 'mn. This Qal 'mn means 'to be firm', 'to be secure', and is used to express physical firmness and consequent security. The Hiph'il occurs 52 times in the T.M. and is the regular term to express faith. How is this meaning 'to believe' to be derived from a verbal stem the fundamental meaning of which is 'to be firm'? According to A. Weiser, the Hiph'il *he'emin* means to 'declare God to be

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. H. Dirksen, *The New Testament concept of Metanoia*, Diss. Washington, 1936; R. Joly, 'Note sur Metanoia', *RHR*, 81 (1961), 149-156; E. Roche, 'Pénitence et conversion dans l'Evangile et la vie chrétienne', *NRT*, 79 (1957), 113-134; M. Hoffer, *Metanoia (Bekehrung and Busse) im Neuen Testament*, Diss. Tübingen, 1947; J. Schmiewind, 'Was verstand Jesus unter Umkehr?' in *Die Freude der Busse*, Göttingen, 1958; E. P. Shipham, 'Repentance-Metanoia', *ExpT*, 46 (1934-35), 227-280.

faithful'.<sup>3</sup> But it seems that we have to see here an internal Hiph'il, namely 'the entering into a certain condition and, further, the being in the same'.<sup>4</sup> It is more natural to speak of the condition of a man who finds himself secure and firm in God through his act, rather than to insist on the 'declaration of the faithfulness of God'. So *he'emin* means 'to make oneself firm and secure in God', 'to commit oneself to God'.

This Hebrew verb can be construed in different ways and new shades of meanings are thereby acquired. It is used with the prepositions *b<sup>e</sup>* and *l<sup>e</sup>*, the former expressing the meaning of 'confiding in' someone and the latter giving the meaning of 'assenting to the testimony of a person who proposes an object for belief'. Moreover, the absolute use of *he'emin* gained importance in the theology of Isaiah who, at the apex of his theological insight, made faith the very condition of existence (Isa. 7:9).

It is time now to inquire into the specific character of this verb for expressing the religious content of faith as a self-commitment to God. *He'emin* as a verb in the physical and ordinary sense of firmness and stability acquired its meaning as a religious expression through the insight of the sacred writers. The meaning of *'mn* and *he'emin* is transplanted into the religious sphere in which man finds himself safe and secure through his act of committing himself to God.

This pregnant meaning of *he'emin* was translated as *pisteuein* or its equivalents in the LXX.<sup>5</sup> It soon became the technical term in the religious propaganda of Hellenistic Judaism, whereby the preachers demanded on the part of their hearers 'faith in the One God and trust in His divine providence'. It is true that *pisteuein* was not the best Greek word to translate the wealth of the Hebrew thought; nevertheless its use became more and more common.

The N.T. derives its terminology of faith almost exclusively from the LXX. Thus, besides the usual constructions occurring in the Greek period, there are also such constructions which were coined by the LXX under the influence of the Semitic usage to be found throughout the N.T. In particular, the frequent expression *pisteuein eis*, found neither in Greek nor in the LXX, marks a new stage in the N.T. understanding of faith. Here the N.T. touches the very vertex of its originality. Besides, there is

<sup>3</sup> A. Weiser, *art. 'pisteuo' in ThWNT*, VI, p. 187; 'Zu etwas Amen sagen mit allen Konsequenzen für Objekt und Subjekt . . . . Gott für *ne'eman* erklären, oder umschrieben: zu Gott Amen sagen.' (E.T.: *Faith* (Bible Key Words), p. 11. A. & C. Black, London, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Gesenius-Kautzch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, 1957, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Of the 52 *hiph'il* forms occurring in the TM, 45 are translated as *pisteuein*, five times it is rendered as *empisteuein*, and once each becomes *katapisteuein* and *peisthenai*. *Pisteuein* seems to be derived from *peitho* = to persuade, which is supposed to be semantically related to the Sanskrit *bandh* = to tie.

also the construction *pisteuein oti*. Bultmann claims that both these expressions have the same meaning. They are the abbreviated formula in missionary parlance.<sup>6</sup> The construction *pisteuein eis* in John 'is so frequent that it must be considered the characteristic Johannine expression'.<sup>7</sup> Paul also has this special usage very often. Moreover, according to him, the very Christian existence is a continuous act of faith. He often associates faith with justification. From the concept of faith as the acceptance of the *kerygma* about Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:1-11) he developed a whole history of faith beginning from the O.T. (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6-29) and reaching its culmination and fulfilment in the Christian justification.

In the light of the preceding considerations let us now come to see how the concept of faith unfolds itself in the Biblical revelation. We intend to explain only one specific aspect of this faith, which may be considered the most fundamental one. This we derive from our analysis of the meaning of *he'emin* and its equivalents in the N.T. and from the general consideration of this concept in the history of the Biblical revelation.

In the O.T. the religious content of *he'emin* and its impact on the history and life of Israel as a whole had its greatest emphasis in the theology of the prophets, especially in Isaiah. But the fact that the majority of the passages in which the O.T. uses *he'emin*, refer to the relationship of Israel to God in the Mosaic period,<sup>8</sup> shows clearly enough the close connexion between the special meaning of the term *he'emin* and the tradition concerning the beginning of the covenantal relation between Yahweh and Israel in those early times. In the O.T. the special religious attitude of the people of God to Yahweh is expressed in this word *he'emin*. This is clear from the episode of the call of Abraham (Gen. 15:6) and from the reaction of the people after they had witnessed their miraculous deliverance from the hands of the Egyptians (cf. Ex. 14:31). It is, however, to be noted that *he'emin* is not the only word which brings to light this covenantal relation between Yahweh and Israel.

This covenantal relation of *he'emin* is all the more clear from the fact that, in the O.T., 'not to believe' is very often the equivalent of 'to become apostate' (*pš'*). The idea of apostasy in the O.T. comes in with the ideology of the covenant.<sup>9</sup> This is made even clearer from the fact that *he'emin* is never used

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Bultmann, *art. pisteuein ThWNT*, VI, pp. 203 f. (E.T., *op. cit.*, pp. 58 f).

<sup>7</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge, 1960, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Exod. 4:8 ff., 4:31, 19:9; Num. 14:11, 20:12; Deut. 1:32, 9:23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Weiser, *ThWNT*, VI, p. 188: 'Da der Begriff des "Abfalls" aus der altlichen Bundesideologie stammt und nur in ihrem Zusammenhang sinnvoll ist, wird hier schon deutlich, dass Sitz und Unsprung des religiösen Gebrauches des Wortstammes 'mn in der altlichen Überlieferung des sakralen Jahwebundes zu suchen ist.' (E.T., *op. cit.*, p. 13).

for the relationship of Israel with other gods, whereas other terms expressing trust and confidence, such as *bḥ* and *hsh*, are employed in referring to idolatry also.

This characteristic note of *he'emin* as expressing the covenantal relation between Yahweh and Israel is the origin of various shades of meaning acquired by the derivatives of this verb in the course of its semantic development. Thus God is said to be *ne'emān* who keeps His covenant and steadfast love (Deut. 7:9-12) and holds to His promises to His servant (Isa. 49:7; cf. Jer. 42:5). The divine promises are said to be *ne'emānim* in the context of the eternal covenant (Isa. 55:3). The very covenant is qualified as *ne'emeneth* (Ps. 89:29). The Psalmist confessed the infidelity of the people, saying that they did not remain faithful (*ne'emenu*) to God's covenant (Ps. 78:37; cf. v. 8). We have also to admit a certain semantic relationship between *'emūnah* and *'emeth*, the derivative nouns from *he'emin*, and the covenant relationship. The two substantives are used for qualifying the faithfulness of God and man in a covenantal context.<sup>10</sup>

The act of faith is therefore a combined activity of God and man in the context of the covenant relationship. It is the people who believe in God, but the initiative comes from God, who allows man to make himself safe and secure in Him through his act of self-commitment. This is precisely the meaning of faith in the O.T. in its covenantal context.

The N.T. usage of *pisteuein* and *pistis* shows that the same theology of faith is continued. But we may notice a great difference with regard to the object of faith. According to the N.T. a new centre has been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. This Christ-event constitutes the object of faith, for it is in Jesus Christ (*eis Christon*) that one is now asked to believe. The different books of the N.T. develop this change of object very gradually. We see how the Synoptic Gospels start with the idea of the Kingdom of God as the object of man's encounter and end with the clearest statement that it is in Jesus Christ that man should now believe in order to be saved.<sup>11</sup> This gradual unfolding of the new centre and object of faith goes through the early years of the apostolic preaching as is evinced by the Acts of the Apostles. The Pauline epistles are the forceful witness of this, and a study of his epistles shows clearly enough that Paul understands the Christ-event as the New Covenant. Moreover, he established that the Christ-event as the object of faith is precisely the very centre of the redemptive history, to which the history of the O.T. was only a preparation. In the epistles to the Galatians and the Romans we have

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 36:6, 40:11, 25:10, 57:3-10, 30:10, 71:22, 91:4 (God); Ps. 37:3; Hab. 2:4; Isa. 59:14-15 (People).

<sup>11</sup> Mark 16:15-16. Though the authenticity of this passage is still discussed, we have to see the idea behind it in the light of the other N.T. passages which insist on the necessity of faith. Cf. Rom. 10:9-11.

the most convincing exposition of this theme.<sup>12</sup> In Jesus Christ the new centre of the history of salvation has been established, and therefore the Jews as well as the Gentiles have to turn to Him through faith in order to be redeemed.

(b) *Semantic and thematic development of the concept of conversion*

The term 'conversion' has almost become a fluid term, for it can mean any 'conversion' in the physical, spiritual and ethical spheres. But we are here concerned with 'conversion' as it is presented in the Bible, and our analysis will show that, even here, we have to make a specification as to what is meant by it in the context of the Biblical revelation.

There is almost complete agreement among Biblical scholars that the Hebrew word corresponding to the N.T. words *metanoein* and *metanoia*, which are rendered 'to be converted' and 'conversion',<sup>13</sup> in our language, is the Hebrew verb *šûbh*. This is basically a verb of motion and movement. 'Turn, return, turn back, go back, come back', all come within the meaning of this verb. It can be also used as an auxiliary verb meaning 'again'. Moreover, as a verb denoting movement there are two completely different usages: ordinary physical movement as well as a moral movement of a religious character. This latter meaning is often employed, especially by the prophets in picturing the 'turning' of the people towards or away from Yahweh (Jer. 8:4). We may therefore look for the *Sitz im Leben* of this religious usage in the specific context of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. This religious sense of the term is also derived from its ordinary meaning as a verb denoting movement. Here it is a question of a movement in a religious sphere. This movement on the part of Israel towards or away from Yahweh is nothing but a change of loyalty through which Israel either turns towards or away from Yahweh. The prophets of the O.T. used this theme in order to explain the covenantal relation between Yahweh and Israel. So the *Sitz im Leben* of *šûbh* in the religious sense is a covenantal one. The spatial significance of the verb was applied to the relation between man and God and man's deportment before God, and this acquired very soon a personal touch; from there one could

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<sup>12</sup> Gal. 3:6-29; Rom. 1:18-4:25.

<sup>13</sup> The renderings 'to repent' and 'repentance' are too negative to convey the full meaning of the Greek original. The insistence on 'do penance' and 'penance' characteristic of a rigid dogmatic understanding of *metanoia* has given way to a more Biblical understanding of the same. 'La meilleure traduction des verbes hébreux (*šûbh*) et grecs (*metanoein*) semble être non-pas: Faites pénitence, repentez-vous qui n'expriment formellement que le regret, mais: convertissez-vous, qui exprime en même temps le changement de conduite, consécutif au repentir', Buzy, *Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, quoted by Roche, art. cit., p. 119.

gradually pass on to the idea of the movement typical of the personal relation expressed in the covenant.

It was, then, the privilege and task of the writers of the O.T. to enlarge this basic idea of the verb. We have evidence of a complete mastery of this covenantal denotation of *šūbh* throughout the O.T., the climax being attained in the Deuteronomic theology and in the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that although both apostasy from God and return from evil denote a movement 'from', the former is always expressed by the preposition *me'aharê* and never by *min*. The former has more an idea of withdrawing from God and of stepping back from Him. This shows that the covenant God is the centre of the whole outlook in the various usages of this verb. Moreover, the idea of turning away from God as one aspect of the covenantal relation was introduced by Jeremiah, who shows the ingenuity and originality of his covenant-consciousness in his mastery over the use of *šūbh* (Jer. 4:1, 3:22, 8:4).

It is this verb that was to be rendered into Greek by the LXX. Having recourse to a verb of motion and movement *strephein*, the LXX tried to give expression to the variety of meanings the Hebrew verb *šūbh* had. But an analysis of its usage shows that the translators had to face great difficulty in this attempt, and we can even notice a certain sense of insufficiency, the main reason being that they could not bring out, with this verb, the specifically religious character so clearly manifested in the T.M.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the LXX never translated the Hebrew *šūbh* with *metanoein*, which was used to translate the Hebrew verb *niham*, which means 'to be sorry for' on the part of man or God. However, it was a meaning very close to the idea of a 'return to God' (cf. Jer. 8:6).

In the N.T. we have frequent use of the Greek words *metanoein* and *metanoia*.<sup>16</sup> The contexts in which they occur show clearly enough that it is not only a question of 'being sorry for', but also of a 'conversion' to God, the starting point of which is repentance. It is true that we have also the verb *epistrephein* and its equivalents in the N.T. writings as denoting the turning of man to God. But the words *metanoein* and *metanoia* are to

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. L. Holladay, *The root šūbh in the Old Testament with particular reference to its usages in covenantal contexts*. Leiden, 1958; E. K. Dietrich, *Die Umkehr (Bekehrung und Busse) im Alten Testament und im Judentum*. Stuttgart, 1936; G. Fohrer, 'Umkehr und Erlösung beim Propheten Hosea', *ThZ*, 11 (1955), 161-185.

<sup>15</sup> The LXX uses about 80 different Greek words to translate the Hebrew *šūbh* and the main among them is *epistrephein*. The latter occurs 579 times in the LXX, of which 408 times it is translation of *šūbh*.

<sup>16</sup> *Metanoeo* occurs 16 times in the Synoptic Gospels; *metanoia* occurs eight times. Luke shows a marked predilection for this term, not only in the Gospel but also in the Acts of the Apostles where the verb and the substantive occur five and six times respectively. In *metanoeo* the root *noeo* appears in Sanskrit as *gnā* = to know and in Greek *gno*; *meta* appears in Sanskrit as *mithās* meaning 'with', 'alternatively', 'turn about', etc.



be considered the technical terms for bringing forth the idea of 'return' found in the O.T. We cannot go into details to show how this came about in the N.T. period. We may only refer to three currents of thought which may have influenced this process. First of all, there is the semantic development of the Greek words *metanoein* and *metanoia* from the Classical period to the Hellenistic period, in which these words acquired the meaning of a change of direction on account of sorrow for a past action.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, we may refer to the Rabbinic theology of *thešûbah* in which the entire religious history of mankind was viewed in the light of *thešûbah* and the messianic salvation was seen as the result of the redeeming power of it.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, we have the recently discovered writings of the Qumran community, in which there are frequent references to *šûbh*,<sup>19</sup> which was understood as a 'return' to the Law of Moses as a condition for experiencing the eschatological salvation.

The preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus and later that of the Apostles insist on the necessity of *metanoia* as a condition for receiving salvation. How is this insistence on *metanoia* to be understood? Although we may refer to some immediately preceding thought-patterns and their cross-influence on the N.T. usage, a close study of the circumstances, nature and content of the N.T. concept of *metanoia* makes it clear that it is the same prophetic message and promise of conversion that is characterizing this period. In fact, the prophetic exhortation to conversion was turned into a promise of conversion which would take effect in the context of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezra 36:26-28). When the New Testament announces the inauguration of this New Covenant, it was only natural to refer back to this prophetic message with its strong imperative gained in the succeeding years through the influence of the sectarian theology of the 'Covenant of Conversion' (*thešûbah*) (C.D. 9:15) and the Jewish proselytism which insisted that all Gentiles should be converted (*metanoein*) from idolatry to the monotheism of Judaism.

Coming to the very heart of the N.T. message we have to see the great shift of emphasis the concept of conversion underwent. Conversion is no more a turning back to the Old Covenant, but a turning towards the New Covenant promised by Yahweh and constituted in Jesus Christ. The new centre of the redemptive history has been established and for both Jew and Gentile conversion means a submission to the saving power of God revealed in Jesus Christ. We have already seen how

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. E. F. Thompson, 'Metanoeo and metamelei in Greek literature until A.D. 100' in *Historical and Linguistic studies in Literature related to the New Testament*. Sec. ser. Vol. 1, Chicago, 1908, pp. 558 ff.

<sup>18</sup> C. G. Montefiore, 'Rabbinic conceptions of Repentance', *JQR*, 16 (1904), 297-357; Würthwein, *art. metanoeo*, *ThWNT*, IV, pp. 991-994.

<sup>19</sup> H. Braun, "'Umkehr" in spätjüdisch-haeretischer und in frühchristlicher Sicht' in *Gesammelte Studien*. Tübingen, 1962, pp. 70 ff.

the N.T. presents the Christ-event as the New Covenant and invites all to have faith in Jesus Christ. Here we see how in the N.T. the concepts of faith and conversion are fused into one. Conversion in the O.T. was a return to the faith-existence established in the Old Covenant; now conversion is the turning towards the New Covenant constituted in Jesus Christ, and this is nothing but faith in Him and the entering into a covenant relationship that is foretold by the prophets as characteristic of the messianic times. That is why we do not find great importance given to the concept of *metanoia* in the Pauline writings. For Paul, faith in Jesus Christ contains in itself the idea of conversion. Moreover, conversion in the N.T. refers to the need of conversion in the O.T. sense, for without that basic return to the O.T. faith it is now impossible for the Jews to turn to Jesus Christ and to have faith in him. So also for the Gentiles, turning to Jesus Christ through faith demands first a return to the monotheism from which they have through their own fault turned away. Apostasy on the part of the Jews and idolatry on the part of the Gentiles are the *terminus a quo* of their turning towards Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:18—3:20). Faith in Jesus Christ therefore carries with it repentance for their sins and conversion from their sinful existence to Jesus Christ.

At the same time, following the O.T. concept of *šūbh* conversion (*metanoia*) in the N.T. can also mean the conversion of the believers to the integrity of their Christian life inaugurated through faith, a theme which gained great importance in the first century of the Christian era in writings such as the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians (chs. 8-9), Pastor Hermas. Evidences of this stress on the need of a second *metanoia* we have also in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 6:4-6), the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:5, 16:21-22, etc.) and in the writings of Paul (2 Cor. 7:8-10, 12:21; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).

## 2. THE RELATION OF FAITH AND CONVERSION TO BAPTISM AS A COVENANTAL ACT

After having seen the concepts of faith and conversion in their covenantal context, it is now time for us to discuss the relation of these concepts to the concept of baptism. We can do it, first, by seeing baptism as the expression of faith and conversion and then by understanding Christian baptism as a covenantal act.

### (a) *Baptism as an expression of faith and conversion*

In the texts we have cited in the beginning of this study we saw how the N.T. refers baptism to both faith and conversion. The conclusion of our analysis of these concepts evinces the basic fact that it is a quite legitimate approach, for both these concepts fundamentally have their *Sitz im Leben* in the

idea of the covenant, both in the O.T. and in the N.T. Moreover, in the N.T. revelation they take on a new meaning due to the new dimensions of thought it has through the coming of Jesus Christ as the object of man's faith and conversion. It is precisely in the context of this Christo-centric understanding of faith and conversion that we have now to analyse the relationship between faith, conversion and baptism.

### *Baptism as the expression of faith in Jesus Christ*

The personal relation that is established in faith between the believer and Christ needs an authentic external expression which is characterized by the profundity of the personal commitment of man to God. The N.T., especially the epistles of Paul, throw a good deal of light on this point. It is true Paul unfolds at large the necessity, meaning and the sufficiency of faith. He can even say, 'man is justified by faith alone'.<sup>20</sup> Looking back into the history of salvation, he sees only one thing that is permeating and perennial: faith. The faith of Abraham was controlling the history of salvation. Is it all that Paul has to say about man before God?

There are authors who deny all 'causative' efficacy to baptism and admit only a 'cognitive' value;<sup>21</sup> there are others who ascribe to baptism a quasi-magic effect.<sup>22</sup> But the majority of scholars insist on the necessity of faith and baptism.<sup>23</sup> It is true Paul refers to baptism *en passant*; but while doing so, he fixes the point of departure for the Christian existence in it. For him baptism is '*das Faktum des christlichen Lebens*'. His more serious arguments regarding Christian life are drawn from the fact that the believers are baptized. Baptism is for

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<sup>20</sup> We must note here that the expression *sola fide* is not necessarily a Protestant one and that it has its origin much earlier than Protestantism. Cf. S. Lyonnet, *Quaestiones in Epistolam ad Romanos* (prima series), Rome, 1962, pp. 114 ff.; H. Küng, *Rechtfertigung*, Einsiedeln, 1957, pp. 243 ff. (E.T.: *Justification*, London, 1965); L. Bouyer, *Du Protestantisme à l'Église*, Paris, 3rd ed. 1959, pp. 103 ff., E.T.: *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, London, 1956.

<sup>21</sup> According to K. Barth baptism is a *pictura verbi* in which justification through the word of the Gospel is made known to man. Cf. *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe*, Zürich-Zollikon, 1943. E.T.: *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*, London, 1958; M. Barth, *Die Taufe, ein Sakrament? Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Gespräch über die kirchliche Taufe*, Zollikon-Zürich, 1951.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Religionen*, Leipzig, 1927, pp. 252-261; H. Weinel, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen, 1926, pp. 304, 422 ff.; H. Lietzmann, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testaments*, III, Tübingen, 1913, pp. 30 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament doctrine of baptism*, London, 1948, pp. 80-84; H. G. Marsh, *The Origin and Significance of N.T. Baptism*, Manchester, 1941, pp. 142-145; G. F. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, London, 1961, pp. 151 ff.; O. Cullmann, *Le baptême des enfants et la doctrine biblique du baptême*, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1948, pp. 40 ff.

Paul the decisive event in the life of the believer, which once and for all determines the nature of life he should lead. The sanctity of life he should have (1 Cor. 6:11), the unity of Christians he should foster (1 Cor. 1:13, 12:13), the radical transformation which he should realize (Rom. 6:3-11; Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Cor. 10:1-2), all these are referred back to baptism.

The close relationship that exists between faith and baptism is clearly brought out in Gal. 3:26-29.<sup>24</sup> According to this passage the new existence of the Christians as sons of God is effected through faith and baptism. They are both related to the person of Christ whom they encounter in their faith as well as baptism. What is said here about faith (v. 26) is further confirmed (*gar*) through what is said about baptism (v. 27). The meaning of both consists in the fact that they have now put on Christ and have become one person (*heis*) with Christ, whom they had believed. The word 'baptism' occurs here once, but the theology centred on it is the final answer of Paul to the infiltration of 'another Gospel' (Gal. 1:6) into the Christian communities.

### *Baptism as an expression of conversion*

As we have seen, the preaching and mission of John the Baptist is centred on the 'baptism of conversion'—baptism as the sealing of man's conversion. Scholars have been trying to find out the origin of this practice and to see its relation to Christian baptism.<sup>25</sup> There are two kinds of baptismal rites in pre-Christian times which may have influenced the Johannine baptism: proselyte baptism was administered to the Gentiles when they became Jews; the other was related to the Jewish practice of purification which gained great importance in the communities of Qumran. The baptism administered to the Gentiles was the confirmation of their conversion (*metanoia*), bringing them from their idolatry towards the one true God.<sup>26</sup> The practices of purifying baths in the community of Qumran bring to light the relation between conversion and baptism. According to them, these purifying baths are the external expression of inner conversion. The *Manual of Discipline* speaks about the 'stains of *thešûbah*' which cannot be cleansed by any waters of ablution, or sanctified by immersion in lakes or river,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Grall, 'Le baptême dans L'Épître aux Galates', *RB*, 58 (1951), 503-520.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Delorme, 'Le pratique du baptême dans le judaïsme contemporain des origines chrétiennes', *Lum Vie* No. 26 (1956), 21-60; J. Jeremias, 'Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe', *ZNW*, 28 (1929), 312-320; J. Leipoldt, *Der urchristliche Taufe im Lichte der Religionsgeschichte*. Leipzig, 1928; R. Reitzenstein, *Die Vorgeschichte der Christlichen Taufe*. Leipzig, 1929; J. Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie*. Grembloux, 1935, pp. 356-391.

<sup>26</sup> J. Jeremias, 'Proselytentaufe und N.T.', *ThZ*, 5 (1949), 418-428; *Syb. Oracl.*, IV, vv. 152-170; M. Simon, *Verus Israël*. Paris, 1948, p. 333.

or purified by any bath.<sup>27</sup> In IQS 5:13 it is said the entrance into the water is to be denied to the unrepentant, for men cannot be purified unless they repent their evil. It is quite probable that the neophytes were admitted 'to the purer waters of baptism' in the sight of the assembled people.

The Acts makes a clear distinction between the Johannine baptism and the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:3-4). At the same time the former is seen as oriented towards the Christian baptism. The specific note of the latter is that it is administered 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. Even here conversion is demanded on the part of the hearers (Acts 2:37-38); but this conversion is subordinated to faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ and conversion to Him are equally given internal realization and external expression in baptism. As we have already indicated, faith in Jesus Christ carries with it all the characteristics of conversion in the Biblical sense, because it is as sinners that the Jews and Gentiles believe in Him. Such a faith cannot but express itself in an act in which the believer understands with all seriousness the fact that he is a sinner. This is precisely what we have in baptism, although our present methods of baptism hardly call to mind this depth of meaning. However, it is not correct to see baptism as an event in which the believer is shown forth as punished by God. P. Bonnard has given such an explanation: 'to be baptized means that the death of Christ, inasmuch as it is a judgement of God on sin, is applied to the believer; the baptized is concretely under the blow of the condemnation exhibited on Calvary'.<sup>28</sup> It is true Paul explains baptism as a participation of the believer in the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3 ff.). But how are we to understand this? Here we come to see the covenantal meaning of baptism—baptism as an expression of faith and conversion is also a covenantal act.

### (b) *Baptism as a Covenantal Act*

According to Biblical and Jewish traditions, baptismal practices have in themselves a covenantal aspect. Reference is often made to the Rabbinic teaching which explains circumcision, baptism and sacrifice as rites through which Israel entered into the Sinai covenant with Yahweh. The Israelites were circumcized in Egypt, baptized in their crossing of the Red Sea (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2), and offered sacrifice, by which the covenant

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<sup>27</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, 'The baptism of John and the Qumran community', *HTR*, 50 (1957), 175-191; L. Cerfaux, 'Le baptême des Esséniens', *RSR*, 19 (1929), 248-265; M. Black, *The Scrolls and the Christian Origins*. London, 1961, pp. 91 ff.; cf. IQS 3, 4 ff.

<sup>28</sup> P. Bonnard, *L'Épître aux Galates*. Neuchatel-Paris, 1953, p. 77: 'Être baptisé en Christ . . . signifie que la morte du Christ, en tant que jugement de Dieu sur le péché, est appliquée au croyant; le baptisé est concrètement sous le coup de la condamnation signifiée au Calvaire . . . le baptême n'a de sens que comme application au croyant de l'histoire de Christ à la croix.'

was sealed at Mount Sinai.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the idea of the New Covenant is closely associated with that of purification with water. Ezekiel describes the New Covenant as being made after an eschatological washing (cf. Ez. 16:6-14, 36:26-28). The concrete expression of this purification with its reference to the eschatological washing we have in the texts of Qumran, especially in the Manual of Discipline (IQS 3:4-5, 4:20-22, 5:13-14). Since the members of this community considered themselves to be the beneficiaries of God's eschatological intervention, they prepared themselves through internal conversion (*šūbh*) and external expression of it in certain rites of baptism with its meaning not only of ritual purification, but also of an internal purification of the heart and soul as a prelude to the messianic baptism through the spirit of holiness. In other words, they were getting ready for the inauguration of a new covenant community.

The preparation of such a messianic community began with the preaching of John the Baptist, who 'would turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God and would make ready for the Lord a people prepared' (Luke 1:16-17). However, his mission was only to be a messenger, a herald; his period is characterized by a deep sense of 'return' to God, but it lacks an inner dynamism both in the person of the preacher and in the baptism which he administered. He always points to a 'mightier one' who is to come and who will baptize 'in spirit and fire'.<sup>30</sup>

On the day of Pentecost the first messianic community was formed, when the Apostles administered baptism to those who believed in Jesus as Christ and Lord (Acts 2:37-47). According to certain Jewish traditions Pentecost, otherwise called the 'Feast of Weeks', was a commemoration of the giving of the Law and the concluding of the covenant on Mount Sinai.<sup>31</sup> This tradition is attested also by the writings of the Qumran community. In the light of these traditions it becomes clear that the Apostles and the first Christians understood the Christian baptism as the promulgation of the New Covenant. The reference to Joel 3:1-5, regarding the outpouring of the Spirit as the sign of the eschatological times, attests to this conviction (Acts 2:17 ff.). The constituting of the New Covenant in the death and resurrection of Jesus was thus promulgated on the day of Pentecost, when God sent the Spirit of His Son and wrote His Law upon the hearts of the believers (cf. Jer. 31:33; Ez. 36:27).

<sup>29</sup> J. Jeremias, 'Der Ursprung der Johannaufe', pp. 312-320.

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26-33. Cf. E. Best, 'Spirit-Baptism', *Nov. Test.*, 4 (1960), 236-246; J. Guillet, 'Baptême et Esprit', *Lum. Vie* No. 26 (1956), 85-104.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Le Deaut, 'Pentecôte et tradition juive', *Spiritus* No. 7 (1961), 127-144; B. Noack, 'The day of Pentecost in Jubilees, Qumran and Acts', *Annu. Sued. Theol. Stud.*, 1 (1962), 73-95; G. Kretschmar, 'Himmelfahrt und Pfingsten', *Zeits. für Kirchengeschichte*, 66 (1954-55), 209-253; E. Kutsch, *Das Herbstfest in Israel*. Diss. Mainz, 1955.

Although the conviction that baptism was a covenantal act was predominant in the primitive Christian community, the theology of baptism was still to be developed in the Pauline epistles. This we have mainly in Rom. 6:3 ff. and Col. 2:11 ff. The practice of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39) has its theological explanation in Paul. He shows how the believer in his baptism undergoes a process of death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3) and receives the Spirit as the principle of Christian life (Rom. 8). The believer is one who in his baptism had died with Christ, was buried with Christ, and waits for the resurrection with Christ. So the existence of the baptized Christian in the world has its resemblance to the state of Jesus between His death and resurrection. The *Zwischenzustand* of Jesus corresponds to the *Todeszustand* of the Christian between his baptism and final resurrection.<sup>32</sup> This dead state of the believer is conditioned by his sure hope of a final resurrection, because through faith he knows that Jesus is risen from the dead and that he too will rise with Him.

This inclusion of the believer in the death and resurrection of Jesus through baptism is nothing but his participation in the central event of the New Covenant. Now that the believer is convinced of the saving significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus and sees in it the inauguration of the New Covenant, he goes on to realize in himself that event and thus to become a full partner in the covenant. This is basically an act of love, for the believer is conscious of the love of Jesus Christ, which forced Him to give Himself for the believer (Gal. 2:20). The Church as the community of the people of God administers this rite of baptism, thus admitting the believer into the new covenant community. In the place of the Old Law given to Israel as the external manifestation of the covenant relationship, now a New Law is given to the believer—the law written on the heart (2 Cor. 3:3). It is the Law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), for ‘by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’ (1 Cor. 12:13). Because the Spirit of the Son is present in the believer he is entitled to call God ‘Abba, Father’. Thus through faith in Jesus Christ and baptism in His name a new community is formed. It is the community of the New Covenant, where there are no racial, national or social distinctions, for all are now one person in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27-29).

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<sup>32</sup> E. Stommel, ‘Begraben mit Christus (Rom. 6:5) und der Taufritus’, *RQS*, 49 (1954), 1-20; *Idem*, ‘Das Abbild seines Todes’ (Rom. 6:5) und der Taufritus’, *RQS*, 50 (1955), 1-21; cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Das Heilsgeschehen bei der Taufe nach dem Apostel Paulus*. München, 1950 (E.T.: *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul*. London, 1964); *Idem*, ‘Todes- und Lebensgemeinschaft mit Christus. Neue Studien zu Röm. 6:1-11’, *MTZ*, 6 (1955), 32-53; F. Mussner, ‘Zusammengewachsen durch die Ähnlichkeit mit seinem Tode. Der Gedankengang vom Röm. 6:1-6’, *TrTZ*, 63 (1954), 257-268.