

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Editorial

THE recently published Report of the Church of England Liturgical Commission on Baptism and Confirmation (S.P.C.K., 7s. 6d.) is distinguished by the beauty of its printing rather than by the depth of its theology. That is not to say, however, that it is lacking in commendable qualities. We welcome, for instance, the introduction into the service of Adult Baptism of the Old Testament lesson, Ezekiel xxxvi. 24-28—a passage which recites the promises attached to God's covenant with His people, and we have read with approval the short homily included in this service, based on this Ezekiel passage and on the Gospel (now Mark i. 1-11 instead of John iii. 1-8). We also commend the proposal to include a general rubric stating that "if the Font is so placed that the people cannot see and hear, the Minister of the Parish may at his own discretion set up a temporary Font in a suitable place, so that Baptism may be ministered in the face of the whole congregation". In the proposed service of Infant Baptism there is an excellent brief prayer for God's blessing on the parents who have brought children for baptism, asking that He will "give unto them the spirit of wisdom and love, that their earthly home may be an image of thine everlasting kingdom".

Less satisfactory is the Report's blunt assertion that "in the New Testament Adult Baptism is the norm" and that "it is only in the light of this fact that the doctrine and practice of Baptism can be understood". Obviously, in the nascent church (whether in the New Testament or on the mission field) those who first profess faith in Christ and receive baptism are adults. But it does not follow that adult baptism was the norm in the New Testament any more than it follows that adult circumcision was the norm in the Old Testament because it was first administered to the aged Abraham as a seal of the righteousness of his faith. The household baptisms of the New Testament are no less significant in this connection than were the household circumcisions of the Old Testament.

On the theology of infant baptism the Report flounders badly. The Gospel at present prescribed (Mark x. 13 ff., describing how our Lord called little children to Himself and blessed them, declaring that "of such is the kingdom of heaven") is excised on the supposition that it "has no obvious connection with baptism" (!) and, in its place we find Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations and baptize them (Matt. xxviii. 18-20)—a passage, certainly, which is connected with baptism, but, because of its missionary implications, not immediately with infants. The Report's fundamental weakness at this point is the result of its lamentable oversight in ignoring the theology of the Covenant of Grace, with its plain teaching concerning the position of children within the Church. (On this subject we venture to draw attention to the essay on "The Place and Purpose of the Sacraments" which appeared in the last two issues of this quarterly.) It may not be inopportune to remind the members of the Commission, and any other would-be revisers of the baptismal service, of the statement of Richard Hooker (a man whose Anglicanism is unlikely to be

suspect !) that " the fruit of baptism dependeth only upon the covenant which God hath made ".

We question, further, the wisdom of unnecessarily (albeit optionally) adding to the symbolism of the baptismal rite by the presentation to each newly baptized adult of a lighted candle—" in token that thou hast passed from darkness to light, and that henceforth thou mayest shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father ".

Whether those who have received baptism as adults also need to be confirmed, is another question which calls for fuller consideration. If, as at present, they are required to present themselves for confirmation, then it is most desirable that the latter rite should follow immediately on their baptism, as in fact this Report proposes. But what must be avoided at all costs is any suggestion that the sacrament of baptism is either devoid of effect or in some measure deficient unless it is supplemented by confirmation. To teach that the gift of the Holy Spirit is conveyed in confirmation through the laying on of the bishop's hands is derogatory to baptism because of the accompanying implication that the Holy Spirit is absent from, or only partially present in, that sacrament. After all, baptism is the sacrament of regeneration by water and the Holy Spirit. Yet this implication resides in the proposed prayer in which the bishop says : " Send down from heaven upon them thy Holy Ghost the Comforter " (and surely, incidentally, we should dispense with the term " Ghost " as applied to the Holy Spirit) ; and it is discernible also in the rather surprising explanation given in the Introduction that the word " confirm " possesses two meanings—" to strengthen and to complete ". We, however, deny that it bears the latter connotation, and we urge that the prayer in the present Order of Confirmation should be retained (or a prayer to the same effect) : " Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter. . . "

There are certain other points which may be mentioned briefly.

(1) It is, to say the least, " jumping the gun " to refer to various rubrics " in conformity with the new Canons ", as though the draft canons now under discussion were already legal and binding.

(2) Let us discard language, in headings, rubrics, or elsewhere, which speaks of *blessing* the water, since concepts of the blessing of inanimate objects or elements border on the superstitious.

(3) For a similar reason we may advantageously dispense with the petition (already in our Prayer Book and retained in this Report) : " . . . sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin. . . "

(4) At the baptism of infants, the questions should be addressed not only to the sponsors, but to the parents also.

(5) Let us have done with superstitious notions (perpetuated in this Report) concerning *the danger* of infants or adults dying unbaptized. Does any sane Christian really believe that the eternal destiny of persons *in extremis* is determined or altered by the application of water or the repetition of a formula ?

* * * *

Reading in *The Times* of July 20 that millions of pilgrims were expected to visit Trier during the next two months for the purpose of

venerating the tunic which is claimed to be the seamless garment worn by Christ at His trial, and reputedly brought to that city by the mother of Constantine, one could not help thinking of a humorous writing of the sixteenth century in which the author seeks to demonstrate the advantages that Christendom might derive from an inventory of relics. It is a work which the pilgrims to Trier would be sure to find entertaining reading during an afternoon off. Speaking only of those relics of which he himself had knowledge, the writer remarks that the preservers of them would find it of no avail to shelter themselves under the name of Constantine or King Louis or some of the popes "when they have to prove that fourteen nails were used in fixing our Saviour to the cross, that a whole hedge was plaited in making His crown of thorns, that the spear's point produced three other points, that His robe was so multiplied as to be converted into three, or that it changed its form so as to be metamorphosed into a Mass vestment, to which it had not the least resemblance, or that one napkin produced as many other napkins as a hen does chickens".

This laughter-maker was a Frenchman by the name of John Calvin—one with whom this number of *The Churchman* is not unconcerned.

* * * *

In some respects, indeed, this is an unusual number. For one thing, it is designed to commemorate neither an Anglican nor an Englishman, but a Continental churchman belonging to a Church with presbyterian orders who was born 450 years ago—to be precise, on July 10, 1509—in the French town of Noyon. It is, moreover, 400 years since the publication of the final edition of his most famous work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and since, also, the founding by him of the Academy at Geneva. The abiding greatness of this remarkable man is indicated by the fact that these anniversary milestones have during recent months been celebrated by publications and speeches and public gatherings, not only in his native land and in Geneva, the city that adopted him as her own, but also in many other countries and cities throughout the world. We should remember, moreover, that Calvin's dynamic influence extended to the Church of England, through Archbishop Cranmer by correspondence, and through other English churchmen by personal encounter in Geneva, and also of course through his writings.

For another thing, this number is unusual because two of those who contribute articles are not members of the Anglican Church. But on an occasion such as this our readers will readily admit that it is fitting that two acknowledged Calvin scholars of Presbyterian allegiance should be welcomed as our guests. Dr. Jean Cadier is Dean of the Faculty of Protestant Theology in the University of Montpellier; he is a compatriot of the great Reformer and a respected authority on his life and writings; he is President of the Calvinist Society of France; he is joint-editor of the new edition in modern French of Calvin's commentaries and *Institutes* which is at present being produced in France; he is the author of a biographical study of Calvin, "the man whom God tamed," published last year in Geneva; and there is yet more that could be said about his qualifications to speak with authority on John

Calvin—but we forbear, knowing him to be a man of Christian modesty. His article on the Relevance of Calvin appeared earlier this year in the French-Swiss journal, *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, and is reproduced here in English by kind permission of both author and editor. We are indebted also to the Rev. Noel Pollard and Mr. Gervase Duffield for their valuable assistance in the preparation of a translation.

The other Presbyterian contributor, the Rev. Basil Hall, is Lecturer in Reformation Church History in the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. He is fast moving into the forefront of English authorities on the French Reformer, and his article says some things, forthrightly and incisively, which have needed for a long time to be said, and which we hope will be heeded. The two remaining contributors are Anglicans: Dr. James Packer, who is resident Lecturer at Tyndale Hall, Bristol, is no stranger to the pages of *The Churchman*; and Mr. Gervase Duffield, who is an Oxford graduate in the School of Theology (as is Dr. Packer also), is at present pursuing special studies in the theology of Calvin at Cambridge.

P.E.H.
