

## Baptism in the Fourth Century.

THEODORE of Mopsuestia (born in Antioch about 350, Bishop of Mopsuestia in 392, died in 428) was the most influential thinker in the Eastern Church after the death of Chrysostom. He was a great expositor and wrote many commentaries. As a theologian he has been held responsible for Nestorianism; a charge which does not now concern us. In *Christianity in History* by Vernon Bartlett and A. J. Carlyle (p. 279), Theodore is described as "one of the most modern minds of the Ancient Church in psychological insight as well as in historical methods of exegesis."

Among his many surviving writings is *Liber ad Baptizandos*, containing a commentary on the Nicene Creed, followed by six discourses on the Lord's Prayer, Baptism and the Eucharist. It seems likely that it was used as a kind of textbook for catechumens in the Greek Church of Antioch. His lectures on Baptism and the Eucharist throw a great deal of light upon the development of sacramental practice and thought. On several points he confirms and develops what are left as obscure hints in other writers. His account of the Liturgy, describing in detail the administration of the Eucharist, are intensely interesting. Here we are concerned only with what he has to say about baptism. The quotations in what follows are taken from the translation of the Syriac version by A. Mingana in *Woodbrooke Studies*, Vol. vi. (Heffer, 1933).

Theodore claims to be describing and explaining "the ceremonies which are only performed, prior to the sacrament, and according to an early tradition, upon those who are baptized." (p. 35). We may note at the outset that he has apparently never heard it suggested that infants should be baptised. For him the subjects of baptism are believers who have been instructed in the Faith, and with some thoroughness, if his own lectures are samples. We may note also that he takes it for granted that the mode of baptism is immersion.

The lectures on baptism are expositions of every detail in the elaborate services, together with their underlying theology. "Every sacrament," he says, "consists in the representation of unseen and unspeakable things through signs and emblems. Such things require explanation and interpretation for the sake of the person who draws nigh unto the sacrament, so that he might

know its power." (p. 17). It is evident that, according to the words of the Apostle, when we perform either Baptism or the Eucharist we perform them in remembrance of the death and Resurrection of Christ, in order that the hope of the latter may be strengthened in us. He quotes Romans vi, 3-4 (p. 20).

Baptism is, further, a coming to the Church of God. The full meaning of this we can know only in the next life, but Christ wished that those who believe in Him should live in the Church of the living God. The candidate "ought to think that he is coming to be the citizen of a new and great city and he should therefore show great care in everything that is required of him before his enrolment in it" (p. 24). He has to show that he is worthy of the citizenship of the city. That is why he must be conducted by a sponsor or godfather who testifies to his worthiness and who promises to act as a guide to his inexperience. So sponsored, the catechumen has his name entered upon the books of the church by "a duly appointed person." This registrar has the duty of examining him as to his manner of life and his knowledge of Christian belief.

The next stage is exorcism. The exorcists pray "in a loud and prolonged voice" for the deliverance of the candidate from the servitude of Satan. During this ceremony he stands barefooted on sack cloth, "so that from the fact that your feet are pricked and stung by the roughness of the cloth you may remember your old sins and show penitence and repentance of the sins of your fathers . . . and so that you may call for mercy on the part of the Judge and rightly say, 'Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness' (Psalm xxxii)" (p. 32).

After a period of probation the candidate appears before the priest "to make his engagements and promises to God." He is required to declare that he will keep the faith and the creed and remain till the end in the doctrine of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whose discipleship he has been admitted by faith (p. 33). Before the priest he recites the Creed and the Lord's Prayer and utters the words of abjuration: "I abjure Satan and all his angels and all his works and all his service and all his deception and all his worldly glamour; and I engage myself and believe and am baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Theodore explains at length what is involved, both in belief and in practice, in abjuring Satan. He particularises all pagan ceremonies and practices and a number of heresies then current, including those of Arius and Apollinarius, who are "angels of Satan." "Your association should be with Christ our Lord, as a member united to His head and far from those who endeavour to detach you from the faith and creed of the Church." (p. 41).

The priest then signs him on the forehead with holy oil, which stamps him as a lamb of Christ, as an owner stamps his sheep, and also as an enlisted soldier of Christ. (p. 46). For the baptism proper, which is "the symbol of the second birth," the candidate takes off all his garments and is again anointed with oil all over his body. "You draw nigh unto the gift of Baptism in order to die and to rise with Christ so that you may be born again to the new life, and thus, after having been led by these symbols to participation in the realities, you will perform the symbol of the true second birth."

He is then brought to the water, which the priest blesses, praying "that the grace of the Holy Spirit may come upon the water . . . so that those who descend into it may be fashioned afresh by the grace of the Holy Spirit and born again into a new and virtuous human nature." (p. 56). In the water the priest puts his hand on the head of the candidate and says: "So-and-so is baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." At the mention of each name the candidate bows his head beneath the water. "He says, 'so-and-so is baptised,' not 'I baptise so-and-so' in order to show that as a man like the rest of men he is not able to bestow such benefits which only Divine grace can bestow." (p. 59). There were thus three immersions and the method of immersion was different from that customary in our Baptist churches today.

The candidate is then clothed in a shining white raiment, typical of his new life, and is once again anointed on the forehead, as a sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit, "and He will be and remain with you."

HUGH MARTIN.

*Down where the Bee-Folk Fly*, by Victor J. Smith. (Independent Press, 7s. 6d.).

Mr. Smith has written another nature book for children. He takes them week by week during the year down the byways of the East Anglian countryside. Of course, this is not just a "nature book." Mr. Smith has his own deft way of helping children to think of nature's God. Ministers in search of inspiration for children's addresses must make what terms they can with the customary warning—"All rights reserved."

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