

## The Theology of Baptism in Baptist History<sup>1</sup>

IT is an open secret that among paedobaptists at the present time there is much uncertainty and discussion as to the meaning of baptism and the persons to whom it should be administered. What is the relationship of baptism to grace, to faith, to regeneration, to church membership, to confirmation? Does baptism make any difference to the person baptized, and if so, what? The present inquiry is an attempt by a paedobaptist to discover what answers Baptists have given in the past to the above questions. The task has not been altogether easy, because the doctrine of baptism does not occupy a central place in Baptist theology. This is a fact which always comes as a surprise to paedobaptists. For instance, of Spurgeon's three thousand sermons, only five are on baptism; or to take another illustration from an earlier age, when in 1674 Thomas Hicks, with the approval of Hanserd Knollys and other leading Baptists, made thirty-one accusations against the Quakers, he did not think it necessary to make any mention of the Quakers' disregard of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper<sup>2</sup>. When Baptists do write of baptism, they have been much more concerned to prove the impropriety of the sprinkling of infants than to define what happens at the immersion of believers. The evidence for the present inquiry, therefore, has had to be collected chiefly from incidental references, sometimes even from writers taken, so to speak, off their guard.

The many theories of baptism held by paedobaptists fall broadly into three main categories. In the first category are those which regard baptism as purely symbolic and as incapable of effecting any change either of character or of status in the person baptized; under this view infants are baptized in order to demonstrate the love of Christ for children as well as adults. The second type of theory holds that baptism, whether or not it has any symbolic value, is primarily the act which admits into membership of the visible Church, or which solemnly ratifies an existing membership; under this view infants are baptized on the ground that they ought not to be denied membership of the Church. The third type of theory maintains that, in addition to any symbolic or initiatory value that baptism may have, its chief purpose is to be the means whereby God confers a gift or benefit of some kind on

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered to the Baptist Historical Society in April, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Crosby, *History of the Baptists* (1738), II. 296-306.

the person baptized, whether that gift be described as regeneration, or forgiveness of sin, or grace, or the Holy Spirit, or a "seal" by which the person baptized is assured of his inclusion in the Covenant; under views of this third type, infants are baptized because it is thought that they ought not to be deprived of the benefits of the sacrament. It will be convenient to consider the views of Baptists under the same three heads. (In order not to complicate unduly a sufficiently complex subject, the inquiry will be mainly confined to the English Baptists from 1610 onwards).

### Baptism as a Symbol

The first question, then, for our consideration is whether Baptists have regarded baptism as having symbolic value only, and what it has been held to symbolise.

The question whether Baptists consider baptism to be anything beyond a mere symbol will be answered more fully under the second and third heads of this inquiry; let it suffice at this point to state that from about the middle of the 17th century until quite recent times the main tendency of Baptist thought has been to regard this ordinance as having no more than a symbolic value. For instance, the Confession of Faith of 1677, which was modelled on the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians, deliberately omitted all reference to the efficacy of baptism, its conferring of grace by the Holy Ghost, its being a seal of the Covenant, and its admission of the party baptized into the visible Church;<sup>3</sup> instead it merely declared that—

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

Typical of 18th century thought is Joseph Hart's hymn<sup>4</sup>—

Water no man denies;  
But, brethren rest not there;  
'Tis faith in Christ that justifies  
And makes the conscience clear.

Even more pointed is Upton's hymn revised by Spurgeon<sup>5</sup>—

No trust in water do we place,  
'Tis but an outward sign;  
The great reality is grace,  
The fountain, blood divine.

Prof. Matthews, writing on behalf of the American Baptists

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxviii, sections i and vi.

<sup>4</sup> Gadsby's Collection, Philpots Edition (1850) no. 863.

<sup>5</sup> *Our Own Hymn Book* (1866), no. 923.

in 1937 in the Faith and Order volume *The Ministry and the Sacraments*, stated that—

Baptism is considered only an outward sign of an inner experience, a symbol in which the individual pledges himself to a newness of life.

It is only very recently that any noticeable tendency in the contrary direction has appeared, and Principal Underwood was perhaps still representing only a minority view when in the same volume he wrote (p. 223)—

While many Baptists would regard Prof. I. G. Matthews's paper as an adequate expression of their opinions of the Ministry and the Sacraments, there is an increasing number of Baptists in both England and America who cannot give their consent to Prof. Matthews's virtual reduction of the Sacraments to *nuda signa*.

If, then, the sole or main value of baptism is symbolic, what does it signify? The early Arminian Baptists were not of one mind on this point. The Mennonite Confession of 1580 had confined its attention to the washing away of sins, but the Twenty Articles of John Smyth define baptism as "the external sign of remission of sins, of dying and of being made alive." A similar statement is in Helwy's Amsterdam confession of 1611, but Smyth's followers in 1612 preferred to speak of baptism figuring the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire.<sup>6</sup> The Arminian Confessions of Faith of 1651 and 1660 make no mention of any symbolic value of baptism, while the "Orthodox Creed" of 1678 is similar to the Calvinist Confession of 1677, and doubtless influenced by it. These early Arminian Baptists seem to have practised believers' baptism simply because they held it to be the divinely-appointed door of entrance into the Church and not because of any particular symbolic significance. Immersion is not mentioned until the Confession of 1660, and this may have helped to retard the discovery of the symbolic importance of baptism.

The Calvinistic Baptists, on the other hand, were from the first more interested in the symbolic than in the initiatory significance of baptism. This was natural, because if our acceptance by Christ depends entirely on God's eternal decree, it cannot have any real connection with baptism.<sup>7</sup> The Calvinists practised immersion as early as about 1640, and the Confessions of 1644, 1646, 1656, 1677, and 1689 all declare the symbolic connection between baptism and (to use the words of the two earliest) "the interest the Saints

<sup>6</sup> *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion . . .* no. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin himself did not admit this conclusion, but sometimes claimed that baptism admits to Church membership and begins the life of grace. See *Inst.* IV. xv. 10, 12, xvi. 3, 22, xvii. 1. Karl Barth seems to have overlooked this in his famous lecture.

have in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ." The same point is made by Tombes,<sup>8</sup> d'Anvers,<sup>9</sup> and Bunyan.<sup>10</sup> Most of these sources give also some other significations of baptism: according to the 1644 Confession it signifies also the washing of the soul in the blood of Christ and the final resurrection of the bodies of the Saints; according to the 1677 Confession it signifies the believer's engrafting into Christ, the remission of his sins, and his dedication to God; according to Tombes<sup>11</sup> "perhaps the primary end of baptism" was "that it should be a sign that the baptized shows himself a disciple, and confesseth the faith in which he hath been instructed." All these interpretations are to be found together in d'Anvers *Treatise of Baptism*. But throughout this period the central emphasis is on the connection between baptism and the death of Christ.

Later writers, such as Abraham Booth<sup>12</sup> and Spurgeon<sup>13</sup> seem to have concentrated almost entirely on the symbolism of dying and rising with Christ, and this alone seems to have been alluded to in the Basis of the Baptist Union,<sup>14</sup> and in the Statement for the Faith and Order Commission which was approved by the Council of the Baptist Union in 1948.<sup>15</sup> A similar process has taken place in Baptist hymnody: an older generation could sing at a baptismal service—

<sup>8</sup> *An Examen of the Sermon of Mr. Stephen Marshall . . .* (1645), p. 168. "And for Baptism, it seals dying with Christ, and rising with Christ, *Rom.* vi. 3, 4, 5. *Gal.* iii. 27. *Col.* ii. 12. *1 Pet.* iii. 21, and therefore not only the first work of conversion, but also aftergrowth and exercise of holiness."

<sup>9</sup> *A Treatise of Baptism* (1674), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> *A Reason for my Practice in Worship* (Works, ed. Ofor, II. 604 b). "Touching shadowish, or figurative ordinances; I believe that Christ hath ordained but two in His Church, viz., Water baptism and the supper of the Lord: both which are of excellent use to the Church in this world, they being to us representations of the death and resurrection of Christ; and are as God shall make them, helps to our faith therein. But I count them not the fundamentals of our Christianity . . ."

<sup>11</sup> "An Exercitation presented to the Chairman of a Committee of the Assembly of Divines (1645), p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. the quotation from his *Apology for the Baptists* on page 67 of Robert Hall's *Terms of Communion*. "In submitting to baptism we have an emblem of our union and communion with Jesus Christ, as our great representative, in His death, burial, and resurrection." Cf. also his *Paedobaptism Examined*, 1829 edition, I. 438.

<sup>13</sup> *Sermon* 1627.

<sup>14</sup> "Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'."

<sup>15</sup> *The Nature of the Church* (Faith and Order, 1952), p. 166. "Baptism of believers by immersion . . . is an 'acted creed'. We value the symbolism of immersion following the Pauline teaching of the believer's participation in the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord (*Rom.* vi, 3.).

Our souls he washes in his blood  
 As water makes the body clean,  
 And the good spirit from our God  
 Descends like purifying rain.<sup>16</sup>

but the hymns in the Baptist Church Hymnals of 1900 and 1933 are almost wholly concerned with personal profession of faith and participation in the death of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

### Baptism as Initiation

We turn now to our second main question: is baptism the door of entry to the Church?

John Smyth several times gave an affirmative answer to this question,<sup>18</sup> and in this he was followed uniformly by the Arminian Baptists for the next fifty years. The letter intercepted in 1620 says that believers "are made God's house, or church, through being knit together by the Spirit of God, and baptized into his body, which is the church."<sup>19</sup> Similar statements appear in the Confessions of 1651 and 1660, the latter of which distinguishes between the *necessity* of baptism to the gathering of churches, and the *duty* of those who have been constituted church members by baptism to receive the laying on of hands and to join in church fellowship and worship. Not until the 1678 Confession is there any perceptible weakening on this point: Calvinistic influence is traceable in this Confession, and it goes no further than saying that baptism is a sign to the believer of, among other things, his ingrafting into the body of Christ, which is his church; "And orderly none ought to be admitted into the visible church of Christ, without being first baptized." Similar language is used in the Articles of 1770 of the General Baptist New Connexion: "No person *ought* to be received into the church without submitting to that ordinance."

It was different with the Calvinists. It is true Collier in *The Font-Guard Routed* (1652) asked: "Where is the Scripture that saith baptism is only for *Initiation*, and not for *Confirmation*; it's a fancy of your own brain; may not baptism be initiation and confirmation too?" And the Somerset Confession, for which he was largely respon-

<sup>16</sup> General Baptist New Connexion Hymn Book (1830 edition), no. 501, by Isaac Watts.

<sup>17</sup> A statistical analysis of some representative hymn-books is given as an appendix to this paper.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., in *The Character of the Beast*, p. 59 (Works, 1915, p. 150) baptism is described as "the door of the Church", typified by the laver at the door of the Tabernacle. See also p. 150, item II(1) of reply to Clifton's *Plea for Infants*; and p. 757 in his *Retraction*. "It is not lawful for every one that seeth the truth to baptize, for then there might be as manie churches as couples in the world and none have any thing to do with other."

<sup>19</sup> Crosby, I, 135.

sible, states that believers are by baptism "planted in the visible church or body of Christ . . ." (*Acts* ii. 41). But none of the other Calvinistic Confessions of the 17th century makes baptism the initiatory ordinance; the nearest approach is in the Appendix to the 1646 Confession which makes baptism a precondition of church membership.<sup>20</sup> Tombes went so far as to say that "The Church of God may consist without baptism, as in the crucified thief, etc."<sup>21</sup>

The subsequent history of Calvinistic thought on this point follows these early precedents. A few have regarded baptism as the door to the Church, but the prevailing view has considered baptism to be simply a highly important duty of those who have already entered the church invisible by faith and the church visible by vote of a church meeting. It is tempting at first sight to suppose that the advocates of strict communion thought of baptism as admitting to church membership; but this is not so. It was common ground between Bunyan and his opponents Paul and Kiffin that baptism was not the entering or initiating ordinance:<sup>22</sup> their objection to Bunyan was based simply on the ground that lack of water baptism is a gross breach of good order, and that admission to the Lord's Supper would be a condonation of it.<sup>23</sup> Yet among Bunyan's opponents d'Anvers took the minority view that baptism is the door into the New Testament Church, as circumcision had been into the Old Testament Church.<sup>24</sup> A similar view appears to have been taken by Denne.<sup>25</sup>

More than a century later the majority view was held not only by Robert Hall, the champion of Open Communion, but also by Abraham Booth and Joseph Kinghorn, who advocated Strict Communion. Alone among the champions on the strict side at that time, Andrew Fuller held baptism to be "the initiatory ordinance of Christianity."<sup>26</sup> After his death this view survived in one or two 18th century hymns sung by the General Baptists of the New Connexion. Thus Deacon had written—

Read your Bible for instruction,  
There you find the will of God,  
There you find the introduction  
To the church is through the flood.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Section XVII: "Believers baptized ought to agree and join together" in doctrine, fellowship, etc. "And a company of baptized believers so agreeing and joining together are a church or congregation of Christ."

<sup>21</sup> *Exercitation*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Bunyan's *Works*, II, 606<sup>a</sup>, 619<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> "You object" (said Bunyan, *Works*, II, p. 626<sup>a</sup>). "That this putteth the whole of God's instituted worship . . . to the highest uncertainties." Bunyan was in his opponent's view indulging the unbaptized in the sin of infant baptism (p. 631<sup>b</sup>).

<sup>24</sup> *A Treatise of Baptism*, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Bunyan, II, p. 650<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *Letter to a Friend* . . . (1814), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Hymn Book of the General Baptist New Connexion (1830), no. 517.

And a baptismal hymn by Fellowes had contained the line—

Come to his church, enter his gates.<sup>28</sup>

A similar conception appears in Ingham's *Hand-book on Christian Baptism*, published in 1865. Ingham was a General Baptist of the New Connexion and, like the old Arminians, seems to have been more interested in the initiatory than in the symbolical significance of baptism. For him it is "the law of the Christian dispensation . . . that all be admitted to the church on earth through water"; "we regard baptism . . . as the divinely appointed way of entrance into the body of Christ."<sup>29</sup>

Spurgeon, on the other hand, was much more interested in the symbolism of baptism, and would go no further than calling it "the avowal of faith; the man was Christ's soldier, but now in baptism he puts on his regimentals."<sup>30</sup> Even further from initiation is the constitution drawn up by John Clifford for the New Connexional Chapel at Westbourne Park in 1877, which treats baptism merely as the privilege of the believer which every applicant for church membership is urged to consider but is not obliged to undergo. "The whole question is left to the individual conscience."<sup>31</sup>

The minority view has been revived again in recent times by Dr. Wheeler Robinson, who on page 84 of *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* stated that "We become members of the living body of Christ by being consciously and voluntarily baptized in the Spirit of Christ"; but he had to admit in a footnote to page 98 that according to the Baptists "Entrance into the Church is regarded as distinct from baptism, though in practice usually combined with it." In consonance with this distinction, the reply returned in 1926 by the Baptist Union Assembly to the Lambeth Appeal stated, with reference to membership of the church—

We believe that this holy society is to be found wherever companies of believers unite as Churches on the ground of a confession of personal faith.

There is no reference here to baptism. Similarly the 1948 Statement says that—

The basis of our membership in the Church is a conscious and deliberate acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord by each individual.

The Statement goes on to describe baptism as the expression and safeguard of this vital evangelical experience, but not as the means of entry into the Church. The majority view still prevails.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 495.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Sermon 573, vol. x., p. 326.

<sup>31</sup> For the full text see Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (1947), p. 210.

## Baptism as a Means of Grace

The third question for our consideration is whether, in Baptist thought, baptism is regarded as conveying anything from God to the person baptized, or effecting any change in him. This is really a very complex question, and must be further subdivided. There is first the question whether baptism is in any sense the sacrament of regeneration; secondly, if it is not that, is it still in some sense a means of grace to the recipient? and thirdly, if not a means of grace, is it at least a seal or assurance to him of his being in a covenant relationship to God?

Almost without exception, Baptists have treated the idea of baptismal regeneration with an emphatic repudiation. It is true that in the heat of their righteous indignation they have not always clearly stated what it was that they were rejecting; for the term "regeneration" can mean a number of different things. From God's side, it can mean His election of the individual to salvation; or His forgiveness of all his past sin; or His ingrafting of him into Christ; or His conferring on him the Holy Spirit; or His creation in him of that eternal life which begins on earth and continues after death. Further, from man's side "regeneration" can be thought of as the awakening of the soul to the claims of Christ; the change of heart known as conversion; or the changed life that issues from the change of heart. But Baptists have been unanimous that in one or other of these senses, if not in all, baptism is neither the means nor the occasion of regeneration.

It would be easy to produce an impressive catena of quotations from Baptist writings, from 1620 to the present day,<sup>32</sup> in which baptismal regeneration is repudiated; but it is perhaps more to our purpose to notice some instances of a contrary tendency. It has been claimed<sup>33</sup> that a vital difference between the Churches of Christ and the English Baptists is that the former maintain that baptism, if conjoined with faith in the person baptized, is the means through which the new life in Christ is begun; whereas the latter allow it no such efficacy. But the distinction is not absolute. Alexander Campbell, the Father of the Churches of Christ, in his fascinating book *Christian Baptism, with its Antecedents and Consequents* (1853), did indeed contend that baptism was designed for remission of sins, and that adoption and justification were among

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Crosby, I. 134; Tombes, *Exercitation* (1645), pp. 24, 30; Booth, *Apo:gy for the Baptists* (1778), pp. 2, 6; Hall, *Terms of Communion*, p. 79; Kinghorn, *Baptism a Term of Communion* (1816), p. 31; Spurgeon, *Sermons* 130, 381, 573; Tymms, *Evolution of Infant Baptism*, Preface; Underwood, *Conversion*, pp. 109, 112, *History of the English Baptists*, p. 269.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. by Dr. William Robinson in *What Churches of Christ Stand For*, Chap. vi.



its consequents ; to grace, faith, repentance, and baptism, he said,<sup>34</sup> must all be assigned "a concurrent efficacy in the rescue and delivery of man from sin, misery and ruin." But similar sentiments can be found among Baptists. Henry d'Anvers (if Bunyan did not misrepresent him)<sup>35</sup> held that in baptism believers put on Christ by their baptismal vow and covenant. A baptismal hymn by Fellows in the following century seems to imply remission of sins in baptism :

Come to His Church, enter His gates ;  
For you His gracious presence waits ;  
Here peace and pardon are bestowed ;  
Great gifts ! and worthy of a God.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly an anonymous hymn of the New Connexion declares that "in the baptismal laver"—

Bath'd in repentant tears,  
The sins which you deplore  
Dead in your Saviour's grave shall lie  
And shall be seen no more.<sup>37</sup>

More emphatic is Rawson's hymn in the *Baptist Church Hymnal* of 1900 :

Baptized into the Father's name,  
We're children of our God :  
Baptized into the Son, we claim  
The ransom of His blood :

Baptized into the Holy Ghost,  
In this accepted hour  
Give us to own the Pentecost  
And the descending power.<sup>37</sup>

About the same time, Ingham was writing as follows :

We also believe that baptism is meant when we read of being born of water ; but we do not believe that the Scriptures say that "to be saved by the washing of regeneration" is "to be baptized". The words of Paul to Titus are : "According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing (or bath) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The words refer to baptism *and* to the renewing operations of the Divine Spirit. Mr. Stacey here puts asunder what God has joined together, as do some on *Acts* ii. 38, attributing remission of sins to baptism, as if the Apostle had not equally directed everyone to *repent AND be baptized*.<sup>38</sup>

Here the argument is precisely Campbell's—that while baptism alone is useless, it has a concurrent efficacy with the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration. This line of thought has been taken up again in the present century by Dr. Wheeler Robinson :

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 255.

<sup>35</sup> *Works*, vol. II. p. 655<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Hymn Book of General Baptist New Connexion (1830), no. 495.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 515.

<sup>38</sup> *Hand Book of Christian Baptism*, p. 564.

To be baptized into Christ is to put on Christ, i.e., to enter that realm of the Spirit over which Christ is Lord . . .

The recipient of baptism in the New Testament times normally expected to be the recipient of the spiritual powers of the new life which he entered by his baptism. There could be no risk of encouraging the idea of "baptismal regeneration" (in the modern sense), because all who were baptized were already believers, i.e. the moral and spiritual conditions of their personal faith became the real channel of the Spirit's highest energies.<sup>39</sup>

I have given these quotations because of their inherent interest, but few Baptists have gone so far in attributing an efficacious connection between baptism and the new birth. Yet there have been some who, while attributing the beginning of the new life to faith alone, have nevertheless not denied to baptism a sacramental efficacy as a means of grace, or as a channel through which the holy Spirit is received, either for the first time or in greater measure than before. In theological terms, they have accepted baptism as a means of sanctification, while denying it any part in justification. This appears to be a quite recent development. For instance, apart from Rawson's hymn already mentioned, I have not found earlier than 1925 any claim by a Baptist that there is a bestowal of the Holy Spirit at baptism. The Arminian Confession of 1660 does refer to the Holy Spirit, but promises it *after* baptism, through prayer and the laying on of hands. Dr. Underwood, however, in his study of *Conversion* (p. 110) points out that the Apostle Paul "does not view baptism simply as an outward sign of an inward repentance, but connects it closely with the gift of the Spirit and union with Christ." About the same time Dr. Wheeler Robinson wrote: "I am pleading for the connection of water baptism with the Spirit in exactly the sense in which all Baptists plead for its connection with faith. If the New Testament teaches the latter, it assuredly also teaches the former; and Baptists are really committed to both."<sup>40</sup> Dr. Underwood, however, does not appear to regard baptism as the occasion for the first bestowal of the Holy Spirit, but rather, like the Lord's Supper, as an occasion for the enhancement of an already existing possession. These are his most recent words :

The baptism of believers . . . is an unforgettable experience of the first rank, in which God does something for them in response to their repentance and faith. They receive from Him a *further* endowment of the Spirit and *further* power to walk in newness of life. It makes their surrender to Christ *more* absolute and enhances their union with Him. It *quickens* their sense of responsibility to Him as Lord, *deepens* their sense of pardon and of sin forgiven, and brings them a *profounder* experience of that Divine grace they had already embraced by faith at their conversion.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (1927), pp. 176-7. <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> *History of the English Baptists*, p. 269; italics mine. Cf. also his article in *The Ministry and the Sacraments* (1937), pp. 225, 227.

Dr. Underwood and Dr. Wheeler Robinson have not been alone in regarding baptism as a means of grace. Dr. Payne has admitted that the meaning of baptism is not exhausted by its being a dramatic representation of the believer's conversion, but that "incorporation into the new Israel, appropriation by Christ and the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit are other and inseparable elements" in it.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Hugh Martin has remarked that "Baptism is at once an acted parable and a means of grace."<sup>43</sup> Indeed this view seems to have reached the point of orthodoxy, for the Statement of 1948 declares: "We recognise the two sacraments. . . . We hold that both are 'means of grace' to those who receive them in faith."<sup>44</sup>

I promised finally to say something on the question whether baptism, if not the means through which the new birth or the gifts of the Spirit are received, might yet be described as "a sealing ordinance." This not altogether clear expression has been much resorted to by paedobaptists fleeing from the lion of sacramentalism, in an attempt to avoid the bear of mere symbolism. But Baptists have not found this a necessary refuge. John Smyth, it is true, did once describe baptism as "the seal of the covenant,"<sup>45</sup> and Tombes admitted "that baptism is in its nature a seal of the righteousness of faith," but immediately pointed out that "God doth not seal this to everyone that is baptized, but only to true believers."<sup>46</sup> One or two modern hymns pray that in baptism we may be sealed by Christ for his own,<sup>47</sup> but Robert Robinson had already been baptized when he wrote—

Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,  
Seal it from thy courts above!

Collier refused to attach any sealing virtue to baptism:

Whereas you conclude Baptism to be a *Seal of the Covenant of Grace* . . . where is your Scripture for it? Did you ever read of any New Testament seal, besides the Spirit of Christ? *Eph.* i, 13, iv, 30.<sup>48</sup>

This protest is repeated in the Appendix to the 1677 Confession of Faith. Thereafter the controversy disappears from view.

<sup>42</sup> *Scottish Journal of Theology*, III. 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Baptist Quarterly*, XIV. 221.

<sup>44</sup> This view—that baptism is a means of sanctification but not of justification is almost precisely that maintained by Gorham a hundred years ago and upheld as lawful within the Church of England by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council: see Nias, *Gorham and the Bishop of Exeter* (1951), especially the final chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Burgess, *Smith the See Baptist* . . . , p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> *Examen*, p. 164.

<sup>47</sup> *Baptist Church Hymnal* (Revised), nos. 470 and 480.

<sup>48</sup> *The Font-Guard Routed*, p. 4.

If a brief summary may now be attempted of all this evidence, it may be said that broadly the earliest English Baptists thought of baptism primarily as the Scriptural mode of entry into the Church. Under Calvinistic influence this was replaced by a conception of baptism as merely a symbolical way in which the believer, for his part, testifies to what Christ has already done for him otherwise. In the present century, under a more objective study of Scripture, baptism is being increasingly regarded not only as something the believer does but as a means through which God acts upon him.

At the time of the Reformation one of the great evils of the Roman Church was its attribution of spiritual effects to merely material acts. The logical opposite to this was to abandon the sacraments altogether, or if this was going too far, at least to refuse to administer the sacraments except to those who, at the time of receiving them, could receive also God's spiritual gifts in the only way in which they can be received, that is to say by faith. But, said the good Reformers, this is Anabaptism, and Anabaptism implies the grossest heresy, immorality, and anarchy:<sup>49</sup> the excesses at Münster had closed the door to fair consideration of the Baptist solution.<sup>50</sup> Consequently the Reformers felt that they must continue to baptize children and find non-Roman reasons for doing so. Some of these reasons will not bear examination.

Now it was common to both Roman and Baptist views of baptism that they implied a separation between spirit and matter. Either one becomes a Christian by baptism, or one becomes a Christian by faith, and Baptists chose the second alternative. Separation of spirit and matter, however, is not final truth, but was part of the philosophy of the time, an inheritance from Ancient

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Ross, writing his *View of All Religions* in 1653, makes no reference to contemporary Baptists, but describes the Anabaptists of the previous century as follows: "Their tenets were that Christ was not the Son of *Mary*, nor true God; that we were righteous not by faith in Christ, but by our own merits, and sufferings. They rejected original sin, baptism of Infants, communion with other Churches, Magistracy among *Christians*, Oaths, and punishments of Malefactors. They refused to swear allegiance to Princes; and held that a *Christian* may have many wives, and that he may put away his wife if she be of another Religion, and marry another. That no man must possess anything in proper; that re-baptization may be used; that before the day of judgement the godly should enjoy a Monarchy here on earth; that man had free-will in spiritual things; and that any man may preach, and give the Sacraments.

<sup>50</sup> "Whether the English Baptists held at first any part of the wild and seditious sentiments of the German fanatics it is difficult to say . . . One feature or resemblance, however, joined to an identity of name, was sufficient to surmount in the public feeling the impression of all the points of discrepancy or of contrast, and to subject them to a portion of the infamy attached to the ferocious insurgents of Munster."—Hall, *Terms of Communion*, p. 178.

Greece. In recent times the philosophical background has changed, and we are able to see certain things in Scripture to which we were formerly blind. It is possible for writers like Mr. Fleming-ton<sup>51</sup> to show us that the Bible treats spirit and matter as a unity, and is full of symbols which effect what they symbolise. It is no longer necessary for us to fear that we are sinking towards Rome if we follow Scripture in joining baptism with faith as the instrument of our salvation. It is no longer necessary for us to explain away expressions such as "Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"—"Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling upon his name"—"You are all sons of God through faith, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"—"As eight souls were saved (in the ark) through water, so now its counterpart, baptism, saves us." Thus the whole baptismal controversy is thrown into the melting-pot again. It remains to be seen whether the result will be to turn all Baptists into paedobaptists, or vice versa, or to permit both practices to continue as expressions of the same doctrine within a reunited Church.

## APPENDIX

## ANALYSIS OF CERTAIN HYMN BOOKS

- (1) Hymn Book of the General Baptist New Connexion, 1830 Edition.
- (2) Gadsby's Collection, revised by Philpot, 1850.
- (3) *Our Own Hymn-Book*, Ed. Spurgeon, 1866.
- (4) *Baptist Church Hymnal*, 1900.
- (5) *Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* 1933.

The hymns analysed are those, and only those, which the hymn-book specifies as appropriate to baptismal services.

	(1) New Connexion	(2) Gadsby	(3) Spurgeon	(4) B.C.H.	(5) B.C.H.R.
Total of baptismal hymns	37	24	16	17	16
Number containing no direct reference to baptism	4	1	3	9	9
Baptism as obedience to—					
(a) Christ's example	10	7	3	—	—
(b) Christ's precept	6	4	—	—	—
(c) primitive practice	4	—	—	—	—
Baptism associated with—					
(i) death and burial of Christ	14	16	10	5	5
(ii) final resurrection	1	—	1	—	—
(iii) washing of sin	4	4	1	1	1
(iv) pardon of sin	3	—	—	—	—
(v) descent of the Holy Spirit	1	—	—	1	—
(vi) entrance into the Church	2	—	—	—	—
Baptism as a demonstration of the believer's faith	5	3	2	10	8

J. M. Ross.

<sup>51</sup> *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism*, chapters 6 to 9.