

Ourselves and the Ordinances

THERE is a growing concern, especially among some of our younger men, that for too long now we Baptists have been sitting lightly upon the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper. An attitude has arisen, almost an atmosphere, that has given rise to most unfortunate repercussions both within as well as outside the Denomination. It seems fairly evident from what one reads that in many circles our standpoint is not only misunderstood, but is very often only superficially regarded. Take for example the following extracts from an article by the Rev. Frank Colqhoun, an evangelical Anglican, in *The Record* of 15th August, 1947 :—

“Baptist tenets appeal so strongly to simple folk who have little or no insight into the great Biblical principles concerning the Church and the Covenant and who do not want to be bothered by such considerations as the continuity of the New Israel with the Old. . . . That is why the Baptist movement is making such rapid progress among people who do not possess great intellectual depth and whose knowledge of the Bible as a whole is decidedly limited.”

We may smile at such a remarkable observation or, alternatively, feel very indignant, but before we make reply we must take ourselves to task and ask : “How can a man resort to an ‘argumentum ad hominem’ in order to refute our position if he is really aware of what it is?” The answer is of course that we ourselves have failed to make convincingly plain our convictions. Let us face it; we have been content to deal with our distinctive sacrament on pamphlet level. We have hidden our light under a bushel. Thus it comes as no great surprise when Cullman claims that Barth's little though extremely valuable contribution to the subject of Baptism is by far the most weighty book yet written from the standpoint of the Baptist position and has no peer even in Anglo-Saxon Baptist circles which have produced so many fine scholars in other spheres.

Consider also our treatment of the Lord's Supper. It has come to be regarded as an extra course to the main diet of worship and is viewed by many as little more than a spiritual Remembrance Day service. Dr. Payne, in his book, *The Fellowship of Believers*, draws attention to the fact that in neither of the Baptist Hymnals is there a hymn by a Baptist in the Communion section. We made no separate contribution to the communion set up by the Faith and

Order movement that dealt with the interpretation of the Ministry and the Sacraments, and with regard to the Lord's Supper were content to accept the statement made by J. S. Whale on behalf of the Congregationalists. This was Calvinistic in its approach rather than Zwinglian, which rightly or wrongly is perhaps the most popular conception of the Lord's Supper current in our Baptist churches, though few of our people would understand what is meant by these terms, which is all the more regrettable. Further, no article has appeared either in the *Transactions* of the Baptist Historical Society or the *Baptist Quarterly*, dealing theologically or historically with the Lord's Supper. (Cf. pp. 58-59, *op. cit.*). Recently there appeared a book, *The Lord's Supper—A Baptist Statement*, which sets out briefly if not very unanimously, our views on this sacrament. Dr. Rowley has a chapter on the Sacraments in his book, *The Unity of the Bible*, and we must not forget the section in *The Gathered Community*. But it is the dearth of works by competent Baptist scholars that is to a large degree responsible for the general ignorance of our theological position regarding the Sacraments, to say nothing of our practice. We have been content to rebut the arguments of those who have differed from us without making any positive contribution to the subject, and it is a sad reflection on us, that most of the matter, if not all that has been written in recent years on the Sacraments, has come from pens outside the Baptist denomination.

But this lack of interest in the Ordinances has not only had its repercussions outside the denomination but within it as well. What do Baptism and the Lord's Supper mean to many of our people? A recent contributor to the *Baptist Times* spoke of Baptism as a beautiful symbol of our trust and dedication, or words to that effect. But is that all we can say for Baptism? Is it but a symbol of that which is so very beautiful? Does the emphasis on our trust and dedication sum up precisely its New Testament meaning? Or to put it in another way, do the Ordinances testify to what we do or to what God has done, or both? The present writer has the feeling that we have been inclined to make the Sacraments man-centred rather than God-centred and the contribution which man makes has overshadowed God's work in redemption. We must regain our perspective and regard the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as essentially indicative of what God has done and continues to do in Christ for man in the first place and how men respond in the second. These are both integral parts of the Sacraments and must neither be confused or separated. As Dr. Rowley has pointed out: "If Baptism is to be charged with meaning and power it must be both a divine and human act" (*Unity of the Bible*, p. 168). If we emphasise the Godward aspect to the exclusion of the other we must arrive ultimately at paedobaptism and infant Communion. And

vice versa if we glorify the manward we arrive at a position when Baptism becomes purely a sign of our faith and the Lord's Supper a memorial rite with little other meaning. We may even arrive at a point when we come to regard both Sacraments as outmoded symbols of a past age with little or no utility in the contemporary Church. If we are to redeem our present position, if we are to rekindle in the hearts of our people the belief that the Sacraments were meant by our Lord to play an important part in the life and experience of the believer, then we must return to our New Testament documents and re-examine again their evidence.

NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE

There is not sufficient space, nor is it here necessary, to view all the strands of evidence except as they illustrate our arguments. In any case there are more detailed works on both the Sacraments which thoroughly examine the New Testament material. But we shall take for granted two issues that are generally agreed upon by most scholars as being settled. The first is that the Sacraments owe their place in the life of the Church to the explicit or implicit commands of our Lord. The second is that Baptism in the New Testament was administered solely to those capable of making a faith response to the claims of the Gospel.

In the New Testament Baptism is seen as a comprehensive rite in which the following ideas are clearly shown. (a) The identification of the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection, concomitant with the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, involving for the believer a death to self and sin and a rebirth to a new life. (b) The identification of the believer with, and his incorporation into, the redeemed community which is the Body of Christ, the Church. This in turn entails his participation in its fellowship, privileges and responsibilities. (c) The anticipation of a future hope, for Baptism has also an eschatological content. In his Baptism the believer looks forward to that fullness of life which is to be the portion of all believers at the Parousia. Though not specifically mentioned, "until He come" is as much a byword of Baptism as it is of the Lord's Supper.

It may be objected that such a definition is too unwieldy for practical purposes. But is it not our attempts to define the meaning of Baptism within the limitations of a sentence that have resulted in lowering our general conception of it? We try to say that Baptism is this or that and only succeed in defining half-truths. If the Gospel so frequently and erroneously termed the simple Gospel is such as to command the attention of scholars and thinkers for centuries and not to be exhausted, can we hope to define either of the Sacraments in a line when they are no less than the Gospel in action?

Now we must briefly justify our definition by enlarging on

the various propositions that we have made. First of all let us examine Baptism as union with Christ in His death and resurrection. *Romans* vi. is, of course, the classical example of this idea, but the whole conception of the Pauline doctrine of mystical union with Christ is not only the outcome of Paul's thought and temperament alone, but has a concrete foundation in the life and religious experience of the apostle's and other believer's actions in Baptism. Thus such phrases as "I have been crucified with Christ" (*Gal.* ii. 20) ought to be read in the light of *Romans* vi., and it is suggested that they might well read as the equivalent of "I have been baptized into His death." It will be observed that Paul in *Romans* not only speaks of our union with Christ but of our union with Him in His death and thus removes any idea that Baptism speaks primarily of our faith. We are pointed to the redeeming act which makes our union with Christ a possibility at all.

Baptism is also intimately associated with the gift of the Spirit. Whereas we know that the reception of the Spirit was not necessarily determined by Baptism, in the New Testament generally speaking the reception of the Spirit was believed to take place within the context of this rite. This of course is understandable, for in New Testament times conversion, the reception of the Spirit and Baptism, were the experience of a moment. There was little delay between the faith response and Baptism, such as we know it today. A number of passages in the New Testament suggest this close connection of Baptism in the name of the Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In *Galatians* iii. 27 Paul views Baptism as a putting on of Christ. "As many of you as were baptized have put on (*endusasthe*) Christ." Now in a number of other places the apostle urges his readers to put on (*endusasthe*) Christ, and this 'putting-on' is closely associated with the gift of the Spirit or with spiritual gifts. (Cf. *Rom.* xiii. 14, *Col.* iii. 12, *Eph.* vi. 11, and possibly *Eph.* i. 13-14, but see below). This does not mean that Paul believed in frequent baptisms, but is urging his converts to remember that the gift of the Spirit at Baptism is one that needs to be continually appropriated. It is interesting to notice that while *Luke* is silent with regard to our Lord's command to baptize, he does record our Lord's promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Behold I send the promise of the Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed (*endusesthe*) with power from on high" (*Luke* xxiv. 49). Putting on Christ then or being clothed in Him, has close connections with Baptism, the gift of the Spirit, and spiritual gifts.

Secondly, we shall consider Baptism as identifying the believer with the Church and incorporating him into it. In *Acts* ii. we read that those who responded to Peter's preaching and were baptized continued in the apostles' fellowship and teaching in the breaking of bread and prayers. These converts not only leave the

old life behind them but they take their place in the fellowship of the redeemed community. They become part of the Body of Christ. Here we are reminded of a very important factor in the life of the Christian. While being a very personal encounter between the believer and his Lord, the life of faith is nevertheless not one to be lived in isolation and without vital fellowship with those who have shared a similar experience. The New Testament knows nothing of an independent Christian or one with no real attachment to a worshipping community. Paul expands upon this truth when he writes to the Corinthians and says: "For just as the body is one and has many members . . . so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized in Christ" (1 *Cor.* xii. 12-13).

It will be appreciated that Baptism into the Body of Christ brought with it certain responsibilities and privileges, and we may notice here the communalism of the early Church. There was a speedy recognition of the social obligations that marked the life of the disciple of Christ and also the high moral tone of the Church's life and witness. Such lapses as were perpetrated by Ananias and Sapphira could not be tolerated. They were a blot on the community, and so discipline had to be strict. Paul warns the Corinthians against presuming too much upon their baptismal experience and reminds them of the need for constant moral vigilance (1 *Cor.* x.). Baptism does not make a man a Christian, it is the mark that he is!

Finally Baptism has a forward look. We may remind ourselves that the baptism of John differed profoundly from contemporary proselyte baptism not the least in its eschatological hope (cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 25). It pointed to One who was to come and baptize with the Holy Spirit. In the same way our Lord's Baptism foreshadowed His Passion and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. Now this proleptic aspect is also present in the Baptism of the believer. In *Ephesians* i. 13-14, Paul writes: "In Him also you who have heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation and have believed in Him, were sealed (*sphragizomai*) with the promised Holy Spirit which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." It is generally agreed by many New Testament scholars that the word seal (*sphragizomai*) is used here in reference to Baptism. If this is so then the intimate connection between Baptism and the gift of the Spirit is further demonstrated. But even if this is not the case in this instance and the sealing does not refer to Baptism, the verse still points to the end time and reminds us of our future hope which is part of the Gospel of which Baptism speaks. However *Ephesians* v. 25-27 and *Titus* iii. 4-7 both contain eschatological references within baptismal contexts. So we may confidently claim then that Paul also sees Baptism as the guarantee of a future hope. It looks forward to a

time when all who are in Christ will obtain possession of it. That time as Paul says in *Ephesians* i. 10 is to be regarded as the crown of God's purposes for the world "when all things will be united in Him."

We turn next to the Lord's Supper. In the New Testament the Lord's Supper was a fellowship meal in which the bread and the wine were given a special significance. In the early days of the Church it is possible that on every occasion when groups of disciples met and entertained one another in their homes, the meal concluded with the distribution of the bread and the wine or at least the serving of bread and wine during the actual meal was given a special place. (cf. *Acts* ii. 46). Later on this meal was held only on the Lord's day. By the end of the first century, due to abuses which were already evident in apostolic times, the distribution of the bread and wine was rapidly becoming a rite in itself and by the time of Justin in the middle of the second century the Lord's Supper as we now call it, or Eucharist, was certainly separated from the fellowship meal or agapé. But our immediate thought is with its meaning and not its history and to an examination of the essential characteristics of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament we now turn.

Once again we find it inadequate to define these characteristics within a sentence and we must go to some length in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution. Primarily the Supper is the Supper of the Cross. It is the celebration of an act; Christ's redemptive act upon the Cross. We cannot erase sacrificial associations from the rite. We need not argue at this point whether the Johannine chronology is to be preferred to the Synoptics on the question of the day of the crucifixion, nor whether the Last Supper was a Haburah or fellowship meal, a sabbatical Kiddush, or the Passover meal itself. Whatever may be the answer to these problems one thing is certain and that is that the week preceding the death of Christ must have been charged with the Paschal atmosphere and sacrifice was in the very air. Our Lord was aware that soon a greater deliverance than that experienced by Israel from Egypt was to be accomplished. He Himself was to be the Deliverer. He was also to be the Offering. In the Cross Christ was to offer up to God on man's behalf His perfect obedience, His total submission to the Will of God the Father, His complete atonement for sin and what He was about to do for His disciples and for the world was conveyed in the simple act of breaking the bread and pouring out the wine. The disciples "were regarding His death as a calamity quashing all their hopes. He presents it to them in a way words could not, by an act of symbol which was also the reality, for the gift at the table was part and moment of the gift upon the cross. It is . . . as if He should say . . . The death you dread is not disaster either to you or to Me. It is

the one gift I came from God to give Him and as such I give it to you here. This is not the Atonement but the gift of it to you. I am not making the sacrifice but making it yours. (P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 255). Forsyth goes on to say: "Already the passion had begun and before it came to the pitch that took away the thought of man, He consigned to men in a subsidiary act what He gave to God in the greater compendious act of the cross. The same act moved in two directions at once, and the supper was the donation of its salvation manward as the cross was its oblation Godwards." (*op. cit.*, p. 256). It is quite clear that without the Cross the Supper would never have retained its place or its significance in the early Church and as Paul reminds us it is "as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup" that we "proclaim the Lord's death till He come."

But this act of the Lord's Supper has three complementary aspects which express the believer's part in the meal. (i) The Supper is Commemorative. However the case for or against the veracity of Paul's account of the institution may be argued it seems to be commonly accepted now that "This do in remembrance of me" represents if not the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord, at least His intention. Thus the Supper is retrospective. It goes back to the "night on which He was betrayed." It recalls again the swift passage of events which led up to the Supper and beyond to the Cross. Those who partake of the elements hear again the voice of the Lord: "This is my Body" and "This is my blood." It is not that the bread is the body but rather that it is the body broken! It is not that the wine is the blood but that it is the blood of the covenant poured out. In other words we may say that it is the act rather than the substance that is the all-important thing. It is as though our Lord should say: "Take, eat, drink—these are for you. This action is my life for you in death. I go to offer to the Father that which is beyond your comprehension let alone your ability to achieve. These elements are pledges of what I am about to do for you. They are the guarantees of my redeeming work. You will not lift a cup to your lips nor eat a morsel of bread without remembering this night and what I am about to accomplish in it."

(ii) The Supper is also Participative. Those who share in it share in the Body and Blood of the Lord. Paul writes: "The cup of blessing which we bless is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ?" (1 *Cor.* x. 16). The Lord's Supper then is a real communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, and these words when read in the light of their context surely give the death blow to any view of the Lord's Supper which is only commemorative? As Forsyth pointedly remarks, the holding of a memorial service is rather incongruous for One who is always present. But in what way are

we to interpret this word 'participation' or *koinonia* in its relation to the phrases "body and blood of Christ"? If we may accept the testimony of a growing number of New Testament scholars, the sharing in His blood means to appropriate the benefits of His death and the sharing in His body means to participate in the fellowship of the Church of which He is the Creator. "In participating, Christians all partake and share in His life the life that creates and sustains the fellowship as it reaches us through His sacrifice." (Moffatt, *Commentary, Corinthians*, p. 135). Whether this conception of sharing in the body was present in our Lord's mind in the upper room may be questioned. Whether it was in Paul's mind, however, is another matter, though his reference to some who did not or were not "discerning the body of the Lord" seems to point in this direction. (Cf. *1 Cor.* xi. 29). It is certain, however, that the Lord's Supper was in very truth a fellowship meal between the believing participants and their Lord, and the projection of this idea to the fellowship of believers with believers was a natural consequence. Nothing has been mentioned concerning the Johannine teaching in *John* vi. concerning the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Christ but, whether we accept this passage as eucharistic in character or not, it must be admitted that sooner or later in the history of the Church and the developments in the Lord's Supper, these words were bound to be considered in a sacramental manner.

(iii) The Supper is Proleptic. That is, there is an eschatological content within it; a hope of better things. Paul asserts in *1 Corinthians* that "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (xi. 26). The eschatological view of the Lord's Supper has of course been held in a more thoroughgoing manner by Schweitzer and others but we need not be afraid to acknowledge this emphasis providing we recognise the presence of the other two that we have already considered. Our Lord Himself looked forward to the day when He would drink again the fruit of the vine in the Kingdom of His Father (*Luke* xxii. 17). He looked beyond the parting and its sorrow to the final reunion in the Kingdom. Furthermore this proleptic element was not simply something that Jesus had Himself introduced into the Last Meal. It was part and parcel of the Jewish hope at that particular season. The singing of the *Hallel* Psalms at Passover is an indication of this fact in itself as will be seen by a swift glance at their content. And a certain Rabbi ben Hannaniah who flourished around 90 A.D. said that the Passover was a night on which the Jews had been redeemed in the past and on which they would be redeemed in the future. (Cf. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, p. 47).

To gather up our thoughts so far, we may say that the Lord's

Supper in the New Testament was a meal during which in the distribution of bread and wine, the redemptive act of Christ upon the Cross was remembered, the blessings of the Cross were by faith appropriated and the consummation of the Kingdom in its fullness was anticipated. It will be seen from our examination so far that the characteristics which belong to the Lord's Supper have their parallels in Baptism also. Thus both rites point to the death of Christ. Both emphasise a union or communion with the Lord in His death and (by implication in the Lord's Supper at least) resurrection. Both have a direct bearing upon the life of the believer in his relations with the believing community and both contain an eschatological hope. The one great difference is that Baptism is not repeated while the Lord's Supper is. The reason, to quote Forsyth again, is that "Baptism is the sacrament of the new birth and birth begins life once and for all. But the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of the new life continued and this by the repeated gift of grace." (*op. cit.*, p. 275).

OUR PRESENT SITUATION

Having reviewed if only very briefly the New Testament testimony we must now relate our findings to our present situation and ask whether we as a denomination, or more precisely, whether we as local fellowships are in line with what we have found there concerning the Ordinances and their significance. In attempting this task we are faced at the outset with a number of important questions. Can we continue to regard the Ordinances as signs of our faith only; are they but 'bare signs,' cold symbols of a prior and much warmer experience, or do they convey more? Ought our approach to them be more sacramental in a greater degree than is common now, without being sacramentarian? If we believe that the sacraments are Dominical institutions then surely they were intended by our Lord to play a vital part in the life and experience of the believer. If we still regard them as being 'means of grace' in what sense are we to use such a phrase? Perhaps it is just at this point, within the problem of sacramental experience that we meet our difficulty and we need to ask how the sacraments can become for us the experiential agencies that they quite obviously were in the days in which the New Testament was written.

In suggesting an avenue of approach we might turn our attention to an idea that Dr. Wheeler Robinson put forward some years ago which a number of non-Baptist scholars are taking up as a means towards an interpretation of sacramental symbolism. In his book, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, he writes: "It is possible that we should get nearer to the sacramental experience of the first believers if we approached it through that genuinely Hebrew product 'prophetic symbolism' rather than through the

Greek mystery religions" (p. 192). Wheeler Robinson had in the mid-1920's given a paper to the Society for Old Testament studies in which he had worked out more fully this idea. A similar conception may be traced to the German scholar Julicher. With regard to the Last Supper he held that Jesus was speaking and acting in parable. Forsyth, grasping this idea, developed it in the same connection and called it laden action, while Otto termed it an acted prediction which was effectively represented. Forsyth, in his *Church and the Sacraments*, has suggested that had this principle of interpretation been recognised earlier it would have saved the Church and the world a great deal of strife. This form of symbolism was a striking feature in the prophetic activity of the Old Testament for so often the spoken word was accompanied by a symbolic act, as for example when Isaiah walked the streets of Jerusalem in the garb of a captive prophesying the doom of Egypt and Ethiopia, or when Jeremiah made a yoke of iron and wore it as a sign of the impending captivity of his countrymen under the Babylonians. Now the significance of the symbolism was that it was not simply regarded as a sign but was as Wheeler Robinson points out, "part of the will of Jahweh, to whose complete fulfilment it pointed. It brings that will nearer to its completion, not only by declaring it, but in some small degree as effecting it. It corresponds to the prophetic perfect of Hebrew syntax by regarding the will of Jahweh as already fulfilled" (*O.T. Essays*, pp. 14-15). These acts were not just the product of the oriental mind and evidence of their love for the concrete but were what "Paul might have called an 'arrabon' an earnest of what will be, a little part of reality which is yet unseen as a whole. With something of this realism we may conceive the earliest believers entering the waters of baptism and sharing the bread and wine. The acts resembled those of the prophets of Israel; they did something that corresponded with the spoken word and helped to bring it about" (*The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, p. 193).

Now it may be questioned whether we can possibly enter into the same type of experience as those early believers, living as we do in a different thought world and religious milieu. It may even be argued that such a spiritual religion as Christianity ought not to require such material symbolism. But symbolism is a common factor in the world today and there are few spheres of life that can dispense with it entirely. Whatever difference there may be, there must also be a common core of religious experience between Christians of today and those of days gone by and, as Wheeler Robinson says, "where there is so much common experience there must be some more fundamental ground of agreement, some common recognition of the Divine activity through the Sacraments" (p. 195. *Op. cit.*). Does that ground lie within the activity of the Holy Spirit? Dr.

Robinson thinks it does. "If there is any truth in the claim that the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits is in the unity of an indissoluble experience then we may equally claim that the acts in which that experience is incorporated may possess the same unity." (*Op. cit.*, p. 196).

From this point we may go on to ask whether the Sacraments as we value them today do indeed possess a unity with those of the early Church both in form and content. If they do not agree in form then it may well be that our ideas of their effective content may be defective also. To begin with let us consider contemporary Baptism, within our own communion, of course. We may justly contend that we have certainly preserved the New Testament form of total immersion, but can we say that our appreciation of the rite is the same? Is present day baptismal experience part of the conversion experience as it was in the days of the apostolic Church? May it not be that in emphasising Baptism as a sign of faith publicly expressed we have overshadowed Baptism as an indication of what God in Christ has done for us and the world before our faith? Thus the candidate becomes non-expectant as far as God's action in the Ordinance is concerned for we incline to inform our candidates not to expect to feel any different and warn them against emotionalism and the consequence is that their emotions are even more stirred because they feel themselves to be the centre of the picture and barely give thought to the fact that in Baptism they are united as in no other way with our Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection. Furthermore, does not our present baptismal thought tend to isolate the act from membership in the Church? There seems to have evolved amongst many of our folk the idea that Baptism is a separate act from joining the Church and both something extra to conversion. In some cases there is quite an appreciable lapse of time before the initial faith experience and Baptism with another lapse of time before the Christian is received into membership of the local community.

We might tell a similar story with regard to the Lord's Supper. Is it not a fact that our present form, with its neat cubes of bread and its convenient thimbles of wine, have all but destroyed the significance of the symbolism? The important thing at the Last Supper was what Christ did through the *breaking* of the bread; it was the action rather than the substance. It may be argued of course that our present method serves the interests of hygiene and order and this may be valid, but let us beware of sacrificing meaning to convenience in these things. Even if it is necessary to carry out our service as is common today there is no reason why the minister should not himself preserve the essential symbolism by his own action. The late Dr. Percy Evans when conducting college Communion services always broke a piece of bread and poured out

wine from a flask before the elements themselves were distributed. Then the content of Communion needs to be assessed as well. Do our folk expect to receive a blessing from partaking of the elements at the Lord's Supper apart from a reminder that we are recalling our Lord's death for us? Do we ministers lead them in the service to its fitting climax and do so in a way that its spiritual significance is not misunderstood? Are we afraid to regard the Ordinances as anything more than signs of faith because we have lost that sheer abandonment of scepticism which in the past expected to receive something in the Sacraments—and did—or because any suggestion of grace bestowed smacks of sacramentarianism and *ex opere operato* conceptions? Surely as we practice them today the participants of both ordinances being conscious and active and exercising however imperfectly their faith, are safeguard enough against any such ideas.

There seems reason to suppose, then, that we have no grounds to be complacent in our attitude towards the Sacraments and that there is room for closer thought and renewed interest in sacramental theology and practice within the denomination. Although it is not our purpose here to suggest even a tentative answer to the problems that have been aired, the following observations might serve as helps towards a clearer conception of the Ordinances on the part of the majority of our members.

(a) We ought to emphasise at all levels that the Ordinances are the Gospel in action, and the important thing is that they testify to what God in Christ has done and is doing for men rather than what we ourselves do. The part that faith plays is in receiving the benefits of which they speak and in making them effective for us. Faith does not condition the primary act of God though it is necessary for the reception of its benefits. (b) We must re-affirm the New Testament teaching regarding the Ordinances, and see that no one aspect is exaggerated to the detriment of another. These New Testament conceptions ought to be taught in our Sunday Schools and Bible classes as a normal part of the body of Christian truth. Why is it that we save up the specific teaching of the Ordinances until our young folk have made some profession of faith? We do seem to suggest by implication that these things are separate from initial Christian experience. Ought we not try to make it possible for conversion, Baptism and Church membership to be more closely associated in time and thought? In the early days of the Church these acts were practically simultaneous (cf. Selwyn on 1 *Peter*, p. 297). There was no need for delay because the right religious conditions existed and subsequent teaching made up for any lack. Similar conditions might be forthcoming if we treated our children as catechumens and not just as boys and girls who may or may not become Christians. It is a source of perplexity to many of our young

people and others, too, that though they have made a declaration of faith they are not able to enter fully into the life and privileges of the Church until they have been baptized. This is not to suggest that we baptize indiscriminately or make it easier, but it does seem to indicate that if our young people were thoroughly grounded in the meaning and importance of the Sacraments and made to see that they constitute accompaniments rather than extras to faith it would prevent the unfortunate time lapse. Moreover they would be spared an attack of spiritual indigestion brought about by trying to swallow in six or more weeks the whole content of the Christian life. Baptism, Communion, church membership, its privileges and responsibilities, and other kindred subjects. Baptism ought so to be taught that when the right time comes our young folk, and especially those whose parents are church members, will look upon Baptism as a joy to be experienced rather than a duty to be performed in order to please their parents. They will view Baptism as an act of loving obedience to and union with their Lord rather than an outward symbol of faith shorn of any real meaning and coldly bare. They will know it as a living experience full of the prophetic eloquence of which we have been thinking and consummate with their deepest yearnings and highest ideals. Lastly, we should encourage our folk to expect something from participating in the Ordinances both as onlookers at a baptismal service and active communicants at the Lord's Supper. Most folk expect to receive something from the preaching of the Word so why not from the Sacraments which are the Word in action? We should be the better for participating, not from any sense of duty performed but from grace received through faith. Both Ordinances ought to be a constant challenge to our zeal and devotion to Christ, our consciences ought to be stirred and our hearts open and receptive to receive the grace of God.

We have in our Ordinances living symbols that express more than anything else the fullness of the apostolic *kerygma* and its meaning for the world of men and women. Let us not abuse them by taking them for granted. Let us not weaken them by an inadequate conception of their theology. Let us hold fast to what we believe to be their New Testament significance even at the risk of being called legalistic or literalistic, not because others are entirely wrong but because we know them to be, by personal experience, holding fast to ideas that are really inadequate.

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