



incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

“IN the New Testament Adult Baptism is the norm, and it is only in the light of this fact that the doctrine and practice of Baptism can be understood.” This comment is taken from the Introduction to *Baptism and Confirmation* which is a Report submitted by the Church of England Liturgical Commission to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in November, 1958, and published this summer. It is a comment with which Baptists would, of course, agree. And there is more in the Report which appears to come close to Baptist beliefs—though not to our practice. The principle adopted by the Commission was that set forth in Resolution 74(c) of the Lambeth Conference of 1958: “A chief aim of Prayer Book Revision should be to further that recovery of the worship of the Primitive Church which was the aim of the compilers of the first Prayer Books of the Church of England.”

However much we may feel that the compilers of the first Prayer Books missed the mark in regard to baptism, the present Commission has made a laudable attempt to redeem the situation. The Commission took as its starting point the quotation at the head of this Editorial. From there the group goes on to say that it treats the Baptism and Confirmation of Adults as the archetypal Service and therefore prints it first. Then follows, in second place, the order for Infant Baptism. It could be suggested that such ordering of services creates the impression that the Commission thinks Infant Baptism should now be regarded as a less desirable

alternative to a normal practice of the Baptism and Confirmation of Adults. This is not stated in the Report, but that the suggested Services even lend themselves to such a possible interpretation is remarkable enough.

Reaction in the Anglican Communion to the Report has not been particularly rapid. The comments we have heard in conversation with members of the Church of England may perhaps be best summed up in the remark: "They will never get away with it!" Probably they won't, but there are several particular points which—in addition to the general emphasis of the Report—call for comment.

First, there is, in the Baptism of Infants, the substitution of *St. Matthew* xxviii 18-20 (the Great Commission) for *St. Mark* x 13-16 (the blessing of the children) as the Gospel to be read. The reason given is that the Marcan passage "has no obvious connection with Baptism." Paedo-baptist apologists such as Oscar Cullmann in Switzerland and his followers in Scotland and elsewhere would perhaps beg to differ from this distinguished Anglican Commission.

Secondly, there is in the proposed Services an absence of explicit emphasis on the individual sinfulness of the candidate for baptism. This is most significantly so in the proposed Service of Infant Baptism and especially when the new rite is compared with the present Prayer Book Service. This is not wholly unexpected as the doctrine of the Original Sin of the individual and certainly his Original Guilt, appears to be on the retreat in much Anglican theology. This was made clear in the report *Baptism and Confirmation To-day* (1955) which spoke rather in terms of there being in man an inherited spiritual weakness and infirmity—a tendency towards evil rather than good which needs God's grace and power for its remedy. In baptism there takes place incorporation into the redeemed and forgiven society of the Church Universal and here God's power becomes operative. All of this poses the question as to the state of the child before baptism. This was quite clear if Original Sin and Guilt are accepted; but what now? Is there any distinction to be made between those children born into Christian families and those not? There are a number of such questions which Anglicans have now to answer. The Methodists, to some extent, and the Congregationalists, to a much greater extent, have, long ago, begun to answer them. But what do Baptists say? Baptist statements on such question are none too frequent and none too clear when they are made. The 1948 Statement says: "Baptists believe that from birth all children are within the love and care of heavenly Father and therefore within the operation of the saving grace of Christ." This may be thought to pose as many questions as it answers! Questions, for example, concerning the age of com-

ing to faith, the necessity of baptism and the meaning of the fellowship of the Church. We hope to return to these matters in an article shortly.

Thirdly, and following on from the last point, although we find the word "regenerate" used in the new Service, the usage seems to demand some such meaning as "reborn into the realm of grace where God's power is operative to deal with sin." One of the prayers after the baptism runs: "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate these children with the Holy Spirit, to receive them for thine own children by adoption, and to incorporate them into thy holy Church." Regeneration is the beginning of a process—not the whole process. The prayer continues: "And humbly we beseech thee to grant that, confessing the faith in which they have been baptized, and renewing the promises made in their name, they may be confirmed with thy holy and life-giving Spirit. . . ." With the disappearance of the extreme Augustinian baptismal theology, what is meant by "regeneration" may well need to be re-stated clearly by Anglicans and understood afresh by others.

Fourthly, although it is still quite clearly stated that infants by baptism are made members of the Church, there is again a pointing forward to the developing membership. This is illustrated in the quotation already given concerning regeneration and also in the opening sentences of the exhortation delivered to parents and sponsors with which the Service of Infant Baptism begins: "You have brought these children to our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that, by an act of divine power, he will give them a new and heavenly birth, and will receive them into his family the Church. It is our duty to ensure that they are brought up within that family, and that they come to understand what our Lord has done for them in Baptism." No doubt the faithful sponsors and parents together with the worshipping community will see to the child's Christian upbringing just as carefully as any Baptist parents. The Anglican will bring his child for confirmation; the Baptist will lead his towards baptism. Anglicans and Baptists may have different theologies about the child, but the path the child follows in the life of the two communities is much the same. The child is treated as though there is no difference in its status. We may well ponder on what the Anglicans mean by saying that the child is made a member of the Church at baptism and what Baptists mean when they talk of the crisis of encounter with God in Christ normally occurring within or because of the young person's life in the Christian Community.