

# 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 Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

## Can our Controversy with the Paedobaptists be Resolved?

### 1. The Genesis of this Paper

THIS essay began as a personal communication to my respected friend, Dr. George Beasley-Murray, but developed to such a length that I had to give up the idea of sending it as a letter. I write, of course, from within the Baptist tradition. As a theological student, I once won a college prize for an essay on "Baptism in the New Testament". I remember, however, being slightly uneasy at the time about the way in which, "as a good Baptist", I had handled the evidence in the New Testament regarding the baptism of entire households; I should now describe that treatment as tendentious! Nearly forty years have passed since then, during which period developing experiences—as a missionary, a parent, and a servant of the ecumenical movement—have successively afforded fresh vantage points from which to look at the issues involved in this very long-standing Baptist/Paedobaptist controversy. I recently read with great appreciation Dr. Beasley-Murray's excellently-written *Baptism: Today and Tomorrow*.<sup>1</sup> I decided that, as I read it, I would watch carefully to see whether or not he answered the objections which I would myself now bring against part of our Baptist position. He did not! Hence this letter, which became an essay. Between my first draft and the paper here presented, however, I also received and read with tremendous interest the booklet entitled *The Child and the Church*,<sup>2</sup> the report of a specially appointed study group which the Baptist Union Council of Great Britain made available to encourage further discussion. Although I honour its general tone, its genuine concern, and some of the points it makes, nevertheless in my judgment it confirms the assertion with which I concluded my original draft, that Baptists are not only deficient in the psychology, they also have no adequate theology, of infants and little children in believing households. Indeed the writers of the report themselves explicitly say "we must concede that Baptists do not possess a coherent theology of the child". Since I find the theology of the booklet incoherent, I

<sup>1</sup> Published by Macmillan, London, and by St. Martin's Press, New York, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Published by the Carey Kingsgate Press. 1966

entirely agree—but I am expanding my essay to point out why. (And, for convenience, I shall hereinafter refer to this document simply as “the report”.)

## 2. The Basis of a Hope for Progress

It seems obvious that the reason why Baptists and Paedobaptists fail to convince one another is not only that each side has part of the truth, which of course it cannot and must not give up, but even more because each fails to do *adequate* justice to the truth apprehended by the other party to the controversy. It is unsatisfactory merely to leave things there—and the proposed series of parallel and alternative steps in the complete process of initiation into full church membership, as set out in present schemes of Church Union in which Baptists are involved, is no more than a working, and probably uneasy, compromise. It is moreover doubtful whether the problem will ever be solved by books which reach the very conclusion that might antecedently have been expected of the author, in view of his position on one side or other of the debate. Thus Dr. Beasley-Murray's book comes out where the author went in, dead against infant baptism! At a time when many of those who practise infant baptism are becoming seriously and openly critical of errors in their practice, it ill behoves Baptists to sit smugly waiting for others to adopt their beliefs. It would be more honest and more responsible, as well as more ecumenically helpful, if Baptists similarly recognised and admitted the weaknesses in their position. I therefore have the temerity to offer this contribution *not* as a compromise, but as a possible pointer to an eventual solution, which not only builds upon the truths but also rejects the errors so clearly perceived on each of the two sides in the controversy.

## 3. Baptism is Faith-Baptism, and signifies Entry into Membership of the Church

Let me at the outset establish two fixed points as fundamental to what I have to say. I regard baptism as signifying entry into church *membership*, nothing less. And I believe that baptism is always a sign or sacrament of the subject's faith. While accepting the plea of the report that Baptists should recognize the value of a catechumenate, I nevertheless adhere to the traditional Baptist definition of the Church as “a fellowship of believers”—though I prefer the Scriptural term “the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10). To my own mind, I remain loyal to the deepest Baptist convictions concerning the necessity of faith, the nature of church membership, and therefore the significance of baptism. Where I find myself parting company with my Baptist brethren—and joining the vast majority of other Christians—is in doing more justice to the facts regarding children of believing parents. I wholeheartedly

repudiate all forms of "indiscriminate baptism", since these imply magical views of the ordinance as something which operates apart from personal, particular faith. My task is to indicate how these positions can be reconciled.

#### **4. New Testament Principles, not Practice, as Determinative**

Also at the outset I would submit that New Testament theology, and not the practice of New Testament churches, should be determinative for the Church today. My two reasons are (1) that basic differences between New Testament times and our own day need to be recognised as pertinent to the discussion ; and (2) that certain principles are to be found in the New Testament only in a germinative form, and not yet seen through to their logical conclusion. It is of course important that New Testament practice be established as definitely as possible, and clearly understood. But, as I shall go on to explain, these differences between New Testament times and our own forbid our allowing the historian to settle the matter once and for all on evidential grounds—even if he could, and I believe he can't ! To deal first with the question of principles perceived but not yet carried through, I illustrate by slavery and by women's place in society. As we know, the New Testament nowhere attacks slavery as an institution, yet no one today would defend slavery on the basis of that argument. A whole climate of understanding and attitude has changed, and with it the situation. It is similarly accepted by at least many today that the place accorded to women in the New Testament Church was determined by the social customs of the times, and is not normative for the Church in the 20th century. In each case, our more enlightened practice rests upon New Testament theology, not upon the customs reflected in New Testament writing. Beasley-Murray agrees with Oscar Cullmann's statement of the real issue as being "Is infant baptism compatible with the New Testament conception of the essence and meaning of baptism ?" He similarly agrees with T. W. Manson's statement that "the crucial question about baptism is that of the relation of the individual to Christ in his Body, the Church". It is the answers to those theological questions that we must continue to seek, if we are ever to resolve the controversy.

#### **5. Three Fundamental Differences between New Testament Times and our Own**

The whole background of Old Testament thought would predispose us to expect the basically corporate psychology which in fact finds abundant expression in the New Testament. The individualism of the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe has warped Christian understanding of much that is plain to careful readers of the Bible. Secondly, the New Testament is signally uninterested in the personality of little children. Not one is named in its pages from

beginning to end. The story of our Lord's blessing of little children is quite exceptional—and we note the surprise and displeasure of His disciples! Thirdly, the New Testament Church was being built up chiefly from converts to faith in Jesus Christ, and not mainly from the children of believing parents. All these three factors have a direct bearing on our subject.

## 6. Our Approach must be Broadly Based

This baptismal controversy, to my mind, excellently illustrates the general superiority of broad arguments over discussion only of a multitude of points of detail. I would have called the latter "niggling arguments", did I not have a real respect for their value in their own place. I admit that one such point of detail, firmly established, is sufficient to upset any sweeping statement. Nevertheless, a whole lot of detailed arguments may fail to convince, either because a bias eventually becomes evident, or because other detailed arguments which would not in fact support the case have been overlooked or omitted. The Scriptures are so rich in material having a bearing upon any such issue as this, that it is difficult to cover all the ground in question without getting quite bogged down. What, then, determines the choice of arguments adduced?

Dr. Beasley-Murray is very clever, for example, in his handling of the instances of baptism of households. Nevertheless I think that he, as I myself long ago, is really tendentious. It would not have occurred (in fact it did not!) to any New Testament writer to mention what happened to infants and little children when whole households were being baptised. The matter would then have seemed slight—and obvious! But what did they in fact do? The silence of the New Testament on this question leaves it equally open to either side to feel sure that infants were or were not baptised, as the case may be! It is *not* settled by reference to *oikos* or *oikia*, as Dr. Beasley-Murray points out. Nor is it settled by such arguments as he himself uses when he says, for example, that since in the household of Cornelius "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word" (Acts 10:44), therefore infants could not have been included in the baptisms which followed. Their exceptional case was not mentioned. But must it not be admitted that the experience and decision of the head of a household, such as the Philippian jailer, were sufficient to bring the whole household into the Church? For, having regard to the psychology and practice of the times, can it reasonably be maintained that there must have been a separate individual conversion experience for every member of the household baptised? And if, say, slaves were thus baptised into the Church, why not infants? The real question is simply whether or not it would have been natural in New Testament times to exclude infants or little children from what was happening to the household as a whole. And that must be answered on the basis of broad arguments.

Finally, to illustrate the omission of an awkward detail, I note that in this book Dr. Beasley-Murray says nothing about the strange custom of baptism on behalf of the dead, referred to in I Cor. 15:29, which seems to imply vicarious baptism.

### **7. The Bible presents no one neat Theological System**

The older I get, the more I am impressed by, and grateful for, the variety of New Testament thinking and practice. The rich plurality of New Testament metaphors, and the discernable differences between Pauline, Johannine and Petrine theology, to go no further, warn us against any attempt to reduce all Biblical thought to a single system. I believe this to be of Divine intention. Similarly, it is by now well known that different forms of Church order have with equal justice claimed to be based on New Testament practice—because there was no one practice. Why, then, should it be thought that baptism, even in New Testament times, necessarily meant always one and the same thing? Granted that it signified entry into the Church, yet since entry was possible by the two quite different ways of conversion from the pagan or Jewish world and of birth into a Christian family, why should not baptism, though retaining its identity, have correspondingly had two quite distinguishable meanings? Several different metaphors are used in the New Testament concerning baptism; it is illegitimate to press even the most significant of them, that of Romans 6, as directly applicable to all cases—although, as we shall see, it does remain indirectly applicable even to infant baptism in “the household of the faith”.

### **8. The Biblical Plan of Salvation can be understood only in Corporate Terms**

Following these preliminary considerations, let me now suggest a series of broad arguments upon which I shall seek to base my thesis and its practical conclusions. First, I submit that the whole Bible is to be read as the drama of God's dealings with mankind, not just with individuals. It is the story of His restoration of a fallen race. The two pivotal figures are the first man Adam and Christ, “the second Adam”, the head of the new redeemed humanity. The Church is the Body of which Christ is the Head. This is the “one new man” in which the ancient hostility between Jew and Gentile is broken down (cf. Eph. 2:15); the “full-grown man” into which all Christians have to grow (4:13); this is the “new creation” which becomes manifest whenever a man is “in Christ”, i.e., becomes a Christian (II Cor. 5:17).

Both conversion and baptism are essentially community concepts. In the Old Testament, conversion means a spiritual return to the Covenant-relationship between Yahweh and Israel; in the New Testament, conversion is linked with the Kingdom, i.e. with

the reign of God as established and manifested in the Messiah's death, resurrection and ascension, and in the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost and thereafter. In both cases it represents a personal committal, in repentance and trust, to what God is doing to win back *humanity* into the joy of willing obedience to His purposes. And this means *ipso facto* entry into the community which He is calling into being, the new people of God (I Pet. 2:9-10). Baptism is the rite of entry into this community, of which St. Paul says "We are a colony of heaven, and we wait for the Saviour who comes from heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

### 9. The Church and the World in God's Saving Purposes

The report satisfactorily recognises this broad sweep of God's plan of salvation, but appears to me strangely muddled in applying this to man's condition. Thus on p.14 it states: "We recognise the infant, regardless of his parentage, to be a member of Adam's race redeemed in Christ. This is not because his parents are Christian but because he is a human being." On p.15 it proceeds to say: "There is a recognition by most that the salvation won in Christ is given to every infant regardless of his parentage or his baptism. The Church is not simply a community that benefits from the atonement over against a world that does not. The New Testament separates the Church from the world and at the same time speaks of the work of Christ upon the Cross as being effective for all mankind." Then every individual as he is born, quite independent of the question of faith, is already redeemed and saved? This astonishes me! I would agree that, since Christ, every baby has been born into a race which not only fell in Adam, but for which Christ has already effected His redeeming work on the Cross. I further agree that various effects of God's saving work in Christ flow into human history like the Gulf Stream into the Atlantic Ocean. But I cannot think—against the tenor of so much Scripture—that every individual is therefore automatically saved! Or, as the report in places seems to imply, that every baby is thus redeemed, though he may prove unregenerate later! The report states: "In our opinion, it is clear that the child of a Christian home does not stand in any position of privilege in relation to God's redemptive work in Christ." (p.14). In my opinion, as I shall proceed to show, there is a fundamental difference between the children in believing homes and all other children. But it is not a question of "privilege". The difference relates to faith. The report fails to distinguish between being "included in God's purpose of salvation" or "born within the sphere of Christ's atoning work" (to quote from p.18) and being saved by faith. For without faith, the *full* effects of redemption can never be appropriated.

Now the Church is "the household of the faith", and membership in it is conditioned by faith. And faith is itself the gift of God. Thus we confront the mystery of election. But election is not to privileged salvation, as Calvinists misunderstood and therefore logically but terribly believed in election to damnation. It means selection in the service of God's purposes of salvation for all. This is the truth which the report so admirably recognizes (e.g. "the Church is not a self-enclosed 'saved' community, but a Body whose *raison d'être* is the salvation of mankind", on p.16, and "the Christ-event determines that the Church is not simply the elect Covenant community; it is the elect Covenant community in order that it might serve mankind as Christ serves mankind. Election and mission are indivisible", on p.20). But it seems to me confusing to ask: "Is there, then, any possibility of using the Covenant concept in discussion of the nature of the Church if prevenient grace extends to all mankind and if the line which separates Christian parents from their children runs through baptism, involving as it does, personal recognition of and response to the salvation won in Christ?" (p.19). In *that* sense, prevenient grace does not extend to all mankind, but the Covenant extends to the New Israel—to all who have faith. In spite of the assertions quoted in the preceding paragraph, the report does admit that "in practice . . . we are bound to recognize important differences. Where one or both parents believe, the children have an undeniable advantage . . ." (p.24). But these differences are not adequately recognized for what they are—differences of faith!

## 10. Faith Connotes Receptivity

Just as man fell from grace to unbelief and disobedience, it is through the *metanoia* of repentance and faith that he turns around to enter the new order. But faith is simply a response to what God has done, to what God is giving. It is a capacity to receive, not a merit to be rewarded. In God's intention, life in the new order is indeed offered to all; no one can deserve it, all are called to it. It is *not* that some deserve it and some do not. But man shows an inveterate Pelagian tendency towards believing that, in some sense, he is called upon to win salvation through his own deserts; he thus perverts faith into the fulfilling of a condition which deserves a reward. Unconsciously there is often something of this psychology behind the objections of those who feel that salvation cannot come to infants, since they do nothing to prove their fitness for it. But they can *receive* it. Indeed, our Lord said to His disciples, "Whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15). Surely little children themselves, then, are not excluded. But it is not a question of merit.

### 11. The New Testament Indicative precedes its Imperative

In the New Testament, God's gift precedes His demand. This is the whole basis of "justification by faith". God freely grants a new status which is undeserved, and in the power of that, man is progressively changed by the Holy Spirit into what he ought to be. To give two illustrations of St. Paul's typical appeal to "be what you are", we cite first the argument of Romans 6:1-14 and 8:1-13, "You are dead with Christ . . . so reckon yourselves to be dead to sin . . . and put to death all the base pursuits of the body". Secondly we note the Apostle's way of dealing with the Corinthians in his first letter to them; only after his wonderful description of the "saints at Corinth" in I Cor. 1 does he proceed to upbraid them for their failures to live up to their high calling, which nevertheless remains a gift. But the source of all this lies in our Lord's own teaching and example—His parable of the welcome home given to the prodigal son, and His saying to the unstable and erratic Simon: "You are Simon . . . You shall be called Peter, the Rock" (John 1:42). Membership in the Body of Christ is similarly a sheer undeserved gift. It is never merited or won. The only question is, Can it be received?

### 12. Can we be Saved by Another's Faith?

We are now ready to take up the question which Dr. Beasley-Murray dismisses far too easily. He states: "The belief that one may exercise faith on behalf of another for his salvation is inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament generally. It is one thing to have faith that one's child may recover from a malady (as, for example, Mark 9:23 ff), it is another to exercise faith with a view to his being cleansed, justified, united with Christ by the Holy Spirit, and born anew into the Kingdom of God." We may first note that besides the story of the healing of the epileptic boy in response to the father's (even imperfect) faith, the stories about the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24 ff) and the centurion's son (John 4:46 ff) similarly focus on the importance of faith, the way that Jesus elicited it, and His marvelling when foreigners showed it more than the Jews who were called to faith (cf. Luke 7:9). In each case the healing was done in response to someone else's faith. And St. John adds the report that the army officer "and all his household became believers" (John 4:53) as a result. Dr. Beasley-Murray makes a sharp distinction between the faith that wins healing, and the faith that wins (?) spiritual salvation. But to do this accords neither with the Old Testament nor the New Testament usage, in which *shalom* includes both temporal and spiritual blessing, and *sozein* means to give either physical or spiritual healing—or both. The Bible does *not* thus divide the "wholeness" of man's life. Nor do up-to-date psychology or medicine.

Of particular importance here is the story of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1 ff). Two notable points have a direct bearing upon this issue. The narrative says that Jesus, "seeing *their* faith" spoke His healing word to the paralytic. And He started by assuring him, "Son, thy sins are forgiven". The Gospel story does not answer the question whether faith on the part of the paralytic himself was included along with that of the friends who, with such pertinacity and temerity, broke up the roof to give him his chance. It does make clear that, whereas they came for healing, our Lord first declared a free forgiveness. Once faith is recognised as a capacity to receive a free gift, and not as conformity to a condition which proves an individual's worthiness to receive, it is neither unreasonable nor surprising that faith should, so to speak, spill over in its beneficent results. Indeed, who of us has not been blessed and strengthened through the faith of another? But there has to be a direct personal relationship as the channel through which faith overflows from life to life.

### 13. A Little Child's Faith is Real

What Christian parent has not been rebuked and inspired by the prayers of little children brought up in truly Christian homes? Is not their faith real, however simple, though it is a faith entirely derived from that of the parents? In a country like India, for example, it is so obvious that a little child will have a faith, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or some other—or contrariwise no faith at all—wholly in accordance with the household into which he or she has been born. Yet I submit that the religious faith of a little child is a pure and effective faith. The most significant thing in the episode of our Lord's blessing of the little children, from the point of view of our argument, was not that He blessed them, but that He said "of such is the Kingdom of heaven". In what respect was He commending them? Not surely for angelic conduct, but for their simple and ready trust. What He said was that *we* have to repent and *become like them*, not that they have to wait until they can repent like us! Brought up in a believing home, they are straightaway ready to receive the Kingdom.

This is potentially true of any little child, but in fact everything depends upon its environment and upbringing. This does not mean that children do not sin—far from it! But believers also sin. The question simply concerns faith to receive the Kingdom. And in this connexion to suggest or imply that the condition of children in believing homes is fundamentally the same as that of children in pagan homes is, as I see it, not only nonsense, but wicked nonsense. (The Biblical expression "children of wrath" is, of course, a Hebraism applying to adults, not children.) Dr. Beasley-Murray, and the writers of the report also, would at least admit that *in some sense* the children of believing parents belong to

the Church. But why not as genuine members of the Church, since their faith, though derived from their parents, is no less real than theirs ?

The report is remarkably inconsistent referring to such children. On pp.9-10, it says : "Baptists generally would say that a child who has not yet made his responsible committal to Christ cannot be regarded as a member of the Church nor, most would add, as a Christian. But is it right to be content with such negative assertions without qualification ? What of the child nurtured in the Church, who earnestly directs his prayers to God 'in Jesus' name' ? If not a Christian, what is he ? We cannot speak of the child as *a member* of the Church, but surely we must qualify our denial in some manner when we find him sharing in the worship of the Church and obviously at home in its environment (Psalm 8:2). Would we say that such a child does not *in any sense* belong to the Church ?" Yet on p.24 it simply states : "They are not yet Christians, but they are becoming aware of Christ." On p.27, however, it magnificently asserts : "We must not think of the child as the church member of the future. We must recognize that at three years of age he makes certain responses to Jesus Christ, he is in a certain relationship with the Church, he has a certain awareness of the Bible—each as valid for his age as the very different attitudes and relationships he will have at the age of 13 or 30." Whereas on p.15, for example, it speaks of believer's baptism as drawing a "line of demarcation . . . between those who recognize Christ's Lordship and those who do not", on p.39 it speaks of the child being trained "to make decisions for himself and thus to be committed at whatever stages of development he has reached". And on p.28, it points out that when St. Paul exhorts children to obey their parents "in the Lord", this means "as a member of the Church, of the Body of Jesus Christ, who has assigned to each member its special function". Did St. Paul have only grown-up children in mind ? I think not !

Dr. Beasley-Murray suggests that infant baptism means either "weakening the New Testament conception of the Body of Christ, and what is involved in becoming a member of Christ, or it drives us to accept a full-blooded doctrine of sacraments effecting what they represent, irrespective of the condition or identity of the subject". I submit that the baptism of infants in believing households does neither. The first thing that is "involved in becoming a member of Christ" is to repent and become like a little child. Baptism is a sacrament which "effects what it represents", but it depends upon the faith of its subject. The vital distinction to be made between the children of believing parents and those of parents who do not believe indicates who are fit or unfit subjects for infant baptism, as a question not of privilege but of receptive faith.

As regards the theology of Romans 6, Dr. Beasley-Murray himself declares that its primary meaning is not the revolutionary change in the repenting believer (which, in a secondary way, is fitly symbolised in baptism as a death and a resurrection) but the death and resurrection which are his because Christ "died and rose as his representative". That is, because he is part of a redeemed community, the "new man" constituted in Christ. And this is equally true of the subjects of infant faith-baptism.

#### **14. Infant Baptism preferable to Child Baptism**

It will have appeared that I keep swithering from infants to little children. But as regards faith, I recognize no difference. Following the above lines of argument, the baptism of children in a believing home has been termed faith-baptism, the context being no vague invocation of the faith of the Christian community in general, but demanding precise reference to the particular faith of the household to which the child belongs. The basis is a derived faith, but—assuming proper Christian nurture—it is, for the early years of life, an entirely predictable faith. This being so, it is wholly logical to baptise infants, since faith will be theirs just as are race, nationality, and the belonging to this or that social class. This has the advantage of making doubly clear the fact that any faith which a child has is derivative—prior to the time when it is capable of making a *genuine* decision for itself.

#### **15. Faith, Decision and Full Church Membership**

The normal age for believer's baptism in Baptist churches around the world in fact ranges from four to, say, eighteen years, though the earlier years are less common, and there is of course no age limit at the other end. But this very unfortunately confuses faith which is inherited with faith which is a personal affirmation after a genuine situation of choice has been reached. After a child has been baptised in infancy, however, there comes a time when, by deliberate choice in years of discretion, he or she must personally affirm the faith which has been inherited. For a mature faith involves intelligent and deliberate decision. With faith, as with many other things, what is perfect in childhood is no longer adequate or worthy for the adolescent, still less for the adult. When, then, is the right time for this decision and confirmation? When an adolescent has already begun consciously to question the traditions in which he or she has been brought up? After the first real experiences of doubt or rebellion? Or at a time when the option of accepting an alternative faith to Christianity has made possible a genuine choice of religions? Whereas in the case of a conversion from outside the Church to the Christian faith, it is relatively easy to determine the time for baptism (setting aside the

problem created by the common but, to my mind, mistaken missionary practice of a lengthy catechumenate, in place of post-baptismal instruction), it is more difficult to determine the most satisfactory time for confirmation.

Whenever it takes place, confirmation should be no formality, but mark a meaningful and deliberate commitment to Jesus Christ and to His Church. And Christian parents, on Christian grounds, having faithfully endeavoured to nurture their children by the truths of the Gospel, should scrupulously refrain from *any* kind of coercion towards acceptance of full church membership. Having reached years of discretion, and having been brought up within the Church, children must be wholly free to make their own response to their Christian calling. The Gospel is an offer and an invitation, not a demand. Our Lord called the rich young ruler—and let him turn away (Mark 10:17-27).

It would anyway seem appropriate that confirmation should usually take place at a time when the privileges and responsibilities of full church membership can naturally be accorded. Confirmation, of course, does not imply that the child has not already been a *member* of the Church, for—in a believing home—he has been a member from birth. When, however, he grows up, he must be allowed the freedom to renounce his birthright, or else to accept its full responsibilities. An undergraduate is fully a “member” of his university, even while he is *in statu pupillari*. At Oxford and Cambridge, for example, his whole status in the university changes when he takes his Master’s degree. Yet he then becomes no more a member of the university than he was previously—he is now, however, a member with teaching responsibilities and privileges. On the other hand, after years of discretion have been reached, a man may legally change his name or nationality, or repudiate his class status. A Christian child may similarly with deliberation leave the Christian Church.

## 16. Norms for the Practice of Infant Faith-Baptism

The whole of the foregoing argument is based upon the conviction that a truly believing parent will and can, unless obstructed by the other parent, bring up his or her child in the faith—supported, of course, by the faith and the concerned responsibility of the whole Christian community to which the parent belongs. Although a fully Christian home requires both parents to be committed, practising Christians, St. Paul’s plain statement in I Cor. 7:14 is that “the unbelieving husband is consecrated in the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated in the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy”. It is to be noted that whereas St. Paul speaks of the unbelieving spouse as “consecrated” (*hagiazō*), he speaks of the

children in such a home as "holy" (*hagios*), using precisely the same word as is used of Christians in the New Testament, "saints", in the sense of "people belonging to God".

It will be objected that it is difficult to determine whether at least one of the parents is truly a believer or not, and what is the likelihood of the infant's being nurtured in the Christian faith and way. I suggest that these questions are no more difficult to answer than is that of the faith of the candidate for believer's baptism. In the latter case, too, a judgment is called for; and the local congregation makes it. It should similarly be the responsibility of the church before admitting an infant to baptism, to insist that at least one parent be a communicant church member in good standing, and to pass a favourable judgment on the likelihood of real Christian nurture. The matter should be treated with the same seriousness; and in all cases of doubt, baptism should be deferred until years of discretion. I fully recognise the practical difficulties of this position but if Baptists cannot make a helpful contribution out of experience, towards overcoming them, what do they mean by examining candidates for believers' baptism? It is the parents who are being examined, not the baby, so sentimentality may be suppressed!

### 17. Implications for Christian Education

The implications of all this for Christian education are obvious, and of tremendous importance. One of the tragic features in Baptist church life is that in spite of all the importance attached to giving baptism and church membership their full significance, and to providing Sunday school education or Family Church services throughout the denomination, yet there is a tremendous "leakage" between senior Sunday school and the Church. Is not this a result of our false premises regarding many of the children we teach? Baptists are right in protesting against the unreality (or downright falsity) of saying to a child in its teens, "You are a Christian, because you were baptised when you were an infant", unless its whole upbringing has obviously been based upon that premise. But I submit that we are even more wrong in saying or implying to a Christian child, "When you are older, you will have to decide whether or not you want to become a Christian". I believe it to be wholly untrue to New Testament thought, and very unwise in practice, to regard children in Christian homes as "uncommitted to Christ". All through childhood, believing parents and the church should be saying to their children, "You belong to Jesus Christ and to His Church. You must pray and live accordingly. When you are grown up, you will have the opportunity of publicly professing that you believe in Him, and then you will be able to take the full responsibilities of Church membership". Children need spiritual, as well as other forms of psycholo-

gical security. They are ready for proper claims upon their loyalty.

### 18. Main Conclusions

The main conclusion to which the writer has thus been led by the foregoing arguments is that, just as there are two normal ways of entering the Church, by conversion in years of discretion, or by birth into a believing family, so there are two baptisms and two types of faith upon which their administration is conditional, the one depending upon a personal decision in years when a real choice is possible, and the other upon the normal process of nurture of little children into all that their parents hold most dear. In either case, the local church has the responsibility of satisfying itself of the presence of faith, whether avowed, or given by prevenient grace through birth in a godly household. The Church further has the responsibility of assisting believing parents in their task of bringing up baptised infants in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord"—as Christian children, not as merely potential Christians.

Before confirming someone baptised in infancy in the full privileges and responsibilities of membership, the Church needs to prepare and examine the candidate, requiring him to make a personal and public affirmation of the faith into which he was born. Such confirmation, as also the administration of believer's baptism in years of discretion, should be accompanied by the laying on of hands, as a sacramental expression of God's gift of the Holy Spirit for such share in the Church's total ministry as the Spirit will direct. Baptists should reform the shocking readiness of many of their congregations to receive into full church membership Christians who have never been baptised, their practice of distinguishing between baptism and public entry into church membership through the enacting of these on separate occasions, and their omission of the scriptural practice of the laying on of hands at the time of believer's baptism (or of confirmation), with all the doctrine which that act would imply and teach concerning the meaning of the real responsibilities of church membership. Paedobaptists, on their side, should give up the all-too-widespread yet none-the-less quasi-magical practice of infant baptism without regard to the faith of the household in which the infant will be brought up.

The implications of the foregoing for schemes of Church Union should be obvious. If Baptists and Paedobaptists could agree on the baptism of infants in believing households, and only such infants, believer's baptism would become the norm for all other entry into the Christian Church. There would be no need for alternative processes of Christian initiation, and membership in the Church would be clearly and fully linked with faith. And though baptism, like circumcision, would be understood to be of no avail apart from the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6), yet it

would retain the position given to it in both New Testament theology and New Testament practice.

### 19. A Missionary Church would still Baptise Converts !

The question may be asked whether this plain recognition of two different forms of baptism would not deprive the Church of all that Baptists have most wanted to affirm in the ordinance—all that is meant by being baptised into the death of Christ, and rising with Him into newness of life. Here come my crucial points. This would not be so if baptism were understood and taught, not just as an individual testimony and experience, but as an act of the whole Christian community, incorporating the child of believing parents (or the convert to the Christian faith) into the Body of which Christ is the Head. Nor would it be so if our churches were missionary churches, as according to the New Testament they ought to be. It is a shame on us that, for the most part today, both at home and abroad, our churches are built up—if they are built up!—chiefly from children born into the Christian community, and very little through the winning for Christ of people from the non-Christian world. The baptism, in maturer years, of someone who has all along been brought up in a Christian home represents the fruit of Christian education and upbringing, but *not* the full New Testament testimony to the significance of conversion. It is “missionary” baptism, no matter in what country, which shows forth what the Gospel truly means in its impact on an unbelieving world.

VICTOR E. W. HAYWARD

---

### OUR CONTRIBUTORS

V. E. W. HAYWARD, M.A.,

Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

J. E. C. HILL, M.A., D.Litt.,

Master, Balliol College, Oxford.

B. R. WHITE, M.A., D.Phil.,

Tutor, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

Reviews by : N. CLARK, G. J. M. PEARCE, G. W. RUSLING, D. C. SPARKES, B. R. WHITE.