

Infant Baptism: A Further Comment

THE Editor has kindly invited me to comment (though at limited length!) on Dr. Beasley-Murray's response¹ to my paper on infant baptism.²

It is a delight to engage in debate without the slightest *odium theologicum*. Unfortunately, however, we haven't altogether avoided the bad habits of debaters! Thus my honoured friend, though unnecessarily suggesting that I question whether he is *compos mentis* (p. 226) —the last doubt that I should raise, does not scruple himself to write "If Mr. Hayward has understood their problem, he has dismissed it all too easily" (p. 229) and intimates his "guess that Mr. Hayward has allowed himself to be bullied (by his ecumenical colleagues?) into the view that to insist on faith as integral to the Gospel is to pervert faith into a work" (p. 232). I had explicitly spoken of my great appreciation for Dr. Beasley-Murray's book *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*, but gave reasons for questioning whether this age-long controversy could ever be solved by further strengthening of the arguments for either side, and suggested instead a greater recognition by each party of the *weaknesses* in its own position. This is helpfully happening with many Paedobaptists. I believe I *do* understand the problem of the relationship of our Lord's redemptive work, not to the Church, but to the world. But my concern is with children born within the household of the faith, whom I regard as in the Church. I certainly haven't been bullied by my ecumenical colleagues; the perception that Protestants often turn faith into "works", in St. Paul's parlance, is one that has gradually dawned on me over the years. That was a quite unfair remark, in view of my explicit statement that "I believe that baptism is always a sign or sacrament of the subject's faith" (p. 51). For unlike, as it would seem, some of those who wrote the report *The Child and the Church*, I maintain that "without faith, the full effects of redemption can never be appropriated" (p. 55).

It appears to me that Dr. Beasley-Murray has almost entirely ignored the crucial point of my whole paper, namely, that only those infants should be baptized of whom at least one parent is a communicant church member in good standing, able to give a reliable promise of real Christian nurture. I do regard faith as essential to baptism; my thesis depends entirely on the reality of what I have explained as "derived" faith. Indeed, on my view, Baptists

¹ "I Still Find Infant Baptism Difficult", in the *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 4, p. 225 ff.

² "Can our Controversy with the Paedobaptists be Resolved?", *op. cit.*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, p. 50 ff.

should introduce this practice "into their own churches forthwith, without waiting for reunion schemes to prod them into action" (p. 225), as I had supposed my paper made clear. But now I realize that at least at one point I did unfortunately obscure my meaning and intention.

Dr. Beasley-Murray was justified in asking why I did not carry through the implications of "vicarious faith" to a logical conclusion, and I am grateful to him for making me realize this weakness in my presentation. The fact is that my thesis rests on "derived" not "vicarious" faith. My only purpose in referring to the latter was my disagreement with Dr. Beasley-Murray's assertion that "The belief that one may exercise faith on behalf of another for his salvation is inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament generally". My point was set out at the end of section 12: "Once faith is recognized 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 beneficial results. . . . But there has to be a direct personal relationship, as the channel through which faith overflows from life to life." But the real basis of my argument was not there at all; it was in my contention, developed in section 13, that the faith of little children brought up in truly Christian homes is wholly real, though entirely derived and not at that stage the result of deliberate choice. As I pointed out, our Lord said that "*we* have to repent and *become like them*, not that they have to wait until they can repent like us" before receiving the Kingdom! (p. 58).

I am further very grateful to Dr. Beasley-Murray for a number of important admissions which he did make in the course of his reply. I will give these in his own words. "Now in all candour I have to admit that it is not impossible that Mr. Hayward may be right in his guess that baptism may have been applied to infants, and that in that case it did have a different meaning from believer's baptism; I have to say this, for there is no statement in the New Testament to say that such baptisms did *not* take place, and none to say that such an interpretation was *not* placed upon it!" (p. 235). In view of the arguments which I gave in sections 5-8 of my paper, he was by no means justified in going on to suggest that I was simply arguing, in a purely speculative way, from silence. Dr. Beasley-Murray said, "When issue is taken concerning the Baptists' view of little children, and their relation to the Church and the Kingdom of God, undoubtedly a sensitive point is touched. It cannot be denied that Baptists have given insufficient thought to this, and now they are trying to remedy the fault, they are finding themselves in difficulties. I am inclined to think that the difference between Baptists and others at this point is not that Baptists are confused while everyone else knows, but that everybody is confused, and that whereas Baptists are beginning to realize their difficulties, members of other Churches have been unwarrantably confident that they have the right answers"

(p. 228). I entirely agree that it is not only Baptists who are confused, or who "read the New Testament with denominational spectacles", but I certainly don't think Baptists have shown themselves any more ready than others to admit this. I'm glad that Dr. Beasley-Murray acknowledges that "the document *The Child and the Church* suffers from the fact that the group that produced it was divided on the basic question of the relation of the world and the Church to Christ and His redemption" (p. 228-9). That was precisely my point about its inevitably incoherent theology. Again, Dr. Beasley-Murray says "I entirely agree with Mr. Hayward that a child's faith is to be respected, and if he wants to go on to suggest that we Baptists in Europe have not taken it sufficiently seriously I will agree again" (p. 230). I do draw the conclusion that children in the household of faith "are not merely potentially heirs of the Kingdom but they are actual heirs . . . fit for baptism and for recognition as members of the people of the kingdom (the Church)" (pp. 230, 231). But I repudiate the phrase "a responsible faith that is not a mere imitation of its parents' attitudes"; a child's imitative, or derived, faith is none the less a responding and receptive faith.

Two points remain to be made. I would not regard the baptism of slaves, in the setting of New Testament times, as "purely external and so meaningless" (p. 227), even though I do not think they would all have had individual conversion experiences at the time. The situation would have been comparable to mass movements towards Christianity of peoples accustomed to corporate, rather than individual, decisions. And as regards Romans 6, I would stress the implications of what Dr. Beasley-Murray himself wrote in *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*: "The death and resurrection of the baptized man is the death and resurrection that he suffered in the Christ who died and rose as his representative. The death and resurrection are his because he has become united with Christ." (p. 48). The little child in the believing home, who has as yet no personal experience of dying and rising again, is nevertheless in that way united with the Body of Christ.

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