

Baptists and Christian Initiation*

BAPTISTS have rarely been very clear or consistent theologians. Nor has their practice been well-ordered and regular. Like many other Christians, they stoutly claim that the New Testament is the authority for their faith and practice, and that they try to reproduce the structure and order of the earliest Christian churches. But it has long been clear that the evidence of the New Testament is open to different interpretations, and has a number of tantalising gaps and some apparent inconsistencies. Canon Streeter talked exuberantly about all the different traditions getting prizes. But are all the prizes of equal worth? What *can* be claimed, I think, is that in the course of Christian history in spite of all the conflicts and controversies, certain basic patterns can be traced in matters of faith and order. There have been rather violent swings to both right and left on occasion. In the end a broad central stream of witness and practice can be discerned and must be ascribed, I believe, to the constraint and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Without certain variations, protests and even temporary separations, essential truths might have been lost. But no tradition can now be satisfied with its procedures and structures, let alone their customary theological defences. A lesson clearly set out in the New Testament and emphasised by Christian history is that fellowship, mutual understanding and loyalty is the intended way of discipleship and is likely to provide the means for the most effective nurture and evangelism, whether by the individual or the group.

Our immediate concern is Christian initiation, the admission and recognition of individuals as members of the visible Church. Baptists have no standard, authorised procedure. They are guided by custom and tradition, their practice closely related to their belief that a local fellowship of believers is a valid and true manifestation of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and their conviction that the rite of baptism (whether described as an ordinance or a sacrament, and whether administered by immersion or affusion) must involve personal decision and testimony. These two elements—the local fellowship and the rite—are essential. There have been instances among Baptists of private baptisms, but they are rare and not seriously defensible. There are cases where believer's baptism is not directly linked with membership of a church, but they are out of line with the teaching of the Baptist Confessions of Faith, as well as that of other Christian traditions; clearly they should rarely be embarked upon.

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Our practice assumes that an individual has heard and been apprehended by the Gospel, is ready and able to make to it an intelligible response and shows evidence of at least some of what the New Testament calls the fruits of the Spirit. It assumes also that he wishes to be incorporated in the visible Body of Christ. Reading again the foundation documents re-printed by W. J. McGlothlin and W. L. Lumpkin in their collections of Baptist Confessions of Faith, I have been impressed by the emphasis on preliminary preaching and teaching. Stress is laid on the order implied by the frequently quoted *Matthew* 28. 19: "Go ye and teach all nations", then baptize. There is a right and necessary sequence: preaching, faith, rebirth, baptism, church fellowship. This year is the 450th anniversary of the baptisms at Zollikon in 1525. Describing what then happened, George Blaurock, one of the chief figures, said:

"In the pure fear of God they recognised that a person must learn from the divine word and preaching a true faith which manifests itself in love, and receive the true Christian baptism on the basis of the recognised and confessed faith, in the union with God of a good conscience (prepared) henceforth to serve God in a holy Christian life with all godliness, also to be steadfast to the end in tribulation" (G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 1962, p. 122, quoting from the *Hutterite Chronicle*).

They followed their baptism with the Lord's Supper.

This approach is reiterated again and again in one of the noblest and most interesting of Anabaptist (Hutterite) documents, the *Rechenschaft* of Peter Rideman which comes from 1540.

"Just as little as John, the messenger of Christ, came without teaching, even so little can the true baptism of water take place without being preceded by preaching" (p. 75).

Baptism is "a testament of the recognition, knowledge and grace of God . . . The recognition of God . . . cometh . . . from hearing the word of the gospel" (p. 77).

Baptism is described as "a bath of rebirth signifying that he hath entered into the covenant of grace and knowledge of God" (p. 75).

"He who is to be baptised must first request, ask for, and desire it" (p. 79).

"Since the Lord desireth to have a beautiful temple, a holy church . . . they must first be told by word of this nature and purpose and so led into the covenant of sonship . . . after such teaching hath been given, doth he command baptism, as the seal of the covenant of sonship, that all who have received and believed the word be baptised and so accepted into the community of the saints, and after baptism he commandeth to continue to teach the observance of all things whatsoever the Lord hath commanded" (pp. 170-171). "Baptism is acceptance into the Church of Christ" (p. 68).

There is the same emphasis on preaching and on *Matthew* 28.19 (which is described as "the primitive Institution") in the Declaration

of the English in Amsterdam in 1611, and this in turn follows closely the words of John Robinson, the pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers:

“The proper ends and uses of baptism are to initiate the parties baptised into the church of Christ and to consecrate them to his service, and to serve for badges of Christianity, by which it is distinguished from all other professions . . . to be administered . . . only to such as are externally, and so far as men can judge, taught and made disciples; do receive the word gladly; believe and so profess, have received the Holy Ghost” (*A Justification of Separation from the Church of England*, 1610, quoted by Isaac Backus, *A History of New England*, I, 1777, p. 15).

The London Particular Baptist Confession of 1644 similarly stresses that faith is ordinarily begotten by the preaching of the Gospel and that baptism is “an ordinance for persons professing faith or that are Disciples or taught”. The Thirty Congregations of General Baptists, who stated their beliefs in 1651, said that baptism “ought to be known by everyone, before they submit themselves or obey it.” The Midland Particular Baptist Association stated explicitly in 1655 “faith, fruits, then baptism”. There are warnings here against indiscriminate, careless baptism—something to which even 17th Century Baptists were liable. It is the Holy Spirit who assembles the Church, but—as the Somerset Confession of 1656 has it—the Spirit is administered by or through the word of faith preached, the believer is “planted in the visible Church” by baptism and is then “in full assurance to receive a greater measure of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit” (Lumpkin, pp. 209-211).

Our forefathers usually described baptism as an ordinance, a word they often employed in a very general sense to cover what were regarded as the commands of Christ. The London Particular Baptist Confession of 1644 gives it this name and goes on to speak of it as “a sign” signifying:—

“first, the washing of the whole soul in the blood of Christ: second, that interest the Saints have in the death, burial and resurrection: thirdly, together with a confirmation of our faith, and that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and riseth again, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of resurrection, to reign with Christ” (Lumpkin, p. 167).

The Particular Baptist Confession, first drawn up in 1677, modelled on the Westminster Confession, adopted by the Assembly in 1688 and often re-affirmed subsequently, speaks of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “ordinances of positive and sovereign institution” and as “holy appointments” and a “sign” of being engrafted into Christ, of remission of sins and of living and walking in newness of life (Lumpkin, p. 291). Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are treated together. The General Baptists did not reject the term “sacraments”, but they also spoke of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “ordinances of positive, sovereign and holy institution” (Lumpkin, p. 317). A century later the Articles

of Religion of the New Connexion of General Baptists spoke of "Regeneration by the Holy Spirit" and of baptism as "the indispensable duty of all who repent and believe the Gospel" (pp. 343-344). The Bunyan tradition that "differences of judgement about water baptism" should be "no bar to communion", that is, to fellowship together in a local church, spread from Bedford into the counties around. There were churches of this type in the closing decades of the 17th century and early in the 18th century. The number increased towards the end of the 18th century and again in the 19th. Early in the present century the formation of Union Churches became the policy of both the Baptist Union and the Congregational Union, though it was recognised that no minister should be expected to baptize in a manner that offended his conscience. The churches of this type taken together (though disapproved of by some) comprise a very impressive and challenging group and have made a notable contribution to our denominational life and to Christian witness in this and other lands.

Our American cousins accepted the Assembly Confession of the Particular Baptists and it was issued by the Philadelphia Association in 1742 with two additions. These were taken from the edition of the Confession prepared by Benjamin Keach and his son Elias. The latter had spent a few years in New England as a young man. These additional clauses dealt with two matters of controversy, first, the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in public worship (long a matter of uncertainty and rejected by the Swiss Brethren as disturbing concentration on the Word of God) and, secondly, the laying on of hands (to which I shall return). In the 19th century, the New Hampshire Confession of 1833 (described by T. B. Maston, *Isaac Backus*, 1962, p. 35 as "non-committal on every point of difference between the Calvinistic and Arminian systems") became influential among Baptists in the United States. It speaks of "the ordinances of Christ" and appears to include in the term not only baptism and the Lord's Supper, but also the Christian Sabbath and Civil Government. Baptism, it says, is:

"to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem our faith in a crucified, buried and risen Saviour, with its purifying power".

It is regarded as "a prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation and to the Lord's Supper" (Lumpkin, p. 366), language which is as flat as that of some modern British liturgical reformers. The important 1925 Statement of Faith of the Southern Convention uses the phrase "the ordinances of Christ" and language similar to that of the New Hampshire Confession (*ibid.* p. 395).

Immersion soon took the place among Mennonites and Baptists which affusion had had in some circles from the time of the Zollikon baptisms of 1525. Controversy came to centre around the laying on of hands. When, twenty years ago, I wrote about the use of this rite among Baptists, I thought that the earliest references in this country to its formal association with baptism occurred in the 1650's and I followed Dr. Whitley in suggesting that the custom had spread a few

years earlier through the adherence to the Baptist ranks of Francis Cornwell and Henry Denne, both of whom had been Anglican clergymen. Indeed Henry Danvers in the second edition of his *Treatise on Baptism* published in 1674, expressly states that Cornwell began to preach "the necessity of laying on of hands", when he joined the General Baptist church in White's Alley, Spitalfields, in 1646. Soon after my article appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly*, an American friend drew my attention to the fact that Roger Williams mentions *Hebrews* 6, 1-2 in his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, which was published in London in 1644, when the author was seeking a charter for the self-government of the plantation on Rhode Island. Roger Williams had been for some years involved in the controversies with John Cotton, which are the basis of his work. He refers to *Hebrews* 6 as "the foundation of doctrines, without the knowledge of which there can be no true profession of Christ, according to the first institution", but admits that in some of the doctrines mentioned "to wit, those concerning baptisms and laying on of hands God's people will be found to be ignorant for many hundred years; and I yet cannot see it proved that light is risen, I mean the light of the first institution, in practice" (Hanserd Knollys edition, 1848, p. 40).

It is clear that the correct interpretation and practice of *Hebrews* 6 was a matter of discussion a good deal earlier than 1646. It is also clear that by 1660 the General Baptist churches had adopted the passage as their basis: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. In their Standard Confession they set out their belief in the following manner:

"XII. That it is the duty of all such who are believers Baptised to draw nigh unto God in submission to that principle of Christ's Doctrine, to wit, Prayer and Laying on of Hands, that they may receive the promise of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Lumpkin, p. 229).

In their Orthodox Creed of 1678 they have the following:

"XXXII. Prayer, with imposition of hands by the bishop or elder, on baptised believers, as such, for the reception of the holy promised Spirit of Christ, we believe is a principle of Christ's doctrine, and ought to be practised and submitted to by every baptised believer in order to receive the promised spirit of the Father and Son" (Lumpkin, pp. 320-321).

By 1678 there had been sharp controversy in Baptist circles over the matter, both in this country and the American colonies. The Rhode Island church divided on the issue in 1652, the majority favouring general redemption and the laying on of hands. The church at Newport, Rhode Island, divided in 1656. There were divisions in London and in Wales, but many churches—and not only General Baptist churches—practised the laying on of hands after baptism. Thomas Tillam went from the original Particular Baptist church in London to Hexham and administered "the holy ordinance of baptism (under the 4th principle)". In 1655 he issued a pamphlet defending the prac-

tice. There was revived controversy in the 1670's. Thomas Grantham, the well known leader in Lincolnshire and East Anglia, argued for the practice in his *Christianismus Primitivus*. Benjamin Keach became convinced in its favour. In New England in 1701 the Welsh Tract church was organised in separation from the Old Pennepack church of 1688, because the latter did not require the laying on of hands upon the newly baptised (Torbet, *History*, p. 230). As already mentioned, it was via Keach and his son that the laying on of hands found a place in the influential Philadelphia Confession of 1742. It does so in the following terms:—

“XXXI. We believe that (*Heb.* 5. 12 and 6. 1-2, *Acts* 8. 17, 18 and 19.6) laying on of hands (with prayer) upon baptised believers, as such, is an ordinance of Christ, and ought to be submitted unto by all such persons as are admitted to partake of the Lord's Supper: and that the end of this ordinance is not for the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but for (*Eph.* 1. 13, 14) a farther reception of the Holy Spirit of promise, or for the addition of the graces of the Spirit and the influences thereof . . . ” (Lumpkin, p. 351).

In many Baptist churches in the U.S.A., both Particular and General, the practice continued into the 19th century. The Philadelphia Association reaffirmed it in 1783 (see Norman Maring, p. 93), but gradually it became an optional rite and gradually disappeared. T. B. Maston, *Isaac Backus*, 1962, p. 37n. says: “There are extant two manuscripts by Backus opposing the laying on of hands. One of these is dated February, 1769 and the other 5th June, 1788”. A Virginia Association, formed in 1786, decided in favour of the laying on of hands and also that footwashing was a church ordinance, but each local church exercised liberty in these matters. The United Virginia Baptists, when they revised the Philadelphia Confession in 1806, dropped from it the clause about the laying on of hands (Garnett Ryland, p. 164). There are, however, still groups in America, who maintain the practice.

In this country, also, it gradually fell into disuse in Particular Baptist circles. The famous Dr. Gill had expressed his doubts about it as early as 1729 and this no doubt proved influential. In General Baptist churches it was common until the end of the 18th century.

Difference of opinion on the matter was almost inevitable in view of the lack of clarity in the New Testament and in the records of the Early Church. T. W. Manson, in an important article he wrote in 1947 for the *Journal of Theological Studies* on “Entry into Membership of the Early Church”, argued that the probability seems to be that the usual order soon became:

1. Prayer for the reception of the Spirit with the imposition of hands and perhaps unction.
2. Baptism.
3. Admission to the congregation and the Lord's Table.

Later—and in Manson's view unfortunately, perhaps under the influence of the Mystery Religions—the order changed to:

1. Baptism.
2. Admission to the congregation.
3. Prayer for the Spirit.

The significant things demanding expression are clear. The means and order are perhaps less important. Certainly by the time of Tertullian baptism was followed by anointing and the imposition of hands, though in Syriac-speaking churches the order was reversed. By the time of Augustine with his doctrine of original sin the actual gift of the Holy Spirit was associated with the laying on of hands and even infants were the subjects.

In the 19th century, partly in opposition to High Church doctrines and ritual, Baptists—and others—became chary of almost all forms and ceremonies and casual in their practice. Suspicion of verbal creeds, and the discovery that claims to orthodoxy guarantee neither charity nor morality (nor, of course, does unorthodoxy), led to the gradual abandonment in many churches of any very close examination of candidates for baptism and church membership. Revivalism in both America and England also played a part in the changes that took place. Testimony before the whole church must always have been a considerable ordeal. Examination by visitors has become a strain on both visitors and candidates, as "religious illiteracy" has increased. But the recognition that baptism, church membership and the Lord's Supper are inseparably related was never entirely lost, even if a theological exposition of this has been rare and references to the Holy Spirit few. The Serampore missionaries, for example, joined in instructing Krishna Pal for a month before his baptism on that memorable last Sunday of the 18th century. On that morning Carey preached on baptism at the English service held at that time in the home of the Danish Governor, Colonel Bie. In the early afternoon he spoke again about baptism at the river-side, this time in Bengali, then baptized his son, Felix, and Krishna Pal. Then within an hour or so they celebrated the Lord's Supper together, for the first time in Bengali. The church fellowship had been constituted eight months earlier, on 24th April, 1800, with Carey as pastor and Fountain and Marshman as deacons.

Or take this example, which came to my notice unexpectedly a few weeks ago in the autobiography of a Victorian cabinet-maker. As an apprentice in Nottingham in 1837 James Hopkinson became associated with a Baptist church. He tells how he appeared before two or three of the church officers and the minister in a vestry one weeknight and was examined. He was already teaching in the Sunday School, but describes the occasion as "quite a trial". He was baptized in the morning of Goose Fair Sunday with three other men and twelve women. The choir, he says, sang two lines of a very pretty hymn to drown "any noise which might be caused through the coldness of the water". Men candidates stayed in the water to help the women through.

Young James—he was 18 at the time—thought that immersion face downwards with the candidate standing or kneeling would have been preferable, but says he was “so happy that day that had the whole world been looking on it could have made no difference”.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated that same afternoon and for the first time he partook of the elements and felt himself fully within the Church. (Jocelyn Baly Goodman, Editor, *Memoirs of a Victorian Cabinet Maker: James Hopkinson, 1819-94*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 41). The pattern is familiar though often obscured and distorted. In my own case baptism took place some four months after I had been received into the Church at a Communion Service (though this may have been due to the exigencies of World War I). A glance at the hymnbook—and not only our own—will show that Christian Initiation, in the sense in which we have been thinking of it, has not been in the mind either of writers or compilers. There are 16 baptismal hymns in the *Baptist Hymn Book*. There is reference to the Spirit in only six of them. The word ‘Church’ does not occur even once. One hymn has reference to the “soldier of the cross” being “with all the saints of old, apostles, seers, evangelists and martyr throngs enrolled”, but it was written by Edward Bickersteth, the Victorian Bishop of Exeter!

There are now signs, however, that in this whole matter of Christian initiation the greater casualness of recent generations is being slowly reversed. Among the Baptists of this country it began, I think, with the introduction into most of our churches of a service of Infant Dedication or Presentation. This was followed by the writings of Dr. Wheeler Robinson with their re-iterated plea for a recovery of the New Testament emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The controversies over infant baptism which started in the 1930's gave a considerable impetus to further thought about these matters. Baptists were rather slow in realising what was taking place in other denominations. It was Emil Brunner, the Reformed theologian, who in 1938 in his *Olaus Petri* lectures declared:

“Baptism is not only an act of grace, but just as much an act of confession stemming from the act of grace . . . the contemporary practice of infant baptism can hardly be regarded as being anything short of scandalous”.

Brunner was followed by Barth, who from 1943 until his death wrestled with the problem of Christian initiation, urged on by his son, Markus. Their writings caused much excitement on the continent. In this country, from 1942 onwards, the Anglican Church became more and more concerned to provide a theological defence of its procedure and more adequate practical safeguards against abuses. A whole series of reports and the provocative writings of theologians like Dom Gregory Dix and G. W. H. Lampe tell the tale and have been studied by many of other Christian traditions. Infant baptism, until supplemented by confirmation is only half a sacrament, said Gregory Dix. Methodist scholars joined in the discussion, while in the

Church of Scotland, T. F. Torrance, once an eager disciple of Barth, felt stung to attempt a Calvinist defence of infant baptism.

Eventually, in these different Churches, in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and in the negotiations which have led to United Churches in India and elsewhere, attention has become concentrated once more on the whole process of Christian initiation and not just on the rite of baptism. Baptists have been impelled to do some fresh theological thinking about their position and to examine their practice. We were a bit slow off the mark.

I did not succeed in getting a copy of Barth's 1943 lecture until Christmas, 1945. Various people on whom I urged the importance of an English translation dismissed the idea, so I finally struggled with the task myself. My translation was published by the SCM Press in 1948, but I doubt whether it would have appeared had Hugh Martin not been the Manager of the Press. By 1948, however, I had discovered that Danish Baptists practised Christian initiation in a manner much more in accord with ancient procedure than had become customary in this country. Examination by the Church preceded baptism; baptism was followed immediately by prayer for the Holy Spirit and then the Lord's Supper. Six years later in the U.S.S.R. I witnessed a very similar service.

The group that produced the volume essays entitled *Christian Baptism* came together in 1953. The volume appeared in 1959. The denomination owes a considerable debt to Alec Gilmore, who acted as editor, and to the ten laymen and two women, who subsidised the work financially. Neville Clark, who was one of the contributors, had already in his monograph *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* (SCM 1956) shown that baptism and the eucharist are inseparable theologically. In his essay in *Christian Baptism* he urged that the general pattern in the primitive Church was baptism, laying on of hands, then first communion, and that this should be restored.

"It is the response to the Word which the Spirit empowers that makes baptism Christologically congruous and ethically meaningful. Existence in Christ is churchly existence, that is to say, baptismal and eucharistic existence" (*op. cit.*, p. 324).

Consciously or unconsciously that language carries echoes of the 17th century Confessions. Neville Clark's blunt statement that "rebaptism as believers of those who have received baptism in infancy constitutes a blow at the heart of the Christian faith" (*ibid.* p. 325) landed me as Secretary of the Baptist Union in a good deal of correspondence. As I had written an introduction to *Christian Baptism*, it was suggested that the Union was committed to this position. Fortunately the volume had been published by the Lutterworth Press and not the Carey Kingsgate Press, though that provided a somewhat cowardly escape. Neville Clark was surely right in his suggestion that "from the earliest times infant baptism has been a practice in search of theology" (*ibid.*, p. 320). If, however, we seriously examine the implications of baptism, whether

administered to believers or to children, its once for all character is manifest.

George Beasley-Murray has been rather more cautious than Neville Clark, but has moved in the same general direction. His contribution to the volume *Christian Baptism* was on St. Paul's teaching, but three years later his Whitley Lectures *Baptism in the New Testament* appeared. Whilst unwilling to recognise infant baptism as in any sense the baptism of the New Testament Church, he was clear that Baptist practice was seriously in need of reform and was ready to suggest that Baptists "refrain from requesting the baptism of those baptised in infancy who wish to join our churches and administer baptism to such only where there is a strong plea for it from the applicant" (*op. cit.*, p. 392). At the same time he urged a return to the practice of the laying on of hands as an integral part of baptismal initiation into Christ and the Church and pleaded that the service of baptism be concluded with the Lord's Supper, in connection with which the laying on of hands should take place (*ibid.*, pp. 125, 394-5).

In *The Pattern of the Church*, a second volume edited by Alec Gilmore and published in 1963, he, Neville Clark, Morris West and Stephen Winward explored these matters further. Morris West pleaded for "the retention of the true ordering of the classic pattern" of Christian initiation as "a gift that Baptists can bring to the future Church", but he did not commit himself completely to the re-introduction of the laying on of hands (*op. cit.*, p. 41). Gilmore declared in this volume: "There is no question of the laying on of hands adding anything to baptism; it is but another part of the whole baptismal act, important in that whereas immersion symbolises the washing away of sin and incorporation into Christ, the laying on of hands symbolises the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the vocation of Christian ministry" (*ibid.*, p. 125). This last point is also made by Winward, who describes the laying on of hands as "the making of a Christian layman: it is ordination to priesthood. It is the acceptance of the vocation of intercession and witness" (p. 63).

The criticism of independency and individualism in *The Pattern of the Church* provoked a hostile reaction in some "conservative" circles, both those theologically conservative and those still clinging to the ecclesiological carelessness of the late 19th century. There was, however, little if any discussion of the sections of the book dealing with Christian initiation. Alec Gilmore followed up his own contribution in *Baptism and Christian Unity* (1966). Chapter 4 deals with what he calls "the mechanics of admission to membership" and the ceremony of baptism. The laying on of hands is, he urges, "a biblical and an appropriate way of signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism" (p. 70).

Now that we have reached the 1970's these matters have a new practical urgency. Faith and Order discussions have resulted in statements about the meaning of baptism based on a wide consensus of opinion by theologians of very varied traditions. No one can study the

report of the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Louvain in 1971 without realising how much closer to one another the Churches now are in their thinking about Christian initiation. The Baptist churches of Orissa and many in North India have joined the Church of North India, which came into existence in 1970. This Church recognises both believers and infant baptism in a comprehensive rite of Christian initiation. Orissa has as bishop one who came from the Baptist community and when a *Book of Common Worship* is produced for the Church the order of service for baptism and the reception of baptised persons into the full fellowship of the Church is likely to give even clearer expression to the convergences of recent years than does the liturgical material of the Church of South India.

Through the agency of the Baptist World Alliance Baptists are now involved in inter-confessional discussions with both Lutheran and Reformed Churchmen. Nearer at hand, here in England, urgent practical issues arise in "Areas of Ecumenical Experiment" and in enterprises under the Shared Buildings Act of 1969. If we are to share in creating united and credible Christian fellowships in these new conditions, there must be agreement on conditions for membership, the kind of testimony asked for and the nature of the rite which—whether or not called Confirmation—completes baptism and—to use the word of our Somerset Confession of 1656—"plants" a person in the visible church and body of Christ (Lumpkin, p. 209).

The new Churches' Unity Commission involves Baptists in discussions with a wider range of traditions than any we have shared directly with before. We inevitably face some sharp challenges at local and national level, in the realms both of theology and practice. It behoves all our ministers—and church officers—to give careful thought to what Christian initiation should include and imply, and to guide our churches to more satisfactory procedures. Once it is recognised that the ceremony of baptism is only one part of a process or progress, we shall find ourselves not only closer to our founding fathers, but closer also to many of our fellow Christians of other traditions. And this is important as Christian discipleship becomes more costly and the disciple more clearly marked off from most of those around him. A valuable aid to thought about these matters is the booklet *Initiation and Eucharist*, edited by Neville Clark and Canon Jasper for the Joint Liturgical Group, on which nine Churches, including our own, are represented.

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