

Relativity, Ecumenism and the Liberation of the Church

OIKOUMENE, the motto of the World Council of Churches, is a kind of ecclesiastical double entendre. While its common meaning is that of a collective variety made possible by the convergence of confessional traditions — the usual understanding of the ecumenical movement — its root meaning refers to a global universality which embraces different cultures, races and perspectives.

British Baptists are able to find a meeting place for confessional variety within the British Council of Churches and the Baptist World Alliance provides an international family of culturally differing churches. But neither body is able to offer the mixed diet of both cultural and confessional diversity. It is true that there are theological gradations within the Baptist family and that the British church scene offers some cultural pluralism, but the scale is nothing in comparison with the richness offered by the world church. It might seem that I am merely stating the obvious, and this is true. However, it is important to reflect theologically upon the obvious.

The report of the 1979 W.C.C. Consultation on Baptism, held at Louisville Kentucky, contained a whole section on what it termed "contextuality" which began:

"Each form of baptismal practice, theology and terminology is determined by its particular history, socio-cultural context and missionary concern."¹

I wish to reflect upon the assertion that theology and liturgical practices are *determined* by cultural context and to suggest how this might influence our understanding of theology and our approach to inter-confessional dialogue and co-operation. I will attempt to use baptism as an illustrative case study.

PLURALISM AND RELATIVITY

Pluralism is a fact of life. We continually accept, to a lesser or greater degree, people with differing views from our own as fellow Christians. Even Christians with an agreed basis of faith and a detailed creed will differ in their interpretation of it. The tension between agreement and disagreement has sometimes been explosive, as well as savage and unchristian. Acceptance of another's differing point of view has usually rested upon the belief that that which is held in common is more important than that which divides. This shared priority may be the acceptance of an ecclesiastical identity or authority (such as "the Church teaches . . ."), the acceptance of an agreed source of norms (such as the Bible) or a shared phenomenology (such as charismatic renewal or a stereo-typed conversion experience). In each case a conscious or unconscious decision

is made as to what is important. It could be argued that this decision is rarely, if ever, a theological one, even though theological explication may follow. For example, the choice of a source of authority, be it ecclesiastical, scriptural or personal, will usually say more about the cultural context of the believer than his or her theology. The theology will follow from the source of authority and its interpretation in context.

The experience of diversity can have a variety of effects. It can result in the acceptance or rejection of other positions, the discovery of common ground or the erecting of barriers. Often context will be crucial. A common experience of external pressure, be it persecution or severe numerical decline, may lead to the discovery of a common faith and the disregarding of historical barriers.² On the other hand an experience of growth may lead to competition and the sharpening of differences.³ The identity of the "I" is formed by encounter with the "Thou", so the formation of the identity will differ according to the "Thou" which is in contradistinction. Of course it is dangerous to over-generalize and other factors will affect the dynamics of a given situation. Differing responses to an external pressure, such as co-operation with, or resistance to, the state, can increase differences between confessional groups⁴ — but even here it is the context which is important in the forming of identity and thus theology.

There is need to reflect critically and theologically on the affirmation of pluralism. Belief in the Holy Spirit must lead us to discover and recognize his activity both inside and outside the church. We must affirm the Lordship of the Creator and acknowledge that Lordship as dynamic and active. Above all, our theology of the Body of Christ must include not only the unity which emanates from his Headship, but the variety of flesh which he assumes in the mission of the church.

It is exciting to look at the way in which churches in the so-called Third World are growing in maturity and in expression of their faith, as well as numerically. We see young churches engaging in their own cultural contexts as they seek to free themselves from the Western culture which was the embodiment of much Western missionary activity.

The *People's Theology*⁵ of Asia highlights three key Christian themes — creation, incarnation and hope. The belief that God is the Creator of all things leads these theologians to a positive evaluation of Buddhism and Hinduism. These religions are part of the church's cultural context, they are received, and so they are valued as part of God's creation. This leads to the suggestion of a parallel between the relationship of these religions to Christ and the relationship of the Old Testament to him. This tendency is underlined by the theme of incarnation which calls the church "to share the cup of suffering" with the people of Asia. The ministry of the church must be to follow the example of Christ who gave himself up to the cross in order to bring liberation. Christian hope gives meaning to this suffering by pointing to a transformation of the community in the light of the resurrection.

In Korea the *Theology of Minjung*⁶ seeks to interpret the present reality of the country with the insights of the prophet Micah (especially 2.7-9). The mediation is performed by the term *minjung* which means

“the people in their political, economic and cultural life”. This term is compared with Micah’s use of the phrase “my people”, those who have been robbed of power and even their homes. The enemy, “this people”, is not to be found in any foreign domination but in a section of the people which has seized power and created structures of oppression. The internal divisions of Korean society lead the theologians to Micah and the polarizing of the people of God rather than to the Exodus theme of the Liberation Theology of South America.

C. S. Song seeks to find in the ancestor worship of South East Asia a model for the communion of saints. The past is present in the community as a cloud of witnesses. He also sees the seed of life in the womb as the hope and future also brought into the present. Asian spirituality in his *Third-Eye Theology*⁷ provides a new perspective for the very task of theology which begins with humility, is undertaken in love and is transformed by hope.

The *Africanization* of the church is an attempt to work out the Lordship of Christ in the context of Africa, engaging with the tradition of community and the monism of much primitive religion. Cultural authenticity must go further than African music and folk tale.⁸ The theme of creation is again seen to undergird the church’s relationship to its cultural context – the vision of Peter in the house of Simon the Tanner is a vision of inspiration that all that God has created is good and is not to be despised.

The *Liberation Theology* of Latin America wrestles with the crying human need of that sub continent. When the church sees economic growth in Brazil, for example, increasing the gap between the rich and the poor, rather than narrowing it, it is surely right to speak out in the name of justice and of the God who sent such prophets as Micah, Amos and Isaiah.⁹ Mission is not to be defined in terms of God’s grace, but God’s grace as it meets human need – and in differing situations that human need will be perceived differently. The project of liberation which captures the imagination of many Latin Americans is an expression of the need for justice and a peace born of justice. The suffering of Jesus Christ at the hands of the religious, political and colonial powers, his denunciation of those who laid burdens upon the shoulders of the weak and the poor, his denunciation of religious forms which merely supported the status quo and the inhumanity of Palestinian life are the aspects of the biblical tradition which come to the fore when human need is seen in terms of the raising of people from the chasm of degradation and the need for human dignity.

Liberation Theology has been accused of being provincial and one-sided, for being politically partial. Yet its greatest contribution to Christian theology so far has been its answer to that charge. In defence of standing alongside the oppressed and the poor Latin American theologians have pointed to the ideological relativity of Western theology.¹⁰ In a world that is divided between the powerful and the powerless the theologian is a member of the community and must stand on one side or the other. To stand aside from the struggle for justice and to claim impartiality is to consent to the status quo and is not to stand with Jesus.

Western theology has claimed to be the main stream of the church’s thinking and so this critique is an important one. If we take seriously the

prophetic witness of these theologians in different parts of the world and their engagement with these different cultural and political contexts, then we have recognized the relativity of all theology. For all theology has its matrix in the church and the society in which the theologians have been nurtured and continue to live. This contextualization is the same process as that undergone by Christianity when, bursting the old wineskins of Hebrew nationalism, it sought to express itself in the Hellenic culture of the first century and which moved towards the affirmation "Jesus is Lord". The Aristotelian framework of Western theology and the Platonistic basis of Orthodox theology must then be seen as further examples of contextuality.

It must be stressed that contextual theology does not mean dressing up Western theology in attractive ethnic dress — that would be seduction, not engagement! Answers are mainly governed by the questions which are asked. The questions of those gathering for the Council of Chalcedon are different questions from those asked by the resident of a Brazilian favela or a Saharan village. Indeed, they are different from the queries raised by people in Sutton and Southport. Herein lies our theological liberation. Once we have acknowledged the validity of another's contextual task we are set free from the idolatry of traditional formulations and enabled to begin the task of reflecting theologically about our *own* situation in faith and hope.

This pluralism leads us to reflect upon not only the common ground, the basis for unity between the different theological tasks and contexts, but upon the nature of theology itself and of religious truth. In the area of theological debate "relativity" has usually been a dirty word. In the arid debates between fundamentalists and the advocates of biblical criticism, the old argument has been hoisted up the flagpole countless times. "If you undermine one small part of biblical truth you are cast adrift on a sea of cultural relativity." Such a charge says more about the insecurity of such a position than about the truth of its affirmation. For the issue is not whether we are cast adrift on a sea of cultural relativity but whether or not the biblical critic is correct to approach the Bible in such a way. Indeed, historical criticism has enabled us to understand the contextuality of the biblical tradition — the influences and serious engagement with culture which have gone towards the formation of Scripture. The historico-critical tools which have developed over the last century and a half have liberated the Bible from the dangers of idolatry. They have enabled us to see the Word made flesh in the liberation of the Hebrew slaves and the settlement of the promised land, in exile and restoration and, above all, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is true that relativity will involve a discarding of false certainties, but false certainties are a hindrance to true faith.

AN ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

What is needed is theological understanding of the theological task. Conservatism will see theology as the explanation and interpretation of propositional truth, as though such earthenware treasures as human thought and human language were able to contain adequately the truth

about God and his revelation. Relative Theology is an incarnational theology which sees God's revelation as embedded in the story of a people, in the ups and downs of their history, the ebb and flow of their faith and faithlessness. The Word has been made flesh — man cannot reverse that process. In the fourth century Hilary of Poitiers wrote,

“We must strain the poor resources of language to express thoughts too great for words. We dare to embody in human terms truths which ought to be hidden in the silent veneration of the heart.”

Man needs to speak and break the silence of adoration, yet he must remember that his words and affirmations will be totally inadequate before the glory of God. Theological relativity is an acknowledgement that those affirmations will be governed and controlled by the context in which they are made, by the human concerns of which they are born and by the human perceptions by which they are moulded.

It is important in emphasizing the “embeddedness” of theology and the articulation of faith that we place this within the framework of the glory of God. It is not only through empirical observation that we are able to speak of cultural conditioning, but it is out of a faith in the transcendence of God. The immanence of his revelation in the affairs of mankind is counter-balanced by his over-arching transcendence. The finitude of theology is sharpened by our awareness of His infinity. Surely this is what the motif of the “*deus absconditus*” is all about. The hiddenness of God is based not only upon the spiritual experience of the dark night of the soul, but is born of an awareness of the greatness of God and the smallness of man.

There is a human need for absolutes. In the language of Tillich, man finds meaning in an ultimate concern. The tragedy is that often he confuses the creation for the Creator and idolatry is born. So, the search for absolutes must begin and end at the throne of grace. Nothing else is absolute. Man is created and finite — only God is infinite. In our perception and our expressing of his greatness human language breaks down. This was the basis of the Barthian Dialectical Theology. To come close to expressing the glory of God man must speak dialectically, in contradiction. Two mutually contradictory statements about God, equally true but equally partial, are held in tension and together reveal more about God than either could do on its own.

So we may view the plurality of theology throughout the world, the seriousness with which each area engages in its context, as an enriching of man's affirmation of the salvation story. The transcendence of God is experienced in his immanence, in his involvement with his world. The infinite is known through the finite. It is expressed by finite minds and in finite thoughts.

This theology of pluralism is the foundation upon which an Ecumenical Theology can be built, for the emphasis upon context, the acknowledgement of the absolute transcendence of God and the awareness of the limitations of human thought, speech and action are the midwives of theological humility. Such humility makes room for love, respect and fellowship and the possibility of unity. This unity is not a steam roller which will flatten tradition and destroy individuality; it is not a conformity to a

metropolitan party line, but a unity which contains within it the richness of diverse traditions and divergent cultural expressions. The transcendence of God and the finitude of man is the beginning of the liberation of theology and of the church.

It could be argued that such a theology would be a theology of the status quo, because respect for and acceptance of differing formulations and practices could be seen as an acceptance of the existing structures and divisions within the church. This is not so, for the differences of culture and tradition are seen within the broader perspective of God's greatness and the relativizing of each theological tradition is possible because of the acceptance of God's sovereignty. *Thus the existing denominational and cultural structures may be seen as an absolutizing of relative theologies.* Theological pluralism is not the changing of a person's or a group's beliefs for another's but the acceptance that both might be valid. This is not to be confused with a woolly liberalism but is rather a vigorous acceptance of the majesty of God. For just as a human being cannot be fully described or painted from one position so we cannot capture the ineffable divinity by one dogmatic stance.

The diversity which we recognize in different cultural contexts across the world may also be given an historical perspective. Just as Korea is not Lancashire, so first century Palestine is not twentieth century London or sixteenth century Germany. Once we have relativized the task of theology we have given a new perspective to our received confessional traditions. It has often been said that faithfulness to the past does not mean a slavish imitating of our forefathers but rather, being inspired by their faith, we are led to do a new thing in our own generation. This is the centre of an Ecumenical Theology.

This has wide implications for the theory and practice of dialogue and the movement towards unity. "One faith, one Lord, one baptism" no longer needs to be seen as a lowest common denominator, an emasculated faith based on the common ground of overlapping, but divergent, positions. The ecumenical task becomes the embodiment in structure and mission of a unity which is based upon God himself.

Any similarity between this understanding of theology and the doctrine of the Trinity is strictly intentional, for in that model we see a God who fully reveals himself as the Lord in each of three ways and is also one. Just as God is one and is Father and Son and Spirit, so our response to that revelation is on the one hand dialectical in our differing responses and unified in our acknowledgement of his Lordship. The trinitarian model tempts us to go further for, just as some theologians have seen in the trinity the eternal expression of love and mutuality, so an ecclesial and theological model based on it will embody love and respect as well as unity.

BAPTISM

In view of the recent endeavours of the W.C.C. to achieve a consensus in matters of Faith and Order, it would be appropriate to use the issue of baptism as a case study for the application of this Ecumenical Theology.¹¹ This is a good example to use for, on the surface, the debate concerning

the validity of infant or believer's baptism seems to be a question of "either/or". However, if we see theology as a collection of different insights which separately are inadequate but which, when held together, present a truer picture of God and his ways, then this has implications for the *life* of the church as well as its thought.

Baptism may be seen as both an initiatory rite and a statement about the nature of the church. On the one hand it is the means of entry into the church and a recognition of God's gracious forgiveness in Christ. On the other it is a reflection of the faith of the individual and the community. If infant baptism is the norm then the nature of the church as the family of God is stressed — it is the arena of God's initiating grace. If believer's baptism is the norm then the church is seen as the gathered community of the faithful. Yet it must be acknowledged that Baptists would also want to testify to the divine initiative and paedo-baptists to the importance of discipleship.

Church situations where both forms of baptism have been practised have tended to provoke a variety of reactions from outside observers. These reactions have varied from the confidence to the fear that eventually one form will swamp the other. If we load these areas of experiment, where mutual trust and fellowship are of prime importance, with traditional expectations and meanings we may not only invite disaster but bring it about as well. The coexistence of two forms of baptism should not be judged in the light of the two traditions from which they arose but in the light of the new tradition which is being formed. We must be wary of putting old patches on new cloth!

The Ecumenical Theology suggested above is based on the belief that no one human tradition is an adequate receptacle for the whole truth about God or the vehicle of his total activity towards man. We must contrast this with a propositional view of truth which claims that if one baptismal theology is true then another, differing one, must necessarily be false. This Ecumenical Theology would prefer to affirm alternative views of baptism held in tension in the belief that they will prove more adequate symbols and channels of grace than one view in isolation. This is not to give an imprimatur to all claims of validity for all shades of baptismal practice, for theological development and contextualization must remain in touch with the Christ who is proclaimed. We shall see below that even tradition is to be seen as the unpacking of what is believed to be implicit in Scripture. This openness is an acknowledgement that in its God-ward direction the sacrament will express different experiences and perceptions of the divine nature and that in its manward direction the sacrament will approach human need in its variety and diversity of cultural experience. Thus a search for consensus will not consist primarily in agreeing to a series of propositions, although this may be part of it, but the acceptance of the majesty of God and the variety of human need. Thus consensus is seen as the accepting of diverse practices and understandings and seeing them as absolute and true — not in some academic or ecclesiastical limbo, but in each's utter appropriateness to its context.

In practice this view of unity will wish to see the mutual acceptance of differing baptismal practices as valid and appropriate. The Church of

North India and local ecumenical projects in Britain provide examples of co-existence of believer's baptism and paedobaptism. Sceptical spectators see the pastoral concern which surrounds mention of "re-baptism" as a clouding or postponing of the issue. However, mutual recognition of different baptismal practices is not a vague compromise but a recognition that membership of the fellowship is more important than how you join it. Baptism, after all, is about joining the church and if fellow Christians are accepted as Christians then it may be argued that an ecclesiastical dogmatism which disqualifies their church membership is a non-recognition of their status as believers and members of the Body of Christ. If it is argued that the issue is not one of membership rite per se but the question as to whether or not infants are members of the church then the shift has already taken place away from sacramental validity and towards a debate about the nature of church membership.

Many Baptists have lived with a false impression of the issues involved in the debate about infant or believer's baptism. They have created a script of their own devising and rehearse a dialogue where the answers are already known. The rules that are chosen can only lead to one result and to some extent this is understandable, for a denomination's identity is at stake. The mistaken belief is that the rules have been agreed between both sides and that the area of disagreement can be thus contested. This is not so. This belief is based on the understanding that both sides are concerned with a discussion of biblical exegesis and that when the practice of the early church has been deduced then the discussion is complete. The presupposition that the sacramental practice of the first century is binding for the people of God two thousand years later is not agreed and cannot be. It is not enough for Baptists to use the Aunt Sally of paedobaptists rummaging about the New Testament for hints of infant baptism. The dividing issue is, to a large extent, a matter of presuppositions. Bluntly put, *the difference can be said to rest upon the acceptance or rejection of Tradition as a valid and authoritative norm over and against Scripture.*

Many Baptists would appeal to Scripture as the sole norm in the determining of faith and order. But the matter cannot rest there, for how is Scripture to be understood, interpreted and applied without the wisdom of centuries of church tradition and the contemporary guidance of the Holy Spirit? In other words, the distinction between Scripture and Tradition is a false one. Unless an extreme fundamentalism is adopted (and even then extraneous methods and codes of interpretation are employed) biblical criticism and concern for our present context will be tools to help us understand Scripture. *We cannot sharpen the distinction between Scripture and Tradition by referring to one as "God-given" and the other as "man-made", for historical criticism has shown us the human raw materials of the former and our faith reminds us of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the latter.*

The Declaration of Principle in the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland does not only begin:

"That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures."

but continues:

“. . . and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to *interpret* (my italics) and administer His Laws.”¹² Again, the Report of Theological Conversations sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1973-1977 affirms the

“holy Scripture as the normative source for faith and practice”.

But it notes that this affirmation is not identical with “what the Bible says”, indeed,

“the Scriptures . . . are not a “code of law” but a book of proclamation.”

Thus

“the great question is always how the results of biblical and historical scholarship can be put to a good use in the situation today.”¹³

Yet it was interesting to note that in the two papers presented to the Louisville Consultation on Baptism concerned with providing a justification for each of the two forms, that the paedo-baptist contribution¹⁴ should be mainly concerned with a *theological* defence of the development of infant baptism in the post New Testament church and its appropriateness for the life of the church today, while the Baptist contribution¹⁵ was primarily an *exegetical* examination of the relationship of faith to baptism in the New Testament.

The way in which Scripture is used in the baptismal debate must be analysed and reflected upon theologically. It could be argued, for example, that the command to go and make disciples of the nations and baptize them in the name of the Trinity, at the end of Matthew's gospel, is not a detailed formulation to be slavishly copied by all ensuing generations. According to one's exegetical point of view it is either an instruction of Jesus to eleven men who are left to work out its implications as they seek to obey their risen Lord, or it is a reflection of church life at the time Matthew was writing his gospel. Either way, it is not a detailed programme to be universalized for all time and in all places. The pattern of church life must rightly vary according to each society and its needs. We do not provide irrefutable directions for twentieth century churches simply by describing a baptism in the Gaza desert.¹⁶

When the cluttered reconstructions of New Testament *practice* are put aside, Baptists argue that the baptismal *theology* of the New Testament assumes believer's baptism. But is this the end of the matter? Paedo-baptists argue that the development of infant baptism, accepted by the majority within the Christian church, is an eloquent expression of valid Christian insights, namely, God's initiative in our salvation and the absolute gratuity of his gifts, the communitarian nurture of the church and Christ's care for children. In other words, the appeal to Tradition is not over and against the appeal to Scripture, but claims to bring out *biblical* truths under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist appeal to Scripture thus becomes an appeal to the *direct* application of the faith and order of the New Testament church. Nonconformists may wince at the argument against the ordination of women which appeals to the fact that the apostles were all male, but the Baptist belief that the pattern of the New Testament

church is universal and not contingent has the same logical basis. What needs to be introduced into the debate is a Baptist exposition of the appropriateness of believer's baptism for the twentieth century church — not to mention the differing cultures represented within it. Such a claim is often implicit in Baptist apologetics,¹⁷ especially where they link baptism to the missionary nature of the church, but this needs to be brought to the fore as an example of the contemporaneity of God's call and the means of grace.

Relative Theology is incarnational theology and thus sees the *absoluteness* of the New Testament faith and order as *absolute in its appropriateness* for the first century. This is not to argue against believer's baptism for today. Indeed, it may be argued that its testimony to the forgiveness of sins, the Lordship of Christ and the resurrection life are entirely appropriate for our age. What is being argued is that they are not the only insights which come out of the New Testament and minister to the needs of mankind. Far from seeing those rare situations where both forms of baptism are accepted as ambiguous and ill-fated experiments, we should more properly regard the conventional acceptance of a single form of baptism as an impoverishment of the church and its sacramental life. Biblical scholarship has taught us how the Word becoming flesh meant first century flesh and warns us from a simplistic use of Scripture. Baptism is made for man and not man for baptism. The Christ who relativized the cult comes to us in ways beyond our devising and speaks to us in words and actions which are more our own than the frozen patterns of a theology which speaks of the Spirit only in the past tense.

NOTES

- 1 "Report of the Consultation with Baptists," *Review and Expositor*, vol. LXXVII (Winter 1980) (*W.C.C. Faith and Order Paper no. 97*) p. 106. See also J. F. V. Nicholson, "Baptism in Context: Further Reflections on Louisville 1979", *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. XXVIII (April 1980) pp. 275-279.
- 2 Some sociologists wish to find a motive for the British ecumenical movement in the process of secularization and the numerical decline of the mainstream churches. See Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, Pelican Books, 1969, pp. 151-205.
- 3 The low ecumenical priority of the expanding protestant churches of Brazil may be seen as a contemporary example of this response.
- 4 Examples of this conflict may be found in the struggle of the Confessing Church and the German Christians in pre-war Germany. We may see differences arising in east European churches about the nature of the relationship between church and state.
- 5 There is little written and available at the moment and most of this information has been culled from private conversations. But see Koson Srisang, "Recovering the Power of Life", *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. XXXII (January 1980) and Koson Srisang, "Sharing the Cup of Suffering: Mission and Evangelism from a Third World Perspective" — a speech for the *Disciples' Ecumenical Consultative Council Conference on Unity and Mission* at Kingston, Jamaica, October 1979, available from the author at the C.C.P.D. of the W.C.C., Geneva. See also J. B. Fuliga, "Fellowship and Neighbourliness: A Key Concept for a Christian Filipino Theology" in *Indigenous Theology and the Universal Church*, J. S. Mbiti (ed). Bossey (1979) pp. 11-15.

- ⁶ Again there is little available at the moment. However, Christian Journals (Belfast) Ltd are hoping to publish an introduction in Spring 1981 entitled *Minjung Theology* by Prof. Cyrus Hee-Suk of Seoul.
- ⁷ C. S. Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings*, Lutterworth, 1980.
- ⁸ See Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "Indigenous African Christian Churches — Signs of Authenticity", in *Indigenous Theology and the Universal Church* (note 5).
- ⁹ For a readable and reliable introduction to some of the liberation theologians, relating their theology to its context, see Derek Winter, *Hope in Captivity: The Prophetic Church in Latin America*, Epworth, 1977; another survey, this time by a leading liberation theologian himself, is J. M. Bonino, *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*, S.P.C.K., 1975; the classic text is Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, S.C.M., 1974; for a detailed biblical discussion see J. P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, S.C.M., 1977; for Christological studies see L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for our Time*, S.P.C.K., 1980 and J. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, S.C.M., 1978.
- ¹⁰ See especially J. L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, Gill and Macmillan, 1977, and J. M. Bonino op cit. Also J. M. Bonino, "A View from Latin America" in *Agenda for Prophets: Towards a Political Theology for Britain*, R. Ambler and D. Haslam (ed.), Bowerdean, 1980.
- ¹¹ This is especially appropriate following the Louisville Consultation on Baptism held 28 March-1 April, 1979. See note 1 for details of full report. Also W. M. S. West, "Towards a Consensus on Baptism? Louisville 1979", *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXVIII (January 1980), pp. 225-232.
- ¹² *The Baptist Union Directory: 1978-79*, p. 13.
- ¹³ Quoted by T. Lorenzen, "Baptists and Ecumenicity with Special Reference to Baptism", *Review and Expositor*, vol LXXVII (Winter 1979), p. 26.
- ¹⁴ J. F. Eagan, "The Authority and Justification for Infant Baptism", *Ibid.* pp. 47-62.
- ¹⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Authority and Justification for Believers' Baptism" *Ibid.* pp. 63-70.
- ¹⁶ Acts 8.26-40. It could be argued that much that happens in *Acts*, especially in relation to baptism, the Spirit and conditions surrounding the joining of the church, are abnormal. There is a certain untidiness about the work of the Spirit as the old wineskins are burst by the effervescent liberation of the post-pentecost era. If this is so then it is even more dangerous to universalize church norms from contingent incidents in a period of on-going change.
- ¹⁷ See F. B. Meyer, *Seven Reasons for Believers' Baptism*, pp. 8-12; S. F. Winward, *Your Baptism*, pp. 26-31; W. M. S. West, *Baptist Principles*, pp. 26-31, all published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

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