

He has also come more definitely to the conclusion that we have no justifiable reason to refuse either of the Sacraments to those who, after due explanation, desire to receive them either for themselves or for their children.

II

A PLEA FOR BAPTISMAL REFORM

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SINCE Baptism is the initiatory rite of the Church of Jesus Christ any discussion of this subject, its importance and significance, must start from the standpoint of the Church. Surely it is no mere coincidence that concern about indiscriminate Baptism should come to the fore at the very time when the Church is becoming self-conscious to a degree unknown for centuries.

It should be clear that if the Church is simply vague and nebulous "without body, parts or passions," then the rite initiating a person into such an undefinable community will lack corresponding significance: at best bestowing some unspecified benediction with no obligatory demands, at worst, an "opportunity of contact" with the initiate! (Imagine the Early Church regarding its initiatory rite as an "opportunity for contact" with the subject of initiation!) On the other hand, if the Church of Jesus Christ is a community of people clearly and sharply defined to which a person obviously belongs or equally obviously does not (as, *e.g.*, in the case of a modern Masonic Lodge), then the initiatory rite becomes correspondingly significant and important—not to say sacred. We do not so readily cast our pearls before swine in the mere hope of establishing a contact.

Now much of the writing which has brought the meaning and significance of the Church to our consciousness has tended to ignore what we may call its "utter distinctness" from any other body on earth. The reason for this may be that we have not yet fully shaken ourselves free from the clinging folds of Comparative Religion, concerned, as it is, to eliminate distinction and to emphasise what is common, and that we are still too allergic to the sneer of being "other worldly". An unbiased examination of Scripture, however, cannot but reveal that, while there may be a false conception of distinctness, nevertheless by its very constitution the Body of Christ has an inherent distinctness and even solitariness which belonged to the earthly experience of the One who now constitutes its Head. Indeed, the impact made by the Church upon the world in every generation depends upon its realizing this "utter distinctness." "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." "Ye are the salt of the earth" (and how distinct is salt!); but (significantly) "if the salt shall lose its strength . . ."

What then are the factors which make the Church the Church and which effect this "distinctness" of which we have been thinking?

The first great factor which constitutes the Church as such is that the individual members are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is this experience of the Holy Ghost which, in the New Testament, makes an

individual a Christian and goes on to weld him with others of similar experience into “ an habitation of God.” And secondly, this experience of the Holy Spirit enables him, with others, to make the simple but devastating confession, “ Jesus Christ is Lord.”

The interaction of these two factors so bound participants together that they constituted by this distinctness a veritable “ third race.” Previously the division of humanity had been into Jew and Gentile, but now there had appeared a third, and the classification was “ Jew, Gentile, and the Church of God.” It produced a new humanity even—a humanity “ in Christ ” as the old had been “ in Adam ”—with a distinctness as fundamental as death and life, for “ in Adam all die,” but “ in Christ all are made alive.”

Now in the New Testament the great “ moment ” when this change took place was that of Baptism—the initiatory rite of the Church. It is important to realize that the act of Baptism, and not the moment of personal repentance and faith, is regarded as the point at which the Holy Spirit is given (the experience of Cornelius excepted). It is as the believer passes through the waters of Baptism that he receives the Spirit and comes into this literal new world of which we have been thinking. Baptism with its gift of the Spirit has severed him from the old life as decisively as if he had been granted papers of naturalization. He has become a “ citizen of heaven ”, is bidden to “ walk worthy of his vocation.” Henceforth he might legitimately ask nothing from his former associations but a cross on which to glorify his Lord. So stringent might the demands of his new citizenship be that, unless to die was gain, he was “ of all men most to be pitied.”

Once we have recognised this inherent “ utter distinctness ” of the Church, the mere suggestion of indiscriminate Baptism becomes singularly inept.

Flowing from this principle of “ Utter Distinctness ” is that of the “ Solidarity ” of this new humanity. Modern psychology has taught us to regard humanity in Adam as being essentially a lump, but theologians have been slow so to proclaim the essential solidarity of the humanity which is “ in Christ.”

The question of the validity of infant Baptism is settled once and for all by this conception of solidarity. When a man changes his nationality all his dependants change with him for weal or woe; so in the early Church when a man went through the waters of Baptism his household went with him. Then, assuming this solidarity to be a fact, where are subsequent children born—“ in sin ” (Adam) or “ in Grace ” (Christ)? The question seems to be settled by asking where was a child born under the Old Covenant. Abraham was a Gentile (*i.e.*, uncircumcised) who became a Jew (*i.e.*, circumcised). But what about his descendants? Were they born Gentiles, remaining so until they received the seal of circumcision? Or were they born Jews, receiving the sign of circumcision as a seal of their solidarity in Abraham and his seed? Surely the latter is the case. So the writer believes in regard to the children of believers that they are born in Grace: “ if one of you is a believer then are your children holy, else were they unclean.” Baptism in this case is both a statement and a

seal of their solidarity with their parents in Grace, not a device to ensure their escape from the wrath of God.

But although this principle of "Solidarity" establishes the practice of infant Baptism, it is no less an effective barrier to indiscriminate Baptism than is the principle of "utter distinctness"; for to snatch children from their uncommitted parents and baptise them into this completely new world is as unseemly as to snatch children from their parents in England and carry them off to Australia, be the benefits thereof never so many.

This brings us to the consideration of the relation of Baptism to the paradox of the divine initiative and human freedom. What is the relation? We would suggest that at this point there is much confusion of thought in the direction of what we would call the enervating over-emphasis of the divine initiative to an extent that human freedom is obliterated. Baptism is too often confused with divine blessing, which is an unconditional bestowal of divine favour, and in this connection there is no more confusing Scripture than the incident of our Lord blessing little children—a story which is out of place in a Baptismal Service and is quite obviously inserted in the Book of Common Prayer to *defend* the practice of infant Baptism. There is much more in Baptism than that. Baptism is rather the place where divine initiative is met by human freedom.

The analogy of marriage will make this clear. Most women like to think they have been pursued right up to the chancel steps—which may or may not be true! But the fact remains that in the sacrament of marriage the woman comes out into the open and of her own choice and free will commits herself to the initiative which has been pursuing her. And in the service the bridegroom cannot experience any greater joy than when he hears the bride's "I will." The same principle applies to the Sacrament of Baptism; yet there are those expositors, even in Evangelical circles, who would deny to God the thrill of hearing the "I will" of the believer as he commits himself and his loved ones, for better or for worse, to that divine initiative which has refused to let him go, "reckoning that the sufferings of this present time (as he turns his back on the old life) are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed."

It is easy to see how indiscriminate Baptism radically destroys the significance of the act, for the parent for the most part knows not what he does.

The same reply may be made to the argument in defence of indiscriminate Baptism on the ground that it is the right of all children to receive the divine gift irrespective of what they subsequently make of it, inasmuch as salvation is a world (even perhaps a cosmic) concern. While, of course, this is true and it is the obvious right of all the world to *hear* the good news, it is nevertheless not right to administer Baptism in this way, otherwise the first work, even duty, of the Church when it arrives in the foreign field is to bestow this right upon as many children as possible; but faced with this dilemma even our *ex opere operato* brethren will not go quite so far as this.

Now it is one thing to see a vision of what the Church of Jesus Christ ought to be, as outlined in the New Testament, and the relation

of Baptism thereto ; it is another thing to realise this in concrete experience. And to-day there are fundamental problems facing all who seek its realization. The first is that Baptism, whether adult or as Baptism—Confirmation, is no longer the “ moment ” when the Holy Spirit is given. This may sound almost to be blasphemy, but we believe the realization of it is essential. For the fact remains that, for the most part, initiates to-day remain essentially individuals without any consciousness of belonging to an entirely new community, a consciousness which can only come through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This explains the appalling lapses, especially of those initiated by Baptism-Confirmation : they have just never received the Holy Ghost in the New Testament sense, either at Baptism or Confirmation. Those of us who have received the Holy Ghost in this New Testament sense have largely received the gift through the channel of teaching on the subject, may be years after we have been baptised or confirmed. It is a situation for which the New Testament makes no provision, for though Baptism was the usual channel—and when Baptism failed (as, *e.g.*, the incident of the Samaritans in Acts viii.) the Laying on of Hands succeeded—we have no instance of what happened if both failed. It is because of this that the whole problem of Baptism has arisen, for what Baptism effects has become a matter of interpretation and speculation—and so of confusion—rather than, as it was in the New Testament, a definite experience of the Holy Ghost. We get as a result the imprint theory, the germ theory, and the covenant theory ; but in the New Testament no theory was required : the experience spoke for itself.

Another problem which flows out of this is the plain fact that the Church as it is conceived in the New Testament scarcely exists to-day. Our congregations are largely made up of individuals who have little or no dealing with the individuals next to them. Far from their being welded together in a new humanity, so that if one member suffers all the members suffer with it, the idea has never been heard of. The lack has often been explained, or rather excused, on the grounds of a natural reticence and reserve, but the real explanation is simply that the Holy Ghost in the New Testament sense has not been given, for often there is no lack of what we may call sectional fellowship resulting from natural affinity, a common cultural background, or a common interest in a particular activity (*e.g.*, drama, or simply a good time of social entertainment). But when the Holy Ghost is given He cuts across cultural background and everything else, revealing a new humanity, the Church of Jesus Christ, with an interest centred in Him and in His Kingdom, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, but “ one new man.” The result, so far as Baptism is concerned, is that the initiate is simply brought into a vacuum. We may form a communicants’ guild on a secular basis “ to keep young communicants together,” but so far as genuine Christian fellowship created of the Holy Ghost is concerned we have seen hardly anything of it, and the inevitable drift sets in directly a new interest crosses the path. So the vicious circle continues : we go on producing individual units who simply are not “ there.”

Thus far we have been critical and in a measure destructive. We

must end on a constructive note. How may we find the way out of the impasse? We believe simply as follows. Let those who have received the Holy Ghost through whatever channel in any congregation, get together in really deep and authentic Christian fellowship until they become literally bound inseparably to each other in the Lord. They will be the Church in the New Testament sense and before long the warmth will begin to radiate among the individuals who make up the congregation and others will want to warm themselves at the "fire."

From henceforth—and this is important—let believers be initiated by Baptism (or Baptism-Confirmation) into this church and not just formally into the mere congregation. The Initiation should be a public one, and the service should be conducted in the presence of as many neighbours and acquaintances as possible, so that they may witness this break with the old order and reception into the new.

In this way we would eventually hope to recover the "utter distinctness" of the Church of Jesus Christ, and with this recovery would come an ever growing consciousness of a "solidarity" in a new humanity seeking to fulfil its heavenly calling; and we might hope that Baptism would again become what it was in the New Testament—the literal gateway into the New Humanity in Christ.

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an open and notorious sinner. Now the Anglicans themselves provided in the Prayer Book, and later in the Canons, a machinery of discipline of this kind which only needs to be applied. The Puritans did not think this machinery sufficient. Perhaps some to-day would agree. But at least the application of such discipline as there is would be a beginning. It would eliminate the worst abuses of indiscriminate sponsorship, and clarify the position as far as members of the church are concerned.

In the light of sixteenth century discussions we may well ask whether there is any more justification now than then for the restricting of baptism to, say, the children of regular communicants, and the treatment of all others as sub- or post-Christians (to use the new phrase). The early Anglicans hesitated even to forbid baptism to the children of open unbelievers and evil-livers. If baptism is desired, if opportunities of Christian instruction still exist, if sponsors are forthcoming or can be found, then there seems to be no case for this excessive discrimination. What is required is a far more careful and zealous application of the necessarily outward rules with regard to the sponsors who do come forward together with the clear and dogmatic insistence that the church's requirements must be satisfied, and the proviso that if necessary the church itself will provide or will act as sponsor. It was this latter course which Hooker envisaged when, arguing for natural children and the children of the accursed, he pertinently asked: "Were it not against both equity and duty to refuse the mother of believers herself admittance, and not to take her in this case for a faithful parent?" (*Laws*, V. 64 : 5).