

# The Fraternal

---

JANUARY, 1956

No. 99

---

## EDITORIAL

### THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND BAPTISM

GEORGE BEASLEY-MURRAY, Ph.D., Tutor, Spurgeon's College.

### THE CHURCH MEETING

R. L. CHILD, M.A., Principal, Regent Park College, Oxford.

### THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

DAVID S. RUSSELL, M.A., B.D., Principal, Rawdon College.

### MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY

JOHN O. BARRETT, M.A., Superintendent, N.E. Area B.U.

### WORSHIP IN A BAPTIST BETHEL

W. J. GRANT, M.A., Baptist Minister, Paisley.

### CHURCH DISCIPLINE

STEPHEN F. WINWARD, M.A., Baptist Minister Walthamstow.

### TELEVISION

W. P. WEST, Baptist Minister, Ilford.

### AN EXPERIMENT IN EVANGELISM

L. R. MISSELBROOK, B.A., Baptist Minister, Watford.

### THE FELLOWSHIP

### OF INTEREST TO YOU

### THE WIDER CIRCLE

### BOOK REVIEWS

feels that he is the least of all. Above all, "though unrevealed to mortal sense, the spirit feels Him near—" Who is the true Head and Glory of the Church, her Risen and Ascended Lord.

Somewhat Sentimental? Be it so, but, my soul, be ever-sensitive to these spiritual realities and, taking other aspects of Church life in thy stride, join with Isaac Watts to sing of His people and their spiritual home :

"My tongue repeats her vows :  
 Peace to this sacred House!  
 For there my friends and kindred dwell;  
 And, since my glorious God,  
 Makes thee His blest abode,  
 My soul shall ever love Thee well."

---

REV. P. F. LANYON

As the notes for this issue of the *Fraternal* were being written news came in of the death of P. F. Lanyon of New Zealand—news not unexpected, because of his long period of impaired health, nevertheless news which came as a great shock. Our greatly esteemed brother was a loyal member of our B.M.F. and, as is seen elsewhere, our current N.Z. items were supplied by him, in an affectionate letter written only a few weeks ago. After efficient pastoral service he was appointed, fifteen years ago, Secretary of the B.U. and the B.M.S. of N.Z. and during that long period proved a wise counsellor and leader. At the recent Assembly of the Union he occupied the Presidential Chair and all are glad that he lived long enough to receive this signal honour. His loss will be felt throughout New Zealand and Australia and here, across the seas. The mantle of this Elijah has fallen upon L. A. North, bearer of an honoured name and inheritor of a great tradition. We send respectful sympathy to Mrs. Lanyon and pray all blessing upon his successor as he enters upon his high office.

## THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND BAPTISM

THE existence of a Commission of the Church of Scotland on Baptism will be known to British Baptists, if for no other reason than Dr. Payne's article on it in the *Baptist Times*. Every Presbytery of the Scottish Church has been asked to send its comments on the Commission's Interim Report by the end of 1955. Professor Torrance, the Commission's convener, has asked for a review of the Report in *The Fraternal*, that he and his colleagues might learn what Baptists have to say about it. This is a generous gesture. I respond to it with no little diffidence, for so careful a piece of work requires a corresponding assiduity that cannot be given at immediate notice. What I offer here is a purely personal and spontaneous reaction to the document in question and I hope it will be received as such.

It will be expected that this Report, coming from the home of solid theological learning, should manifest solid theological thinking. The expectation is fulfilled. It is the most impressive concise statement of the case for infant baptism that I have read. My brief enumeration of its arguments can do no more than indicate the positions reached. They are as follows :

(1) The Commission of the Risen Lord to baptise is rooted in His entire work as Incarnate Son. His baptism at the hands of John, which witnessed his baptism by the Spirit, led straight to the baptism of blood on the Cross, with its consequent gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. This *total* salvation event is what Paul means by the "one baptism" in Ephesians iv, 5—the baptism which Christ fulfilled for all men, giving validity to every subsequent baptism.

(2) John's baptism, culminating in the baptism of Jesus, was the inauguration of the Messianic era and therefore was integrated within the great salvation events wrought by the Christ. It was the fulfilment of the Isaianic prophecy of the New Exodus, when God should recreate His people, bringing them through Red Sea waters again, as it were, into a new realm.

(3) Christian baptism brings a man into such radical relation with the redemption and kingdom of Christ that his whole being becomes subject to the creative operation of the Spirit. Baptism, accordingly, is the sacrament of the new creation by which we enter on the regenerate life. This affords a parallel with the old creation: God did not consult man when He created him in His image; neither does He when He recreates him in redemptive grace. "Infants . . . are no more responsible for their being baptised than for their being created. But as they were created into responsibility, so in their recreation they are baptised into responsibility. They are baptised into Christ, summoned to confess His name."

(4) The promises of the New Covenant are distinctly declared to be "to you and your children" (Acts ii, 38). The objective fact behind baptism is God's calling, which is answered by our calling

on the name of the Lord. Not faith nor repentance, but God's adoption and the promise of the Spirit are prior. Baptism is the sacrament not of faith nor of repentance, but of the Gospel of grace. "In the New Covenant infants who are baptised learn to call on the name of God because they have been baptised into the name of the Lord and belong to Him."

(5) Abundant evidence from the New Testament shows that children as well as adults were normal recipients of baptism. Note in particular such cardinal sayings as Matt. xi, 25 f.; Matt. xviii, 2-5; Matt. xix, 13 ff.

(6) The idea of believers' baptism is entirely modern. It is bound up with the Renaissance idea of human individualism and autonomy and represents a radical divergence from the biblical teaching about man.

On these propositions I make the following comments:

(1) It is confusing to speak of the whole redemptive activity of Christ as His "baptism". The term *baptisma* in the New Testament is said to be a unique Christian word to describe God's great redemptive act. I doubt it very much. Every one of the six instances of its employment in Acts relates to *John's* baptism. In the Gospels the same applies to all but two passages. How can a term preponderately used to describe John's baptism be regarded as coined specifically to denote Christ's redemption? The two passages referred to are Mark x, 38-39, and Luke xii, 50, wherein the sufferings of Jesus are likened to a baptism. The precedents for this are surely the Old Testament comparisons of sufferings to the billows of the sea that threaten to overwhelm a man. In the Marcan saying the baptism is precisely paralleled by the cup, and the disciples are to share both; the former term is no more determinative for Jesus than the latter, and neither is fitted to express the completeness of His redemption. The "one baptism" of Ephesians iv, 5, is as exclusively the sign of the Church as the one faith along which it is set; I can find no evidence that by *hen baptisma* Paul meant the saving acts of Christ.

(2) It unduly magnifies John's baptism to call it the inauguration of the Messianic era. It heralds it, yes, but does not open it. John is the last of the old order, standing on the threshold of the new. He belongs to prophets and law (Matt. xi, 13). Though he was the greatest born of women, he stands *outside* the Kingdom and is therefore less than the least in it (Matt. xi, 11). At most John announced the plagues: Jesus was responsible for the Exodus (Luke ix, 31). To Paul John's baptism was purely anticipatory, and he that submitted to it required Christian baptism (Acts xix, 4); a baptism which requires rebaptism belongs to an order which has passed away.

(3)-(4) can be dealt with together, for the relation between the redemptive event, the covenant, baptism and faith is crucial. This

report declares: "Baptism, which takes place in a covenant relation between God and His people and requires faith and obedience, declares that it is not by our believing that we are saved, but by God alone. We cannot be saved apart from faith, if we grow up into responsible life, but faith relies entirely upon the faithfulness of Christ." With this we may agree. But with whom does God establish the New Covenant but those who, hearing the word, cast themselves on His mercy, surrender to the Christ who saves (for faith does nothing, Christ does all), are baptised into His death and resurrection and henceforth live in the Spirit? We set no age limit to the members of the New Race of priestly kings, as it is alleged of us, but we do declare that such are born not of the flesh but of the Spirit, and that no word of the New Testament encourages us to believe that a man can be crucified with Christ, risen with Him and born of the Spirit apart from his own responsive faith.

Adolf Schlatter declared that Paul can "express the Gospel not in half measure, but completely, without mentioning the sacraments at all. But if they come into view he connects with them the entire riches of the grace of Christ, because he sees in them the will of Jesus not partially but fully stamped and effective." I assent to that statement. But if the Gospel can be completely expressed in terms of faith, it is clear that all statements about the sacraments presuppose an active faith that *accompanies* them, not one merely expected or hoped for. This Scottish report speaks of Baptism as a dying with Christ, a rising with Him, a union with Him, a recreation in Him, a subjection to His total Lordship over body and soul: such language is acceptable on one condition only—that baptism and conversion be viewed as an indivisible unity of experience. In the view of most of us, to apply it to an infant is not one whit less superstitious than the miracle of the mass.

(5) The serious grappling with the theological problems of baptism in this report commands my profound respect. Candour compels me to say that its attempt to extort infant baptism from the Gospels fills me with astonishment. We are asked to believe that the "infants" to whom God has exclusively revealed the mystery of Christ (Matt. xi, 25 f.) are literally young children, and that the "little children" to whom John writes (1 John ii, 12) were actually infants. I would be intrigued to visit any creche whose inmates could take to themselves 1 John ii, 28; iii, 7; iii, 18; iv, 4; v, 21, and would willingly baptise the lot on the spot. Our Scottish friends, with their binocular spectacles on the wrong way round, find difficulty in explaining how Jesus could have spoken of "little ones who believe on me" (Matt. xviii, 6). They offer two explanations: (i) since these children are presumably baptised, to "believe into" is synonymous with "baptised into"; (ii) more probably faith is literally meant—"a staggering thing to say of 'little ones'." If infants are in mind, staggering is the right word. If children are in mind, why is it staggering?

But more: if in Matt. xviii, 6, to "believe into" equals to be "baptised into", then, urge our friends, to put a stumbling block in the way of children = to prevent their being baptised, which in the Lord's view, is "a terrible crime". Now let us be clear about this. Who are these terrible criminals? Baptists above all, for while a majority of pagans in western civilisation conform to custom and have their children baptised, we resist it. We therefore deserve to have millstones around our necks and be sunk in the Pacific! Far from belonging to the New Israel, we are like the Egyptians whom God destroyed in Israel's sight (the linguistic parallel is explicitly drawn in the report). Since Mark sets the saying in a context warning of the judgment of hell, without doubt we are doomed (Mark ix, 42 ff.). I can only presume that Dr. Torrance sent this report to me as a warning to flee from the wrath to come! Need one say more? Is this not a *reductio ad absurdum* of such views?

(6) Baptists are believed to have abandoned the Biblical doctrine of man and to be the product of Renaissance individualism. Why should that be said? It has always seemed to me a curious phenomenon that Old Testament scholars enthusiastically demonstrate the emergence in Israel of a strongly individual consciousness of God, such as we see in Jeremiah, but their New Testament opposites manifest an undue anxiety to talk down the consummation of this process, such as we see in Paul and supremely in our Lord. With all their faults, Baptists have always taken the doctrine of the Church seriously, and if it be true that the Biblical stress on corporate personality enshrines an imperishable truth, we may be pardoned for recalling that it was a Baptist who did more than anyone else for making that clear to Biblical theologians. We have never sought to diminish the reality of social solidarity, whether it be "in Adam" or "in Christ". Our great sin has apparently been the insistence that the transition from the one solidarity to the other can take place only as a man answers the call of Christ and receives His grace. But a personal relationship with Christ is the hall-mark of New Testament Christianity and must be maintained at all costs. We follow in the steps not of Erasmus but of the prophets and apostles, and evidently feel considerably more at home with their writings than our Pædo-Baptist friends appear to do.

Our denomination has much to learn of the theology of Baptism from our Scottish brethren. It is our shame that they have so little to learn from us. Yet that little is crucial: *To die and rise with Christ, and therefore to be baptised, is the prerogative of him who confesses, "Jesus is Lord"—of him and of no other; for the Baptism wherein God acts is the Baptism wherein man confesses.* This is the one Baptism of the Apostolic Church. The New Testament knows no other. The Gospel allows no other. Any theology claiming the sanction of the New Testament must come to terms with the significance of this primitive Baptismal utterance. It is our earnest hope that our friends north of the border will yet do so.

G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY.