Baptism and Faith

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While the Protestant churches have long paid lip service to the importance of the relationship between baptism and faith, a relationship deeply rooted in the New Testament, the understanding of the nature of it continues to be the point at which the churches most sharply diverge. It occasions concern not only for the major church families and theological traditions, but is definitely an increasing concern for the churches and people within the Reformed-Presbyterian tradition. There is among us a growing uneasiness about the relationship between baptism and faith.

This new uneasiness is due, no doubt, to many factors: the growth of conservative churches in the believer-baptism tradition, the less homogeneous character of our own congregations in a time of ecumenical openness and population mobility, the mass evangelism movements of our time with their emphasis upon adult conversion and baptism, the charismatic renewal with its emphasis on "second baptism," etc. In the light of this new situation, there appears to be a need for a reexamination of the biblical insights which inform our theology of baptism. This paper proposes to indicate some of the biblical and theological data which we need to take into account in any serious discussion of the relationship between baptism and faith.

1. SOME RELEVANT BIBLICAL MATERIAL.

The relationship between baptism and faith is deeply rooted in the New Testament and therefore important for its theology of baptism. Even the casual reader of the New Testament will be impressed by the way the New Testament attributes salvation blessings both to baptism and faith. What baptism "effects" differs in no way from what faith accomplishes. The blessings and gifts of grace credited to baptism in the New Testament will be a consternation to those who tend to look on baptism as a harmless bit of symbolism. It does not appear too much to say that there is no gift of grace which ensues from the redemption of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit which is not available to us in baptism. G. R. Beasley-Murray has assembled the most exhaustive list of these blessings:

Forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:38, and cleansing from sins, Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; union with Christ, Gal. 3:27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Rom. 6:3ff., Col. 2:11f., with all that implies of release from sin's power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Rom. 6:1-11; participation in Christ's sonship, Gal. 3:26f.; consecration to God, 1 Cor. 6:11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27-29; possession of the Spirit, Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 6:11, 12:13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e., regeneration, Titus 3:5, John 3:5; grace to live according to the will of God, Rom. 6:11f., Col. 3:1ff; deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Col. 1:13; the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, John 3:5; and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Eph. 1:13f., 4:30.1
Beasley-Murray not only associates with baptism this impressive list of saving benefits but credits them to baptism and remarks that "the extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind." I am certain that many in his believer-baptism tradition will find his declaration not only astonishing but quite unacceptable. As a rule, those in this tradition are much closer to Markus Barth and his vehement attack not only on infant baptism but baptism as such and all sacramental theology when he renounces baptism as a "means of grace," and views it simply as an act of human obedience, the human answer to the divine command.

A careful study of the above passages should convince us of the correctness of Beasley-Murray, because nowhere in the New Testament are we encouraged to view baptism as a vacuous symbol. The New Testament speaks in the above passages of what happens in baptism and not what is symbolized by it, of what happens in baptism and not before it, and of which it is simply a confirmation. As another New Testament scholar has observed,

Paul again and again appeals to baptism as the evidence and cognitive ground of the church's share in Christ. Because believers have been baptized they know, or at least they must and may know, that they have once died, been buried, and raised with Christ (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12). In that sense the later characterization of baptism as the seal of belonging to Christ — a qualification Paul uses for circumcision (Rom. 4:11) — is certainly not out of place.

What is truly astonishing, however, and even daunting, is that this same list of saving blessings in the New Testament is credited to faith. And here instead of presenting another lengthy excerpt from the major work of Herman Ridderbos, I offer in tabulated form a condensed summary of his discussion.

THE BIBLICAL DEMAND FOR CORRELATING BAPTISM AND FAITH

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<tr>
<th>Blessings</th>
<th>Attributed to Baptism</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cleansing, forgiveness</td>
<td>Acts 2:38; 22:16</td>
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<td>Justification</td>
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<td>Union with Christ</td>
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<td>Members of the Body of Christ</td>
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<td>Giving of the Holy Spirit</td>
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*These blessings extend over the whole life of the baptized and are confined neither to the moment of baptism nor to the moment of faith.
This attributing of the same grace gifts and salvation blessings both to baptism and faith is most provocative and serves notice that we have on our hands a problem of considerable dimension and difficulty. In no one place of the New Testament is there an exposition of this connection. As a consequence, we must have recourse to the theology of the New Testament and draw from it our conclusions. At this point I am less sanguine than Beasley-Murray about the ability of a scholar to interpret this theology apart from all confessional limitations. What follows is what I conceive to be the connection of baptism and faith in the New Testament, and you must judge the extent to which I read and interpret with my confessional spectacles.

2. SOME EXPLANATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BAPTISM AND FAITH.

A. The connection of baptism and faith in the believer-baptism tradition. Since the Anabaptist controversy of the sixteenth century, it has been the contention of the believer-baptism tradition that faith is the necessary prelude to and the indispensable requirement for baptism. Beasley-Murray represents this tradition when he says, "It is undoubtedly true that in the New Testament, it is everywhere assumed that faith proceeds to baptism and that baptism is for faith." And let it be said forthrightly that such a contention finds considerable support in the New Testament. For one thing, the New Testament makes clear that the sacraments are sacraments of the gospel and as such are addressed to faith. While both baptism and the Lord's Supper witness to the objectivities of God's gracious redeeming deeds in Jesus Christ, and to the operation of the Holy Spirit applying these redeeming deeds in and to God's people, both involve recipients. As Hugh T. Kerr once said, "In them [sacraments] we see the Gospel even as we hear the Gospel through preaching." In baptism there is cleansing and one who cleanses, but also one who is cleansed. In the Supper there is feeding and one who feeds, but also one who does the eating and drinking. Calvin had no hesitancy in declaring that apart from faith the sacraments could spell nothing but trouble for the church.

It is also apparent from many places in the New Testament that faith is described as a pre-condition of baptism (Acts 10:44-48; 16:14, 15, 31-34, etc.). In the rapidly expanding missionary situation of the church as described in the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, proclamation and acceptance of the gospel followed by baptism are characteristic happenings. And no doubt, this situation goes a long way in explaining why Paul can ascribe the same gospel blessings both to baptism and faith. This characteristic connection of the two events comes to view at I Cor. 6:11 where Paul reminds his readers that when they turned to Christ and away from their former pagan ways, the moment of their decision and faith was also the occasion of their baptism: "And such were some of you. But you were washed [baptized], you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God." It is this missionary situation, the context of adult decision and faith, in many Pauline passages, that makes it possible for Ernst Fuchs to say, "baptism is the goal of faith," and for
Herman Ridderbos to say that "in order not to lose the correct view of the Pauline [and New Testament] doctrine of baptism, one must maintain faith as a co-constituting factor of baptism." 

Our agreement with this particular correlation of baptism to faith, however, must be limited by certain biblical and theological considerations. Beasley-Murray and other proponents of the believer-baptism tradition, often seek to give the impression that the above data is the final or only word of Scripture on the subject. They use this data to claim that faith always comes to baptism, and since infants cannot exercise faith, therefore infant baptism is a mere rite, quite empty of all but some psychological significance, and that believer-baptism is the only baptismal practice in the New Testament. By way of response to this contention, let us direct attention to two considerations.

For one thing, this correlation of baptism to faith is not the exclusive or only correlation of baptism in the New Testament. What is admittedly a part of biblical data must not be made to do duty for the whole of it. Paul himself has much more to say about baptism than is embraced in the foregoing position. Mention needs to be made here, if only briefly, of Paul’s history of salvation framework of thought and the covenantal character of this redemptive history. The first and primary correlation of baptism in the New Testament is to the objectivities of God’s grace in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The connection between Christ and his people has its ultimate ground in his historical death and resurrection for them and their inclusion in that death and new life. Following his exposition of how God provided an acceptable righteousness for his people in the cross and resurrection of Christ (Romans 3-5), Paul, assuming the corporate connection of Christ and the church, goes on to ask: "What shall we say, then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1ff.). This corporate idea of the "one" for the "many" is the origin of the church. It may be said that the church died, rose again in and with Christ (II Cor. 5:14ff.). "Dying and rising with Christ" are not mystical categories but part and parcel of Paul’s salvation history framework of thought, which gives rise, in turn, to his use of such categories as "in Adam — in Christ" “being crucified with . . . being raised with Christ.” The declaration in Romans 3-5 that the church has died to sin with Christ on the cross is followed by his appeal: “Do you not know that all we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). In other words, it is this redemptive historical event that is appropriated to believers by baptism. Baptism, in Paul’s thought, is the incorporating into and the putting on of Christ and so sharing in his saving work, and participating in the new age. We cannot again crucify ourselves with Christ ethically or mystically; we are crucified in and with him on Golgotha’s hill, and in baptism we are incorporated individually into his redemptive work. Along with this salvation history framework of thought in Paul must be noted its covenantal character. It is the latter which gave Paul the basis for his doctrine of the church as the people of God, the people of the new covenant who together with their children inherit the promises of God. The prophetic promise of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31ff.; Ezek. 36:25f.; Isa. 61:8) is fulfilled, according to Paul, and grounded in the death of Christ (I Cor. 11:25), and the evidence
for the truth that the church constitutes the new people of God is to be found in their new spiritual disposition (II Cor. 3:6ff.). In this connection, it should be observed that Paul does not hesitate to apply to the church all the privileges and titles previously attributed to Israel: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:16f.). And despite the probability that I Cor. 7:14 says nothing directly about baptism, nevertheless it does involve covenant language, and the "holiness of the children" is one piece with the Pauline principle that "if the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16).

When these assertions are placed alongside of Paul's insistence that baptism as well as circumcision is a covenantal sign (Rom 6:3f.; Col. 2:12f.), his "household baptism references" (I Cor. 1:16 and 16:15), his paraetic sections where he includes directions to children as members of the church (Eph. 6:1f.; Col. 3:20), and his instructions to church leaders about the proper discipline and nurture of their children (I Tim. 3:4, 12), we can only conclude that Paul everywhere assumes the continuity of the covenant of grace and that in this continuity he correlated baptism to the covenant. Such a reading of the data is supported by Ridderbos when he says, "the children, together with and belonging to their parents, were incorporated into the church by baptism and in this participated in the gifts of Christ and in the liberating rule of his Spirit."12

While not as extensively treated as his correlation of baptism to redemptive-history and its covenantal character, Paul does correlate baptism also to the Holy Spirit. Earlier we cited from a list supplied by Beasley-Murray, a resume of salvation blessings attributed both to baptism and faith, and included was the giving and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does the New Testament encourage the idea that baptism is magical, an ex opere operato sacrament. All that is attributed to baptism and to faith is owing to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. No New Testament writer could have conceived of anyone being a member of the body of Christ and a part of the new age apart from the Holy Spirit. Where Christ is, there is the Spirit, and if one is in Christ, he has the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). The incorporating of one into Christ by baptism is also a baptism into the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:11). It was this connection of baptism with the Holy Spirit that made baptism a sacrament of fulfillment for the New Testament writers. Water washing stands for the regeneration and renewal which the Holy Spirit effects (Titus 3:5). It is not the subjective response of faith that looms so importantly in baptism, but God and his working through the Holy Spirit. According to Paul it is God who is the subject of baptism and not faith. "He saved us through washing with water" (Titus 3:5). "He [Christ] cleansed [the church] by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:26). It is also appropriate to recall here Paul's singular use of the passive voice in certain well-known passages: "you were washed" (I Cor. 6:11); "we were baptized . . . we were buried" (Rom. 6:3, 4). The one-sided correlation of baptism to faith in the believer-baptism tradition, then, fails to do justice to the broader perspective of the New Testament which points to several other correlations. In responding to this contention, I invited your attention to two considerations, and let us proceed now to the second point.

The point is simply this. The New Testament does not support the idea that the
correlation of baptism to faith is always that of co-incidence and conjunction. Beasley-Murray, you will recall, insists that faith must precede baptism. If baptism is correlated to salvation history and its covenantal character, to the prior work of God’s grace for us in Christ and its application to us by the Holy Spirit, as mentioned above, then the connection of baptism and faith cannot always be that of coincidence and conjunction. This is not to imply that faith is in no way required of those who are incorporated into the church by baptism in their infancy, but simply that in such cases faith is not the requisite prelude. Moreover, there is no room in the New Testament, as there seems to be in much fundamentalist teaching, that faith is the necessary subjective counterpart to God’s objective saving work. The New Testament provides no support for such a balancing out of the subjective over against the objective. These two realities do not stand side by side as balancing or equivocal realities.

While the activity and instrumentality of faith in salvation are self-evident in the New Testament (Rom. 3:25, 29; Gal. 2:20, etc.), so likewise the giveness of faith (Eph. 2:8), and the electing grace of God (Rom. 8:29f.; 9:6-9; Eph. 1:4f.), but nowhere is there any room for a dogma of coincidence or conjunction. The insistence on chronological priority of faith to baptism in the believer-baptism tradition may be due in some cases to the assumption of a causal connection between the two, and in other cases it may be due to the assumption that in sacraments, the outward sign ought to be accompanied by an inward grace.

It may be well to protest this somewhat more strongly, because even within our Protestant church tradition of infant baptism, this coincidence and conjunction idea has had some impacts. For example, although Luther argued that the validity of infant baptism rested on the Word and command of God, he did have recourse to infant faith or the childlike capacity for faith. In our own theological tradition, there have been some who have sought to establish the presence of faith in some form or other at baptism. Some have done it by speaking of the faith of the parents, and others of the faith of the Christian community. Working under the same persuasion, there have been those who have sought to defend infant baptism on the ground of presumptive regeneration. It appears to me that all of these positions evidence a yielding to the idea that what baptism symbolizes ought to be subjectively present in some form or other in the baptism of infants. These positions force upon the correlation of baptism and faith in the New Testament some kind of coincidence or conjunction, and is this the conclusion to be drawn from the parallel blessings credited both to baptism and faith?

B. The connection of baptism and faith in the infant baptism tradition.

Despite the fact that the New Testament correlates baptism to many realities other than faith, the connection of baptism and faith is among them and cannot be ignored. Although faith is essential to the sacrament of baptism, the connection does not appear to be such so as to preclude the rightfulness of infant baptism. The Reformers, at least, did not think so.

In the absence of a clearly explicit apostolic interpretation of this connection of baptism to faith, the construction must emerge from the theology of baptism in the scriptures, and obviously all do not read this theology in the same way. The temptation
is always present to go beyond the limits of revelation. Beasley-Murray and others in
the believer-baptist tradition use logic to establish the connection and assuming that in
the New Testament faith always comes to baptism, the connection of faith to baptism is
defined as that of a prerequisite. Roman Catholicism and the Anglo-Catholic party in
Anglicanism have established a causal connection between the two in the form of
baptismal regeneration in which baptism has the nature of an *opus operatum*.

Most of the above interpretations of the connection between baptism and faith
appear to proceed from the assumption that writers of the New Testament are in-
terested in what we term the *ordo salutis*, and that they teach one. If Paul may be taken
as representing one of the most comprehensive and reflective theologians of the New
Testament, then it must be said that only here and there does he evidence any interest
in the *ordo salutis*, and nowhere does he present a full and systematic doctrine of the
application of salvation. To insist, therefore, as does Beasley-Murray, that the correla-
tion of baptism to faith involves a necessary priority of active, confessing faith, is to
credit to Paul an interest which is not at all typical of him. Paul’s thought is eschatologi-
cal, not anthropological. His viewpoint is that of the history of salvation, the *historia
salutis*, not that of the *ordo salutis*. Although Paul together with other New Testament
writers insists that divine grace precedes human response, and that the gift of faith is
prior to the activity of faith, yet nowhere does Paul argue baptism, adult or infant, on
the basis of prevenient grace.

What, then, is the connection between baptism and faith in the New Testament?
Both baptism and faith are individualizing acts of participation in the corporate,
representative death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ’s own baptism and
subsequent life of obedience, his death and resurrection are saving events by which he
inaugurated the new age and brought into that new age and the church, the people of
the new covenant in the new age. The significance of his death and resurrection is one
piece with his position as the “second Adam,” the one who stands for the many:

> We have come to this judgment that one died for all. Therefore all have
died. And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for
themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. Wherefore if
any one is in Christ, he is a new creation . . . (II Cor. 5:14f.).

The same corporate connection of the “all in the one” is explicated further in the
well-known passage at Romans 5:13ff., and it is this thought framework that is behind
those numerous passages where believers are said to have died, been buried and raised
again “with Christ” (Rom. 6:4, 5, 11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 2:12, 20; etc.), or
where Christ is said to have died, given himself “for us” (I Cor. 5:7, II Cor. 5:21; I
Thess. 5:10; etc.). It is this corporate connection between Christ and his people that
enables Paul to say that Christ took the church with him into his death and resurrection
(Col. 3:3; Rom. 6:2), and what happened to Christ, happened to the church, not
metaphorically or mystically, but in the historical sense. He represented the people of
the future.

Now the first step in individualizing this redemptive history is sacramental, by and
through baptism, that is, baptism as such. (The New Testament speaks only of
baptism, and phrases such as “baptism of believers” and “baptism of infants” is the
language of later church practice. Strictly speaking, there is a certain impropriety in the use of such phrases as "believer baptism" and "infant baptism." At Romans 6:3-4 Paul declares "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." One could not ask for a clearer statement of the redemptive significance of baptism. Our union with Christ in his death and resurrection occurs at baptism. Baptism does not reenact Christ's death and resurrection, and the believer does not experience ethically, symbolically or mystically the dying and rising again of Christ. There is no intimation here that in baptism we look for something to happen in us. Let it be noted too, that although Paul is surely writing to the Roman church, there is not one word in this passage about faith. What Paul does say is that by baptism the baptized becomes a sharer in what has taken place in Christ.

Now previously at Romans 3-5, Paul has declared that God provided us with a new righteousness and brought us into a new time and situation through the past historical event of Christ's death and resurrection. At Romans 6 he says the same thing only this time with respect to baptism. What is the relation between the historical event and the event of baptism? While both refer to the same redemptive event, the past event of Christ's death and resurrection establishes a solidarity relationship between him and his people, whereas baptism marks an individualizing participation in what once happened in Christ.

According to the first, believers are regarded as "the many," who were already included in the death and resurrection of the one; according to the second, by baptism they become incorporated into this solidaric relationship with the one and thus into his death and resurrection.\(^{17}\)

How this takes place is explained by Paul in terms of the "baptized unto Moses" analogy at 1 Cor. 10:1f., where he says:

> I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

By stepping into the Red Sea at the Exodus, Israel died to the bondage of Egypt under Moses, and entered upon promised future of God as his covenant people under Moses. Being baptized unto Moses meant having a share in the redemptive movement headed by Moses. And because the effects of the Exodus created a covenant people in which the effects were celebrated and remembered, to be introduced into that community was tantamount to being baptized unto Moses even though subsequent generations never literally came out of Egypt. Likewise, the new and greater Exodus of Christ created the people of the new covenant, and what he accomplished was celebrated and remembered in their midst. To be baptized is to be incorporated into Christ and the body of Christ. It is to be made a living member of the redeemed community and through the community one of those for whom the redeemer died and rose again.\(^{18}\) Baptism, as such, has this meaning, irrespective of its application to adults or infants. Baptism signs and seals what happens to us, not first or even foremost what happens in us.
In using the term sacramental individualizing, the caution should be expressed that the word “individualizing” is not altogether satisfactory. Most children do not come to baptism under their own volition, but are brought to baptism by their parents on the ground that the latter are in Christ and in the body of Christ. “For the promise is to you and your children and to all that are afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39). The individualizing or personalizing in infant baptism is in terms of the family. This, of course, was the social and religious unit of that time. As J. Vernon Bartlett has said,

The idea that a parent should enter a religion or covenant-religion with God as an individual merely, i.e. by himself as distinct from his immediate family, would never occur to the ancient, least of all to a Jew. There were no “individuals” in our sharp modern sense of the term.19

On the ground of the parents’ solidarity relationship to Christ, the head of the new covenant people of God, children are incorporated into that community via baptism, the sign and seal of covenant membership. In this community Christ is confessed, loved, served, worshiped, and expected, and here children learn to identify themselves as among those for whom Christ died and rose again. Provided with a genuine and meaningful nurture, they will faithfully and joyfully accept the meaning of their baptism.

The second step in personalizing Christ’s corporate redemptive work is existential, that of faith, personal faith. Writing in defense of infant baptism, Ridderbos says,

This does not of course mean that faith would for them be superfluous — such would presuppose a magical operation of baptism detached from God himself — but rather that the way of faith is more plainly opened for them, and the obedience of faith more emphatically demanded of them.20

When ready to acknowledge their faith in Christ, baptized children do so “as children of their heavenly Father, and stand before the church for the deliberate and public ratification in their own persons of the covenant of God of which their baptism is the sign and seal.”21 Baptism does not make faith irrelevant or unnecessary. On the other hand, faith does not complete or validate baptism. When our baptized children stand forth to declare their faith in Jesus Christ, it is the Saviour and Lord with whom they were united by baptism in the covenant community. The church should recognize that they are called to faith by their baptism, not in addition to it or in spite of it. Baptism calls them not only to confession of faith but a life of continuing faith. We are saved by grace, through faith. Since faith is first of all a gift, what we are speaking of here is the activity or exercise of faith. And the gift or exercise of faith ought not to be so temporally confined to the moment of confession as is common in many circles. Those baptized in infancy will have knowledge and experience of the life of faith before the moment of confession, and will continue in that life of faith long after the moment of confession.

It has been my observation that in our own Reformed-Presbyterian tradition, we tend to become quite vulnerable at the point of holding in proper tension baptism and faith. While the foregoing theology may be valid, it does not always inform and control our church practice. We tend to one of two extremes. On the one hand, it is possible to
make so much of baptism that it becomes a magical *opus operatum*, and in the persuasion of its efficacy to encourage an indiscriminate baptizing. Unfortunately, this over-emphasis on the sacrament is often accompanied by a lack of necessary nurture and emphasis on an expected faith.

On the other hand, it is possible to make so much of the moment of faith’s decision and confession that we embrace a theology of evangelism and mission that is incompatible with our infant baptism tradition. If what I see of our own church practice is any indication of the total situation, I would say that the latter extreme is much more common among us than the former. The sacrament of baptism of infants among us has fallen upon a bad time. There is little preaching about the meaning, privileges and responsibilities of baptism. Our children and young people do not seem to fall back upon their baptism in time of storm and stress as did Martin Luther with his cry “Baptizatus sum,” “I am baptized.” There is little instruction of parents in the meaning of the sacrament preparatory to the baptism of a child. When the Sunday arrives for the sacrament, it is pushed about and squeezed into the liturgy for the Lord’s Day where it will be most inconspicuous; often unaccompanied by scripture or sermon appropriate to the occasion. Neither before, during or after the service do parents and congregation sense that anything celebrative and significant has taken place. About the only significant comment to be heard will be “Oh, the baby was so good. We didn’t hear even a peep out of him.”

It is quite otherwise among us when the occasion is the confession of faith and admission to the Lord’s Table. For this there is no lack of preparatory instruction, appropriate hymnology and liturgy, and afterward there is a festive air and the extension of the hand of Christian fellowship.

And unfortunately, there is growing among us an over-concentration on the punctiliar aspect of faith, the aspect of decision and confession. We seem to approve a rationalizing of faith by our emphasis upon the importance of an acceptance of Christ which proceeds from self-awareness. We encourage the Holy Spirit to work within the confines of our children’s adolescent years, and tend to think negatively of those who do not incubate this particular expression of faith according to our calendar. We do not seem to have much to say to troubled parents whose children may be living the life of faith but who have not given this expected verbalization of faith. It may well be that our forefathers left the moment of connecting baptism and faith too much to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, but we may be going too far in the other direction. There is still good reason to embrace in our theology and church practice, baptism and faith, and to alert ourselves again to the importance of holding them in a tension which evaporates neither of their proper function and place in the life of God’s people.

**FOOTNOTES**

Ibid., p. 272f.

Ibid., Preface

Ibid., p. 272.


A helpful contemporary discussion along these very lines is available in Lewis B. Smedes, *All Things Made New*, (Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 138ff.

