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THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM AS AN
ECUMENICAL FACTOR

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The writer is aware of the nervelessness of the cliches which describe a subject as "vital," "one of the most perplexing problems of the day," "focal point of theological attention," and so on, yet he is prepared to use them and justify their use in relation to the doctrine of Holy Baptism. This is done not merely because certain writers who can speak with some authority on the subject refer to it in terms such as these,¹ but because of the weight of evidence that clearly testifies to the widespread interest this subject has attracted particularly in recent years, and the nature of the questions in regard to it still being asked and requiring urgent answers by churchmen today.

It is not my intention at this moment to illustrate the extent and the nature of this surge of interest in Baptism--that will be done in Chapter II. The primary impulses which have contributed to it, however, need to be mentioned now, for they point to the purpose of this present study.

¹For example, "In the course of the last three to four centuries it is questionable if any topic in Christian theology can claim as prolific a literary output as the subject of baptism." John Murray, Christian Baptism (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952), p. 1. "One of the notable features of the theological discussions of the past thirty years has been the increasing attention given to baptism." Ernest A. Payne, "Baptism in Recent Discussion," Christian Baptism, edited by Alec Gilmore (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 15. "The Church is coming to view baptism as a pivotal episode in the tremendous drama of salvation, as a climactic moment in the tragic and redemptive saga, a sign by which the church points to its central mystery." Paul S. Minear, "The Mystery of Baptism," Religion in Life, XX (Spring Number 1951), p. 228.

One of these has been the Liturgical Movement, or as some prefer to call it, the Liturgical Revival, which has not only increased interest in liturgy and liturgical forms, but "has given a clearer perception of the indissoluble unity of Word and Sacrament,"² which in turn has caused many, who previously saw in Baptism little more than a desirable church custom, often conducted privately, to come to understand more fully the individual blessing and the corporate privileges and responsibilities that Baptism brings into the life of the individual Christian and the Church.³

Another reason why Baptism in recent years has become a center of controversy relates to pastoral problems connected with its administration. One of these problems is the increasing mobility of populations, which gives pastors in many areas little opportunity to get to know the parents who bring children to Baptism. Thus they are unable to determine whether parents are capable and willing to assume the responsibilities which Baptism imposes upon them as parents, namely, to see to it that the child is brought up in the faith into which it has been baptized and instructed in the lifelong implications of Holy Baptism. Again, in connection with infant Baptism, there has been a strong reaction against so-called "indiscriminate" Baptism, which has not only led many ministers to do their utmost in discouraging that popular outlook which, as Gregory Dix puts it, "associates Baptism vaguely with vaccination and Confirmation

²Eugene R. Fairweather, "Worship and the Sacraments: Some Ecumenical Trends," Religion in Life, XXXII (Spring 1963), p. 205.

³A. C. Lichtenberger, "The Social Implications of the Liturgical Renewal," The Liturgical Renewal of the Church, edited by Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 106.

with school-leaving,"⁴ but has led them to question the value and necessity of infant Baptism itself. This has made it necessary for churches to examine closely the whole doctrine of Baptism. Indeed, as reported in Time a few weeks ago, some ministers in the Church of England have resigned over this very issue, believing that only believing adults are the proper subjects for Baptism, and that other ministers, uncertain and perplexed, are hoping "that some clarifying guidance will come from this month's church convocations."⁵

Perhaps more influential than any other single factor in stimulating contemporary interest in the doctrine of Baptism has been the Ecumenical Movement and ecumenical thinking generally. There are a number of reasons why ecumenists have singled out the doctrine of Holy Baptism for special attention, as will be seen in Chapter III. But the most urgent of all has been the need to come to grips with the embarrassing paradox that the very Sacrament which, so it would seem, more than any other factor unites the churches has been, and still is, very largely responsible for their disunity. Most Protestant churches accept as valid the Baptism which joining members have received in another church, even though they may reject that church's doctrine of Baptism. Even the Roman Catholic Church affirms that those outside the Roman church who have received a valid Baptism are organically united to Christ, and by virtue of that fact

⁴Dom Gregory Dix, The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism (London: Dacre Press, Adam & Charles Black, 1946), p. 40.

⁵"Baptism: For Babies or Believers," Time, LXXXV (January 8, 1965), p. 36.

brothers in Christ.⁶ It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the logical starting point in any serious attempt to bring the Protestant churches, and Protestantism and Catholicism, together would be the doctrine of Holy Baptism. And yet, despite this recognition of "one Baptism" by the churches, there are very definite differences in regard to this doctrine, and a long and sometimes bitter history, especially within the Protestant churches from their very beginnings, of division accentuated, if not brought about by such differences.

This ecumenical problem of apparent unity in disunity is the starting point for this study. All aspects of the problem, however, cannot be fully investigated here, so it has been narrowed down to show how a major ecumenical organization, The World Council of Churches, through its Assemblies and Commissions has become increasingly interested in the doctrine of Holy Baptism, to investigate why it has done so, and to trace the attempts it has made to formulate a doctrine of Baptism that it is hoped will resolve the problem of unity in disunity to the satisfaction of all concerned.

To place the study in its proper theological context, to try to show how other factors, too, have contributed to the interest in Baptism and how they bear upon the central problem, Chapter II will outline the thinking of a number of theologians and churches on the subject in recent years. The extent to which Baptism has figured in the Assemblies of The Lutheran World Federation will also be indicated.

⁶Augustin Cardinal Bea, The Unity of Christians, edited by Bernard Leeming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 30, 32, 55, 56, 121, 201.

Finally, an attempt will be made in Chapter VI to evaluate this modern ecumenical thinking regarding the Sacrament in the light of the Lutheran teaching on Baptism to see, on the one hand, what is of doubtful or negative value, and, on the other hand, what can be learned from it that will lead to a deeper appreciation and a more fruitful use of the Sacrament in our own circles.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RECENT STUDIES ON THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

Some Individual Theologians

According to Ernest Payne, Emil Brunner was the first contemporary theologian of note to raise provocatively the matter of Baptism.¹ In his Olaus Petri lectures delivered in Uppsala in 1938 and published in English in 1943 as The Divine-Human Encounter,² Brunner claimed that "Baptism is not only an act of grace, but just as much an act of confession stemming from the act of grace."³ Since all ancient Baptism liturgies implicated as the essential element the confession of faith of the parents or the witnesses to the Baptism and the vow to provide Christian instruction for the one being baptized, "the contemporary practice of infant Baptism can hardly be regarded as being anything short of scandalous."⁴

Before Brunner's lectures were published in English, the controversy which they sparked off had been fanned into full flame by Karl Barth's lecture delivered in May, 1943, and published shortly thereafter under the title Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe,⁵ and in 1948 in English as

¹Ernest A. Payne, "Baptism in Recent Discussion," Christian Baptism, edited by Alec Gilmore (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 17.

²Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, translated by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943).

³Ibid., pp. 178-179.

⁴Ibid., p. 183.

⁵Karl Barth, Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1943).

The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism.⁶ Barth states that

Christian Baptism is in essence the representation (Abbild) of a man's renewal through his participation by means of the power of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁷

The basic idea of Baptism is therefore the threat of death and a deliverance to life, which can be properly symbolized only by immersion.⁸ The principles underlying the order of Baptism are

the responsibly undertaken task of the Church, on the one side, and on the other, the responsible readiness and willingness of the baptized to receive this pledge and to consent to this oath of allegiance.⁹

Baptism, therefore, is not to be administered to infants, for,

Neither by exegesis nor from the nature of the case can it be established that the baptized person can be merely a passive instrument. Rather it may be shown, by exegesis and from the nature of the case, that in this action the baptized is an active partner and that at whatever stage of life he may be, plainly no infans can be such a person In the sphere of the New Testament one is not brought to Baptism; one comes to Baptism.¹⁰

Barth, however, considers his own Baptism, as an infant, valid but incorrect, since it rests on an erroneous theological presupposition.¹¹

Barth, therefore, is in a somewhat ambiguous position inasmuch as he rejects infant Baptism, because an infant cannot give the necessary

⁶Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948).

⁷Ibid., p. 9.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁹Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 42.

¹¹Herman Sasse, "The Doctrine of Baptism," Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 4, translated by P. H. Buehring, p. 6 (mimeographed).

subjective response, and yet he ascribes to infant Baptism an objective validity, an inconsistency which the Baptists, whose position Barth has otherwise affirmed, have been quick to point out.¹²

Scholars quickly rose to the defence of infant Baptism. Paul Althaus was one,¹³ but far more influential was Oscar Cullmann.¹⁴ Mindful that Barth's statement was "the most serious challenge to infant Baptism which has ever been offered,"¹⁵ Cullmann looked carefully into the antecedents of Christian infant Baptism, especially proselyte Baptism. But one of his most important contributions to the controversy was the distinction he made between general Baptism, into which all are baptized by virtue of Christ's universal justification of the world and which is offered "independent of the decision of faith and understanding of those who benefit from it," and special Baptism, which is an individual participation in this death and resurrection of Christ. The latter is "why those received into the church today are baptized."¹⁶ Cullmann believes that the Baptism of whole houses is an inconclusive argument for infant Baptism since we do not know whether there were infants in them or not, but it is true that when heathen came into Judaism, their children came too, and we might well expect the same to have happened when conversions were made to

¹²For example, Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1952), p. 10.

¹³Paul Althaus, Was Ist Die Taufe? (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950).

¹⁴Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1950).

¹⁵Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 20-22.

the Christian faith. Moreover, Cullmann argues that, although there is no direct evidence of an infant being baptized in the New Testament, neither is there any of sons and daughters of Christian parents who later became baptized as adults,¹⁷ thus giving the supporters of believer's Baptism a new nut to crack. The basic question regarding infant Baptism is whether it is compatible with the New Testament conception of the essence and meaning of Baptism. Here Cullmann believes that Barth asks the right question, but gives the wrong answer, because the essence of Baptism is not man's assent but God's gracious act in which man is the passive object; "is baptized" is an unambiguous passive. God's grace is always prevenient, and faith is response to this grace of God.¹⁸ Both infant and adult Baptism are therefore Biblical.

One of the strongest contenders for the validity of infant Baptism has been Joachim Jeremias. In his Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries,¹⁹ the English title of his Hat die Urkirche die Kindertaufe geübt?, he maintains that since the New Testament was written in a missionary situation, it is not surprising that all New Testament statements about Baptism relate to missionary Baptism, that is, Baptism administered when Jews and Gentiles were received into fellowship. Jeremias thus contends:

If we realize this fact, we shall understand why, in the New Testament statements about Baptism, the conversion of adults

¹⁷Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 31-34.

¹⁹Joachim Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, translated by David Cairns (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

and their Baptism stand right in the middle of the picture. For it is they who are joining the Church, while the children, who are, as it were, hidden in the bosom of the family, cannot claim the same degree of attention. This makes the task which engages us more difficult. Yet luckily we are not entirely without material which enables us to infer an answer to the question "Were the children of converts baptized along with their parents?"²⁰

Jeremias answers his question in the affirmative. He makes much use of what is known as the oikos formula, on the basis of texts such as 1 Cor. 1:16; Acts 16:15; 16:33; 18:8. This formula, he believes, was adopted from the Old Testament cultic language, particularly the terminology of circumcision, and introduced into the formal language employed in the primitive rite of Baptism. This does not mean that in every case when a "whole household" is mentioned small children were present, but "it does mean that Paul and Luke could under no circumstances have applied the oikos formula if they had wished to say that adults only had been baptized."²¹

Jeremias finds further proof for his view in the eschatological significance attached to Baptism by the New Testament Church, the relationship between Christian Baptism and proselyte Baptism, and then proceeds to discuss the evidence for infant Baptism in the third and fourth centuries, on the basis of evidence from Origen, Hippolytus, Tertullian and others. He finds that infant Baptism was the regular practice, and that the first evidence of the withholding of Baptism from infants is of relatively late origin, that is, the early part of the fourth century. Had

²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

²¹Ibid., pp. 21-23.

it been earlier, it surely would be found in the sources. His conclusion, then, is that, from the historical point of view, Scripture, and the early church, there is ample evidence on which to conclude that infant baptism was practised.

Kurt Aland soon issued a strong challenge to the accuracy of Jeremias' conclusions.²² His primary question is whether the sources used by Jeremias allow any other interpretation. He maintains they do. For example, Jeremias has not distinguished clearly enough between the Baptism of infants and the Baptism of children; the oikos formula is irrelevant, because, in the final analysis, it is applicable to only one text of Scripture, and this clearly indicates that no children were present. Moreover, the church fathers cited by Jeremias in support of his theory may be used to support the contrary case. Tertullian, for example, is resisting the introduction of a new custom, infant Baptism, not discouraging it as though it already existed. He believes, then, that there is no demonstrable practice of infant Baptism in the New Testament or the early church before circa 200.²³

Jeremias has replied to Aland's challenge with The Origins of Infant Baptism.²⁴ Here he states that his re-examination of all sources has left him more convinced than ever that his position is correct. He directs special attention to Aland's theology of Baptism, which suggests that the

²²Kurt Aland, Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press, 1963).

²³Ibid., p. 100.

²⁴Joachim Jeremias, The Origins of Infant Baptism, translated by Dorothea M. Barton (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1963).

sinfulness of innocent children was a doctrine that developed gradually, and thus partially explains why infant Baptism was introduced at this stage,²⁵ and which "overlooks the wholeness of the New Testament theology about Baptism, as well as its basic eschatological character."²⁶

From amongst the many Continental theologians who have in recent years written on some aspect of Baptism brief mention may also be made of the following: Anders Nygren, Isaiah 53--the Key to the Understanding of Baptism. This was one of the papers discussed at the Oberlin Conference in 1957.²⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg's, Das Heilsgeschehen bei der Taufe nach dem Apostel Paulus,²⁸ is divided into two parts: the first is a very thorough exegetical study of the Pauline passages that deal with Baptism, and the second part develops a baptismal theology on the basis of these texts which centres chiefly on the relationship between Baptism and Das Heilsgeschehen and its sacramental character as dying and rising with Christ. Johannes Schneider²⁹ and Johannes Warns³⁰ are two Baptists

²⁵Ibid., pp. 103-108. Cf. also: "Is Aland fully right in thinking that 'to establish this (i.e., sinful corruption from birth) is surely superfluous'? I am sorry to say that I do not think he is . . . The doctrine of original sin raises grave and ramifying problems whose solution is not easy. But unless those problems are faced and the mystery of sin admitted, a defence of infant baptism must be inadequate and unsatisfactory." Bernard Leeming, "Notes and Comments on the Theology of Infant Baptism," The Heythrop Journal, IV (October 1963), 392.

²⁶Jeremias, p. 26.

²⁷Stephen J. England, "A Survey of Some Recent Literature on Baptism," Encounter, XXI (Summer 1960), p. 342.

²⁸Rudolf Schnackenburg, Das Heilsgeschehen bei der Taufe nach dem Apostel Paulus (München: Karl Zink Verlag, 1950).

²⁹For bibliographical details, cf. supra, p. 8.

³⁰Johannes Warns, Baptism, translated by G. H. Lang (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1957), passim.

who reject baptismal regeneration and stress repentance, faith, Baptism, gift of the Spirit as the New Testament order of Baptism. In 1951 Markus Barth, Karl Barth's son, wrote a large volume on Baptism which is even more destructive than his father's work, for it not only rejects infant Baptism, but also the sacramental aspects of Baptism.³¹ Rudolf Stählin develops the theme that

die Alte Kirche hat in der Taufe die Grundgestalt alles kirchlichen Handelns und Redens gesehen. Man nannte die Taufe gerne die ianua ecclesiae, die Kirchentüre, und bekundete damit, das alles, was in der Kirche geschieht, sein Urbild and seine Form im Sakrament der Taufe hat.³²

Wolfgang Metzger, with an eye on current problems in Germany in connection with the practice of infant Baptism, concludes his essay:

Eine echte Missionsfront durchzieht heute Europe. An ihr ist die Lage hinsichtlich der Taufe klar: den Heiden, den neuen Heiden, muss Christus verkündigt werden, dass sie Jünger werden, indem sie sich taufen lassen und halten lernen alles, was Christus geboten hat. Aber uns in der Kirche ist die Gemeindesituation gegeben; wir können sie nicht aufheben. Wir können das Getaufstein so vieler kirchlicher Randsiedler weder auslöschen noch ignorieren. Die Missionsaufgabe wandelt sich hier in die Aufgabe der Evangelisation. Es geht um die Erweckung der Gabe, die in der Taufe schon gegeben ist, um das Zeugnis von dem uns bereits Zugeeigneten, das angeeignet werden muss . . . Auch in der notvollen Volkskirche, der Nachwuchskirche, der Kirche der Kindertaufe braucht das Lob Gottes am Taufstein nicht zu verstummen; auch heute haben wir noch Grund und Anlass, in vollem Masse aus der Taufe unserer Kinder ein Fest der Dankbarkeit zu machen.³³

In France, Pierre Ch. Marcel, largely following Cullmann's line of

³¹Markus Barth, Die Taufe--ein Sakrament? (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1951), passim.

³²Rudolf Stählin, Der Weg der Taufe (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954), passim.

³³Wolfgang Metzger, Die Taufe im Missionarischen Anfang und in der Gemeindesituation (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1961), pp. 68-69.

reasoning, has written a spirited defence of infant Baptism.³⁴ Reference will be made to this work later.

In Britain, a considerable literature has developed in Anglican circles about the administration of Baptism to infants of families whose connection with the church is purely nominal, and the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation. In 1946 L. S. Thornton wrote Confirmation Today, which states in general terms the problem presented by infant Baptism.³⁵ Dom Gregory Dix's address, delivered in 1946, "The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism," in which he affirms that on historical grounds infant Baptism is always an abnormality and that Confirmation is the necessary completion of Baptism and the gift of the Spirit,³⁶ has been extremely influential in shaping thinking in the Church of England on this subject. G. W. H. Lampe, however, in The Seal of the Spirit, agreed that Confirmation was part of the original baptismal rite, but he rejected the idea that it added anything to Baptism. "Spirit-baptism" and "water-baptism" were, in Lampe's view, inseparably linked in the apostolic church.³⁷ Thornton has written a later book supporting his earlier position and the one taken by Dix.³⁸ A small study by P. W. Evans argues

³⁴Pierre Ch. Marcel, The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism, translated by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (London: James Clarke & Co., 1953).

³⁵England, p. 339.

³⁶Dom Gregory Dix, The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism (London: Dacre Press, Adam & Charles Black, 1946), p. 38.

³⁷Payne, p. 19.

³⁸Lionel S. Thornton, Confirmation: Its Place in the Baptismal Mystery (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1954).

for the reliability of Matthew 28:19, and on the basis of it, the universality of the baptismal command.³⁹ Cyril E. Pocknee lectured on current baptismal problems in the Church of England at Evanston, Illinois, in June, 1961, and his lectures have appeared in published form.⁴⁰ His view is that the original separation of Baptism from Confirmation was on pastoral rather than theological grounds.⁴¹ Baptism is the means of Christian initiation, but Confirmation, especially teaching and preparation for responsible Christian witness, relates closely to it.⁴²

A Methodist, W. F. Flemington, has made a careful study of New Testament teaching and practice,⁴³ in which he agrees with Barth that "there is no direct evidence in the New Testament for the Baptism of infants,"⁴⁴ but with Cullmann he holds that "the Baptism of infants is a thoroughly legitimate development of New Testament teaching."⁴⁵ He also rejects Dix's view that Confirmation rather than Baptism was the predominant element in Christian initiation.⁴⁶

³⁹P. W. Evans, Sacraments in the New Testament (London: Tyndale Press, 1946).

⁴⁰Cyril E. Pocknee, The Rites of Christian Initiation (London: A. R. Nowbray & Co., 1962).

⁴¹Ibid., p. 33.

⁴²Ibid., p. 44.

⁴³W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: S.P.C.K., 1953).

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 148.

Baptists in Britain have also watched the baptismal controversy closely. In 1959 Christian Baptism, edited by Alec Gilmore, appeared⁴⁷ with contributions from a number of Baptist writers, all of whom affirmed the Baptist position, with the exception of Neville Clark, whose contribution, "The Theology of Baptism," to a certain extent, found both Baptist and Paedo-baptist practice defective;⁴⁸ and, arguing from the fact that as there is one Lord and one faith, so there is one Baptism, he found that an unqualified denial of infant Baptism can be theologically justified only if all baptized are unchurched. He asks: "Can we, in this day and age, follow our forefathers to so radical a conclusion?"⁴⁹

Of the other Baptists who have made contributions to discussions on Baptism, perhaps Ernest A. Payne and G. R. Beasley-Murray are the best known. Both have played important roles in ecumenical discussions on Baptism and have written extensively on the subject from the Baptist viewpoint. Beasley-Murray wrote an introduction to his translation of Aland's reply to Jeremias, entitled "The Baptismal Controversy in the British Scene,"⁵⁰ and his more recent work, Baptism in the New Testament,⁵¹ is one of the most extensive investigations of this subject.

In Scotland three important contributions to recent literature on Baptism have come from T. F. Torrance, whose work in connection with

⁴⁷For publication details, cf. Supra, p. 6.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 324.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 326.

⁵⁰Aland, pp. 17-27.

⁵¹George R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (London: Macmillan, 1962).

Commissions of The World Council of Churches will be mentioned again later, and whose Conflict and Agreement in the Church⁵² includes a number of references to Baptism. Donald M. Baillie writes briefly on Baptism in The Theology of the Sacraments⁵³ and John Baillie in Baptism and Conversion,⁵⁴ although attempting to see the subject in the light of present problems and ecumenical needs, in the main affirms the recent position taken by the Church of Scotland, which will be outlined later.

In America, few works of a decisive nature have appeared on Baptism. Encounter devoted a whole issue to the subject in 1960.⁵⁵ Earlier, in 1952, John Murray in Christian Baptism, defended the historic Presbyterian doctrine of Baptism.⁵⁶ One of the most recent works, Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church, by Warren Carr,⁵⁷ is the attempt of a moderate Baptist, who sees distortions in both traditions, Baptist and Paedo-baptist, to accent the nature of Baptism rather than the subjects. Therefore,

Each tradition must look to what their Baptisms do to the world mission as well as to what damage is wrought to the act of Christian

⁵²Thomas F. Torrance, Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol. I (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), Vol. II (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960).

⁵³Donald M. Baillie, The Theology of the Sacraments (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

⁵⁴John Baillie, Baptism and Conversion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

⁵⁵Encounter, XXI (Summer 1960), pp. 255-354.

⁵⁶John Murray, Christian Baptism (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952).

⁵⁷Warren Carr, Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

Baptism in its own right Christians must make sure that Christian Baptism becomes what it is intended to be.⁵⁸

In Missouri Synod circles there have been a few discussions on the subject of late, but, although attention has been drawn to certain aspects of Baptism that appear to have been neglected somewhat, no significant change in the historic Lutheran position is evident here. Martin Marty in his Baptism makes brief mention in the preface of influences the Liturgical Movement and World Council of Churches studies have had on the subject,⁵⁹ but his own emphasis is on living one's Baptism.⁶⁰ Willis F. Laetsch presented a doctrinal essay on the subject to the Cleveland Convention of the Missouri Synod,⁶¹ and Professor Harry G. Coiner wrote on "The Inclusive Nature of Holy Baptism in Luther's Writings," in 1962.⁶² Perhaps the most detailed work in the area has been Dr. Arthur C. Repp's Confirmation in the Lutheran Church, which stresses that confirmation is a man-made rite, not the complement of the initiatory sacrament of Baptism, and its prime function is teaching, which "discloses to the catechumen the meaning and continued significance of the sacrament," and furthermore, "prepares the child for joyful and reverent participation in

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁵⁹Martin Marty, Baptism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. vii.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. viii.

⁶¹Willis F. Laetsch, "The Doctrine of Baptism," The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Regular Convention, (Cleveland, Ohio, June 20-29, 1962) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 25ff.

⁶²Harry G. Coiner, "The Inclusive Nature of Holy Baptism in Luther's Writings," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXIII (November, 1962), 645-657.

the Lord's Supper and richer sharing of all that life in the body of Christ implies."⁶³ A number of articles on aspects of the doctrine have come from the pen of Dr. John Theodore Mueller,⁶⁴ and valuable contributions have been made to the subject by Dr. Herbert J. A. Bouman,⁶⁵ Dr. E. W. A. Koehler,⁶⁶ and Dr. John H. Elliott.⁶⁷

Within the Protestant Churches

In the Church of England, since 1940, the Baptismal Movement, which comprises a number of parish priests and theologians, has been trying to find answers to some of the pastoral problems raised when people whose attachment to the church is purely nominal present their children for Baptism. The concern is stated by Pocknee:

The ignorance of the fundamentals of the Christian religion often displayed by parents and godparents when presenting an infant for Baptism has been the cause of increasing concern on the part of many incumbents and parish priests.⁶⁸

⁶³Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 156.

⁶⁴John Theodore Mueller, "Die grosse Kluft in der Lehre von der Taufe," Concordia Theological Monthly, V (January 1934), 9-19; (February 1934), 93-101; "Holy Baptism," The Abiding Word, Vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 394-422; "St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, XIX (June 1948), 417-439.

⁶⁵Herbert J. A. Bouman, "The Baptism of Christ with Special Reference to the Gift of the Spirit," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVIII (January 1957), 1-15.

⁶⁶E. W. A. Koehler, "Infant Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (July 1939), 481-491.

⁶⁷John H. Elliott, "Rudolph Bultmann and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (June 1961), 348-355.

⁶⁸Pocknee, p. 10.

Of a more official nature have been the various committees and commissions that have been appointed by the Church to enquire into Baptism and Confirmation. In 1942 the Convocations of York and Canterbury set up committees

to investigate the grave disparity between the numbers of children presented for Baptism and those brought to Confirmation and communion.⁶⁹

Their first report, Confirmation Today, released in 1944, amongst other things, stated: "it is infant Baptism rather than adult Confirmation which needs justification."⁷⁰ In 1946, Dom Gregory Dix in the lecture already referred to, argued that the Church can afford infant Baptism

provided that it is never allowed to be thought of as normal never wholly complete by itself and absolutely needing completion by the gift of the Spirit and the conscious response of faith for the full living of the Christian 'eternal life' in time.⁷¹

Two years later, in 1948, a Theological Commission in its report, The Theology of Christian Initiation, stated, as reported by Beasley-Murray, "the great privileges bestowed in Baptism are inseparable from 'the hearing of faith' and the conscious renunciation of the pagan world,"⁷² and therefore urged, that Baptism on its own, was insufficient as initiation into the Christian community; it must be coupled with Confirmation and first Communion. Further reports were issued, Baptism Today, 1949, and Baptism and Confirmation Today, 1954. The latter stated

⁶⁹Payne, p. 18.

⁷⁰Dix, p. 37.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 38.

⁷²Aland, p. 22.

that infant Baptism was in line with the full teaching of the Church if it was accepted that it pointed forward to Confirmation and first Communion, if there was a reasonable chance that the child would be taught to "improve his Baptism," and if instruction of baptized children in the Christian faith and life was regarded as a matter of utmost importance.⁷³

Finally, in 1958 a Report submitted by the Church of England Liturgical Commission to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Baptism and Confirmation, maintained (although not unanimously) that in the New Testament adult Baptism is the norm, and that it is only in the light of this that the doctrine and practice of Baptism can be understood. The Commission, therefore, rearranged the present services of Baptism and Confirmation, making the Baptism and Confirmation of adults the archetypal service.⁷⁴

In Beasley-Murray's view, this represents perhaps the boldest step in theological and liturgical reform of any state church since the Reformation, and its consequences cannot yet be foreseen.⁷⁵

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a special Commission on Baptism in 1953

to carry out a fresh examination of the Doctrine of Baptism, and through its report to the General Assembly, and in any other ways it may find desirable, to stimulate and guide such thought and study throughout the Church as may lead to theological agreement and uniform practice.⁷⁶

⁷³Payne, p. 19.

⁷⁴Report submitted by the Church of England Liturgical Commission to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in November, 1958, Baptism and Confirmation (London: S.P.C.K., 1961), p. x.

⁷⁵Aland, p. 22.

⁷⁶Study Document issued by The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland, The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1958), p. 5.

The first stage of its work concerned the Biblical teaching on Baptism, and its findings were released in an interim report in 1955. The second interim report, published in 1956, dealt with the history of baptismal belief and practice up to the time of Augustine. The third interim report appeared in 1957 and dealt with the history of Baptism during the period of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. The 1959 installment outlined the teaching of the Scottish Reformers. The 1955 report was rewritten in 1958 in a shorter form for use as a study document under the title, The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism. After statements concerning the antecedents of Christian Baptism, the relation of Baptism to the great salvation events, such as the incarnation and Jesus' Baptism, the Apostolic interpretation of Baptism, especially by St. Paul, the place of children in Christian Baptism on the basis of the New Testament and early Church practice, the Report comes to a theological formulation of the doctrine. Baptism is seen as "initiation into a saving relationship with Christ, rather than the mechanical receiving of a gift"; it depends for its efficacy "primarily on the faithfulness of God, and only secondarily on our response of faith"; and "the divine and human aspects of the sacrament must neither be confused nor separated."⁷⁷ The doctrine has been formulated in the light of recent Biblical theology in which the mighty acts of God in history, particularly the Christ-event, have been seen as central, and the Bible is taken as a whole, in which New Testament thought is basically a continuation of Hebraic thought, and modern distinctions such as "objective" and "subjective," "form" and "matter,"

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 55-64.

"body" and "soul," do not exist; unity and solidarity is always emphasized. On the basis of this mode of procedure, the Report says,

We have accorded central importance therefore to the corporate unity of the Church as the Body of Christ, and to the unity of the baptized with Christ.⁷⁸

The Report concludes:

Baptism is an involvement in the salvation-events of the Gospel, a bond of unity with Christ, and an incorporation into His Body. While it is primarily an initiation, it is an initiation which anticipates the whole Christian life, here and hereafter. It is, we believe, because of this anticipation of the whole Christian life in Baptism that the baptismal pattern appears so richly in the pages of the New Testament, even apart from passages where Baptism in itself is being discussed.⁷⁹

This Report has received a mixed reception. J. A. T. Robinson comments approvingly, "The emphases of this Report are all ones that have come out of the new 'high' doctrine of the Church and Sacraments that is characteristic of the Ecumenical Movement."⁸⁰ Robert G. Bratcher, on the other hand, believes that the conclusions reached are by "constantly disregarding the critical and literary problems involved . . . and by adopting an approach . . . which forces Scripture to apparent theological positions established in advance."⁸¹

Other churches, too, have been active in the study of Holy Baptism. In 1946 the National Council of the Reformed Church in France appointed

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁰J. A. T. Robinson, Review of "The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism," Scottish Journal of Theology, XIII (1960), 99.

⁸¹Robert G. Bratcher, "The Church of Scotland's Report on Baptism," Review and Expositor, LIV (April 1957), 205.

a Commission on Baptism. A result of this was Pierre Ch. Marcel's The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism, the English translation of which appeared in 1953. Marcel finds the covenant of grace the sole theological basis for infant Baptism. Therefore Baptism should not be withheld from infants, if they are the children of believers, or rather, if "at least one of the child's parents avows belief in the Lord's promise."⁸² Churches that have departed from this rule, however, bear "a heavy responsibility."⁸³

Already in the 1930's the Congregational Union of England and Wales was discussing the two sacraments, the Lord's Supper and Baptism, and the matter was later taken up by Nathaniel Micklem and J. S. Whale.⁸⁴

The Ancient Catholic Church, in a Report issued in 1955, according to Beasley-Murray, regards infant Baptism as the unchallenged practice of the Christian Church from the beginning, and the idea of believer's Baptism something that is quite modern resulting from the Renaissance idea of human individualism and autonomy.⁸⁵

The Baptist Church is intimately involved in contemporary discussions on Baptism, since it has always insisted exclusively on believer's Baptism and Baptism by immersion. The Baptist position has been considerably strengthened, in the minds of many, by the turns some recent studies have taken, for example Karl Barth's. However, there is by no means

⁸²Marcel, p. 234.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Payne, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁵Aland, p. 23.

perfect unanimity within the ranks of the Baptists, as has already been indicated in the works of Clark⁸⁶ and Carr.⁸⁷ In preparation for its eighth Baptist World Conference, Ernest Payne states,

a Commission on the Doctrine of Baptism was set up. It was soon clear that there were wide differences of viewpoint and practice among the Baptists, and that with all other Christians they must give themselves to a renewed study of the New Testament. After the Congress, therefore, a statement and a questionnaire--The Doctrine of Baptism (1951)--were issued by the Baptist World Alliance and the pamphlet has helped to stimulate thought and discussion in many different countries.⁸⁸

Possibly more so than anywhere, the churches in Germany have been forced to restudy the doctrine and practice of Baptism in view of recent criticism of infant Baptism, current problems regarding its administration, and the challenge of Communism. Wolfgang Metzger's book, referred to earlier,⁸⁹ is actually an essay delivered to a Conference of the Württemberg Evangelical Landeskirchen held at Bad Boll in 1961. The nature of his treatment and his conclusions give a good idea of the unrest that was apparent here.

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) adopted a "Declaration Concerning the Doctrine of Holy Baptism," at its convention in Ansbach in 1950. The Declaration consists of theses and antitheses which take into account current problems in connection with Baptism. The Declaration, in brief, emphasizes that Baptism is based on Christ's

⁸⁶Supra, p. 16.

⁸⁷Supra, p. 18.

⁸⁸Payne, p. 23.

⁸⁹Supra, p. 13.

institution, Matt. 28:18-20; that it is a means of grace; that the power of Baptism comes from Christ's saving work and comes to the water through the power of the Word, Eph. 5:26; that Baptism effects what Christ's death and resurrection has effected, namely, justification, regeneration, the inauguration of the life of the new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness, Rom. 6:3-4; faith does not make Baptism, but receives the blessings offered and worked through Baptism, therefore he who has been baptized retains the sign of Baptism all his life; for this reason the call to repentance must be sounded continually, Mark 16:16; little children, too, should be brought to Baptism, for they are by nature sinful and in need of the redemption Christ has won also for them; in Baptism they are incorporated into the body of the Christ, become members of His Church, and receive the Spirit.⁹⁰

Writing in the London Quarterly and Holborn Review, A. Marcus Ward reviews some of the thinking going on in the Methodist Church in regard to Baptism. He says that recent discussions must eventually be brought to bear on the Methodist Service Orders, but as yet they are "too fluid and inconclusive to justify the composition of new orders of service." Yet, since the Methodist Conference has already approved Statements on Holy Baptism (1952) and on Church Membership (1961), Ward feels that the Church is committed to some degree of revision of its service order.⁹¹

⁹⁰F. E. Mayer, "A German Lutheran Declaration of the Doctrine of Holy Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (November 1950), 855-860.

⁹¹A. Marcus Ward, "The Methodist Orders of Service for Baptism and the Public Reception of New Members," The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, CLXXXVII (July 1962), 207.

The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States has also worked on the revision of its Baptismal Service and attempted

to take a forward step in clarifying fundamental principles of our liturgical inheritance in terms consonant with the teaching of Holy Scripture and the ancient Fathers, in the light of the best historical scholarship of the present day, and in loyalty to the truth as our Church has received the same.⁹²

As a result, the Commission recommended changes in the Baptismal Service in connection with the length of the service (a frequent criticism was that it was too long), clarification of the rubrics to meet modern needs and demands, and the simplification of the ritual text.⁹³ The Commission affirmed baptismal regeneration⁹⁴ and the gift of the Spirit in Baptism.⁹⁵

The Church of South India came into existence in 1947 when the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist churches united. The importance of Baptism in this union is stated thus:

The framers of the Constitution, living in the midst of a non-Christian world and knowing that Christians of all denominations formed a tiny minority in South India, were clear from the first that the Christian Church in South India was and must be a visible community of men and women who had been admitted into that fellowship by a definite act of initiation, Baptism, and whose full membership in that fellowship was marked by their participation in another visible act, the Holy Communion.⁹⁶

Their Book of Common Worship has two baptismal liturgies: one for

⁹²The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Prayer Book Studies (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1950), p. 5.

⁹³Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁶Church of South India, The Nature of the Church (Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1952), p. 6.

believer's Baptism, and one for the Baptism of infants.⁹⁷ Moreover, the Church of South India considers Confirmation to be the completion of Baptism.⁹⁸ The Church of South India's Baptism and Confirmation Orders would appear to be composite orders that reflect the traditions of the churches that make up the Church of South India.

The doctrine of Baptism has also figured prominently in discussion on church union between the churches of North India and Pakistan. It is proposed that "both infant Baptism and believer's Baptism shall be accepted as alternative practices." In the case of the former, before admission to communicant membership, evidence of repentance, faith and love must be given through Confirmation by a bishop. While Baptism is seen as "a sign and seal of engrafting into Christ and entrance into the covenant of grace," full Christian initiation is a process which is concluded only when the initiate participates for the first time in Holy Communion. A minister who has scruples in regard to the administration of Baptism to infants is free to invite some other minister of the church to perform the rite. When believer's Baptism is practised, the children of Christian parents are to be brought to a service of Infant Dedication.⁹⁹

The Lutheran World Federation

The First Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Lund, Sweden,

⁹⁷Church of South India, The Book of Common Worship (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 102-122.

⁹⁸Thomas S. Garrett, Worship in the Church of South India (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 36.

⁹⁹Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1957), pp. 5-7.

in 1947, speaks of Baptism in fairly general terms. It indicated that the Sacraments have to do with Christ's work for us, not any work or sacrifice we offer him; that our fundamental incorporation into Christ is through Baptism, which, as a washing of regeneration, sets us in an entirely new context; that this engrafting into Christ is not a mere metaphor, but a real thing. Moreover, it emphasized that Baptism is not merely an act of initiation, but that it affects the whole life of a Christian, that it is a daily dying with Christ and rising with him. Finally, just as circumcision was the seal of membership in the Old Covenant, so Baptism is the seal of the New Covenant which God has made with us. Hence the Church has the duty in its preaching to impress upon the baptized the meaning of his fellowship with Christ so that this may ever become more meaningful to him.¹⁰⁰ In regard to the subjects of Baptism it stated:

Remembering that God's grace is always 'prevenient grace,' our Lutheran Church firmly maintains that infants should receive Holy Baptism We baptize infants, because the significance of Baptism does not depend on our faith, but upon Christ's institution of it and His Sovereign action in it.¹⁰¹

At the Second Assembly of the Federation at Hannover, Germany, in 1952, the main statement on Baptism is found in the second part of the Study Document, "Das lebendige Wort in einer verantwortlichen Kirche." Here we find the familiar Lutheran emphasis that Baptism rests upon Christ's command, that it is the Word in and with the water that gives Baptism its

¹⁰⁰Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden, June 30-July 6, 1947. Summary Report (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publications House, 1948), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 15.

power, that it is the new birth in which we die and rise again with Christ.¹⁰² Then, mindful of current criticism of infant Baptism, the following is stated:

Auch kann man dieser Gefahr nicht dadurch entgehen, dass man die Praxis der Kindertaufe aufgibt. Denn die Gefahr des Abfalls besteht besonders in Zeiten der Verfolgung, auch für diejenigen, die als Erwachsene getauft worden sind. Es ist für das Verständnis der Taufe als Bad der Wiedergeburt besonders wichtig, dass die Kindertaufe als echte Taufe und Bad der Wiedergeburt festgehalten wird, besonders heute, da in weiten Kreisen der protestantischen Welt eine starke Kritik der Kinder-taufe sich regt. Das Wesen des Glaubens als reiner Empfang des Lebens und des Werkes Jesu Christi ist in der Kindertaufe gegen alle Umdeutung des Glaubens in eine von dem Wort und Werk Gottes losgelöste Gläubigkeit festgehalten (Matth. 18, 3). Die Auffassung der Kindertaufe als eine Taufe ohne Glauben ist unbiblisch und unreformatorisch.¹⁰³

Finally, a pertinent reference is made to the oneness of Baptism:

Durch die Taufe ist aber der Mensch aus einer Einsamkeit, die letztlich die Einsamkeit der Sünde und des Todes ist, genommen und in die wahre Gemeinschaft mit Gott und den Menschen berufen. Es ist die Verantwortung der Kirche, diese Gemeinschaft, die von Gott gegeben ist, anzuerkennen und in Wort und Tat zu bezeugen.¹⁰⁴

Only brief references to Baptism were made at the Third Lutheran World Federation Assembly held at Minneapolis in 1957. In the "Theses on Christ Frees and Unites," it was mentioned that Baptism is the means by which man is incorporated into the church,¹⁰⁵ and that "in the sacrament of

¹⁰²Das lebendige Wort in einer verantwortlichen Kirche; Offizieller Bericht der zweiten Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Welte bundes, Hannover, 1952, herausgegeben von Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist (Hannover: Lutherhaus-Verlag, 1952), p. 133.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵The Proceedings of the Third Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U. S. A., August 15-25, 1957, edited by Carl E. Lund-Quist (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958), p. 85.

Baptism we are brought under the power of the resurrection and are born anew to a living hope, waiting for the redemption of our bodies."¹⁰⁶ Then, amongst the recommendations of the Commission of Theology there was one which urged an investigation of the teaching of Baptism together with studies on justification, the Lord's Supper, ministry, and church polity. It was also stated that this study should "be concrete and central and that it be applied to the present situation within theology and within the Church."¹⁰⁷

Kurt Frör reported in The Lutheran World that the Third Assembly also asked the Commission on Education to make a study on Confirmation. He points out that propoganda for the atheistic "Jugendweihe" (the ceremony of dedication of youth to Communist ideology with preparatory indoctrination) has confronted the churches with the task of rethinking the whole complex of problems and of giving new ways in the outward order of Confirmation. This development, which has led in some instances to a radical break with the traditional form, is still continuing and it cannot yet be seen where it will lead.¹⁰⁸ At a Seminar held in connection with these matters, it was found that historical research into the origins of Confirmation reveals evidence which is "not sufficiently unequivocal for the question of its theological interpretation."¹⁰⁹ Rather, instruction

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ Kurt Frör, "Confirmation: A Lutheran Federation Seminar," Lutheran World, VIII (September 1961), 174.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 176.

and catechetical examination belong to the essence of Confirmation. Instruction, however, should be more than a mere preparation for the Lord's Supper. Confirmation, too, is in no way an amplification, completion, or renewal of the baptismal covenant, for the necessary baptismal recollection occurs Sunday after Sunday in every congregation through Word and Sacrament; Baptism establishes full membership in the church, since by it the individual is incorporated into the body of Christ, and Confirmation adds nothing to it in this respect.¹¹⁰

Again, there was no specific treatment of Baptism at the Helsinki Assembly of the Federation. The emphasis here was on Justification. But in his lecture, "Grace for the World," Gerhard Gloege refers briefly to the relationship of justification to Baptism,¹¹¹ and in his lecture, "The New Song of Praise," Andar Lumbantobing shows how Baptism is essentially related to Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. In Baptism, we, too, are buried and raised up again to a new life. Furthermore, the Spirit works through Baptism a rebirth by means of the water and the Word. Although this rebirth is a one-time occurrence and is complete in itself, it must be renewed again and again through repentance and faith.¹¹² In the Study Document, "on Justification," Baptism is said to be that act whereby "God claims the person as His own, uniting him to the church, the body of Christ." And though the frustrations, disappointments and

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 176-180.

¹¹¹Messages of the Helsinki Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 20.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 73.

tragedies of life carry away many of the testimonies of God's goodness, Baptism remains unaffected. It is "the perennial reminder that man's salvation depends upon God's loving deed in Christ and not upon human impulse or endurance."¹¹³

The World Council of Churches

At the first World Council on Faith and Order, Lausanne, 1927, one of the subjects discussed was "The Sacraments."¹¹⁴ The Report on this discussion says regarding Baptism:

We believe that in Baptism administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the remission of sins we are baptized by one Spirit into one body. By this statement it is not meant to ignore the differences in conception, interpretation and mode which exist among us.¹¹⁵

Further, in the theses drawn up by this Section on "The Sacraments" and "The Unity of Christendom and the Relation thereto of Existing Churches," Baptism is said to be the divine seal, imposed in the name of Jesus Christ on each individual, a vocation addressed to the soul, a prophecy of unfoldings, offered or promised The Sacrament of Regeneration and the Sacrament of Communion fundamentally unite all the disciples of our Saviour and establish the catholic basis of a true Christendom.¹¹⁶

¹¹³Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹⁴Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927, edited by H. N. Bate (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), pp. 286-320.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 390-391.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 392-393.

In regard to the Sacraments in general it was held:

That in the Sacraments there is an outward sign and an inward grace, and that the Sacraments are means of grace through which God works invisibly in us.¹¹⁷

The Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh in 1937 again took up the matter of the Sacraments. In the Report of Section III, "The Church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments," most attention is given to such matters as "The Authority for the Sacraments," "The Nature of the Sacraments," "The Number of the Sacraments," "The Validity of the Sacraments," but there are also specific statements on Baptism and the Eucharist. The Statement on Baptism reads:

The reunited Church will observe the rule that all members of the visible Church are admitted by Baptism; which is a gift of God's redeeming love to the Church; and, administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is a sign and seal of Christian discipleship in obedience to our Lord's command.¹¹⁸

It will be noted that the subjects of Baptism are not mentioned here, and the Baptist delegates indicated that they took the statement to refer only to believers, those capable of making a personal confession of faith.

The Report continues:

In the course of the discussion it appeared that there were further elements of faith and practice in relation to Baptism about which disagreement existed. Since the time available precluded the extended discussion of such points as:

- (a) Baptismal regeneration.
- (b) The relation of Faith and Grace.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 472.

¹¹⁸Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937, edited by Leonard Hodgson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 321.

- (c) The true nature of the Church.
- (d) The admission of unbaptized persons to Holy Communion.
- (e) The relation of Confirmation to Baptism.

The section is unable to express an opinion as to how far they would constitute obstacles to proposals for a united Church.¹¹⁹

The Third World Conference on Faith and Order did not meet until 1952 in Lund. In the meantime important statements had been made on Baptism by a number of the theologians discussed above, and the ecumenical scene had been somewhat transformed by the formation of The World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948. Moreover, in 1938 and 1939 three international Theological Commissions were appointed to study (i) the Church, (ii) Ways of Worship, and (iii) Intercommunion. The reports of these Commissions were published for study in 1951 under the title Ways of Worship. Payne summarizes these as follows:

The first laid before the Lund Conference an important series of statements by the main Christian communions, each of which included brief reference to Baptism. The second Commission noted the current discussions on Baptism, but its concern was with liturgical worship in general. It was the third Commission--that on Intercommunion--which opened up a new line of discussion on Baptism.¹²⁰

This "new line of discussion" was necessary because attempts to achieve intercommunion in the basis of the nature and practice of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper were completely abortive.¹²¹ Thus it was recommended that

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 321-322.

¹²⁰Payne, pp. 20-21.

¹²¹Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund, August 15th to 28th, 1952, edited by Oliver S. Tomkins (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 49-59.

all Churches should give attention to the relationship of their theology and practice of Baptism to their theology and practice of the Lord's Supper. Our attention has been drawn to the essay by Professor T. F. Torrance in the volume Intercommunion and to his suggestion that "to refuse the Eucharist to those baptized into Christ Jesus and incorporated into His resurrection-body (i.e., the Church) amounts either to a denial of the transcendent reality of Holy Baptism or to attempted schism within the Body of Christ" (p. 339). We believe that this challenging statement might provide the starting point for further fruitful ecumenical discussion.¹²²

The Second Assembly of The World Council of Churches at Evanston, 1954, did not discuss Baptism in detail, but two important statements were made in the Report of Section 1, "Faith and Order: Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches," namely,

We all receive His gift of Baptism whereby, in faith, we are engrafted in Him even while we have not yet allowed it fully to unite us with each other.¹²³

It was furthermore pointed out

We must learn afresh the implications of the one Baptism for our sharing in the one Eucharist. For some, but not for all, it follows that the churches can only be conformed to the dying and rising again in Christ, which both Sacraments set forth, if they renounce their eucharistic separateness. We must explore the deeper meaning of these two sacramental gifts of the Lord to His Church as they are rooted in His own redeeming work.¹²⁴

In 1957, the North American Conference on Faith and Order met at Oberlin, Ohio, and discussed amongst other matters a "Working Paper on Baptism" prepared by the Theological Commission appointed after the Lund Assembly to study "the nature of the Church in close relation both to the

¹²²Ibid., p. 56.

¹²³The Evanston Report. The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954, edited by W. A. Visser't Hooft (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 86.

¹²⁴Ibid., pp. 90-91.

doctrine of the person and work of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁵ The Report, headed, "Baptism into Christ," depicted the situation existing at present amongst the churches regarding Baptism and pointed to the objectives of the study, namely, to discover to what extent Christian Baptism was an element in the unity and disunity of the various churches, to study Scripture teaching on Baptism, to examine recent scholarly studies on Baptism, and the like.¹²⁶ The Report issued after the discussion and intended for transmission to the member churches for information and study drew attention in its First Part to "Affirmations of Agreement," which included such matters as the primacy of God's act in Baptism, the spiritual act as being more important than the external method of Baptism, Baptism as a means of entry into the universal Church, not only into a particular denomination, and that considerable slackness regarding the practice and teaching concerning Baptism existed. The Second Part was a "Statement of Differences," which showed that some affirm the necessity of believer's Baptism, others the necessity also of infant Baptism; that for some Baptism is an actual effecting of regeneration, for others the symbol of a spiritual change; but the most significant differences are the different views on the doctrine of the Church, its nature, authority, and order. The final section summarized and pinpointed several matters for further serious study.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Payne, p. 21.

¹²⁶The Nature of the Unity We Seek. Official Report of The North American Conference on Faith and Order, September 3-10, Oberlin, Ohio, edited by Paul S. Minear (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), p. 195.

¹²⁷Ibid., pp. 195-199.

Thus, although the "Working Paper" began with the confident words, "Within the disunity of the churches, the unity of Baptism has remained," the discussions at the Conference and the Report soon made it clear

that the widespread mutual recognition of the validity of Baptism wherever administered was no solid basis for affirming the unity of the Church in practice, and that discussions of the subject raised old familiar controversies. The effort to use the rite of Baptism as a simple approval to the unity of the Church turned out to be one of those apparent short-cuts which lead into a blind alley.¹²⁸

The World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order Report on "The Meaning of Baptism," was presented in 1960. This was the result of a most intensive investigation, which, in its introduction, traced the increasing concern about the doctrine of Baptism amongst scholars, churches, and various groups of churches, including The World Council of Churches. It was fully aware of the failure to make any real progress towards unity in the doctrine of Baptism on the method tried and found wanting at Oberlin, for this fixed too much attention on the external rite of Baptism. Therefore, it states as its central task "to elucidate the connection between Baptism and Christology,"¹²⁹ for,

if we wish to understand the meaning of Christian Baptism, we must look to the saving work of Jesus himself. And if we wish to understand the meaning of Jesus' Baptism, we must look at it in connection with the Baptism of John.¹³⁰

¹²⁸One Lord One Baptism, World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism. Presented to the Commission 1960 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), p. 47.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 48.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 49.

Thus the study concentrated first on the relation of Baptism to Heilsgeschichte, and secondly, the theological implications of this, such as the meaning or participation, the relation of faith to Baptism, the significance of Baptism for life and the Lord's Supper. Finally, implications for the present-day life of the Church are discussed.¹³¹

So that the laity might also be brought into these discussions on Baptism, The Department on the Laity of the World Council of Churches published a Study of Baptism and Confirmation, Ye Are Baptized, by Lukas Vischer,¹³² which gives summaries of how the ancient church and major denominations today understand Baptism. The final chapter is "An Ecumenical Study of Baptism," which points out the ecumenical implications of the "one Baptism" and the meaning that this implies for the baptized.¹³³

The Third Assembly of The World Council of Churches at New Delhi in 1961 made several significant statements on Baptism. It admitted that despite the fact that "the mutual recognition of Baptism, in one sense or another, has been a foundation stone in the ecumenical discussions of the present century," yet the studies of Faith and Order have revealed "deep and wide divergences in theory and practice amongst the churches of The World Council of Churches," and urged

that these studies be widely circulated amongst the churches and that the churches in each place study the meaning of Baptism

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 50-71. The theology of the whole Report will be considered in greater detail, Infra., pp. 63ff.

¹³²Lukas Vischer, Ye Are Baptized, A Study on Baptism and Confirmation Liturgies as the Initiation to the Ministry of the Laity (n.p., The Department on the Laity World Council of Churches, n.d.).

¹³³Ibid., pp. 44-46.

together, and in the light of such studies to seek to come to a deeper understanding of the one Baptism by which all have been sealed into the one Lord through their one faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴

Further, it was stated:

Our ecumenical fellowship is essentially based upon the fact that we all want to be obedient to God's commandment in being baptized "into the body" (1 Cor. 12, 13). Our failure to share in the one Table of the Lord, to live and act as one visible and united body, is an obvious contradiction to the baptismal gift that we all claim to possess. This contradiction can be explained in some cases by unjustified rationalizations and must therefore be overcome. In other cases, it reflects an obvious lack of agreement as to the true nature of the fellowship into which Baptism introduces us.¹³⁵

However, some advances towards unity have been made, for

It is important that disagreement as to the meanings and modes of Baptism does not now entail outright denial or nonrecognition of non-approved Baptism. Even more important is the wide agreement that the initiative in Baptism is from God by his Holy Spirit and that the baptized person's appropriate response must be expressed in the entirety of the life of faith. Such an understanding of Baptism would suggest to those churches which practise infant Baptism that this entails a more serious enterprise of Christian nurture than is often the case . . . and to those churches that practise "believer's" Baptism, that they should reconsider the place of infants and children in the household of faith.¹³⁶

Although the Theological Commissions of Faith and Order are today directing themselves more specifically to other theological issues, Baptism has not been forgotten. The "Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission and Working Committee," which met in Montreal in 1963, drew attention to the work done through The World Council of Churches to help

¹³⁴New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961, edited by W. A. Visser't Hooft (New York: Association Press, 1962), pp. 118-119.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 127.

¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 127-128.

churches in their understanding and practice of Baptism, and put on record:

It is of the opinion, however, that much still needs to be done in many member churches to help Christians to understand their Baptism as including commitment to the service of Jesus Christ in the Church and in the world. It therefore recommends continued attention by the Commission to the expression of the meaning of Baptism in the life of the churches.¹³⁷

¹³⁷Commission on Faith and Order. Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission and Working Committee, Montreal, Canada, 1963 (Geneva: Commission on Faith and Order, 1963), pp. 22-23.

CHAPTER III

WHY BAPTISM HAS BECOME A BASIC ECUMENICAL FACTOR

The foregoing survey of recent discussion on the doctrine of Holy Baptism reveals a number of reasons why this doctrine has been a matter of particular interest to individual theologians, churches, and ecumenical organizations. It concluded with a summary of the attention that The World Council of Churches has paid over the years to the doctrine, and the serious attempts it has made to find a unanimity within its member churches both in the meaning and the practice of this Sacrament. Our purpose in this present chapter is to investigate more fully the reasons that have prompted the concentration of attention upon the doctrine as an essential ecumenical factor within The World Council of Churches.

General Motives

First, there are several general motives, motives which bring all doctrines, not only Baptism, under close scrutiny. Ecumenical vision, Cardinal Bea points out, sees the whole world and all its confessions. From this wholeness is selected, first, what is held in common; this, at the same time, aids in distinguishing more clearly the remaining differences. "for it is a well-known principle of method that in obscure questions one starts from what is clear, advancing step by step into the obscure."¹ Establishing what we have in common gives cause for joy, and

¹Ecumenical Dialogue at Harvard. The Roman Catholic-Protestant Colloquium, edited by Samuel H. Miller and G. Ernest Wright (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 32.

this provides a suitable atmosphere for discussing differences. Therefore it would be a mistake to assume that ecumenical interest has centered exclusively on Baptism; it has been but one facet of the many-sided ecumenical diamond. And yet it is a facet that has received special attention.

Another impulse of a general nature that has occasioned ecumenical interest in Baptism has been the desire to utilize as much as possible the results of recent studies on Baptism by individual theologians and church study groups. One of the objectives of the Oberlin Conference was: "To discern the recent changes in both scholarly and popular attitudes toward the significance of this event."² In addition, Baptism has been one of the many subjects that has come under the influence of new approaches and techniques of Biblical interpretation. Paul Minear writes, apposite to this:

The changed context may be attributed . . . to the radical changes in Biblical studies since the last tempest over baptism. There are new ways of listening to the Bible, of interpreting each passage, and of relating each text to the central message Historians have furnished clearer and more accurate pictures of the ecclesiastical development in the first century, with the varieties of organization and liturgical practice. All of these have affected both the content and the direction of current thinking on the meaning of the sacrament.³

While general impulses such as these have undoubtedly made their contribution to ecumenical interest in Baptism, of far greater significance are three essential ecumenical goals, the reaching of which has been vitally related to the doctrine of Baptism: Intercommunion, the necessity

²The Nature of the Unity We Seek. Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio, edited by Paul S. Minear (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), p. 195.

³Paul S. Minear, "The Mystery of Baptism," Religion in Life, XX (Spring Number 1951), 227.

of one Baptism on the mission field, and the resolution of the apparent unity in disunity paradox.

Intercommunion

There is by no means complete agreement amongst writers on the ecumenical movement as to exactly what goals the movement should strive for, and in which ways unity should manifest itself. Should it be a unity of mutual recognition, or a unity of co-operative action? Or should it be organic unity, the most manifest form of unity? These are the questions Angus Dun asked the Oberlin Conference in his opening address.⁴ Matthew Spinka asks whether the basic ecumenical goal should be uniformity, unity-in-union, or diversity-in-unity.⁵ One of the most recent and most clearly articulated statements on the goals of Christian unity was made in the Report of the Section on Unity to the New Delhi Assembly of The World Council of Churches. It stated:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for tasks to which God calls his people.⁶

⁴The Nature of the Unity We Seek, pp. 31-43.

⁵Matthew Spinka, The Quest for Church Unity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 82.

⁶The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of The World Council of Churches, 1961, edited by Visser't Hooft (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 116.

The Report, however, immediately points out that "we are not yet of a common mind on the interpretation and the means of achieving the goal we have described."⁷ Even so, it is insistent that unity among Christians cannot be less than this.

The Report then examines briefly each aspect of this ecumenical goal. We are chiefly interested here in what it says concerning the Lord's Supper.

It is this:

Nowhere are the divisions of our churches more clearly evident and painful than at the Lord's Table. But the Lord's Table is one, not many. In humility the churches must seek that one Table. We would urge the Commission on Faith and Order to continue study and consultation to help us identify and remove those barriers which now keep us from partaking together of the one bread and sharing the one cup.⁸

While there has been a considerable difference of opinion concerning just what kind of a unity the ecumenical movement should strive for and how this should be manifested, there has never been any doubt that intercommunion, however interpreted, is an essential part of the unity of the churches. This was evident already at the Edinburgh World Conference on Faith and Order in 1937, where it was stated:

We regard sacramental intercommunion as a necessary part of any satisfactory Church unity. Such intercommunion, as between two or more Churches, implies that all concerned are true Churches, or true branches of the one Church.⁹

The same thought was expressed at the Lund Assembly in 1952, where

⁷Ibid., p. 117.

⁸Ibid., p. 120.

⁹Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937, edited by Leonard Hodgson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 331.

reference was made to the Edinburgh statement, and a Report on a full study on Intercommunion presented. This submitted:

We are painfully aware that as long as we remain divided at the Lord's Table we cannot fully enjoy and express the unity which has been given us in Christ.¹⁰

At first it was hoped, although there were dissenting voices to this,¹¹ that a satisfactory reconciliation of differences could be achieved to allow the practice of intercommunion. But when the Council met at Evanston in 1952 it was obvious that little headway had been made. The Council purposed to join churches together, and yet, "thirty-five years after Lausanne, very few churches which were not de jure or de facto in communion with each other in 1927, are now enjoying unrestricted eucharistic fellowship," Eugene Fairweather wrote.¹² Evanston heard the story of failure in the effort to achieve intercommunion; but it also heard the suggestion of a new way to approach the goal, namely,

We must learn afresh the implications of the one Baptism for our sharing in the one Eucharist. For some, but not for all, it follows that the churches can only be conformed to the dying and rising again in Christ, which both Sacraments set forth, if they renounce their eucharistic separateness. We must explore the deeper meaning of these two sacramental gifts of the Lord to His Church as they are rooted in His own redeeming work.¹³

¹⁰Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund, August 15th to 28th, 1952, edited by Oliver S. Tomkins (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 50.

¹¹Edinburgh Report, p. 333.

¹²Eugene Fairweather, "Worship and the Sacraments: Some Ecumenical Trends," Religion in Life, XXXII (Spring 1963), p. 202.

¹³The Evanston Report. The Second Assembly of The World Council of Churches, 1954, edited by Visser't Hooft (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), pp. 90-91.

When The World Council of Churches met at New Delhi in 1961, the Section on Unity in its Report drew attention to the serious problems that were hindering intercommunion; but the emphasis on the urgency to break through these barriers was still there. It said:

It is intolerable and incomprehensible that a common love of God should not be expressed and deepened by common participation in the Holy Communion which he offers.¹⁴

It added, furthermore,

The urgency of finding a way to break through the present impasse on the question of intercommunion makes it imperative that denominations and confessions undertake a new examination of their eucharistic doctrines and liturgies in the light of all these new factors introduced by the ecumenical situation.¹⁵

More important for our present purpose is that it directly linked failure to reach agreement concerning eucharistic fellowship to failure rightly to understand and appreciate Baptism. Thus the Report:

Our failure to share in the one Table of the Lord, to live and act as one visible and united body, is an obvious contradiction to the baptismal gift that we all claim to possess Where does our Baptism lead us?¹⁶

So it is that attention has come to be centered more and more on Baptism as a means of resolving the deadlock in regard to intercommunion.

The Missionary Situation

Already at Lausanne in 1927 it was claimed that in the mission fields more than anywhere else unity is essential.¹⁷ At a recent conference of

¹⁴The New Delhi Report, p. 124.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁷Lausanne Report, p. 539.

the International Missionary Council, a speaker for the "Younger Churches" urged:

In the lands of the younger churches divided witness is a crippling handicap. We of the younger churches feel this very keenly. While unity may be desirable in the lands of the older churches, it is imperative in those of the younger churches.¹⁸

Stephen C. Neill explains:

The real significance of Baptism is much more fully understood by the convert, and even by the non-Christian, where the Church stands over against a non-Christian faith and manner of life Baptism is the great and tragic reality. It involves the rejection of the one totality and the acceptance of another. It puts the individual beyond the possibility of compromise. He has died to the old to embrace the new.¹⁹

A case in point is given by Gustav Stählin in his essay, "Lutherische Ethik und Missionspraxis," given at the Hannover Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation. He cites the instance of a well-educated Hindu who refused Baptism, claiming that Baptism is the mark of separation. By being baptized he would become a member of one of the many Christian churches in India, whereas by remaining unbaptized he belonged to the world-wide unity of Christian discipleship.²⁰

Since Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation and separation, it is regarded as essential that there be unity of doctrine and practice in this rite particularly in the mission fields. Carr comments:

¹⁸A Joint Report. Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), p. 5.

¹⁹Cited by Paul S. Minear, "The Mystery of Baptism," p. 226.

²⁰Das lebendige Wort in einer verantwortlichen Kirche: Offizieller Bericht der zweiten Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes, Hannover 1952, edited by Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist (Hannover: Lutherhaus-Verlag, 1952), p. 67.

The question of Baptism is germane to the world mission of the Church. Baptism ought not only say something to the Church itself but also to the world. What it does say in both realms should avoid contradiction so that it does not give an "uncertain sound."²¹

Again, it is universally agreed that as there is one Lord, and one faith, so there is but one Baptism. The vital question is, however, which is this one Baptism? Is it infant Baptism, or believer's Baptism, or both? Is it Baptism, complete in itself, or Baptism requiring to be completed by Confirmation? The Church of South India has allowed for diversity in its baptismal orders. But many members of The World Council of Churches do not approve of this principle of resolving the problem of Baptism, for many question its theological basis as well as its ability to exhibit to the heathen world the oneness of Baptism that is regarded as essential. The need for a satisfactory definition and implementation of "one Baptism" on the mission front has therefore become a matter of urgent concern to ecumenists.

As far as the South India experiment in church union is concerned, it is disputed whether it will succeed or not. Stephen Neill is hopeful that it will succeed.²² George H. Tavard thinks otherwise, for in his opinion it can solve no more than superficial difficulties. "At its best, it covers up doctrinal divergences with a common experience of brotherly fellowship. At its worst, it dilutes various traditions into a soft-pedaled Christianity."²³

²¹Warren Carr, Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 192.

²²Stephen Neill, Christian Partnership (London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 118-119.

²³George H. Tavard, The Catholic Approach to Protestantism (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 81.

Unity in Disunity

Right from the outset, The World Council of Churches has been aware of both agreements and disagreements within its member churches. Perhaps this has been expressed most clearly by the Faith and Order Report to the Evanston Assembly in 1954 which was headed: "Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches."²⁴ The Commissions of the Council have untiringly examined the basic doctrines of the Christian religion to determine what measures of agreement and disagreement exist, for it is realized by most that there can be no true unity without as much agreement as possible in the basic doctrines. Visser't Hooft writes:

Church unity means unity in those things which are indispensable for the life of the Church; the common faith, the common sacraments, the common ministry, the common life in each place where the Church is planted. An ecumenical unity which goes together with disagreement on essential questions of doctrine . . . falls short of the unity to which the Church is called.²⁵

The experience of Commissions of The World Council of Churches, however, has been that, while the Lord's Table is a communion, "we find ourselves divided at his table and by his table."²⁶ In discussing Baptism it found that "our most significant differences appear to be rooted in our different views of the Church."²⁷ The starting place for a more intimate

²⁴The Evanston Report, pp. 82-98.

²⁵Cited by Bernard Leeming, "General Problems of Ecumenism," The Churches and Christian Unity, edited by R. J. W. Bevan (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 38.

²⁶The Nature of the Unity We Seek, p. 199.

²⁷Ibid., p. 198.

manifestation of doctrinal unity thus could not be found in the doctrines of the Lord's Supper or the Church. Baptism, however, seemed to offer better prospects of success. To a certain extent there was already oneness of Baptism in practice inasmuch as churches in the majority of cases recognize as valid the Baptisms joining-members have received in other churches. Even the Roman Catholic Church, through no less an authority than Cardinal Bea, says:

By a valid Baptism--even conferred outside the Roman Catholic Church--the baptized person is organically united to Christ and his mystical Body, that he becomes by virtue of grace the adopted son of God and that in consequence all those who are validly baptized are brothers . . . our separated brethren. These separated brethren the Church also calls her sons, an expression that she does not use and never would use of the non-baptized, the non-Christian.²⁸

But the unity in Baptism is seen to be much deeper than this. At the Oberlin Conference it was pointed out:

All churches regard Baptism as the means of entry into the universal Church and not only into membership of a particular denomination; the full implications of this are not always realized. The impossibility in a divided Christendom of finding our unity in the outward and visible Church obscures for Christians the fact of their real unity in Christ through baptism.²⁹

As a result of this it was urged:

We must devote ourselves to a fresh examination of and submission to the biblical teaching concerning Baptism. We must also make a reassessment of our own traditions in order to arrive at a more adequate understanding of what God intends in this ordinance or sacrament for the new life in Christ of the believer.³⁰

²⁸Cardinal Bea, The Unity of Christians, edited by Bernard Leeming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 201-202.

²⁹The Nature of the Unity We Seek, p. 196.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 196-197.

The ultimate purpose of this renewed study of Baptism, however, was to resolve, if possible, the paradox of unity in disunity, and to achieve oneness in teaching and practice. Thus, the Section on "Baptism into Christ," stated:

This unity, unity in Baptism, often formless and voiceless, yet presses two gifts on all who share it. One is a fresh and deep understanding of the greatness of Christ's Church and the failure of many of our present practices in Baptism and in church-membership and life to measure up to that greatness. The second is a sharper sense or urgency in our ecumenical task. The very fact of the unity already existing among Christians who share one Baptism and the new life expressed by it and growing out of it gives an almost irresistible impulse to press forward afresh in our assault on the root differences between us.³¹

For these reasons, then, the doctrine of Holy Baptism has become a focal point in ecumenical studies. And yet, in a certain sense, there is really nothing new in the emphasis. The Section on Unity reported to the New Delhi Assembly:

The mutual recognition of Baptism, in one sense or another, has been a foundation stone in the ecumenical discussions of the present century.³²

But, the Report continued,

Closer examination of the assumptions and implications of this fact invariably brings to light deep and wide divergences in theory and practice amongst the churches of the World Council of Churches.³³

It is our purpose in the next chapter to discuss some of the major "divergences in theory and practice" that have interfered with a more harmonious expression of the churches common baptismal unity.

³¹Ibid., pp. 198-199.

³²The New Delhi Report, pp. 118-119.

³³Ibid., p. 119.

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN SEEKING A UNITY IN BAPTISM

General Problems

There are a number of common problems which are encountered by ecumenists no matter what the doctrine may be when unity in teaching and practice is sought. One of these is the problem whether any doctrine can be taken more or less in isolation, for a doctrine is but one in a corpus of doctrines, and principles which govern the whole will also affect each of the parts. Thus the doctrine of Baptism, for example, is basically determined by one's attitude to Holy Scripture. And one's interpretation and use of passages of Scripture is governed by one's hermeneutical principles. Baptism, too, incorporates into the church. Accordingly, as the Oberlin Conference experienced, the doctrine of Baptism is intimately connected with the doctrine of the church.¹ The dilemma of the ecumenist, therefore, is whether he should, or can, proceed from general principles to specific instances, or whether he should, or can, proceed inductively from particular doctrines to those general principles which underlie all doctrines to a lesser or greater extent. In this connection, Eugene Fairweather writes:

It is obvious . . . that different conceptions of the church and conflicting views of the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the church play a large part in our mutual alienation in worship We cannot hope to deal adequately with the ecumenical problem of

¹The Nature of the Unity We Seek. Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio, edited by Paul S. Minear (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), p. 198.

worship and the Sacraments unless we keep our eyes open to the wider context within which that particular problem belongs.²

A second problem of a more general nature encountered by the ecumenist in trying to formulate a doctrine is to what use, if any, he can put the often widely divergent views of modern theologians. To be sure, even here it is possible to find some points of agreement, but the main theses are often diametrically opposed, as, for example, those of Barth and Cullmann on the one hand, and Jeremias and Aland, on the other, in regard to aspects of the doctrine of Baptism.³

It is possible that situations such as these can lead to a sort of agnosticism, which makes some people wonder if doctrinal agreement is ever possible, and if the most that can be hoped for is a co-operatio in externis, or a toleration of doctrinal diversity. Others feel, however, that differences of opinion amongst the scholars are merely a re-echo of the doctrinal differences that exist amongst the churches. This shows that there is at least some error in every position, and that therefore an entirely new approach to the doctrine should be made.

Still another problem which ecumenists meet in connection with all doctrines is the outcry against breaking ancient traditional denominational ties, church confessions, and treasured practices of the fathers. Some may tend to shrug this off as an irrelevancy, as does Clark when he says, "The precise pattern of the past is not necessarily sacrosanct."⁴ Maybe it is

²Eugene R. Fairweather, "Worship and the Sacraments: Some Ecumenical Ecumenical Trends," Religion in Life, XXXII (Spring 1963), 203.

³Supra, pp. 6-12.

⁴Christian Baptism, edited by Alec Gilmore (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 324.

not, but the matter is not quite so simple. The particular issues involved here were heavily underlined by Dr. August Lang when the Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order was discussing the Sacraments. He said:

It is impossible to reach any agreement on the subject before us today! That is what many people think, and we are all tempted at first to repeat it. For indeed when we look into history we see nothing but bitter conflicts in regard to the Sacraments, and these conflicts contributed not a little to the dismemberment of the Church. What was the reason for all this? It would be an error to ascribe it simply to opinionatedness or culpable obstinacy. The memory of the Reformers of this hospitable country, of Zwingli, Calvin and Vinet, to mention only a few--memories which we are glad to revive during this Conference--should suffice to banish any such suggestion. Those men searched the Scriptures, amid bitter sufferings, in order to secure a firm basis for their convictions, no matter what might be the consequences. And that applies not only to them but undoubtedly to their opponents as well. The conflicting doctrines with regard to the Sacraments have been sealed with the blood of martyrs, and have been maintained in hard fought wars. Let us pay homage to such heroic courage! How can it be imagined that we could shake the reputation of such men by the speeches or observations which we may offer here? We must leave every Church free to hold such opinions regarding the Sacraments as it desires to maintain, according to its understanding and to the enlightenment granted to it by the Holy Spirit in the past and in the present.⁵

Yet another ecumenical problem is the problem of language. George H. Tavard draws attention to this in the following statement from a World Council of Churches Committee:

The main problem is how one can formulate the ecclesiastical implications of a body in which so many different conceptions of the church are represented, without using the categories or language of one particular conception of the church.

Tavard's own comment on this is:

Posited in these terms, the problem can have no solution. The language adopted, for instance, at Evanston tends to show that the

⁵Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August: 3-21, 1927, edited by H. N. Bate (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), p. 301.

World Council is now oriented toward a purely nominal overcoming of doctrinal divergences, by selecting ambiguous terminology which, as such, is no property of any one doctrinal tradition but may be understood in various senses by all. This seems to be the present dilemma of Protestant ecumenism.⁶

Specific Problems

In the context of these general problems there are a number of problems which apply specifically to Baptism as an ecumenical factor. First, there is the nature of Baptism. From the days of the Reformation there have been those who say Baptism is a sacrament, a true, efficacious means of grace through which regeneration of heart, mind, and will is effected, and those who say that it is merely a sign or symbol of a spiritual gift received earlier. The difference still exists today, for the Oberlin Conference reported:

A point of real tension was discerned between those who regard the very act of Baptism as the occasion for the specific activity on the part of God in effecting the regeneration of the individual and those who hold that Baptism symbolizes a spiritual change which has already taken place as the result of believing faith.⁷

Then, quite a number of basic disagreements have always existed within the Protestant churches concerning the subjects of Baptism and matters that relate to this. There are those who affirm only believer's Baptism, since they believe that this is the only Baptism taught and practised in the New Testament, and that in any case personal faith and decision are necessary conditions of God's activity in Baptism. Others just as firmly maintain

⁶George H. Tavard, The Catholic Approach to Protestantism (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), pp. 83-84.

⁷The Nature of the Unity We Seek, pp. 197-198.

that infant Baptism is to be practised and is truly efficacious because it rests on God's command and promise and the spiritual needs of infants.

Faith, it is maintained, does not make a Baptism; it receives it.

It will be seen from this that one cannot adequately discuss the subjects of Baptism apart from the nature of Baptism, for such matters as the relation of faith to the Sacrament, the relation of water-Baptism to "the corporate Baptism of the Church which is already cleansed and sanctified through the self-sacrifice of Christ and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost,"⁸ are also basic to this.

That there are still vital differences in regard to the subjects of Baptism and matters connected thereto is quite clear from the "Statement of Differences" given at the Oberlin Conference.⁹

Then, there is the question of what place is to be ascribed to Baptism in the process of Christian initiation as a whole. There are some who hold that Baptism is complete in itself, that the one act of Baptism is truly efficacious and valid for the whole of life, that the gift of the Spirit is given through Baptism. On the other hand, there are others, particularly in Anglican circles, who believe that Baptism is never complete in itself, that it must be completed by Confirmation, and that the gift of the Spirit is never given in full measure until Confirmation. That there is an awkward problem here is pointed out by Carr when he says:

⁸One Lord One Baptism. World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism. Presented to the Commission 1960 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), p. 197.

⁹The Nature of the Unity We Seek, p. 197.

The choice between one of the two abnormalities is not a pleasant prospect. If infant Baptism is complete and whole within itself, Confirmation is an abnormality. If Confirmation completes, fulfills, and corrects infant Baptism, then infant Baptism is an abnormality. The present strife concerning all such communions is only the logical, inevitable result.¹⁰

Still another subject on which opinions differ is the mode of Baptism.

For some the mode is not an essential part of Baptism, providing that water is applied to the head of the individual in the name of the Triune God; for others, particularly churches in the Baptist tradition, immersion is essential.¹¹ And then, of course, there are some who reject the sacrament in toto, as do the Salvation Army and the Quakers, for example.

These problems, both general and specific, in connection with the doctrine and practice of Baptism mentioned above would seem to make it not only what the Section on Unity at the New Delhi Assembly called "a tangled issue,"¹² but one in which the divergences of opinion are so deep-rooted that any attempt to remove them in the interests of "one Baptism" would be an impossibility from the start. This, indeed, is what the history of attempts to effect baptismal unity amongst the churches up to this time reveals again and again. Even though it was impressed upon participating churches that we are actually "all one in our common Baptism," yet this continually became obscured. The Study Document, The Meaning of Baptism, commented thus:

¹⁰Warren Carr, Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 91-92.

¹¹Clarence Tucker Craig, The One Church (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 86.

¹²The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of The World Council of Churches 1961, edited by Visser't Hooft (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 127.

It [the given unity in Christ] became obscured by the idea of mutual recognition by the "churches" of each other's Baptisms. The danger then was that attention should be fixed on Baptism as an external rite, as if that could guarantee the unity of the Church.¹³

The Study Document then explains that the approach it is taking will not be in the light of denominational differences, but exclusively Christocentric. It explained:

The task confronting us is that of concentrating our whole attention, to the exclusion of everything that might obscure the issue, on this central question of the christological reference of Baptism and the place of Baptism in the context of the history of salvation.¹⁴

Although the Study Document does not regard its approach as being an entirely new approach, as it turns out, it is, inasmuch as it seeks to understand the meaning of Baptism by looking not to the teachings of denominations, or to the theological bases for such teachings, but exclusively to the saving work of Jesus himself. To the results of this new approach, its attempt to resolve the dead-lock in unity discussions in connection with Baptism, and to make the given unity in Christ in Baptism a more significant factor for the unity of the churches, we address ourselves in the next chapter.

¹³One Lord One Baptism, p. 49.

¹⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM: A NEW APPROACH TO ELUCIDATE BAPTISMAL UNITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCHES

When The World Council of Churches Study Group met at St. Andrews, Scotland, in August, 1960, to discuss once again the questions: what is Baptism, what does it mean, and where should it lead us? it was fully cognizant of the difficulty of the task before it and the unsuccessful efforts of others which lay behind it. It had been thought that by stressing the given unity that already existed among Christians by virtue of their Baptism into Christ there would be a good chance of arriving at a more harmonious understanding of the doctrine and practice of Baptism in the churches. This was the basic approach at the Oberlin Conference, but it did not reach its expected goals. The Edinburgh Study Group felt that the approach to the problem taken by the Oberlin Conference was basically correct, but denominational differences had hindered it from reaching its goal. So the Edinburgh Group also started from the Baptism into Christ which is "one Baptism." But it went beyond this, for to be baptized into Christ is not merely to find a given unity amongst Christians. Behind Christian Baptism stands the Baptism, unique, and all-inclusive, undertaken by Jesus for the sins of the world. Indeed, as John A. T. Robinson had pointed out earlier, "the fundamental reason why Baptism 'makes one' is that it brings men under a Baptism 'once made.'"¹ Likewise, the group at Edinburgh was determined in trying

¹John A. T. Robinson, "The One Baptism as a Category of New Testament Soteriology," Scottish Journal of Theology, VI (1953), 257.

to understand the meaning of Christian Baptism to look to the saving work of Jesus himself.² It therefore concentrated on two main subjects: "Baptism and the Heilsgeschichte," and "Theological Implications and Questions."

The relationship between Baptism and Heilsgeschichte, it is pointed out, is seen first in the Baptism of John, for "John's ministry formed the immediate background and starting-point of the ministry of Jesus."³ The two outstanding features of John's Baptism were "the eschatological situation, the drawing near of the messianic kingdom," and the water symbolism of the Old Testament, which was connected in various ways with Israel's Heilsgeschichte.⁴ Whether John's Baptism conferred forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit or not, is not clearly stated. The important stress is rather on what links John's Baptism with Christian Baptism. The answer is:

Eschatology. If we ask wherein the difference between the two Baptisms lies, the answer is the same: eschatology. In the Baptism of John it is a case of waiting for the imminent arrival of the messianic time, and of being prepared to enter it; in Christian Baptism the position is that the messianic kingdom has already come, and it is a case of being admitted to that kingdom and of belonging to the Messiah, Christ.⁵

Next, the Baptism of Jesus is discussed. At first it is strange to us that Jesus should request Baptism at the hands of John, a request which also

²One Lord One Baptism. World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism. Presented to the Commission 1960 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 50.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 52.

puzzled John, for his Baptism was intended for people summoned to repent and receive forgiveness in view of the nearness of the messianic age. Surely this Baptism, then, would not apply to the Messiah himself! The solution of the problem lies in the message of the voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," for these words relate to the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Accordingly, there is nothing really puzzling about Jesus' being baptized with John's Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, for, in the words of the Study Document:

Jesus' Baptism meant that the Servant of the Lord, as the only righteous One, was to enter vicariously into "the sin of the many" (Isa. 53.12), to bear it as his own sin and so to make the many participants in his righteousness. It is Baptism into solidarity with sinners and the initiation of redemptive action, Baptism into obedience to the Father and love for the lost, a stepping into the unknown It was his consecration to suffering and death.⁶

The Study then shows more specifically how Jesus' Baptism anticipated his whole life, how through it he entered on the path that led to his death on the cross. His Baptism, like his whole messianic work, was accomplished by his death on the cross. But more than this, for Jesus' Baptism relates also to his resurrection and exaltation. Thus, Jesus' Baptism "covers his whole life, right through to its fulfilment in suffering and death, in resurrection and exaltation, and on to his eternal fulfilment."⁷

The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is the next subject discussed in the Study Document. This is the counterpart of what happened to Jesus at his Baptism. Thus, the same Spirit which descended upon Christ and remained with him during his messianic ministry since Pentecost dwells in

⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

the Church. Christ's commission to his Church is given in Matthew 28:18-20, and this has both universal and eschatological elements; universal, because it comes from the Lord of all and applies to all, eschatological, because the Church has to carry out this commission as it expectantly moves towards the Parousia. And since Baptism in the Church of Christ is a Baptism in the name of Jesus, then what happened at Jesus' Baptism has its counterpart in the Baptism that is administered in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁸

Finally, in this section of the Study Document the question is asked: "What then is the meaning of the Baptism of an individual person?" The answer is to be found in the Baptism of Jesus. "The Baptism of Jesus meant that the one righteous One took upon himself the sin of the many and became one with them. Our Baptism means that we, the many, are incorporated into him and become one with him and in him."⁹ The meaning of Baptism, therefore, is that in this divine act we participate in the ministry of Christ; that is, in his whole ministry, the whole history of salvation. It is not anticipatory, but actually incorporates into Christ so that his death is our death, his resurrection our resurrection. This is God's mighty work in us, not our own. In summary:

We are baptized--it is something done to us, not something that we ourselves do. And what is done to us is that we are incorporated into Christ, so that we become his and are no longer our own.¹⁰

The second major part of the Study Document addresses itself to

⁸ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

"Theological Implications and Questions" arising out of the preceding exposition of "Baptism and Heilsgeschichte." First, there is the central question of participation, of being "grafted into" or united with Christ, of becoming a "member" of the body of Christ, of being buried and raised with Christ. "Participation means to share in another, to have one's life in another." This does not mean the loss of the reality of one's own life, but "to have one's own life determined by Christ's life in a way which penetrates to the centre of self-hood." Just as Christ in the incarnation took humanity into himself, so now He is the Messiah who represents and joins himself indissolubly to the people. This is the primary thing. Christ united us with him in his suffering and death; he raises us with him also to the new life. This is the great unitive act of God for the salvation of the world.¹¹

Participation in Christ means also "the reconstitution of human life through being opened up to new life." It means "the entire ordering and opening of the self to Jesus Christ." It is expressed in "obedience to him and being conformed to the pattern of his life." Therefore, "worship, declaration of faith, proclamation of the gospel, the life of love in obedience to Jesus Christ--all are modes of participation in him and in one another."¹²

At this point the Study Document reveals an awareness of its ecumenical task. In regard to participation, as it has been here described, the following is deduced:

¹¹Ibid., p. 59.

¹²Ibid.

It would appear that the problem of Baptism and the unity of the Church is complicated by the fact that various groups may have been led to stress one or another aspect of participation. For example, the Society of Friends shares with the Church as a whole a deep sense of that dedication, participation and witness which are symbolized in the rite of Baptism, while recognizing no necessity to practise the rite. In this way it has sought to bear a corporate testimony to the fact that, while to be a member of Christ's body does not necessarily involve Baptism with water, it does inescapably require an inner transformation of the whole self by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. In many ways, therefore, we may seek to describe the mystery of how our life is life in Christ.¹³

Furthermore, incorporation into Christ through Baptism is not merely an event of a moment. Rather, the Study Document says:

The rite of Baptism is itself the sign and seal of the whole movement of salvation-history, and it refers to the whole life of the baptized ones. . . . This act is one which covers the whole of life. In such a context one can speak of regeneration in Baptism (John 3:5). To speak of "baptismal regeneration" as if it were merely a momentary event is both to separate the rite of incorporation from Christ's own mighty act and to neglect the reference of Baptism to the whole of life. But when Christ's act of joining man to himself, and the uniting of the baptized to the Church upon which his Holy Spirit has been poured out, and the reference of the incorporation in Baptism to the whole life are all held together, then it can be recognized in the deepest sense that this is a "washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit."¹⁴

The next question the Study Document poses is: What is the relation of faith to Baptism? The answer is:

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that Baptism and faith are inseparably linked in the New Testament, and any understanding or practice of Baptism which separates or obscures their fundamental connection is untrue to the New Testament witness.¹⁵

Faith, moreover, is "not a mere belief that the blessings of redemption are given in Baptism." Rather, faith is described as:

¹³Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 63.

a complex phenomenon, but is chiefly to be defined as response to the redemption made known in the Gospel. It includes acknowledgement of the truth of the gospel, obedience, trust in the Lord, with fear and trembling, yet with confidence in the faithfulness of God to fulfil his word. It is the necessary means of receiving the salvation offered in the gospel. Faith may thus be seen as man's total response to the grace which is the gift of God in Christ.¹⁶

The relationship between grace, as seen in Christ's redeeming act, and faith "may be likened to source and vessel, gift and receiving." It may also be stated in terms of Spirit and faith, although every attempt to define the relations of divine sovereignty and human freedom involves us in a paradox, for "the Spirit is gained through faith and faith through the Spirit, just as the grace of Christ follows on faith and yet conditions it as its basis."¹⁷

In elucidating this function of faith just given, the Study Document explains that it has in mind here the relationship between faith and Baptism in terms of the Baptism of the convert who has heard the Gospel and confesses it in Baptism. In this case, then,

Just as Baptism is both an act through which God proclaims the gospel of Christ's redeeming love, and an act of confession of the truth and power of the gospel on the part of the convert, so also faith is an act through which God proclaims and man confesses the same gospel.¹⁸

Baptism is thus seen as "the crowning moment and goal of the faith which turns to the Lord." From such a point of view, the presence of personal faith in the recipient of Baptism is considered essential.¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 61-62.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 63.

Whereas personal faith is essential in adult Baptism, in infant Baptism, which may or may not have been practised in the earliest Church but soon became a regular mode of Christian Baptism along with the Baptism of believers, "stress is laid upon the corporate faith, upon the environment of faith, rather than upon the explicit decision of the recipient of Baptism." The whole community thus affirms its faith in God and pledges itself to provide the proper environment for Christian faith to operate in home and church. This does not diminish the necessity of the baptized himself to believe, for

the claim and promise of the gospel are laid on the child in Baptism to which a response of obedience must be owned and which must be received by faith if the fruits of Baptism are to be known and flourish in his life. Thus in the Baptism of infants, the rite does not take the place of faith, but demands it.²⁰

In short, "the various baptismal practices of the Church accordingly, must never be understood in isolation from faith." Nor should we ever fail to consider these three aspects:

the faithful action of God for mankind's redemption in Jesus Christ; the response in faith of the Church and of its individual members; and the personal decision of faith of the recipient of Baptism (whether immediately connected with the rite of Baptism or deferred to a later time).²¹

The Study Document next draws attention to "The Significance of Baptism for the Whole of Life, its Eschatological Aspect, and its Relation to the Lord's Supper and Confirmation." The point is made here that Baptism is inclusive inasmuch as it applies to the whole of life, and it is eschatological inasmuch as it anticipates the Parousia. Both these aspects of

²⁰Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²¹Ibid., p. 64.

Baptism are revealed in the "dying and rising with Christ." In Baptism the Christian is sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked out as Christ's own property who will be manifested at the Lord's appearance. As an eschatological act, moreover, "Baptism is administered once for all and is unrepeatable." It is "an act of decision and final significance." But this does not mean that when Baptism is once accomplished it is over and done with. Christian initiation is not a mere entrance into the Christian life, a mere starting point, a moment which is left behind.

Rather, the Study emphasizes:

Initiation consists of mimesis, i.e., the dramatic presentation of the sacred story. Baptism effects in a single symbolical act the death to the flesh and the resurrection to life in the Spirit, through union with Christ, which is to be unfolded by the action of divine grace throughout the whole course of Christian life in this world and hereafter. There occurs, in a single sacramental act, what is to be worked out in terms of the daily dying and rising with Christ which is the essential character of life "in Christ."²²

In this respect marriage is analogous to Baptism, inasmuch as the marriage service is once and for all and complete, yet its significance is unfolded and realized throughout the course of Christian married life.

The Lord's Supper, like Baptism, is an eschatological act, because it too "gives the present assurance of the resurrection life and enjoys a participation in Christ within the present order, which is to be consummated at the Parousia." In Baptism the individual is incorporated into the body of Christ; in Communion the individual's life as a member of the body of Christ is nourished. Thus "the new covenant declared in Baptism is continually confirmed in the Communion where the union of the Christians with

²²Ibid., p. 65.

Christ in his death and resurrection is continually reaffirmed by him and acknowledged by his people.²³

Confirmation, where practised, is also intimately linked with Baptism, since in Confirmation the individual reaffirms the baptismal profession of faith made by the congregation as his own personal faith and to which he pledges himself as a responsible individual.

The Study Document explains this as follows:

There is a double confirmation, of faith on the one hand, and of the gospel on the other. For the person baptized as a believer, there can be no such decisive affirmation of baptismal faith at his Confirmation. But for him too the rite affirms that by virtue of his Baptism he has been incorporated into the special sphere of the Spirit's operation, the Spirit-possessed community of Christ's people. It symbolizes this fact by the sign of identification (the imposition of hands), which, to those who maintain the transition of episcopal confirmation, seems to be appropriately administered by a representation of the whole, as opposed to the merely local community.²⁴

Baptism does not inaugurate a person into a sinless way of life, yet sin does not annul Baptism. True, it is possible for a person to repudiate his Baptism, by deliberate apostasy. "In such a case, if the apostate does not repent, his Baptism becomes a sign of judgment. The seal which identifies the soldier of Christ then serves, as Augustine said, 'to convict the deserter.'²⁵

The last part of the Study Document is headed, "Baptism as Call to Service." This points out that to be baptized means to be called to a life of service. Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant of God, did not live for

²³Ibid., p. 66.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 67.

himself but for many. That is why those joined to him in Baptism cannot live for themselves but must be servants. This has a threefold implication: "To be baptized means to live in and for Christ." The natural tendency is to live for ourselves; but this selfish, godless life subjects us to corruption, sin, and death. Man corrupts himself and his neighbour. Christ came and sacrificed himself to deliver us from this. Through Baptism we are united with him, and are drawn into his work of salvation. We no longer belong to ourselves, but to him. He is our new Lord; we are his servants.

The second implication of Baptism and service is this: "To be baptized is to live in and for the Church." The Church is the body of Christ, into which Baptism incorporates us. To be incorporated thus into the body of Christ means that we are no longer individuals but members of his Church. As members of the Church we are called to a life of worship, prayer, and service. Each member is directly connected with the Head, but each member has to fulfil his special function in the body and thus contribute, in his particular place, to the building-up and the growth of the body.

Finally, "To be baptized is to live in and for the world." Baptism delivers us from the powers of this world, and makes us citizens of heaven. But this does not mean that earthly affairs are no concern of ours and that we should separate from the world as much as possible. On the contrary, Baptism declares that the word of Christ has to do with the world. His command is "Go ye therefore"--out into the world, the whole world. This is his charge to each baptized person.

Thus, through Baptism we are both withdrawn from the world and sent out into the world as the servants of Christ. This service is shown in our

praise to God through living a Christian life, by the worship in which we exercise the priesthood of all believers, by manifesting compassionate concern for the world of men. "Baptism thus stands guard against all ecclesiastical introversion and isolationism, and in this too it displays its universal and eschatological significance."²⁶

In its conclusion, the Study Document directs attention once again to the theological approach it has taken, namely, that Baptism is considered not as a self-sufficient rite but as "the expression of the whole Heilsgeschichte. For then other sacraments or sacramental rites do not depend upon the rite of Baptism, but on that which Baptism mediates, and which they too mediate in their own way."²⁷ Secondly, the presentation given, although theological, is not to be considered as merely theoretical. "It is highly significant both for the practical life of the Church and for the unity of the Church."²⁸ The paragraphs illustrating both these facts are so basic to the whole purpose of the Document that they are here given in toto:

a. Since Baptism encompasses the whole Christian life, lack of clarity concerning the meaning of Baptism leads to uncertainty all along the line. It is beyond dispute that in no church body does Baptism have the decisive significance which the witness of the New Testament ascribes to it. Here we all have much to learn. A serious penetration into the meaning of Baptism and an appropriation of the treasure given in Baptism would give preaching and teaching both a centrally focussed content and a new breadth, together with an insight which clarifies and unifies the whole of Christian life. The more the baptized learn to see their whole life in the light of

²⁶Ibid., pp. 67-69.

²⁷Ibid., p. 70.

²⁸Ibid.

their Baptism, the more does their life take on the pattern of life "in Christ." It is also of decisive importance to pastoral care to be able to say to a troubled human being, "You are baptized," with all the assurance with [sic!] this implies.

b. But the fuller insight into the meaning of Baptism has also decisive significance for the unity of the Church. The deepest meaning of Baptism is participation in Christ. Through Baptism we are members of the body of Christ, planted in Christ, who is our unity. This is a unity given by God, a unity which we have not constructed, but into which we have been joined through Baptism. All we who have been baptized are one with Christ and therefore also with one another. Baptism thus bears witness to the unity given in Christ, the unity of the Church. But if this unity already is present, "the churches" must strive to give expression to it in fuller measure and in more visible form. Only when this takes place can the Church consistently carry on its faith-inspiring mission for the world, according to the words of our Lord: "that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me" (John 17:23).²⁹

²⁹Ibid., p. 71.

CHAPTER VI

AN EVALUATION OF THE ATTEMPTS TO ELUCIDATE THE MEANING OF BAPTISM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS AN ECUMENICAL FACTOR OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE

In the foregoing chapters a comprehensive survey has been given of the attempts made in recent years by individual theologians, churches, and ecumenical commissions and assemblies to define and elucidate the doctrine of Holy Baptism, its meaning and its significance, particularly its significance as an ecumenical factor. Why Baptism has become a rallying point in efforts to bring the churches to a closer unity has been pointed out, as have been the various problems which ecumenists have struggled with, and continue to struggle with, in their efforts to express more tangibly the ecumenical implications of the "one Baptism." In the preceding chapter a summary account was given of the most recent and the most challenging of all attempts to explain the full content of Baptism and its implications in The World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order Study Document, The Meaning of Baptism.

It would take us beyond the scope of this present study to attempt an evaluation of all that has been said about Baptism in recent years, or even to try to discuss The Meaning of Baptism in full detail. Accordingly, all that can be attempted in this evaluation will be to concern ourselves with two matters that are intimately related to our subject--the ecumenical goal and the approach used to reach that goal, particularly in The Meaning of Baptism.

The Ecumenical Goal

The word "goal" is here used in a broad sense, because, as indicated above¹ one may speak of a number of ecumenical goals which are sought in connection with Baptism. The question before us is whether there is any hope, as a result of ecumenical studies on Baptism, that the oneness in Christ which binds all Christians together in Baptism will lead to a closer unity in the understanding and practice of Baptism than has existed in the past, and thus make Baptism a more significant factor in bringing about the ultimate ecumenical goal, the organic unity of the churches.

One is immediately inclined to answer this question with an emphatic negative, for these reasons: first, as the historical survey in Chapter II has revealed, there is as yet no indication in ecumenical circles of any united movement towards the goal sought. At New Delhi, the churches were still being encouraged "to study the meaning of Baptism together to come to a deeper understanding of the one Baptism."² Although it was felt here that there is now a more tolerant attitude amongst the churches in regard to non-approved Baptism beliefs and practices, it was still being urged that the failure to live and act as one visible and united body was "an obvious contradiction of the baptismal gift that we all claim to possess."³ The Faith and Order Commission that met in Montreal in 1963 had little more to

¹Supra, pp. 43-54.

²The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of The World Council of Churches 1961, edited by Visser't Hooft (New York: Association, 1962), p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 127.

say than to recommend continued study of "the expression of the meaning of Baptism in the life of the churches."⁴

In addition, men who are closely connected with ecumenical studies on Baptism do not appear to be particularly optimistic about achieving their goal. Eugene Fairweather writes, especially in regard to the 1960 Study Document, The Meaning of Baptism:

It may be well that in the excitement of rediscovery some of our ecumenists have exaggerated the immediate practical consequences of their interpretation of the "one Baptism." There is certainly no reason to suppose that the old controversies between Catholic and Protestant or between the defenders and the critics of infant Baptism can be resolved simply by the application of the new formula. Nevertheless, insofar as it promotes theological agreement on the "content" of Christian Baptism, the revival of biblical teaching on Baptism can help to create a more favourable atmosphere for the common study of controversial issues connected with the "operation" of the sacrament.⁵

Warren Carr is not quite so tentative. He applauds the Edinburgh Study Group, for,

unlike the American committee at Oberlin this group decided against turning the giant mirror of Baptism to the wall. It agreed that the reflection of the Church's manifold problems in the search for unity must be viewed in the clear and distinctive setting of Baptism. These words are heartening; they strike the appropriate note of relevance. As such they will bear more fruit in the ecumenical vineyard than will be the case with the recommendations of the North American committee.⁶

While Carr applauds the general attitude of the Edinburgh Study Group for facing up to the really divisive factors in Baptism, for not restricting

⁴Commission on Faith and Order. Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission and Working Committee, Montreal, Canada, 1963 (Geneva: Commission on Faith and Order, 1963), p. 23.

⁵Eugene Fairweather, "Worship and the Sacraments: Some Ecumenical Trends," Religion in Life, XXXII (Spring 1963), 209.

⁶Warren Carr, Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 19-20.

their attention to the ecumenical question, and for pointing out the total significance of the doctrine, nevertheless he issues this warning:

If the Church should follow this lead, it must make sure that something more than another expedient course is being followed; renewed concern for Baptism must be marked by theological depth and ethical sensitivity. Lacking such seriousness, not renewal, but accelerated obsolescence could well result. Raising a hue and cry for the renewal of Baptism's importance only to disallow its real meaning would be tragic. The rite would become a victim of what Helmut Thielicke calls a "ciphered nihilism," a disguised or covert nothingness Without the proper elements in breadth and depth, the revival of Baptism can have no more permanent effect than a jet trail; first it marks the sky with its high line, lofty, straight, and clean; then fuzziness; and finally it is not visible at all as if an impatient teacher had erased its meaningless scrawl from the atmospheric board.⁷

Quite noticeably, and Carr indicates this too, there has been a shift of emphasis. It can be discerned at the Oberlin Conference, but is more apparent at Edinburgh and New Delhi. The ecumenical emphasis is still there, but now, together with it, is the broader, more inclusive significance of Baptism. In my opinion, the most timely and at the same time the most successful feature of The Meaning of Baptism, for example, is the way it has illuminated the significance of Baptism for the whole of life and for showing the implications of incorporation into Christ for Christian conduct. This shift of emphasis, however, may be viewed as the conscious attempt of the Study Group to illuminate the ecumenical implications of Baptism in the light of the totality of the doctrine. It may indicate that the ecumenical aspect is but one aspect, perhaps not the most important aspect of the doctrine. And it may reveal, between the lines, that the ecumenical goal, although highly desirable, is really a utopia.

⁷Ibid., pp. 20-21.

The question thus arises whether a spiritual unity, such as Baptism creates, and which binds all Christians together, can be visibly manifested as ecumenists are trying to do with Baptism. Is it a legitimate Scriptural deduction to argue that because the one unity, the inner, invisible unity exists, therefore the outer, visible unity must exist as the necessary earthly counterpart of this? To be sure, there is a Christian unity that transcends minor differences of belief and opinion; this is the oneness of those joined to Christ in faith and united in the una sancta ecclesia. It is also perfectly true that this spiritual unity should not only be preserved, but also demonstrated as clearly as possible. But whether the fellowship which unites all Christians in the una sancta ecclesia can and should be manifested in an all-embracing visible church fellowship is quite another matter. Accordingly, it is not strange that at the Oberlin Conference it was felt that different thinking regarding Baptism stems, basically, from different thinking about the doctrine of the Church,⁸ for, as I see it, what is being sought in this ecumenical endeavour is to manifest the una sancta ecclesia, which is just as impossible as trying to make visible the Holy Trinity, for the una sancta ecclesia, and the Trinity are not articles of sight but of faith. Dr. Hermann Sasse's words are apropos here:

The churches of Christendom should learn to live with one another and without giving up the polemics that are necessary for the sake

⁸The Nature of the Unity We Seek. Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio, edited by Paul S. Minear (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), p. 198.

of the truth, they should learn to speak with one another in such a manner as becomes evident that we really believe in the una sancta.⁹

But this would appear to be the real crux of the matter. There are many ecumenists, who, although they may believe in the una sancta as a possibility for the future, do not believe that it exists today, because for them the una sancta, the Christian Church, is not an article of faith but a world-wide ecumenical church. In other words, there is often no clear distinction made between the Church, on the one hand, and the churches, on the other.

It needs to be stressed, however, that this Lutheran affirmation of the una sancta ecclesia as the Church and the impossibility of identifying it per se with this or that visible church organization does not mean that the Church is in effect a sort of Platonic state that exists hypothetically or ideally but not in actual fact. Lutherans have always repudiated this assertion, as does the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which points out:

We are not dreaming about some Platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world.¹⁰

On the contrary, the existence of the una sancta ecclesia is sure and certain, for its manifestation is not by certain ceremonies and rites or even

⁹Hermann Sasse, "On the Problem of the Relation Between the Reformed and Lutheran Church," Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors, translated by Ralph Gehrke, Quartalschrift, XLVI (October 1949), 231.

¹⁰"Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), VII and VIII, 20.

by external church organizations, but by teaching and practice, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments, the so-called notae or marks of the Church.¹¹

These notae, moreover, not only indicate the presence of the Church; they are, as Article VII of The Augsburg Confession puts it, "sufficient for the true unity of the Christian Church."¹² It should not be imagined, therefore, that Lutherans are indifferent to the manifestation of the Church, which they confess to be one and catholic, and to seeking Christian church union. They take John 17 and Ephesians 4 seriously in this connection. But they also take seriously the true nature of such unity as well as the basis on which any serious union of churches must be built. What this is will become evident in the next section of our discussion.

The Approach Used to Reach the Ecumenical Goal

It will be observed from the foregoing, that the approach to a uniform manifestation of the meaning of Baptism proceeds from the premise that all are one in Christ through Baptism. It is true, as previously stated, there is such a spiritual oneness, and Baptism, which incorporates individuals into Christ, makes them one in him. This oneness is, strictly speaking, discernible only to God. Human beings can say no more than that where the marks of the Church are, the preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments, there Christians will normally be found. It must be realized, too, that faith must continue beyond Baptism if membership in

¹¹"The Augsburg Confession," VII.

¹²Ibid.

the body of Christ is to continue. I may be able to say quite truthfully: "This group of people was baptized, and by Baptism was engrafted into Christ." But I cannot say with the same assurance that they are still one with him, for this would mean that no fall from baptismal faith is possible, which is false, or that I can read people's hearts, which I cannot do. Consequently, even apart from the Scriptural doctrine of the true nature of the Church which is involved here and which was discussed above, it is inadmissible to argue: "We are all one in Christ by virtue of our Baptism, therefore we rightly should have one visible church," since this is arguing from a supposition to an expected reality, which is logically a false procedure. Moreover, even if it were logically and Scripturally legitimate to argue: "We are all one by virtue of our one Baptism, therefore we should have one visible church," would it not be also just as correct to take this argument in reverse, and deduce, that because the churches are not agreed on a given doctrine, therefore they are not one in Christ? A case in point is the Oberlin Conference where the Report can in one breath speak of a "deep unity in Christ," and yet admit serious doctrinal differences.¹³ It would seem that such a statement can be made only in a context of conscious religious and doctrinal indifferentism.

Lutherans, to be sure, seek church union, but the basis of the unity we seek and the approach we take to achieve it in true Lutheran circles right from the beginning of Lutheranism has been one and the same: there must be agreement in doctrine and practice before there can be any acknowledgement of church union. Or, as Dr. Martin Franzmann puts it, the

¹³The Nature of the Unity We Seek, p. 198.

criteria of theocentricity, christocentricity, and bibliocentricity must be applied in the quest for church unity.¹⁴

Furthermore, what appears to be lacking in the ecumenical argumentation described above, but considered essential by true Lutherans, is the need to regard seriously confessional obligation as consonant with the unity of faith and where this should lead us. Confession of faith is never merely a matter of personal whim or denominational expediency. The formation of creeds and confessions, Dr. Hermann Sasse reminds us, did not begin with man's initiative, but with the divine will of the Lord Jesus Himself.¹⁵ Accordingly, a failure to regard confessional obligation is basically a failure to distinguish between obedience and disobedience, between truth and error, which invariably results in a tendency to group all doctrinal differences under the heads of "theological issues," and "differences of interpretation." Where such an attitude persists in a group, one may genuinely question whether there can be unity in Christ there at some time.

Confession, moreover, is not only private and individual; it involves the church, for a church gathers around a confession. This may be a particular confession or set of confessions, which define very clearly and fully, on the basis of Holy Scripture, just what the church's teaching is, as, for example, the Lutheran Confessions define the theological position of the Lutheran Church; or it may be a more general somewhat ambiguous creed

¹⁴"The Nature of the Unity We Seek," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVIII (November 1957), 802.

¹⁵Hermann Sasse, "Concerning the Nature of Confession in the Church," Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors, translated by E. Reim, Quartalschrift, XLVI (July 1949), 172.

such as The World Council of Churches has.¹⁶ Now, it is interesting to note that The World Council of Churches' Commissions on Baptism found they could not make headway by proceeding from the confessional positions of various member churches on the doctrine of Baptism, hence in their most recent study a new approach was adopted. But if the confessional churches take their confessions seriously, if these are held to be doctrinally correct and normative, how can they be "given up" or "moved away from" unless it can be shown that the confession has falsely interpreted Scripture?¹⁷

This present study has shown that ecumenists have tried to proceed either from the "unity in Baptism" idea to a sort of general manifestation of this in joint worship, witness, and service, preferably as one visible church, or, after having led the churches to reach agreement in the doctrine and practice of Baptism, to move on to other doctrines and try to find unity in them too, particularly the Lord's Supper. Again one wonders how such an approach is Scripturally tenable. In either case, agreement for the time being would exist in one doctrine only, the doctrine of Baptism. But what about all the other doctrines on which disagreement would still exist? How can a church be united in worship and witness with other churches against which it must raise the charge of false teaching or of tolerating false doctrine? For a convinced Lutheran, these actions are

¹⁶"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit," The New Delhi Report, p. 426.

¹⁷Sasse, "Concerning the Nature of Confession," Letters, in Quartalschrift, p. 178.

not only self-contradictory; they are unconfessional and unscriptural.¹⁸

Coming now to the new approach adopted in the Edinburgh Study Document, the confessional Lutheran would notice that it is methodically the antithesis of what he finds in his church's historic approach to church union. Here, as demonstrated, for example, in The Formula of Concord, the status controversiae with respect to the doctrine under discussion is stated. Then the relevant Scripture passages, in particular the sedes doctrinae are examined, and in the light of such evidence one expects humble submission to Scripture as the sole judge. This approach, however, was deliberately avoided by the Edinburgh Study Group in favour of the Heilsgeschichte approach, which concentrates on taking the subject exclusively in the context of Christ's saving action.

As a matter of methodology, of course, one need not object to this new approach, provided that it does justice to all the facts, and provided that, as a method, it explains and clarifies a given content and does not presume to determine that content. There is no doubt that the Heilsgeschichte approach, which here concentrates on the christological reference to Baptism and sees Baptism purely in the context of the history of salvation,¹⁹ is in itself a very necessary approach to any doctrine of the Church. Lutherans, as Luther did before them, will heartily approve of this principle of Biblical interpretation, in fact will insist on it, provided that it is not

¹⁸"The Augsburg Confession," VII.

¹⁹One Lord One Baptism. World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism. Presented to the Commission 1960 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), p. 49.

separated from the two other emphases mentioned above--theocentricity and bibliocentricity.²⁰ Thus the Edinburgh document is, in many ways, a most commendable piece of scholarship. The objectivity of Baptism is rightly stressed: it is God, not man, who acts in Baptism. The relation of Baptism to the total work of the Lord Jesus in winning man's salvation and our participation in that work through faith and through Baptism, are emphases that have our approval. The same can be said of the emphasis on faith as the receiving means and the significance of Baptism for daily living.²¹

The Christological approach, however, when over-emphasized and used exclusively, has its dangers, and it would appear that the Study Document here under discussion has not escaped them, for it does not give the same weight to sola Scriptura as it does to solus Christus. Henry Hamann cautions against such an approach when he says:

The person who begins to theologize independently of the Scriptures may have the good intention to adhere strenuously to his "Christological concentration," but he has launched his vehicle upon a precipitous inclined plane. There is no telling where he will end.²²

We can speak of the same matter in the categories of the formal and the material principles so well known to Lutherans. We cannot have the

²⁰Supra, p. 85.

²¹Luther used the Romans 6 passage in his Catechisms to show the significance of baptism for daily living, but he also used it, although Lutherans have not stressed this sufficiently, to show how in baptism we actually share in Christ's death and resurrection, cf. "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Vol. 36, Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 68.

²²Henry Hamann, "Christological Concentration," Australasian Theological Review, XXII (December 1951), 123.

true Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures, without the Scriptures. To be sure, in a certain sense the formal principle, bibliocentricity, may not be so fundamental as the material principle, christocentricity, since corruptions of the material principle lead to quicker and more fatal results than corruptions of the formal principle,²³ yet the two are so closely intertwined that an error in the one often leads to an error in the other; and the down-grading of the formal principle opens the door to all kinds of subjectivism and rationalism. Dr. Hamann sounds a note of warning when he says: "The unionistic stress is: agreement in the material principle is sufficient for fellowship."²⁴

What one misses in the Study Document, The Meaning of Baptism, then, is clear, Scripturally based statements of what Baptism really is and what it does. We are given much valuable and necessary information about how Baptism relates us to Jesus and his work of salvation, how Baptism makes us sharers in this, the meaning Baptism should have for every aspect of the Christian life, but nowhere do we find it stated unequivocally, as Luther does, for example, in his Small Catechism: This is what Baptism is; this is what it gives or profits; this is where its power and efficacy lie, and so on. Thus, while there is much stress on the relationship of faith to Baptism, nowhere is it stated that faith is created in Baptism, that Baptism is a medium justificationis. Baptism is spoken of as "incorporation into Christ," but we do not find it stated, as Titus 3:5 does, that Baptism

²³Henry Hamann, "The Formal and the Material Principles," Australasian Theological Review, XXX (September 1959), 60.

²⁴Ibid., p. 63.

regenerates, that it washes away sins of old and young alike, that it gives full and complete remission then and there. Again, Baptism is spoken of as a symbol and seal of something done, but what Baptism actually does, that it is a Sacrament, an efficacious means of grace, is not stated in so many words. It would appear that in such instances one may read those meanings into the Document as are consistent with one's denominational or personal viewpoint. Therefore the objective of the framers of the Document to avert this very thing which heretofore had prevented the manifestation of the unity sought in Baptism has not been removed; it has merely been taken underground.

This tentativeness of expression and occasional ambiguity of meaning is seen also in connection with what is said relative to infant Baptism, which is one of the most unsatisfactory sections of the Document. Whether infant Baptism was practised in the New Testament or not is not taken up, and the somewhat surprising doctrine is advanced that the infant's Baptism avails because of the corporate faith of the witnessing congregation. That the congregation has a very important obligation toward the baptized infant is not to be questioned, but that the congregation's faith avails for the child is in effect a denial that Baptism actually works personal faith in the child. One is here strongly reminded of the teaching of the Catholic Church, which lets the faith of the Church take the place of the personal faith of the infant being baptized,²⁵ and of the historic Reformed position which views infant Baptism as a sign of the covenant analogous to the Old

²⁵Luther's position, too, in his earlier writing on baptism. Cf. "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Vol. 36, Luther's Works, p. 73.

Testament sign of circumcision.²⁶ On these premises, therefore, infant Baptism is justified, but one is left with the strong suspicion that although infant Baptism should be practised, since it has been instituted by Christ and is a means of incorporation into Christ, yet it is not really necessary for salvation at all. In the final analysis, then, Baptism cannot give man, adult or infant, anything that he would not have without Baptism, as the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army maintain. This, too, is Karl Barth's position, since he asserts that in connection with Baptism one can speak only of a necessitas praecepti, never of a necessitas medii.²⁷ Such a broadening of the concept of Baptism certainly accents its value as an ecumenical factor of considerable importance, but it is not the Lutheran and Scriptural teaching that Baptism is a "washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,"²⁸ a true means of grace in the strict sense, which not only offers but actually bestows the merits of Christ together with the gift of the Holy Ghost to the baptized, young and old alike, and therefore is necessary for salvation. Even though the Lutheran Church teaches that God is not absolutely bound to his sacraments, nevertheless his church here on earth is, and thus the church must follow his Word and guard against tearing asunder Word and Spirit, external and internal, Spirit: Baptism and water Baptism.

Something more needs to be said about the relationship of faith to Baptism, infant Baptism in particular. It would appear that the Study

²⁶Hermann Sasse, "The Doctrine of Baptism," Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 4, translated by P. H. Buehring, p. 5 (mineographed).

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Titus 3:5.

Document has rightly tried to combat the opus operatum idea of Roman Catholicism by strongly asserting the necessity of faith, but in doing so it fails to do justice to the sola fide principle of Lutheranism, which holds good for young and old alike, if they would be saved. The Study Document requires personal faith for adults who come to Baptism, and holds that the faith of the witnessing congregation, or a kind of germ faith implanted in the child by Baptism that will blossom out through Christian education and environment into full faith later on, will do for children. Lutherans cannot agree with this for two reasons. First, they will point out that saving faith is a medium leptikon and that the efficacy of Baptism, even in the case of adults, does not rest on a synthesis of God's act plus man's response in faith. Luther in his Large Catechism points out that the faith of an adult never suffices as a ground for Baptism.²⁹ Secondly, there is the failure to realize that saving faith is always personal faith, and that there is essentially no difference between the faith of an adult and the faith of an infant which is worked by Baptism and which receives Baptism. Again, Luther's words come through clearly and loudly: "It effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare."³⁰ The only distinction that can be made is that in the case of infants it is not yet a conscious faith which they themselves can confess.

Accordingly, as Dr. Sasse points out, from this point of view the question of infant versus adult Baptism becomes theologically irrelevant.³¹

²⁹Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," IV, 53.

³⁰Martin Luther, "Small Catechism," IV, 6.

³¹Sasse, "The Doctrine of Baptism," Letters, No. 4, p. 8.

Dr. Sasse goes even further and says that this is why the question cuts no figure either in the New Testament or in Luther. The church baptizes infants "just as though" they were adults, even as we adults believe "just as though" we were infants. Whatever the difference between adults and infants may signify for us human beings and for our estimate of a man, for God it signifies nothing. A human being is a human being, is a child of Adam or a child of God without regard to his age. That is why, Dr. Sasse says, "all baptismal rituals treat the infant 'just as though' it were grown up. Only the Nestorian and the Reformed Churches have produced special rituals for infant Baptism."³²

This oneness of Baptism does not come through in the Document under discussion, for a distinction is made in the essence of Baptism and how faith relates to it in the case of adults on the one hand and children on the other. This shows that basically the radical differences that exist within the World Council of Churches on this subject have not been clarified, let alone removed; they have merely been clouded over in such a way that most churches can read their own meanings into them. Lutherans who are true to their Confessions and the New Testament cannot be satisfied with this if they are to continue to hold both the objectivity of the sacrament and the sola fide, not forgetting that justifying faith is not a matter of a single moment but lifelong, as Luther makes clear in his Catechisms. That Baptism is never a finished act which lies in the past but one to which the Christian returns again and again and in which he lives his whole life are points well made in the Document. But its understanding of the essence of

³²Ibid.

Baptism and the true nature of saving faith are not satisfactory from the Lutheran point of view.

It is apparent therefore, particularly in regard to infant Baptism, that the insufficiency of the Heilsgeschichte approach, used too exclusively here, is seen, for the basic New Testament teaching why infants too need to be baptized,³³ namely, because of their sinfulness as a result of original or inherited sin, the command of Christ in Matthew 28, the efficacy of Baptism, the nature of faith as a medium leptikon, and the power of the Holy Spirit which little children also receive in Baptism, is not clarified. The context for any doctrine, in the final analysis, is not only the whole of Christ's saving act, but the whole of Scripture. And there are aspects of the doctrine of Baptism, as with other doctrines, where the Christian must bow in humility to the Word and receive in faith its message even though he cannot see the why and the how of that message.

Thus the approach used in the Study Document, The Meaning of Baptism, is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. It has not taken full cognizance of all that Scripture says on the subject. It has not allowed the Law to speak out loudly to show man's need not only for salvation in general, but for Baptism in particular. This is very evident in the Document's treatment of infant Baptism. As a result of this the essential Law-Gospel tension which is so basic to a right understanding of the doctrine is defective in the Document. Very little, too, has been made of the command and the promise of Baptism. In fact, one gains the impression that the command

³³From the Lutheran point of view, Neville Clark is thus quite wrong when he says that "from the earliest of times infant baptism has been a practice in search of a theology." Christian Baptism, edited by Alec Gilmore (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 320.

has been pushed into the background in order to justify the position of those churches which hold that "participation and witness are symbolized in the rite," but who do not "recognize a necessity to practise the rite."³⁴ Baptism is thus not contingent upon Christ's command and promise but upon man's decision to recognize its necessity or not. This not only destroys the authority for the doctrine of Baptism; it also destroys the Heilsgeschichte, for a person might plausibly argue that he does not "recognize a necessity" to accept this either.

Other aspects of this Study Document could be discussed, but the above examples should suffice to show that the Document, despite its earnest concern to make more real the unity that exists in Baptism and the many commendable statements it has made in this connection, is not altogether satisfactory, because the approach used has not allowed the full light of Holy Scripture to be focussed on the doctrine. This may have enabled the Study Group to produce a document that will excite new interest in Baptism as an ecumenical factor amongst the ecumenically-minded, but it cannot have the whole-hearted support of those who believe that true Christian unity can and must be determined purely on the basis of Holy Scripture as a whole and in all its parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, the only source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life in the church.³⁵

³⁴One Lord One Baptism, p. 60.

³⁵"The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration," The Summary Formulation, 3ff.

Conclusion

Although the kind of ecumenical goal sought and many of the means used to reach it in connection with Baptism, as this study has shown, cannot in the main be approved, the concentration of attention on this doctrine that this ecumenical interest has aroused has not been without its blessings. It has led churches to restudy Baptism, to clarify their thinking on the doctrine, and to be more concerned about the meaning and purpose of the Sacrament in the Christian's life. One can without reservation say a hearty Amen to the concluding section of The Meaning of Baptism, where it is said:

The more the baptized learn to see their whole life in the light of their Baptism, the more does their life take on the pattern of the life "in Christ."³⁶

Baptism, no doubt, will continue to be an ecumenical factor. For the reasons given above it is doubtful that it will achieve the goals most ecumenists seek by it and through it. But continued study of the doctrine by the churches and ecumenical groups will not be without profit. And there is always the assurance, so long as men study the Scriptures earnestly and honestly that in spite of their differences, the Spirit of God is working, and it is he who alone can and does "guide into all truth."³⁷

³⁶One Lord One Baptism, p. 71.

³⁷John 16:13.

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