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INFANT BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1957

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to determine whether infant baptism was practiced in the early Christian Church.

This problem is important because of conditions in the Christian Church today. Particularly here, in denomination-ridden America, there is violent disagreement on this issue. About one-third of all professing "Protestants" (including Lutherans) in the United States are members of "Baptist bodies," i.e., churches which reject infant baptism.¹ Are they correct in insisting upon "believers' baptism?" or are the "historic churches" right in baptizing infants? There are two possible approaches to this problem: that of Biblical theology and that of Church history.

The approach of Biblical theology is to examine carefully all Scripture passages which have any bearing on infant baptism, and try to determine their meaning and relevance to the subject. This is the usual approach. This is the procedure the German theologians Althaus, Cullmann, and Jeremias have been using, for example, in trying to refute Barth.²

¹Cf. Yearbook of American Churches, 1957, edited by Benson Y. Landis (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., c.1956), pp. iv, 16-26.

²Karl Barth, a Swiss Reformed theologian, came to the conviction several decades ago that infant baptism did not

The approach of Church history, on the other hand, is to examine all historical evidence from the time of the Apostles pertaining to infant baptism, and on the basis of this evidence determine what has been the practice of the Church. This is the approach taken in this study.

There are two factors which have contributed in limiting the scope of this investigation: (1) Holy Scripture itself is absolutely silent in regard to the specific subject of infant baptism³; and (2) from the fifth century on infant baptism was unquestionably the general practice of the catholic Church.⁴ The fact that Scripture itself says nothing about

originate with Christ, but instead was invented by the Church, and hence should be discontinued. His position is set forth in Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe, zweite Auflage (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon, 1943; English translation by Ernest A. Payne, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism; London: S. C. M. Press, 1943). He is answered by Oscar Cullmann in Die Tauflehre des Neuen Testaments (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, c.1948; English translation by J. K. S. Reid, Baptism in the New Testament; Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1950) and by Paul Althaus in Was ist die Taufe? (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, c. 1950). An excellent summary of the Lutheran Biblical theology viewpoint is found in Werner Elert, Der christliche Glaube, zweite Auflage (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, c.1941), pp. 548-554. Joachim Jeremias includes argumentation along New Testament theology, Church history, and archeological lines of thought in his excellent book, Hat die Urkirche die Kindertaufe geübt? (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949).

³This statement does not mean that no passages of Holy Scripture have any direct bearing on infant baptism. It states only that no passages of Scripture refer to infant baptism explicitly. Thus Acts 11:14; 16:15,33; 1 Cor. 1:16, etc., can be offered as evidence, but not as proof, for infant baptism. Thus Oscar Cullmann (op. cit., English translation, p. 24) says that these passages are indecisive and insufficient for proof.

⁴All sources in the bibliography consulted for this study

infant baptism means that our treatment of Scripture will not be direct, but only incidental. The Biblical theology approach would be to treat these passages directly; the strict historical approach must pass them by. The second premise, that from about 400 A.D. on infant baptism was in general a universal practice, means that our study will be limited to the first four centuries of the Christian era.

The importance of Scripture's absolute silence on infant baptism can hardly be overemphasized. This is undoubtedly the mightiest weapon which the opponents of infant baptism have. And their second greatest weapon is similar, namely, that infant baptism is not specifically named by any of the Church fathers until about the year 200, and then it is first mentioned by an opponent of infant baptism.⁵

Scripture's silence on such an important subject would naturally tend to enhance the importance of an historical investigation such as is here undertaken. On the other hand, this writer would be among the first to agree that our opinion of infant baptism dare not rest on the evidence which Church history furnishes, but instead on Scripture alone. Men can and do err; it is God alone who is infallible. The

agree on this conclusion. The evidence for it is overwhelming. E.g., the Council of Carthage in 418 A.D. was explicit in its support of infant baptism: cf. William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, second edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: University Press, 1844), I, 468-471. All the leading theologians of the age, too (e.g., St. Jerome, St. Augustine), supported infant baptism; cf. infra, chap. iv.

⁵Tertullian; infra, chap. 2, pp. 19-26.

evidence of Church history, then, must not be taken as normative, but only as ancillary. It is of value only as it throws light on the Christian Church's understanding, or lack of understanding, of God's will as revealed in His Word.

It was indicated above that the scope of this study will be the extra-Biblical Christian literature from the time of Christ to about 400 A.D. This paper is thus patterned after the outstanding treatment of this same subject made about 250 years ago by Dr. William Wall of England.⁶ In fact, this thesis is so indebted to his thorough scholarship that an acknowledgement of this kind in our introductory chapter is obligatory. His work is quoted throughout this paper, and the reader interested in studying this subject more intensely is referred to this rather ancient, but not outdated, work. On the other hand, it has been attempted to make this paper more than simply a rehashing of Dr. Wall's thorough treatment. Also many modern writers on the subject have been consulted so that several important aspects of the problem not treated by Dr. Wall are found here. However, while an attempt has been made to consider all the important angles of the subject, this paper is far from exhaustive. The interested reader is invited to consult, not only the books in the bibliography, but also many of the sources to which the books in the bibliography refer.

⁶Wall, op. cit. 4 vols. For an adverse criticism of Dr. Wall's work by an opponent of infant baptism, cf. Alexander Campbell, Christian Baptism with its Antecedents and Consequents (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1913), pp. 278-312 passim.

CHAPTER II

THE EVIDENCE OF THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES

As indicated above in the introduction, there are no specific references to infant baptism in the Christian Church until about 200 A.D., when Tertullian opposed it. Nevertheless, much other Christian literature from before 200 throws light on our subject. It does so, not because of what it says or fails to say about infant baptism, but because of what it says about Christian baptism in general.

Clement of Rome

The first of the "Apostolic Fathers" was Clement of Rome, a disciple of Peter and Paul.¹ According to Eusebius he was bishop of Rome from about 92 to 101. "Of the many writings ascribed to him, only the first to the Corinthians (in which he seeks to settle disturbances between clerics and laics) is considered authentic (A.D. 96)."² In this first letter to the Corinthians Clement comments the following on 1 Cor. 14:4:

Again of Job it is thus written, that he was just and blameless, true, one that feared God, and eschewed evil. Yet he condemns himself, and says, there is none free

¹For a brief biographical sketch of his life, cf. Ernest Leigh-Bennett, Handbook of the Early Christian Fathers (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), pp. 1-3.

²Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin L. Lucker, editor in chief (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), pp. 44-5.

from pollution; no, not though his life be but the length of one day.³

Clement was convinced that also new-born babes are corrupted by sin and need God's forgiveness.

Ignatius

The second of the "Apostolic Fathers" was the third bishop of Antioch, Ignatius.⁴ He was martyred, according to Eusebius, under Trajan in 107. In Ignatius we find a strong episcopal emphasis, understandable because (1) he himself was a bishop and because (2) the current persecution made episcopal leadership imperative. Thus he permitted no baptisms without a bishop's supervision.⁵ At one place he ascribes to the passion of Christ a purifying effect upon the baptismal water.⁶

³The original Greek with a Latin translation of this passage is given in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Graecorum (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862 et al.), I, 243-4. Hereafter Migne's edition of Greek fathers will be referred to as MPG. The English translation given here is in Joseph Bingham, The Antiquities of the Christian Church and Other Works (London: William Straker, 1843), III, 457, and William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: University Press, 1844), I, 47. Cf. also the translation in The Library of Christian Classics, John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Vandusen, general editors (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953, etc.), I, 52. Cf. also Andre Benoit, Le Baptême Chrétien au Second Siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), pp. 83-94.

⁴For a biographical sketch, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 9-17.

⁵Library of Christian Classics, op. cit., I, 115. Cf. also Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 62.

⁶In his letter to the Ephesians, chap. 18, found in MPG, V, 659-660. A translation is given in Library of Christian

The Didache

The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, was also written about this time. While it discusses baptism, it is only concerned with the mode, outward preparation, and act of baptism itself, and says nothing about either infant baptism or the effect and power of baptism.⁷

Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas originated in Egypt about 130 A.D. It taught that "the believer enters upon the possession of the blessings of redemption through baptism,"⁸ and that through baptism we become free from sin.⁹ "We go down into the water laden with sins and filth and rise from it, bearing fruit in the heart, resting our fear and hope on Jesus in the spirit."¹⁰ Barnabas taught that baptism was a means of freeing from sin.

Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas was written according to ancient tradition about 140 A.D. by a Roman Christian, Hermas. It

Classics, op. cit., I, 92-3. Cf. also Benoit, op. cit., pp. 59-82.

⁷An English translation of The Didache is given in Library of Christian Classics, op. cit., I, 161-179. For an excellent discussion of The Didache, cf. Benoit, op. cit., pp. 5-33.

⁸Epistle of Barnabas II.1, 8, found in MFG, II, 729-30. Cf. also Seeberg, op. cit., I, 71.

⁹Epistle of Barnabas VIII.15.

¹⁰Epistle of Barnabas II; MFG, loc. cit. Cf. also Benoit, op. cit., pp. 34-58.

was esteemed so highly by the early Church that at times it was included in the canon of Scripture. It taught that through baptism we receive the remission of our sins.¹¹ Life is given us through the water of baptism, and this is so necessary that it must in some way be applied even to Old Testament believers.¹² Through baptism all the sins which a man has committed are forgiven.¹³ Hermas goes so far as to state that the Church is built upon the waters of baptism.¹⁴ This witness of Hermas bears even more weight if it is dated considerably before 140, as many scholars feel it should be.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr was a famous apologist who was born about 100 and who suffered martyrdom under Marcus Aurelius in 166.¹⁵ His principal works are his two Apologies and his

¹¹Man. IV, 3:1, para. 15, found in MPG, II, 917-922. Cf. also Joseph Cullen Ayer, A Source Book for Ancient Church History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 184.

¹²Vis. III, 3:5, found in MPG, II, 899-910; also Sim. IX, 16:2, 3, 5, found in MPG, II, 979-1010.

¹³Man. IV, 3:1, and IV, 1:8, found in MPG, II, 917-922. Cf. also Seeberg, op. cit., I, 60-61, Ayer, loc. cit., and Bingham, op. cit., III, 457-461.

¹⁴Vis. III, 3:5; MPG, II, 899-910, and Sim. IX, 16:2, found in MPG, II, 979-1010. Cf. also Seeberg, op. cit., I, 62, and Benoit, op. cit., pp. 115-137. Even Newman, a Baptist, admits that Hermas teaches baptismal regeneration: Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, c.1899, 1933), I, 230-1.

¹⁵For a biographical sketch, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 40-54.

Dialog with Trypho the Jew. Four passages especially require consideration.

In one place in his Dialog with Trypho Justin says about Jesus,

We indeed know that He did not approach the river because He needed either the baptism or the Spirit who came down upon Him in the shape of a dove. So, too, He did not condescend to be born and to be crucified because He was in need of birth or crucifixion; He did it solely for the sake of man, who from the time of Adam had become subject to death and the deceit of the serpent, each man having sinned by his own fault.¹⁶

As Wall goes on to explain, this quotation shows that

in these times, so very near the Apostles, they spoke of original sin affecting all mankind descended of Adam; and understood, that, besides the actual sins of each particular person, there is in our nature itself, since the fall, something that needs redemption and forgiveness by the merits of Christ.¹⁷

In section 43 of his Dialog Justin contends,

We also who by Him have had access to God, have not received this carnal circumcision, but the spiritual circumcision, which Enoch, and those like him observed. And we have received it by baptism, by the mercy of God, because we were sinners; and it is allowed to all persons to receive it by the same way.¹⁸

This section shows two things about Justin's thinking on baptism: that Christian baptism replaced the carnal circumcision of the Old Testament; and that a "spiritual circum-

¹⁶Dialog with Trypho, section 38; original in MFG, VI, 685-6; English translation from The Fathers of the Church, 32 vols. Translated by Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan, et al. New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., c.1947, et al. III, 289.

¹⁷Wall, op. cit., I, 64.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 65. The original is in MFG, VI, 567-568.

cision" is enacted through baptism.¹⁹ The fact that infants were circumcised in the Old Testament era, then, would argue strongly for their baptism now by Justin.²⁰

In his First Apology Justin defends the Christian religion against the charges of its heathen enemies. Part of his discussion of baptism is as follows:

How we dedicated ourselves to God when we were made new through Christ I will explain, since it might seem to be unfair if I left this out from my exposition. Those who are persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true, and promise that they can live accordingly, are instructed to pray and beseech God with fasting for the remission of their past sins, while we pray and fast along with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are reborn by the same manner of rebirth by which we ourselves were reborn; for they are then washed in the water in the name of God the Father and Master of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.²¹

This passage shows Justin's connection of regeneration (being born again) with baptism. He looked upon baptism as the means for effecting regeneration.²²

A much disputed passage from Justin is the following, also found in his First Apology:

¹⁹Wall, loc. cit.

²⁰Cf. Bingham, op. cit., III, 461-2.

²¹First Apology, chap. 61. MPG, VI, 419-20. English translation from Library of Christian Classics, op. cit., I, 282. Another translation is given in Wall, op. cit., I, 66-68, and Ayer, op. cit., p. 33.

²²Wall, loc. cit. Cf. also chap. 66 of the First Apology (original: MPG, VI, 427), translated in Ayer, op. cit., pp. 34-35. Cf. also Benoit, op. cit., pp. 138-185.

Several persons among us of sixty and seventy years old, of both sexes, who were disciplined (or made disciples) to Christ in, or from their childhood, do continue uncorrupted (or virgins).²³

Many advocates of infant baptism contend that this passage proves that their practice obtained also in St. Justin's day.²⁴ How else could "children" be "made disciples"? However, it must be admitted that the expression $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\tau\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$ (from childhood) is not restricted to infants. It can also be applied to children who have reached the age of responsibility, e.g., children who are six, eight, or ten years old.²⁵ Hence even if Justin did have baptism in mind as the means to "make disciples" of all nations²⁶ there is no proof here that he applied this also to infants.

St. Irenaeus

St. Irenaeus is a very important figure, both because he was "the most eminent teacher of the Church in the second

²³First Apology, chap. 15. MPG, VI, 349-350. English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 70.

²⁴E.g., Wall, loc. cit., and F. G. Hibbard, Christian Baptism (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippett, 1845), Part I, pp. 186-8.

²⁵Cf. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, and Cambridge, The University Press, c.1957), pp. 609-610.

²⁶And even this is incapable of direct proof. Cf. K. R. Hagenbach, A Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by C. W. Buch and revised and edited by Henry B. Smith (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1861), I, 200: "Justin Martyr Apol. I.15 speaks of $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\rho}\epsilon\sigma\ \delta\alpha\iota\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\tau\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$, but this does not necessarily involve baptism; comp. Semisch, II, 431sq." Cf. also Andreas Wiberg, Christian Baptism Set Forth in the Words of the Bible (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), pp. 215-216.

half of the second century"²⁷ and "the soundest among the ante-Nicene fathers,"²⁸ and because he was a pupil of Polycarp, who, in turn, was a disciple of the Apostle John.²⁹

Irenaeus, as Justin, speaks of original sin as affecting "all mankind"³⁰ and all our "race,"³¹ putting us in a state of being "debtors to God, transgressors, and enemies to Him,"³² under the stroke of the serpent and addicted to death."³³ Irenaeus also discusses Christ's redemption and baptism, treating baptism "as of the means or instrument by which this redemption is conveyed and applied to anyone, and calls it by the name of *λύτρωσις* and *ἀπολύτρωσις*, 'redemption.'"³⁴

²⁷Lutheran Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 523.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Here there is a direct "apostolic succession" from John through Polycarp to Irenaeus, a direct line which, because of its shortness both in time and in number of "links" involved, can be expected to preserve both correct apostolic teaching and practice. For a brief biography of St. Irenaeus, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 24-39.

³⁰Against Heresies, Book V, chap. 19; found in MFG, VII, 1175-6.

³¹Ibid., chap. 21; MFG, VII, 1178-82.

³²Ibid., chap. 16; MFG, VII, 1167-8.

³³Ibid., chap. 19; MFG, VII, 1175-6, and Book IV, chap. 5; MFG, VII, 983-6.

³⁴He clearly teaches that it is only in and through Christ that we have reconciliation and redemption; cf. Against Heresies, Book III, chap. 20; MFG, VII, 942-5. He identifies this work of Christ with baptism in Against Heresies, Book I, chap. 18; MFG, VII, 641-650. Cf. also Wall, op. cit., I, 71.

The most quoted and disputed passage from Irenaeus which has bearing on our problem, however, is the following from his second book Against Heresies:

Therefore as He Christ was a Master, He had also the age of a Master. Not disdaining nor going in a way above human nature; nor breaking in His own person the law which He had set for mankind; but sanctifying every several age by the likeness that it has to Him. For He came to save all persons by Himself; all, I mean, who by Him are regenerated unto God; infants and little ones, and children and youths, and elder persons. Therefore He went through the several ages: for infants being made an infant, sanctifying infants; to little ones He was made a little one, sanctifying those of that age; and also giving them an example of godliness, justice, and dutifulness; to youths He was a youth.

. . .³⁵

The argument for infant baptism in this passage hinges on the word renascuntur, are regenerated. Elsewhere Irenaeus identifies this term with baptism.³⁶ If the same identification is made here Irenaeus can be cited as an important witness for infant baptism. This argument is strengthened by the inconceivability of "infants" being regenerated in any way except by baptism.³⁷

³⁵Against Heresies, Book II, chap. 22, para. 4; MFG, VII, 783-4. The English translation given here is from Wall, op. cit., I, 72-3.

³⁶Cf. supra, p. 12, footnote 35; also Irenaeus' Against Heresies, Book I, chap. 21, para. 1; Book III, chap. 17, paras. 1 and 2, and chap. 22, para. 4; and Book IV, chap. 36, para. 4, all found in MFG, VII. Cf. also Bingham, op. cit., III, 464-6.

³⁷This same line of argumentation is used by Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 183-4, and Wharton B. Marriott in his article "Baptism," in A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, edited by William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (London: John Murray, 1875), I, 169. Cf. also Hencit, op. cit., pp. 186-221. For the view of those who separate regeneration and

With this we conclude our study of the first and second century Church fathers. While Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen also lived during the latter part of this period, their main activity was after 200, and so they will be considered in the next chapter.

Summary of the Evidence from the First and Second Centuries

1. As no material explicitly referring to infant baptism has come down from this era, the conclusion is warranted that this "problem" was not a problem at that time. No apologetic or polemical literature has endured which either defends or attacks infant baptism. Infant baptism was either universally accepted or universally rejected by the Church.

2. There is considerable evidence from this period that the Church regarded all human beings corrupt from birth, full of sin, and needing God's forgiveness (Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus). There is also evidence that the Church regarded baptism as a means (even the means) of regeneration (Ignatius, Barnabas, Hermas, Justin Martyr,

baptism, cf. Hagenbach, op. cit., I, 200-201, and Wiberg, op. cit., pp. 222-227. Reformed theologians agree on the identification of regeneration with baptism, but still maintain that Irenaeus and the other Church fathers did not teach baptismal regeneration. E.g., James Ragan Collinsworth, The Pseudo Church Doctrines of Anti-Pedo-Baptists Defined and Refuted (Kansas City, Mo.: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1892), p. 395: "Irenaeus called baptism 'regeneration' because it is an external emblem of it."

Irenaeus).³⁸ And, finally, there is evidence that the Church considered also infants capable of regeneration (Irenaeus). These facts can be summarized as testimony for infant baptism in the second century in the following valid syllogisms:

First Syllogism

Major premise: All (infants) / are (human beings infected by sin and in need of God's forgiveness).

Minor premise: All (human beings infected by sin and in need of God's forgiveness) / are (subjects in which God is capable of effecting regeneration).

Conclusion: Therefore, all (infants) / are (subjects in which God is capable of effecting regeneration).³⁹

Second Syllogism

Major premise: All (infants) / are (subjects in which God is capable of effecting regeneration).

³⁸On this point cf. Johann Christian Wilhelm Augusti, Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie (Leipzig: der Dyk'schen Buchhandlung, 1836), II, 309-321; Charles W. Bennett, Christian Archaeology, second edition, vol. IV of the Library of Biblical and Theological Literature, edited by George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst (New York: Eaton and Mains, and Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, c.1898), pp. 432-4; Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 183-5; J. F. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine (London: Methuen and Co., 1903), pp. 378-390; and Albert Hauck, "Taufe" in Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, second edition, begun by Johann Jakob Herzog and Gustav Leopold Plitt and continued by Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1885), XV, 220ff.

³⁹which is exactly what Irenaeus taught; supra, pp. 12-13. For the opposite view, that infants are incapable of regeneration, cf. Alexander Campbell, Christian Baptism with its Antecedents and Consequents (Nashville, Tenn.: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1913), pp. 238ff.

Minor premise: All (subjects in which God is capable of effecting regeneration) / are (persons capable of regeneration through baptism).⁴⁰

Conclusion: Therefore, all (infants) / are (persons capable of regeneration through baptism).⁴¹

⁴⁰Which is exactly what Justin Martyr expresses in his Dialog with Trypho, section 43; quoted supra, p. 9.

⁴¹Many scholars agree that the accumulative testimony of this period points unanimously to the practice of infant baptism, even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the literature which has survived from this era. E.g., cf. Bennett, op. cit., p. 447, and Philip Schaff, Ante-Nicene Christianity, vol. II of History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 258-260. Others, of course, who believe infant baptism to have been introduced later and gradually from outside the Church, discount all this evidence because there is no specific mention made of infant baptism. E.g., cf. Wiberg, op. cit. For an excellent and scholarly study of this second century period, cf. Benoit, op. cit., especially the conclusion, pp. 223-230. An excellent bibliography is given on pp. 231-240.

CHAPTER III

THE EVIDENCE OF THE THIRD CENTURY

In this chapter will be discussed the evidence of the Church fathers who functioned during this century, and also one Church council of this period. Here there are many specific references to infant baptism.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria lived from about 150 to 213. He was born of heathen parents; studied in Italy, Syria, and Palestine; and later went to Egypt, where he became the head of the famous center of Christian learning at Alexandria.¹ He was first instructed by Pantaenus, and later became the teacher of the famous Origen.² At one place in his Instructor Clement disputed against some heretics who said that catholic baptism was not enough to put one into a complete state of Christianity. Other rites, too, were necessary. Against them Clement declared,

When we were reborn, we straightway received the perfection for which we strive. For we were enlightened, that is, we came to the knowledge of God. . . .

This is what happens with us, whose model the Lord made Himself. When we are baptized, we are enlightened; being

¹Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin L. Lueker, editor in chief (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 238.

²For a biographical sketch of Clement, cf. Ernest Leigh-Bennett, Handbook of the Early Christian Fathers (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), pp. 77-94.

enlightened, we become adopted sons; becoming adopted sons, we are made perfect; and becoming perfect, we are made divine. "I have said," it is written, "you are gods and all of you the sons of the most High."

This ceremony is often called "free gift," "enlightenment," "perfection," and "cleansing"--"cleansing," because through it we are completely purified of our sins; "free gift," because by it the punishments due to our sins are remitted; "enlightenment," since by it we behold the wonderful holy light of salvation, that is, it enables us to see God clearly; finally, we call it "perfection" as needing nothing further, for what more does he need who possesses the knowledge of God? It would indeed be out of place to call something that was not fully perfect a gift of God. He is perfect; therefore, the gifts He bestows are also perfect. Just as at His command all things came into existence, so, on His mere desire to give, there immediately arises an overflowing measure of His gifts. What is yet to come, His will alone has already anticipated.³

Here in Clement, as in the earlier Church fathers, we find an identification of baptism and regeneration.⁴ The entire primitive Church is unanimous concerning this regenerative ability--this "sacramental power"--of baptism. Here, too, Clement's broad education, extensive travels, and important position as head of the Alexandrian school enhances the opinion that his view was that of the entire Christian Church of his time.

³Instructor, Book I, chap. 6. This passage in its original Greek is given in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Graecorum (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862 et al.), VIII, 279-311. Hereafter Migne's edition of the Greek fathers will be referred to as MFG. This English translation is found in The Fathers of the Church, XXIII, 25-26. 32 vols. Translated by Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan, et al. New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., c.1947, et al.

⁴Of. also Clement's Treatise on Marriage, given in English translation in The Library of Christian Classics, John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry F. Van Dusen, general editors (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953, etc.),

Tertullian

Tertullian, "the father of Latin theology," was born at Carthage in North Africa about 150. He was converted to Christianity sometime between his thirtieth and fortieth year. Later he joined the Montanists, an ascetic sect which blasphemously held that a man named "Montanus" was the paraclete or comforter which our Savior promised to send His disciples. Tertullian in later life was definitely outside the stream of catholic Christianity. He died between 220 and 240.⁵

Tertullian was unique in that he both affirmed the necessity and saving power of baptism and advised the delay of baptism as long as possible. The most pertinent sections are the three quotations given below, all from Tertullian's treatise On Baptism.

Whereas it is an acknowledged rule, that none can be saved without baptism, grounded especially on that sen-

vol. II, Alexandrian Christianity. P. 79: "For there is no need for the Lord to make believers do this [i.e., wash] after intercourse since by one baptism He has washed them clean for every such occasion, as also He has comprehended in one baptism the many washings of Moses." P. 81: "He [God] thus wishes us to turn ourselves again and become as children who have come to know the true Father and are re-born through water by a generation different from birth in the created world." Also one of our Baptist sources frankly admits that Clement teaches regeneration through baptism: cf. V. L. Peterson, Baptismal Regeneration, the Great Pagan Idol (n.p., c.1947. The book may be ordered from Rev. V. L. Peterson, 1349 Midway Parkway, St. Paul 13, Minn.), p. 38: "When we come to Clement, 193-202, we find indications of the regenerative power of baptism."

⁵cf. Lutheran Cyclopedia, op. cit., p. 1044; Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 55-76; and William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: University Press, 1844), I, 87.

tence of our Lord, Unless one be born of water he cannot be saved: some scruples do arise, and even rash discourses of some men, how according to that rule the apostles could be saved, whom we do not find to have been baptized with our Lord's baptism, except Paul. And when Paul only of them had the baptism of Christ, either the rest, who wanted this water of Christ, must be supposed in a dangerous condition, that so the rule may stand fast; or else the rule is broken, if any persons not baptized, can be saved. I have heard some men (God is my witness) talk at this rate, and would have nobody think me so lowd as by the itch of my pen to raise questions purposely, which may cause scruples in other men. I will here give an answer, as well as I can, to those men that deny the Apostles to have been baptized. For if they received only the baptism of John as of a man, and had not that of our Lord, (inasmuch as our Lord Himself had determined that there is to be but one baptism, saying to Peter when he desired to be washed, He that has been once washed, has no need again: which He would not have said to one that had not been washed at all,) even this is a plain proof against those who take away from the Apostles even the baptism of John, that they may abolish as needless the sacrament of water. . . . Here again these impious men raise cavils, and say, baptism is not necessary for those that have faith, which is sufficient; for Abraham without any sacrament of water, but of faith only, pleased God.

But in all matters the later injunctions bind, and the following rules take place above those that were before. Though there were salvation formerly by bare faith before our Lord's passion and resurrection: yet when the faith is enlarged to believe in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there is an enlargement of the sacrament, the sealing of baptism, as it were a garment to our faith; which formerly was bare, but cannot now be without its law: for the law of baptizing is given, and the form of it appointed: Go, says He, teach the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And when to this law that rule is added, Except one be regenerated of water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, it has bound up faith to a necessity of baptism. And therefore all believers from thenceforward were baptized. . . .

⁶Tertullian, On Baptism, chapters 12 and 13. The original Latin is given in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Latinorum (Paris: Garnier Freres, 1862 et al.), I,

Later, in chapter seventeen, he says that it is not absolutely unlawful for laymen to baptize, and then adds,

But how much more necessary for laymen is it to keep the rules of humility and modesty; that since these things belong to men of higher order, they do not arrogate to themselves the office of the bishops that is proper to them? Emulation is the mother of schism. The most blessed Apostle said, that all things were lawful, but all things were not expedient. Let it suffice that thou make use of this power in cases of necessity: when the circumstance either of the place, or of the time, or of the person requires it. For then the adventuring to help is well taken, when the condition of a person in danger forces one to it: because he that shall neglect at such a time to do what he lawfully may, will be guilty of the person's perdition [or damnation].⁷

These two sections tell us much about Tertullian's opinion of baptism. He clearly regarded it as a means of regeneration. For him it was the new birth which brought a person into Christ's kingdom.⁸ Accordingly, he held that a lack of baptism damns, and the negligent party is guilty of the damnation of the unbaptized. All this must be borne in mind when considering the following:

But they whose duty it is to administer baptism, are to know that it must not be given rashly. Give to every one that asketh thee, has its proper subject, and relates to almsgiving: but that command rather is here to be considered, Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine; and that, Lay

1321-24. Hereafter Migne's edition of the Latin fathers will be referred to as MPL. This English translation is found in Wall, op. cit., I, 90-91.

⁷Tertullian, On Baptism, chap. 17; MPL, I, 1327-28. The English translation is from Wall, op. cit., I, 92.

⁸For additional proof of this, cf. Tertullian, De Pudicitia, I, 21, found in MPL, II, 980-983. An English translation is found in Joseph Cullen Ayer, A Source Book for Ancient Church History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 186.

hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's faults. . . . Therefore according to every one's condition and disposition, and also their age, the delaying of baptism is more profitable, especially in the case of little children. For what need is there that the godfathers should be brought into danger? Because they may either fail of their promises by death, or they may be mistaken by a child's proving of wicked disposition. Our Lord says indeed, Do not forbid them to come to Me. Therefore let them come when they are grown up; let them come when they understand; when they are instructed whither it is that they come; let them be made Christians when they can know Christ. What need their guiltless age make such haste to the forgiveness of sins? Men will proceed more warily in worldly things; and he that should not have earthly goods committed to him, yet shall have heavenly. Let them know how to desire this salvation, that you may appear to have given to one that asketh.

For no less reason unmarried persons ought to be kept off, who are likely to come into temptation, as well those that never were married, upon account of their coming to ripeness, as those in widowhood for the miss of their partner: until they either marry or be confirmed in continence. They that understand the weight of baptism will rather dread the receiving it than the delaying of it. An entire faith is secure of salvation.⁹

In this section Tertullian obviously advises the delay of baptism. This delay is not only advised regarding infants, however, but also regarding adults. How can this view be reconciled with the preceding opinion, according to which a delay of baptism is pictured as entailing the possibility of damnation?

Much has been written on this problem, not only because of Tertullian's apparent self-contradiction, but also because

⁹Tertullian, On Baptism, chap. 18; MPL, I, 1329-31. This English translation is from Wall, op. cit., I, 93-94.

of his apparent opposition to infant baptism. This opposition carries much weight in view of the fact that Tertullian is the very first of the Church fathers to refer specifically to this practice. Modern opponents of infant baptism assert that Tertullian's opposition "proves" that infant baptism had not been in vogue in the Church before his time, and was just then being introduced.¹⁰ He, then, as a conscientious and "orthodox" theologian, opposed it. Is this conclusion warranted?

The following appears to be the best solution.

Tertullian, as the other ancient Church fathers, regarded baptism as the means for effecting regeneration. In fact, baptism for Tertullian was the only means of regeneration, for had not Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water [i.e., baptism] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"?¹¹ Accordingly, baptism is absolutely necessary for eternal life, for by this means all our past sins are washed away. Whether sins, especially grave sins, which are committed after baptism can be forgiven, is a very difficult problem. Baptism washes away the guilt of all origi-

¹⁰E.g., cf. Andreas Wiberg, Christian Baptism Set Forth in the Words of the Bible (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), pp. 229-231. However, even one of our sources opposed to infant baptism admits that Tertullian "taught infant baptism unto regeneration." Peterson, op. cit., p. 38.

¹¹John 3:5; used by Tertullian in support for the necessity of baptism, supra, p. 19.

nal sin and all past actual sins, but not sins committed after baptism. Accordingly, in order to "get the most" out of one's baptism, one should delay it as long as possible. If you wait until right before death baptism can wash away all the sins you have committed in this life. A deathbed baptism makes you more sure of your salvation, more positive that all your sins are washed away. And, if God unexpectedly calls you out of this world without your having been baptized, you may be sure that your faith by itself effects for you the forgiveness of your sins: "An entire faith is secure of salvation."¹² However: when an unbaptized person is on his deathbed, baptism is not to be neglected or refused under any circumstances whatever. He who refuses to baptize the deathly sick is imperiling their salvation, and, if they die unbaptized, is guilty of their damnation. Accordingly, "emergency" baptism is to be administered to all in danger of immediate death, no matter what their chronological age.

This seems to be the best construction of Tertullian's position. He appears to be a witness on the side of those who practice infant baptism, rather than on the side of those who deny it, in the following respects:

¹²On Baptism, chap. 18; quoted supra, p. 22.

1. He affirms that baptism is a means of regeneration, a means of washing away sin, rather than merely a sign of a regeneration already effected.¹³
2. His testimony is clear that he himself believed infants could be regenerated through baptism.¹⁴
3. He advises the delay of baptism, not only for infants, but also for older people.
4. His reason for the denial of baptism to infants is not their lack of understanding; nor the absence of their need for the forgiveness of sins; nor the inability of baptism to effect the forgiveness of their sins. His only reason for postponement is consideration for sins committed after baptism.
5. His argument in chapter 18 is not against infant baptism per se, but rather against early baptism per se and for the delay of baptism on all age levels (except the aged).
6. His discussion in chapter 18 of bringing little children to baptism is no proof that infant baptism was first being introduced about that time. He does not say that he opposes infant baptism because it is an innovation, and contrary to ecclesiastical custom, but rather because of unforgivable sins which might be committed after baptism.
7. In fact, Tertullian's failure to use Church custom in support of his denial of baptism to infants is an argumentum e silentio for the practice of infant baptism at this time.
8. His mention of godparents who testify for the children who are incapable of answering for themselves (ch. 18) also points to the practice of infant baptism at this time.

¹³Supra, pp. 19-22; cf. also Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 132-3.

¹⁴On Baptism, chap. 18; supra, pp. 21-22.

In conclusion, Tertullian's position on baptism can be summarized as follows. He regarded baptism as the means of regeneration. It effects the forgiveness of sins through this rebirth in everyone who is baptized, regardless of age. However, baptism washes away only past sins. Hence baptism is to be delayed as long as possible. Tertullian looked upon baptism as the culmination of the Christian life, rather than as an initiation into it. Many aspects of his position as expressed in his writings point to the conclusion that, while he personally opposed baptism early in life, this practice--including infant baptism--was in vogue during his time.¹⁵

Origen

One of Tertullian's contemporaries was Origen, "the most famous representative of the Alexandrian theology,

¹⁵The position set forth in the preceding paragraphs is also maintained essentially by the following: F. G. Hibbard, Christian Baptism (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1845), pp. 189-194; Charles W. Bennett, Christian Archeology, second edition, vol. IV of the Library of Biblical and Theological Literature, edited by George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst (New York: Eaton and Mains, and Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, c.1898), pp. 434-36, 448; Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hofling, Das Sakrament der Taufe (Erlangen: der Palm'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1846), I, 104-108; James Ragan Collinsworth, The Pseudo Church Doctrines of Anti-Pedo-Baptists Defined and Refuted (Kansas City, Mo.: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1892), pp. 395-6; Joseph Bingham, The Antiquities of the Christian Church (London: William Straker, 1843), III, 466-8; Paul Feine et al., "Baptism," in The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1951), I, 451; K. R. Hagenbach, A Text-book of the History of Doctrines, translated by C. W. Buch and revised and edited by Henry B. Smith (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1861), I, 201; Thomas Callaher, A Short Method with

which aimed at a reconciliation of Christianity and hellenistic thought."¹⁶ He was born of Christian parents in 185, and was educated under Pantaenus and Clement of Alexandria. At age eighteen he became leader of the catechetical school in Alexandria, which was an outstanding center of learning. He traveled to Rome, Arabia, Palestine, and Greece. He was captured and cruelly tortured under the emperor Decius, which caused his death in 254.¹⁷ Three sections of Origen's writings require attention.¹⁸

the Dipping Anti-Pedobaptists (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Co., 1878), pp. 161-4; and Philip Schaff, Ante-Nicene Christianity, vol. II of History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 261. Cf. also J. R. Graves and Jacob Ditzler, The Graves--Ditzler or Great Carrollton Debate (Memphis, Tenn.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1876), pp. 723-770 passim. For the opposite view cf. Augustus Neander, Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas, edited by J. L. Jacobi, translated from the German by J. E. Ryland (London: Henry C. Bohn, 1858), I, 231-3. Bennett summarizes (p. 449): "That infant baptism was opposed at any time in the early centuries arose largely from the mistaken notion that baptism washed away all (past) sins, and that sins committed after baptism were specially difficult of cleansing; hence the frequent deferring of baptism until a late period in life or just before death."

¹⁶Lutheran Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 767.

¹⁷For a biography of Origen, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 95-113.

¹⁸Some opponents of infant baptism contend that these quotations are unreliable. They are all taken from Rufinus and Jerome's Latin translations of Origen's original Greek. Rufinus and Jerome are somewhat unreliable, however, in that they often were not content with translating, but often interjected their own ideas into the work of the translation. Nevertheless, the evidence points to these sections being original with Origen. For a thorough discussion of this problem cf. Wall, op. cit., I, 106ff.; III, 544ff.; IV, 423ff.; and Wiberg, op. cit., pp. 232-6.

(1) From Origen's Homily Eight on Leviticus, chap. four:

Hear David speaking, I was, says he, conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother bring me forth: showing that every soul that is born in the flesh is polluted with the filth of sin and iniquity: and that therefore that was said which we mentioned before; that none is clean from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day.

Besides all this, let it be considered, what is the reason that whereas the baptism of the Church is given for forgiveness of sins, infants also are by the usage of the Church baptized: when if there were nothing in infants that wanted forgiveness and mercy, the grace of baptism would be needless to them.¹⁹

Origen here stands as a powerful witness for infant baptism. He affirms (1) that original sin affects all from birth, (2) that baptism gives the forgiveness of sins, and (3) that the Church baptizes infants for this reason. It is to be noted that Origen here is not giving his opinion of what should be done, as was the case with Tertullian (supra), but instead is indicating what IS the teaching and practice of the Church.

(2) From Origen's Homily Fourteen on Luke:

Having occasion given in this place, I will mention a thing that causes frequent inquiries among the brethren. Infants are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins? Or when have they sinned? Or how can any reason of the laver in their case hold good, but according to that sense that we mentioned even now: none is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon the earth? And it is for

¹⁹Origen's Homily Eight on Leviticus, chap. four; MFG, XII, 492-508. This English translation is from Wall, op. cit., I, 104.

that reason because by the sacrament of baptism the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptized.²⁰

(3) From Origen's Comments on the Epistle to the Romans, Book V, chap. 9:

And also in the law it is commanded, that a sacrifice be offered for every child that is born, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons: of which one is for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering. For what sin is this one pigeon offered? Can the child that is new born have committed any sin? It has even then sin, for which the sacrifice is commanded to be offered; from which even he whose life is but of one day is denied to be free. Of this sin David is to be supposed to have said that which we mentioned before, In sin did my mother conceive me: for there is in the history no account of any particular sin that his mother had committed.

For this also it was, that the Church had from the Apostles a tradition [or order] to give baptism even to infants. For they, to whom the divine mysteries were committed, knew that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be done away by water and the Spirit: by reason of which the body itself is also called the body of sin.²¹

Here, too, Origen bears witness to original sin, the sacramental power of baptism, and the practice of infant baptism. In addition should be noted Origen's statement that infant baptism was a tradition (or order) "from the Apostles." Instead of being a recent innovation, Origen maintains that this practice was derived from the Apostles

²⁰MPC, XIII, 1833-38; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 104-5.

²¹MPC, XIV, 1047; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 105-6

themselves, some of whom were still living about 150 years before Origen wrote this.²²

The objection might be raised that Origen was heretical in many areas of Christian theology, and hence his witness should be discounted. His speculative and mystical philosophy led him to deny the physical resurrection of the dead, assert the pre-existence and pretemporal fall into sin of souls, and affirm an eternal creation and the final restoration of all men and of fallen angels.²³ For these views he was attacked both by his contemporaries and by churchmen of succeeding generations. However, it should be noted (1) that by no one was he accused of heresy because of his view of baptism and infant baptism; in this area all other churchmen seemed to agree with him; and (2) even on the

²²cf. H8fling, op. cit., I, 108-9; Hagenbach, op. cit., I, 201; Hibbard, op. cit., pp. 194-6; Seeberg, op. cit., I, 155-6; Bingham, op. cit., III, 468-9; and Wiberg, op. cit., pp. 232-246. Origen's statement about infant baptism being an apostolic tradition is in direct contradiction to Hagenbach (op. cit., I, 198), that "Infant baptism had not come into general use before the time of Tertullian." Origen also contradicts Neve, a Lutheran(!), who asserts (Juergen Ludwig Neve, A History of Christian Thought; Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1943, I, 153), "But in the meantime [since that of the New Testament writers] the adult baptism had changed to infant baptism. At first this practice was exceptional, but with Constantine it had become the rule." With this view, of course, modern Baptists agree entirely. This position is also maintained by Neander, op. cit., I, 228-235. The two chief arguments against Origen are (1) that these sections are interpolations of Jerome and Rufinus, and (2) that Origen's "little ones" refers to older children.

²³Lutheran Cyclopedia, loc. cit.

basis of only his own writings Origen's teachings on baptism have more weight than his position on other subjects, for he plainly asserts that his teaching and practice of baptism are not only his, but instead are of the "Church . . . from the Apostles." He does not say this regarding his other teachings which the Church has regarded as heretical.

In conclusion: Tertullian and Origen were contemporary churchmen, both heretical, who had divergent views on baptism. Both considered it a means of regeneration which washed away sin. They differed in that Origen practiced infant baptism, while Tertullian advised the delay of baptism as long as possible. The prominence of both of these churchmen leads to the conclusion that both procedures were practiced to a certain extent at that time. There are several facts, however, which lead to the conclusion that Origen's position was that of the great majority in the Church, and that Tertullian's was an innovation.

Origen claimed that his teaching was that of "the Church." He declared, in effect, "On this issue I am orthodox and speak for the whole Christian Church." His extensive travels and vast learning would tend to support his claim. Tertullian, on the other hand, did not claim that his view was that of "the Church." Even if he had, his more limited travels and experience would tend to minimize his claims.

Origen declared that infant baptism was a tradition (or order) from the Apostles themselves. Tertullian made no

such claim for the denial of infant baptism or even for the delay of baptism at all.

Tertullian set forth his view as his own personal opinion of that which should be done in the Church; he indicates no practice of the Church to support him. Origen, on the other hand, claimed that infant baptism was the practice of the Church, and that he was merely a spokesman for this universal practice.

Tertullian seems to intimate that others in his day disagreed with him, and did practice baptism early in life (including infant baptism). Origen, on the other hand, gives no indication of any disagreement with his practice of infant baptism.

St. Cyprian

St. Cyprian is the next churchman to require attention. Born about 200, he first became a Christian in 245. His tremendous popularity caused his elevation to the bishopric of Carthage (in North Africa) in 248. He fled during the Decian persecution (254), but was apprehended and beheaded later under the emperor Valerian.²⁴

There are many passages from St. Cyprian which indicate his agreement on baptism with all the Church fathers (except Tertullian) cited thus far. At one place, discussing the

²⁴Lutheran Cyclopaedia, op. cit., pp. 277-8. For a brief biography of Cyprian, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 114-134.

frequenting of heathen sacrifices by "Christian" parents, he speaks of "their little infants also being led or brought in their parents' arms, lost that which they had obtained immediately after they were born."²⁵ His obvious reference here is to infant baptism, as St. Augustine and others understood 150 years later.²⁶ In another place he says that in baptism man experiences the second birth and that baptism has a regenerative force.²⁷ In another he states that the recipient of baptism receives the Holy Ghost.²⁸ Elsewhere he contends that baptism frees from the devil²⁹ and from death and hell.³⁰ In another he declares that with baptism begins the whole origin of faith.³¹ More important than all these passages together, however, is Cyprian's letter to Fidus (epistle 59). This letter was in response to two questions asked by Fidus, a country bishop in North Africa. Fidus had sent his questions to a council of sixty-six bishops who met in Carthage, North Africa, in the year 252. Cyprian was the presiding bishop. One of the problems in-

²⁵In Cyprian's book, On the Lapsed; MPL, IV, 477-510. English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 143.

²⁶Cf. St. Augustine's Letter to Boniface; MPL, XXXIII, 359-364; the English is given in Wall, op. cit., I, 144-5.

²⁷To Donatus; MPL, IV, 203-205; cf. also Liber de Oratione Dominica, 23; MPL, IV, 552-3.

²⁸Epistle 63, para. 8; MPL, IV, 391.

²⁹Epistle 69; MPL, IV, 413-420.

³⁰Epistle 55; MPL, IV, 406-409.

³¹Referred to in Seeberg, op. cit., I, 194.

volved the crime of a certain Victor, a presbyter, who had been "admitted too soon to absolution" by a rash bishop. The other problem was whether infants might be baptized before they were eight days old. Cyprian, as head bishop of the council, was the author of the responding letter. It reads as follows.

Cyprian and the rest of the bishops who were present at the council, sixty-six in number, to Fidus our brother, greeting.

We read your letter, most dear brother, in which you write of one Victor a priest. . . .

But as to the case of infants: whereas you judge that they must not be baptized within two or three days after they are born; and that the rule of circumcision is to be observed, so that none should be baptized and sanctified before the eighth day after he is born; we were all in our assembly of the contrary opinion. For as for what you thought fitting to be done, there was not one that was of your mind, but all of us on the contrary, judged that the grace and mercy of God is to be denied to no person that is born. For whereas our Lord in His Gospel says, The Son of Man came not to destroy men's souls [or lives] but to save them: as far as lies in us, no soul, if possible, is to be lost.

For what is there deficient in him who has been once formed in the womb by the hands of God? They appear to us and in our eyes to attain perfection [or increase] in the course of the days of the world; but all things that are made by God are perfect by the work and power of God their Maker. The Scripture gives us to understand the equality of the divine gift on all, whether infants or grown persons. Elisha, in his prayer to God, stretched himself on the infant son of the Shunamite woman that lay dead, in such manner that his head, and face, and limbs, and feet were applied to the head, face, limbs, and feet of the child; which, if it be understood according to the quality of our body and nature, the infant could not hold measure with the grown man, nor its little limbs fit and reach to his great ones. But in that place a spiritual equality, and such as is in the esteem of God, is intimated to us; by which persons that are once made by God are alike and equal; and our growth of body by age makes a difference in the sense of the world, but not of God. Unless you

will think that the grace itself, which is given to baptized persons, is greater or less, according to the age of those that receive it; whereas the Holy Spirit is given not by different measures, but with fatherly affection and kindness equal to all. For God, as He accepts no one's person, so not his age; but with an exact equality shows Himself a Father to all for their obtaining the heavenly grace.

And whereas you say, that an infant in the first days after its birth is unclean, so that any of us abhors to kiss it. We think not this neither to be any reason to hinder the giving to it the heavenly grace. For it is written, to the clean all things are clean: nor ought any of us to abhor that which God has vouchsafed to make. Though an infant come fresh from the womb, no one ought to abhor to kiss it at the giving of the grace and the owning of the peace [or brotherhood,] when as in kissing the infant, every one of us ought, out of devotion, to think of the fresh handiwork of God: for we do in some sense kiss His hands in the person newly formed and but new born, when we embrace that which is of His making.

That the eighth day was observed in the Jewish circumcision, was a type going before in a shadow and resemblance; but on Christ's coming was fulfilled in the substance. For because the eighth day, that is, the next to the sabbath-day, was to be the day on which the Lord was to rise from the dead and quicken us, and give us the spiritual circumcision; this eighth day, that is, the next day to the sabbath, or Lord's day, was signified in the type before; which type ceased when the substance came, and the spiritual circumcision was given to us.

So that we judge that no person is to be hindered from obtaining the grace, by the law that is now appointed; and that the spiritual circumcision ought not to be restrained by the circumcision that was according to the flesh: but that all are to be admitted to the grace of Christ; since Peter, speaking in the Acts of the Apostles, says, The Lord has shown me that no person is to be called common or unclean.

If any thing could be an obstacle to persons against their obtaining the grace, the adult and grown and elder men would be rather hindered by their more grievous sins. If then the greatest offenders, and they that have grievously sinned against God before, have when they afterward come to believe, forgiveness of their sins; and no person is kept off from baptism and the grace: how much less reason is there to refuse an in-

fant, who, being newly born, has no sin, save that being descended from Adam according to the flesh, he has from his very birth contracted the contagion of the death anciently threatened: who comes for this reason more easily to receive forgiveness of sins, because they are not his own but others' sins that are forgiven him.

This, therefore, dear brother, was our opinion in the assembly; that it is not for us to hinder any person from baptism and the grace of God, Who is merciful and kind and affectionate to all. Which rule, as it holds for all, so we think it more especially to be observed in reference to infants and persons newly born: to whom our help and the divine mercy is rather to be granted, because by their weeping and wailing at their first entrance into the world, they do intimate nothing so much as that they implore compassion.

Dear brother, we wish you always good health.³²

The witness of this letter to infant baptism is obvious. Especially important are the following considerations:

1. The issue at stake was not infant baptism. This procedure seems to have been taken for granted by all concerned. The problem was whether infant baptism, like Old Testament circumcision, had to wait until the eighth day after birth.³³
2. Circumcision was regarded as a type of baptism, which, in turn, was referred to as "spiritual circumcision."
3. New-born babes were looked upon as possessing sinfulness, which they had inherited from their parents. These Church fathers, as all others examined thus far, believed in original sin.

³²Cyprian's Epistle (no. 59) to Fidus; original in MPL, III, 1047-1056; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 129-132. Cf. also MPL, IV, 369-370.

³³Thus this letter offers no support whatever for the contention of one Baptist writer, that in this letter we can see the origin of infant baptism in North Africa at this time. Cf. J. M. Cramp, Baptist History (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), pp. 32-35. Infant baptism was taken for granted by all concerned.

4. Baptism was looked upon as imparting the forgiveness of sins.
5. In this letter there is the witness of sixty-six bishops collectively for infant baptism.³⁴ This witness bears much weight in that it represents the unanimous decision of a considerably large number of the leaders of the Church. These were all, no doubt, educated and wise men, theologians, well acquainted with the practice and teaching of the Church. Probably all were at least middle-aged, and some in all probability were seventy or eighty, which would mean that they were born about 170 or 180. A change in practice so fundamental as infant baptism could not have been introduced without some controversy and opposition. Instead all sixty-six men, including the learned Cyprian, agreed--and even took for granted--that infant baptism was to be practiced.³⁵

Methodius

Methodius was bishop of Olympus in Lycia toward the end of the third century (died in 311). He taught plainly that regeneration took place through baptism.³⁶

³⁴Some attempt has been made to prove this letter a forgery of a later generation, but with little success. Cf. the discussion in Wall, op. cit., I, 132-6.

³⁵Wiberg (op. cit., pp. 247-251) tries to annul the council's testimony in that (1) its letter has no reference to any apostolic tradition regarding infant baptism and (2) infant communion, which the Western Church now rejects, is also advocated by the council. Neither of these factors at all disprove the main issue involved, however, that infant baptism was an accepted, undisputed, and apparently universal practice about 250 A.D. in the North African Church.

³⁶Convivium Decem Virginum, Orat. VIII, chap. 6 and 8: MFG, XVIII, 147-152; and Orat. III, chap. 8: MFG, XVIII, 71-76. Cf. also Seeberg, op. cit., I, 188.

³⁷For an excellent discussion of the third century witness concerning infant baptism, cf. Johann Christian Wilhelms

Summary of the Evidence from the Third Century

(1) In this period of Church history, as in the previous century, there is united testimony on the part of the Church fathers regarding original and inherited sin, the universal need for forgiveness, and the power of baptism as a regenerative force to impart this forgiveness.

(2) In addition, this century contains three outstanding churchmen who make many specific references to infant baptism. These three are Tertullian, Origen, and St. Cyprian, all contemporaries. All three were infected by some heresy, but St. Cyprian's was the least fundamental and obnoxious. All three bear some witness to infant baptism being a practice of the Church. Two of the three support the practice, and one, Tertullian, disparages it. He does so, however, not because he believes infant baptism contrary to apostolic teaching and practice, nor because he thinks the baptism of infants ineffective or unnecessary, but only because he approved the delay of baptism on all age levels. He viewed baptism as the climactic conclusion of the Christian life, rather than as an act of initiation into it. There is no evidence that he or any other third century Church father regarded infant baptism as an innovation. Instead there is the testimony of Origen, "that the Church had from the Apostles a tradition to give baptism even to infants."³⁷

³⁷For an excellent discussion of the third century evidence concerning infant baptism, cf. Johann Christian Wilhelm

Augusti, Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie (Leipzig: der Dyk'schen Buchhandlung, 1836), II, 330-343. Origen's testimony given here is in direct contradiction to Andre Legerde, quoted in Euphenia Neil McGraw Schwartz, A Compendium of Baptist History (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 40-41: "Until the sixth century, infants were baptized only when they were in danger of death. About this time the practice was introduced of administering baptism even when they were not ill."

The following is the Council of Elvener:

If anyone go over from the catholic Church to any heresy (or sect) and do return again to the Church: it is resolved that persons so returned shall not be admitted to communion until they have acknowledged their fault. Let him be in a state of penance for ten years, and after ten years he ought to be admitted to communion. But if they were infants when they were carried over, inasmuch as it was not by their own fault that they sinned, they ought to be admitted immediately.

This section is submitted because of its reference to infants being carried over into the sects. According to this quotation these infants were already regarded as members of the catholic Church. It is well known that some were considered members of the Church until baptism. Hence this decree supports the theory that infant baptism was the ancient practice of the Church.²

The Council of Neocaesarea

The Council of Neocaesarea is the second decree which has no explicit reference to infant baptism, but which is

¹Council of Elvener, canon 22. The English translation is from William Hall, The History of Infant Baptism, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1844), I, 148.

²A discussion of the matter is found in Hall, pp. 148-150.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVIDENCE OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

The Council of Eliberis

About the year 305 a group of Church officials decreed the following at the Council of Eliberis:

If anyone go over from the catholic Church to any heresy (or sect) and do return again to the Church: it is resolved that penance be not denied to such an one; because he acknowledges his fault. Let him be in a state of penance for ten years, and after ten years he ought to be admitted to communion. But if they were infants when they were carried over; inasmuch as it was not by their own fault that they sinned, they ought to be admitted immediately.¹

This section is submitted because of its reference to infants being carried over into the sects. According to this quotation these infants were already regarded as members of the catholic Church. It is well known that none were considered members of the Church until baptism. Hence this decree supports the theory that infant baptism was then the common practice of the Church.²

The Council of Neocaesarea

The Council of Neocaesarea in 314 made a decree which has no immediate reference to infant baptism, but which is

¹Council of Eliberis, canon 22. The English translation is from William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: University Press, 1844), I, 148.

²A discussion of the matter is found in Wall, op. cit., I, 148-150.

still thought to enlighten the subject. It states as follows:

A woman with child may be baptized when she pleases. For the mother in this matter communicates nothing to the child; because in the profession every one's own resolution is declared [or because every one's resolution at the profession is declared to be peculiar to himself].³

This canon, contend some opponents of infant baptism,⁴ shows that these Church fathers likewise refrained from baptizing infants. A pregnant woman is here advised to be baptized when she pleases; her own baptism in no way affects the spiritual condition of the child she is carrying. The Church fathers are here understood to oppose those who had doubts about the propriety of such a woman's baptism, because they thought that in such a baptism the child might also be baptized. Such an infant baptism, contend the opponents of infant baptism, the fathers must also have objected to; otherwise they would not have had scruples regarding such a joint baptism. Also, the decision that the woman's baptism communicates nothing to the child indicates that, if such a communication of baptism did take place, the fathers, as opponents of infant baptism, would have regarded it as unlawful. Further, the statement about "in the profession every one's own resolution is declared"

³Council of Neocaesarea, canon 6; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 151.

⁴E.g., Grotius; Wall, op. cit., I, 151ff. passim.

seems to indicate that baptism took place only after a public profession of faith.

Backers of infant baptism have a different interpretation. To them the problem before the council was simply, would the mother's baptism also hold for her child? If they baptized the child after its birth, there was a possibility that it was being baptized twice. But if they did not baptize it after birth, there was a danger that it had not been baptized at all. Over against this situation, then, the council ruled that "the mother . . . communicates nothing to the child"; each one must be baptized for himself. Regarding the "profession" made at baptism: this was done also in the case of infants, who had sponsors for this very purpose.⁵

A careful study of the passage involved will show that it is legitimately capable of either interpretation. The bare words do not show which of these two meanings the fathers had in mind. Nevertheless, as Wall points out,⁶ the word order in the original Greek favors the second explanation; for the sense of the last clause is not, "every one must make his own choice at the profession," but rather, "the choice which is made at the [baptismal] profession, is declared by every one to pertain only to himself." This, then, is only an explanation for the preceding statement,

⁵Cf. Tertullian, supra, p. 21.

⁶Wall, op. cit., I, 153-4.

that the mother in baptism communicates nothing to her unborn child.

Gregory Nazianzen

Gregory Nazianzen was a leading theologian of the Eastern Church in the fourth century. He lived from about 329 to 390. Born of a pious Christian mother and highly educated, he traveled from his native Cappadocia to Alexandria, Athens, Palestine, and Constantinople, where he became bishop in 381. His views can be expected to be representative of the catholic Christianity of his age.⁷ In his Oration on Baptism, Gregory says the following:

Religion teaches us that there are three sorts of generation or formation: that of our bodies; that of baptism; and that of the resurrection. The first of these is of the night, and is servile, and tainted with lust. The second is of the day, and is free and powerful against lust, and takes away all that veil [or darkness] contracted in our birth [or generation], and renews us to the supernal life. The last is more dreadful and sudden, bringing together in a moment all the creation, to be set before their Creator.⁸

Here it is evident that Gregory, as the previous Church fathers, regarded baptism as the means of spiritual regeneration. Through it our sins are forgiven and we receive eternal life.

⁷For a biography of St. Gregory, cf. Ernest Leigh-Bennett, Handbook of the Early Christian Fathers (London: Williams and Morgate, 1920), pp. 219-236.

⁸Oration XL, para. 2; found in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Graecorum (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862 et al.), XXXVI, 359-428. Hereafter Migne's edition of the Greek fathers will be referred to as MPG. The English translation is from Wall, op. cit., I, 164.

This passage has even more bearing on infant baptism, however, because of its identification of baptism with "generation of the day." In another oration, talking about St. Basil, Gregory declares,

Now let us contemplate the affairs that relate to him himself. In the beginning then of his age he was by his excellent father, who was at that time a public teacher of virtue in the country of Pontus, swaddled, as I may call it, and formed with that best and most pure formation, which divine David rightly names "of the day," and which is opposed to that of the night.⁹

According to Gregory's description of baptism in his Oration on Baptism, this section must refer to St. Basil's baptism. That St. Basil was a mere infant at this time is brought out both by the expression "in the beginning of his age" and by the use of the word σπαργανοῦται, "swaddled," which evidently refers to infant swaddling clothes.

Also more pertinent evidence can be adduced from Gregory's Oration on Baptism. In paragraph four he mentions some of the names by which baptism is known: "The gift, the grace, baptism or washing, the anointing, the laver of regeneration, the amending of our make [or formation], the seal,"¹⁰ and then explains the reasons for these names. In paragraph seven he says that baptism "is a seal for such persons as newly enter into life; so to those that

⁹Oration XLIII, in praise of St. Basil MPG, XXXVI, 493-606. The English translation is from Wall, op. cit., I, 165.

¹⁰Wall, op. cit., I, 169; MPG, loc. cit.

are adult it is a grace, and the restoring of the image which they had lost."¹¹ Later he has an extensive section warning against the dangers of delaying baptism.¹² From this discourse the following is most apropos to our subject:

Art thou a youth? Fight against pleasures and passions with this auxiliary strength: list thyself in God's army. . . .

Art thou old? Let thy gray hairs hasten thee: strengthen thy old age with baptism. . . .

Hast thou an infant-child? Let not wickedness have the advantage of time; let him be sanctified from his infancy; let him be dedicated from his cradle to or by the Spirit. Thou, as a faint-hearted mother and of little faith, art afraid of giving him the seal because of the weakness of nature. Hannah, before Samuel was born, consecrated him, devoted him to God, and as soon as he was born, consecrated him, and brought him up from the first in a priestly garment, not fearing for human infirmities, but trusting in God. Thou hast no need of amulets or charms; together with which the devil slides into the minds of shallow persons, drawing to himself the veneration that is due to God. Give to him the Trinity, that great and excellent preservative.¹³

Here there is explicit advice to have one's infant children baptized. Later, after warning that the neglect of baptismal grace imperils salvation, he continues:

Some may say, suppose this to hold in the case of those that can desire baptism: what say you to those that are as yet infants, and are not in capacity to be sensible either of the grace or the miss of it? Shall we baptize them too? Yes, by all means, if any danger make it requisite. For it is better that they be sanctified

¹¹Wall, op. cit., I, 170.

¹²Mostly quoted and translated in Wall, op. cit., I, 170ff.

¹³Oration on Baptism, para. 17; MFG, XXXVI, 359-428; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 171-2.

without their own sense of it, than that they should die unsealed and uninitiated. And a ground of this to us is circumcision, which was given on the eighth day, and was a typical seal [or baptism] and was practised on those that had no use of reason: as also the anointing of the doorposts, which preserved the first-born by things that had no sense. As for others, I give my opinion that they should stay three years or thereabouts, when they are capable to hear and answer some of the holy words: and though they do not perfectly understand them, yet they form them: and that you then sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of initiation. For though they are not liable to give account of their life before their reason be come to maturity, (they having this advantage by their age, that they are not forced to account for the faults they have committed in ignorance,) yet by reason of those sudden and unexpected assaults of dangers that are by no endeavor to be prevented, it is by all means advisable that they be secured by the laver [of baptism].¹⁴

Gregory then replies to those who wanted to delay baptism because Jesus was not baptized until He was thirty years old. Gregory says that Jesus was perfect, and needed no cleansing; while we are begotten in corruption, and need to be clothed with incorruption and immortality through baptism.¹⁵

In this section, too, St. Gregory gives explicit advice in support of infant baptism. As in previous Church fathers, so here, too, is seen the comparison of baptism to circumcision and the opinion that baptism effects regeneration. Very noteworthy, however, is the fact that Gregory

¹⁴Oration on Baptism, para. 28; MPG, loc. cit.; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 177-8.

¹⁵Oration on Baptism, para. 29; Wall, loc. cit.

here advises immediate baptism only for those infants in danger of death.¹⁶ He recommends the delay of baptism for all others until age three, at which time they can participate--at least a little--in the ceremony. Here two observations are pertinent: (1) Gregory adduces this view as merely his opinion, and does not say it is the practice of the Church; and (2) even this position is not identical with that of the modern churches which demand "believers' baptism" only.¹⁷ Wall comments that St. Gregory probably took this position because of the delay of his own baptism.¹⁸

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa was a contemporary bishop of St. Gregory Nazianzen, also in the Eastern Church. He died af-

¹⁶On this point cf. the following: Charles W. Bennett, Christian Archaeology, second edition, vol. IV of the Library of Biblical and Theological Literature, edited by George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst (New York: Eaton and Mains, and Cincinnati: Curtis and Jennings, c.1898), p. 449; Joseph Bingham, The Antiquities of the Christian Church (London: William Straker, 1843), III, 471-4; and F. G. Hibbard, Christian Baptism (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1845), Part I, pp. 202-205.

¹⁷There is no foundation at all in this material from St. Gregory for the following comment of Andreas Wiberg, Christian Baptism Set Forth in the Words of the Bible (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), p. 253: "It shows most clearly that infant baptism in the Greek Church at this time was a new affair, unsettled by law, human or divine, and that baptism of new-born children was yet far from being there a general practice."

¹⁸Wall, op. cit., I, 181; cf. also K. R. Hagenbach, A Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by G. W. Bush and revised and edited by Henry B. Smith (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1861), I, 358-9.

ter 394. He taught that by baptism a child is instated into the paradise from which Adam was thrust out.¹⁹

Optatus

Optatus was bishop of Milevis in North Africa during the fourth century. He wrote several outstanding books against the schism of the Donatists about 370. In these he affirms that the catholic and Donatist doctrine and practice of baptism was the same in both parties.²⁰ In one book he compares a Christian's putting on Christ in baptism to the putting on of a garment. After calling Christ so put on "a garment swimming in the water," he continues,

But lest anyone should say, I speak irreverently, in calling Christ a garment: let him read what the Apostle says, As many of you as have been baptized in the name of Christ, have put on Christ. Oh what a garment is this, that is always one and never renewed, that decently fits all ages and shapes! It is neither too big for infants, nor too little for men, and without any alteration fits women.²¹

According to this, both catholics and Donatists in North Africa practiced infant baptism.

¹⁹In his Oratio Catechetica Magna, para. 33; found in MPL, XLV, 9-106. For a brief biography of Gregory of Nyssa, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 237-251.

²⁰Cf. Wall, op. cit., I, 160-1.

²¹De Schismate Donatistarum, V; found in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Latinorum (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862 et. al.), XI, 1063. Hereafter Migne's edition of the Latin Fathers will be referred to as MPL. The English translation is given in Wall, op. cit., I, 161-2. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 201-2.

St. Basil

St. Basil of Caesarea, one of "the three great Cappadocians," lived from about 330 to 379. He was the champion of orthodoxy in the Trinitarian controversies of the age and made important contributions in several different ecclesiastical fields.²² In his Oratio Exhortatoria ad Baptismum he expresses himself as follows:

There is therefore a several²³ season proper for several things; a time peculiar for sleep, and one peculiar for watching; a time for war, and a time for peace. But any time of one's life is proper for baptism.²⁴

Later he warns about the danger of delaying baptism, affirming that through baptism his hearers could be renewed and born again.²⁵ They, instead, wanted to delay baptism so that, as St. Basil alleges, they could continue enjoying the sinful pleasures of this world. These were catechumens, "half-Christians," who had taken instruction for a considerable time but who as yet had not crossed the threshold into the Church through baptism. Their not having been baptized before is no argument against infant baptism, however, as there is no proof that these catechumens had Christian par-

²²For a biography of St. Basil, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 196-218.

²³I.e., different.

²⁴Oratio Exhortatoria ad Baptismum, para. 1; Wall, op. cit., I, 209.

²⁵Oratio Exhortatoria ad Baptismum, para. 4.

ents.²⁶ As Wall observes, "this is no proof that any Christians, after they were once baptized themselves, did ever suffer their infant children to go without baptism."²⁷

St. Ambrose

St. Ambrose was a leader and teacher of the Western Church who lived from 340 to 397. A practical theologian, he was educated in Rome and spent almost all his life in Italy.²⁸ In his Commentary on St. Luke, Book I, he discusses Luke 1:17 and points out many similarities between John the Baptist and Elijah. After having mentioned Elijah's miracle of dividing the River Jordan, he continues,

But perhaps this may seem to be fulfilled in our time and in the Apostles' time. For that returning of the river waters backward toward the spring head, which was caused by Elijah when the river was divided (as the Scripture says, Jordan was driven back), signified the sacrament of the laver of salvation, which was afterward to be instituted; by which those infants that are baptized are reformed back again from wickedness or a wicked state to the primitive state of their nature.²⁹

Here St. Ambrose clearly affirms that infants through baptism are freed from sin and in some way brought back to the state of innocence which prevailed before the fall.

²⁶Wiberg, op. cit., pp. 253-4, takes the opposite view, contending that St. Basil's exhortation, "from a child you have been catechized in the word" in this address proves they were children of Christians. There is no positive proof either way. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 205-6.

²⁷Wall, op. cit., I, 210.

²⁸For a biography of St. Ambrose, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 290-303.

²⁹Commentary on St. Luke, Book I, chap. 1, para. 37; MFL, xv, 1628; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 221.

In another book, where he discusses circumcision, he calls baptism a spiritual circumcision from sin, and then continues,

Both the home-born and the foreigner, the just and the sinful, must be circumcised by the forgiveness of sins, so as not to practice sin any more; for no person comes to the kingdom of heaven but by the sacrament of baptism. . . . For unless any person be born again of water and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. You see he excepts no person, not an infant, not one that is hindered by any unavoidable accident.³⁰

The evidence is clear in this place, too, for baptism being a sacrament of regeneration and for infants being included as proper subjects.

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople, lived from about 345 to 407. As bishop of the city which for a while was capital of the Roman Empire, it may be expected that all his practices, if not his doctrines, were in accord with catholic Christianity.³¹ In Homily Forty he discusses the pain and trouble of Old Testament circumcision, and then continues,

But our circumcision, I mean the grace of baptism, gives cure without pain, and procures to us a thousand benefits, and fills us with the grace of the Spirit; and it has no determinate time, as that had; but one

³⁰De Abrahamo Patriarcha, Book II, chap. 11, para. 84; MPL, XIV, 521; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 223. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 206-7, and Bingham, op. cit., III, 475.

³¹For a biography of St. Chrysostom, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 252-271.

that is in the very beginning of his age,³² or one that is in the middle of it, or one that is in his old age, may receive this circumcision made without hands. In which there is no trouble to be undergone, but to throw off the load of sins, and receive pardon for all foregoing offences.³³

St. Chrysostom here, as St. Ambrose above, agrees as to the power and efficacy of baptism and also as to its applicability to infants. By itself this section can also be understood as permitting the delay of baptism, but elsewhere St. Chrysostom indicates his disapproval of this procedure.³⁴

There are also citations from St. Chrysostom demonstrating his approval of infant baptism which have survived only in the Latin by way of St. Augustine.³⁵

³²St. Chrysostom here meant infancy, as is demonstrated by his use of this expression elsewhere; cf. Wall, op. cit., I, 228.

³³Homily Forty, on Genesis, para. 4: MPG, LIII, 373-4; English translation from Wall, loc. cit. In his approval of infant baptism in this passage St. Chrysostom seems to contradict a more recent John Chrysostom, who, with George J. Leber, says in The Holy Liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church (Washington D.C.: Order of Sons of Pericles, c.1946), p. 8: "Infant baptism (now practiced in the Greek Orthodox Church) had not yet [at the time of St. Chrysostom] been introduced into the Church, and before one could receive baptism, he was required to have a good knowledge of the faith." Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 207-8.

³⁴Cf. Wall, op. cit., I, 230.

³⁵Cf. St. Augustine's Contra Julianum, Book I, chap. 6, para. 21; MPL, XLIV, 654-5; English translation in Wall, op. cit., I, 231-4.

The Second Ecumenical Council

In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council was called in Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius I. One of the major achievements of this council was the completion of the Niceno-constantinopolitan Creed, which the Council of Nicea (325) had concluded with "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Among the articles added at Constantinople was this, "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." While this does not relate directly to infant baptism, it does demonstrate unquestionably that the entire orthodox Church of that age looked upon baptism as a "sacrament"--a divinely appointed means for imparting the forgiveness of sins.³⁶

The Council of Carthage

The Council of Carthage of 397 also requires attention. Held in North Africa at the time of the Donatist schism, it questioned whether those baptized in the Donatist churches could later receive holy orders in the catholic Church. The following canon was passed:

In reference to the Donatists, it is resolved that we do ask the advice of our brethren and fellow bishops Siricius and Simplicianus, concerning those only who are in infancy baptized among them; whether in that which they have not done by their own judgment, the

³⁶Cf. Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, second edition, translated from the German by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1896), II, 340-351, and Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York: Harper and Brothers, c. 1877), II, 57-8. The original is, ὁμολογοῦμεν ἐν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

error of their parents shall hinder them, that when they by a wholesome purpose shall be converted to the Church of God, they may not be promoted to be ministers of the holy altar.³⁷

The answers of these two bishops must have favored admission of the converts to the ministry, for four years later another council of Carthage ruled in this way.³⁸

The evidence of these councils indicates that infant baptism was the accepted practice of both catholics and Donatists.

St. Jerome

St. Jerome, one of the most learned and scholarly men of the fourth century, lived from 331 to 420. He devoted the last thirty-four years of his life to intensive literary work near Bethlehem. It was during this time that he translated the Vulgate and wrote many commentaries on the books of the Bible.³⁹ Innumerable quotations from St. Jerome could be adduced in support of infant baptism; here only two will be cited.⁴⁰

(1) In a letter to a Christian lady named Leta he admonishes that she carefully provide for the religious

³⁷The Third Council of Carthage, canon 48. English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 309.

³⁸Wall, op. cit., I, 310. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, p. 213.

³⁹For a biography of St. Jerome, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 272-289.

⁴⁰For references to more passages, cf. Wall, op. cit., I, 238-41, 348ff. passim.

training of her child. Parents are accountable for their children. After discussing this point he continues,

And how then is it true, you will say, that the sins of the fathers are not imputed to the children, nor those of the children to the fathers, but the soul that sinneth, it shall die?

This is said of those that have understanding; of such as he was, of whom it is said in the Gospel, "He is of age, let him speak for himself." But he that is a child, and thinks as a child, (till such time as he comes to years of discretion, and Pythagoras' letter (Y) do bring him to the place where the road parts into two,) his good deeds, as well as his evil deeds, are imputed to his parents. Unless you will think that the children of Christians are themselves only under the guilt of the sin, if they do not receive baptism; and that the wickedness is not imputed to those also who would not give it them; especially at that time when they that were to receive it could make no opposition against the receiving it. As also on the other side (or, as also in the kingdom of life) the salvation of infants is the advantage of their parents.⁴¹

Here St. Jerome makes specific reference to children of Christian parents who do not yet "have understanding," who have not yet come "to the years of discretion," and who are not yet capable of giving opposition to the receiving of baptism, and who nevertheless are to be baptized. Infant baptism must have been meant.

(2) Not many years after St. Jerome had written the letter cited above the Pelagian controversy broke out. In this doctrinal struggle St. Jerome was one of the champions

⁴¹Epistle ad Letam de Institutione Filiae (Epistle 107); MPL, XXII, 873-4; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 238-40. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 209, 216-17.

of the catholic Church against the errorists, who were denying original sin. They practiced infant baptism, but maintained that it was not for the forgiveness of sins, because new-born babes had no sin. About 410 St. Jerome published three books against these Pelagians, which are written in the form of a dialogue between a catholic and a Pelagian. In one place in book three the Pelagian objects to the torment of eternal misery being inflicted, according to catholic teaching, on "innocent" babies, and contends that they have no sin.⁴² A little later the conversation goes:

Critobulus [Pelagian]: Tell me, I beseech you, and free me from all doubt; for what reason are infants baptized?

Atticus [catholic]: That in baptism their sins may be forgiven.

Crit.: What sin have they incurred? Is any one loosed that never was bound?

Att.: Do you ask me? That trumpet of the Gospel, that teacher of the Gentiles, that golden vessel shining through all the world, shall answer you.

"Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come . . ." And if you object that it is said, that there were some that had not sinned; understand it, that they sinned not that sin which Adam committed in paradise, by breaking God's command. But all persons are held obnoxious either by their own, or by their forefather Adam's sin. He that is an infant is in baptism loosed from the bond of his forefather; he that is of age to un-

⁴²St. Jerome, Dialogus contra Pelagianos, Book III, para. 17; MPL, XXIII, 614-615; translated in Wall, op. cit., I, 419-20.

derstand, is by the blood of Christ freed, both from his own bond, and also from that which is derived from another.

Atticus then corroborates his orthodoxy by quoting verbatim the epistle of Cyprian to Fidus, written about 160 years before,⁴³ and then continues his exposition of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁴

These sections demonstrate adequately the unquestioned acceptance of infant baptism both by St. Jerome and by his Pelagian opponents. Especially to be noted is that there is no indication at all of any of their contemporaries or earlier churchmen who held different views. Infant baptism seems to have been practiced "everywhere, and at all times, and by all."

St. Augustine

St. Augustine's position as champion of catholic orthodoxy at the end of the fourth century is undisputed. He lived from 354 to 430, and was one of the greatest Latin Church fathers and one of the greatest Christian theologians of all time. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Protestants all claim him as a champion of their beliefs. He was bishop of the church in Hippo, near Carthage, North Africa, and

⁴³Quoted supra, pp. 34-36.

⁴⁴St. Jerome, op. cit. para. 18; MPL, XXIII, 615-616; Wall, op. cit., I, 418-21.

his influence extended over the entire catholic Church of his time.⁴⁵

Here, too, countless quotations could be adduced, but should be unnecessary. St. Augustine's position as an exponent of infant baptism is universally acknowledged. Like his contemporary St. Jerome, he contended that infants should receive baptism because it washes away their original sin which they received from their parents. According to St. Augustine, regeneration takes place through baptism.⁴⁶ Further, baptism gives the forgiveness of sins and instates the recipient into the kingdom of God.⁴⁷ In spite of this unquestioned testimony, two specially pertinent sections will be quoted at length.

(1) In his fourth book against the Donatists St. Augustine says much about infant baptism, including the following:

And as the thief, who by necessity went without baptism, was saved; because by his piety he had it spiritually; so where baptism is had, though the party by necessity go without that [faith] which the thief had, yet he is saved.

While the whole body of the Church holds, as delivered to them, in the case of little infants baptized: who

⁴⁵For a biography of St. Augustine, cf. Leigh-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 304-335.

⁴⁶Cf. St. Augustine's City of God, Book XIII, chap. 7; MPL, XLI, 391-2.

⁴⁷However, according to St. Augustine, those who receive baptism and the Lord's Supper can later fall away and eventually be lost; cf. City of God, Book XXI, chap. 25; MPL, XLI, 741-3.

certainly cannot yet believe with the heart to righteousness, or confess with the mouth to salvation, as the thief could; nay, by their crying and noise while the sacrament is administering, they disturb the holy mysteries; and yet no Christian man will say they are baptized to no purpose.

And if any one do ask for divine authority in this matter; though that which the whole Church practices, and which has not been instituted by councils, but was ever in use, is very reasonably believed to be no other than a thing delivered [or ordered] by authority of the Apostles; yet we may besides take a true estimate, how much the sacrament of baptism does avail infants, by the circumcision which God's former people received.⁴⁸

St. Augustine then makes an extended comparison between circumcision and baptism.

To be noted here is not St. Augustine's approval of infant baptism, but rather his statement that the whole Church holds this and practices it; and that this practice was not instituted by councils, "but was ever in use," and is very reasonably believed to have been handed down from the Apostles. St. Augustine believed that infant baptism had always been the universal practice of the Church.⁴⁹

(2) In his letter to Dardanus St. Augustine admirably sums up the catholic teaching of infant baptism as follows:

⁴⁸St. Augustine, De Baptismo Contra Donatistas, Book IV, chapters 23 and 24; MPL, XLIII, 174; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 254-5. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 208-12, and Bingham, op. cit., III, 475.

⁴⁹As Wall points out (op. cit., I, 102), St. Augustine was evidently unfamiliar with the writing of Tertullian, who about 200 years earlier had advised the delay of baptism, especially in the case of infants; cf. supra, pp. 19-26.

It is a wonderful thing to consider how God dwells in some that know Him not, and in some that do know Him He does not dwell. For they who, when they know God, glorify Him not as God, nor are thankful, do not belong to His temple; and infants sanctified by the sacrament of Christ, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, do belong to His temple; who, though they be regenerated, cannot yet by reason of their age know God. . . . we affirm therefore that the Holy Spirit dwells in baptized infants though they know it not; for after the same manner they know Him not, though He be in them, as they know not their own soul; the reason whereof which they cannot yet make use of, is in them as a spark raked up, which will kindle as they grow in years.⁵⁰

This letter was written by St. Augustine about the year 388.

St. Augustine's unequivocal testimony on the side of infant baptism stands as a powerful witness near the end of this period. As supreme champion of catholic Christianity he was head and shoulders over all other theologians of his day. And instead of discussing the gradual--or sudden--introduction of infant baptism, or describing sections of Christendom which do not follow this practice, he concludes that infant baptism was handed down from the time of the Apostles and is practiced by "the whole body of the Church." It was a "catholic" practice.

Summary of the Evidence from the Fourth Century

The written testimony on every hand points to the universal practice of infant baptism.⁵¹

⁵⁰Epistle ad Dardanum (Epistle 187), para. 17; MPL, XXXIII, 832-848; English translation from Wall, op. cit., I, 277-278. Cf. also Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 208-223 *passim*, and Wiberg, op. cit., pp. 256-8.

⁵¹For a complete listing of pertinent passages in Migne's Latin Church fathers, cf. MPL, CCXIX (index volume), pp.

840-1. Modern Baptists disagree with this conclusion, and affirm that infant baptism was rather becoming prevalent during this period. Their views correspond with those of Augustus Neander (Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas, edited by J. L. Jacobi, translated from the German by J. E. Ryland; London: Henry G. Bohn, 1858), II, 402-5, who claims that infant baptism was not in general practice in the East until after this time.

(1) The Jewish practice of proselyte baptism at the time of Christ also enlightens this subject. From the Old Testament the Jews had the command to circumcise their children on eight days old. They were also to circumcise all proselytes; i. e., all Gentiles who became converts to the faith of the Jewish religion and vowed to observe its laws. In addition, however, all those proselytes who received a water baptism, (and their infant children who had been born before their parents became proselytes) Christian baptism, likewise, was looked upon as an obligatory rite for a new religion. In accord with the universal practice of Jewish proselyte baptism, then, the apostles could also be expected to baptize the infant children of converts as well as the converts themselves.

In support of this argument of the following Martin B. Harnack, "The History of Christian Baptism," in A History of Christian Dogmas, edited by J. L. Jacobi, translated from the German by J. E. Ryland; London: Henry G. Bohn, 1858, Part I, pp. 176, 305-7; also, Handbuch der christlichen Dogmatik, Leipzig: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1893, II, 11. The following passage, "The Institution of the Church—Baptism," in Theological Dictionary, revised edition, edited by James G. Sumner (New York, 1881),

CHAPTER V

OTHER EVIDENCE AND PROBLEMS

A. Other Evidence

(1) The Jewish practice of proselyte baptism at the time of Christ also enlightens this subject. From the Old Testament the Jews had the command to circumcise all their males when eight days old. They were also to circumcise all Gentile proselytes; i. e., all Gentiles who became convinced of the truth of the Jewish religion and wanted to become Israelites. In addition, however, all these proselytes received a water baptism, including their infant children who had been born before their parents became proselytes. Christian baptism, likewise, was looked upon as an initiatory rite into a new religion. In accord with the contemporary practice of Jewish proselyte baptism, then, the Apostles could also be expected to baptize the infant children of converts as well as the converts themselves.¹

¹In support of this argument cf. the following: Wharton B. Marriott, "Baptism," in A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, edited by William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (London: John Murray, 1875), I, 170; F. G. Hibbard, Christian Baptism (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1845), Part I, 95-106, 306-7; Johann Christian Wilhelm Augusti, Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie (Leipzig: der Dyk'schen Buchhandlung, 1836), II, 326ff.; and Richard Watson, "The Institutions of the Church--Baptism," Part IV, chap. 3, in Theological Institutes, revised edition, edited by Thomas O. Summers (Nashville, Tenn.:

(2) Many heretical sects troubled the Church during these four centuries, but all, as far as can be determined, practiced infant baptism as did (according to St. Augustine) the catholics. These sects included the Ebionites,² Montanists, Donatists,³ Novatians,⁴ Nestorians,⁵ and Pelagians. Much controversial literature was written, both by

Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1899), pp. 712-720. Cf. also Richard Whately, "On Infant Baptism," Essay XI in Essays on Some of the Difficulties in the Writings of the Apostle Paul and in Other Parts of the New Testament, eighth London edition (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1865), pp. 323-8; William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: University Press, 1844), I, xxviii; Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hofling, Das Sakrament der Taufe (Erlangen: der Palm'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1846), I, 1-140 passim, and II, 1-20 passim; and J. R. Graves and Jacob Ditzler, The Graves--Ditzler or Great Carrollton Debate (Memphis, Tenn.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1876), pp. 658-803 passim. The Baptists contend that Jewish proselyte baptism did not include infants and, even if it did, it still had no bearing on New Testament Christian baptism. Cf. J. R. Graves and Jacob Ditzler, op. cit., pp. 772-4. A penetrating refutation of this position is found in Joachim Jeremias, Hat die Urkirche die Kindertaufe geübt? (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949).

²Thus the Clementine Writings of the Ebionites explicitly taught the regenerative power of baptism: cf. Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History, revised edition (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, c.1933), I, 179-180. In spite of this evidence, however, Newman still contends here that the Ebionites did not practice infant baptism.

³Even Newman admits the Donatists taught baptismal regeneration and practiced infant baptism: Newman, op. cit., I, 210.

⁴Ibid., pp. 206-7.

⁵Cf. G. Diettrich, editor and translator, Die nestorianische Tauf liturgie (Giessen: J. Ricker'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1907).

the catholics and these sectarians. In none of it, however, was the practice of infant baptism an issue. Neither side in any controversy accused the other of wrongly practicing, or refraining from practicing, infant baptism. Instead there is the testimony of St. Augustine, that the whole body of the Church held and practiced infant baptism, which had been handed down from the Apostles.⁶

(3) So far no consideration has been given to spurious literature written during this period. Much was produced and then falsely attributed to the great churchmen of the same or a preceding age. While of inferior worth because of its deceptive nature, it yet is valuable as indicative of the thinking and practices of the times. Throughout this literature, too, there is a unanimous testimony for the practice of infant baptism.⁷

⁶Many of the early Church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Augustine) wrote histories of sects and heresies current at or before their time, but none describe any who denied infant baptism. Cf. Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 220-3. It is true that some of this time, e.g., the Paulicians, opposed infant baptism; but they also opposed adult baptism; i.e., they were against baptism entirely. Cf. Newman, op. cit., I, 382-3. Thus also Andreas Wiberg (Baptist) in his Christian Baptism Set Forth in the Words of the Bible (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), p. 255, agrees that "several heretical sects, earlier and contemporary with Pelagius, denied all baptism, and of course denied the baptism of infants." He then continues: "And many orthodox sects who held to baptism, denied it to infants." He offers no proof for this claim. Cf. also Hibbard on this point, op. cit., Part I, pp. 317-323.

⁷E.g., cf. the Apostolic Constitutions, VI, 15, which advise, "Baptize your infants, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of God. For He says, Suffer the little children to come to Me, and forbid them not." Wall, op. cit.,

B. Problems

There is one particularly outstanding problem which seems to prevent the conclusion that infant baptism was a universal practice during this period. This is the evidence that during the fourth century some of the leaders of the age were not baptized until maturity. Especially notable among these were St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and the emperor Constantine the Great.⁸ It is definitely known that some of these had Christian parents.⁹ Does the failure of these parents to baptize their infant children contradict the evidence exam-

I, 526. The Apostolic Constitutions are found in J. P. Migne, editor, Patrologiae Patrum Graecorum (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862 et al.), I, 509-1156. Hereafter Migne's edition of the Greek fathers will be referred to as MPC. A discussion of this passage is given in Wall, op. cit., I, 524ff., and in James Ragan Collinsworth, The Pseudo Church Doctrines of Anti-Pedo-Baptists Defined and Refuted (Kansas City, Mo.: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1892), pp. 388-391. Cf. also the Recognitions or Travels of St. Peter, referred to in Joseph Bingham, The Antiquities of the Christian Church (London: William Straker, 1843), III, 462-4.

⁸Many are convinced that the name of St. Basil should be added to this list (e.g., Wiberg, op. cit., p. 254), but historical evidence rather favors his having been baptized in infancy. Cf. Hibbard, op. cit., Part I, pp. 202-3.

⁹St. Gregory Nazianzen had as his mother the pious Nonna and St. Augustine had Monica. St. Jerome, also, had Christian parents. Moreover, Monica and St. Jerome's parents evidently were already Christians at the time of the birth of their children mentioned here.

ined thus far, and prove that infant baptism was not universal at that time?¹⁰

The persons mentioned above will be considered individually. St. Augustine, although he had pious Monica as his mother, had a heathen father, who did not accept the Christian faith until St. Augustine was seventeen years old.¹¹ It is probable that, even if Monica did want to have Augustine baptized when he was a baby, his father prevented it.¹²

History indicates that St. Chrysostom's parents were heathen at the time of his birth, and that St. Chrysostom was such himself for a time.¹³

St. Jerome was definitely born of Christian parents. Many are of the opinion that he was not baptized until about

¹⁰So conclude the following: Charles W. Bennett, Christian Archaeology, second edition, vol. IV of the Library of Biblical and Theological Literature, edited by George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst (New York: Eaton and Mains, and Cincinnati: Curtis and Jennings, c.1898), p. 448; Wiberg, loc. cit.; Augustus Neander, Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas, edited by J. L. Jacobi, translated from the German by J. E. Ryland (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1858), I, 228-235, and II, 402-405; and Dr. J. R. Graves in his debate with Jacob Ditzler, The Graves--Ditzler or Great Carrollton Debate (Memphis, Tenn.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1876), pp. 782-3, 804.

¹¹Cf. Wall, op. cit., II, 115-121; also Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin L. Lueker, editor in chief (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 72.

¹²Wall, loc. cit.

¹³Ibid., pp. 91-97.

twenty-nine years old.¹⁴ The proof for this is open to question; he might have been baptized in infancy.¹⁵

There is contradictory testimony regarding St. Gregory Nazianzen as to whether his parents were Christians at the time of his birth, or were not converted until later. That he was not baptized until after his conversion in early manhood is certain, but this is no proof that infant baptism was not practiced.¹⁶ Later he himself advocated the immediate baptism of all babies in danger of death, and the baptism of all healthy children when about three years old.¹⁷

Constantine the Great was not born of Christian parents, hence could not be expected to have been baptized in infancy.¹⁸ After he had embraced Christianity, however, he continued unbaptized until right before his death. He evidently did this because of a reluctance to forsake all worldly ways, which he would have had to promise to do at the time of his baptism.¹⁹

¹⁴E.g., cf. the Lutheran Cyclopedia, op. cit., p. 531.

¹⁵Cf. Wall, op. cit., II, 100-115.

¹⁶For a thorough discussion of this whole problem, cf. Wall, op. cit., II, 76-89.

¹⁷Cf. supra, pp. 43-47.

¹⁸Wall, op. cit., II, 47-60 passim.

¹⁹Cf. Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier and Son, 1900), II, 204-6.

In conclusion: there is definite proof that many adult converts to Christianity during these centuries delayed their baptism. Tertullian advised postponement;²⁰ St. Basil admonished his catechumens because of their delay;²¹ Constantine the Great put off his baptism until he was near the point of death.²² There were two reasons for these delays: (1) a love of the pleasures of this world, and a loathing to leave them, the problem with Constantine the Great and St. Basil's catechumens; and (2) a misunderstanding of the meaning of baptism, which was the case with Tertullian. Tertullian advised delay because of damning sins which otherwise might be committed after baptism. He looked upon baptism as the culmination of, rather than an initiation into, the Christian life. For him it was an act of preparation, not for this life, but for the life to come. These two reasons, either individually or together, evidently induced many to delay their baptisms. However, as far as can be proved these cases always involved converts. To repeat Wall's statement quoted above:²³ "There is no proof that any Christians, after they were once baptized themselves, did ever suffer their infant children to go without baptism."²⁴

²⁰Cf. supra, pp. 19-26.

²¹Supra, pp. 48-49.

²²Gibbon, loc. cit.

²³Supra, p. 49.

²⁴Wall, op. cit., I, 210.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter there will first be given a summary of this paper, and then several conclusions based upon this material.

1. Infant baptism is not specifically mentioned either in Scripture or in early Christian writings until about 200 A.D. Evidently this practice was not a controverted issue at all. Either the entire Church practiced it or the entire Church refrained from this practice.

2. Tertullian about 200 A.D. was the first to discuss infant baptism, and he opposed it. However, he advised the delay of baptism on all age levels. And he did sanction the baptism of infants when they were in danger of death.

3. Origen, a contemporary of Tertullian, said that infant baptism was a practice of the Church received from the Apostles.

4. A council of sixty-six bishops under Cyprian seemed to take infant baptism for granted in 252 A.D.

5. Fourth century Church fathers spoke unanimously for infant baptism, with the exception of Gregory Nazianzen, who advised the delay of the baptism of healthy children until they were three years of age.

6. St. Augustine declared that the entire Church

practiced infant baptism, that it had been ever in use, and that it had been delivered (or ordered) by the Apostles.

7. Many delayed baptism (1) because of a love for the ways of the world or (2) a misunderstanding of the meaning of baptism. However, this applied mainly, perhaps exclusively, to converts. There is no absolute proof that Christian parents neglected the baptism of their infant children, either for these or other reasons.

8. Coupled with an absolute silence regarding infant baptism as a controversial issue in the early Church is an absolute silence regarding its introduction. There is no historical proof either for the contention that infant baptism was introduced from outside of the Church, or for the notion that it began slowly in one place and then gradually spread throughout the Church.

9. Unanimously the Church of this entire age held to the regenerative power of baptism. All, likewise (up to Pelagius), apparently believed in original sin. These two teachings, when placed together, constitute a good argument for infant baptism.

10. Jewish proselyte baptism included infants; Christian baptism could be expected to do the same.

11. All spurious Christian literature of the period favored both baptismal regeneration and infant baptism.

From all this evidence can be drawn the following conclusions.

1. Infant baptism was unquestionably present in the Church from about 200 A.D. on. It was probably general in the Western Church by about 250 and universal in Christendom by the year 400.

2. Historical evidence also favors the practice of infant baptism before 200; in fact, throughout the entire Christian Church from its founding. One becomes least involved in unanswerable questions, historical anachronisms, and argumenta e silentio if one accepts the testimony of St. Augustine, that the practice of infant baptism was universal and received from the Apostles themselves.

3. Nevertheless, the silence of the entire Church before 200 and of the Eastern Church before the fourth century cannot be simply disregarded. There is no absolute proof that infant baptism was practiced at those times and places. On the other hand, all historical evidence points to such practice. Accordingly, the burden of proof for their position lies with those who maintain that infant baptism was not practiced in the Eastern Church before the fourth century and/or in the entire Church before 200, rather than with those who maintain that it was.

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