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### Historical Evidence for Infant Baptism

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SHORT TITLE

INFANT BAPTISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia University, St. Paul,  
Department of Educational Psychology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Education

John J. [unclear]

June 1958

Approved by:

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HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR  
INFANT BAPTISM

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
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by

John D. Frey

June 1958

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Shortly before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave this command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> The Book of Acts presents this command in action. "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."<sup>2</sup> But nowhere in Scripture do we find the specific command, "Baptize infants." Nor do we find a statement which specifically says that infants were baptized. This has caused many people to wonder about infants. Are they also to be baptized? Is infant baptism a valid, apostolic practice?

The purpose of this paper is to assist in finding the answer to this question. We shall attempt to show the validity of infant baptism. But our evidence shall be restricted to extra-Biblical, historical sources.

This is not to imply that Scriptures fail to answer our question. Mueller,<sup>3</sup> Gullman,<sup>4</sup> Althaus,<sup>5</sup> and others present

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 28:19.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 2:41.

<sup>3</sup>Mueller lists the following points as evidence from Scripture for infant baptism: (1) Infants are a part of "all nations," Matt. 28:19. (2) Col. 2:12 shows that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. And we know that circumci-



cogent evidence from the New Testament alone which shows the rightness of infant baptism.

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sion was performed on male children, eight days old. (3) The Apostles baptized whole families, 1 Cor. 1:16, Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33. The word "household" ordinarily suggests children. (4) Holy baptism is called a "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," Tit. 3:5. Children need this regeneration because they are flesh born of flesh, John 3:6; because they must be born again of water and the Spirit, John 3:5. (5) Christ desires little children to have blessing and salvation, Mark 10:13-16. (6) Little children can believe, Matt. 18:6. (7) The silence of the New Testament regarding infant baptism indicates that it was considered a matter of course. J. T. Mueller, "Holy Baptism," The Abiding Word, edited by Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), II, 398-400.

<sup>4</sup> Cullman stresses the fact that Christ completed a general baptism by His death and resurrection. This baptism marked the completion of all atoning work. This means that all men, in principle, have received baptism when Christ was baptized for them. Why, then, must individuals still be baptized? The sixth chapter of Romans answers this question. It shows that baptism plants a person with the dead and risen Christ. It makes him a part of His completed baptism. It takes him into the Body of Christ. This is God's operation. And God's operation is independent of any condition in man. Not even faith is a necessary pre-condition for divine action. But faith does play a vital role. It must follow baptism as the agent which receives God's gracious gift. Hence, the Church can rightly baptize infant children of Christian parents. It is true that they have no faith, but faith is not a necessary pre-condition for baptism. But faith must follow baptism. And it is right for the Church to assume that children of Christian parents will eventually respond in faith with proper training. But the Church cannot rightly baptize unbelieving adults. For such do not respond in faith. Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> Althaus also lays great stress on Romans six. For this chapter shows that baptism is more than a mere picture; more than a dedicatory act. Baptism is God acting on men. Baptism actually brings about union with Jesus Christ. Through baptism we share in the death and resurrection of Christ. And this applies to infants as well as adults. Paul Althaus, Was Ist Die Taufe? (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950).



But extra-Biblical sources have their place in arriving at a better understanding of Scripture. For instance, without extra-Biblical sources it would be impossible to render a complete translation of the original Greek Testament. In 2 Cor. 9:9, the statement is made, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the penās." If we were restricted to the New Testament, we would never know exactly what was meant by "penās." For this is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> But extra-Biblical sources show that "penās" means "the poor."<sup>7</sup> Without extra-Biblical sources, we could never fully understand various basic concepts. For instance, in order to gain a full meaning of "love" in the New Testament, we examine this concept in the Old Testament, in pre-Biblical Greek, in Rabbinic Literature, and in the sub-Apostolic age.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible teaches baptism. In order to understand this concept better, we are going to historical sources. We shall examine what these sources indicate concerning its proper

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Plummer, Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, in The International Critical Commentary, edited by S. R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), xlix.

<sup>7</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 648.

<sup>8</sup> Gottfried Quell and Ethelbert Stauffer, "Love," Bible Key Words, edited and translated from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum Neuen Testament by J. R. Coates (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).



use, concerning its relation to the recipient, and concerning its dependence on age.<sup>9</sup>

This is our procedure.

We shall begin by readily admitting that infant baptism was not always practiced or approved in the early Church. Evidence for infant baptism cannot be given on the grounds that all Christians baptized their children. For such grounds do not exist. It will be shown that there were three forms of antipedobaptism in the ancient Church (chapter two).

In the next chapter, we shall discuss Jewish baptism and its implications. Evidence will be given which strongly indicates that the Jews baptized infant proselytes before the time of Christ, even as they do to this day. This Jewish practice would seemingly have implications for Christian baptism. For it was against this background that the disciples received the command to baptize.

The primary purpose of chapter four is to show that

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<sup>9</sup>Luther offered this historical evidence to show the validity of infant baptism. "That the Baptism of infants is pleasing to God is sufficiently proved from His own work, namely, that God sanctifies many of them who have been thus baptized, and has given them the Holy Ghost: and that there are yet many even to-day in whom we perceive that they have the Holy Ghost both because of their doctrine and life; as it is also given to us by the grace of God that we can explain the Scriptures and come to the knowledge of Christ, which is impossible without the Holy Ghost. But if God did not accept the baptism of infants, He would not give the Holy Ghost nor any of His gifts to any of them; in short, during this long time unto this day no man upon earth could have been a Christian." Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), p. 208.



infant baptism was a common, general, accepted practice in the Church before 250 A. D., even before 200 A. D. The evidence will consist of significant quotations from the Fathers. But the quotations listed will be shown to have another implication. They indicate that infant baptism originated with the Apostles.

Chapter five is the principle section of this work. Here we will attempt to give definite evidence that infant baptism is in accordance with Apostolic teaching. It will first be shown that if the Apostolic teaching on baptism excluded infants, there would be indication of this teaching in the extant writings. This indication would be due to the controversy centering around infant baptism and its denial. There would have been many who considered infant baptism an invalid, heretical act and many who considered the same of its denial. The significant heretical teachings of the ancient Church are listed in the many polemical works, the hereseologies and the histories. After showing that there would be indication of a denial of infant baptism if this denial were Apostolic, it will be shown that there is no such indication. It will be shown that there is no suggestion that anyone in the ancient Church denied the validity of infant baptism.

Two items must be mentioned before proceeding.

The first item is a problem which arises in an attempt to produce passages from the early Church concerning infant baptism. For the Fathers sometimes used words like "infants"



or "little ones" to designate those adults who were "infant" in faith or those who were humble like little children. Two examples of this are furnished by Clement of Alexandria and Origen; in his Instructor, Clement of Alexandria writes:

That, then, Paedagogy is the training of children, is clear from the word itself. It remains for us to consider whom Scriptures points to; then to give the paedagogue charge of them. We are the children. In many ways Scripture . . . describes us, . . . giving variety to the simplicity of the faith by diverse names. . . .

The prophetic spirit also distinguishes us as children. . . .

. . . . .

the Word thus marvelously and mystically describing the simplicity of childhood. For sometimes He calls us children, sometimes chickens, sometimes infants, and at other times sons. . . .

. . . We who are little ones being such colts, are reared up by our divine colt-tamer.

. . . . .

. . . For so is the truth, that perfection is with the Lord, who is always teaching, and infancy and childishness with us, who are always learning.<sup>10</sup>

In his Commentary on Matthew, Origen writes:

"See that ye despise not one of these little ones." It seems to me that as among the bodies of men there are differences in point of size,--so that some are little, and others great, and others of middle height, . . . so also among the souls of men, there are some things which give them the stamp of littleness, and others things the stamp of greatness, so to speak, and . . . other things that stamp of mediocrity.

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<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," Book I, ch. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), II, 212-213.



. . . In the case of souls, it is our free-will . . . that furnishes the reason why one is great, or little or of middle height. . . . The little ones are . . . such as stand in need of nursing-fathers and nursing-mothers, . . . but, when we have become perfected, and have passed through the stage of being subject to nursing-fathers, . . . we are meet to be governed by the Lord Himself.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, a passage must clearly indicate that it is referring to actual infants, to children in their earliest stages of life, before it can be considered a genuine reference to infant baptism.

The second item concerns the scope of this work. Many passages which definitely refer to infant baptism<sup>12</sup> have come to us from the period 250 A. D.-500 A. D. Cyprian, Optatus, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Prosper, Gennadius, Cassianus, several Councils and others have occasion to speak on this subject.<sup>13</sup> The works of Augustine alone contain

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<sup>11</sup>Origen, "Commentary on Matthew," Book 13, par. 26, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Allan Menzies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), IX, 490.

<sup>12</sup>These passages indicate that they are referring to actual infants by such descriptive phrases as "infants brought in parents' arms"; baptism is a garment "neither too big for infants, nor too little for men"; "a seal for such persons as newly enter into life"; let an infant child be baptized "from his cradle"; baptize infants who "are not in capacity to be sensible either of the grace or the miss of it"; etc. See William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: The University Press, 1844), I, 125-524.

<sup>13</sup>For a listing of passages by these men and others (most in the original language with English translation) see Wall, op. cit., I. Also consult the indexes to each volume of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886-1908) and the indexes of the Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952-1956).



countless references. For in his dispute with the Pelagians, he wrote whole books which prove original sin from the practice of infant baptism. These passages clearly show that infant baptism was a common, accepted practice during this period. This fact is uncontested.<sup>14</sup> It also goes uncontested that infant baptism prevailed after 500 A. D.<sup>15</sup> In this work we shall consider the general practice of infant baptism after 250 A. D. a known fact. We shall not undertake the task of listing all the passages which bear this out.

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<sup>14</sup>David Schley Schaff, "The Baptism of Infants," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), I, 45.

<sup>15</sup>Wall, op. cit., II, 230-231.



## CHAPTER II

### ANTIPEDOBAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

It would be a simple matter to give strong historical evidence for infant baptism if it could be shown that infant baptism was practiced by everyone who claimed to be Christian, if it could be shown that there was not one word of opposition. Unfortunately, this cannot be done. Instead, history shows that not all people had their infants baptized. It even shows instances where infant baptism was opposed.

There are three forms of antipedobaptism which can be found in the ancient Church. There were those who rejected all water baptism, adult and infant; there were those who rejected all baptism administered by the "impure," or by the schismatics; and there were those who favored the delay of baptism. We shall produce evidence which shows that each of these forms of antipedobaptism existed in the early Church.

First, there were those who rejected all water baptism. In about the middle of the second century, the Valentinian sect arose. It was typically gnostic in character. The teachings were a jumbled mixture of Greek and Alexandrian philosophy, Egyptian theosophy, and confused Christian ideas. They believed such things as these: Depth and Silence are the eternal male and female principle; the Creator of the world was an abortion of the lowest aeon, who ignorantly made this



world of matter; the work of Christ is to liberate the spiritual nature in man from the evil, material existence.<sup>1</sup> They had various ideas concerning baptism. Some rejected water baptism completely. This is known from the words of Irenaeus:

For some of them prepare a nuptial couch, and perform a sort of mystic rite. . . . Others, again lead them to a place where water is, and baptize them, with the utterance of these words, "Into the name of the unknown Father of the universe--into truth, . . . ."  
. . . Others still repeat certain Hebrew words, in order the more thoroughly to bewilder those who are being initiated. . . .

. . . Others, however, reject all these practices, and maintain that the mystery of the unspeakable and invisible power ought not to be performed by visible and corruptible creatures, nor should that of those (beings) who are inconceivable, and incorporeal, and beyond the reach of sense, be performed by such as are the objects of sense, and possessed of the body. . . . The redemption must therefore be of a spiritual nature.<sup>2</sup>

Then, during the time of Tertullian, a woman by the name of Quintilla was active. She was a woman preacher who, according to Tertullian, had seduced a great many. Her main tenet was opposition to all water baptism. Tertullian wrote his treatise on baptism for the express purpose of refuting this woman. He makes this statement by way of introduction:

A viper of the Cainite heresy, lately conversant in this quarter, has carried away a great number with her most venomous doctrine, making it her first aim to destroy

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Revised edition; Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), I, 188-189.

<sup>2</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book I, ch. 21, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), I, 346. Hereafter The Ante-Nicene Fathers will be referred to as TANF.



baptism. . . . But we, little fishes, . . . are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water.<sup>3</sup>

A few other references could be produced. But these should suffice to show that there were those who rejected all water baptism. This, of course, includes a rejection of infant water baptism.

Another form of antipedobaptism is found in the relations between various communities. In the early Church we find some very distinct bodies. And quite often it happened that one of these communities or individuals within the community would reject all baptism performed by another body.

As examples of this we can cite three communities: the Catholic Church, the Novatians, and the Donatists.

The Catholic Church was the Mother Church. It descended from the Apostles and had never broken off from some other body.

The Novatian community came into being around the middle of the third century. It resulted from conflicting principles on Church discipline. During the Decian persecution some Christians lapsed from the Faith. When persecution subsided, many of the lapsed wished to re-enter the Church. The Catholic Church, as a general rule, felt that they should be given this opportunity. Of course, those who were allowed to

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<sup>3</sup>Tertullian, "On Baptism," ch. 1, TANF, III, 669.



return must show true repentance. Novatian disagreed. He admitted that God might pardon the lapsed but strenuously denied that the Church had any right to readmit them into its communion. So the Novatians broke away from the Catholic Church. They sought to build up a congregation of the "pure." It was their belief that the visible Church should be a communion of saints, and of saints only.<sup>4</sup>

The Donatist party arose during the beginning of the fourth century for much the same reason as the Novatian. It resulted from conflicting views on the discipline called for in the case of those who had surrendered the sacred books to the persecutors. There were those who favored a mild approach and those who demanded absolute strictness. The rupture occurred when Caecilean was chosen bishop and consecrated to office by Felix of Aptunga. The strict party regarded Felix as a "traitor," and declared the consecration invalid. They set up a rival bishop, and this bishop was succeeded by Donatus. Through a combination of many influences, this conflict led to the formation of two warring Churches, the Catholic and the Donatistic. The Donatists believed that the sacraments administered by one deserving excommunication were invalid. They held that since the Catholic Church failed to excommunicate such, the Catholics had

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<sup>4</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 179.



ceased to be the true Church. The Donatists alone were the Body of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Our present interest in these three communities concerns their relations with one another. For these relations reflect a form of antipedobaptism. Both the Novatians and the Donatists rejected all baptism administered by the Catholic Church, including that of infants. And there were some in the Catholic Church who rejected all baptism given by schismatics. There are abundant references which could be cited; we shall limit ourselves to a few.

Concerning the Catholic Church, we look at Cyprian and fellow bishops of North Africa. They denied the validity of all baptism administered by those outside the Catholic Church. In reply to a letter from Jubaianus, Cyprian writes:

You have written to me, dearest brother, wishing that the impression of my mind should be signified to you, as to what I think concerning the baptism of heretics; . . . . This baptism we cannot consider as valid or legitimate, since it is manifestly unlawful among them. . . .<sup>6</sup>

In another letter he writes: "We decided that every baptism was altogether to be rejected which is arranged for without the Church."<sup>7</sup>

Cyprian also serves to show the position of the Nova-

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>6</sup>Cyprian, "Epistle 72, to Jubaianus," par. 1, TANF, V, 379.

<sup>7</sup>Cyprian, "Epistle 74, to Firmilian," par. 19, TANF, V, 395.



tians. He condemns them for rejecting baptism administered in the Catholic Church and insisting on rebaptism. In the same letter to Jubaianus, he writes:

Nor does what you have described in your letter disturb us, dearest brother, that the Novatians re-baptize those whom they entice from us, since it does not in any wise matter to us what the enemies of the Church do.<sup>8</sup>

Eusebius, in his Church History, also mentions this position of the Novatians. He reports:

For with good reason do we feel hatred toward Novatian, who has sundered the Church and drawn some of the brethren into impiety and blasphemy. . . . And besides all this he rejects holy baptism, and overturns the faith.<sup>9</sup>

As to the Donatists, St. Augustine supplies information in his work, On Baptism, Against the Donatists. He makes this introductory remark:

There are two propositions, moreover, which we affirm,--that baptism exists in the Catholic Church, and that in it alone can it be rightly received,--both of which the Donatists deny.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, these three communities, in their relations with

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<sup>8</sup>Cyprian, "Epistle 72, to Jubaianus," par. 2, TANF, V, 380.

<sup>9</sup>Eusebius, "Church History," Book VII, ch. 8, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), I, 296. Hereafter Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, will be referred to as Second Series.

<sup>10</sup>Augustine, "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," Book I, ch. 3, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), IV, 413. Hereafter Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, will be referred to as First Series.



one another, give instances of a form of antipedobaptism. Some Catholics rejected all baptism, including that of infants, performed outside of the Catholic Church. The Novatians and Donatists rejected all baptism, including that of infants, performed by the Catholics.

The postponement of baptism is a third form of antipedobaptism found in the early Church. For there were some Christians who, for some reason or other, postponed their own baptism to a later date. There were some who postponed the baptism of their children. And there were some who openly encouraged all parents to delay baptism in the case of infants.

We shall look at quotations from Gregory Nazianzen and Chrysostom. They reveal that some Christians were delaying their baptism. For both men, as did other bishops and presbyters, sought to correct what they considered a very unhealthy practice.

In his Oration On Holy Baptism, Gregory makes this plea:

If after baptism the persecutor and tempter of the light assail you, . . . you have the means to conquer him. . . .

Let us then be baptized that we may win the victory. . . . Let us be baptized today, that we suffer not violence tomorrow; and let us not put off the blessing as if it were an injury, nor wait till we get more wicked that more may be forgiven us. . . .

Why wait for a fever to bring you this blessing, and refuse it from God? Why will you have it through lapse of time, and not through reason? . . . Why must you hear of your death from another, rather than think of it as even now present? . . .



. . . Every time is suitable for your ablution, since any time may be your death.<sup>11</sup>

Chrysostom explains the matter in this way:

And consider: a man has gotten grievous sins by committing murder or adultery, or some other crime: these were remitted through baptism, . . . but for those committed after Baptism he suffers a punishment as great as he would if both the former sins were brought up again, and many worse than these. For the guilt is no longer simply equal, but doubled and tripled. . . .

Perhaps we have now deterred many from receiving baptism. Not however with this intention have we so spoken, but on purpose that having received it, they may continue in temperance and much moderation. . . . Receive baptism then, because He is merciful and ready to help.<sup>12</sup>

But not only did Christians postpone their own baptism. They even put off the baptism of their children. It is apparent that Gregory directs the following remarks against just such a situation.

It is a shameful thing to be past indeed the flow of your age, but not past your wickedness; but either to be involved in it still, or at least to seem so by delaying your purification. Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Fearest thou the Seal on account of the weakness of nature? O what a small-souled mother, and of how little faith! Why, Anna even before Samuel was born promised him to God, and after his birth consecrated him at once, and brought him up in the priestly habit, not fearing anything in human nature, but trusting in God. . . .

. . . And in one word, there is no state of life and no occupation to which Baptism is not profitable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 40, On Holy Baptism," pars. 10-13, Second Series, VII, 362-364.

<sup>12</sup>Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily I," First Series, XI, 8-9.

<sup>13</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, op. cit., 365.



Jerome also speaks against parents who do not bring their children to baptism.

If then parents are responsible for their children when these are of ripe age and independent; how much more must they be responsible for them, when, still unweaned and weak, they cannot, in the Lord's words, "discern between their right hand and their left:"--when, that is to say, they cannot yet distinguish good from evil. . . . But perhaps you imagine that, if they are not baptized, the children of Christians are liable for their own sins; and that no guilt attaches to parents who withhold from baptism those who by reason of their tender age can offer no objection to it. The truth is that, as baptism ensures the salvation of the child, this in turn brings advantage to the parents.<sup>14</sup>

Neither Jerome nor Gregory approved of these excessive delays in baptizing children. But by their condemnation of the practice, they reveal that such a practice existed.

Another way of showing that some Christian parents failed to baptize their children in infancy is by citing actual case histories. Of course, this presents difficulties. For it would be necessary to prove that an individual was not baptized in infancy and also that both parents were Christians at the time of his birth. But this very thing can be done in the case of Gregory Nazianzen, who was born around 329.<sup>15</sup> For his own writings reveal that he was not baptized as an infant and yet was born of Christian parents.

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<sup>14</sup>Jerome, "Epistle 107, To Laeta," par. 6, Second Series, VI, 192.

<sup>15</sup>Friedrich Armin Loofs, "Gregory Nazianzen," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), V, 70. Hereafter Jackson's edition will be referred to as Schaff-Herzog.



That his father, Gregory the Elder, was a Christian at the time of his birth is indicated by a poem, Carmen De Vita Sua. In this poem, Gregory Nazianzen tells the story of his life. At one place he speaks of his father's desire to have him enter the priesthood. He gives the arguments which his father used in trying to persuade him to take up a vocation he dreaded. Among these arguments, we find the father saying to the son: "You have not passed over as much of life, as the time I have spent in sacrifice."<sup>16</sup> This statement reveals that Gregory's father was in the priesthood before his son was born.

That Gregory's mother, Nonna, was a Christian at the time of his birth is indicated in several orations. Gregory mentions how his mother "promised him to God before his birth."<sup>17</sup> In another place he shows how Nonna was responsible for her husband's conversion.<sup>18</sup> Hence, she must have been a Christian before Gregory the Elder entered the priesthood and hence, before the birth of Gregory.

And finally, that Gregory was not baptized in infancy can be seen from the oration which he gave at the death of

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, "Carmen de Vita Sua," lines 512-513, translated by the present writer, Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), XXXVII, 1064.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 18, On the Death of His Father," par. 11, Second Series, VII, 258.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 8, On His Sister Gorgonia," par. 5, Second Series, VII, 239.



his father. There he describes a journey which he once took.

I was on a voyage from Alexandria to Greece over the Parthenian Sea. . . . After making some way on the voyage, a terrible storm came upon us, and such an one as my shipmates said they had but seldom seen before. While we were all in fear of common death, spiritual death was what I was most afraid of; for I was in danger of departing in misery, being unbaptized, and I longed for the spiritual water among the waters of death.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, in the case of Gregory Nazianzen, we have a good instance of delayed baptism. Both of his parents were Christians at the time of his birth, and yet he was not baptized as an infant.

Our last references are undoubtedly the most impressive witnesses from the early Church concerning antipedobaptism. For here we shall see two important men actually encouraging parents to delay the baptism of their children. The men are Tertullian and Gregory Nazianzen.

This is Tertullian's view as he expressed it in his treatise, On Baptism:

But they whose office it is, know that baptism is not rashly to be administered. . . . And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary--if (baptism itself) is not so necessary--that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfill their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood? The Lord does indeed say, "Forbid them not to come unto me." Let them "come," then, while they are growing up; let them

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<sup>19</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 18, On the Death of His Father," par. 31, Second Series, VII, 264.



"come" while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the "remission of sins?" . . . Let them know how to "ask" for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given "to him that asketh."<sup>20</sup>

Gregory Nazianzen gives these instructions:

Be it so, some will say, in the case of those who ask for baptism; what have you to say about those who are still children, and conscious neither of the loss nor of the grace? Are we to baptize them too? Certainly, if any danger presses. For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart unsealed and uninitiated. A proof of this is found in the circumcision on the eighth day, which was a sort of typical seal, and was conferred on children before they had the use of reason. . . . But in respect of others I give my advice to wait till the end of the third year, or a little more or less, when they may be able to listen and to answer something about the Sacrament; that, even though they do not perfectly understand it, yet at any rate they may know the outlines; and then to sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of our consecration.<sup>21</sup>

Both of these men encouraged parents to delay the baptism of their infant children. As seen in an earlier reference, Gregory opposed the excessive delays practiced by some. But he still thought it a good idea if they wait until the children could "answer something about the Sacrament."

The opinions of these men undoubtedly carried some influence. Tertullian began his clerical career around 180 A. D. as a presbyter in the Carthagagan Church. His able and voluminous Latin writings enjoyed great popularity. They

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<sup>20</sup>Tertullian, op. cit., ch. 18, pp. 277-278.

<sup>21</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 40, On Holy Baptism," par. 28, Second Series, VII, 370.



greatly contributed in laying the foundations for Latin theology. In about the middle of his career he joined the Montanists. He was appalled by the scandal and laxity in the Roman Church under Bishop Zephyrinus. The rigor and enthusiasm of the Montanists carried him away. He soon became one of their important leaders.<sup>22</sup> According to Augustine, he ended life in a sect of his own making, the Tertullianists.<sup>23</sup>

The opinions of this great man undoubtedly had some influence in the Catholic Church, certainly among the Montanists and Tertullianists. There were perhaps some who followed his advice and did not baptize their infants.

Gregory Nazianzen was a leading theologian of the Eastern Church. In 381 he became bishop of Constantinople.<sup>24</sup> His opinions as bishop and theologian were certainly an influential factor.

In this chapter we have attempted to show one thing; it is incorrect to say that no antipedobaptism can be found during the first four centuries of the Church. For there were those who rejected all water baptism including that of infants. There were those who rejected all baptism performed by some other community. And there were those who postponed baptism of children and some who openly encouraged it.

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<sup>22</sup>David Schley Schaff, "Tertullian, Quintus Septimus Florens," Schaff-Herzog, XI, 305-307.

<sup>23</sup>Augustine, "Concerning Heresies to Quodvultdeum," Operum Sancti Augustini, Benedictine edition (Bassani: n.p., 1797), X, 28.

<sup>24</sup>Loofs, op. cit., 70-72.



## CHAPTER III

### JEWISH BAPTISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In gathering historical evidence concerning infant baptism, it would be well to consider the Jewish religion at or before the time of Christ. Did the Jews practice baptism? Did they baptize infants? This would, of course, have a bearing on the Apostles' understanding of baptism. For it would be against such a background that they received the command to baptize all nations.

There is substantial evidence which shows that long before the time of Christ, the Jews developed the practice of baptizing proselytes to their faith. They considered all mankind except themselves to be in an unclean state. Before heathen people could enter into the covenant of Israel, baptism was necessary. This denoted purification from uncleanness.

The chief witness to proselyte baptism is the Talmud.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Talmud is a collection of Jewish law, consisting of two main parts, the Mishna and its commentary, the Gemara. The basis of Jewish law is the Pentateuch. But during the post-exilic period new laws and new decisions were needed. Slowly a rabbinical supplement to the Pentateuch, orally transmitted, grew up. This material, called Mishna, was sorted and reduced to writing about the beginning of the third century after Christ by Rabbi Judah. The Mishna, in turn, became the text of a still more extended commentary in the Jewish academies of Palestine and Babylon. This exposition is called Gemara. There are two recensions of the Talmud, the Palestinian, completed around 370 A. D., and the much more important Babylonian, completed a century later. "Talmud," Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 1033.



Our first reference comes from the Order on Women of the Babylonian Gemara. This reference indicates that ablution is a prescribed procedure for proselytes. It also shows that this ablution occurs in water. One rabbi held that a man could be a proper proselyte without ritual ablution. Others maintained its absolute necessity. But whether baptism of proselytes was absolutely necessary or not, this reference shows it to be the accepted practice.

A man cannot become a proper proselyte unless he has been circumcised and has also performed ritual ablution; when, therefore, no ablution has been performed, he is regarded as an idolater. . . .

Our Rabbis taught: If a proselyte was circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, R. Eliezer said, "Behold he is a proper proselyte; for we find that our forefathers were circumcised and had not performed ritual ablution." If he performed the prescribed ablution but had not been circumcised, R. Joshua said, "Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that the mothers had performed ritual ablution but had not been circumcised." The Sages, however, said, "Whether he had performed ritual ablution but had not been circumcised or whether he had been circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, he is not a proper proselyte, unless he has been circumcised and has also performed the prescribed ritual ablution." . . .

A man can never become a proselyte unless he has been circumcised and has also performed the prescribed ritual ablution. Is not this obvious? . . .

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, and harassed and overcome by afflictions?" If he replies, "I know and yet am unworthy," he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. . . . If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. . . . As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when



two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects.

In the case of a woman proselyte, women make her sit in the water up to her neck, while two learned men stand outside and give her instruction in some of the minor commandments and some of the major ones. . . .

"As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution." Only after he is healed but not before! What is the reason?--Because the water might irritate the wound.<sup>2</sup>

Another reference can be found in the Order on Holy Things of the Babylonian Talmud. The Mishna makes this pronouncement: "A proselyte is regarded as a person who still requires a ceremony of atonement until the blood has been sprinkled for him."<sup>3</sup> Then the Gemara give this commentary:

As your forefathers entered into the Covenant only by circumcisions, immersion and the sprinkling of the blood, so shall they enter the covenant only by circumcision, immersion and the sprinkling of blood.<sup>4</sup>

But not only the Talmud exhibits the ancient practice of the Jews to baptize proselytes to their faith. Indications can also be produced from the writings of the Christian Church Fathers.

Cyprian writes:

For the case of the Jews under the Apostles was one,

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<sup>2</sup>Isidore Epstein, editor, The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nashim I, Yebamoth I (London: The Soncino Press, 1948), XV, 302-314.

<sup>3</sup>Isidore Epstein, editor, The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashim, Kerithoth (London: The Soncino Press, 1948), VI, 63.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 64.



but the condition of the Gentiles is another. The former, because they had already gained the most ancient baptism of the law and Moses, were to be baptized also in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

St. Basil makes these observations:

I think it logical to follow what has been said regarding the kingdom of heaven with a brief instruction on the difference between the baptism according to Moses and the baptism conferred by John. Then, at length, we may be accounted worthy, by the grace of God, to comprehend the pre-eminent dignity of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in its incomparable magnitude of glory. . . . The baptism which was handed down through Moses recognized, first, a difference in sins; for the grace of pardon was not accorded at transgressions; also, it required various sacrifices, it laid down precise rules for purification, it segregated for a time one who was in a state of impurity and defilement, it appointed the observance of days and seasons, and then baptism was received as the seal of purification. The baptism of John was far superior. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Gregory Nazianzen writes:

Let us speak about the different kinds of baptism, that we may come out thence purified. Moses baptized but it was in water, and before that in the cloud and in the sea. . . . John also baptized; but this was not like the baptism of the Jews, for it was not only in water, but also "unto repentance."<sup>7</sup>

In these casual references the Church Fathers do not expressly state that this baptism was applied to proselytes.

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<sup>5</sup>Cyprian, "Epistle 72, to Jubaianus," par. 17, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), V, 383.

<sup>7</sup>Basil, "Concerning Baptism," Book I, ch. 2, The Fathers of the Church, edited by Roy Joseph Deferrari (New York: Fathers of The Church, Inc., 1950), IX, 354-355.

<sup>8</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 39, On The Holy Lights," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), VII, 358.



But there is certainly a strong possibility that it was to such a proselyte baptism to which they referred.

These references from the Talmud and Church Fathers give clear indication that the Jews baptized proselytes to their faith from ancient times. The Jewish Encyclopedia furnishes this explanation:

According to rabbinical teaching, which dominated even during the existence of the Temple, baptism, next to circumcision and sacrifice, was an absolute necessary condition to be fulfilled by a proselyte to Judaism. . . .

The baptism of the proselyte has for its purpose his cleansing from the impurity of idolatry, and the restoration to the purity of a new-born man. This may be learned from the Talmud (Sotah 12b) in regard to Pharaoh's daughter, whose bathing in the Nile is explained by Simon B. Yohai to have been for that purpose. . . .

The real significance of the rite of baptism can not be derived from the Levitical law; but it appears to have had its origin in Babylonian or ancient Semitic practice.<sup>8</sup>

It is quite apparent that the Jews baptized proselytes. But another question remains. If the proselytes had infant children, were these children also baptized? For the answer to that we look again at the Babylonian Talmud. In the Order on Women, the Mishna states:

A woman proselyte, a woman captive, and a woman slave, who has been redeemed, converted, or freed (when they were) less than three years and one day old--their kethubah is two hundred (Zug), and there is with regard to them the claim of (non-) virginity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> S. Krauss, "Baptism," The Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1902), II, 499-500.

<sup>9</sup> Isidore Epstein, editor, The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nashim III, Kethuboth I (London: The Soncino Press, 1936), XVII, 54-56.



The Gemara adds this commentary:

R. Huna said: A minor proselyte is immersed by the direction of the court. . . . Is it not that they immersed them by the direction of the court? No, here we treat of the case of a proselyte whose sons and daughters were converted with him, so that they are satisfied with what their father does. R. Joseph said: When they have become of age, they can protest (against their conversion).<sup>10</sup>

The footnote gloss of this section offers this explanation:

Prior to and for the purpose of conversion the would-be proselyte has to undergo circumcision and immersion in water. The immersion is to signify his purification. If the would-be proselyte is a minor and has no father to act for him, the Courts can authorize his ritual immersion.<sup>11</sup>

The Mishna shows that minors less than three years and a day can become redeemed and converted. The Gemara and footnote indicate that baptism was involved in this conversion of minors. It appears that the infant children of proselytes were baptized. Either the parents or the Court could authorize their baptism.

Even if no statement could be found definitely showing that infants were baptized, this would be the natural conclusion. For if the Jews considered the heathen in need of baptismal purification before entering the Covenant, they would certainly give this baptism to heathen infants. The Jews believed that infants have a place in the Covenant. For in obedience to the command of God they circumcised their eight-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



day-old sons.<sup>12</sup> This served as a seal, showing that their infant children were in God's Covenant. Infants could enter the Covenant, but the heathen must first be purified by baptism. It would seem quite probably that the infants of heathen parents, which the Jews received into their Covenant, were baptized.

Thus our investigation has given evidence that in very ancient times the Jews developed the practice of baptizing proselytes to their Faith, including infant children. It might be mentioned that this practice continues to this day in all Orthodox Jewish Churches.<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish practice of infant baptism certainly has implications for Christian baptism.

Shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave this command to His disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>14</sup> With these few words Christ instituted His baptism. As far as we know, He gave no further explanation.

But this brevity did not confuse the Apostles. They did not wonder, "What does He mean--baptize all nations? Should we actually baptize with water? What should we baptize--

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<sup>12</sup>Gen. 17:12.

<sup>13</sup>According to Rabbi Bernard Lipnick of B'nai Amoona Congregation, St. Louis, Missouri, 1958.

<sup>14</sup>Matt. 28:19.



their clothes, their property?" There was no confusion because the disciples knew what Jesus wanted. Their background filled them in with the needed details. It told them to use water, on people. But this background also had something to say about age. It said that infants as well as adults are proper subjects for baptism.

Of course, Christ's baptism is different from the old Jewish rite. His baptism is for all nations, for all people, for Jew and Gentile. His baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But these differences Christ explicitly stated. He mentioned no difference concerning the age of a proper subject.



## CHAPTER IV

### INFANT BAPTISM BEFORE 200 A. D.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to prove from history that infant baptism was a common, general, accepted practice of the Church before 250 A. D.--even before 200 A. D. The evidence consists of significant statements made by the Fathers.

Our first reference comes from Irenaeus<sup>1</sup> in his work, Against Heresies. It was written in Lyons, Gaul, around the year 185 A. D. This paragraph is from the Second Book directed against the Valentinian Gnostics:

Being thirty years old when He came to be baptized, and then possessing the full age of a Master, He came to Jerusalem, so that He might be properly acknowledged by all as a Master. For He did not seem one thing while He was another, as those affirm who describe Him as being man only in appearance; but what He was, that He also appeared to be. Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master, not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor around the year 115 A. D. He spent his youth at Smyrna where he received instruction from Polycarp and other disciples of the Apostles. He taught at Rome for a while and later served as a presbyter at Lyons, Gaul. In 177, when the bishop of Lyons suffered martyrdom, Irenaeus became his successor. It was in this capacity that he wrote his principle work, Against Heresies, around 185. He died sometime after 190. Irenaeus is known as the great champion of orthodoxy against the Gnostic heresies. Franz Ritter Von Zahn, "Irenaeus," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), VI, 28-31. Hereafter Jackson's edition will be referred to as Schaff-Herzog.



in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself--all, I say, who through Him are born again (renascuntur) to God--infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise.<sup>2</sup>

As shown in the Introduction, the Church Fathers sometimes used words meaning "infants," or "little ones," to designate adults who were "infant" in their faith or who were humble like little children. For that reason, there must be some indication in the passage that the author is referring to actual infants--to children who were in their earliest stages of life. There are such indications in this passage from Irenaeus. The entire chapter in which this passage occurs deals with chronological age and baptism. Irenaeus has set out to prove to the Valentinians that their thirty eons are not typified by Christ's baptism in His thirtieth year. This leads him into other discussions concerning Christ's age and baptism.

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<sup>2</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book II, ch. 22, par. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), I, 391. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as TANF.



Irenaeus shows how Christ's growth from infancy to manhood has benefited all people. By being an infant, he sanctifies infants; by being a youth, he sanctifies youths, etc. Irenaeus even claims that old men are sanctified by Christ's old age. For he believed that Jesus was more than 50 years old when He died.<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus is dealing with chronological age. It is quite obvious, that when he talks about infants, youths, old men, he is speaking about various age levels--age levels which Jesus Himself passed through. That these infants were children in their earliest stages of life is indicated by the progression from infants to boys to youths. But he does not say this of infants. The reason is probably that infants do not yet have the mental facilities to examine the life of Christ and see there an example of pious living. The reference to "infants" in this passage is obviously to those who are in their earliest stages of life.

Another matter must be examined. Irenaeus does not use the word "baptize" in direct reference to infants. He says that Christ "came to save all . . . who through Him are born again [renascuntur] to God--infants, . . . ." But it is obvious that this is a reference to baptism. He merely uses the word "born again" in place of the word "baptize." For the paragraph in which this phrase occurs--the entire chapter--is dealing with baptism and age. But there are other reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book II, ch. 22, par. 5, TANF, I, 392.



We might ask, "How did Irenaeus believe it possible for some infants to be born again?" It would be hard to imagine that he believed that infants heard the preaching of the Gospel, pondered it, believed it, and were reborn. But perhaps he considered this a baptismal rebirth, a new birth through baptism. For Irenaeus definitely believed that baptism is a rebirth, a regeneration. In the Third Book he writes:

And when we come to refute them, we shall show in its fitting place, that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God, and thus to a renunciation of the whole Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>

It was a common practice in the early Church to use such words as "regeneration," "rebirth," "redemption" in the place of "baptism." Several examples will make this evident.

The first example is from Irenaeus himself. In the Third Book he writes:

And again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, He said to them, "Go and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>5</sup>

Another example from Irenaeus is found in the First Book. In the twenty-first chapter he describes the views which some heretics have on baptism. He makes this introductory remark:

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<sup>4</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book III, ch. 17, par. 1, TANF, I, 443.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 444.



Thus there are as many schemes of "redemption" as there are teachers of these mystical opinions. And when we come to refute them, we shall show in its fitting place, that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God.<sup>6</sup>

The next quotation comes from the First Apology of Justin Martry, written at Rome around 150 A. D.<sup>7</sup>

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicate ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ. . . . As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting. . . . Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated.<sup>8</sup>

Clement of Alexandria writes (around 195 A. D.<sup>9</sup>):

Straightway, on our regeneration, we attained that perfection after which we aspired. . . . The same also takes place in our case, whose exemplar Christ became. Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; . . . This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins.<sup>10</sup>

Cyprian writes (around 255 A. D. at Carthage<sup>11</sup>):

For he who has been sanctified, his sins being put away in baptism, and has been spiritually re-formed into a new man, has become filled for receiving the Holy Spirit; . . . Moreover, it is silly to say, that although the second birth is spiritual, by which we are

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<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book I, ch. 21, par. 1, TANF, I, 345.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, A History of Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Justin Martry, "First Apology," ch. 61, TANF, I, 183.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, op. cit., pp. 202-203.

<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," Book I, ch. 6, TANF, II, 215.

<sup>11</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 268.



born in Christ through the laver of regeneration, one may be born spiritually among the heretics. . . .<sup>12</sup>

These examples should be sufficient. They show that the early Fathers were accustomed to use words like "rebirth" in the place of "baptism." They did this because they believed that baptism was a rebirth. It would certainly be nothing unusual for the phrase, "He came to save all . . . who through Him are born again to God--infants, . . ." to be a reference to baptism.

But there is not only the possibility that this phrase refers to baptism; there is also the probability. In summary the reasons are the following: the phrase occurs in a baptismal context; Irenaeus could hardly conceive of infants being re-born except through the rebirth of baptism; and the Fathers were accustomed to use words like "re-birth" in the place of baptism.

Hence, in Irenaeus, we undoubtedly have our first reference to infant baptism.

This reference is significant in two ways: it indicates the practice of the Church and the teaching of Irenaeus.

Irenaeus is neither defending nor condemning the practice of infant baptism. In the course of writing, he happens to make a casual reference to it. But this casual reference indicates that the Church was baptizing infants. Against Heresies was written around 185 A. D.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Cyprian, "Epistle 73, to Pompey," par. 5, TANF, V, 387.

<sup>13</sup>Franz Ritter Von Zahn, loc. cit.



This casual reference also indicates the teaching of Irenaeus on infant baptism. It is true that he neither defends nor condemns. But by considering infant baptism a rebirth of infants he gives his stamp of approval. He obviously considers it a valid, apostolic practice. And the opinion of Irenaeus as to what was practiced in the apostolic age must certainly have some significance for us. For he certainly was in a wonderful position to know the facts. He was involved in the Christian Faith from his early youth. He himself tells how as a boy he treasured the discourses of Polycarp. He undoubtedly met and talked with many people who were quite active in the apostolic age. For when Irenaeus was a young man twenty years old, only about thirty-five years had elapsed since the apostle John had died. Special mention should be made concerning Polycarp. For Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, and Polycarp was a student of John.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Irenaeus describes his relation with Polycarp in a letter sent to a certain Florinus. There he writes: "For, while I was yet a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp, . . . I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse--his going out, too, and his coming in--his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their word to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teachings, Polycarp having thus received information from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scripture. These things, through God's mercy which was upon me, I then listened to attentively, and treasured them up not



These, then, are the implications of our quotation from Irenaeus. It shows that the Church was practicing infant baptism before 185. It gives some direct indication that infant baptism is an apostolic practice. For Irenaeus obviously considers it so, and he was in an opportune position to know the facts.

Our second reference to infant baptism comes from Tertullian.<sup>15</sup> In his treatise, On Baptism, he writes:

But they whose office it is, know that baptism is not rashly to be administered. . . . And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary--if (baptism itself) is not so necessary--that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfil their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood? The Lord does indeed say, "Forbid them not to come unto me." Let them "come," then, while they are growing up; let them "come" while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when

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on paper, but in my heart; and I am continually, by God's grace, revolving these things accurately in my mind." Irenaeus, "Fragment II," TANF, I, 568.

<sup>15</sup>Tertullian is "the first great writer of Latin Christianity and one of the grandest and most original characters of the ancient Church." He was born at Carthage around 150 or 160 A. D. He was educated in law and philosophy. At Rome he became a distinguished lawyer and teacher of rhetoric. There, it appears, he was converted and returned to Carthage a Christian. He was soon appointed a presbyter in the Carthagian Church. About 207 he broke with the Catholic Church and became the leader and brilliant exponent of Montanism. He could no longer endure the laxity of the Catholic Church. Near his death he left the Montanists and organized a little sect of his own, the Tertullianists. He died at Carthage between 220 and 240. David Schley Schaff, "Tertullian, Quintus Septimus Florens," Schaff-Herzog, XI, 305-307.



they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the "remission of sins?" . . . Let them know how to "ask" for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given "to him that asketh."<sup>16</sup>

In this passage Tertullian is obviously referring to actual infants, not to adults who were infant in faith. He specifically says that "age" is a factor to consider in baptism. He refers to these infants as "the innocent period of life." He indicates that they have not yet grown up; they are not able to "know" and "ask."

Tertullian disapproves of infant baptism.<sup>17</sup> He can not understand why infants are "hastened" to baptism. He points out to the sponsors that they might be disappointed in the god-child; he might grow up and develop an evil disposition. But by this disapproval Tertullian reveals an important fact. He shows us that infants were being baptized; they were "hastened" to the font. He shows that the custom of "sponsors" was established. For this was the situation that caused and hence preceded his remarks of disapproval.

Around the year 200 A. D., Tertullian was a presbyter of the Church at Carthage. It was then that he wrote the

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<sup>16</sup>Tertullian, "On Baptism," TANF, III, 677-678.

<sup>17</sup>It should be noted that Tertullian does not object to infant baptism on the grounds that it is an invalid act, that it is actually no baptism at all. But for certain reasons, he believes it "preferable" to delay baptism in the case of children. Though he did not approve of infant baptism, he obviously considered it a valid baptism. He refers to it as "the remission of sins." We nowhere find him warning people who were baptized in infancy that they must be baptized again as an adult if they wish to have a valid baptism.



treatise, On Baptism.<sup>18</sup> Hence, he shows that before the year 200 A. D., infant baptism, even the use of sponsors, was a common practice.

The next references to infant baptism are from the works of Origen.<sup>19</sup>

The first quotation is from a Sermon 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 that reason because by the sacrament of baptism the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptized.<sup>20</sup>

The second quotation is from a Sermon on Leviticus:

And if you like to hear what other saints also have felt in regard to physical birth, listen to David when

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<sup>18</sup>Edgar J. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>19</sup>Origen was one of the greatest Christian scholars and one of the most prolific writers of antiquity. He was born of Christian parents in Alexandria around the year 182. During his youth, he studied under Clement of Alexandria. At the age of eighteen he was placed at the head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria, successor of Clement. For a dozen years, he carried on that work. During that time he traveled to Rome, Arabia, Palestine, and Greece. Around 230, he was ordained a presbyter by the bishop of Caesarea. The bishop of Alexandria objected to this and forced Origen to leave Alexandria. The remainder of his life was spent at Caesarea, Palestine, where he conducted a theological school. He died around 251 as a result of imprisonment during the Decian persecution. Erwin Preuschen, "Origen," Schaff-Herzog, VIII, 268-273.

<sup>20</sup>Origen, Luke, Homily 14. Quotation found in William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: The University Press, 1844), I, 104-105.



he says, I was conceived, so it runs, in iniquity and in sin my mother hath borne me, proving that every soul which is born in the flesh is tainted with the stain of iniquity and sin. This is the reason for that saying which we have already quoted above, No man is clean from sin, not even if his life be one day long. To these, as a further point, may be added an enquiry into the reason for which, while the church's baptism is given for the remission of sin, it is the custom of the church that baptism be administered even to infants. Certainly, if there were nothing in infants that required remission and called for lenient treatment, the grace of baptism would seem unnecessary.<sup>21</sup>

The third passage is taken from his Commentary on Romans:

And also in the law it is decreed, that a sacrifice be offered for a child which is born; a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons: one of which is for sin, and the other for a burnt offering. For what sin is this one pigeon offered? Can a new-born child have committed any sin? It has even then sin, for which the sacrifice is commanded to be offered; from which he is denied to be clear, even he who is but one day old. Therefore, concerning this, David is believed to have said that which we mentioned above, "In sin did my mother conceive me:" for in the story that follows there is no sin of the mother mentioned. And because of this the Church has received a tradition from the apostles, to also give baptism to infants. For they to whom the mysteries of divine mysteries were committed, knew that the natural pollution of sin was in all, which must be washed away by water and the Spirit. Because of this pollution, the body itself is called the body of sin.<sup>22</sup>

It is obvious that in all of these passages Origen is referring to actual infants. He is setting forth the fact

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<sup>21</sup> Origen, Leviticus, Homily 8, ch. 4. Quotation found in Selections From the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen, edited by R. B. Tollinton (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> Origen, "Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," Book V, par. 9, translated by present writer, Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), XIV, 1047.



that no one is free from the pollution of sin, not even newborn infants who are but one day old. He explains that this is the reason why infants are baptized, even they are sinful and need the grace and forgiveness of baptism.

In these passages Origen is not disputing whether infants are to be baptized or not. He is not fighting for its validity as though there were someone who denied it. He merely uses this common, accepted practice to prove a point--that even infants are sinful.<sup>23</sup>

These passages certainly show that infant baptism was a general practice at the time of their composition. It was so common and so accepted that Origen uses it to prove a point. The passages were composed sometime during Origen's career, between 200 A. D. and 251 A. D.<sup>24</sup> Hence, we are shown that before Origen's death in 251, infants were commonly baptized. But we are shown more than this.

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<sup>23</sup> Jerome confirms the fact that the ideas expressed in these passages are genuine to Origen. In a treatise against the Pelagians, he writes: "That holy man and eloquent bishop Augustine not long ago wrote to Marcellinus . . . two treatises on infant baptism, in opposition to your heresy which maintains that infants are baptized not for remission of sins, but for admission to the kingdom of heaven, . . . . But if you think the remission of another's sins implies injustice and that he has no need of it who could not sin, cross over to Origen, your special favorite, who says that ancient offences committed long before in the heavens are lost in baptism. Jerome, "Dialogue Against the Pelagians," Book III, par. 18, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), VI, 482-483. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as Second Series.

<sup>24</sup> Erwin Preuschen, loc. cit.



Origen states that "the Church had from the Apostles a tradition to give baptism even to infants." He here reports that infant baptism originated with the apostles; that since their day, infant baptism was practiced by the Church. With this report Origen serves as a historian.

The question is, "How much confidence can we place in this historical report?" It is true that Origen held many strange ideas, such as the pre-existence of souls, etc.<sup>25</sup> We certainly would place little confidence in his religious opinions. But with all of his error, there can be little doubt of his honesty and sincerity. He considered the ascetic life the highest form and practiced it. It is said that he possessed but one coat and no shoes; he rarely ate flesh, never drank wine, and slept on the bare floor. Influenced by a literal interpretation of Matt. 19:12, he emasculated himself.<sup>26</sup> There would be no grounds to consider this report a deliberate lie. Origen undoubtedly considered it a fact.

But even though Origen considered this report to be true, was he in a position to know the facts?

Origen certainly had a good knowledge of the Church as

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<sup>25</sup> Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 146-161.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Revised edition; Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), I, 280-281.



it existed around the year 200 A. D. He saw it with his own eyes, studied in it, worked in it. By 200 A. D. he was eighteen years old and headed the Catechetical school at Alexandria.<sup>27</sup> His own personal contact with the Church around 200 would make him a reliable historian for this period.

Origen did not have this first-hand contact with the Church during its first century after the Apostles. But he undoubtedly knew much about it.

He was born into a family that had been Christian for many years. Eusebius (280-339)<sup>28</sup> points this out in defending Origen against the charges of a certain Poryphyry. He writes: "For the doctrine of Christ was passed on to Origen from his forefathers (prógonos)."<sup>29</sup> Rufinus (c.345-c.410)<sup>30</sup> interpreted Prógonos to be "ab avis atque atavis"<sup>31</sup> (from his grandfather and great-grandfather).<sup>32</sup> Origen's forefathers

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<sup>27</sup>Eusebius, "Church History," Book VI, ch. 3, Second Series, I, 251.

<sup>28</sup>Erwin Preuscher, "Eusebius of Caesarea," Schaff-Herzog, IV, 208-211.

<sup>29</sup>Eusebius, Kirchengeschichte, Book VI, ch. 19, translated by present writer, in Die Griechischen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte, edited by Eduard Schwartz (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), IX, 560.

<sup>30</sup>Herman Gustav Eduard Krüger, "Rufinus, Tyrannius," Schaff-Herzog, X, 110-111.

<sup>31</sup>Eusebius, Kirchengeschichte, Book VI, ch. 19, in Die Griechischen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte, edited by Eduard Schwartz (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), IX, 561.

<sup>32</sup>Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, editors, Harper's Latin Dictionary (Revised edition; New York: American Book Company, 1877), pp. 187ff.



were perhaps converted during the time of the Apostles. He had no further to go than the tradition of his own family to learn much about the practices of the Church during the previous century.

During his early years his father, Leonides, gave him a thorough education. He trained him "in the Greek sciences and drilled him in sacred studies, requiring him to learn and recite every day."<sup>33</sup> While still a boy, he was also a pupil of Clement in the Catechetical school. He had a very broad background, living in Alexandria, Caesarea (Palestine), Caesarea (Cappadocia), and traveling over most of the Christian world.<sup>34</sup> He was certainly one of the most learned men of the Church. This is obvious from his own writings and from comments made by Eusebius, Rufinus, Jerome, etc.

It would be impossible to determine exactly how much Origen knew of the Church during the second century. It would be impossible to determine how much proof he had for his historical opinion that infant baptism had been a usage of the Church since the time of the Apostles. But it can hardly be questioned that this learned man, of a family Christian for many generations, only one hundred years removed from the Apostles, had some facts to back up this

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<sup>33</sup>Eusebius, "Church History," Book VI, ch. 2, Second Series, I, 250.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 249-292.



historical judgment.

The next quotation is from Cyprian.<sup>35</sup> It is taken from a letter written in reply to a certain Fidus. Fidus had several problems for which he wanted help. One of these was whether or not an infant might be baptized before it was eight days old. He sent a letter to Cyprian, asking for an answer. Cyprian presented the matter to a Council of sixty-six bishops. They decided upon the question, and Cyprian sent this decision to Fidus. This is his reply:

Cyprian, and others his colleagues who were present in council, in number sixty-six, to Fidus their brother, greeting. We have read your letter, dearest brother, in which you intimated concerning Victor, formerly a presbyter, that our colleague Therapius, rashly at a too early season, and with over-eager haste, granted peace to him before he had fully repented, . . . .

But in respect of the case of the infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man. For as the Lord says in His Gospel, "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them," as far as we can, we must strive that, if possible, no soul be lost. For

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<sup>35</sup>This great Latin Church Father was born in North Africa around the year 200 A. D. He belonged to a provincial pagan family and became a teacher of rhetoric. Around 246 he was converted to Christianity. He entered into the work of the Church and soon became a presbyter. In little more than two years after his conversion he was chosen bishop of Carthage. A good part of his bishopric was spent in controversy concerning the lapsed and heretic baptism. He died in 258, beheaded under the Emperor Valerian. Karl Ludwig Leimbach, "Cyprian," Schaff-Herzog, III, 330-332.



what is wanting to him who has once been formed in the womb by the hand of God? To us, indeed, and to our eyes, according to the worldly course of days, they who are born appear to receive an increase. But whatever things are made by God, are completed by the majesty and work of God their Maker.

Moreover, belief in divine Scripture declares to us, that among all, whether infants or those who are older, there is the same equality of the divine gift. Elisha, beseeching God, so laid himself upon the infant son of the widow, who was lying dead, that his head was applied to his head, and his face to his face, and the limbs of Elisha were spread over and joined to each of the limbs of the child, and his feet to his feet. If this thing be considered with respect to the inequality of our birth and our body, an infant could not be made equal with a person grown up and mature, nor could its little limbs fit and be equal to the larger limbs of a man. But in that is expressed the divine and spiritual equality, that all men are like and equal, since they have once been made by God; and our age may have a difference in the increase of our bodies, according to the world, but not according to God; unless that very grace also which is given to the baptized is given either less or more, according to the age of the receivers, whereas the Holy Spirit is not given with measure, but by the love and mercy of the Father alike to all. For God, as He does not accept the person, so does not accept the age; since He shows Himself a Father to all with well-weighed equality for the attainment of heavenly grace.

For, with respect to what you say, that the aspect of an infant in the first days after its birth is not pure, so that any one of us would still shudder at kissing it, we do not think that this ought to be alleged as any impediment to heavenly grace. For it is written, "To the pure all things are pure." Nor ought any of us to shudder at that which God hath condescended to make. For although the infant is still fresh from its birth, yet it is not such that any one should shudder at kissing it in giving grace and in making peace; since in the kiss of an infant every one of us ought, for his very religion's sake, to consider the still recent hands of God themselves, which in some sort we are kissing, in the man lately formed and freshly born, when we are embracing that which God has made. For in respect of the observance of the eighth day in the Jewish circumcision of the flesh, a sacrament was given beforehand in shadow and in usage; but when Christ came, it was fulfilled in truth. For because the eighth day, that



is, the first day after the Sabbath, was to be that on which the Lord should rise again, and should quicken us, and give us circumcision of the spirit, the eighth day, that is, the first day after the Sabbath, and the Lord's day, went before in the figure; which figure ceased when by and by the truth came, and spiritual circumcision was given to us.

For which reason we think that no one is to be hindered from obtaining grace by that law which was already ordained, and that spiritual circumcision ought not to be hindered by carnal circumcision, but that absolutely every man is to be admitted to the grace of Christ, since Peter also in the Acts of the Apostles speaks, and says, "The Lord hath said to me that I should call no man common or unclean." But if anything could hinder men from obtaining grace, their more heinous sins might rather hinder those who are mature and grown up and older. But again, if even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins is granted--and nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace--how much rather ought we to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins--that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another.

And therefore, dearest brother, this was our opinion in council, that by us no one ought to be hindered from baptism and from the grace of God, who is merciful and kind and loving to all. Which, since it is to be observed and maintained in respect of all, we think is to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born person, who on this very account deserve more from our help and from the divine mercy, that immediately, on the very beginning of their birth, lamenting and weeping, they do nothing else but entreat. We bid you, dearest brother, ever heartily farewell.<sup>36</sup>

There can be no doubt that this letter deals with actual infants. For the entire problem centers around a baby under eight days old.

This council did not institute infant baptism. They were

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<sup>36</sup> Cyprian, "Epistle 58, To Fidus," TANF, V, 353-354.



not attempting to introduce a new practice. Infant baptism was taken for granted. The problem was simply this, "should an infant be baptized before the eighth day?" Fidus was of the opinion that the ancient law of circumcision should be observed. He felt that an infant should not be baptized until the eighth day. He shuddered at the thought of baptizing and kissing an infant in the first days after its birth. But the entire council disagreed. Cyprian replied, "We all rather judged that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man." All sixty-six bishops were unanimous in their opinion that infants, even under eight days old, were proper subjects for baptism. For, according to these bishops, grace is not given according to age, but according to the "love and mercy of the Father alike to all."

This letter was written somewhere between Cyprian's conversion and his death (246 A. D. to 258 A. D.), perhaps around the year 252 A. D. It clearly shows what a general, common, accepted practice infant baptism was at that time. Cyprian, sixty-six bishops, and Fidus take it for granted. There was not a single person who held that baptism should not be given to infants. Far from that, all but Fidus considered even a day-old baby a proper subject.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Few manuscripts of the ancient Church can be shown to be more authentic than this letter of Cyprian. For it is often referred to by Jerome and Augustine in their controversy with Pelagius over original sin. For its use by Augustine see "Letter 166, To Jerome, A Treatise on the Origin of the Human Soul," ch. 8, par. 23; "On Forgiveness of Sins and Bap-



Our last passage is a quotation from Augustine.<sup>38</sup> It is true that this great Churchman lived nowhere near 200 A. D. or 250 A. D. His activity centered around the year 400. But the following statement is worthy of our attention as we consider infant baptism before the years 200 A. D. to 250 A. D.-- it comes from the treatise, On Baptism, Against The Donatists:

. . . But since we must look at it in itself, without entering upon the question of the salvation of the recipient, which it is intended to work, it shows clearly enough that both in the bad, and in those who renounce the world in word and not in deed, it is itself complete, though they cannot receive salvation unless they amend their lives. But as in the thief, to whom the material administration of the sacrament was necessarily wanting, the salvation was complete, because it was spiritually present through his piety, so, when the

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tism," Book III, ch. 10; "On the Proceedings of Pelagius," ch. 25; "On Marriage and Concupiscence," Book II, ch. 51; "Against Two Letters of the Pelagians," Book IV, ch. 23, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), I. For its use by Jerome see "Dialogue Against the Pelagians," Book III, par. 18, Second Series, VI, 482.

<sup>38</sup> Augustine is considered the most important Father of early Church. He was one of the most fertile writers and fortunately his works have come down relatively complete in number. He was born at Tagaste in 354 and died at Hippo Regius in 430, both in present day Algeria. His father was hostile to the Church until shortly before his death, while the consecration of his mother is often an object of his praise. The first thirty-two years of his life were sordid. While studying at Carthage he was drawn into the moral rotteness of the day. He then came under Manichaean influence and held to their doctrine for nine years. In 385 he went to Milan, Italy, as a teacher of rhetoric, and this proved to be the turning point in his life. For it was there that he came under the influence of Ambrose. He was converted in the following year. He returned to Africa and was ordained a presbyter. Around 395 he was chosen Bishop of Hippo. Until his death he served as a great defender of the orthodox faith. Friedrich Armin Loofs, "Augustine, Saint, Of Hippo," Schaff-Herzog, I, 365-372.



sacrament itself is present, salvation is complete, if what the thief possessed be unavoidably wanting. And this is the firm tradition of the universal Church, in respect to the baptism of infants, who certainly are as yet unable "with the heart to believe unto righteousness, and with the mouth to make confession unto salvation," as the thief could do; nay, who even, by crying and moaning when the mystery is performed upon them, raise their voices in opposition to the mysterious words, and yet no Christian will say that they are baptized to no purpose.

And if any one seek for divine authority in this matter, though what is held by the whole Church, and that not as instituted by Councils, but as a matter of invariable custom, is rightly held to have been handed down by apostolic authority, still we can form a true conjecture of the value of the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants, from the parallel of circumcision, which was received by God's earlier people, . . . .

By all these considerations it is proved that the sacrament of baptism is one thing, the conversion of the heart another; but that man's salvation is made complete through the two together. Nor are we to suppose that, if one of these be wanting, it necessarily follows that the other is wanting also; because the sacrament may exist in the infant without the conversion of the heart; and this was found to be possible without the sacrament in the case of the thief, God in either case filling up what was involuntarily wanting. And baptism may exist when the conversion of the heart is wanting; . . . . Therefore we are right in censuring, anathematizing, abhorring, and abominating the perversity of heart shown by heretics; yet it does not follow that they have not the sacrament of the gospel, . . . .<sup>39</sup>

Augustine obviously refers to actual infants in this passage. That is shown by the context and such phrases as, "unable with the heart to believe unto righteousness" and "crying and moaning."

These remarks are directed against the Donatists. This

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<sup>39</sup>Augustine, "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," Book IV, chs. 23-25, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), IV, 461.



was a "purity" sect that had broken off from the Catholics during the fourth century. They believed that baptism was invalid if it were administered by a heretical or depraved priest. They believed that anyone who came to them from a heretical body had to be re-baptized.<sup>40</sup> Augustine points out that baptism is Christ's and not the minister's, that every baptism performed in the name of the Triune God is valid, despite the character of the administrator. Augustine backs this up by showing that baptism is valid even though the recipient had a wicked, unconverted heart. He proves this from the example of Simon Magus. And he offers more proof from the fact that infants are baptized. All admit that infant baptism is valid. This is the firm tradition of the Church handed down from the Apostles. But infants are not converted before their baptism. This shows that baptism is valid despite the condition of the recipient. And this indicates that baptism is valid despite the condition of the officiant.

Augustine is not discussing the validity or non-validity of infant baptism. He merely uses this universal accepted practice to prove a point, that the disposition of neither the administrator nor the recipient has any bearing on a valid sacrament.

But in the process of refuting the Donatists, Augustine gives this historical report. Infant baptism was not insti-

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<sup>40</sup> Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., I, 315-316.



tuted by some Council but was handed down from the Apostles and has always been in the Church.

Augustine was born around 354 A. D. He did not actually see the Church baptize infants during its first centuries. But his historical report certainly has some value. Augustine is less than three hundred years removed from the Apostles. He undoubtedly had access to written and spoken traditions which have long ago disappeared. His writings show him to be a very learned man. His numerous quotations indicate that he was very well read. It should be kept in mind that Augustine was a historian. According to Schaff, the Polemic-theological works of Augustine are the "most copious sources of the history of doctrine." Around 430, Augustine wrote De Haeresibus Quodvultdeum, giving a survey of eighty-eight heresies, from the Simonians in the days of Paul to the Pelagians.<sup>41</sup> He undoubtedly had some facts at his disposal which made him confident that infant baptism had always been in the Church.

The quotations presented in this chapter allow us to make several observations.

Infant baptism was a common practice in the Church around the year 250 A. D. It was such an accepted practice before the death of Origen (251) that he can use it to prove the doctrine of original sin. It was so common that Cyprian and

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<sup>41</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (3rd revision; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), III, 1011.



sixty-six bishops in Council (c. 252) unanimously agree that an infant under eight days is a proper subject for baptism.

It can also be seen that infant baptism was used all over the Christian world around 200 A. D. Irenaeus is our witness for the Northwest. Around 185 at Lyons, Gaul, he wrote his treatise Against Heresies. He reveals that the Church is baptizing infants. Tertullian is our witness for the Southwest (Carthage). Around 200 he wrote his treatise On Baptism. He condemns the practice, but shows that infants are "hastened" to the font. He even shows that the custom of sponsors is already established. Origen is our witness for the East (Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor). It is his belief that the Church has always baptized infants. His personal, living contact with the Church around 200 A. D. makes him a reliable historian for this period.

These quotations also present evidence that infant baptism was always in the Church, that it originated with the Apostles.

They definitely show that infant baptism was a common practice around 250 A. D., even around 200 A. D. Hence, we know that it was a common belief in the Church around 200 that infant baptism was a valid, apostolic practice. For Christians would hardly baptize infants if they considered it an invalid practice. This general, common belief gives indication of apostolicity. Of course, it cannot be denied that many individuals taught false doctrine before 200 A. D.



There were false teachers in the days of the Apostles.<sup>42</sup> If only one or two or a dozen individuals taught infant baptism while others opposed, that would give little proof of its validity. But not just one or two or a dozen individuals taught infant baptism. It was a common belief among the Christians. However, it must also be admitted that even a general belief among Christians can be wrong. Protestants believe that the general belief in purgatory during the medieval ages was wrong. But the factor which makes the general belief in infant baptism an indication of apostolicity is that it was a belief in 200 A. D. These Christians were certainly in a favorable position to know genuine apostolic teaching. They were only one hundred years removed from the apostolic age. There were undoubtedly many traditions still in existence that had been passed down from the Apostles without any serious alterations. For a tradition could come to 200 A. D. with only one or two intermediaries. A man living in 200 could have been born around 125. It would have been very possible for him to have associated with men from the apostolic age. There would be only one intermediary between him and the apostolic age. There is another factor which makes the general belief in infant baptism around 200 significant. Imagine for a moment that infant baptism was invalid, that a person baptized as an infant had no baptism,

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<sup>42</sup> 1 Tim. 1:3-7.



that infant baptism was making it impossible for people to receive a true Christ-commanded baptism. It seems unlikely that such a pernicious doctrine could not only enter the Church, but become generally accepted during the first hundred years after the Apostles. Hence, the fact that infant baptism was a general belief around 200 A. D. gives indication of its apostolic origin.

Another indication is the approval of Irenaeus. As a young man, Irenaeus had contact with Polycarp and probably many others who were eye witnesses of the apostolic age.

There is a third indication. Both Origen and Augustine expressly affirm that the custom, the tradition, of infant baptism originated with the Apostles. Both men were in favorable positions to know the customs of the Church since apostolic times. Origen was a learned man, of a family Christian for many generations, only one hundred years removed from the Apostles. Augustine was so familiar with the past of the Church that he wrote a history of eighty-eight heresies, beginning with the Simonians in the days of Paul.

We arrive at these conclusions: infant baptism was a common practice in the Church around 250 A. D.; it was common around 200 A. D. And there is indication that it originated with the Apostles.



## CHAPTER V

### THE VALIDITY OF INFANT BAPTISM

The purpose of this chapter is to give evidence from history that infant baptism is a valid, apostolic practice. Several significant factors will be presented which make it extremely difficult to imagine that the Apostles opposed the baptism of infants. In this presentation, it will be necessary to draw upon the observation of previous chapters; that infant baptism was a common, accepted, universal practice in the early Church, even before 200 A. D.

Our procedure shall be similar to a method known in geometry as the "indirect proof." A certain hypothesis is set up. One or more conclusions are drawn from this hypothesis. If it can be shown that any of these conclusions are faulty, then the hypothesis is wrong. In this presentation our hypothesis will be that the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone." It will then be shown that, if this hypothesis be correct, we would have indication of this teaching in the early Church. And finally, it will be shown that there is absolutely no such indication.

Our hypothesis is that the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone," they taught that baptism is for confessing Christians only. The only valid baptism is one that is given to a person who possesses faith in Christ. The rite applied to any other person is no baptism. It is an empty ritual



with no power, no effect, no meaning. This includes infants. Infants are unable to confess faith in Christ. The rite given to them is no baptism at all. An individual who receives this rite in infancy must be baptized in later life when he confesses faith. Otherwise he has no baptism. He disobeys Christ's command that all confessing Christians should be baptized.

If this hypothesis be correct, we would have indication in the extant writings that this doctrine was held in the early Church. This conclusion requires evidence. For the claim is not merely made that this doctrine was held by many in the early Church. This fact is self-evident. For if the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone," this doctrine would certainly be found in the Church which they founded, especially in its early years. Many might fall into error, but many would certainly know and teach the true doctrine. But we are claiming more than this. We are claiming that if "confession baptism alone" is Apostolic, we would have indications in the writings which have come down to us from the early Church that this doctrine was held in the Church.

In the writings which we have received from the early Church, the various doctrines are discussed and re-discussed. The Apologists present the Christian teachings in their fight with the heathen world. Irenaeus gives a full exposition in his refutation of heresies. And in the hundreds of other polemical writings, exhortations, and treatises we find the various tenets held by the early Church. Baptism



especially receives considerable treatment. Practically every Father has something to say on this subject. It certainly seems likely, that if "confession baptism alone" were a doctrine held in the early Church, there would be some mention of it in the writings. If this were not the case, if there were no indication of this doctrine, then we would have evidence against its apostolicity.

But this evidence would not be too conclusive. It is strictly based on "argumentation from silence." For though very unlikely, it could just happen that the Fathers failed to discuss this aspect of baptism. Certainly not every aspect of every doctrine is treated. For instance, concerning the doctrine of God, it could very well be that not every attribute is discussed, as omniscience, eternity, etc. That would not mean that all the Fathers denied these attributes. They just did not have opportunity, cause or occasion to write on them all. And there is also the possibility that the Fathers did discuss "confession baptism alone," but that these writings are no longer extant.

But there is one fact which we have not yet considered; the fact which was presented in previous chapters; the fact that infant baptism was a common, general belief and practice in the early Church, even around 200 A. D.<sup>1</sup> This puts an entirely new perspective in our discussion. For if the apostles taught "confession baptism alone," this doctrine would be

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<sup>1</sup>See chapters I and IV.



thrown into the polemic field.

The early Church engaged in extensive polemics. Men fought against and wrote against what they considered false doctrine and practice. This activity extended throughout the first centuries of the Church. The New Testament is our witness for the first century. The Apostles themselves attacked the false doctrines that were springing up.<sup>2</sup> A few polemic writings have survived from the second century. But we know that many more were written. For instance, we know that Justin Martyr wrote a treatise Against All Heresies;<sup>3</sup> Hegeseppius wrote five books against the various gnostic errors.<sup>4</sup> Eusebius quotes from many other polemic works of the second century which are no longer extant.<sup>5</sup> The host of polemical works which have come to us from the third and fourth centuries indicate that this period saw a continuation of polemic activity.

Doctrines or practices considered erroneous were at-

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<sup>2</sup> Paul attacked the Judaizers (Gal.), Jude, the Libertinistic-gnostics, John, the docetists and antinomians, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology," ch. 26, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), I, 172. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as TANF.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, "Church History," Book IV, ch. 22, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), I, 198-200. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as Second Series.

<sup>5</sup> For a listing of these works, see Johannes Quasten, Patrology (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1951), I, 278-284.



tacked in order to expose their errors and destroy their influence; in order to convince the erring and prevent others from following their example.<sup>6</sup> In Against Heresies, Irenaeus states this purpose:

Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, . . . and by means of their craftily constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, not every heresy of every individual was detected and condemned. But if a teaching considered heretical were known and exerted influence, if it attracted a following, then the attacks would come. This influence would not have to be too large. Not all the heresies condemned in the ancient Church had a sizable following.

The types and kinds of errors condemned are many and various, great and small. They range from the gnostics whose fantastic schemes were far removed from New Testament teaching to the Novatians, who were pietistical Christians.

Certainly the doctrine of "confession baptism alone" would be involved in this polemic activity. It would be involved if this were an apostolic teaching held in the early Church. For there were those who completely parted from this doctrine, those who baptized infants.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book I, Preface, TANF, I, 315.



The adherents of "confession baptism alone" would certainly oppose infant baptism. They would oppose it because it was a false doctrine--a doctrine which held that confession of faith was not necessary for baptism. They would oppose it because it destroyed true baptism. Baptism given to infants is actually no baptism. It is a worthless, invalid act. They would insist that those who received the baptismal rite in infancy must receive that rite again when they are able to confess their faith. Otherwise, they have no baptism. They completely disobey Christ's command.

The adherents of "confession baptism alone" would certainly make known their opposition to infant baptism. For there were many who were baptizing infants. We have already seen that by the year 200, infant baptism was a common practice used all over the Christian world. As a heretical doctrine, it could not have originated with the Apostles. But during the years before 200, this heresy must have been born. During those years it was able to spread and finally reach the world-wide status it had in 200. Somewhere along the line, this heresy would be noticed by those who held the true doctrine. And then the attacks would begin. This would make more people aware of the situation. The opposition would increase. And as this heresy continued to spread, as it threatened to engulf all Christendom, there would be more alarm, more opposition. Those who knew the truth would fight to defend it. They would present the Apostolic teaching of "confession baptism alone." They would present infant baptism



as a pernicious heresy, as an invalid act. They would warn those who received the rite in infancy to receive the rite again.

That these attacks would have occurred is more than conjecture. It would be difficult to imagine otherwise--difficult to imagine, that is, if the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone." It would be difficult to imagine that there were not some who knew the truth, who saw the error in infant baptism, who became alarmed at its growth, who presented their opposition.

But these polemics would be a two-way affair. For those who accepted infant baptism would attack those who denied its validity. They would oppose them for teaching what they considered false doctrine. They would oppose them for causing dissension and strife. They would oppose them for depriving this seal of God from a dying infant. For the opinion was held that an infant dying unbaptized was not saved. Augustine says:

Now, inasmuch as infants are only able to become His sheep by baptism, it must needs come to pass that they perish if they are not baptized, because they will not have that eternal life which He gives to His sheep.<sup>8</sup>

They would also oppose them for their anabaptist teaching; for teaching that those who receive the baptismal rite

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<sup>8</sup>Augustine, "On Forgiveness of Sins, And Baptism," Book I, ch. 40, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), V, 31. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as First Series.



in infancy must receive it again when they confess their faith. The Catholics considered the Donatists to be anabaptists. For they baptized anew all who came to them and had been baptized by the "impure" Catholics.<sup>9</sup> We hear Augustine pleading with them:

Cease, then, to bring forward against us the authority of Cyprian in favor of repeating baptism, but cling with us to the example of Cyprian for the preservation of unity.<sup>10</sup>

He tells the Donatists:

men, by a sort of hidden inspiration from heaven, shrink from any one who for the second time receives baptism which he had already received in any quarter whatsoever.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, it is obvious, that if "confession baptism alone" were held in the early Church, there would have been controversy. Many would have opposed infant baptism as an invalid, heretical act. Many would have condemned its denial as a vicious heresy. This polemical activity would have been especially strong in the years before 200 A. D. It would have been then that the heresy originated, grew, and was assuming world-wide proportions. And if "confession baptism alone" retained a following throughout the succeeding years, the controversy would continue. For we know that during the third and fourth centuries, infant baptism was a common,

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, "The Correction of the Donatists," ch. 4, par. 17, First Series, IV, 639.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," Book II, ch. 12, First Series, IV, 430.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Book V, ch. 6, p. 465.



general practice.

The claim was made that, if the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone," we would have indication of this doctrine in the extant writings from the early Church. The fact that this doctrine would have been involved in controversy gives considerable evidence for this claim. For that would make "confession baptism alone" an object of concern for the writers of polemical works, hereseologies, and histories. We would expect to find indications of this doctrine in these three types of extant works.

We first consider the polemical works which have come to us from the second, third, and fourth centuries. We look at those works which refer to various heresies and consider their bearing on "confession baptism alone."

The second century has given us much literature which is either edifying (the Apostolic Fathers) or apologetic in nature.<sup>12</sup> But it has also given us works which mention various heretical teachings. The Apostolic Fathers mention docetism,<sup>13</sup> judaizing,<sup>14</sup> and others. The Apologists mention heresies that concern the person of Jesus,<sup>15</sup> the resurrection

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<sup>12</sup> Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Revised edition; Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), I, 211-246.

<sup>13</sup> Polycarp, "Epistle to the Philipppians," ch. 7, TANF, I, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ignatius, "Epistle to the Magnesians," ch. 10, TANF, I, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology," ch. 58, TANF, I, 182.



of the dead,<sup>16</sup> and other matters. Clement of Alexandria shows how the various heresies received their names and gives examples from prominent heresies.<sup>17</sup>

Special note should be taken concerning Irenaeus's work, Against Heresies, which comes to us from the second century. The full title of this work is, The Detection and Refutation of False Knowledge.<sup>18</sup> The primary purpose of this treatise is to expose and refute the various errors of the Gnostics, especially the Valentinians. This Irenaeus clearly states:

Thou has indeed enjoined upon me, my very dear friend, that I should bring to light the Valentinian doctrines, concealed as their votaries imagine: that I should exhibit their diversity, and compose a treatise in refutation of them. I therefore have undertaken--showing that they spring from Simon, the father of all heretics--to exhibit both their doctrines and successions, and to set forth arguments against them all.<sup>19</sup>

But Irenaeus believed that an exposure of the Gnostics would amount to more than an exposure of one peculiar sect. He considered this an exposure of all heresies. He believed that all heresies could be found in the various gnostic sects and opinions. As Irenaeus states it:

The man, however, who would undertake their conversion,

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<sup>16</sup>Justin Martyr, "On the Resurrection," TANF, I, 149.

<sup>17</sup>Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata," Book VII, ch. 17, TANF, II, 555.

<sup>18</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book IV, Preface, TANF, I, 462.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Book III, Preface, p. 414.



must possess an accurate knowledge of their system or schemes of doctrine. . . . This was the reason that my predecessors . . . were unable, notwithstanding, to refute the Valentinians satisfactorily, because they were ignorant of these men's system; which I have with all care delivered to them in the first book, in which I have shown that their doctrine is a recapitulation of all the heretics. . . . <sup>20</sup>

Hence, Irenaeus can speak, not only of detecting and refuting the gnostic errors, but of detecting and refuting all heretics.

Since, therefore, it is a complex and multiform task to detect and convict all the heretics, and since our design is to reply to them all according to their special characters, we have judged it necessary, first <sup>21</sup> of all, to give an account of their source and root.

As we read this treatise of Irenaeus, it is not difficult to realize why he considered this exposure of the gnostics to be an exposure of all heresies. For in this work we see numerous errors that touch on practically every doctrine of the Christian faith; on the Trinity, creation, angels, the person and work of Christ, sanctification, etc. Even various heretical views on baptism are discussed. <sup>22</sup>

The extant writings after the second century abound in polemical works. The Fathers were quick to address themselves against those who were promulgating false doctrine. We see Tertullian writing treatises on baptism, on the soul, on the flesh of Christ, on the resurrection of the flesh--

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Book IV, Preface, p. 462.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Book I, ch. 22, p. 347.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Book I, ch. 21, pp. 345-347.



all in connection with particular heresies. He wrote against the errors of Praxeas, Hermogenes, Marcion, Valentine, and others.<sup>23</sup> A host of other men and their writings could be listed. It will suffice to point out that numerous teachings of all kinds and types are condemned as heretical. The extant works of the various writers abound in polemics.

Many and various teachings are condemned as heretical in the extant writings from each of the three centuries after the Apostolic age. Many of these condemned teachings are of little importance with an extremely small following.

This polemical literature gives evidence for the claim that if "confession baptism alone" were an Apostolic teaching held in the early Church, we would have indication of this doctrine in the extant writings. For if "confession baptism alone" were held in the early Church, there would have been a bitter controversy. Many would have considered infant baptism to be a pernicious heresy, while many would have thought the same of its denial. It is certainly reasonable to conclude that these two teachings would be mentioned in the extant polemical writings. Some of the writings might condemn infant baptism as a heretical, invalid act. Others might condemn "confession baptism alone" as a pernicious heresy. But regardless of which writings condemned which teaching, one or the other or both would be

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<sup>23</sup> These works of Tertullian can be found in TANF, III.



mentioned as heretical. If there were only one extant writing which condemned either those who practiced infant baptism or those who denied it, then we would know that "confession baptism alone" was held in the early Church.

There are two other important groups of extant writings from the early Church which should receive special consideration. They are the hereseologies and the histories. For these writings give even further proof for our claim--the claim that we would have indication in the extant writings that "confession baptism alone" was held in the early Church if it were actually an apostolic teaching.

Each of the hereseologies has one specific purpose. That purpose is to expose and refute the various heresies which have confronted the Church from its beginning.

Reference has already been made to Irenaeus's Against Heresies as a polemical work of the second century. This can be considered the earliest extant hereseology. For Irenaeus shows that by exposing the gnostics, he exposes all the heretics from the time of Simon Magnus to the present.

Other extant hereseological works are:

The Refutation of All Heresies<sup>24</sup> by Hippolytus. This work was written by a disciple of Irenaeus between the years 223-235.<sup>25</sup> It is a long treatise divided into ten books.

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<sup>24</sup>Hippolytus, "The Refutation of All Heresies," TANF, V, 9-153.

<sup>25</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Fifth edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), II, 764-765.



Of the first four books, two are missing. The other two give a general description of heathen philosophy and magic which are the sources of many heresies. Books five through ten contain the real subject matter--an exposure of heresies. Hippolytus claims that this work is a refutation of all heresies.<sup>26</sup> He covers a period from the Apostles to his own time. Thirty-two heresies are listed.

The Medicine Chest.<sup>27</sup> This treatise was written by Epiphanius between the years 374 and 377. Schaff considers this the chief hereseological work of the ancient Church. "Epiphanius brought together, with the diligence of an unweariest compiler, but without logical or chronological arrangement, everything he could learn from written or oral sources concerning heretics from the beginning of the world down to his time." He describes and refutes eighty heresies. Of these, sixty are Christian heresies, while twenty precede the time of Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Book On Heresies,<sup>29</sup> written by Philastus around 380. This treatise enumerates 156 heresies, 28 before Christ and

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<sup>26</sup>Hippolytus, op. cit., Book V, Preface, 47.

<sup>27</sup>Epiphanius, "The Medicine Chest," Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1863), XLI, 173-1199.

<sup>28</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 929.

<sup>29</sup>Philastrius, "Diversarum Hereseon Liber," Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, edited by Fridericus Marx (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1948), XXXVIII, 1-137.



128 after.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning Heresies to Quodvultdeum.<sup>31</sup> Augustine wrote this review of heresies between 428 and 430. It appears in the form of a letter written to a certain Quodvultdeum. Augustine gives a survey of eighty-eight heresies, from the Simonians to the Pelagians.<sup>32</sup>

Predestination. The author of this ancient work is unknown. It contains the same listing of heresies as that found in Augustine's work with two additions--the Nestorians and the Predestinarians.<sup>33</sup>

Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium<sup>34</sup> by Theodoret (d. 473). This treatise consists of five books covering heresies from the time of Simon Magnus to Eutyches. In all, about sixty heresies are listed.<sup>35</sup>

The pseudo-Tertullian treatise on heresies.<sup>36</sup> This treatise is generally appended to the works of Tertullian.

<sup>30</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 931.

<sup>31</sup>Augustine, "Concerning Heresies to Quodvultdeum," Operum Sancti Augustini, Benedictine edition (Bassani: n.p., 1797), X, 1-32.

<sup>32</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 1011.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 932.

<sup>34</sup>Theodoret, "Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium," Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1863), LXXXIII, 335-556.

<sup>35</sup>Blomfield Jackson, "Prolegomena," Second Series, III, 20.

<sup>36</sup>"Against All Heresies," TANF, III, 649-654.



But the authorship is uncertain.<sup>37</sup> The entire work is no longer extant. Of the fragment which remains, about twenty-six heresies are listed.

In addition to these hereseologies, special consideration should be given to the ancient Church histories. First in importance stands the Church History<sup>38</sup> of Eusebius, written around 324.<sup>39</sup> It covers a period from the birth of Christ to the victory of Constantine over Licinus in 324. The significance of this work can be seen from the fact that it is the only history of the first three centuries which comes to us from the ancient Church. Schaff gives this evaluation:

He is neither a critical nor an elegant writer of history, but only a diligent and learned collector. . . . His Ecclesiastical History . . . owes its incalculable value . . . almost entirely to his copious and mostly literal extracts from foreign, and in some cases now extinct, sources.<sup>40</sup>

After Eusebius came other historians. They continued the history of the Church at the point where Eusebius left off and extended it to the sixth century. Socrates<sup>41</sup> covered the period from 306 to 439; Sozomen from 323 to 423;<sup>42</sup> and

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<sup>37</sup>Jackson, op. cit., III, 14.

<sup>38</sup>Eusebius, "Church History," Second Series, I, 81-387.

<sup>39</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 876.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 876-877.

<sup>41</sup>Socrates, "Church History," Second Series, II, 1-178.

<sup>42</sup>Salaminus Sozomen, "Church History," Second Series, II, 239-427.



Theodoret<sup>43</sup> from 325 to 429. All three of these histories cover approximately the same area, but they greatly supplement one another.<sup>44</sup> Our interest in these historical works lies in their coverage of the various heresies and controversies which confronted the Church during the first four centuries.

The proposition was made that, if "confession baptism alone" were an Apostolic teaching held in the early Church, we would have indication of this doctrine in the extant writings. The hereseologies and histories would seem to furnish conclusive evidence for this proposition. For if "confession baptism alone" were actually held in the early Church, it would certainly be indicated in these two groups of writings.

If "confession baptism alone" were an Apostolic teaching held in the early Church, there would have been two conflicting teachings. There would have been many who considered infant baptism to be an extremely dangerous heresy, a threat to the very existence of true baptism. There would have been many who considered "confession baptism alone" to be a pernicious, divisive heresy. The authors of the hereseologies had for their purpose the exposure and refutation of heretical teachings which confronted the Church from

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<sup>43</sup>Theodoret, "Church History," Second Series, III, 33-159.

<sup>44</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 931.



earliest times. Some even state it as their purpose to expose all heresies. If a particular author were among those who considered infant baptism to be a destructive heresy, he certainly would not fail to expose and refute it. He certainly would not fail to mention a heresy which was threatening to blot out true baptism; a heresy which had caused so much controversy and strife. And the same can be said of an author if he were among those who considered "confession baptism alone" as heresy. He certainly would not fail to mention a heresy which deprived dying infants this seal of God; a heresy which sacrilegiously demanded re-baptism; a heresy which had caused so much contention. Certainly among the many heresies listed in the hereseologies, one or both of these teachings on baptism would be found.

The histories also mention many heresies which confronted the Church during the first four centuries. Hence, what was said of the hereseologies can also be said of the histories. In their reporting of heresies, certainly the teaching on baptism would be included which was considered the heresy. The historians were also interested in the controversies which occurred in the Church. For these played a significant role in the history and growth of the Church. If infant baptism were a heresy that spread to world-wide portions by 200, this certainly would have caused a tremendous controversy. We would expect at least Eusebius to give some account of this major happening.



Perhaps it should be mentioned how the authors of the hereseologies and histories obtained their information on heresies and controversies. They often obtained this information from first-hand experience. For many of the heresies listed were active when a particular author wrote. But they often made use of oral and written reports from earlier times. Irenaeus specifically mentions that he used The Sayings of Papias of Hieropolis, The Sayings of the Elders of Asia Minor, and Justin's Treaties Against Marcion.<sup>45</sup> According to Schaff, Ephiphanius made large use of works by Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and others.<sup>46</sup> There was a great supply of polemical works to which they could refer. For many of these now extinct works are quoted by Eusebius and others.<sup>47</sup>

In this way the authors could obtain information on the two conflicting baptismal teachings, and list one of them among the heresies. They could perhaps come into personal contact with the two teachings. Or they could learn of them through the oral and written reports. For if these two teachings actually had engaged in a vicious struggle, there would be many reports condemning one or the other teaching as a vicious heresy.

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<sup>45</sup>Quasten, op. cit., I, 290.

<sup>46</sup>Schaff, op. cit., III, 931.

<sup>47</sup>Quasten, op. cit., I, 278-284.



At the outset of this chapter it was claimed; if "confession baptism alone" were an apostolic teaching, we would have indication of this teaching in the extant writings. This, in summary, has been our proof. First, we would expect this teaching to be presented as a matter of course. We would expect it to be presented among the numerous doctrinal discussions, among the numerous discussions on baptism. Second, it certainly seems likely that there would be indications of this teaching in the polemical writings. For there would have been a tremendous controversy between those who baptized infants and those who upheld the apostolic teaching. Many would have considered infant baptism to be a vicious heresy, and many would have thought the same of its denial. Many heresies are condemned in the extant writings from each of the three centuries after the Apostles. Many of these heresies were relatively unimportant with respect to the following they had and the trouble they caused. Among all the heresies mentioned, it certainly seems likely that one or both of these teachings on baptism would be included. Our third and most positive proof comes from the hereseologies and histories. For these writings made it a point to mention the heresies and controversies which had confronted the Church from earliest times.

Concerning the polemical works, it should be noted that it makes no difference which position a particular author takes. For by condemning infant baptism as an invalid,



heretical act, the author indicates that he held to "confession baptism alone." And by condemning "confession baptism alone," the author indicates that others held this view. In either case we would have indication that "confession baptism alone" was held in the early Church.

The evidence shows our claim to be well-founded. If "confession baptism alone" were an apostolic doctrine held in the ancient Church, there would be indications of this teaching in the extant writings.

But there is no such indication in the extant writings. There is no indication that anyone held "confession baptism alone." There is no indication that anyone denied the validity of infant baptism purely on the grounds that it was infant baptism; on the grounds that only those who confess faith can receive a valid baptism.

It is true that there were those who rejected all water baptism, including infant baptism.<sup>48</sup> But they did not reject infant baptism on the grounds that it was infant baptism. They rejected infant baptism because they rejected all water baptism. They held that baptism must be "of a spiritual nature," and not performed by corrupted creatures with earthly water.<sup>49</sup>

It is true that Tertullian made the statement, "The

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<sup>48</sup>Supra, ch. 2, pp. 9-11.

<sup>49</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," Book I, ch. 21, TANF, I, 346.



delay of baptism is preferable . . . in the case of little children."<sup>50</sup> But there is no indication that he considered such a baptism invalid. He merely considers it "preferable" to wait. His opposition is undoubtedly grounded on his view concerning the relation of baptism and mortal sin. He believed that only baptism could wash away mortal sin. But baptism cannot be repeated. Hence, after baptism, it is impossible to have mortal sins forgiven.<sup>51</sup> For that reason he advises not only infants, but also the unmarried and the widowed to postpone this sacrament. They should postpone until they are no longer in danger of forfeiting forever the grace of forgiveness by committing a mortal sin.<sup>52</sup>

It is true that Gregory Nazianzen advised parents to delay baptizing their infants "till the end of the third year, or a little more or less."<sup>53</sup> But previous to this advice he warns the parents to baptize their infants if any danger presses. "For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart uncreated and uninitiated."

It is true that there were those who deliberately postponed the baptism of their children.<sup>54</sup> But there is no in-

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<sup>50</sup> Supra, ch. 2, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Schaff, op. cit., II, 261.

<sup>52</sup> Tertullian, "On Baptism," ch. 18, TANF, III, 678.

<sup>53</sup> Supra, ch. 2, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Supra, ch. 2, pp. 16-19.



dication that this postponement was due to a denial of infant baptism. But there is definite indication that postponement was due to fear. There were certain ideas present in the early Church concerning baptism and the life after baptism. The Shepherd of Hermas and Clement of Alexandria allowed the possibility of only one repentance after baptism.<sup>55</sup> Tertullian believed that a person could not remain in the Church if he committed a mortal sin after baptism.<sup>56</sup> Chrysostom presents this view:

And consider: a man has gotten grievous sins by committing murder or adultery, or some other crime: these were remitted through baptism. For there is no sin, no impiety, which does not yield and give place to this gift; for the Grace is Divine. A man has again committed adultery and murder; the former adultery is indeed done away, the murder forgiven, and not brought up again to his charge, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); but for those committed after Baptism he suffers a punishment as great as he would if both the former sins were brought up again, and many worse than these. For the guilt is no longer simply equal, but doubled and tripled. . . .<sup>57</sup>

Because of these views, many people delayed their baptism. They delayed out of fear. They feared the prospect of having only one repentance after baptism, or the possibility of committing mortal sin, or the doubling and tripling

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<sup>55</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 215.

<sup>56</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 175.

<sup>57</sup>John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily I," First Series, XI, 8-9.



of punishment after baptism. Chrysostom even says after threatening the tripling of punishment, "Perhaps we have now deterred many from receiving baptism."<sup>58</sup> Gregory Nazianzen asks concerning baptism, "But are you afraid lest you should destroy the Gift, and do you therefore put off your cleansing, because you cannot have it a second time?"<sup>59</sup> Out of fear for themselves, many delayed their own baptism. Out of fear for their children, many delayed their baptism. As Gregory writes:

Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Fearest thou the Seal on account of the weakness of nature?<sup>60</sup>

Baptism was also postponed out of pure hedonism. There were those who put off baptism in order to enjoy the world first.<sup>61</sup> Such people would also probably hold off the baptism of their children. They could hardly ask the Church to baptize their children while they themselves refused it.

Fear and the desire for pleasure are two reasons indicated in the writings for the postponement of baptism. But there is no indication anywhere that parents postponed the baptism of their children because they considered it invalid.

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<sup>58</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup>Gregory Nazianzen, "Oration 40, On Holy Baptism," Second Series, VII, 364.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., ch. 17, p. 365.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., ch. 20, p. 366.



It is also true that the Fathers speak of certain requirements for baptism. They say that a candidate must first repent and believe, he must confess his faith and answer questions. According to Seeberg, "the requirements for its reception were faith, as a recognition of the doctrine of the Trinity, and a penitent frame of mind."<sup>62</sup> But the fact that the Fathers made these requirements does not necessarily mean that they taught "confession baptism alone"; that they denied the validity of infant baptism. For these requirements could very well have been addressed to those who had the mental ability to fulfill them. It could have been then as is now the case among pedobaptists. Certain conditions for baptism are still demanded, but these conditions are demanded of those who have the ability to fulfill them.

The Book of Common Prayer states:

When any such Persons as are of riper years are to be baptized, timely notice shall be given to the Minister; that so due care may be taken for their examination, whether they be sufficiently instructed in the Principles of the Christian Religion; and that they may be exhorted to prepare themselves, with Prayers and Fasting, for the receiving of this holy Sacrament.<sup>63</sup>

A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism

says:

Those who can receive instruction are to be baptized after they have been instructed in the principles of the Christian religion.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Seeberg, op. cit., I, 299.

<sup>63</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, Standard Book of 1928 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 273.

<sup>64</sup> A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), p. 172.



But there is more positive proof that the requirements for baptism by the Fathers does not automatically mean a denial of infant baptism. For a Father can be seen to present certain conditions for baptism while also teaching infant baptism. Ambrose writes:

Now, even the catechumen believes in the cross of the Lord Jesus, wherewith he too is signed; but unless he be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot receive remission of sins nor gain the gift of spiritual grace.<sup>65</sup>

you were baptized in the Name of the Trinity, you confessed the Father. Call to mind what you did: you confessed the Son, you confessed the Holy Spirit. . . .<sup>66</sup>

A little further on, Ambrose says:

You went down, then into the water, remember what you replied to the questions, that you believed in the Father, that you believed in the Son, that you believed in the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

Thus Ambrose states that a baptized person believes, confesses faith, and replies to questions. But Ambrose also teaches infant baptism. In his Commentary on St. Luke, he writes:

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 Elias when the river was divided (as the Scripture says, "Jordon was driven back"), signified the sacrament of the laver of salvation, which was

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<sup>65</sup> Ambrose, "On the Mysteries," ch. 4, par. 20, Second Series, X, 319.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., ch. 4, par. 21, p. 319.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., ch. 5, par. 28, p. 321.



afterward to be instituted; by which those infants that are baptized are reformed back again from wickedness to the primitive state of their nature.<sup>68</sup>

St. Chrysostom makes this requirement for baptism:

In order, therefore, that we return not to our former vomit, let us henceforward discipline ourselves. For that we must repent beforehand, and desist from our former evil, and so come forward for grace, hear what John says, and what the leaders of the Apostles says to those who are about to be baptized. For the one says, "Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father:" and the other says again to those who question him, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>69</sup>

Chrysostom states that a person must repent before baptism. But he also teaches that an infant may be baptized.

There was pain and trouble in practice of that, and no other advantage accruing from the circumcision, than this only; that by this sign they were known and distinguished from other nations. 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 that is in the very beginning of his age, 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.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, the mere fact that certain Fathers speak of

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<sup>68</sup> Ambrose, Commentary on St. Luke, Book I, ch. 1. Quotation found in William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, edited by Henry Cotton (Oxford: The University Press, 1844), I, 221.

<sup>69</sup> John Chrysostom, "Instructions To Catechumens," First Instruction, par. 3, First Series, IX, 167.

<sup>70</sup> John Chrysostom, Genesis, Homily XL. Quotation found in William Wall, op. cit., I, 227-228.



conditions for baptism, is not an indication that they denied infant baptism.

There is no indication that anyone denied the validity of infant baptism. There is no indication even among the separated bodies.

The Novatians and Donatists rebaptized all those who came to them from the Catholic Church. But they did not deny the validity of Catholic baptism because it was given to infants. They rejected it on the grounds that an impure Church such as the Catholic, cannot administer a proper baptism.<sup>71</sup> There are many writings extant which contain a ventilation of all the disputes between the Catholics and these two sects. Nowhere do we find an indication that either the Novatians or the Donatists denied infant baptism on the ground that it was baptism given to infants. In fact, in the case of the Donatists, it can be definitely shown that they did baptize infants. The Council of Carthage, 419 A. D., contains this canon:

Concerning the Donatists it seemed good that we should hold counsel with our brethren and fellow priests Siricius and Simplician concerning those infants alone who are baptized by the Donatists: lest what they did not do of their own will, when they should be converted to the Church of God with a salutary determination, the error of their parents might prevent their promotion to the ministry of the holy altar.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Seeberg, op. cit., I, 179, 316.

<sup>72</sup> Council of Carthage, A. D. 419, "Canon 57," Second Series, XIV, 463.



The Pelagians denied original sin. They believed that each soul is created pure and has perfect freedom to do good or evil. Accordingly, new-born children are sinless, and baptism cannot in their case have any sin-remitting effect.<sup>73</sup> If there were those in the early Church who denied infant baptism, we would certainly expect the Pelagians to be among them. But even the Pelagians baptized infants. St. Augustine gives this description of the Pelagians' teaching on baptism:

This is their comment on the passage: "Because He does not say, 'Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he shall not have salvation or eternal life,' but He merely said, 'he shall not enter into the kingdom of God,' therefore infants are to be baptized, in order that they may be with Christ in the kingdom of God, where they will not be unless they are baptized. Should infants die, however, even without baptism, they will have salvation and eternal life, seeing that they are bound with no fetter of sin."<sup>74</sup>

In the extant writings from the early Church, there is not one indication that the validity of infant baptism was denied on the grounds that it was infant baptism.

One of the first men to make this observation was Pelagius around the year 415.<sup>75</sup> And there were undoubtedly many more manuscripts extant in his day than there are now. Little is known of Pelagius other than his part in the Pelagian

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<sup>73</sup>Seeberg, op. cit., I, 331-338.

<sup>74</sup>Augustine, "On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism," Book I, ch. 58, First Series, V, 37-38.

<sup>75</sup>Seeberg, op. cit., I, 353-357.



controversy. But there are indications that he was a very learned man. The Catholic Encyclopedia says of him: "Pelagius was highly educated, spoke and wrote Latin as well as Greek with great fluency and was well versed in theology."<sup>76</sup>

This observation by Pelagius is found in Augustine's On Original Sin.

But I would have you carefully observe the way in which Pelagius endeavoured by deception to overreach even the judgment of the bishop of the Apostolic See on this very question of the baptism of infants. He sent a letter to Rome to Pope Innocent of blessed memory; and when it found him not in the flesh, it was handed to the holy Pope Zozimus, and by him directed to us. In this letter he complains of being "defamed by certain persons for refusing the sacrament of baptism to infants, and promising the kingdom of heaven irrespective of Christ's redemption." . . .

And then observe how he makes his answer, . . . . For after saying that "he had never heard even an impious heretic say this" (namely, what he set forth on the objection) "about infants," he goes on to ask: "Who indeed is so unacquainted with Gospel lessons, as not only to attempt to make such an affirmation, but even to be able to lightly say it or even let it enter his thought? And then who is so impious as to wish to exclude infants from the kingdom of heaven, by forbidding them to be baptized and to be born again in Christ?"<sup>77</sup>

Thus Pelagius says that "he never heard even an impious heretic say this about infants." He never even heard of an impious sect who refused the sacrament of baptism to infants.

The same observation is made by Dr. William Wall. In

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Pohle, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann and others (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), 604.

<sup>77</sup> Augustine, "On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin," Book II, chs. 19-20, First Series, V, 243-244.



the year 1705, Wall published his two-volume work, History of Infant Baptism. It was widely accepted at its appearance. Since then it has passed through several editions and translations.<sup>78</sup> This work contains a vast collection of quotations taken from the Fathers concerning infant baptism. Concerning these quotations, Wall states:

Seeing . . . that a great many have desired to see the history of this practice fully and fairly represented: I have thought it worth my pains to draw up and publish such a collection as is expressed in the title.

And if any one ask, what there is done in this more than in others that have been already: I answer, . . . that this is more complete than any I have seen: because among those I have seen, each one omitted some testimonies which the other had: and it is easy for one that collects out of all of them, to have more than any one: beside that, no inconsiderable number of these have been gathered from my own reading.<sup>79</sup>

Wall records these quotations in the original Greek or Latin, along with English translation and critical notes. He presents himself as one who is widely read in the Fathers. He made it a point to acquaint himself with patristical statements on infant baptism. He devoted many years of his life writing and debating on this one subject. After all of his research and study, he makes this observation:

As these evidences are for the first four hundred years, in which there appears . . . no one man saying it was unlawful to baptize infants.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Cotton, "Preface," Wall's History of Infant Baptism, op. cit., I, vi-x.

<sup>79</sup> Wall, op. cit., I, xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., II, 501.



This observation is given by Philip Schaff (1819-1893). Few men could be better acquainted with patristical writing than Schaff. He wrote an eight-volume history of the Church. Almost 2,000 pages are devoted to the era between 100 and 400 A. D. He edited the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, and other major works that deal with the Fathers. He states:

Among the Fathers, Tertullian himself not excepted--for he combats only its expediency--there is not a single voice against the lawfulness and the apostolic origin of infant baptism.<sup>81</sup>

Learned men have made this observation: there is no indication of anyone in the ancient Church, heretic or otherwise, who considered infant baptism to be an invalid, non-apostolic practice. There is no indication, that is, among those who practiced water baptism. The present author found nothing to disprove this observation. And anyone can demonstrate this fact for himself by careful reading through the patristic writings.

A hypotheses was set up at the beginning of this chapter. It was assumed that the Apostles taught "confession baptism alone," that infant baptism was invalid--an empty ritual with no power, no effect, no meaning. It was then shown that if this hypotheses were correct, there would be indications of this teaching in the extant writings from the early Church. But there are no such indications in any of

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<sup>81</sup>Schaff, op. cit., II, 259.



the writings, not even in the polemical works, the heresies, and the histories. Hence, we conclude that the hypothesis is wrong. We conclude that the Apostles did not teach "confession baptism alone." They did not teach infant baptism to be a worthless, invalid practice.

The following points are the result of this investigation. The Orthodox Jews of today baptize all infant converts into their faith. And there is evidence which shows that this practice originated long before the time of Jesus. The Bible is our witness. It teaches that all proselytes were purified through baptism. It teaches that infants less than three years and a day can become redeemed and converted through baptism. It was against this background that the disciples received the command to baptize and baptize all nations. Of course, Jesus made His baptism different from the old Jewish rite. His baptism was for all nations, for all people, Jew and Gentile. His baptism was to be in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But Jesus specifically stated these differences. He mentioned no difference concerning the age of a proper subject.

Infants were baptized around the year 300 A. D. This was not a practice peculiar to a few individuals. It was a common, accepted thing, practiced throughout the Christian world. This gives evidence of apostolicity. The Christians of 300 A. D. were only one hundred years removed



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Our purpose has been to examine the validity of infant baptism through historical sources. The following points constitute the result of this investigation.

1. The Orthodox Jews of today baptize all infant proselytes to their faith. And there is evidence which shows that this practice originated long before the time of Jesus. The Talmud is our witness. It teaches that all proselytes must be purified through baptism. It teaches that minors less than three years and a day can become redeemed and converted through baptism. It was against this background that the disciples received the command to disciple and baptize all nations. Of course, Jesus made His baptism different from the old Jewish rite. His baptism was for all nations, for all people, for Jew and Gentile. His baptism was to be in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But Jesus specifically stated these differences. He mentioned no difference concerning the age of a proper subject.

2. Infants were baptized around the year 200 A. D. This was not a practice peculiar to a few individuals. It was a common, accepted thing, practiced throughout the Christian world. This gives indication of apostolicity. The Christians of 200 A. D. were only one hundred years removed



from the Apostle John. They had access to numerous oral and written traditions direct from the Apostolic age. They had access to traditions which had only passed through one or two intermediaries. And there is another factor to consider. If infant baptism were a pernicious heresy, it seems very unlikely that it could enter the Church and assume world-wide proportions within such a short span of time.

3. Irenaeus obviously refers to infant baptism with approval. For he considers it a rebirth to God. This furnishes direct evidence that infant baptism was taught by the Apostles. For Irenaeus had contact with Polycarp and probably many others who were eye-witnesses of the Apostolic age.

4. Both Origen and Augustine affirm that the custom of infant baptism originated with the Apostles. The historical reports of these two men certainly contain a high degree of reliability. Origen was a learned man, of a family Christian for many generations, less than one hundred years removed from the Apostolic age. Augustine was so familiar with the past of the Church that he wrote a history of eighty-eight heresies, which confronted the Church from earliest times. It should not be forgotten that both men had access to numerous oral and written reports which are no longer extant.

5. If the Apostles taught infant baptism to be an empty, invalid act, there would be indications of this teaching in the extant writings. Three reasons can be given for this



claim. First, we would expect this teaching to be presented as a matter of course among the numerous doctrinal discussions, especially among the numerous discussions on baptism. Second, it certainly seems likely that there would be indication of this teaching in the polemical writings. For there would have been a tremendous controversy between those who baptized infants and those who denied its validity. Many would have considered infant baptism to be a vicious heresy, and many would have thought the same of its denial. Many heresies are condemned in the extant writings from each of the three centuries after the Apostles. Among all these heresies, it certainly seems likely that one or both of these teachings on baptism would be mentioned. Our third and most positive proof comes from the hereseologies and histories. For these writings made it a point to mention the heresies and controversies which had confronted the Church from earliest times. If the Apostles taught infant baptism to be an invalid act, there would certainly be indications of this teaching in the extant writings. But there are no such indications. Among all the Fathers, there is not a single voice which speaks against the validity and Apostolic origin of infant baptism. We are forced to conclude that the Apostles did not teach infant baptism to be an empty, invalid act.

These five points constitute the result of our examination of historical sources. They assist us in obtaining a



better understanding of the Biblical concept of baptism. They indicate that the age of the recipient is an insignificant matter. They give cogent evidence that infant baptism is a valid, apostolic practice.



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