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### An Examination and Evaluation of the Theology of Karl Barth and Oscar Gullman on the Doctrine of Baptism, with Particular Emphasis on the Question of Infant Baptism

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AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE WRITINGS OF  
KARL BARTH AND GEORGE CULLMAN IN THE DISCUSSION  
OF BAPTISM, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM

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

**Short Title**

**BARTH AND CULLMAN ON BAPTISM**

by  
Richard Fured

June 1960

Approved by:

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AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF  
KARL BARTH AND OSCAR GULLMAN ON THE DOCTRINE  
OF BAPTISM, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of New Testament Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity	3
III. Baptism and the Death of Christ	13
Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins	22
Baptism and Salvation	28
Barth's Theology Explains His Position on Baptism	30
IV. BAPTISM AND HUMAN RESPONSE	46
V. THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM	46
Barth's Eschatological Principle	46
Baptism	50
VI. CONCLUSIONS	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72

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June 1960

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Reader

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE NATURE OF BAPTISM . . . . .	3
Barth's Position . . . . .	3
Cullman's Position . . . . .	7
III. THE EFFICACY OF BAPTISM . . . . .	13
Baptism and the Death of Christ . . . . .	13
Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins . . . . .	22
Baptism and Salvation . . . . .	28
Barth's Theology Explains His Position on Baptism . . . . .	30
IV. BAPTISM AND HUMAN RESPONSE . . . . .	40
V. THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM . . . . .	46
Barth's Cognition Principle . . . . .	46
Baptism and Circumcision . . . . .	60
VI. CONCLUSION . . . . .	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	72

submit them to analysis and criticism. During the course of the paper it will be necessary to refer to the various statements of the New Testament regarding baptism and to compare these passages with certain conclusions reached by Barth or Cullman. Also, in the case of Barth, it will be necessary to deal with other facets of his theology which,

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On May 7, 1943 in a lecture delivered to a gathering of Swiss theological students a world renowned Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, expressed some very controversial views concerning the subject of infant baptism. This lecture, subsequently printed under the title Die Kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe as number fourteen of the series of Theologische Studien edited by Karl Barth, exposed Dr. Barth to attack by eminent Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullman, who disagreed with Barth's position on baptism. Oscar Cullman expressed his objections to Barth's work in the form of his own study on baptism entitled Die Tauflehre des Neuen Testaments.

It is the purpose of this paper to present the respective views of these two leading theologians on the subject of baptism, in particular infant baptism, as expressed in their two publications on the subject, and to submit them to analysis and criticism. During the course of the paper it will be necessary to refer to the various statements of the New Testament regarding baptism and to compare those passages with certain conclusions reached by Barth or Cullman. Also, in the case of Barth, it will be necessary to deal with other facets of his theology which,

it is believed by the writer, have much bearing on his treatment of baptism. The weight of the paper will concern itself with the position of Karl Barth. However, Oscar Cullman's main objections to Barth's position will be examined and criticized. The ultimate goal of this study will be to attempt to determine to what degree Barth and Cullman have arrived at a correct understanding of the doctrine of baptism.

doctrine. He says, "Christian baptism is in essence the representation (Abbild) of man's renewal. . . .<sup>1</sup> To Barth, then, baptism is a sign of spiritual rebirth. He says he uses the word "sign" after the terminology of Augustine.<sup>2</sup> In itself baptism affects nothing. It portrays a "supremely critical happening" according to the "basic passage in Romans 6:11."<sup>3</sup> This

<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, translated by E. A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 9. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Baptism*.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, p. 11. It is of interest to note that Augustine did not use the same thing by this term as does Barth. That baptism to Augustine was not only a "sign," but a source of grace is illustrated by a letter which he wrote to Scythian in which he spoke of people bringing their children to baptism "with the purpose that they may by spiritual grace be regenerated unto eternal life." (E. W. A. Koehler, "Infant Baptism," *Scottish Theological Monthly*, 2 (July, 1934), 431-34.) Furthermore, Augustine speaks of "those who have been baptized when they could no longer escape death, and have departed this life with all their sins blotted out. . . ." (Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 417.)

<sup>3</sup>Barth, p. 11.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

#### Barth's Position

Karl Barth begins his brief treatise on baptism with a very significant statement which reveals in part his understanding of the doctrine. He says, "Christian baptism is in essence the representation (Abbild) of man's renewal. . . ." <sup>1</sup> To Barth, then, baptism is a sign of spiritual rebirth. He says he uses the word "sign" after the terminology of Augustine. <sup>2</sup> In itself baptism effects nothing. It portrays a "supremely critical happening" according to the "basic passage in Romans 6:1ff." <sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by E. A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 9. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Baptism.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13. It is of interest to note that Augustine did not mean the same thing by this term as does Barth. That baptism to Augustine was not only a "sign," but a means of grace is illustrated by a letter which he wrote to Boniface in which he spoke of people bringing their children to baptism "with the purpose that they may by spiritual grace be regenerated unto eternal life." (E. W. A. Koehler, "Infant Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (July, 1939), 481-84.) Furthermore, Augustine speaks of "those who have been baptized when they could no longer escape death, and have departed this life with all their sins blotted out. . . ." (Saint Augustine, The City of God, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, c.1950), p. 417.)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

"critical happening" of which baptism is a sign, a representation, a portrayal, will be dealt with later in this paper. Suffice it to say here that Barth does not see baptism as a means of grace in the Church's traditional understanding of the sacrament, but as a symbol of grace.

However he is quick to add that "baptism is no dead representation, but a living and expressive one."<sup>4</sup> Referring to baptism as a picture of the "Heilsgeschichte which comes to pass between God and man," he says of it that it "is the most living and expressive picture of that history."<sup>5</sup> Although he does not want to assign any undue importance to baptism, he still wants it to be held in some high degree of esteem as he adds to the noun "sign" the adjective "living." He demonstrates what he means by the expression "living sign" when he compares baptism to the spoken Word of God. While the Word is a "signum audibile" of the salvation history which came to pass in Christ, baptism is a "signum visibile" of that history.<sup>6</sup>

Barth expresses his fear that baptism should become anything more than a representation of the Heilsgeschichte.<sup>7</sup> He wants it well understood that baptism is

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 15.



"merely a human act."<sup>8</sup> Gustaf Wingren explains why he is so insistent on maintaining this point when he says that Karl Barth speaks of the "word of God in three forms--proclaimed in preaching, written in the Bible, and revealed in Christ." He then states that it is important to note that only the last "word of God, the revelation in Christ, is really the divine Word. The spoken and written word are signs."<sup>9</sup> He further states that according to Barth "everything external points away from itself." God is in heaven, and withdraws from every outward form. Nothing material can be an organ, a tool, or a means which God holds in His hand and uses for His creative work in the present.<sup>10</sup> Barth sees revelation as something which takes place in Christ and only in Christ. Any external means such as baptism cannot convey anything to man from God. It can only point to Christ as a sign or symbol of Christ. In his commentary on Romans Barth himself asserts this when he says,

The true reality of all impressions of revelation consists in their being signs, witnesses, types,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, translated by E. H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, n.d.), p. 124.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

recollections, and sign-posts to the Revelation itself, which lies beyond all reality.<sup>11</sup>

In the same context he displays his fear of making baptism more than a sign of the Revelation in Christ when he says further,

by identifying truth with some concrete thing we deprive a sign of its truth. Mistaking piety for the content of truth, we take refuge in some intellectual ecclesiastical transaction . . . by attributing to the sign itself mystical and magical interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, then, Barth evaluates baptism by saying,

"It is holy, but it isn't God, nor Jesus Christ, nor the covenant, nor grace . . . it bears witness to all these."<sup>13</sup>

He then goes on to claim that "there is no teaching about Christian baptism which would directly contest the view that water baptism itself is . . . to be understood as a symbol."<sup>14</sup> It seems that Barth is here ignoring certain clear and irrefutable Scripture passages in an attempt to justify his own position. We will discuss these passages in later chapters.

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<sup>11</sup>Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by E. C. Hoekyns (London: Oxford University Press, c.1957), p. 129.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>13</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

## Cullman's Position

Oscar Cullman, in his recent study on baptism, written primarily to combat Barth's position, reacts strongly to Barth's "sign" interpretation of baptism, but he is not averse to referring to baptism as a *σφραγίς*. Baptism is more than just a sign. "It is the seal [*σφραγίς*] which God impresses on the covenant with a community freely chosen by him."<sup>15</sup> Although Cullman would make of baptism more than a sign, he seems unwilling to make it more than a seal of a covenant relationship God has already concluded with the person being baptized. He says that the Church requires some kind of sign from God that this covenant relationship has been brought into effect. In the case of infants, being born of Christian parents is God's sign that a certain child is His. In the case of adults, having faith prior to baptism is that sign.<sup>16</sup> If an infant is not expected to belong to the earthly body of Christ, the sign from God is not present,<sup>17</sup> and the act of baptism cannot follow. Here baptism cannot act as a seal, for there is no existing covenant relationship.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 45.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>Such would be the case with a child born of heathen parents or a dying child.

<sup>18</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 50.

That children born of Christian parents have already been taken into a covenant relationship with God and that baptism for them serves merely as a seal of that relationship Cullman concludes mainly on the basis of First Corinthians 7:14,<sup>19</sup> a passage which enters heavily into his discussion. From this passage Cullman draws the conclusion that the decisive thing in baptism is what he calls "the solidarity of the family."<sup>20</sup> With regard to children born of Christian parents, this means that they are made holy ( *ἁγιοί* ) through the faith of their parents. At this point it becomes necessary to examine First Corinthians 7:14 to determine how correct Cullman's conclusions are.

This is a passage which has been variously interpreted. The French commentator, Godet, seems to concur with Cullman on this passage. He says that it is a universally recognized fact<sup>21</sup> that the children of Christian

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<sup>19</sup>"For the unbelieving husband is consecrated [*ἁγιασθήσεται*] through his wife [*ἐν τῷ σώματι*], and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband, otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy [*ἁγία*]."

<sup>20</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>21</sup>He points out the shift in pronouns from "his" and "her" to "your" and says this means Paul is addressing the second half of verse fourteen to all Christians in general, whose children, notwithstanding their original pollution and inability as yet to believe, nevertheless are regarded as holy in the eyes of God.

parents are not unclean,<sup>22</sup> but holy already, and that this indisputable fact is used as proof to substantiate Paul's claim in the first half of verse fourteen. Hence, if it is not true that unbelieving spouses are sanctified by their believing mates, then it is also not true that the children of believers, by virtue of their close association with their parents, are made holy in the eyes of God. The latter statement is presented as if it cannot be accepted as true and thus as an argument "ad absurdum."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, children of Christian parents are holy already.

However, there are many who disagree with this interpretation. Hodge, in examining the *ἁγιασται* of verse fourteen sees that it is a word which has different meanings. It can mean (1) to be cleansed, (2) to be rendered morally pure, or (3) to be consecrated, regarded as sacred. Any person or thing set aside or consecrated in the service of God was regarded as sanctified, though its holiness was not always of a moral nature. Looking further at the in the second half of verse fourteen he notes that it is a word similar in meaning. A lamb was consecrated and thus regarded as holy, but was not morally clean. A priest was

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<sup>22</sup>"Unclean" to Godet refers to original sin. It cannot, he says, be external or ritual defilement, since it refers to infants.

<sup>23</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, translated by A. Cusin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), pp. 341-42.

holy, but outwardly he was no better than his fellow Israelites. That the children of believing parents are regarded as holy means no more than that the circumstances of their birth had secured for them a place within the theocracy or commonwealth of Israel in the case of the Old Testament, or in the Christian Church in the case of the New Testament. This meant that they were regarded as future members of the Church, having been consecrated or set aside by virtue of their birth, just as gold was consecrated or set aside by virtue of its connection with the temple in which it was placed. Hence "holiness" meant that the child was put into a situation which called for its baptism.<sup>24</sup> Other commentators, namely Goudge,<sup>25</sup> Grosheide,<sup>26</sup> Lange,<sup>27</sup> and Meyer<sup>28</sup> concur with this view,

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<sup>24</sup>Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), p. 113.

<sup>25</sup>H. L. Goudge, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," Westminster Commentary (London: Methuen & Company, 1903), p. 56.

<sup>26</sup>F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), VII, 165.

<sup>27</sup>John Peter Lange, First Corinthians, in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), XX, 148.

<sup>28</sup>H. W. A. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, in Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1884), VI, 159.

although Meyer does not think the passage proves infant baptism.

Looking further in the New Testament we see that *ἅγιος* does not always mean moral or internal purity before God, but can also mean "consecrated" or "set aside" for God.<sup>29</sup> Certain passages in the New Testament would seem to imply that "holy" need not refer to spiritual rebirth resulting from physical birth of Christian parents. These passages are John 3:5-6: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh . . ." and Psalm 51:5: "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me."

However it would appear that none of the evidence concerning the passage is conclusive. First Corinthians 7:14 remains somewhat obscure in meaning, as the various interpretations which have been deduced from it imply. Concerning Cullman's view, it seems he is misusing the passage when he uses it to deprive baptism of its powers of regeneration, making baptism but a seal of a covenant

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<sup>29</sup>In Matthew 4:5 we read, "Then the devil took Him up into the holy [*ἅγιος*] city. . . ." In Luke 2:23 we find these words: "Everyone that opens the womb shall be called holy [*ἅγιος*] to the Lord." First Peter 1:18 has the expression "holy [*ἅγιος*] mountain." The Old Testament cognate *קֹדֶשׁ* is similarly used. In Exodus 28:4 the garments for Aaron are referred to as "holy garments." In Exodus 29:6 the crown which was to be put on the priest's head was called the "holy crown."

relationship which has already been effected. First Corinthians 7:14 is not a passage whose writer intended to deprive baptism of its meaning and efficacy.

We have noted the fundamental difference between the position of Karl Barth and that of Oscar Cullman on the basic nature of baptism. Later in this paper we shall attempt to refute Barth's assertion that baptism is no more than a sign. Cullman's *σφραγίς* interpretation, based largely on First Corinthians 7:14, has been lightly touched upon, although here, too, more remains to be said.

The question is whether a man at his baptism is buried with Christ into death, or whether what happens at his baptism is merely a symbol of the death of Christ. Barth adheres tenaciously to the latter view in keeping with his symbolical interpretation of baptism treated in chapter one. He states, "Baptism bears witness to us of the death of Christ. . . .<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Barth states,

The baptized man differs from the unbaptized in all circumstances as one who has been placed under the sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, under the sign of His Bapt, His death, His advent, because of the divine deed accepted and expressed over him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by E. S. Hayes (London: Oxford University Press, c.1957), p. 59. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Romans*.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Baptism*, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 6. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Baptism*.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE EFFICACY OF BAPTISM

##### Baptism and the Death of Christ

As previously stated, Barth calls Romans 6:1ff. the "basic passage" with regard to the doctrine of baptism. This passage connects baptism with the death of Christ. Barth admits to this connection but is forced to change its meaning to fit into his own conception of the nature of baptism. The question is whether a man at his baptism is buried with Christ into death, or whether what happens at his baptism is merely a symbol of the death of Christ. Barth adheres tenaciously to the latter view in keeping with his symbolical interpretation of baptism treated in chapter one. He states, "Baptism bears witness to us of the death of Christ. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Barth states,

the baptized man differs from the unbaptized in all circumstances as one who has been placed under the sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, under the sign of His hope, His destiny, His advent, because of the divine decree accepted and expressed over him. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, c.1957), p. 59. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Romans.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 6. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Baptism.

Turning to Romans 6:5 itself Barth states that, according to this passage, baptism is the likeness (*ὁμοίωμα*) of Christ's death. "Therefore and in this sense we call baptism a representation."<sup>3</sup> Here, however, it seems that Barth possibly misses the meaning of a word. *ὁμοίωμα* need not mean "likeness" in the sense of "representation," but can mean "likeness" in the sense of "sameness." Thus the phrase means "in the same death that he died."<sup>4</sup> In two of the other three New Testament references to the word, it has this same meaning.<sup>5</sup> Yet, according to Romans 6:5, Barth claims that baptism is the "acted parable of His death."<sup>6</sup> To show that Romans 6 presents baptism as more than a parable, we now turn our attention to the passage to determine its possible meaning. The key expression is found in verse four: "we are buried with Him in Baptism into death" (*τοῦτά φημι ὅτι ἡμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ σὶ*

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Wm. R. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 590.

<sup>5</sup>Romans 8:3, which speaks of Christ's being in the likeness (*ὁμοίωμα*) of flesh, and Philipians 2:7, which says that Christ was made in the likeness (*ὁμοίωμα*) of man, certainly do not mean that Christ looked like or symbolized human flesh. He actually became flesh. Romans 1:23, where *ὁμοίωμα* is also used, however, is the exception, for here *ὁμοίωμα* means "image" or "copy."

<sup>6</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 18.

τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν ὄλυτον. Two expressions in particular require comment, διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος and εἰς τὸν ὄλυτον. That the former is a construction used to express means is shown by the second half of verse four, where the same διὰ with the genitive is clearly used to express means, Christ's resurrection being effected by the  $\delta\omicron\varsigma\epsilon\lambda$  of the Father. There are numerous parallels in the New Testament where διὰ with the genitive expresses means.<sup>7</sup> Concerning the construction Lenski states,

Those must revise their estimate of baptism who make it a mere symbol of something else, something that will happen at a future time. With διὰ Paul makes it a means, not only for applying Christ's death and its benefits to us, but equally for our thus getting rid of sin. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The second expression, εἰς τὸν ὄλυτον, is likewise significant. Lenski says that, in view of recent Papyri finds, the εἰς can be translated as the static εἰς, playing the same role as ἐν, so that the phrase could be translated "in connection with his death."<sup>9</sup> However this passage must be viewed in the light of its context and parallel passages found elsewhere in the New

<sup>7</sup>First Corinthians 14:9; Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:27; Romans 7:4; Ephesians 2:16; et al.

<sup>8</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 393.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 393.

Testament. Sanday and Headlam see the basic thought of the entire passage in verse three, where Paul says, "ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν." In effect Paul is saying, "Don't you know what your baptism involved? It meant the actual incorporation into Christ. This means you have also been incorporated into his death." In this verse Paul is alluding to what he has just said in verse two, namely that they have died to sin. Verse three explains that such dying is effected by incorporation into the death of Christ, that is, we actually died with him. Thus Sanday and Headlam conclude that "it is baptism which makes a man a Christian."<sup>10</sup> That εἰς implies actual incorporation into Christ and His death is also concluded by such commentators as H. A. W. Meyer,<sup>11</sup> John Peter Lange,<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, in International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Company, reprint 1958), XXXII, 156.

<sup>11</sup>H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans, in Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, translated by J. C. Moore and E. Johnson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1884), V, 231.

<sup>12</sup>John Peter Lange, Romans, in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 201.

G. Stoeckhardt,<sup>13</sup> and James Denney.<sup>14</sup> Denney, however, states that the incorporation idea is proved by the argumentative requirement rather than the grammatical construction of the passage.<sup>15</sup> In verse four the thought is reiterated that we, by baptism, are incorporated into the actual death of Christ. Sanday and Headlam point to the *τόν*, which is emphatic and refers to "that death," the death of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

So the passage seems definitely to teach an actual application of the benefits of the death of Christ to the individual by virtue of his incorporation into Christ's death in baptism. Other New Testament passages express the same idea. Colossians 2:12 states that we have been buried with Christ ( *τὸνταφέντες* ) by means of baptism ( *ἐν τῷ ἁπτισμάτι* ). Likewise Galatians 3:27

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<sup>13</sup>George Stoeckhardt, Epistle to the Romans, translated by E. W. Koehlinger (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeo Company, 1943), p. 79.

<sup>14</sup>James Denney, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1951), II, 632.

<sup>15</sup>He says that grammatically it can mean "to be baptized Christward," i.e., with Christ in view as the object of faith. To prove this he refers to First Corinthians 10:2 ( *καὶ πάντες εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθητε* ) and to the expression *βαπτισθῆναι εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ*. But he continues that the passage demands the idea of an actual union to or incorporation in Christ. Denney, nevertheless, accepts the symbolical interpretation in baptism.

<sup>16</sup>Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 156.

speaks of our being baptized into Christ ( εἰς Χριστόν ). Langel<sup>17</sup> and Ridderbos<sup>18</sup> see expressed here the idea of incorporation into Christ by means of baptism.<sup>19</sup>

Hence it would seem that Barth has missed the true sense of Romans 6:4. Cullman states his interpretation of the passage when he says, " this passage presupposes Baptism as a salvation fact . . . it indicates subsequently to those already baptized what happened to them in Baptism."<sup>20</sup> He is referring to the fact that the benefits of Christ's death actually pass over to us in our baptism,

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<sup>17</sup>John Peter Lange, Galatians, in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 87.

<sup>18</sup>Herman N. Ridderbos, Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, in New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), IX, 147-48.

<sup>19</sup>W. D. Davies treats the idea of incorporation into Christ rather extensively. He criticizes the view that Paul by his use of this phrase was showing the influence pagan mystery rites had on him. These rites involved a mystical incorporation of a human into communion with a deity. Davies also criticizes Schweitzer's view which, he says, makes of the incorporation into Christ a mere mechanical, corporeal act. Rather Davies sees that the incorporation idea involves becoming part of a community of which Christ is the head. It involves "the solidarity of Christians with their Lord." It is a process which calls for decision on the part of the individual who has in Christ discovered the true community which is the New Israel. To say that a man is in Christ is to say that he has been incorporated into the church and has willingly accepted this position. W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: S. P. C. K., 1955), pp. 86-146.

<sup>20</sup>Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 49.

because we are baptized into His death. He explains this when he says, "Thus the baptismal death of Christ completed once for all on the cross passes over into church baptism."<sup>21</sup> To prove his point he looks to First Corinthians 1:13, where, he says, crucifixion and baptism are equated.<sup>22</sup> He sees the same conception in Hebrews 6:4 where, he says, "the impossibility of a second baptism [he takes the word *φωτισθέντας* to mean 'baptized'] is based on the fact that baptism means participation in the cross of Christ."<sup>23</sup> He points to the Johannine writings in support of his arguments where, he says, the connection of the water of baptism with the blood of Christ can be detected. The basic passage is John 19:34, which speaks of the water and blood which came from Christ's side. Here he sees a definite connection between baptism and the death of Christ.<sup>24</sup> In this case it seems Cullman is reading too much into a passage. However he continues by pointing to First John 5:6, which, he says, also alludes to the relation between baptism and the death of Christ. Regarding

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 15. The passage reads, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

this passage both Brook<sup>25</sup> and Huther<sup>26</sup> point out that First John 5:6 can have three meanings. It can refer simply back to the water and the blood which flowed from Christ's side, so that Christ, by this incident, "came by water and blood" ( *ἐκ ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος* ). Or it can mean that Christ came and still comes through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Or it can mean that Christ came through His own baptism, when He was commissioned as the suffering servant, foretold in Isaiah 42:1,<sup>27</sup> and through the shedding of His blood on the cross, where He carried out His commission. Both Brooke and Huther dismiss the first two possibilities in favor of the third. Wescott<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, in International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), XLII, 132.

<sup>26</sup>E. Huther, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude, translated by P. J. Gloag, P. G. Croom, and C. H. Irwin (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1887), p. 603.

<sup>27</sup>Cullman refers to the baptism of Christ as being His commission to carry out the great baptism on the cross for the sins of the world. Here appears the link between baptism and the death of Christ. On the cross Christ continued what He had begun in the Jordan on behalf of mankind, so that our baptism becomes a participation in His general baptism effected for us. Cullman, op. cit., pp. 16-18.

<sup>28</sup>Brook Foss Wescott, The Epistles of St. John (London: Macmillan and Company, 1886), p. 181.



and Smith<sup>29</sup> agree on this point.

Thus it seems quite feasible to find in this passage a close connection between the baptism and death of Christ. However, to tie it up with John 19:34 and to say that this passage, too, contains the same reference to Christ's baptism and death seems to go beyond the meaning of John 19:34. The passage in question merely describes in stark detail what happened. John, a probable eyewitness, "without physiological knowledge" recorded what he saw.<sup>30</sup>

Cullman further points to John 13:1ff. in support of his theory that the water of baptism is connected with the blood of Christ. However the most one can conclusively deduce from this passage is that Christ's death on the cross can be thought of in terms of a washing or baptism.

Thus from the Johannine writings we do find expressed these ideas: (1) Christ's baptism is closely connected with His death; (2) Christ's death is spoken of as a washing. On the basis of the passages dealt with above, then, it is easy to conclude that the idea of the cleansing of baptism was closely associated in the early Church with the idea of the cleansing blood of Christ on the cross.

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<sup>29</sup>David Smith, The Epistles of John, in Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, n.d.), V, 195.

<sup>30</sup>Marcus Dods, The Gospel of St. John, in Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1951), I, 859.

In addition, such passages as Luke 12:20<sup>31</sup> and Mark 10:38,<sup>32</sup> referred to by Cullman in connection with the above thesis, offer very significant evidence which cannot be ignored. According to them baptism is quite intimately connected with Christ's crucifixion and death.

We see, then, the positions of Barth and Cullman on the important passage in Romans 6. Barth, contrary to Scriptural evidence, sees baptism as only a representation of Christ's death, while Cullman, basing his stand on Scripture, sees baptism as an actual participation in Christ's death.

#### Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins

When analyzing Barth's conception of the efficacy of baptism one notices further that he completely denies that baptism has the power to wash away sins. According to him "baptism is not a causative means by which are imparted to man the forgiveness of sins. . . ." <sup>33</sup> Over against this Cullman asserts, "by being buried with him, we have the forgiveness of sins." <sup>34</sup> Both men appeal to Scripture to

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<sup>31</sup>"I have a baptism to be baptized with. . . ."

<sup>32</sup>"Are you able . . . to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

<sup>33</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 14.

support their respective views. Therefore we will briefly examine the Scriptural evidence they present.

Barth says, "according to I Peter 3:21 baptism is not 'the putting away of the filth of the flesh.'"<sup>35</sup> Thus he takes one of the most significant proof texts for the efficacy of baptism and uses it to show the inefficacy of baptism, interpreting "filth of the flesh" ( *σαρκὸς βύπτου* ) as moral uncleanness. Regarding this phrase Selwyn says, "the washing of baptism is not physical, but sacramental," and he would translate the entire phrase *οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις βύπτου* as "not a fleshly putting away of dirt." Thus he sees the contrast here between what he calls the "outer" and "inner" sides of baptism. The efficacy of baptism consists not in the outward physical washing but in the inward faith which accompanies it. Hence he thinks the latter part of the passage (*ἀλλὰ σου-εἰδησεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς Θεόν*) teaches that faith is what must accompany baptism to make it effective, but he also sees that the *σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις βύπτου* refers only to a physical washing away of dirt.<sup>36</sup> Beare agrees with this view, stating that immersion is here implied and that *σαρκός* is used in the literal physical sense. He

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<sup>35</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup>Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1952), pp. 204-05.

sees a contrast implied between Christian baptism, which was spiritually effective and Jewish ritual ablutions and washings that preceded initiation into the pagan mysteries, both of which were merely bodily washings.<sup>37</sup> Moffatt<sup>38</sup> and Lenski<sup>39</sup> also agree that the washing is a physical washing away of dirt, while Wand sees the "possibility of physical washing" in verse 21b.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the word *ρῦπος* itself, it is found only once in the New Testament. The related noun *ρυπαρία* occurs in James 1:21, where it refers to moral uncleanness. *ρῦπος* means primarily "dirt,"<sup>41</sup> but has a secondary meaning of "moral filthiness." Thus in the First Peter 3:21 passage it is difficult to be certain about the exact meaning, although the contrast between "outer" and "inner" aspects of baptism discussed by Selwyn

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<sup>37</sup>F. W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, Limited, 1958), p. 149.

<sup>38</sup>James Moffatt, The General Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, in Moffatt's New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), XV, 143.

<sup>39</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1956), p. 171.

<sup>40</sup>J. W. C. Wand, The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, in Westminster Commentary (London: Methuen and Company, Limited, 1934), p. 101.

<sup>41</sup>F. W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 745.

certainly makes it difficult to see any other meaning than that of a physical washing. Thus Barth cannot with any degree of certainty use this passage to support his view that baptism does not wash away sins. As will be seen later the passage actually inveighs against his position.

Cullman speaks of the baptism of John to support his position. He gives no references but says that "its effect was forgiveness of sins." Then he continues by saying that Christians still need the forgiveness of sins, and that this forgiveness still was imparted in Christian baptism, as is stated in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:38.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding his first statement Scripture does indeed say that John's baptism was *εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the idea of washing away sin and impurity was not foreign to the mind of the Jew in John's day. When John appeared on the scene with his ministry of baptism, the Jews needed no information whatever concerning the implications of such washing. They were familiar with the practice of proselyte baptism, which practice will be treated at more length in chapter four. In this ritual a type of moral washing took place. Also, being students of the Law, the ceremonies, and the Levitical ordinances of Moses, the Jews were thoroughly familiar with the idea of moral

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<sup>42</sup>Cullman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup>Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3.

washing. In Exodus 29:4 the idea is found: "Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring into the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation and shalt wash them with water." And Exodus 30:17-21 expresses the same idea: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass. . . . For Aaron and his sons shall wash . . . thereat when they go into the Tabernacle. . . ."

Leviticus 14 gives detailed instructions concerning the purifying of healed lepers by washing. Another reference to such washing is given in Numbers 19, where the laws regarding one who has touched a dead body are given. Numbers 8:6-7 states that when a Levite was ordained into the priesthood he was to be "cleansed" by washing. Since the Jews did understand a baptism which had moral implications, it seems reasonable to assume that John meant his baptism also to be accepted as a moral washing for the forgiveness of sins.

However, still more important, Ezekiel 36:25, a prophecy which concerns the restoration of God's people, contains God's assurance that He will "sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you." This washing was in the future and was to be spiritually and morally effective. It is not too difficult to see the baptism of John as the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy. Another prophecy, found in Zechariah 13:1,

says that "in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Here we have reference to a "fountain" "opened" "for sin and uncleanness," a definite reference to a future washing away of sins. These prophecies become significant in the light of Christ's question to the Pharisees in Matthew 21:25, "The Baptism of John, whence was it? ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἢ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ?" The context implies that it is ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, since Jesus compares it with the authority by which He Himself acted. From this we conclude that the baptism of John, being from heaven, was the fulfillment of the prophecies in Ezekiel 36:25 and Zechariah 13:1 and was, as Mark and Luke tell us, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

That Christian baptism imparted the same forgiveness is deduced from such a passage as Titus 3:5, "According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." This passage echoes Christ's words in John 3:5, "Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." The idea of regeneration or rebirth in the New Testament necessitates the accompanying forgiveness of sins, for, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:1, those "whom God has quickened were dead in trespasses and sins." Sin is that which makes us spiritually dead, and only removal or forgiveness of that sin can impart new life. Hence those

passages which speak of rebirth through baptism definitely imply accompanying forgiveness. In addition we have the Acts passages, which make forgiveness the purpose and result of baptism. Acts 2:38, cited by Cullman, is Peter's exhortation to "repent and be baptized  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma \lambda\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha\iota\varsigma \tau\omega\upsilon \lambda\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\tau\omega\varsigma$  ." Acts 22:16 states the purpose of baptism even more clearly in the words of Paul, "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins." Ephesians 5:26 speaks of the cleansing power of the water of baptism in these words: "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

On the basis of the above evidence Barth seems to be ignoring Scriptural evidence when he says that baptism does not wash away sins, while Cullman has arrived at the correct Scriptural position in this respect.

#### Baptism and Salvation

Concerning the efficacy of baptism we return once again to the passage in First Peter 3:21. The first part of this passage has been traditionally accepted as the clearest proof text in Scripture supporting the efficacy of baptism. If it is true that "baptism saves us," then it must be admitted as true that baptism makes us die with Christ and washes away our sins. Conflicting opinions have been expressed regarding the meaning of the words  $\sigma\acute{\iota} \kappa\alpha\iota$



Συδὲς ἀντίτυπον τῶν σωθῆαι βαπτισμῶν

The problem begins already in the interpretation of verse 20. The question in this verse is whether ὁ Ἰακώβ is genitive of place or means, whether Noah and his family were saved "through the water into the ark (εἰς τὴν ἄρκον)," or whether the water is given as the agent for their miraculous rescue. Selwyn says that, by virtue of the fact that this incident is here given as the type (ἀντίτυπον) of Christian baptism, in baptism we are saved through water, passing through it to safety on the other side, and we are also saved by water. Thus he reads both ideas into this passage. He takes the "water" in verse 20 as the antecedent of the ὅ of verse 21, and renders the verse "and water now saves you, too, who are the antitype of Noah and his company, namely the water of baptism."<sup>44</sup> Huther holds to the same interpretation, although he sees that the ἀντίτυπον refers back to the water also, not to Noah and his company.<sup>45</sup> Bigg, however, claims that the type consists in our being saved from the danger of water. Thus the emphasis is not on water as a means of salvation but on water as a symbol of death.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Selwyn, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>45</sup>Huther, op. cit., p. 301.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, in International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), XII, 164-65.

Wand asserts that most commentators find difficulty in the difference between the hostile nature of the waters in the flood and the saving nature of baptism. But, he continues, we must think of the idea of "drowning in death in baptism." Then the difference does not seem so harsh.<sup>47</sup>

Looking again at the passage in question it is difficult to avoid the fact that it definitely says that baptism saves ( *Bartholomäus Witzel* ). Regardless of what antecedents one finds in verse 20, regardless of how one interprets the typology, these words still stand and speak with unmistakable clarity. Baptism does save. Taken by itself the passage could perhaps be contested. However, in the light of all the other New Testament evidence we have discussed, this passage cannot be ignored.

#### Barth's Theology Explains His Position on Baptism

We wonder why Barth ignores such irrefutable Scripture evidence. Two reasons could be cited here. In the first place Barth is afraid of making baptism a magic rite which will detract from the person of Christ, the incarnate revelation of God. Barth's theology is built around this revelation, and everything else submits to it. Of course, Christ must remain central in all theology, but accepting

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<sup>47</sup>Wand, op. cit., p. 101.

the Scriptural doctrine of baptism does not eliminate Christ. Baptism is in keeping with what the New Testament teaches concerning the grace of God. Baptism cannot be a magic rite. It is rather the individual application of the objective grace of God to the sinner, as Iraenaeus pointed out when he said that the reality of baptism is to be found in the objective reality of that which already has been accomplished and promised for us in Christ.<sup>48</sup> This is the whole thrust of the first part of Romans 6. Chapter 5 of Romans is a chapter rich in its presentation of objective justification effected by Christ, completely destroying any idea of human merit achieving what already is available. Chapter 6 tells how that justification is applied to the individual through baptism. To say that baptism is soteriologically effective, then, does not detract from Christ. Such a statement rather glorifies Christ and His work.

Secondly, Barth cannot but be influenced by his doctrine of the unreality of sin and evil, as he approaches Christian baptism. Barth tends to make evil a powerless force, so that a man's sins can no longer condemn him for all eternity. Regarding evil and its consequences Barth

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<sup>48</sup>Harry Hutchison, Why Baptize Infants (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, c.1957), p. 28.

says,

This whole realm that we term evil--death, sin, the devil, and hell--is not God's creation, but rather what was excluded by God's creation, that to which God said, "No." And if there is a reality of evil, it can only be the reality of this excluded and repudiated thing, the reality behind God's back, which He passed over, when He made it good.<sup>49</sup>

This statement in itself seems harmless, but it must be taken within the entire fabric of Barth's theological structure. Looking elsewhere we can see the theme of the non-existence of evil further developed.

One of the most common expressions Barth uses when talking about evil is the term "non-being" ("das Nichtige"). This "non-being" is "that which has been destroyed through God's act of creation."<sup>50</sup> Barth interprets Genesis 1:2 as speaking of a world which God did not create. It was the creaturely chaos which He ignored in the act of creation.<sup>51</sup> Weber, in summing up Barth's commentary on Genesis 1:2, says that there is indicated in Genesis 1:2 the possibility of a judgement upon that which did not originate in His creative Word. However this judgement is executed only "at

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<sup>49</sup>Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, translated by G. T. Thompson (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 57.

<sup>50</sup>Otto Weber, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, translated by A. C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 187.

<sup>51</sup>G. D. Berkhofer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1956), p. 59.

a single place in the cosmos he has created, only in a single creature, namely the person of Jesus Christ."<sup>52</sup> Here we begin to see what Barth means by "non-being." All creaturely existence was rejected in God's creation. Hence, as Bishop Wingren points out, man also became part of the rejected creation. However, even before creation, God began His covenant. He chose Christ to take our rejection, to take the judgment that was ours. Creation does not precede the covenant, but the covenant precedes creation. Creation cannot be seen in abstracto, but only in the light of the covenant which is the inner ground of creation.<sup>53</sup> God created the world, because He, in creation, thought of redemption. God's will at the beginning desired that man be in communion with Him, man, who was part of the rejected creatureliness.<sup>54</sup> Thus evil did indeed become "non-being." As soon as God looked at evil, He looked at Christ, and evil no longer existed. Man deserved rejection in his creaturely condition. Berkhofer says in summary of Barth's position on this point, "Man, who has become an enemy, must be totally wiped out of existence and brought to nothing."<sup>55</sup> However Weber presents Barth's method of

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<sup>52</sup>Weber, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>53</sup>Berkhofer, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

dealing with this would-be rejection when he says,

in Jesus Christ, it happens that "God--in that He Himself becomes this man--makes Himself responsible and answerable for the man who has become His enemy, and that He makes the whole consequence of His action--his rejection and his death--to be his own concern."<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere Weber says,

God's eternal will is twofold; it contains a "Yes and No." But "In the election of Jesus Christ, which is the eternal will of God, God has intended the first--namely, election, blessedness, and life for man; but the second--rejection, damnation, and death for Himself." God chose our rejection.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore whatever power evil may have had disappeared when Christ came into the world, for He received all God's rejection directed against man, who was His enemy by virtue of his creatureliness. Evil and sin, then, indeed were "das Nichtige." Regarding these elements Barth can say, "They exist; but they are nothing but lies. . . . God's truth [His revelation in Christ] puts an end to them . . . they are exposed as pseudo powers."<sup>58</sup> Or he can also say,

Evil, looked at in Christ, will be able to have only the possibility of existing as the impossible, only the reality of existing as the unreal, only the independent power of impotence.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Weber, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Because of this impotence of evil in Barth's theology Wingren seems justified in concluding, "The law has been eliminated and the question of guilt has disappeared."<sup>60</sup>

Berkhower also seems justified in speaking of the almost inevitable conclusion that there is to be found in Barth's theology a universal apokatastasis.<sup>61</sup> Barth never actually says this. In fact he even denies that he teaches such a thing.<sup>62</sup> Yet, in the light of his theological structure, it is difficult to escape this conclusion, namely that he does teach what amounts to a universal election. The denial of Barth coupled with the conclusions which must be drawn from his theology create a very obvious tension, a tension which Berkhower sees very clearly.<sup>63</sup> Even Weber is aware of the tension involved.<sup>64</sup>

In view of the powerlessness of sin and evil Berkhower says, "Sinful man is no longer dangerous in the light of this fact." He then goes on to quote Barth:

In the death of Jesus God entered into danger; He

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<sup>60</sup>Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, translated by Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, n.d.), p. 120.

<sup>61</sup>Berkhower, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>62</sup>Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, translated by Olive Wyon, in Dogmatics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), I, 348.

<sup>63</sup>Berkhower, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>64</sup>Weber, op. cit., p. 101.

exposed Himself freely to it in order to cleanse and free sinful man of his sin and to disqualify him as an enemy. There can be no resistance by man in the face of the disarming which God has effected.<sup>65</sup>

In his commentary on Romans Barth furthermore says of God that "his nature is to remain faithful, in spite of human depravity. . . . God saves us in spite of what we are."<sup>66</sup> Barth again asserts, "Regarding the two dominions [that of sin and that of righteousness] . . . the first is dissolved by the second; the reverse process is impossible."<sup>67</sup> All of this substantiates the fact that in Christ evil and unbelief become powerless and that no man can stand condemned by his sins any longer, regardless of who he is, believer or unbeliever. No longer can sin separate man from God, for Barth says,

Through Jesus Christ men are judged by God. This is their crisis--but it is both negation and affirmation, both death and life. . . . In Christ high and low, just and unjust, have the same access to the Father.<sup>68</sup>

Man's judgment has passed to Christ, so that nothing he does can negate this for him. Regardless of what he does he cannot again fall under the wrath and judgment of God. Even the godless are free from the bondage of sin and the

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<sup>65</sup>Berkhower, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>66</sup>Barth, Romans, p. 169.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>68</sup>Wilhelm Pauck, Christ and Adam, on Man and Humanity in Romans Five by Karl Barth, Introduction, translated by T. A. Small (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1957), p. 13.



judgment of God. "There are those 'who are isolated from God, godless men,' who are not only elect in Christ, but who 'live as God's elect,' in virtue of the promise which is also valid for them."<sup>69</sup> Thus Barth claims that the Christian Church "in her character as religion" nor in the proud and yet so deceptive idea of the "corpus Christianum," does not have sole claim to "true religion." "The doctrines of the Christian Church are but symptoms of the truth."<sup>70</sup>

That Barth's system implies a universal election and therefore the powerlessness of sin, evil, and unbelief Emil Brunner also concludes in a significant quotation from the first volume of his dogmatics, when he says,

One cannot escape the impression that Barth is playing with fanciful ideas in theology when he says [of Jesus Christ] "from the very outset, and in Himself, He is the double predestination." But it sounds not merely strange, but horrible, when he says that, on the basis of the divine decree, "the only person who is really rejected is His own Son. . . ." But what does this statement, that "Jesus is the only really rejected man" mean for the situation of man? Evidently this, that there is no possibility of condemnation, and thus that there is no final Divine Judgment. . . . Rather, Barth goes much further [than Origen and his followers, who bordered on an apokatastasis]. For none of them ever dared to maintain that through Jesus Christ, all, believers and unbelievers, are saved from the wrath of God and participate in redemption through Jesus Christ. But that is what Karl Barth teaches; for Jesus Christ is, as the only elect, so also the only Reprobate man.

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<sup>69</sup>Barth, Romans, p. 69.

<sup>70</sup>Weber, op. cit., p. 100.

Thus, since Jesus Christ appeared, and through Him, there are no longer any who are rejected. Not only for those who are "in Him" through faith, but for all men, Hell has been blotted out, condemnation and judgment eliminated. This is not a deduction which I have drawn from Barth's statement, but is his own. Since Jesus Christ has taken the condemnation of sin upon Himself "rejection cannot again become the portion of man. . . ." The godless man is also one of the Elect; only he does not know it, and does not live in accordance with the truth.<sup>71</sup>

We see hints of this tendency on the part of Barth to extend the borders of salvation outside the limits of the Christian Church in his treatise on baptism, when he says that John 3:5 does not try to limit God's grace,<sup>72</sup> and when he speaks of Christ's regnum as being wider than Christ's ecclesia.<sup>73</sup> Viewed by themselves these statements would seem to be in place, but when viewed in the light of other things Barth has said, they begin to change their complexion into the color of a universal election.

These conclusions, the universal election of all men and the powerlessness of sin, found in Barth's theology, provide us with the second reason why he must turn his back on any teaching which gives a real efficacy to baptism. Baptism cannot free a man from the bondage of sin, because no man is under that bondage any more. Because of Christ our unbelief and our sin have been rendered

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<sup>71</sup>Brunner, op. cit., pp. 348-49.

<sup>72</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 24.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

harmless. Nothing we do can change God's verdict about us which has been passed over the person of Christ. When sin is not a power capable of damning a man, baptism cannot be the means of washing away sin and saving a man.

Briefly recapitulating, we see that Barth refuses to give any efficacy to baptism, while Cullman is willing to say that we receive the forgiveness of sins in baptism.

Barth seems to have arrived at his position on the basis of the structure of the rest of his theology, while Cullman has proven his position from Scripture.

Barth holds that human response or faith must precede baptism, while Cullman holds that this response, though a necessary correlative of baptism, can come either before or after, depending on when the person being baptized is actually able to respond.

Looking briefly at Barth's position we see that he finds two main experiences to which a man is subjected in baptism. He is "made sure with divine certainty," and "he is placed under obligation by divine authority."<sup>1</sup> The first of these concerns "what Christ

The divine human baptizer himself has to say and does say to the candidate in this part of the Church's proclamation and through the instrumentality of human words and works.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, translated by Ernest S. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

## CHAPTER IV

### BAPTISM AND HUMAN RESPONSE

Closely connected with the efficacy of baptism is the question of the place of human response in baptism. Barth and Cullman represent two entirely different views in this respect. Both affirm the necessity of human response in baptism, but there arises a difference of opinion regarding the time element. Barth thinks human response or faith must precede baptism, while Cullman holds that this response, though a necessary correlative of baptism, can come either before or after, depending on when the person being baptized is mentally able to respond.

Looking briefly at Barth's position we see that he finds two main experiences to which a man is subjected in baptism. He is "made sure with divine certainty," and "he is placed under obligation by divine authority."<sup>1</sup> The first of these consists in what Christ

the divine human Baptizer Himself has to say and does say to the candidate in this part of the Church's proclamation and through the instrumentality of human words and works.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

In connection with these "two experiences" Barth posits two "foundation principles" for proper baptismal order. One is that baptism be "administered by the Church as the carrying out of the command given by her Lord . . . with the rite accompanied by the faithful preaching of the word."<sup>3</sup> The other consists in this, that the person being baptized be "the second of the chief actors in what takes place," having within himself "the responsible willingness and readiness . . . to receive the promise of grace directed toward him," and that he "pledge allegiance concerning the grateful service demanded of him."<sup>4</sup> Barth views baptism chiefly as a message of the Church which demands faith as a human response, with the accompanying decision to live in obedience to that message. Therefore faith must be present at the time of the baptism for that baptism to be at all effective. If a person cannot respond at the time of his baptism, he can not be properly baptized. Barth accordingly speaks against the practice of infant baptism, which subject will be treated more thoroughly in Chapter V of this paper.

To support his principle Barth appeals to several New Testament points. In the first place he observes that in the New Testament "one is not brought to baptism, one comes

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

to baptism."<sup>5</sup> Secondly he notes that the New Testament concept *καὶ ὀντεῖεν* is "certainly no action that can be completed without the responsible decision of the one concerned."<sup>6</sup> Thus he can say that "baptism without the willingness and readiness of the baptized . . . is not correct."<sup>7</sup>

Cullman's position on the subject of human response is that the entire saving act of God is not at all dependent on the faith or merit of man, but that it acts wholly independent of man.<sup>8</sup> This principle is applied to baptism, so that

It belongs to the essence of this general Baptism effected by Jesus, that it is offered in entire independence of the decision of faith and understanding of those who benefit from it. Baptismal grace has its foundation here, and it is in the strictest sense "prevenient grace."<sup>9</sup>

However Cullman speaks of what he calls "the indicative and imperative of Baptism."<sup>10</sup> Although baptism is in itself a sacrament of grace whose efficacy is not at all dependent on human response, nevertheless "in so far as it

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>8</sup>Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

is essentially a sacrament of reception, [baptism] points to the future and demands from the future a human response.<sup>11</sup> According to Cullman response is a vital consequence of baptism. He declares that we are, at our birth, already chosen in Christ. However, "within the mortal life of the person being baptized, that is, of one who has been received into the Church of Jesus Christ," baptism becomes "the starting point of something that happens." But it is a starting point to which a continuation belongs, without which continuation it loses all its efficacy.<sup>12</sup> This continuation consists in the human response which follows baptism. Cullman appeals to First Corinthians 10:1ff.<sup>13</sup> and Hebrews 6:6<sup>14</sup> to show that the later life of the person baptized, a life of response to baptism, is "critical for the act of Baptism."<sup>15</sup> He also points to Romans 6 where he sees both the indicative and imperative of baptism presented. Here Paul says, "You have been made the object of salvation; prove it now true,

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>13</sup>The passage says that "all" the Israelites were "under the cloud," and "all" were "baptized unto Moses," but that "most of them" vitiated all this by their rebellion.

<sup>14</sup>The passage speaks of those who "have been enlightened" but who have since committed "apostasy."

<sup>15</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 47.

you that know it--and for Paul, this means primarily: believe. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Concerning the views of these two men it appears that Cullman's position is Scriptural, while Barth's is not. Throughout the New Testament are to be found what Cullman refers to as the indicative and imperative of baptism. Paul's letters abound in this type of language, especially chapter six of Romans, which enters prominently in this discussion on baptism. Paul says that "We are buried with Christ . . . that we should walk in newness of life." Here, in the same verse, appear the two facets of baptism, namely the objective grace which becomes ours at our baptism and the subsequent "newness of life" which must, of necessity, follow such baptism.

In his doctrinal essay delivered at the sixty-fifth convention of the Central District, in a section dealing with the efficacy of the means of grace, H. J. A. Bouman said, "Man's faith can add nothing to them, nor can man's unbelief make the faith of God without effect."<sup>17</sup> However, on the other hand, he also says, "My refusal to accept a gift which is offered to me does not invalidate the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>17</sup>H. J. A. Bouman, "Holy Baptism," Proceedings of the Sixty-Fifth Convention of the Central District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), p. 36.



worth of the gift, but it certainly keeps me from getting any good out of it."<sup>18</sup> Here is stated very clearly the relation of baptism and response according to New Testament teaching. Cullman's view is in accordance with this while Barth's is not.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

Neither by exegesis nor from the nature of the case can it be established that the baptized person can be a merely passive instrument. Rather it may be shown, by exegesis and from the nature of the case, that in this action the baptized person is an active partner (Bendelater).<sup>1</sup>

The form this human response or cooperation takes can be best described by the word "recognition." "In baptism the word and work of Jesus Christ . . . is recognized. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Therefore Barth further asserts, "In baptism we do not have

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 2. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Baptism.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

## CHAPTER V

### THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM

#### Barth's Cognition Principle

We come now to the issue which is perhaps most controversial in a modern discussion on baptism, the question of infant baptism. Looking first at Barth we see that he argues vehemently against the practice of infant baptism. His approach is entirely consistent with what he has to say about the efficacy of baptism. Baptism, to be efficacious, requires simultaneous human response. Regarding such response Barth says,

Neither by exegesis nor from the nature of the case can it be established that the baptized person can be a merely passive instrument. Rather it may be shown, by exegesis and from the nature of the case, that in this action the baptized person is an active partner (Handelnder).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 6. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Baptism.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

the causa, but the cognitio salutis."<sup>3</sup> In a section treating of proper and improper order in baptism Barth says that the only bad result of baptism not properly administered is that its teaching effects are weakened. "An inadequate order and practice of baptism can obscure . . . its meaning . . . and render difficult the understanding of it."<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge, then, becomes the one objective of baptism. Baptism is, in effect, a teaching arm of the Church. Since infants cannot yet intelligently grasp this knowledge, they cannot be baptized. The word "knowledge" constitutes a fundamental concept in Barth's theology. According to Barth's system, knowledge seems to be the only possible human response to the grace of God, being almost another word for faith. This knowledge, however, is not knowing in the traditional Christian sense of the word, implying a knowing with the eyes of faith, but it is knowing in the sense of intellectually grasping something which exists as a truth and then reacting accordingly. We refer back to a section in Chapter III on the powerlessness of evil and unbelief to be detected in Barth's theology and the subsequent implication of universal election. If this is true, then knowledge or cognition, as he calls it in his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

discussion on baptism, becomes mere cognizance of a saving grace, grace which we already have as members of the human race. This is the cognition that an infant cannot have until he reaches an age when his mind is capable of grasping it.

Wingren says concerning the place of knowledge in Barth's theology that, since evil is not a power opposed to God, and since everything necessary for our salvation already has been given to us, therefore "all we lack is insight."<sup>5</sup> He then continues that "man's knowledge and insight, rather than God's activity, are the center of Barth's theology."<sup>6</sup> If all man lacks is insight, the question arises how he acquired such insight. In his Dogmatics in Outline Barth points out that man cannot attain such knowledge of his own accord, but that it can only come by revelation from God. This revelation, to Barth, is not the written or spoken word of God, but it is Christ, the incarnate Word. When a man becomes aware of Christ, he then acquires the knowledge he lacks.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that the knowledge he acquires is saving

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<sup>5</sup>Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, translated by Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, n.d.), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, translated by G. T. Thompson (London: SCM Press, 1959), pp. 24-25. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Dogmatics.

knowledge. It cannot be that, for our salvation is already assured for us. Rather

Christian faith is the illumination of the reason in which men become free to live in the truth of Jesus Christ, and thereby become sure also of the meaning of their own existence and the ground and goal of all that happens.<sup>8</sup>

Barth presents another explanation regarding the acquiring of this knowledge, or faith, when he says, "It is a reaching out after a divine possession decreed in this name [Christ's]. It is therefore an inquiry about our election."<sup>9</sup> He says also, "Faith means seeing what God sees, knowing what God knows. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Or he states his case simply by saying, "The Christian faith rests upon knowledge."<sup>11</sup> "Faith means knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

Barth's stress on knowledge is sensed strongly by Berkhofer, when he says regarding Barth's view of God's rejection passed upon Christ,

The already taken and no longer nullifiable decision is indeed the fundamental thesis of Barth's view of election. The "not yet knowing" plays a decisive

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>Otto Weber, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, translated by A. C. Cochran (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, c.1957), p. 206. Hereafter this work will be referred to as Romans.

<sup>11</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

role in Barth's thinking. The covenant embraces all.<sup>13</sup>

Then he quotes Barth (Kirchliche Dogmatik, IV, 164):

It embraces very really the world and the Church, the non-Christian and the Christian. It's acknowledgment, however, and therefore its proclamation, is the concern of the Christian Church.<sup>14</sup>

Berkhower concludes, "Only there is yet a difference among men with respect to knowing."<sup>15</sup>

For those who say that Barth still speaks of sin, grace, faith, and means of grace, and therefore his knowledge as faith must still be in the traditional Christian sense, Berkhower further asserts:

If Barth is permitted to construct his whole system in peace, remove the objective existence of evil, the natural knowledge of God, the rule of law in the world, place the revelation of God through the incarnation in the center, define the Gospel as a word about God's disclosure about himself; if he can do all this, then within this framework he can use the whole vocabulary of the New Testament. He can speak of our sin and guilt, our hostility to God, our demonic character. Everything is here, but within the frame of reference of our ignorance. . . .<sup>16</sup>

With this basic conception in mind, namely that to Barth faith can be adequately described as cognition, we can see how cognition then becomes the essential purpose

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<sup>13</sup>G. D. Berkhower, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1956), p. 265.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

of baptism. Regarding what he calls "the creation of the new man" in baptism, he says that here "the truth of the redemption which Christ effected is made known."<sup>17</sup> Barth also speaks of "baptism, that concrete event in time which was the beginning of our knowledge of God. . . ."<sup>18</sup> Weber has this to say concerning Barth's view of baptism:

In the revelation of Christ, the Word, we learn of our existence--that we have come from God. How do we know it? Post Christum!--"From my baptism."  
There I am thrown back, as it were, upon my origin.<sup>19</sup>

In this quotation we notice two facts. By the revelation of Christ we do not receive the grace of God, we rather "learn of our existence." This we learn from our baptism. Then the knowledge we acquire informs us of our origin and existence, thus solving the riddle of life for us. It tells us that we have come from God and should live for God.

We have tried to show that faith, in the mind of Barth, is, in essence, knowledge, knowledge of what we already are by the election of God, and that such knowledge comes to us in baptism. This is the "cognition" principle Barth attaches to baptism, and is basically why he cannot accept infant baptism. Infants are not capable of benefiting

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<sup>17</sup>Barth, Romans, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 191-92.

<sup>19</sup>Weber, op. cit., p. 162.

from this knowledge. It is only when they reach the age of understanding that they can grasp the knowledge of God's revelation in the incarnation of Christ and can then live their lives in accordance with that knowledge.

Concerning Barth's "cognition" principle Oscar Cullman asserts, "it is meaningless to impart knowledge . . . to an infant. . . . Karl Barth is right when he constructs his denial of the Biblical character of infant baptism upon this interpretation." However he says further, "This interpretation . . . does not appear to me to do justice to the New Testament facts."<sup>20</sup> He also says:

Among the passages in the New Testament where Baptism is mentioned didactically, there is not one where information about the saving acts of Christ or cognition . . . is regarded as the specific event of the once-for-all act of Baptism.<sup>21</sup>

Rather Cullman asserts that the baptized in the New Testament really "is set within the body of Christ by God."<sup>22</sup> In Chapter V of our paper we shall examine what Cullman means by the "body of Christ." For now we see that he objects to Barth's cognition principle on the basis of New Testament evidence.

Barth also appeals to the New Testament, claiming

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<sup>20</sup>Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 24.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



that the New Testament knows of no infant baptism. Thus he says, "Baptism is in the New Testament in every case the indispensable answer to an unavoidable question by a man who has come to faith."<sup>23</sup> This statement excludes infants, as Barth admits when he continues by describing infants as "such as cannot yet let themselves ask or answer. . . ." <sup>24</sup> He sees no infant baptism in Acts 2:39 or Matthew 28:10, which speak of "you and your children," and "all nations." These, he says, witness to baptism's "universality" in time and space.<sup>25</sup> He sees only a "thin thread" of evidence in the New Testament, in those passages which speak of the baptism of whole households (Acts 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; and First Corinthians 1:16). Here, however, he "wonders whether one really wants to hold to this thread."<sup>26</sup> In general he sees in the New Testament the invariable sequence of "the preaching of the word, faith, and baptism. . . ." <sup>27</sup>

Cullman agrees that the New Testament is weak in direct proof texts referring to infant baptism. He criticizes those who try to prove infant baptism by quoting

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<sup>23</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

such expressions as "whole houses." Regarding infant baptism he says "the New Testament texts allow us to answer this question with certainty in neither one way nor the other. . . ." <sup>28</sup> Cullman, therefore, does not rest the weight of his arguments on such texts. Rather he appeals to what he calls "indirect proof of primitive Christian Baptism." <sup>29</sup> He says that the New Testament has no cases of the "Baptism of adults born of parents already Christian and brought up by them." <sup>30</sup> He states that the only New Testament passage which deals with the children of Christian parents is First Corinthians 7:14, and this passage "excludes a later Baptism of these Christian children at adult age." <sup>31</sup> He refers to the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism, in which rite both adults and children participated by being baptized. <sup>32</sup> Finally he asserts that infant baptism can be definitely decided only on the basis of New Testament doctrine. <sup>33</sup> Here again we might refer to the key passage in Romans 6 treated earlier in this paper. Cullman's view of the New Testament doctrine of baptism on

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<sup>28</sup> Cullman, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

the basis of this passage is that Romans 6:2 "presupposes Baptism as a salvation fact"<sup>34</sup> for those whom the Apostle Paul was addressing in his letter. The doctrinal implication of this is that baptism in itself is efficacious apart from the person being baptized, and therefore the age of the person is of no importance.

Concerning the first of Cullman's indirect proofs for infant baptism in the New Testament, it cannot be denied that there is no New Testament example of the baptism of adults born of parents already Christian and brought up by them. However this can be explained by the fact that the New Testament Church was a young church and would scarcely have had time for such baptisms when Paul wrote most of his epistles.

Cullman's second proof, which he finds in the words of First Corinthians 7:14, has already received comment in this paper. We have shown that the passage is very ambiguous in its meaning, and can possibly be interpreted in the sense that children of Christian parents have a right to baptism, because God has placed them into a certain situation, that of being in a Christian family. From this passage it cannot be definitely concluded that the later baptism of such children is excluded, for the meaning of the word "holy" in the passage remains uncertain.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

Further comment can be made concerning the third "indirect proof" which Cullman presents, namely the practice of Jewish proselyte baptism. Concerning this rite Dr. Lightfoot is quoted by Wall as saying, "the baptizing of infants was a thing as well known in the church of the Jews as ever it has been in the Christian Church."<sup>35</sup> Wall refers to a well-known quotation from the Gemara Babylon which shows that infant proselyte baptism was a common thing among the Jews in the early centuries after Christ. The quotation reads, "They are wont to baptize such a proselyte in infancy."<sup>36</sup> Koehler states that in the Mishnah, both of the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud, there is reference to children over or under the age of three years being made proselytes by baptism.<sup>37</sup> Joachim Jeremias says concerning the reception of infant proselytes into the fold of Judaism:

beim Übertritt von Heiden zum Judentum war es völlig selbstverständlich, dass gleichzeitig auch die Kinder mit in das Judentum aufgenommen wurden, und zwar auch die Minderjährigen. Schon die ältesten rabbinischen Quellen, die tannaitischen Traditionen, bieten zahlreiche Belege für die Aufnahme von heidnischen Kleinkindern und Säuglingen in das Judentum.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>William Wall, History of Infant Baptism (Oxford: University Press, 1894), I, 21.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>37</sup>E. W. A. Koehler, "Infant Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (July, 1939), 483.

<sup>38</sup>Joachim Jeremias, Hat die Urkirche die Kindertaufe Geübt? (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949), p. 18.

He then goes on to quote this tradition, which speaks of the exact days on which certain types of gentile boys were to be circumcised after their births. Regarding girls under three years and one day the tradition says that they "sind den jüdischen Mädchen gleichgestellt."<sup>39</sup> Since baptism was the only act which could be performed on girls, Jeremias concludes that "bei den Mädchen die Taufe von heidnischen Mädchen im frühesten Lebensalter für die tannaitische Zeit bezeugt."<sup>40</sup> Jeremias speaks of the first actual mention of infant proselyte baptism, found in a statement by Rabbi Huna, who lived in the third century A.D. Concerning the procedure accompanying the reception to Judaism of an infant proselyte whose father had died, Rabbi Huna wrote, "man lässt ihn auf Grund einer Entscheidung des Gerichtshofes das Tauchbad nehmen."<sup>41</sup> Hence in the Jewish traditions there were definite provisions for infant baptism. This shows that infant baptism was practiced by the Jews in the days of the apostles in connection with the reception of proselytes into the fold of Judaism. Therefore Karl Barth is completely unjustified in saying that "baptism is no original creation of Christianity, but was

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

taken over from Hellenism."<sup>42</sup>

Against this background Koehler makes two interesting observations, both of which carry much weight in a consideration of what the New Testament says or does not say about infant baptism. In the first place, Christ instituted a sacrament of baptism not dissimilar from the Jewish baptismal rite in its outward forms. Koehler asserts that Christ took over baptism as he found it, adding only this, that He "exalted it to a nobler purpose and a larger use."<sup>43</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem must have had this thought in mind when he said, "Baptism is the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New."<sup>44</sup> Had Christ meant that His baptism should differ from the Jewish counterpart to the extent that infants should be excluded from Christian baptism, He would have so indicated to His disciples.<sup>45</sup> As it is, He merely gave the command to baptize. To the apostles with their Jewish backgrounds this command included everyone, adults and infants alike.

Secondly Koehler points to the Jewish insistence that new gentile converts should be circumcised.<sup>46</sup> This

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<sup>42</sup>Barth, Romans, p. 192.

<sup>43</sup>Koehler, op. cit., p. 484.

<sup>44</sup>Harry Hutchison, Why Baptize Infants (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, c.1957), p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>Koehler, op. cit., p. 483.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

insistence included also children, as we see from the cases of young Titus and Timothy. However, nowhere in the New Testament do we see signs that the Jews demanded that gentile converts be baptized. The absence in the New Testament of any such references would seem to indicate that the gentiles, both adult and infant, who had become Christians, were already baptized by the Christian communities when they were received into the Church, thus removing any basis for Jewish accusations that infants were not baptized.

Cullman's fourth "indirect proof," that infant baptism can be proved not on the basis of New Testament example but rather on the basis of New Testament doctrine, is the most decisive one which he presents. We have dealt at length already with the nature and efficacy of baptism, and have attempted to show that the age of the person being baptized is of no consequence. It is in keeping with the efficacy the New Testament attaches to baptism to baptize infants as well as adults.

In connection with Cullman's remarks on Romans 6:2, we note in addition to our preceding remarks about the passage that the word *ὅσοι* is a very significant one, being an all-inclusive term, meaning everyone in the Christian community Paul was addressing in this letter. Arndt and

Gingrich state that ὅσος has the meaning "all that."<sup>47</sup> Godet points to the ὅσος in Galatians 3:27, a passage which speaks of baptism, and he points to the corresponding passage in First Corinthians 12:13, where the expression πάντες πάντες is used instead of ὅσος.<sup>48</sup> Thus ὅσος means "all" or "everyone," infants included.

### Baptism and Circumcision

Another New Testament proof for infant baptism is sought by Cullman in the relation between Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision. Circumcision was the rite whereby a Jew was received into the covenant fellowship of the Jewish people.<sup>49</sup>

Here Barth disagrees with Cullman. Circumcision is to Barth the "sign of election of holy lineage of Israel, which, with the birth of the Messiah, achieved its goal, so that therewith this sign lost its meaning."<sup>50</sup> Hence Barth sees circumcision as a sign in the same sense that

<sup>47</sup>Wm. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 590.

<sup>48</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, translated by A. Cusin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), pp. 341-42.

<sup>49</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>50</sup>Barth, Baptism, p. 43.



baptism is a sign to him. It had no efficacy aside from that. Cullman negates Barth's claim that circumcision was mere reception into the Jewish race and had no sacramental import by pointing to Romans 4:11, where circumcision is definitely associated with reception into the covenant relationship, being the seal of their relationship.<sup>51</sup>

Cullman's view that circumcision was not reception into a distinct "holy lineage" but the reception into the covenant relationship lays the foundation for his conception of the relation between circumcision and baptism. In the sense that circumcision was reception into the Old Testament covenant, baptism is that which marks the entrance of a person into the new covenant. Regarding circumcision Romans 2:25 says that it was  $\omega\phi\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\tau$  to the Jews, actually effecting something. However in this passage Cullman sees a distinction drawn between the sacramental operation itself and the sacramental attestation, which in the passage is expressed by the words  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\nu\ \pi\rho\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\beta\eta\varsigma$ . Circumcision was then efficacious only if accompanied by faith. The fact that some who were within the covenant by virtue of their circumcision did not remain with the circle of the believing is not due to circumcision's inefficacy, but to the "lack of response on the part of the

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<sup>51</sup>Cullman, op. cit., p. 58.

circumcised."<sup>52</sup> Old Testament circumcision was incomplete without a resultant human response. The lack of such response could vitiate circumcision's efficacy. Cullman therefore maintains that "true circumcision must also consist of circumcision of the heart."<sup>53</sup> Mere physical circumcision without the corresponding "heart circumcision" was of no avail. Romans 2:25, a passage referred to by Cullman in the connection discussed earlier, is also worthy of note here. The passage reads:

Circumcision is of value if you keep the law. But if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore if an uncircumcised person keeps the precepts of the law, isn't his uncircumcision reckoned for circumcision? . . . For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is circumcision outward and physical. But he is a Jew who is one secretly and circumcision is of the heart, by the spirit and not by the letter.

This passage seems to substantiate Cullman's view of circumcision. It is such "circumcision of the heart which leads directly over into Christian baptism, that is the circumcision of Christ."<sup>54</sup> Therefore the continuity between circumcision and baptism is to be found in the faith which must respond to reception into the covenant. One of the passages to which Cullman refers to demonstrate the connection between circumcision and baptism is Colossians 2:11.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

This passage reads, "In him also you were circumcised by a circumcision not made with hands. . . ." The passage seems to confirm the fact that "the circumcision that is rightly understood . . . which is circumcision of the heart, leads directly over into Christian Baptism, that is the circumcision of Christ."<sup>55</sup>

Cullman further explains the significance of the close relationship between circumcision and baptism. He says that the Jewish act of circumcision was performed "both on adults and on infants." Hence, since baptism is "the fulfillment" of Jewish circumcision, infants ought also to be baptized.<sup>56</sup>

Here, however, we come to a difficulty in Cullman's approach to both circumcision and baptism. The Old Testament Church could not circumcise anyone unless it had received a sign from God that this person had already been chosen by God. In the case of adults a previous confession of faith was that sign. In the case of children "there is a difference only in so far as they are chosen not on the basis of instruction and decision, but on the basis of their birth. . . ."<sup>57</sup> Thus only children of believing parents could be circumcised. We have shown

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

earlier that Cullman says exactly the same thing of baptism. We wonder, then, what type of efficacy Cullman ascribes to circumcision and baptism if he says that they are means whereby one is received into the covenant of grace, and yet, at the same time, affirms that the one to be circumcised or baptized has already been taken into God's covenant of grace and has already been made holy prior to such circumcision or baptism, as we pointed out in our treatment of First Corinthians 7:14. Children born of believing parents are holy by virtue of their birth. This is a view which has been much debated through the centuries whenever the question arises concerning the fate of unbaptized infants who have died. Cullman has made a definite decision on the question and, in so doing, has deprived baptism of the efficacy he so defends. He says baptism is efficacious, yet it really is not efficacious. The only role it can play is that of a seal, and, as we have said previously, this is actually the way Cullman describes baptism.

To find what Cullman means when he says that baptism is a means whereby one is received into the covenant of grace we turn briefly to his concept of the Regnum Christi. Cullman says baptism is a "seal" which God impresses on "the covenant with a community freely chosen by Him." In this sense it is "like circumcision."<sup>58</sup> Baptism is the seal of

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

something which has already happened. Therefore, when Cullman speaks of our entering the body of Christ in baptism, referring to such passages as First Corinthians 12:13, Colossians 1:24, Second Corinthians 1:5, First Peter 4:13, and Galatians 3:27-28,<sup>59</sup> all of which speak of our relationship within the body of Christ, he means something different from the body of Christ outside of which there is no salvation. This body of Christ seems to be the visible Church here on earth into which one, by his baptism, is commissioned for a life of service, as one was so commissioned into a life among the covenant people of the Old Testament by virtue of his circumcision. Cullman differentiates between the Kingdom of Christ and the body of Christ. For the "wider circle of the Regnum Christi, there is that one historical event at Golgotha." For the Church or body of Christ there is a "special event in every act of Baptism."<sup>60</sup> The Regnum Christi is the outer circle of salvation, the Church is the inner circle. A person is baptized into this inner circle to make use of its benefits. Of the person being baptized Cullman says:

In the gatherings of the congregation he is placed under special protection against the trials belonging to this final period of time in which he lives. . . . In the Eucharist of the congregation of the faithful he experiences ever and again the presence of Christ

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

in this Spirit. . . . The effects of Baptism as reception into the body of Christ thus determines the whole of life. Hence the all-important moment when a man is once for all set by God at the place where such things occur . . . must itself, in the very act of so placing him, possess the virtue of imparting the gift of Baptism.<sup>61</sup>

Here we see that baptism's virtue is placing the baptized person "at the place where such things occur." It puts him into the Church to share all the privileges connected with such membership. Cullman further explains his position when he says of baptism:

This does not mean that the members of the Church are preferred in matters of salvation to those not baptized, for whom also Christ is dead and risen. The special baptismal grace of those received into the Church of Christ consists rather in their being "commissioned for special duty." It is Barth's virtue that he emphasized this side of Baptism, and we take over the phrase from him.<sup>62</sup>

Hence Cullman's distinction between the body of Christ and the Regnum Christi begins to bear marks which place it outside the traditional Christian position regarding the body of Christ. Salvation is not limited to those within the body, according to Cullman. The body is only the earthly organization wherein one can receive certain

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

benefits.<sup>63</sup> Baptism is "a commission for duty" within this body. With this in mind, we refer to an insignificantly placed footnote in Cullman's book which looms up quite significantly. Cullman says, "therefore a dying infant need not be baptized."<sup>64</sup> His reason for saying this seems clear. If the function of baptism is only to commission one for duty in the Church, then a dying infant cannot fulfill such duty and therefore should not be baptized.

Cullman's understanding of the relation between baptism and circumcision appears to be correct from a Scriptural point of view. He is correct in stating that both mark the reception of a person into the covenant of grace. He is correct also in his conclusion that, since infants were circumcised, infants ought also be baptized. However he is incorrect from a Scriptural point of view in his conception of the meaning of baptism as an entrance into the body of Christ. The body of Christ is indeed made up of those who have been "commissioned for special duty." But it is more than that. It is the community of the saved.

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<sup>63</sup>Cullman's position reminds us of Davies' interpretation of the body of Christ. *Supra*, p. 18, footnote 19. To Davies the concept involves the solidarity of the individual with the earthly community of believers, of whom Christ is the head. However it seems Cullman goes much further than Davies when he implies that salvation is not limited to those within the body of Christ.

<sup>64</sup>Cullman, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Outside this body there is no salvation. According to John 15:6 everyone who is not a branch of Christ, who does not abide in Christ, is "cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." This is clearly a picture of the eternal judgment of God, passed upon those who do not abide in Christ. The picture of branches is John's way of speaking of the body of Christ.

Paul further elucidates on the constituency of the body of Christ when he describes the Church as that which Christ has cleansed by washing of water with the word, "that the Church might be presented before him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. . . ." <sup>65</sup> In the same context Paul says that as Christ nourishes and cherishes the Church, so husbands should nourish and cherish their wives, "because we are members of his body." <sup>66</sup> Thus to be a member of the Church means to be cleansed with the washing of water by the word, or to be baptized, and it means to be a member "of his body." Here the terms "Church" and "body of Christ" become synonymous. In the fifth chapter of Ephesians Paul says to those who are members of the body of Christ, "for once you were in darkness, but

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<sup>65</sup>Ephesians 5:26-27.

<sup>66</sup>Ephesians 5:30.



now you are light in the Lord."<sup>67</sup> In chapter two of Ephesians Paul says to those same people, "you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins."<sup>68</sup> In the same chapter he continues, "you were once separated from Christ . . . strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and being without God in the world."<sup>69</sup> Here it is plainly stated that to be outside the body of Christ, to be separated from Christ, is to be without God and without hope. Hence Cullman is not justified in speaking of the Regnum of Christ in distinction from the body of Christ, as if the members of the Church are "not preferred in matters of salvation."

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of sins or salvation, but merely symbolize these things.

He is a <sup>67</sup>Ephesians 5:8.

which <sup>68</sup>Ephesians 2:1.

seen <sup>69</sup>Ephesians 2:12.

grace rather than a means of grace is to be found in two basic tenets of his theology. These are his idea of the non-existence of evil and his emphasis on faith as being only knowledge of a salvation which the individual has before faith comes. Christ on the cross forever destroyed the power of evil, so that no person can ever be damned by his sins, be he a believer or an unbeliever. Thus there is no need for a sacrament which imparts forgiveness and salvation. Since evil is forever destroyed, Christ's saving benefits must be universal, so that all men are

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In looking at the respective views of Karl Barth and Oscar Cullman on the subject of baptism, it appears that Barth's position is based more on his own theological thinking than on Scriptural evidence, while Cullman's stand has much more of a Scriptural foundation. Barth's "sign" interpretation of baptism deprives the sacrament of the efficacy the New Testament gives to it. He views baptism as a ceremony which does not impart the forgiveness of sins or salvation, but merely symbolizes these things. He seems to be fearful lest baptism become a magic rite, which obscures the Gospel message of Christ. However it seems the real reason why Barth sees baptism as a sign of grace rather than a means of grace is to be found in two basic tenets of his theology. These are his idea of the non-existence of evil and his emphasis on faith as being only knowledge of a salvation which the individual has before faith comes. Christ on the cross forever destroyed the power of evil, so that no person can ever be damned by his sins, be he a believer or an unbeliever. Thus there is no need for a sacrament which imparts forgiveness and salvation. Since evil is forever destroyed, Christ's saving benefits must be universal, so that all men are

saved, regardless of who they are. Faith then becomes nothing more than knowledge of that which already exists for the individual. Hence baptism is a sign which has teaching benefits, in that it tells us about our salvation. Barth speaks strongly, therefore, against the practice of infant baptism, since infants cannot grasp the knowledge baptism imparts.

Cullman, in speaking against Barth, has laid hold of some key Scriptural concepts regarding baptism. He sees baptism as an actual means of grace. He points to the New Testament passages which speak of baptism as a sacrament imparting forgiveness of sins and the benefits of Christ's death on the cross. He speaks correctly of the importance of the theology underlying baptism, a theology which necessitates an acceptance of infant baptism. He shows from Scripture that baptism is entirely an act of God, an act of grace, and that its efficacy does not depend on any human effort. He explains that baptism involves the incorporation of the individual into the body of Christ, just as circumcision, baptism's predecessor and prototype, involved an entrance into the covenant relationship with God. However there appears to be an inconsistency in Cullman's thinking. Although he defends the efficacy of baptism, he weakens its efficacy by speaking of it as a sign of a relationship already concluded and as a mere "commission for duty" within the earthly fellowship of believers known as the "body of Christ."

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