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**THE VALIDITY OF BAPTISM AS PERFORMED BY
THE LITTLE FLOCK**

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

by

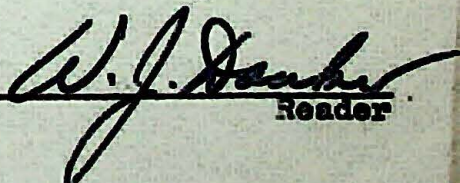
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June 1961

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Advisor



Reader

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LITTLE FLOCK

The Reason For This Study

It is a rather easy thing to find out about the teachings of most denominations. In a few moments of study in a reliable volume, a person can get most of the answers. This is true in a normal parish situation. On a foreign mission field, however, it is not always so easy. Although most Christian denominations which are found in foreign countries are daughters of Western denominations, there are some which are not. At least there are certain ones which do not claim to be.

One such denomination is the Little Flock which flourishes in Taiwan, the Republic of China. It neither claims nor is claimed by any Western denomination as far as I have been able to determine. It caused a problem for missionaries of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod who were engaged in mission work in Taiwan in 1956. I was one of those missionaries.

The problem arose in this way. There were certain members of the Little Flock who were attending the Lutheran Churches in various cities in Taiwan, particularly in Taipei, the capital city. Some of those who attended later enrolled in classes to prepare for membership in the Lutheran Church.

After finishing the instruction class, some of them expressed a desire to join the church. The missionaries questioned them concerning whether or not they had ever been baptized. They answered that they had been baptized while they were members of the Little Flock. The question then arose among the Lutheran missionaries concerning the validity of the baptism which they had received. There was not enough known about the Little Flock to even determine whether or not it was a church which held Trinitarian beliefs. There was nothing that the missionaries were able to find which could shed any light on the teachings of the group.

It was at this time that they asked me to study the matter to try to determine whether the baptism administered by the Little Flock was valid or whether those who asked for membership in the Lutheran Church should be re-baptized.

The Method of Procedure

First, I tried again to find something written in English which might tell about the origin and chief doctrines of the Little Flock. I found nothing. The next step was to try to find out if perhaps some other denomination had studied the teachings of the Little Flock and had written about it in Chinese. It may be that it has been done, but I was not able to find anything. There seemed to be only one way open. I had to find out first-hand for myself. But this was not entirely possible for I was not fluent enough in the Chinese

language to translate sufficient of their writings to even get an idea of their basic teachings. But I had a very able assistant in my language teacher who helped me in the study.

I was interested in two things. I wanted to find out what the writings of the Little Flock said concerning their doctrines. I also wanted to find out if the doctrines which were written agreed with the practises of the group. We studied certain of the books which we were able to obtain. Topics which seemed particularly necessary were translated. These books are listed in the bibliography as primary sources. In order to determine the practises of the church, I arranged an interview with Mr. Chien-I-P'ing, a council member of the First Church of Taipei. The information received in that extended interview is documented in the footnotes in this manner: Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

Limitations Of The Study

The subject is certainly not exhausted in this study. The greatest limitation is this that all of the source material is in the Chinese language. The best that I could hope to do was to try to find articles which explained the chief teachings of the Little Flock. It may be that there would be differences even in the chief doctrines if I would have examined material beyond that which I have used. As will be noted later in the paper, there are even some

differences which are apparent in some of the writings which were examined. In these cases I have tried to present both ideas without comment. There are also certain differences between what was stated in the articles cited and the statements made in the interview with Mr. Chien-I-P'ing. I have tried to present a fair picture with the limited amount of material used.

There is another limitation which I also mention. This exists because of the fact that doctrines presented are not binding upon the church as a whole. To understand this, a little more background is necessary.

The religious body commonly referred to by the name Little Flock is not called by this name because of any desire of the group to be so named. The group does not wish to be identified by any name which brands it as a denomination. It rather prefers to be named after the city in which it has been established. This is mentioned by them as the scriptural way, since the seven churches referred to in the Book of Revelation are named in this way. For this reason the members of the various groups refer to their Churches as the Church of Taipei or the Church of Hsinchu. To distinguish between the various groups in one city, the congregations are named according to the chronological order in which they were established. Thus in Taipei there is the First Church of Taipei through the Seventh Church of Taipei¹

¹Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

The group has adopted the name the Little Flock only because of the government's insistence on the registration of all religious groups as denominations.² Because of the government's insistence on such registration and because of the reluctance of the group to register as a denomination there has been some friction in the past between this religious group and the Chinese Nationalist government. This, at least, is the opinion of Mr. K. M. Tai, a section leader in the cryptography section of the Chinese government.

Since the Little Flock holds this belief with regard to denominations, it is impossible to say that the teachings of any of the churches which make up this group are official doctrine. The group has no common creed and the teachings and practises of one church cannot be said to be binding on any other church for officially they do not recognize any organization larger than the church in a particular city.

This is a definite limitation. The information in this study comes from the Church of Taipei for the most part and particularly from the First Church of Taipei. It is not possible to say that what is taught and practised by them is true for all the groups in Taiwan. I do contend that the indications seem to be that the teachings of these groups are fairly typical of what is taught by the entire Little Flock. There are several things which indicate

²Ibid.

this: First of all, the Church of Taipei claims to be the oldest church in Taiwan.³ Secondly, the publications of the Church of Taipei are used by the other churches in other parts of Taiwan.⁴ Finally, the Church of Taipei is the largest Church in Taiwan, claiming a membership of more than seven thousand in 1956.⁵

The Thesis Discovered By This Study

Within the limitations noted the study was made. Some things are not stated because information was not available. Doctrines other than baptism are mentioned because of the relationships of one doctrine to another. Other teachings are included to demonstrate the unique doctrines and interpretations presented by this group with the hope of stimulating others to additional study of the Little Flock.

All of these items are inter-related to present the basis of the following thesis which is presented on the basis of the study which has been made.

THESIS: Although there are many errors in the teachings of the Little Flock, the baptism performed by the group should be accepted as valid and re-baptism should not be required before admittance for membership in the Lutheran Church.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER II

BASIC TEACHINGS OF THE LITTLE FLOCK

The Source of Doctrine

As the source of all teaching and preaching, the Little Flock accepts the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God and is to be followed faithfully.¹ In addition, however, the gift of prophecy by those having the gift is to be recognized.²

The Trinity

The group expresses belief in the Triune God. They say that God is a three in one God. The Chinese words which they use are "sān-wèi ì-t'ī-te Shàng-tì" which literally means "three persons together one God." They believe that the Father is God, the Son, Jesus Christ, is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. They stress that although there are three persons, there is only one God.³

Creation

Extreme Biblical literalism and faulty interpretation are evident in the doctrine of creation as taught by the

¹Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Little Flock. They hold to a double creation theory. The first creation, they claim, is that referred to in Genesis 1:1. They have much to say of what happened between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. They maintain that Genesis 1:2 which says that "the earth was without form and void" and "that darkness was upon the face of the deep" could not possibly refer to the world as God created it. Rather, they contend, the first world was in good order as soon as it was created by God. They insist that according to Job 38:5-7, God measured and plumbed the world. If He did this when He created it, then it could not have been without form and void. It would have had to be well ordered. Then they continue to explain how it became to be without form and void.⁴

In this first world there were living creatures who were people. In the first creation God also made the angels. To the chief of the angels, Satan, God gave the rule of the world. This is evidenced by such passages as John 12:31 in which Satan is called the prince of the world. But Satan rebelled against God. He wanted to have the same rank as God. And when Satan disobeyed God by this kind of action and thinking, all angels assigned to Satan followed him. The people in the world at that time also followed Satan. God judged Satan and his followers because of their evil. Satan and his angels were banished from the presence of God

⁴Anon., Ministry of the Word (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei, 1954), XXI, 1269-71.

and doomed to hell which God prepared for them.

The judgment of God was also directed against the world with darkness and a mighty flood covering the whole world. The people of the world all drowned in the great water, but their souls continued to live. These are now the ghosts or evil spirits. Only in the water can the evil spirits find peace, they claim. This, according to them, is indicated by Matthew 12:43 which says "when the unclean spirit is gone out of man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none." They certify that the condition of the world after the judgment of God is described in Jeremiah 4:23ff., which says in part:

I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. . . . I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I behold, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger. For thus hath the Lord said, the whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end.

It was into this world which had been made dark and void by the wrath and judgment of God that God brought light again and began the second creation.⁵

Man and Sin

Adam, they believe, was created by God in perfection and holiness. He was created in the image of the Son of

⁵Ibid., XXXI, 1271-73.

God, Jesus Christ. They testify that Adam was necessarily created in the image of the Son for He is the only person of God Who has an image. They believe that it was the purpose of God to create man in the image of the Son, so that when the Son would go to earth, He would be just like other people in appearance.⁶

After God created man, He desired that man choose to serve Him. God would not force man to serve Him. Man must serve God out of choice. For this reason God gave the command to man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man was to choose to follow this commandment of God and do good. He was warned against disobeying God and following the evil. The tree also stood to remind man that there was evil. Man could not act out of ignorance and say that he did not realize that there was such a thing as evil. He also knew the judgment of God that if he would follow the evil and eat of the tree, his soul would die immediately and he would lose communication with God.⁷

Satan tempted Eve and she ate. Adam did likewise. Now the judgment of God was upon man. The soul of man died immediately and his body was also subject to death. Now, unless saved, the whole of man, and especially his soul, would have to suffer the second death which consists of eternal punishment

⁶Ibid., XXXI, 1274.

⁷Ibid., XXXI, 1274.

and eternal absence of any communication with God. The sin of the first people, Adam and Eve, has passed upon all people.⁸ All are sinful at birth.⁹ All deserve eternal punishment in hell.¹⁰

**Salvation Is By Grace Alone
Through Faith In Christ**

Salvation, according to their teachings, is entirely by the grace of God and was gained by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. All emphasis is put on Christ's passive obedience for the reconciliation of mankind. The merit of His active obedience to the law is rejected. The law, they explain, was kept by Christ to gain righteousness for Himself to qualify Him to be the Savior of mankind.¹¹

The necessity of that qualification does not, in their opinion, deny the divinity of Christ. They state very strongly that Christ is true God as well as true man. The necessity of the divinity of Christ is asserted by them when they tell the procedure by which forgiveness is granted. They propose that anyone who grants forgiveness to another must suffer a loss. They present an illustration which states

⁸Ibid., XXXI, 1274.

⁹Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

¹⁰Ministry of the Word, XXXI, 1274.

¹¹Anon., Gospel Questions (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei [n.d.]), p. 40.

that when a person forgives a debt to another, he suffers a loss in so doing. In offering forgiveness to sinful mankind, God also, according to this principle, had to suffer a loss. That was the loss of His own Son. If Christ would have only been a man, then there would be no loss on the part of God. Salvation, therefore, is not possible for those who do not believe that Jesus Christ is true God as well as true man.¹²

In their teachings, they also proclaim the resurrection of Christ on the third day. Through the resurrection of Christ, they stress, it is possible to know that Christ accomplished that which He planned to do. It is also a proof that God was satisfied with what Christ had done to gain salvation for sinners. Without faith in the resurrection of Christ as well as in His death, they say a person cannot be saved.¹³

Faith in the Savior Who died and rose again is the one and only requirement for obtaining salvation, the Little Flock declares. They emphasize that it is not possible for a person to be saved by doing good or by trying to love God with the whole heart, soul, and mind and by trying to love one's neighbor as oneself. Good works, they say, come about as a result of a person's being saved, but are no requirement

¹²Ibid., p. 34.

¹³Ibid., pp. 59-65.

for obtaining salvation. They specifically mention that salvation is not obtained by faith plus hope, faith plus realization of sins, faith plus doing good, faith plus praying, faith plus confession, or faith plus baptism. These things, they point out, are attached (Chinese word is "fù-shū-yü") to faith and salvation, but are not requirements (Chinese word is "t'iao-chien"). To obtain salvation there is no other requirement than faith.¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 99-128.

CHAPTER III

FIVE TYPES OF SERVICES CONDUCTED

Service for Preaching the Gospel

There are normally five different types of services which are conducted by the Church of Taipei. A consideration of these services gives more insight into the doctrines and practises of the Little Flock. The first service is the service for preaching the gospel. This service is intended for those who are not saved. However, there are certain admonitions given to each member concerning these services. First, they are all supposed to attend. They should not think that because they are already saved, they do not need to come. They still need to attend in order that they might be able to help with whatever needs to be done for the service. This includes bringing unsaved with them to the service and looking after them during the service. The members are also admonished not to worry about whether the preaching for this service is good or not. They should just be concerned about people being saved.¹

Service for Praying

For the service for praying there are certain suggestions,

¹Anon., Basic Christian Knowledge and Training (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei [n.d.]), I, 85-90.

which, they say, ought to be observed. Each person should concentrate and not allow other thoughts to come into his mind. The prayers should be real and they should not be very long. A person should pray the same in public as he does in private. This means for one thing that a person who speaks only a few sentences in private prayers should not speak long prayers in public.²

Service for Employing Special Gifts

In the service for employing special gifts of grace, there should be restrictions so that this service does not become the one considered the most important. The gift of prophecy by those speaking in tongues in these services is to be recognized. It is to be observed, however, that the gift of prophecy in tongues is not to be excessive and is never to be presented unless there is one present who has the gift of interpretation. In accordance with the direction of I Corinthians 14, they say that women are to remain silent during this service and the men are to be restrained. All should be given an opportunity to demonstrate their particular gifts of the spirit, but everyone should act so that all things are done in good order and no one should take up all the time for himself.³

²Ibid., I, 95-100.

³Ibid., I, 101-2.

Service for Listening to the Sermon

This service is particularly for the ones who are saved. All the saved brothers and sisters should attend this service so that they may receive the grace that is offered by God through the preaching of the Word. Everyone who attends must be very careful not to be prejudiced and think that the sermon is not good. It must be remembered that it is God Who supplies the words for the sermon and if a person is prejudiced against the sermon, no grace is possible for him through it.⁴

Holy Communion

The service of Holy Communion or the breaking of bread is conducted every Sunday. The celebrant is usually one of the elders but it may be any one of the brothers. A round loaf of bread and grape wine are used as the elements. It was stated that it is not acceptable to use grape juice instead of wine.⁵

The main purpose of this service is to thank and praise God. The purpose, they say, is not preaching and praying. The service, as they celebrate it, is in two parts. The one part is remembering the Lord. This means that the believer is reminded that he was a sinner who deserved to die eternal

⁴Ibid., I, 103-4.

⁵Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

death, but God pitied him and Jesus Christ came into the world to die for him. The one who participates in the service should remember that Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died to gain for him the forgiveness of sins.⁶

The second part of the service centers around demonstrating the unity which exists among all the children of God. This is demonstrated as all drink of the wine and break and eat of the round loaf as it is passed from one to another.⁷

In their explanation of the meaning of Communion, there are some things which are not very clear. There is, for instance, a difference of opinion concerning the real presence. Mr. Chien-I-P'ing stated in the interview with him that he did not believe that those who partake eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord, but that the bread and wine are merely in remembrance of the body and blood of the Lord. One writer says that if a person does not discern the Lord's body and blood as being received in Communion, he is guilty of the body of the Lord.⁸

Those eligible to partake of Communion are all those who are believers and are baptized. Members of other churches may attend, if they make their intentions known

⁶Basic Christian Knowledge and Training, I, 105.

⁷Ibid., I, 106.

⁸Ibid., I, 107.

to the elders before the service. Before any person attends, however, he must examine himself to make sure that he belongs to the Lord.⁹

⁹Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

There are certain things which have to be noticed that in the beginning, at least, the Little Flock may have been

¹⁰Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

CHAPTER IV

ORGANIZATION AND OTHER MATTERS

The Functions of the Ministry

Each of the seven congregations which compose the Church of Taipei are organized in a similar manner. This seems to indicate that the organization may be the same in most congregations of the Little Flock. Each congregation is organized with presbyters and a church council which are responsible for the functions of the ministry within the congregation. There are no ordained ministers and the preaching and conducting of services is carried on by direction of the presbyters and the council. For the preaching, all male members of the congregation may be called upon, since according to their belief, every believer is eligible to preach. Normally the speakers are scheduled according to a definite order, but occasionally, as the spirit gives utterance, an unscheduled speaker may present the message of the day.¹

Similarities and Differences with Churches of Christ

There are certain things which seem to indicate that in the beginning, at least, the Little Flock may have been

¹Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

influenced by the Churches of Christ. One thing that indicates this is that Stone, who is possibly Barton Stone, one of the early leaders in the Churches of Christ movement, is the only foreigner quoted in any of the material which was studied for this paper.²

This in itself is not much of an indication. But this fact coupled with some of the teachings put forth by the Little Flock may show some early connection. The Little Flock's insistence on anti-creedalism, every Sunday Holy Communion, use of New Testament terminology in naming of churches, rejection of denominations, and extreme literalism in Scriptural interpretation are some of the same points stressed by the Churches of Christ.³

On the other hand, there are some differences which the Little Flock has with the Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ have never rejected an ordained ministry. Again, the speaking in tongues is something which the Churches of Christ have never emphasized.

²Anon., Ministry of the Word (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei, 1952), XI, 186.

³J. L. Neve, Churches and Sects of Christendom (Blair, Nebraska: Lutheran Publishing House, 1952), pp. 382-93.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE FLOCK'S DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

Various Kinds of Salvation

In order to understand the position which the group takes concerning baptism, their teaching concerning various kinds of salvation must first be mentioned. While maintaining that only faith is necessary for salvation and asserting that the requirement for obtaining salvation is not "faith plus baptism," they also state that baptism is necessary for one kind of salvation. For eternal salvation, soul salvation, body salvation, and day to day salvation, baptism is not necessary. These terms they do not explain. But they say that the salvation of the unbaptized thief on the cross gives evidence that baptism is not necessary for these kinds of salvation.¹

But there is one kind of salvation for which baptism is both important and necessary. That is salvation from the extent of sins. This is a step toward the teaching of holiness and perfection after a believer has received baptism. They do not go all the way on this, however, and say that all capacity for sin is eradicated by baptism or that the baptized believer does not commit sin. The approach

¹Anon., Gospel Questions (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei [n.d.]), p. 126.

seems to be that once in grace through baptism, a person may not fall from grace, although he does occasionally commit sin.²

The Benefits of Baptism

The ideas of this group concerning the benefits of baptism, however, are somewhat confusing even with regard to the salvation from the extent of sin. They do say that baptism is not a requirement for salvation. This is by faith alone.³ Then again, another writer maintains that baptism is as necessary as faith and repentance to enter the kingdom of God and receive the new birth.⁴ Again, one states that baptism is a ceremony to announce to the world that a person has come out from the extent of sins and is saved.⁵ But on this very point another writer says that baptism is much more than just a ceremony to announce to people that a person has been converted and has come out from the extent of sins. This writer says that baptism is a practical procedure which gives the forgiveness of sins.⁶

²Ibid., p. 126.

³Ibid.

⁴Anon., Ministry of the Word (Taipei, Taiwan: The Church of Taipei, 1952), XI, 182.

⁵Gospel Questions, p. 126.

⁶Ministry of the Word, XI, 185.

A person should be baptized, according to their position, as one of the first things after he has believed. This importance of baptism they draw from the fact that at the beginning of the New Testament, John the Baptist was sent to preach and to baptize. Since the New Testament was begun with baptism, they conclude that it must be very important. This importance is also demonstrated by the fact that Jesus Christ was baptized, although He was the Son of God and the Savior.⁷

In stressing the importance of baptism, the Church of Taipei refutes the claim of those who teach that baptism by water is not necessary for those who have been baptized by the Spirit. They say that the work of guiding people to return to the Lord is not finished until they have received baptism. For their proof of this, they point out that the Spirit did not take Philip away from the Ethiopian eunuch until he had given baptism.⁸

Those Eligible for Baptism

Those eligible for baptism are those who believe. This, according to their writings, is their only criterion. They say that a person should be baptized immediately after he believes so that the Holy Spirit can begin to work strongly

⁷Ibid., XI, 178-79.

⁸Ibid., XI, 180.

and thoroughly in him. They mention the fact that although Paul and Silas had been beaten before they were cast into prison, they still thought that it was important for the converted jailer to receive baptism as soon as he believed. They didn't feel that they could wait until the wounds healed or even until the next day. They also quote Acts 2:41 which says that the three thousand who gladly received the Word were baptized on the same day.⁹

In practise, however, there is some difference. Before a person is baptized, he is questioned by the church council and they decide whether or not he is really ready for baptism. This may be on the same day that a person says that he believes or it may be quite a while afterwards, if the church council does not feel that the applicant's faith is really as full and complete as he claims.¹⁰

Infant baptism is rejected by the group. They do not baptize those "who cannot distinguish their left hand from their right." They do not baptize them because they do not think that they can believe. To put this principle into practise, they do not baptize anyone who has not reached the age of thirteen.¹¹

⁹Ibid., XI, 181.

¹⁰Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

¹¹Ministry of the Word, XI, 189.

Mode and Method of Baptism

The only form of baptism which they practise is that of immersion or dipping the whole body into water. Their main Scripture proof of this is Matthew 3:16 which states that after Jesus was baptized He went up out of the water. It is in this connection that they quote Stone as saying, "baptism is just what we read about it in the New Testament; namely those who were baptized dipped themselves into the water." The Little Flock criticizes those who do not follow this mode of baptism and say that since the Bible gives no other mode, no other mode should be used.¹²

They make much of the fact that any believer is authorized to baptize. They reject the teachings of those who say that certain ones in the church are the ones who have the responsibility to do the baptizing. To deny any believer the right to baptize at any time, they claim, is to reject the clear teachings of the Bible.¹³ However, they do say that the presbyters or members of the church council are usually the ones who do the baptizing.¹⁴

Their writings do not make any clear statement about the words which are used as the baptism formula. In answer to a question, Mr. Chien-I-P'ing said that when he baptizes

¹²Ibid., XI, 186.

¹³Ibid., XI, 191.

¹⁴Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

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¹²Ibid., XI, 186.

¹³Ibid., XI, 191.

¹⁴Chien-I-P'ing, Interview.

a magical performance, for which certain words and actions are absolutely necessary"¹⁶

Since there is nothing in the administration of the baptism performed by the Little Flock which is essentially contrary to the institution and command of Christ, it should be considered valid.

¹⁶John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), p. 83.

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