

Holy Baptism and the Revival of Church Worship in the Church of Scotland—1850-1930

THE *Tracts for the Times* raised the question of Baptismal Regeneration in the minds of many within the Church of Scotland. This doctrine tended to be condemned out of hand at the commencement of the revival of worship in the Established Church. While many argued that the National Church, if she was to recover from the effects of the Disruption and to check the loss of members to the growing Scottish Episcopal Church, must speedily reform her public worship, and while it was openly alleged that a National Church demands a liturgy, one chief reason why few could countenance the Church's adopting the *Book of Common Prayer* was its teaching on Baptismal Regeneration. Bonar, one of the pioneers in Liturgical reform in the Church of Scotland, objected to the *Book of Common Prayer* because of "the superstitious rites that it seems occasionally to countenance, and to the blemishes attaching alike to its baptismal and burial services".⁽¹⁾ Dr Robert Lee, the leading perpetrator of "innovations" in public worship, condemned the Anglican doctrine as un-Scriptural. He said: "The child that was baptized and so regenerated and made a child of God, exhibits no appreciable difference, as he grows up and develops his disposition and character, from another who is still, according to the theory, a child of the devil, polluted with original sin, and therefore lying under the curse of God. Which facts . . . show that the regeneration in question does not take place in or by Baptism, or that it amounts to nothing at all: that 'grafting into the Body of Christ', and 'being regenerate with the Holy Spirit'—that these grand phrases are mere empty words, high-sounding nothings, the dictates and the means of superstition".⁽²⁾

Yet an important letter to Dr Crawford, Convener of the newly appointed Committee on Aids to Devotion, which urged the preparation of a devotional manual for Scots abroad, complained that the current "idea of Baptism with

⁽¹⁾ A. R. Bonar, *Presbyterian Liturgies*, p.7.

⁽²⁾ Quoted in R. H. Story, *Life and Remains of Robert Lee*, vol. II, p.104.

many is very low and erroneous, being often looked upon as little more than giving the child a name". (1)

One of the fruits of the revival of worship was the re-attachment of much spiritual significance to Baptism. In 1918 Professor James Cooper said that until comparatively recently it was held by many in Scotland to be superstitious to "attach much significance" to Baptism. He also attributed the decline in the number of requests for the Sacrament to defective teaching in the Church regarding it. (2) The prevailing diversity of questions put to sponsors at Infant Baptism in the early years of the revival is proof of the lack of coherence in the current interpretation on the significance of the rite. As the revival developed Holy Baptism was more frequently administered in Church, and with more dignity and uniformity. The revival of worship influenced the prevailing view of Baptism in the Church chiefly in three ways: (1) It asserted that the rite was no mere "educational pledge" on the part of the parents, but that in Holy Baptism God acts; (2) it reminded the Church that the verb "exhibit" as used in the Church's Confessional Standards means "applies"; (3) it clarified the distinction between "regeneration" and "conversion".

In its baptismal teaching the revival of worship held that it was foisting no new teaching upon the Church, but was merely pointing out what was the defined, historical teaching of the Church on the Sacraments. Indeed, amid the current pleas for relaxed subscription to the Church's Standards by her office-bearers, in view of the break up of the old Calvinist orthodoxy, the high sacramental teaching of the Standards, particularly of the *Scots Confession*, kept many loyal to these documents, who had departed considerably in other respects from an orthodox Calvinist position. This was true, for example, of the strong, Broad Church element, which, through the Church Service Society, exercised an important influence on the revival of worship, and of the Scottish Church Society, which strove to establish Catholic teaching as well as Catholic forms of worship. Thus Dr Thomas Leishman, interpreting the attitude of the Scots at the time when the *Second Prayer Book of Edward VI* was used in Scotland, could say that the Scots had no difficulty in using the Baptismal Service of the book, because its theology was agreeable to Calvin's *Catechism*

(1) Letter from Dr John Smith to Dr Crawford, 20.4.1857.

(2) Report of the Scottish Church Society, 1917-18, p.23.

and the *Scots Confession*.⁽¹⁾ What inspired this re-interpretation of the baptismal teaching of the Church's Standards?

Edward Irving, not the Tractarians, was the true father in Scotland of a fresh acknowledgement of the vital spiritual union effected in the Sacraments between the soul and Christ, and in particular of the fact of Baptismal Regeneration. Irving claimed that the discovery of the reality of sacramental grace had revolutionized his own life, although by this time he was already a famous divine.⁽²⁾ Some, indeed, have thought that if the Church of Scotland had heeded Irving's sacramental teaching at the time, she might have had, instead of the Disruption, a sacramental revival in her own Church before, or contemporary with, the Oxford Movement.⁽³⁾

In Irving's teaching we find that emphasis which was to characterize the teaching of the Scottish Church Society on Baptism—the distinction between Regeneration and Conversion; the refusal to magnify the importance of Conversion at the expense of the reality, even the necessity, of the spiritual experience of Baptism; the acknowledgement that the grace of Baptism extends over the whole of life; the assertion that God has given to His Church, Baptism to engraft and the Eucharist to nourish.

The testimony of the Catholic Apostolic Church was a continual reminder of the distinction between Regeneration and Conversion. This Church exercised a very important influence on the revival of worship, because of the appeal which its magnificent liturgy made to the compilers of *Euchologion*, and to others who were attracted by an eclectically constructed service-book; and because its baptismal teaching was re-interpreted for the National Church by Dr John Macleod in his treatise on Baptism,⁽⁴⁾ which became the classic statement of the doctrine for Scottish High Churchmen.

Irving, however, was careful to square his baptismal teaching with the Calvinism of the Church's Standards. He wrote: "But, while the Church according to the practice of the Apostles, doth never speak of Baptism as less than it

⁽¹⁾ T. Leishman, *The Ritual of The Church of Scotland*, p. 315.

⁽²⁾ see E. Irving, *The Confessions of Faith and the Books of Discipline of The Church of Scotland*, preface, p.C.

⁽³⁾ Dr H. J. Wotherspoon held this view.

⁽⁴⁾ *The Holy Sacrament of Baptism: The Place Assigned to It in the Divine Economy of Grace and the Present Need in Scotland of Explicit Teaching in Regard to It.*

really is and ought to be, and always is, to a believer ; nor of the baptized as less than they ought to be, if they have faith ; she doth not thereby enter into the secret counsels of God, and determine whether the person who hath received the seed of righteousness by faith be one of God's hidden ones who are chosen in Christ, or whether he be one whom Satan hath introduced into the fold, and to whom God permitted his most faithful ministers unwittingly to open the door ". (1) Also, he could say : " The gift of faith we never set forth as a consequence of Baptism, but as an act of the Divine will ". (2) This is still the " Protestant " view of the Sacrament, which Pusey condemned, because, in his view, instead of asserting that a Sacrament gives something in itself, it makes the faith of the right recipient the consecrating principle and that which really " brings down Christ to the heart of each individual ". (3)

There is a difficulty here which was never faced up to, at least never solved, during the revival of worship. The general tendency was to emphasize the positive statements of the Standards regarding sacramental grace, while disregarding their statements regarding Divine Election, which so limit these statements. By this evasion High Churchmen sought to bring the Church of Scotland nearer to a sacramental view of the Church than she had been since the Reformation. H. J. Wotherspoon openly admitted that " orthodox Calvinism took the position (its doctrine of the elect permitting no more) that in the case of the regenerate, regeneration normally takes place in Baptism, but so that all baptized persons are not undoubtedly regenerate ". (4) John Macleod declared his rejection of any view of Baptism which would exclude from any experience of the grace of God in Baptism those who do not finally persevere. (5) The tendency was to stress the fact that in Baptism the soul is passive. God engrafts and regenerates. H. J. Wotherspoon said that " the human will has no other part than the effort to be passively receptive ". (6)

But, in admitting that all who are baptized are not necessarily saved, they seem to have put all the emphasis on the human will, and said that while God engrafts, the shoot

(1) E. Irving, *Homilies on The Sacraments*, vol. II, pp. 422-3.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 430.

(3) *Tracts for The Times*, No. 69, p. 176.

(4) H. J. Wotherspoon, *Religious Values in the Sacraments*, p. 169.

(5) J. Macleod, *The Holy Sacrament of Baptism*, pp. 144-7.

(6) H. J. Wotherspoon in *The Pentecostal Gift*, p. 123.

may wither and die, that while the grace given in Baptism can enable the baptized to make that obedience of faith which Baptism imposes, it does not ensure the response of faith. Thus we are told: "The contents attributed to Baptism are all of them acts of God. *He* engrafts; *He* regenerates; *He* remits sin; *He* calls and 'engages' us to be the Lord's. God does it, and it is done. But nothing is asserted as to our acceptance or use of this grace, nor of our answer to this calling. We ought in answer to repent, to believe, to turn to God with all our heart, to hold to Christ and to grow up into Him. But Baptism does not ensure our doing of any of these things. It only calls for them and makes them possible Much is true of Baptism which may not be true of each baptized person". (1)

Again Dr Wotherspoon could say, "Nothing is asserted as to our response to the word and the gift of life, God, nor as to anything which depends on our response. God has granted to the baptized severance from the old condemned life. God has set them in the kingdom of His grace, in which is the forgiveness of sins. God has engrafted them into the humanity which by the resurrection of Christ is alive with eternal life. The Holy Spirit, Porter of the door, has opened to them the communion of His own energies. They are raised into the atmosphere of the powers of the age that is coming. The calling, the election of God are upon them. All this we can confidently affirm. What we cannot affirm is that they will undoubtedly give diligence to make their calling and election sure. What we cannot know is that they will embrace the appropriate gift of God in Christ. It is possible to receive the grace of God in vain". (2)

This teaching failed to emphasize the action of God in man's response of faith. It rightly reminded the Church that the action of God must precede faith, that the Church comes before the individual on the Catholic view of the Church. (3) Its emphasis on the prevenient grace of God in the case of Infant Baptism was timely. But it did not consider adequately the fact that the faith by which the baptized can alone appropriate the grace of Baptism is also an act of God, and that to assert that in Baptism God truly engrafts, but that the graft may wither and die, is to attri-

(1) H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine*, pp. 41-2.

(2) H. J. Wotherspoon in *The Pentecostal Gift*, p. 124.

(3) H. J. Wotherspoon, *Religious Values in The Sacraments*, p. 167.

bute imperfection to the work of God, where only perfection can be asserted. If God begins the work of Regeneration, He is also faithful to complete it.

The revival of worship, however, did good service to the Church in stressing that Christ Himself is the Minister of the Sacraments, duly celebrated, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, making them the effectual means of applying to believers that which the Sacraments signify. We hear much of "the prevailing low, Zwinglian view of the Sacraments", in the discussions of the Scottish Church Society. (1) A comparison of John Macleod's treatise with the sacramental views of Principal William Cunningham of New College is illuminating on this point.

The revival of worship expressed its view that "Grace may be neglected and unimproved; it may be received to condemnation, rather than to salvation: but in order that there may be any response on our part to the great Redemptive Acts of God, God's own help is necessary. We may believe, then, that with God's calling there is given God's Spirit. It is at least made possible that the soul should meet mercy with repentance, and love with faith. Baptism is not a mockery". (2) Basing its argument largely upon *Larger Catechism*, Question 167, it concluded: "Reception of Baptism is the normal starting point of the spiritual development of the individual soul, and the course of that development exhibits the unfolding of the content of Baptism. This is the view of the Catholic Church, and of the Church of Scotland in its Standards". (3) It was undismayed by the fact that the Church of Scotland Standards do not confine the membership of the Church to the baptized. The general teaching was that Baptism is to be administered only where there are signs of God's election. These were claimed to be, in the case of adults, faith and repentance; in the case of infants, the appointment of God's providence, recognized where there is due sponsorship.

John Macleod in his treatise seems to follow the Catholic Apostolic Church in identifying Election with Baptism. For Macleod, Baptism means election and incorporation in the Divine Life of the New Adam. He could say: "Holy Baptism is a Divine Act wrought for the purpose of putting the believing recipient in the assured possession of blessings other and beyond those which can be attained by such

(1) see Scottish Church Society Annual Reports, *passim*.

(2) Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 95.

faith as stops short of the reception of that rite". (1) For him "Baptism is ordinarily the Sacrament of God's election and the only Divinely provided means of administering admission to the peculiar grace and vocation belonging to the Church". (2) For Macleod election is a bestowal of grace which does not alter individual responsibility. (3) He accepts an Election within election. The baptized are elect, but only those who persevere are "the Elect". Macleod showed something of the Tractarian concern over post-baptismal sin. He held that the baptized are on trial for the crown of life which they may finally miss. (4)

John Macleod's teaching on Baptism was in Irving's tradition, with its deep conviction of the reality of the Incarnation as the pre-supposition of its sacramentalism, with its viewing the forgiveness of sin and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost as the real consequences of Baptism. Dr Wotherspoon also held that washing, not burial, is the primary symbolism in Baptism. (5) Irving had written, "From the moment of Baptism and ever onward till the separation of soul and body, we ought to look upon our body as a pure and cleansed substance inhabited by the Holy Ghost, and by Him empowered to live the life of Christ and keep the commandments of God blameless". (6)

Later, Brilioth argued that in other countries also, where nineteenth century religious movements were fertilized by Romanticism, kindred thoughts occur of Baptism as the instrument of objective grace. He cited the teaching of Gruntvig, as an instance. (7)

The Scottish revival proclaimed that Baptism, which is a mere prophetic symbol devoid of any content of grace, is not Baptism in the Christian sense. It deprecated an evangelicalism which preached Christ, in place of His Church and His Sacraments. Strongly incarnational in its theology and considerably influenced by Anglo-Catholic teaching, it did not hesitate to speak of the Church as an "extension of the Incarnation", and of grace as being invariably sacramentally conveyed. Thus Macleod could say: "The Church of the Apostles joyfully acquiesced in

(1) J. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 122.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 139.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 153, cf. *Tracts for The Times*, No. 88; H. P. Liddon, *Life of E. B. Pusey*, vol. III, p. 371.

(5) H. J. Wotherspoon, *Religious Values in The Sacraments*, p. 165.

(6) E. Irving, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 435.

(7) Y. Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival*, p. 307.

the conception of grace as being invariably, because of the very fact that it proceeds from Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, either by word, ministry, or ordinance, sacramentally conveyed. All this being so, we must either accept the constitution of the Church *as sacramental*, or else assume that it was intended of God that, after the time of the Apostles, a total revolution should occur in the manner of the dispensation of grace". (1)

Macleod held that neglect of Baptism was the chief cause of the decline of the Church in his time, (2) and that the notion that no grace is obtainable through this Sacrament, which is not obtainable apart from its use, was emptying the churches.

A thorough-going critical analysis of John Macleod's treatise in the light of the traditional interpretation of the Church's Standards appeared in 1897. (3) The confusions and inconsistencies of Macleod's argument are noted, and his failure to square his teaching on baptismal engrafting with the Church's view that the Sacrament is an outward, visible sign of a spiritual reality which is not so conjoined to it that the first necessarily effects the second, and his use of the term election in senses not intended by the Standards, are set out.

Charges of teaching "Baptismal Regeneration" were made against Professor Cooper in the East St. Nicholas, Aberdeen, case, and against Mr Charleson in the Thornliebank case. In practice, throughout the Church the popular emphasis was on Baptism; in the case of adults as a confession of personal faith in Christ, and in the case of infants as an educational pledge on the part of the sponsors. Doubtless the Sacrament was administered with more solemnity and dignity, as the influence of the liturgical revival made itself felt through the practice of the younger clergy, and under the guidance of volumes such as *Eucho-logion* and the *St. Giles' Service Book*, both of which were used as models by probationers for a time. But "decision for Christ" at the "years of discretion" was emphasized at the expense of making much of the state of baptismal grace.

The Scottish Church Society, which in some ways was the Oxford Movement of the Church of Scotland, liked to recall that, like that movement, it started with a re-assertion

(1) J. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

(2) J. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

(3) "Dr Theophilus", *Baptismal Regeneration in The Church of Scotland*, an open letter to Dr John Macleod of Govan.

of the reality of the grace of Baptism.⁽¹⁾ *The Church Times*, indeed, saw in its baptismal teaching the most revolutionary step in the Scottish Church at the time. Commenting on the 5th "Aim" of the Society, "The promotion of the religious education and pastoral care of the young, on the basis of Holy Baptism", this paper said: "None but a Scotsman can fully understand the depth and far-reachingness of this article, for if, as the Apostle held, Baptism is election, and the baptized are the elect who have to make their calling and election sure, and Scots are to be taught accordingly, the gloom of Calvinism will soon be rolled away, never again, we trust, to return. It may be urged that the article has no other meaning than is involved in the 28th chapter of the *Confession*. Granted, yet the fact remains that the training of young Presbyterians has not hitherto impressed the value of baptismal grace apart from some other operation over which they have not got the slightest control".⁽²⁾

Cooper and others insisted that Baptism must be accepted as the basis and foundation of all instruction and training of baptized children in faith and worship. Children are to be treated by adults as follow-members of the Body of Christ.⁽³⁾ Baptism into the Body of Christ joins us to Christ and also to one another. In this light the schism in the Church, which in contemporary Scotland masqueraded as healthy sectarian rivalry, was, amid the bitterness of the Disestablishment campaign, seen by some in the Established Church as grave sin. Amid the plethora of revivalists and mission-hall meetings which flooded Scotland after the Moody and Sankey campaign, this fresh interpretation of Baptism stressed evangelistic work on Churchly lines. The fact of Baptism ought to act as an urge to the baptized to the self-committal of Conversion.⁽⁴⁾

Individualism, however, remained very strong. The popular emphasis in preaching continued to be the individual's experience of Christ, rather than a sacramental view of the Church. Children were exhorted to "love Jesus", or to "behave like children who attended Sunday School", rather than to improve the grace of their Baptism. Nor, for the same reason, did the fact of Baptism into one Body

(1) J. Cooper, *The Revival of Church Principles in the Church of Scotland*. Oxford, 1895.

(2) *Church Times*, 11.11.1892.

(3) J. Cooper, *One Baptism, A Sermon*, Aberdeen, 1.9.1895.

(4) J. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

inspire the community sense and social responsibility it ought to have engendered, until much later. It contributed, however, to the zealous solicitude for the poorer classes, which was a notable feature of the High Church movement in Scotland as in England. The full sacramental teaching, with the corresponding liturgical worship, found a ready acceptance among the plainer people and among those who had little "Church" background.

Sprott succeeded, through the Committee on Aids to Devotion, in having the Apostles' Creed recommended for use at the administration of Baptism. (1) The Church, however, strenuously declined to enforce uniformity of worship, even on a vital matter like the vows at Baptism. It was to prove easier to put a *Book of Common Order* through the Church courts, which was possibly not representative entirely of the prevailing viewpoint in the Church, than it was to enforce any new Directory for Public Worship. Proof of the antagonism to any such enforced uniformity is seen in the rejection by the General Assembly of the very reasonable suggestions of its Committee on the Proper Conduct of Public Worship and the Celebration of the Sacraments, in 1894.

The fresh interpretation of Baptism which the revival of worship inspired influenced public worship mainly in two ways :

(1) It delivered the Church of Scotland from the "gathered Church" and "believers' Baptism" views, which, amid the sectarianism, the evangelicalism, and the individualism of the time, offered a real threat to the Church's spiritual heritage. There was a danger that the Church might come to view her task as that of a permanent missionary society planted amid a pagan community. Instead she remained the National Church. In her public worship she ministered to children and to adults who were at all stages of spiritual development. Her worship was designed not to minister to the converted, or chiefly to convert the unconverted, but to mediate the grace of God, through the Presence and Action in the midst of His Church of the Incarnate and Ascended Son, to all the baptized, for by Baptism they were all seen to be members of the household of faith. Baptism in John Macleod's phrase, meant "entrance into a state of grace in which by an act of will we are to abide". (2)

(1) *Dictionary of National Biography*, George W. Sprott.

(2) J. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

(2) It greatly influenced the theory of Church worship as an offering made unto God. All the baptized were bidden to see themselves as a priesthood set apart to offer sacrifices unto God. Again, largely through John Macleod, the Catholic Apostolic conception of public worship as "a command performance" exerted an influence. Macleod held, of course, that all improvements in public worship which did not make the Eucharist the regular Sunday Morning worship of the Church were purely secondary (and often by their trivial nature savoured of mere aestheticism). These views were shared by Cooper, the Wotherpoon brothers, Cromarty Smith and others. The Eucharist is the only mode of worship which is fully acceptable to God. It is the worshippers' co-operation with the Ascended Lord in His Heavenly Ministry. They sacramentally enact on earth that which He is doing in Heaven, it is a commemorative sacrifice linked supernaturally with Christ's pleading of His Sacrifice in Heaven. This view of worship, in which Baptism played an important part, did not find wide acceptance in the Church, which preferred to view Christ's Heavenly work as Intercession, not Sacrifice, which identified the Lord's Supper with the Risen, rather than the Ascended Christ; but it did much to strengthen, amid the frequently heard pleas that public worship must be objective, the idea which found wide acceptance towards the end of our period of study, that public worship is throughout an offering made to an objective Presence.

Public worship had become more homely and incarnational. The Calvinist distrust of symbol and ceremony, and the great emphasis on instruction had been somewhat discountenanced. Attendance at Divine Service, formerly so regularly referred to as going to "hear Mr X", by whose preaching of the Word one would be exhorted to make one's calling and election sure, was viewed not so much as preliminaries and sermon, but as a single act, in which the worshippers, realizing afresh through the Ministry of Word and/or Sacrament that Jesus is Lord, offered Him their worship, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, from those who had first sacrificed their wills anew to Him. Formerly, in the popular mind, the theology of the services had divided all men into two classes. The validity of religion was an intensely personal experience which had to be worked out in one's own soul. But the teaching on Baptism which was associated with the revival of worship, rooted in a tacit rejection of the doctrine of Election as it was formerly

understood, together with the teaching on the Fatherhood of God and the intense interest in the earthly Life of our Lord, united the worshippers into a community in which there was a place for all.

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