

## Order for the Administration of Holy Baptism <sup>(1)</sup>

THIS ORDER <sup>(2)</sup> was prepared by the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion, in accordance with an instruction of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1961, in collaboration with some members of the Special Commission on Baptism, and is now issued for experimental use. It takes into account the work of the Special Commission on Baptism, which pointed the Church back to the golden age of Scottish theology, represented by such men as John Craig and Robert Bruce. These men, while correcting the errors in the teaching of the Church of Rome, were equally opposed to the errors of what is popularly known as "Zwinglianism." The Sacraments were for them much more than human memorial rites: they were means used by Christ to convey Himself and His benefits to men. The Church today needs to recover the sense, which our Reformers had, that Christ is truly present and active in the preaching of the Word and in the administration of the Sacraments. The mode of His action is never mechanical—it does not operate by coercion; it is always truly personal and operates by persuasion through the *testimonium internum spiritus sancti*.

When a child is brought into the Church in Baptism, he is brought into the communion of the Holy Spirit. This does not guarantee that the child will grow into the fulness of Christian faith and discipleship: but it does mean that he is regenerated in the Reformers' sense of the term, for in the communion of the Holy Spirit he is given the possibility of growth in faith and godliness. Only those who respond in faith and obedience can rightly discern as they look back over the years, the true meaning of their Baptism.

In Baptism God relates us to Himself as children to a Father; adopting us in Christ as His children. <sup>(3)</sup>

(1) Being a paper read to a Conference of the Church Service Society held in Govan, on 7th October, 1963.

(2) Published by the Oxford University Press, 1963. 1/6d.

(3) Cf. *Our Life in Christ* by the Revd. Professor J. K. S. Reid. (S.C.M. Press, 1963). How is it that we, who have been made in the image of God, but have rebelled against him, are still in some sense human beings? The essence of humanity lies in our relationship with God, but this has been destroyed, yet we are in some sense still human. Professor Reid argues that it is "in Christ" that God still retains us as men. This applies to all men, not only to those who know Christ. But Christians have in their Baptism the seal that they have been adopted by the Father as His children in His Only Son.

In Baptism Christ relates us to Himself as members of His Body, ingrafting us into Himself.

In Baptism the Holy Spirit brings us into the communion of saints, sharing in the life of God's children.

These things are possible only because of what God has done objectively, and once and for all, in Christ. Here we have in mind the whole earthly life of our Lord as well as his death and resurrection. What we call the One Baptism of Christ began when He laid aside His heavenly glory and descended into our humanity, born of the Virgin Mary. It continued throughout the whole of His earthly life, which He lived in our name and for our sake in perfect obedience to the Father. It reached its lowest point when He sacrificed Himself to the uttermost on the Cross; and its culmination when, having risen from the dead, He ascended to the right hand of the Father, exalted as our great High Priest and Advocate. The Cross is the symbol of the whole of this One Baptism which from beginning to end was a sacrifice bearing the sins of men.

*The revised Order for Holy Baptism*

The Order begins with the rubric: *Holy Baptism shall ordinarily be ministered at Divine Service after Sermon.* This is in accordance with our Reformed tradition. We wish to eliminate private baptisms except in cases of emergency, and feel that Baptism ought to be administered "in the face of the congregation." This is the reason why we dislike the font being at the back of the church despite the appropriateness of placing it near the main door as a symbol of the truth that it is through Holy Baptism that we enter the Church. A few modern architects have attempted to design churches in such a way that the font can be at the entrance to the church and yet be in view of the whole congregation; but in most of our churches it is impossible to have it both ways. The determining consideration ought to be that Baptism should be administered in the face of the Congregation, which represents the Holy Catholic Church in the Parish.

Baptism should normally be administered after Sermon, for the Sacraments ought not to be administered apart from the preaching of the Word, and should follow the Word as its Seals. What is given in the Sacraments is the seal of the Word which has already been explained to the people. This Reformed principle is a safeguard against any magical

conception of the Sacraments, for it emphasizes that God's action is personal and that this requires our personal understanding and response.

The next rubric begins: *A Baptismal hymn having been sung. . .*" Our *Revised Church Hymnary* is very weak in the section of baptismal hymns. Too many of them ask God to bless this ordinance, as though it were our action and we had misgivings about its rightness! But the truth is that this Sacrament is the seal of what God has done for us in Christ and is now applying to the person being baptized. The hymns used at Holy Baptism should recognize that it is the Gospel which is here being sealed to a particular individual by name. (1) A note of confident assurance and praise ought therefore to dominate the choice of hymns for baptisms. Far better than our weak, sentimental baptismal hymns would be any great objective hymn of praise. (2)

After the opening text: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth," there follows the *Preamble*, which seeks to convey to the parents and to the baptized Congregation the essential significance of the Sacrament. The *Preamble* begins by quoting the words of our Lord from Matthew xxviii 18-20 as the "Warrant" for what we are about to do, but correcting the A.V. by translating "μαθητεύσατε" as "make disciples."

It goes on: "Holy Baptism is administered in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the days of His flesh took upon Himself the sins of the whole world, and submitted to the Baptism of John in the river Jordan. At His Baptism He was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His saving work, which he triumphantly accomplished in His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension." Here the pattern of the One Baptism of Christ, and not merely His Baptism in the Jordan, is brought before the minds of the people.

The *Preamble* then speaks of the Baptism of the Church with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and St. Peter's sermon calling on his hearers to be baptized with their children, and then proceeds to explain to the people the particular symbolism of Baptism. Here there is a difficulty because most of our people are accustomed only to seeing Baptism administered in a very attenuated form.

(1) Cf. P. Carnegie Simpson: *The Evangelical Church Catholic*, pp. 86 ff.

(2) For the substance of this paragraph, I am indebted to an unpublished paper prepared for the Special Commission on Baptism by the Revd. T. H. Keir, M.A., of Melrose.

Ideally it would be much better if we immersed every candidate, but since there is not much likelihood of our being able to do that for a considerable time to come, we must at least make the symbolism as clear as possible. One thing which must be utterly tabooed is the placing of a slightly damp finger on the forehead of a child and imagining that that is baptizing. In Baptism, if the candidate is not immersed, the water must clearly be seen to be poured over the head. Baptism is not merely a symbolic act of washing ; it is a symbolic act of burial. This is why the water ought to be poured, or sprinkled in sufficient quantity, for it to run over the head, which is an attenuated form of plunging the whole person under the water. "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Psalm xlii 7). Unless this symbolism is clearly carried out, people will have no clear understanding of why water is being used at all.

Why is the word "Baptism" used? It goes back to our Lord Himself, and His use of the word goes back to the fact that, in the providence of God, John the Baptist administered a rite of Baptism to Jews, thereby not only marking their decision to repent—to turn into a new way of life—but also sealing them as the slaves of the Messiah who was still to be revealed. Our Lord accepted John's Baptism, identifying Himself with sinful men in their need, and later on spoke of the Baptism He still had to be baptized with, showing that for Him His Baptism in the Jordan pointed forward to His offering of Himself on the Cross in total sacrifice for the sins of the world. Therefore in this rite the ritual of water—Baptism represents the whole of His sacrifice, right up to its culmination. Hence we speak in the *Preamble* of Baptism being administered in obedience to our Lord, not only in obedience to His word of command after His resurrection, but also in obedience to His example "who in the days of His flesh took upon Himself the sins of the world, and submitted to the Baptism of John in the river Jordan."

"At His Baptism He was anointed by the Holy Spirit." We believe that Baptism in water and the giving of the Spirit must not be separated. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches they are separated as two parts of the one rite. They call them Baptism and Chrismation. We believe this to be a mistake. <sup>(1)</sup>

(1) I was interested recently to hear a priest of the Greek Orthodox Church say, after a talk I had given on our new Baptismal Order, that we have the essence of the Sacrament of Chrismation in our Order, even though we do not have the outward rite of chrismation.

We understand Baptism to involve not only being buried with Christ, but also rising with Him into newness of life. It involves, therefore, entry into the life of the company who on the day of Pentecost became so united by the Holy Spirit to the Risen and Ascended Lord as to be the Body in and through which He continues to work in the world. The Baptism of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is therefore the middle term which connects the One Baptism of Christ with our individual Baptism. The Church was at Pentecost made the Body of Christ. Therefore all that He had done for it in the days of His flesh was, in a sense, done by it. All that He had done for us is the inheritance into which the Church was brought on the day of Pentecost. Into all of this we are admitted in our Baptism.

After speaking of Pentecost, the *Preamble* tries to explain to the man in the pew the significance of the rite: "Baptism is thus the Sacrament ordained by Christ as a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself . . ." Here the action of God in the Sacrament is emphasized by being mentioned first.

Then the *Preamble* goes on to explain the significance of the sacramental element and action: "The water signifies cleansing from sin by Christ, who died for us upon the Cross." I should have preferred this to be worded: "The water signifies the blood of Christ in which we are cleansed of our sin." The meaning, however, is the same, though I think less clearly put in the printed form. "It is poured upon the head of the baptized to signify that in Baptism we are, as St Paul said, buried with Christ into death . . ." A very ancient interpretation of the symbolism of the action likened the threefold pouring of water on the head to the threefold sprinkling of earth at a burial. But Christ's death must never be separated from His resurrection, and the symbolism of Baptism represents, in the emergence of the person from his overwhelming by the water, his emergence into the new life in Christ. The *Preamble* therefore continues from the point at which we broke off the last quotation: "that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The *Preamble* continues: "By this Sacrament we are solemnly admitted by name into membership of the Church, which is the Body of Christ . . ." The Gospel is proclaimed to us *by name*. We are admitted *by name* into membership of the Church, "and are covenanted to be wholly and only

the Lord's." Here we have to remember the fundamental Biblical understanding of "covenant." In the theology of the last few centuries covenant has too often been interpreted after the analogy of a business contract in which two equal parties make promises and commit themselves to do something. In the Bible, on the other hand, the word covenant does not suggest two equal parties, for the primary emphasis is upon God's grace in drawing men into a covenant with Himself. By this gracious condescension God lays on men an obligation which, in most instances, is prior to their conscious acceptance. Even in the case of Abraham God's gracious call and promise preceded Abraham's response of faith; and in the case of Isaac God's action came long before Isaac was capable of doing anything.

In the *Prelude* <sup>(1)</sup>, Wordsworth describes an occasion when as a young man he was deeply impressed by the beauty of a sunrise:

"My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated Spirit."

These lines, rather than a business contract, provide an analogy of the covenant of grace in which God's action comes first, and we are, as the Americans put it, "obligated" by what God has done, to respond "else sinning greatly." The understanding of Baptism found among those who practise only "Believers' Baptism" lays too much of the emphasis upon man's conscious response. The emphasis should be primarily upon what God has done, and is now doing for us. Because of this we are "obligated," we are "covenanted to be wholly and only the Lord's". The children of believers are within this "covenant and promise" under the New Testament as truly as under the Old Testament.

The passage about Jesus blessing young children is next quoted, as it was in the earlier Order. This is done in the light of the careful discussion of the passage in the 1955 *Report of the Special Commission on Baptism*, and in the volume: *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*.<sup>(2)</sup> The passage, of course, does not in the first place refer to Baptism, but as understood in the early Church, and possibly also as understood by the Gospel editor, had a direct relevance to infant Baptism, and seems to have been used from the time of the early Fathers onwards as a confirmation of the right-

<sup>(1)</sup> *Book IV, Lines 334-7.*

<sup>(2)</sup> *The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh. 1958. 10/6d.*

ness of the action of the Church in suffering the little children to come to Christ, and not "forbidding" them, which Cullmann believes to be a technical expression belonging to the early baptismal liturgy. (1)

The Order next turns to the action of the parents, or those who are *in loco parentis*: "It is the duty of those who present their children for Baptism to confess the faith wherein they are to be baptized, and to promise to bring them up in that faith, and in the way of Christ and His Church." Here the language has been made more direct than in the earlier form.

There follows the rubric: *Then, the parents or other sponsors standing, the Minister shall say to them*: "Do you present this child to be baptized, earnestly desiring that he may be ingrafted into the mystical body of Jesus Christ?"

This first question, which was not in any recent baptismal Order, is taken from John Knox's *Book of Common Order*. It has been used here to lay emphasis upon the primary thing in the Sacrament—the action of God and to make it impossible for anyone to continue to regard Baptism as merely a human act of dedication of a child by its parents.

The second question is: "Do you believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?" This is a real improvement on the old Order where the question was, either "do you receive the doctrine of the Christian Faith whereof we make confession, saying; I believe in God the Father Almighty . . ." ; or else "do you confess your faith in God as your heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier?" The former of these old alternative questions is open to criticism as suggesting that faith is a mere assent to the teaching of the Church; whereas the latter, through the wording of the first clause, comes dangerously near to suggesting unitarianism! The new form of the question unequivocally affirms the Holy Trinity and explicitly calls for a confession of existential faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

The third question is: "Do you promise, God being your helper, to teach this child the truths and duties of the Christian faith; and by prayer, precept and example, to bring *him* up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and in the ways of the Church of God?" Here the words "God being your helper" have been substituted for the earlier

(1) Oscar Cullmann: *Baptism in the New Testament*. S.C.M. Press, 1950. pp. 71ff.

wording, "in dependence on divine grace," as more likely to convey the meaning to modern parents. But still more significant is the alteration in the form of the parents' response to this question. Whereas to the two previous questions the parents have responded "I do," to the third question they respond: "I do, God being my helper." These words emphasize to the parents and to the Congregation that this promise is one which the parents are unable to give if they rely only upon their natural strength. If they are to give their child a Christian upbringing they will require to avail themselves of the help which God offers through the "means of grace." The parents must therefore practise the faith which they profess.

The Minister then says to the parents: "The Lord preserve you and the child and enable you to fulfil these promises." This is an improvement on the older form: "The Lord bless you and your *child(ren)*, and give you grace faithfully to perform these promises." The older form carries with it a suggestion of the degraded Roman conception of grace as a *donum*, whereas, of course, grace is the personal presence and help of God.

"Then"—and this is quite a radical departure from the earlier form, and I think a very good one—"addressing the congregation, he shall say:

"Dearly beloved, These vows have been made in the presence of God and of you, His people. They can be fulfilled only within the fellowship and discipline of the Church. Therefore let all stand and confess the faith." The whole congregation, together with the Minister and parents, then recite the Apostles' Creed.

I should have preferred the bidding to the congregation to have been a little more explicit, and to have read: "They can be fulfilled only within the fellowship and discipline of the Church *which maintains the faith once delivered to the saints, and endeavours to lead a Christian life.* Therefore let all stand and confess the faith." The words in italics were deleted by the committee because of its concern to keep the Service from being unduly lengthy; but the intention is that the meaning expressed in them should be understood even when the shorter wording is used. This is one of many points in the service which ought from time to time to be explained to the people on the occasion of Baptisms. To help Ministers to do this the Committee intends in time to prepare a number of very brief homilies to be used on occasion at the Minister's discretion.

The Apostles' Creed said by the whole Congregation following the bidding does have a very telling significance. It is followed by the prayer before the Baptism. This begins with the *Sursum corda*, and a very brief blessing of the Triune God: "Blessed art Thou, O God the Father, Creator of all things.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, baptized in Jordan, crucified at Calvary, risen and glorified.

Blessed art Thou, O Holy Spirit of God, Lord and Giver of Life".

This prayer could be elaborated a little more, but the Committee was concerned to keep it as brief as possible. It is followed by the *Epiclesis*: "We beseech Thee, O Lord our God, to send forth Thy Holy Spirit to sanctify us all and to bless this water to the mystical washing away of sin. . ." In the earlier order we had at this point: "ratify in heaven that which by His appointment we do upon earth." I was never very happy about that, for it seems to express the same error as we earlier noted to be characteristic of many baptismal hymns.

In the older prayer we asked only for the sanctification of the water to the spiritual use to which God has appointed it. In the new prayer, following the pattern we use in the Eucharistic Prayer, we ask for the sanctification of all who are present as well as for that of the water, and the prayer continues: "that this child, being born anew of water and the Holy Spirit, may receive the fulness of Thy Grace, and ever be found in the number of Thine elect; Grant that *his* name may be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and that, buried with Christ in Baptism, *he* may rise with Christ into newness of life, and be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord."

This seems to me to be an incomparably more adequate prayer than the one we had previously. I particularly like the petition "that his name may be written in the Lamb's Book of Life," which is virtually identical with the language of the Eastern baptismal liturgies.

It may be noted in passing that the revisers have dropped the Collect which was in the older order: "O Blessed Saviour, who didst take little children into Thine arms and bless them; take this child, we beseech Thee, and seal *him* for thine own: who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, world without end." Their feeling was that this prayer might more appropriately be used privately by the parents before bringing the child

to the church ; or by the Minister if he goes out from the church to bring the parents and children in, before he brings them into the church.

After the prayer the rubric makes it clear that the Congregation shall stand when the child is presented at the Font. In most cases the Congregation will remain standing from the time they recite the Creed, but if in any place they should adopt another posture for the pre-baptismal prayer they should now be called upon to stand.

The rubric also says that the parent, when presenting the child at the Font, shall give the child's name to the Minister, and indicates that if the Minister wishes to take the child into his arms this is the appropriate moment to do so. The Minister is then to call the child by *his* Christian name or names and to pour or sprinkle water on *his* head, saying : " N . . . , I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, descend upon thee, and dwell in thine heart for ever. Amen." This formula and blessing are to be repeated for each child baptized. Thereafter may be said or sung : " The Lord bless thee and keep thee. . ." There are varied opinions about the practice of having the Aaronic blessing sung by the Congregation. In the Old Testament this is exclusively a priestly blessing. It is never used by the whole Congregation as has been widely practised among us. In the new Order its use is optional.

The next rubric directs the Minister, "*using the Christian name(s) and surname of each child baptized*" to say : " According to Christ's commandment N . . . N . . . is now received into the membership of the Holy Catholic Church, and is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and to be His faithful soldier(s) and servant(s) unto *his* life's end." It is desirable, especially in large Congregations, that the surname of the children baptized should be intimated to the Congregation ; but the surname has nothing to do with the Baptism. The Committee considered other possible ways in which the full names of the children could be intimated to the Congregation, but felt that this is the most suitable way to do it.

There is then read St Matthew xviii 5, 6, 10. The Revd. Professor T. F. Torrance is the person responsible for suggesting this, which brings a solemn warning before the whole Congregation of their responsibility so to order their

manner of life that it shall not be a hindrance to the growth of faith in the hearts of Christ's little ones.

The concluding prayers are a drastic revision of the prayers in the old Order and have to a large extent been entirely rewritten. "O God our heavenly Father, whose Son Jesus Christ took little ones into His arms and blessed them: we give Thee thanks that Thou hast received *this child* into Thy Church and sealed *him* as Thine own. Grant, we beseech Thee, that *he*, being ingrafted into Christ the True Vine, may abide in Him for ever, growing in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man. Lead him through the perils of this earthly life, and bring *him* in due time to witness a good confession, and to persevere therein to the end; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The next prayer contains a brief reference to the mother's deliverance. The Committee felt that this ought to be included, since we have no churching service, but it was careful to avoid the language that was common not so many years ago when childbirth was spoken of as the time of the mother's "pain and peril." The Church ought not to encourage unhealthy tensions and fears, and so the new Order uses language as free from emotional overtones as possible:

"Almighty God, we thank Thee for thy love and mercy to *this mother(s)* whom Thou hast delivered to rejoice over *her* little one. Hallow, we beseech Thee, the *home* enriched by the birth of *this child*. Grant Thy help to the parents that in gratitude and faith they may order all their family life in the way of Thy commandments, serving one another in love; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Most merciful God, in whose Church there is but one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism, grant us grace ever to acknowledge the Lordship of Thy Son Jesus Christ, to confess with our whole lives the one true faith, and to dwell in love and unity with all who have been baptized in His Name; through the same Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, who taught His Church ever to pray and say: 'Our Father...'"

"Then may be sung a hymn or doxology." The Committee suggested a doxology as an alternative to a hymn, for two reasons: (1) The Service ought not to be lengthened unnecessarily. (2) The right note at this point is an objective paean of praise followed by the Benediction.

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