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Some Recent Trends in the Theology of Baptism

(Concluded)

BAPTISM AND THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

In addition to what has been said already, a third battleground for those who take up this question of baptism is the place to be accorded to the work of the Holy Spirit. Does a candidate for baptism receive the Holy Spirit at the same time as he is baptized, or does he receive it at a later stage and as a result of a separate ceremony? This, broadly speaking, is the question that confronts us today, and various attempts have been made to answer it. As in our consideration of the other two aspects of this problem, it is to the New Testament that we must turn first of all.

Here we find that there is no real unanimity among scholars once we go beyond the simple statement that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the new feature of Christian Baptism as compared with proselyte baptism and the baptism of John.¹²¹ The passages usually cited in making this point include *Mark* i. 8, *Matt.* iii. 11, *Luke* iii. 16, *Acts* i. 5, xi. 15-16, xix. 1-7, but one glance at them soon gives rise to many doubts as to the precise relationship between baptism in water and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. In the case of Cornelius, for example, it is said that when Peter saw that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, he said: "Can any man forbid the water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (*Acts* x. 44ff.). On the other hand, in the case of the Ephesian converts, we are told that they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit fell upon them subsequently (*Acts* xix. 1-7). These two examples will suffice to show us the difficulty that confronts any man who tries to argue for a set pattern in this matter of baptism and the gift of the Spirit in the early Church.

It is argued by Cullmann¹²² that the gift of the Holy Spirit is closely connected with the forgiveness of sins and is, in fact, the fulfilment of it; further, he makes it clear that both elements are found together in Christian baptism. Then he goes on to show that the Church felt the need of adding to the act of immersion

¹²¹ Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 10. Even so, W. F. Flemington, (*The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism*, pp. 18f.) is not quite certain that such an interpretation does full justice to the baptism of John.

¹²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 10-15. This same point is also established by J. Murray, *Christian Baptism*, p. 8.

another act more specifically connected with the transmission of the Holy Spirit; this resulted in the importance attached to the laying on of hands, accompanied by the danger that the two acts would fall apart into two different sacraments. Cullmann maintains that in the primitive Church such a separation did not actually occur, though the baptismal stories in *Acts* (to which we have already referred) prove the danger to be ever present.

To this essential unity between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament many others have recently borne witness,¹²³ some of them also drawing attention to the close connection between baptism and the gift of the Spirit not only in the *Acts* but also in Paul's teaching,¹²⁴ and it is not surprising that this view has found itself very much at home among Baptists.¹²⁵ Indeed it might appear at first sight that this doctrine of baptism and the Holy Spirit is essentially the doctrine which Baptists have maintained to this day, but further examination makes it clear that two words of warning ought to be uttered at this juncture: (a) the fluidity of practice which we have already noticed in *Acts* must keep us from arguing that we have preserved intact the New Testament pattern, since, as we have been bound to admit, no such clear-cut New Testament pattern is to be discerned. S. Bailey,¹²⁶ in fact, finds no fewer than eight different methods of administering baptism, the gift of the Spirit and the laying on of hands in *Acts* alone, thus making it difficult to accept Cullmann's statement that there the two acts of baptism and the gift of the Spirit are retained as one rite, and more difficult still to maintain that any one branch of the Church is following precisely New Testament lines; (b) except in close-membership churches, Baptists are often at a loss to determine the precise relationship between baptism and church membership, and too often baptism is dismissed as a personal matter between the

¹²³ H. G. Marsh, *The Origin and Significance of New Testament Baptism*, pp. 136ff; G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 45; J. R. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, pp. 45-47; S. Bailey, "Baptism and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament," in *Theology*, vol. 49, (1946), pp. 11-14. *Baptism Today*, p. 15; A. E. J. Rawlinson, *Christian Initiation*, pp. 19, 24f; *The Theology of Christian Initiation*, p. 10; K. Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, p. 32) has a slight variation of this doctrine in that he believes baptism shows the candidate that he has received the gift of the Spirit. It will readily be perceived that this is very different from saying that in baptism he does actually receive it.

¹²⁴ W. F. Flemington, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 67-69, 110; G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Nelson (*op. cit.*, pp. 128f) says it is the receiving of the Spirit that really gives meaning to baptism in the New Testament.

¹²⁵ H. W. Robinson, *Baptist Principles*, p. 13; R. C. Walton, *The Gathered Community*, p. 29.

¹²⁶ *Loc. cit.*; cf. Walton, *loc. cit.*, *The Theology of Christian Initiation*, p. 11; *Baptism Today*, p. 15.

believer and God; to be followed by application for membership to a local church. It is, however, made abundantly clear by Nelson¹²⁷ that if the Spirit is active in our baptism, then our baptism becomes essentially an act of the *ecclesia* and not simply a personal matter between us and God. For him, baptism, the gift of the Spirit and incorporation into the church must stand together, and this can hardly be over-emphasised in a day when there is a tendency to exalt one of the three at the expense of the other two.

Thus far it is difficult to see what cause there could be for disagreement, and how the interpretation of the New Testament could vary to any great extent, but we have seen already how Cullmann accounts for the practice of laying on of hands in the early church; that is, in order to give due importance to the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It is in this that the seeds of division are first to be found, for the church of the West was scarcely 300 years old when certain definite changes in practice had taken place. For a full account of what happened reference may be made to G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*. Suffice it here simply to indicate the main developments.

Like many others, Lampe (p. 57) sees no reason to suppose that there was a distinction between Spirit and water baptism in the thought of the Apostle Paul, and maintains (p. 78) that there is little evidence for the belief that the laying on of hands was a regular ceremony in apostolic times. He does, nevertheless, admit (p. 93) that the New Testament theology of baptism implied the baptism of adults and that the rise of infant baptism changed the whole relationship between baptism and confirmation. In the second century, the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists have little to say about the doctrine of baptism in relation to the Spirit (p. 103), but towards the end of this century, with the increasing remoteness from the apostles and the consequent fading of the eschatological hope, there set in a tendency to identify Spirit-baptism with the laying on of hands of *Acts*. The West then took it all a stage further by separating baptism and confirmation so that it was gradually forgotten that the Holy Spirit was really received through "union with Christ" (p. 149ff). Hence the difficulty of deciding what happened in baptism and what happened in confirmation.

It is then precisely to this issue that many writers in recent years have turned their attention. Does a candidate for baptism receive the Holy Spirit when he is baptized, or when he is confirmed? If when he is baptized, then what is the significance of confirmation?

¹²⁷ *Op cit.*, pp. 45ff.

The modern discussion really began¹²⁸ towards the end of the last century when F. W. Puller and A. J. Mason distinguished between the regenerating activity of the Spirit in baptism and the reception of the indwelling Spirit in confirmation; they declared that in baptism we receive the gifts of grace, but in confirmation the Spirit Himself. For the theory in its more modern form we are indebted to Dom Gregory Dix, who declared that in the New Testament and the Fathers baptism is no more than a prelude to confirmation. It is not surprising that the reactions to such theories, even on the part of the Anglicans themselves, have varied a good deal, and the number of articles that have appeared in *Theology* alone bears some witness to the way in which "the ball has been tossed to and fro." Unfortunately it has not been found possible in the compass of this short paper to deal fully with them all.

It has, however, been strongly argued by A. E. J. Rawlinson¹²⁹ that confirmation is not to be regarded as the completion of baptism, as if there something were given which had previously been withheld, and he does not believe that a person baptized and unconfirmed has been improperly baptized. A. M. Ramsey¹³⁰ admits that in patristic teaching the unconfirmed have not received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but he also agrees with O. C. Quick¹³¹ in the view that this can only apply where the two rites are held closely together. According to the Prayer Book, says Ramsey, baptism makes us members of Christ, and that is why many Anglicans will not agree that children have no share in the Holy Spirit. In support of the same point, though from a slightly different angle, we may cite the evidence of E. J. Bicknell¹³² when he says that in the early Church baptism, unction and the laying on of hands formed a single sacrament and it is doubtful whether the last two can claim any higher authority than the custom of the Church. Perhaps the position of the majority of Anglicans is best summed up by the Archbishops' Commission on Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion¹³³ when they say that full Christian Initiation should be thought of as a process beginning with a request for baptism and concluding with the first com-

¹²⁸ For a fuller account of the controversy on this issue see Lampe, *op. cit.*, pp. viiff., J. R. S. Taylor, *Baptism in the Church*, pp 34ff, and F. C. Tindall, *Christian Initiation*, pp. 15ff.

¹²⁹ *Christian Initiation*, p. 27.

¹³⁰ "The Doctrine of Confirmation," in *Theology*, vol. 48, (1945), pp. 194ff.

¹³¹ *The Christian Sacraments*, p. 184.

¹³² *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England*, p. 477; cf. P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 223.

¹³³ *The Theology of Christian Initiation*, p. 17; cf. Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

munion. Within this sequence, if a "point" of initiation must be sought, it is the moment of baptism.

If so much emphasis is to be given, however, to baptism, we might very well ask what precisely is the place to be filled by confirmation, and, when this question is asked, one senses a certain uneasiness among Anglican scholars, undoubtedly due to the wide separation which has taken place in the west between the two rites.¹³⁴ The answer which usually receives the strongest support is that in confirmation the candidate is strengthened and consecrated for the tasks and privileges which his church membership entails.¹³⁵ C. F. D. Moule¹³⁶ supports this view on the grounds that where it is not a matter of healing, the laying on of hands in the New Testament is usually a matter of spiritual strengthening for a task. Admittedly this comes as rather refreshing after reading of Anglo-Catholic scholars who wish to attribute a far greater importance to confirmation, but on reflection we still want to ask whether confirmation is really an essential rite or whether the Anglican Church is endeavouring to continue a practice which has really lost its meaning the moment it is separated from baptism.

In this connection the reply of R. H. Fuller¹³⁷ to A. M. Ramsey must be of real interest. Fuller says that since 1552 the Church of England has interpreted confirmation as a sacrament of growth but that, however comforting such an interpretation may be to Prayer Book Catholics, it is really quite untenable. Fuller maintains that, for an Anglican, baptism does what in the early Church was, and what in the orthodox Greek Church still is, held to be done by both baptism and confirmation together. After 1552, confirmation was intended to be a solemn act of intercession, but the Anglican reformers left a reference to the Holy Spirit in the intercessory prayer, and in the seventeenth century some scholars began to say that in confirmation the Holy Spirit was not only prayed for; He was bestowed. Since 1833, according to Fuller, it has been commonly taught that the confirmation service is a sacrament in which the Holy Spirit is conveyed, and in 1928 confirmation was held to be performed on the basis of *Acts viii.*, whilst the baptismal service still maintained that the Spirit was given in baptism.

There can be no doubt that among Anglican theologians the

¹³⁴ One example of this is to be seen in S. Bailey, "Baptism and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament," in *Theology*, vol. 49, (1946), pp. 13f.

¹³⁵ A. M. Ramsey, *loc. cit.*, pp. 197ff; cf. S. Bailey, *loc. cit.*, A. E. J. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 30ff.

¹³⁶ "Baptism with Water and the Holy Ghost," in *Theology*, vol. 48, (1945), p. 249.

¹³⁷ "Baptism and Confirmation," in *Theology*, vol. 49, (1946), pp. 114ff.

question of the place to be accorded to the Holy Spirit in regard to baptism and confirmation is a thorny problem, and one that sounds strangely remote to Baptist ears. Should it prove possible, however, to unravel the knot along the lines that Fuller has suggested, it would mean that we were not really so far apart as we sometimes think. Meanwhile we should content ourselves with a consideration of the part to be accorded to the Holy Spirit in our communion.

To do this it is important to distinguish between the kind of society which we have in the Baptist denomination and the kind of which the Church of England is a good example. P. Rowntree Clifford¹³⁸ has recently made this point by defining the Church in terms of two concentric circles; the inner one represents the fellowship of believers, and the outer one the household of God, or (to use a missionary term) the Christian community. In the case of churches of this latter type, baptism and the Holy Spirit are marks of a person's entry to the Christian community, and they are followed by confirmation, defined either as a service of intercession or as a service of spiritual strengthening, when they pass from the Christian community to the fellowship of believers. In the case of the other branches of the Christian church the process is reversed: their entry to the Christian community is marked by a service of dedication or of infant baptism, though a baptism which amounts to little more than intercession. Their subsequent entry to the fellowship of believers is then marked by baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Little more need be said to make it abundantly clear that this different conception of the Divine Society is the fundamental reason for the difference of approach. Thus from the Baptist point of view there is no question of the Holy Spirit being imparted to an infant, and it might therefore appear that our doctrine of the gift of the Spirit is crystal clear. Yet a moment's reflection will serve to convince us that it is not so. For us, the issue changes from one of baptism or confirmation to one of baptism or conversion.

If we argue that the Holy Spirit is imparted to a candidate at his baptism, then we lead ourselves into the dreadful problem of the unbaptized church member; we can scarcely go so far as to deny that he has received the Spirit in some way. Moreover, such a view is not really in keeping with Baptist history, for J. M. Ross¹³⁹ has pointed out that although there have been those who have agreed that baptism is a channel through which the Spirit is received, this appears to be quite a recent development. Indeed, with one exception, Ross has been unable to find any claim by a

¹³⁸ *The Mission of the Local Church*, pp. 54f.

¹³⁹ "The Theology of Baptism in Baptist History," in *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. xv. (1953), p. 109.

Baptist earlier than 1925 that there is a bestowal of the Holy Spirit at baptism. The fact that a theory or belief is modern does not discountenance it though it ought to make us think twice before adopting it.

On the other hand, to argue that the Holy Spirit is imparted to a man at his conversion only serves to weaken further our emphasis on baptism and makes us want to ask what purpose it serves. It may, of course, be replied that by baptism we receive the Spirit in greater measure than before, though many will question whether we can discriminate between "quantities" of the Spirit in this way.

In considering the question of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, we saw that it was very closely linked with the administration of baptism, though the two were not one act. We saw furthermore that no real difficulty was felt in the Church so long as baptism and the laying on of hands were kept closely together, and that the source of the problem really lay in the change over from adult to infant baptism. If this is so it surely means that we Baptists are best in a position to develop a clearer doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The fact that all other communions are in a state of disagreement only serves to enhance our opportunity.

Moreover, it would not be so much of an innovation as a return to what our earliest forefathers originally practised, but which was subsequently discarded. To maintain a clear doctrine of the gift of the Holy Spirit, in close agreement with the Church of the New Testament and the sub-apostolic age, it seems to the present writer that what we need is a separate rite, following baptism, in which we lay a fresh emphasis on the receiving of the Spirit. The most appropriate way would doubtless be prayer and laying on of hands that the Holy Spirit may be received, and this is precisely in line with what the Baptist Confession of 1660¹⁴⁰ lays down as a condition of membership. Doubtless it will be argued by some that this is really what happens when we receive members into the Church, but it should be remembered that there is nevertheless a distinct difference between the right hand of fellowship followed by prayer, and some specific act (whatever its form¹⁴¹) which

¹⁴⁰ Cf. E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers* (enlarged edition), p. 75. In a footnote, Dr. Payne points out how the laying on of hands was a subject of controversy from the earliest times, though there were some Baptist Churches who practised it until early in the 19th century. See also *The Proposed Scheme of Church Union in Ceylon*, pp. 13f, and E. A. Payne, "Baptists and the Laying on of Hands," *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. xv, p. 214.

¹⁴¹ There will be many who are opposed to the idea of laying on of hands, but there is no reason why some other symbolic method, together with some brief words of explanation, should not be used.

makes it clear that the church as a body is making intercession for the Holy Spirit to fill the life of the new member. Such a rite would at least enable us to get a firmer grasp on, and a clearer conception of, the work of the Holy Spirit and His place in the lives of the members of the church. Moreover, in being faithful to one of our early Baptist Confessions and in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament we could hardly feel that we were forsaking those principles by which we have always stood.

Whether such a view would today commend itself to a sufficient number of our Baptist scholars, and how far their lead, if given, would be followed by our people we cannot estimate. Until then, we can but long for the day when our Baptist scholars and leaders give us a clear statement on the place of baptism in the life of the Church.

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Christian Deviations, by Horton Davies. (Philosophical Library, New York, \$2.75; S.C.M. Press, 7s. 6d.)

The author, now Senior Lecturer in Church History at Mansfield and Regent's Park Colleges, Oxford, describes this little book as "a modest attempt at Christian Apologetics, a defence of the historic Christian faith by distinguishing it from those systems which imitate it and yet distort it by misrepresentation or unwarrantable addition to the essentials of Christian belief" (p. 7). He writes of Theosophy, Christian Science, Spiritism, Seventh-Day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, British-Israel, Moral Re-Armament, Astrology and Open-Air Religion. Each chapter contains the basic facts about the movement or sect under consideration, quotations from authentic sources and a judicious and clear appraisal. The book will prove useful because the information it contains is not easy to come by and many of our contemporaries are caught by the missionary zeal of the devotees of some of these cults. Supporters of Moral Re-Armament have felt affronted at being classed as a Christian "deviation" and at finding Dr. Buchman in the same gallery as Mrs. Eddy, Mrs. Ellen White, Charles Taze Russell and Brigham Young, and though the author tries to disarm criticism in his preparatory note, it certainly seems unfortunate that he should have put the Oxford Groupers between the British-Israelites and the Astrologers and have described them as "the foe of the Christian Church" (p. 104). It is true that this last phrase is related to "their disinterestedness in doctrine," but there are many other movements associated more or less closely with "the great historic Communion of Christendom" (p. 7) which deserve a like or even more severe condemnation, if this is to be the criterion.

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