

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Gospel. Perhaps our greatest need is to recover the glory of the "givenness" of the Gospel as witnessed to in Holy Baptism. We must teach and nourish from infancy those to whom we have administered the rite of initiation. So shall we avoid the perils of a non-evangelical religion of "experience", and build on the solid rock of the saving acts of God.

Warns on Baptism

BY THE REV. W. C. G. PROCTOR, M.A., B.D.

JOHANNES WARNS (1874-1937), an accredited teacher among the Brethren in Germany, wrote a book, now translated into English¹, which every Anglican Evangelical ought to read. I do not think it will convert him to the Baptist position, but it will give him an understanding of their point of view which is hardly derivable from any other source because of the wide knowledge of Church history possessed by the present author. And, once again, one can pay tribute to a pleasantly-phrased, and extremely clear, translation by G. H. Lang.

The author goes through the New Testament and early Christian history (to the end of the second century), and finds no reference to infant baptism. From the third century he finds what he regards as "magical" notions being associated with baptism, notions which open the way for the application of baptism to unconscious infants. With the conversion of Constantine and the close alliance between Church and State engendered thereby, he finds an irresistible influence upon the Church to baptize all members of the State, the Church, in his opinion, being an agent of the State to bring its members under a central control. This virtual subordination of Church to State, though broken by the Reformers' doctrine, reappeared in an even worse form in the Lutheran State Churches; and the practice of infant baptism amongst Protestants (whose basic principles are thereby outraged), was retained, leading to the secession of the anabaptists from the Protestant block, and indeed their persecution by Protestants, a persecution as bitter as any experienced by earlier Church movements, such as that of the Donatists. With this historical review in mind, he appeals to all whose consciences are moved by the Holy Ghost, to adopt the baptist point of view, and be rebaptized as believers. The author also gives a full treatment to the question of the manner of baptism in the New Testament and in early Church times, and holds that it was by total immersion.

In spite of this strong, and scholarly, and charitably-written treatise (for it deserves this classification), the present reviewer is not convinced for the following reasons:

1. The basic question is: What is the significance of baptism? Full of information as this book is, only one sentence seems to deal

¹ *Baptism*, by Johannes Warns. Tr. G. H. Lang, Paternoster Press, pp. 352, 15/-.

with this question, namely, "Certainly baptism (sc. of the believer) retains its original significance as an outward testimony to an inward experience of salvation" (p. 509). If this is the meaning of baptism, then, of course, no other use of it makes sense except believers' baptism. But a host of biblical scholars (post-Reformation scholars included) see much more in baptism than this. It is not only something done by man, but it also conveys the grace of God. To enlarge on this here would be out of proportion in a review; but it is strongly felt that our author was too quick in describing any view of baptism which saw in it such conveyance of God's grace, as superstitious or magical. Superstitious views of baptism do exist out of this consideration, but belief in the reception of God's grace through baptism does not necessarily lead to superstitious views.

2. The association of Church and State, and the consequent use of the Church by the State, as envisaged by the author, seem to be overstated. (Pun unintentional!) Speaking out of the Church-situation in Germany (where Church subscriptions, one understands, are collected by the State to the present day), there may be reason for this opinion. But surely one sees, in the case of the Church of England, a situation where the Church remains "the Church", even though "established" by the State. Infant baptism was practised (as our author tells us), long before the Church became associated with the State; so his contention that the State would insist on the continuance of this in order to bring all its subjects into submission from the moment of their birth, is an idea entirely new to the present writer. That the author implied this is his conviction; and he feels obliged to ask for evidence that the State—any State—ever interfered in this manner with the Church's practices.

3. "Confirmation no solution." This is the heading of a chapter. The reason given is that confirmation is said to be virtually imposed on young, immature boys and girls of fourteen years, and so again fails in fulfilling the biblical demand for a voluntary expression of belief. Well, "bring up a child in the way that it should go, and when it is old it will not depart from it," is a good biblical (and practical!) piece of advice. Not every confirmed person, admittedly, proves to be a true believer (and the translator is able to add quotations from notable Anglican writers bemoaning the lapse after confirmation), but is the Baptists' own position any more fool-proof? The author seems to teach that no compulsion should be used in connection with baptism—the desire to be baptized must be from within, an outward proof of the working of the Spirit. But, with a more realistic understanding of human nature, many of us will feel that leading and persuasion are properly applied to hesitant minds; and it is but a further step to a routine (if you like!) presentation for confirmation of boys and girls who have been taught, by earnest teachers, "the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments," and have been further instructed in the Bible and Church Catechism. Is there a real contrast between this practice of Anglicans and the opinion of our author: "The original Christian baptism demands the free personality of the baptized person. No one can be a Christian, a follower of Christ, by compulsion. Member-

ship in the Church presupposes the personal decision of the individual " (p. 270) ?

The information given in this book is valuable and fascinating—one read it with unabated interest, thanks, as already stated, to the pleasantness of the translation. But the argumentation, and the philosophy of life implied by the conclusions, are unconvincing. Nevertheless, in conclusion, let it be said that on the subject itself of baptism, its meaning and use in the Church, there is indeed need for a re-study of it by all Christians who place the Scriptures as the sole authority for doctrine—together, if possible—and in such a re-study, the point of view expressed in this book should receive the most careful consideration.

The Church in the Countryside— A Plea for Realism

By "RUSTICUS"

LAMBETH will discuss many things of importance to the whole Anglican communion, but there is one matter to which it is high time the Church in England gave serious consideration. And that is the present and future of the rural ministry—the Church in the countryside.

It is hard to resist the criticism that a great wastage of manpower is being perpetrated, and that a system—the parochial system as at present constituted—is being kept going for its own sake rather than because it is still the best that can be devised for the job.

I am not speaking of the sub-rural parishes such as are found in the Home Counties or in the hinterlands of great cities. Rochester, for instance, has a number of "country" parishes, but to all intents they are, in population and type, extensions of the town and suburban parishes, though more lovely to look at, or are welcome lungs, and green pastures to which hard-working clergy can be retired for light work. My discussion is directed to the more remote countryside, the far north-western, the west country, the marches of Wales, and so on.

Apart from those few clergy who have a real vocation and gift for work in a village, you might divide the present country clergy into three groups, which we might call (a) Old War Horses (put out to grass) ; (b) Absentees (i.e. specialists, whether diocesan or not, given a "small parish" as a base for wider work) ; and (c) Vegetables.

As regards the Old War Horses, no one would deny that the country parish—whether single or in plurality—provides a valuable field for retirement. The man has done his tough job, abroad or in big town parishes, and now has somewhere not too strenuous where he can exercise a pastoral ministry as his strength allows. It is just the place. The specialist is in a more difficult position, because he is up against the System. Unless he has very strong diocesan backing (a pep talk to the people at his induction : "patience and understanding