

ANABAPTIST THEOLOGIES OF CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

(1) THE REPUDIATION OF INFANT BAPTISM (CONTINUED)*

4. Children, Sin and Salvation

It could be said that the current mood in 20th century theology seems to reflect some impatience with the whole idea of salvation, certainly if it is thereby implied that there are any who are *not* saved. As might be expected, any loss of interest in the question of salvation sees a repudiation of the concept of sin and guilt. In the 16th century the whole question of salvation was of paramount importance, a linch pin in the whole Reformation protest, and certainly of great importance for the Radicals. With the prevailing climate of many infant deaths the issue of infant salvation was a social issue, to which the doctrines of the established Roman Church had supplied satisfactory and comforting answers. The Anabaptists were criticised severely for their rejection of infant baptism, because it seemed to amount to a denial of salvation to infants. The Roman Catholic view was wedded to the sacramental position of the church. Salvation and baptism, and baptismal regeneration at that, cannot be separated. The logic of baptismal regeneration is sound, given the premise that baptism acts *ex opere operato*. Protestant baptism and Protestant systems were invalid, and of no effect. The Magisterial Reformers, on the one hand, held the Augustinian view of man as *massa perditionis*, and on the other hand the necessity of infant baptism for the cleansing of the soul of the new-born infant from the taint of original sin. Baptism also provided some consolation for the parents of the infants who died in infancy, for baptism would save them.

A soteriological issue is raised of immense importance. What is the significance of man's response in the saving work of Christ through the atonement? Is salvation in this life possible at all? Does the work of the Spirit in renewal in the believer bring about any ontological change at all, or is the believer forever a sinner? If the Anabaptists could not answer their critics satisfactorily, then they would be guilty of mere negative protest, without a positive alternative. Thus behind the rejection of infant baptism, and the establishment for them of the true baptism lies a whole theology of grace and sin, with an implied view of man.

Robert Friedmann asks how it is that the Magisterial Reformers and the Anabaptist Reformers, both deriving their doctrines from the Bible could develop teachings in different directions.

The clue to the puzzle may be found in two arguments:
 a) The Anabaptists believe in the freedom of the will, though to be sure not of the Pelagian type... without this freedom of the will discipleship, the heart of Anabaptism loses its meaning. b) The Anabaptists believed in and strongly emphasized spiritual rebirth (John 3.3), the transformation of "natural" man into "spiritual" man...⁴⁵

* The first part of Section (1) appeared in the last issue.
 Editor.

They distinguished between *having* sin and *committing* sin. This posed two different problems: the function of original sin in infants who do not yet know the difference between good and evil, and the role of sin in the life of adults before and after conversion to Christ.

In essence the Anabaptist doctrine of sin and salvation is orthodox, but the stress on the social dimension of salvation is distinctive. The Hutterites believed that man is not saved by his faith alone, nor his professed belief, nor even by his commitment to Christ in the church but in proper social relationship within the Christian community which means communal living.

It is the opinion of Alvin J. Beachy that "In nearly all of the major contacts between representative leaders of the Radical Reformation and those of the Magisterial Reformation during the 16th Century Reformation period, the most frequent charge which the latter bring against the former is that they have no adequate concept of grace".⁴⁶ So Martin Bucer interpreted Denck as holding a view of the atonement as depending upon the subjective appropriation of the believer which had to be made manifest in a Christ-like life. This was a serious criticism. It has been made before and is one of the arguments that was crucial in the debate in the Baptist Union of Great Britain as recently as 1966 on the publication of the Report *The Child and the Church*. Martin Luther (with whom Bucer had some sympathies) as far as we know had no direct contact with the Anabaptists, but wrote a tract in which some think he was in fact referring to the Anabaptists: "I contend that it is not good works which save a man, but rather faith alone. But that does not mean that one should not live a good life".⁴⁷ John Calvin accused the Anabaptists of "works righteousness" in a work from Geneva in 1544.⁴⁸

Clearly, the stress on believers' baptism as a symbol of man's response seriously questioned, if not threatened, the commonly held official views of the witness of (infant) baptism to *gratia praeveniens*, the work of God for man "before we were yet sinners...". Believers' baptism seemed to the Anabaptists' opponents to smack of Pelagianism and the exalting of works and deeds and the achievement of man in order to win approval, and the grace of God. Thus the Anabaptist protest appeared to be a serious threat to the faith, and a corroding of good sound orthodoxy.

For Luther, Bucer and Bullinger the answer was broadly that *sola fide* was based on *sola gratia*. There is righteousness in the believer but it is only the effect of the atoning work of Christ on the cross, whose vicarious substitution produces that righteousness in the believer. This process is a continuing one throughout the believer's life, who remains *simul justus et peccator*. Here is a forensic view of grace.

The Anabaptists were criticised for completely denying original sin and reducing Christ to a mere example, because of their stress on baptism as man's response to the grace of God and church as a holy community. This seemed to suggest that baptism is merely an activity of man.

They replied to these criticisms asserting that nothing is permissible in the church of Jesus Christ which tends to diminish

the grace of God. However, the strength of their position is well summarised by Beachy: "... that the possibility of an actual righteousness in this life as opposed to an imputed righteousness, lay nearer at hand".⁴⁹

But to return to the denial of original sin. The Anabaptists did not disagree about the fall and its seriousness - there was no weakening of a fundamental biblical position here. Neither did they deny in any way the creation of man in the divine image. The issue was the degree of the destruction by the fall of that divine image in man. The Anabaptists were more optimistic about man than their magisterial opponents.

It is possible to distinguish four distinct concepts of original sin amongst the Anabaptist Radical Reformers:

... it is described as an inborn curable sickness, as the loss of power to distinguish between good and evil, as poison which has wrought a corruption within a human nature originally good, and as the natural reason of the mature man which over extends itself into the realm of the supernatural.⁵⁰

Thus none of the Reformers saw original sin in terms of the traditional Augustinian/Pauline view of *massa perditionis* with the conclusion that man was therefore *simul justus et peccator*.

The issue is crucial in that different views of childhood are implied by different attitudes to original sin. The Anabaptists seemed to be guilty of grave injustices towards children in refusing to baptise those children. How could original sin be dealt with adequately? What would be the destiny and status before God of infants dying in infancy without baptism, because of the seriousness of the effects of original sin through Adam? The Anabaptist answer was that since human nature is basically good, and a creation of God himself, then sin cannot be inherited by the sexual procreative act. Original sin does not have any effect in human nature until that point when the knowledge of good and evil is possible. This was so with Adam and Eve as the Genesis story makes clear. It was the temptation which was the sin. So Dirk Phillips wrote:

For while they (children) are of course descendants of a sinful Adam, yet original sin as man calls it, is not reckoned to their account for the sake of Christ. For they are in this respect even as Adam and Eve were before the Fall, in that they are innocent of either right or wrong and understand neither good nor evil.⁵¹

And so the crucial stage in human personal development and the moment of decision for the believer is the point at which he reaches the challenge of the knowledge of good and evil. This doctrine points to the view that *childhood is a state of innocence, that childhood ends at the point of "knowledge of good and evil"*, which is the beginning of the movement into adulthood.

Dirk argues for the universality of grace with reference to original sin in children, bringing the criticism of his opponents that he was propounding a universalist salvation.

For if children may be damned through Adam and because of his transgression then Christ has died in vain for them. Then the guilt of Adam has come upon us and it was not paid thru' Jesus Christ. If this be the case, then the guilt of Adam had come upon us and it was not paid for by Jesus Christ and grace has not overcome sin nor has life overcome death through Jesus Christ. This be far from hence.⁵²

Thus a *distinction between original sin and original guilt* emerges, so vital to the Anabaptist theology of childhood. Dirk has more to say about children and makes explicit that their relationship to God is not impaired by a weight of original guilt for they are in a state of grace:

Some one might now think or ask: If infants do not believe why then are they saved and acceptable to God? We answer: By grace, through Jesus Christ (Roman 5.2) who through his death took away the sin of the whole world so that adults by their penitent faith and infants in their innocence are acceptable to God (John 1.29; 3.16; 1 John 3.16), so long as they continue therein. Of this the Lord himself declares: "Your little ones which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them I will it, and they shall possess it" (Deut. 1.39)... their children, who had no knowledge of good or evil obtained (it) by the grace of God ... Thus the kingdom of heaven belongs to the children we believe without a doubt, as we have declared. But that the salvation of children lies in their baptism and is dependent upon it we do not believe and cannot concede, for Christ accepted the children, and through grace and mercy promised them the kingdom of heaven, and not on account of or by baptism...⁵³

Pilgrim Marpeck makes quite clear that it is not so much the removal of original sin that Christ makes effective in the atonement, rather the affirmation that original sin does not actually become inherited in children before they can distinguish between good and evil.

There is thus a conjoining of justification and sanctification for Marpeck on the assumption that one may, by the strenuous life in the Spirit, imitate the second Adam, willing what he willed. Sin is thus not so much lack of faith, rather lack of obedience. Obedience and discipleship belong together, as do suffering the imitation of Christ, and these are not possible with infants and children, therefore children are outside the realm of sin.⁵⁴

There is here an optimistic view of man, for implicit is a strong doctrine of *natural law*, which is of utmost importance for the doctrine of childhood. Innocence we have already seen is the description of the state of childhood. Such innocence is that state into which children are born, because we all are potentially in Adam as he was before the fall. Therefore it is possible to come to Christ, because the fall has not totally destroyed the image of the divine, nor completely shattered the will. This natural law remains throughout life, though when

innocency comes to an end the child must make a personal response to the gospel and account for himself.

Dirk refers to the commendation of children as models of greatness in the Kingdom (Matt. 3.4; 19.14) and concludes:

Since therefore Christ sets the children before us as an example we should become like children and humble ourselves, it follows without contradiction: First, that children (so long as they are in their simplicity) are innocent and reckoned by God as without sin. Second, that there is also something good in children (although they have become partakers of the transgression and sinful nature of Adam) namely; the simple and unassuming nature in which they are pleasing to God (yet purely by grace through Jesus Christ) so long as they remain therein; for which reason also Christ sets children before us as an example that we should in these respects become like them.⁵⁵

Some of Dirk's texts do not seem in the light of contemporary more liberal attitudes to the Bible to fit his argument. Further, he suggests by his use of the gospel passages relating to Jesus and the children that these passages are simple, straight-forward and can be used to support the kind of theology of childhood that he has already deduced from his views of grace and original sin, and of course the repudiation of infant baptism. But what is Jesus commending in the example of the child in Matt.19.14? It is tempting to read our modern stage theories of development into them. How old was the child? Is Dirk guilty of sentimentalising the action of Jesus in respect of the children? Is he guilty of limiting his interpretation of the texts in question purely in terms of the view of childhood he has already reached from other argumentation? Is he merely doing with these passages for his purpose what the paedo-baptisers did for their purposes, namely adding the example of Jesus to arguments of a more abstract and doctrinal nature to make the practice (infant baptism or in the case of Anabaptists refraining from baptism of infants on grounds of innocence) a justifiable practice? How much can the action of Jesus in welcoming the children be an actual illustration in his earthly life of a concept of grace? These questions will be asked and continue to be asked in the debates on theology of childhood.

Menno Simons shares the views of the others, stressing the knowledge of good and evil, repentance and faith, and the godly life. But he answers the critics, who say if infants cannot have faith then are they saved?

And although infants have neither faith nor baptism, think not that they are therefore damned. Oh no! They are saved; for they have the Lord's own promise of the Kingdom of God; not through any elements, ceremonies, and external rites but solely by grace through Jesus Christ.

If they die before coming to years of discretion, that is in childhood, before they have come to years of understanding and before they have faith, then they die under the promise of God, and that by no other means than the generous promise of grace given through Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

It seems fair to conclude that for the Anabaptists infants who die in their infancy, die in the promise of Christ and are not held guilty of sin, for in their innocency sin has no effect.

However, the question of *actual sin* is important too. Caspar Schwenkfeld draws attention to the careful distinction which must be made in the change from the new man to the old man, and also to the righteousness of deeds which must follow. To be in a state of grace, Schwenkfeld "points to the false fleshly sense of security and arrogance which might arise from such a conviction... But one gift of grace does not make a Christian... nay even a just and faithful man may lapse... in so far as we are born anew of God we do not sin, in so far as we are still fleshly...⁵⁷

The logical consequence of the Anabaptist position, that where there is no knowledge of good and evil there can be no sin, is this:

... that he who is born a fool or crazy man is no sinner before God but innocent and righteous, and Paul before his conversion was no sinner when he persecuted the Christians in ignorance and did it with a good Pharisaic conscience.⁵⁸

Clearly the Anabaptist position is that whilst all actual sin must have its origin in the sinful desire, or the sinful disposition, or in the original sin inherited from Adam, yet such a position cannot be reached before the dawn of reason. Children are therefore innocent, incapable of sinning. There can be no actual sin without it being a manifestation of original sin and for as much as original sin has no effect until the dawn of reason, the point of knowledge of good and evil, as with Adam and Eve, then the child remains unspoiled in his nature.

Menno makes a careful distinction between two sorts of actual sin: first, "works of the flesh" with their origin in the flesh of Adam which is sinful and corrupt e.g. adultery, lying, fornication, avarice, dissipation, drunkenness, hatred, envy, murder, theft, idolatry. For Menno these are the worse sort of sins because original and actual sin are connected here and there is no forgiveness without repentance and new birth. Children cannot commit such as these. The second group of sins is "human frailty" and includes such things as errors, stumbings, unpremeditated lapses in conduct such as can be found even in saints and the unbeliever alike. Thus there is an extremely *voluntaristic view of sin*, almost an "adult" view, where because the grace of Christ has removed the original sin placing children in a state of innocency, therefore "sin" is not a category to be used of childhood at all. But when they reach the point of knowledge of good and evil they are then

responsible for their sins, and it is incumbent upon them to appropriate the grace of God in a personal decision for Christ and lead a new life in him. Any evil inclination in children (which is not the same as any original guilt) is of no consequence in the sight of God and does not count as sin until it breaks out in sins in adulthood. So in respect of the problems thrown up by repudiating infant baptism, rejecting the *ex opere operato* theory of baptism, and in examining the issues of the status of infants in respect of original sin, the Radical Reformers held a concept of universal grace, which in principle either removed the consequences of original sin or greatly ameliorated them. The *massa perditionis* of Augustine was eliminated. This view of universal grace, whilst it answered the question of the status of childhood seemed however to break the solidarity of the human race in sin and posit the possibility that there were some with a solidarity in sin, but there were others who had a solidarity in grace. Thus the Anabaptist protest was a threat and a serious undermining of the stability of the society of their day. Adulthood was the time to move from one state to the other but it was a time for individual decision. Adulthood, the time for repentance and faith and baptism, was measured by the point at which the individual acquired the capacity for good and evil. This theology lays the foundations of religious freedom for the individual. In discussing whether this view was unique to Anabaptists, Beachy, in an important footnote, examines forerunners to the Anabaptists who also held this view of universal grace, but he then concludes:

In any case, whatever its origin, the conviction that children were through Christ universally freed from the crippling effects of original sin prevailed among the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation, both in Holland and South Germany, right on to the end of the formative period of the movement.⁵⁹

We are now in a position to put more details on the picture of childhood amongst the Radical Reformers in the light of the doctrines of Sin and Grace. We have already discovered a view of childhood that suggests three important foci:

1. That infants are not capable of faith.
2. That reason and understanding are vital elements in the human growth process as they represent the point when the person can distinguish between good and evil and this represents a move out of childhood into adulthood, symbolised by baptism on repentance and profession of faith.
3. That children are not "in" the church in terms of membership because membership of the church is the corporate expression of brotherhood and discipleship, and children are not ready for that. Yet the kingdom belongs to them be they living or dead.

Now we can add:

4. The Anabaptists had a very optimistic view of human nature in childhood: the child is innocent, the child is basically good providing he remains within his childhood simplicity.

The example of Jesus suggests this. If there was no good in children at all he would not have used them as models and examples nor commended the childhood state.

5. Infants and children are "in grace" and are saved thereby. They are born in original sin but it has no consequence for them until it is manifest in actual sin. Infants therefore who die in infancy are saved in the universal grace of Christ. Baptism is not necessary.
6. Children cannot sin, are therefore not to be accountable for sin, until that stage of their growth when like Adam and Eve they grow out of innocence, begin to have a knowledge of good and evil, and sin becomes a force in their lives manifested in sins. Thus "natural law" makes possible their coming to Christ one day. This brings the doctrines of creation and redemption into a logical and necessary harmony.
7. Children whilst born as all men in original sin do not thereby share in any original guilt. They are not damned. No baptism is needed in infancy to wipe out the effects of original guilt. They are innocent.
8. Children and adolescents cannot understand the demands of a good conscience, nor right behaviour, nor understand the Gospel. Spiritual maturity is expected and with Servetus is not likely to come until around the age of 30, as evidenced by the example of Jesus. This would appear to be an extreme drawing out of the period of maturation, and whilst it is the view of one Anabaptist leader only, yet it serves to reinforce the view of human nature, in which childhood *is* *innocence*.

5. Covenant

One important concept in the 16th century theologies was that of covenant. For Calvin it was a crucial element in his theology of the atonement and the church and had very important things to say about his theology of childhood. In the later development of the Presbyterian Doctrine of the Child in the Covenant it provided an important base for establishing the relation of children to the church and the gospel and was the grounds for baptising infants, at least the infants of committed Christian church members. It was the basis on which Horace Bushnell worked out his theology of nurture, with the now re-discovered and significant "that the child is to grow up as a Christian and know himself as no other".

The Anabaptists also gave some attention to the notion of covenant. However they distinguished quite sharply between the old covenant and the new covenant, the community of the law and the community of love, and hence also they distinguished between circumcision and baptism.

The Calvinistic view of the covenant is based on the first part of the biblical verse Genesis 17.7: "I will fulfill my covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you, generation after generation, an everlasting covenant to be your God, yours and your descendants after you". (N.E.B.). God

called Abraham and stipulated that he should work in humility and sincerity of heart, and commanded that the covenant should be sealed in Abraham and his children by circumcision which was the confirmatory sign of the covenant. The covenant is therefore a covenant of grace, in a relationship of friendship between God and man whereby man shares the divine life. It is God who takes the initiative, in calling Abraham.

The covenant represents not just an external relationship but a spiritual reality, a communion of life. Calvin went on to speak of the Old Testament covenant sealed by circumcision and that of the New Testament covenant sealed by baptism.⁶⁰ For Calvin the only difference between the two was one of administration. Since baptism means the forgiveness of sins and signifies a spiritual regeneration, Calvin no longer sees children as sinners but "as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ". The punishment for original sin is removed and baptism is the sign of that, therefore they stand in relationship with God as justified. Regeneration for Calvin was the first inception of the new life of God in Christ, and the manifestation of that life in the life of the baptised. As far as children are concerned Calvin included the children of believers in the promise with their parents. However, children are sons of God not by virtue of that baptism (there is no *ex opere operato* action here, no baptismal regeneration), but because they are heirs of God. Baptism is the sign. In the Old Testament, argued Calvin, children were not favoured with circumcision without being made partakers of the things signified by circumcision. The real children of Abraham even before birth, are heirs of eternal life: since the promise of God puts them in the same position as Abraham. If they are partakers of the thing signified, then why exclude them from the sign?⁶¹ So if the covenant is to be trusted and is firm and reliable, then it belongs to the children of believers now as much as it did to the children of Abraham then and Jewish infants, under the Old Testament. Christ, coming as fulfillment of the old covenant, makes the salvation of infants even more certain. If infants can be brought to Christ, if there is salvation for infants, then why exclude them from baptism which is the sign of that?⁶²

The status of the child in the covenant was also a part of Calvin's doctrine of the Church. Calvin distinguished between the visible church and the invisible church.

By the invisible church is meant the whole group in all ages who are the true children of God, those who through adoption and grace are his own. The knowledge of this church must be left to God alone. The visible church however is apparent to men. It includes the whole multitude throughout the earth who profess their faith in God through Christ, and who are initiated into his church by baptism. It includes many who are not of the church invisible.⁶³

Children enter this church on the grounds of the covenant and are presumptively regenerate: "God doth adopt the children with the fathers; and so consequently, the grace of salvation may be extended unto those which are as yet unborn".⁶⁴ The child is

then a *presumptive Christian*, forgiven of sin and regenerate, with new life as a latent seed to be nurtured to mature faith as he grows up. All children dying in infancy are saved because they are heirs of his promise. "In dying before the years of discretion children can only be seen as saved".⁶⁵ These children must be elect and saved on the grounds of the covenant.

The Anabaptists also used the idea of covenant, but in a different way. W. R. Estep, in his summary of Hubmaier's theology of baptism, refers to circumcision and the children of believers:

As to whether children of Christians, and children in the Old Testament times are the children of God, we leave that to Him who alone knows all things and we will not usurp his power. Noah's Ark is a type of baptism - there is plain scriptures for that. But we have no scripture comparing it with circumcision. The baptism with which believers are baptised has its doctrine and example in the plain Word of God.⁶⁶

There is then a rejection of the circumcision analogy, and a trust as to the fate of all infants dying before Christ, as also the infants of believers. Or is it an agnosticism? "To dare to predict their fate is to be as God", seems to be the Anabaptist view!

Once again it is clear that there is a certain order of events in which baptism is a part: preaching, hearing, repentance, faith, good work, church, Lord's Supper. Now this is not meant to be a saving process, nor is the order meant to be a mechanical necessity. But as far as baptism is concerned, certain things are to precede it and certain things to follow it. Baptism is not the beginning of the process.⁶⁷

Hubmaier stressed regeneration as a requisite of church membership and such regeneration demanded a degree of personal maturity, personal faith and volition. Calvin had agreed that the rite of baptism is profaned unless in administering it the person baptised is presumably regenerate. But because God makes children partakers of the covenant then they are presumptively regenerate. Regarding the principle that repentance and faith must precede baptism, which was the fundamental Anabaptist position, Calvin wrote:

That they [children] are baptised into future repentance and faith; for though these graces have not yet been formed in them, nevertheless by secret operation of the Spirit the seed of such as these is latent in them.⁶⁸

The Anabaptist stress on personal experience and the personal desire of the believer to be baptised was countered by Calvin with the criticism that those who hold such a view have fallen into the error of thinking that realisation in experience of the thing signified should always precede the sign. He uses circumcision as the example; it also presupposed faith and repentance and a good conscience towards God, but if it had been necessary that these precede the sign, then clearly it would not have been practised in the Old Testament. Infant baptism is a ratification of the covenant by the Lord.

Hubmaier denied any analogy between circumcision and baptism. Because the Christian religion is personal, one cannot commit another to it; one can only commit oneself. This is true of believers and their own children. The similarity with circumcision and the covenant idea is taken up in Peter Ridemann's "Rechenschaft" of 1541. Covenant is used but the stress is on the *discontinuity* between the new covenant in Christ and the old covenant under Abraham. Ridemann writes that participation in the first covenant is in fact by hearing the Word, repentance and faith:

This birth, however, takes place in this wise. If the word is heard and the same believed then faith is sealed with the power of God, the Holy Spirit who immediately reneweth the man and maketh him live... so that the man is formed a new creature... Thus whosoever is born in this wise, to him belongeth baptism as a bath of rebirth signifying that he hath entered into the covenant of the grace and knowledge of God.⁶⁹

He goes further, and criticises those who saw any analogy between circumcision and infant baptism in terms of covenant continuity by stressing that the analogy was not drawn clearly enough in terms of what the new covenant is. So:

Therefore we teach that as Abraham was commanded to circumcise in his house, even so was Christ to baptise in his house, as the words that he spoke to John indicate "Suffer it to be so, for this it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness". Now just as Abraham could not circumcise in his house before the child was born to him, nor all his seed after him, neither can anyone be baptised in the house of Christ unless he first be born of Christ through the word and faith. But he who is born in this manner, is baptised after he hath confessed his faith.⁷⁰

Thus the ground is cleared away and any analogy between the two covenants and circumcision and baptism is dismissed. There is *discontinuity* between the old covenant and the new in that the new replaces the old and a new order now begins. This order was announced in preaching and accepted in repentance and faith at such a time as the individual could understand. Zwingli showed signs of agreement with Calvin. For in his criticism of the Anabaptists, indeed in his very use of the word "ana-baptist", Zwingli maintained that they were guilty of not only disparaging the old covenant, but of severing the new from the old altogether. Far from exalting the new covenant established by Christ, they were guilty of making the new covenant less inclusive than the old and put forward a narrowness in the guise of evangelicalism. Infant baptism, equivalent of circumcision, was all-inclusive for the children of believers, whereas baptism was for adults only.

Covenant is taken up in the covenant theology of Pilgrim Marpeck. As circumcision is the sign of the old covenant so baptism is the sign of the new. He refers to baptism as the "covenant seal" (*Bundeschleissung*). The covenant seal must be preceded by the circumcision of the heart. For Marpeck,

"Circumcision in the Old Testament is a figure of the circumcision of the conscience of the New Covenant namely the baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire".⁷¹ The new covenant is spiritual, and the real analogy between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament is not baptism at all but the circumcision of the heart. And of course this applies to all men and women, who repent and have faith and are baptised. The baptism is the outward expression of the inner experience. It is a sign or seal. He goes as far as to say that circumcision of the old covenant has the same relationship with the circumcision of the heart, as "shadow has to substance". Now this circumcision of the heart, of which baptism is the outward sign, is the same as regeneration but it must be evidenced in faith. Indeed baptism must not be administered as the sign unless there is faith. "Where there is no faith, there is nothing but nothing (*da ist alle ter kain ler*) and baptism is no baptism".⁷² Thus the prime reference of baptism for Marpeck is discipleship. A child cannot meet the demands of discipleship, therefore baptism is meaningless. So Marpeck, even though he is most careful to use the notion of covenant, also calls on the familiar arguments used by other Anabaptists in refuting infant baptism. However, there is one other usage of covenant which is significant for Marpeck and that is the idea of *the church as the new covenant of grace*. It is the view of Beachy: "Both Menno and Dirk found a large measure of continuity between Israel as the covenant people of God and the Church as the new and spiritual Israel, but for Marpeck there was no continuity but rather a radical discontinuity".⁷³ For Marpeck membership of the old Israel was a matter of compulsion, the children were circumcised without consent. This is not the position under the new covenant, the church. A person must believe for himself.

It matters not that he was born of people who were already Christians, for even as the light is differentiated from the lamp and the picture from reality so much difference is there between Abraham's promise and race, and between Christians as every reasonable person who can distinguish between the Old and New Testaments can easily comprehend.⁷⁴

Thus there is a completely opposite view to Calvin, and a view of childhood that places the child outside the church because he is not yet at a stage in life when discipleship can be voluntarily entered into. For Marpeck the "grace of today" is different from "the grace of yesterday".

Marpeck held that the introduction of infant baptism was the cause of the church's loss of purity. He went further to say that even without the fall of the church after its apostolic purity, those before Christ, Abraham and the patriarchs, could not become Christians or God's spiritual children before the finished work of Christ. Thus there was a complete break in continuity between the old and new covenants. This was seen by Schwenckfeld to be the weightiest of errors and he criticised Marpeck for knowing neither the course of grace nor the character of faith.⁷⁵ Of course, Marpeck and those who

agreed with him had biblical evidence for their views on the new covenant, both in the Old Testament (Genesis 3.15, Numbers 24.17, Deut. 30.16, Jer. 31.31) and passages in the epistles to Hebrews, Colossians, Galatians and Romans. Their concern was to safeguard the uniqueness of Christ and the new dispensation that had come as a result of the atoning work of Christ. Marpeck went further and rejected all notion of an invisible church, first because they used the sword. Here is the Anabaptist stress on pacifism and refusal to take up arms. But, more important for this discussion, he rejected the idea of an invisible church because with Christ appearing the reality which was only previously hoped for was now actual. This places children in a state of innocence until they reach the state of understanding, when they can embrace the promise of new birth for themselves, experience it freely, choose to follow, and be baptised on profession of repentance and faith. It also places children outside the church, in its officially constituted sense, as they are not the right subjects for baptism, and not capable of discipleship.

Into the discussion of covenant theology and the baptism of infants on the grounds of the promise made to the parents and "their seed", Menno adds what may be called a moral argument. He speaks of the godless people who act as sponsors for infants being baptised. Their example, he says, is a bad one and not only will the children grow up like them, but such an example could be a positive danger and hindrance to them in later life:

Yet not withstanding all this, these same persons carry children who are thus illegitimate, born of such seducers, such immoral rascals and abandoned women to the baptism, that they may be called Christian and trained up in the same works and fruit as their unchristian adulterous parents, in whom and by whom they are conceived and begotten in accursed adultery.⁷⁶

Here is a complete contrast with Calvin.

Two quite distinct views of childhood emerge as a result of this discussion on covenant. Schenck traces the development of the Presbyterian Doctrine of the Child in the Covenant and shows that the implication is a view of childhood which places the child firmly in the Christian Faith, in the Christian Community, and treats him as a Christian to be nurtured from that Faith into his own and deeper Faith.

We can now add to our growing picture of Anabaptist childhood as follows:

9. *A lofty view of childhood in Calvin:* each child has a unique personality and has a complete personality for his age; such infants are renewed by the Spirit of God according to their capacity, until the power in them, though latent in infancy, grows by degrees and the presumptive repentance and faith anticipated in baptism, are manifest at the proper time. The child is a "presumptive Christian". *To the Anabaptists*, there is an undoubted innocence in childhood, nevertheless individuality and personality are almost ignored, until the stage in life when a good conscience with God is possible,

knowledge of good and evil is apparent. The child is not a Christian, there is no latent seed of regeneration. Each person is to hear the word of the gospel for himself, receive the gift of new life for himself, and respond in repentance and faith, and symbolise it in baptism. The person is to exercise his own faith, and is not presumed a Christian nor counted as a Christian until he exercises his own faith, and shows the fruit of that faith in his life. Only then does he "covenant" with God and the other believers, such a covenant being based on Christ who abrogates the new covenant, sealed by his blood, the old covenant of Abraham. However, as we have already seen, the optimistic view of human nature (born of the "natural law" theory) provides good grounds for valuing the children, and challenges parents and community in bringing them up.

10. Calvin's doctrine of election had suggested that the child who dies in infancy might well have been called by God, in divine election, to serve in the invisible church. *With the Anabaptists* whilst a child dying in infancy did not die in original sin, and would not be guilty of partaking of Adam's guilt, yet the almost absence of a doctrine of an invisible church and election into it, and the stress on the church as the visible brotherhood of believers, led to an agnosticism as to the fate of the dead infant. Saved in universal grace, yet, but no invisible church and not the consolation of divine calling.
11. Calvin's doctrine of the child in the covenant was based on the significance of the "family unit" - the seed shared in the covenant with "the parents". Clearly a view of unity within the family of believing parents with their own children is implied. Children are thereby placed firmly within the church with their parents, adopted on the grounds of the covenant made to the believers and their children. Baptism as the sign of that adoption confirmed their place in the church, and gave status to them. *For the Anabaptists*, because of the stress on individual, personal decision, because of the voluntaristic notion of the church, and because of the great stress on the need to show the fruits of repentance in the life of the believer (a view reinforced by the practice of the Ban, and the view of an almost "objective holiness" of the church), children were not in the church and could claim no special merit because they were the offspring of believers.
12. The consequence of the Calvinistic doctrine of the covenant and the working out in the Presbyterian Doctrine of the Child in the Covenant, was a pattern of child rearing summed up in the word *nurture*. The child is a presumptive Christian, the latent seed must be nurtured so that it grows as the child grows. Thus the child grows as a Christian and knows himself as no other. The contrast in the *Anabaptist view* of child rearing (to be treated in more detail later on, but inferred here) is that the child in his innocence is to be *instructed* in a knowledge of good and evil, and in the gospel, so that he might respond to it and so be "born

again". Indeed in the later life style of Hutterites and Mennonites the instruction becomes *indoctrination* and *overt socialisation*.

However, one issue remains unsolved: some children are in a different relationship to the church, are already under the sound of the gospel, and within the realms of grace, by virtue of their birth. Neither the Anabaptists, nor Baptists since, have fully recognised the challenge of this.⁷⁷ Further, with the waning of the missionary zeal of the first generation in the experience of the second generation, there is a change in the type of membership. For the Anabaptists each generation must hear the gospel afresh. This may be right and proper, but clearly each succeeding generation after the first is in different relationship than the first by virtue of being "second generation", until that day when some rebirth movement occurs again. Troelstch judges that protest groups emerge as sects when certain doctrines are neglected, or forgotten, or overlooked.⁷⁸

The consequences are that whereas with the first Anabaptist Reformers long agonies of spirit and inward suffering marked the step they took in breaking with the established church, and actual suffering and persecution followed such a step, this is not likely to be the case for the next generations. For some of the early Anabaptists, the inner baptism was more significant than the actual water baptism. Indeed it could be said that the symbolic significance of immersion as the mode of baptism escaped the first Reformers altogether. The pouring of water on the head of the kneeling believers was the most common method of baptising. Gerhard J. Neumann mentions "... a cross made with water on the forehead... sprinkles a shoemaker... baptism was performed by the use of an ordinary dipper... pouring water on the kneeling convert...".⁷⁹ Yet for the next generations, not sharing the agonies of the pioneers, and not feeling so keenly the initial break, baptism itself becomes the most significant mark of one's life in Christ, in fellowship with the others.

Now, make no mistake, the suggestion here is not that the Anabaptists became a church. Indeed there has been strong resistance over the centuries by the various Baptist Unions to become churches. But growth and change so often result in institutionalisation, and the question of second generation must be answered. The answer to the placing of the second generation firmly within their church, is inherent in the Calvinistic doctrine of election and covenant, namely: education, socialisation, or to use Horace Bushnell's word, nurture.

The answer of the Anabaptists seemed to be to present each generation with the gospel afresh and to place all in the same category as each other, children of believers and children of non believers, those brought up under Christian influence to the point of decision, and those converted from completely outside the Christian community. Conversion is the goal of preaching the gospel to all men, and also the goal of child rearing, education and socialisation in the believing communities themselves. Two conflicting views are presented here with different views of childhood. Did the Anabaptists really answer the issue of the second generation in the community? Did they really

examine seriously the case of those children whose parents are believers who are *de facto* in a different relationship with the Church by virtue of birth, and thereby in a different relationship to the Gospel, even though the decision to "opt in" must be taken?

For many people the debates of the 16th century seem strangely irrelevant. I have already remarked that we are not greatly concerned at this time about salvation, lest it imply that there are those who are not saved, and we are thereby presented with a picture of a somewhat unjust, unreasonable, or even capricious God. Questions about the after life and our ultimate destiny occupy little space in modern theology. Yet the debate about childhood and the covenant of grace established by God with his people exemplified by the Calvin/Anabaptist discussion, has been renewed in the theology of the Reformed Baptist movement. Nowhere is it more completely expressed than in the book *Children of Abraham* by David Kingdon.⁸⁰ Kingdon shares his complete sympathy with Calvinistic, Reformed theology until the doctrines of the child in the covenant. Reformed Baptists regard children as non-Christians. Instruction of children is a necessity, to be treated with utmost seriousness, so that they do not grow up with a false sense of security and hypocrisy. To count children as regenerate, as church members, would be to encourage in them false hope. Kingdon says "We do not say to our children 'Be a good Christian child', but 'Repent and believe the Gospel'."⁸¹ He feels that people with such a "high theology" (his words!) as Calvinists do themselves and their theology a grave injustice by sentimentality when it comes to infants. "We take seriously the child's lost estate and alienation from the living God, and thus we can effectively apply the remedy of the Gospel."⁸² His conclusion is that we shall fail our children if we do not teach and impress on them that Jesus commanded "with not one 'verily' but two, 'Ye must be born again'".⁸³

Clearly, there is a firm view of what is the responsibility of parents and the church towards their children. Not all of Kingdon's views are explicitly stated in the the 16th century Anabaptist writings. However, the status of the child before God and his relationship to the church is very much a contemporary Baptist debate and at least one strand of contemporary Baptists has reopened the crucial issue of covenant theology, the essence of Reformed theology, upon which divergent views of childhood are clearly based.

NOTES

- 45 Robert Friedmann, *The Doctrine of Original Sin as Held by the Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century* (MQR Vol.33, 1959) p.207.
- 46 Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Reformation* (B. DeGraff 1977 Nieuwkoop) p.6.
- 47 John Oyer, *The Writings of Luther Against the Anabaptists* (MQR Vol. 27, 1953) p.102.
- 48 Beachy, op.cit., p.8, n.13.
- 49 *ibid.*, p.29.

- 50 *ibid.*, p.38.
- 51 *ibid.*, p.39 being a quotation from "Vander Doope" in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* X p.
- 52 *ibid.*, p.40 "Vander Doope" p.91 and 92.
- 53 Dirk Phillips, "Christian Baptism" pp.42-45, as in *Anabaptist Conceptions of Child Nurture and Schooling: A Collection of Source Materials Used by the Old Order Amish* by John A. Hostetler, 1968, p.17.
- 54 George H. Williams, *The Mystical Heritage Common to Luther and the Radicals* (MQR Vol.48, July 1974) p.298.
- 55 Dirk Phillips, "Christian Baptism", p.44, *op.cit.* John A. Hostetler, p.18.
- 56 Wenger, *op.cit.*, p.132.
- 57 Joachim Wach, *Caspar Schwenkfeld - A Pupil and a Teacher in the School of Christ* (*Journal of Religion*, January 1946) p.28.
- 58 Beachy, *op.cit.* p.41.
- 59 *ibid.*, p.42n.
- 60 John Calvin, *Institutes of Religion* Vol.4 (edited by J. T. McNeill, SCM Press, 1961) p.3.
- 61 *ibid.*, p.5.
- 62 *ibid.*, p.7.
- 63 L. B. Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (Oxford University Press, 1940) p.10,11.
- 64 *ibid.*, p.12.
- 65 Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Review" (*Presbyterian Quarterly* Vol.4, No.18, October 1897) pp.502 f.
- 66 Estep, *op.cit.*, p.158.
- 67 *ibid.*, p.151, being a quotation from the English Translation of Hubmaier's Works.
- 68 Calvin, *op.cit.*, p.20.
- 69 Ridemann, *op.cit.*, p.78.
- 70 *ibid.*, p.78.
- 71 Estep, *op.cit.*, p.164, a quotation from Kiwiet's translation of the Taufbuchlein of Marpeck, pp.130 f.
- 72 *ibid.*, p.164, Taufbuchlein, p.129.
- 73 Beachy, *op.cit.*, p.95.
- 74 *ibid.*, p.95, Vernamung Marpeck, p.226.
- 75 *ibid.*, p.97.
- 76 Wenger, *op.cit.*, p.251,252.
- 77 I developed this myself a little in *Children in the Church - A Baptist View* (The Baptist Union, 1978).
- 78 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon (McMillan 1931) pp.691-728.
- 79 Neumann, *op.cit.*, p.145.

- 80 David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham* (Henry E. Walter Ltd., and Carey Publications Ltd, 1973).
- 81 *ibid.*, p.64.
- 82 *ibid.*, p.65.
- 83 *ibid.*, p.100.

D. F. TENNANT

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NEWS AND NOTES

HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE

As was announced at the Annual General Meeting, the Rev. Peter Wortley has retired from the Secretaryship of the Society, and is succeeded by the Rev. Roger Hayden. Our warm thanks go to Mr Wortley for all his work on the Society's behalf, and our best wishes to Mr Hayden in his future responsibilities. In addition, the Rev. Norman Moon has retired from the Committee after many years' service, and we are indebted to him for his deep interest and wise counsel at every opportunity.

MR CHARLES JEWSON

Readers will be glad to know that among the tributes to the late Mr C. B. Jewson is an obituary in *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. 38, part 1 (1981). It refers to his long-standing service to the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, of which he became President, to the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, and to the Norfolk Record Society. His contributions to *Norfolk Archaeology* and the *Norfolk Record Society* are listed. "Here as elsewhere his deep interest in Nonconformist, especially Baptist, history and his love of the Norwich region and its intellectual and cultural inheritance were central to his writings. These life-long preoccupations flowered most notably in *The Jacobin City, a portrait of Norwich 1788-1802*, published in 1975, which broke new ground as a study based securely on original sources, of Norwich at a time of intellectual and social ferment".

RESEARCH NEWS AND QUERIES

We hope to include in future issues a short section "Research News and Queries" to assist those who feel that other readers of the *Quarterly* may be able to help them in their work in Baptist history and related subjects. Items should be sent to the Editor, stating briefly and as clearly as possible, the subject(s) on which information or further sources are being sought, and the name and address for correspondence.