

The Seal and the First Instalment

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After setting out in some detail the evidence to show that the early Fathers, when they spoke of the 'seal', meant baptism, J. B. Lightfoot added the comment, 'But it may be questioned whether St. Paul (*σφραγισάμενος* 2 Cor. 1:22, comp. Ephes. 4:30) or St. John (Rev. 9:4) used the image with any direct reference to baptism.'¹ We may infer from the few pages hē left of a Commentary on Ephesians that for him the seal was an inward spiritual testimony. Despite notable exceptions, however,² modern opinion seems to have set against Lightfoot's judgment. Recent treatises on baptism³ all claim these texts for their own. Only Professor G. W. H. Lampe, who gives us the fullest treatment of the 'sealing' metaphor in his book *The Seal of the Spirit*, is more cautious—one must say, I think, ambivalent. There is, of course, the third view, so ably refuted by Lampe that we need not discuss it, that the 'seal' is confirmation.

It is not the intention of this article to enter into controversy about baptism, though the results reached may have some indirect relevance for this debate. Rather, the question may be raised whether the common identification of the seal with baptism has not had the consequence of suppressing another side of St. Paul's thought. Two out of the three texts used in the discussion about the seal employ not one, but two vivid metaphors. The work of the Holy Spirit is described not only as a 'seal', but also as the 'first instalment' or 'guarantee'. The intrinsic interest of these striking figures for living religious experience, and the conviction that exegesis has often been distorted by a neglect of the second of them, prompts the following attempt to discuss these texts again.

¹ *Apostolic Fathers*, I, ii, p. 226.

² C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 60; A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, p. 166, 230n.; J. A. Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 36.

³ W. F. Flemington, *The N.T. Doctrine of Baptism*, p. 66ff.; O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 45f., 57; Gabriel Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, p. 31f.; A. Gilmore (Ed.), *Christian Baptism*, p. 142.

THE FIRST INSTALMENT (*ἀρραβών*)

The word *ἀρραβών*⁴ is Semitic, and as it occurs in non-Biblical Greek and also in early Latin, it appears that it was a trading term taken over from the Phoenicians, the great merchants of the Mediterranean. It appears to come from the Semitic root 'rb, to *entwine* and so to *pledge*. In the business world it combined the sense of 'first instalment' and 'guarantee'. It referred to a part payment of a debt which carried with it the guarantee that the full amount would be paid later. It might be made in money or in goods, but the early commentators insist that the *ἀρραβών* had to be of the same kind as that for which it was the security. (In this it differed sharply from *ἐνέχυρον* which might be a security of any type). Thus Lightfoot states, 'The thing given is related to the thing assured, the present to the hereafter—as a part to the whole.' Moreover, there are many examples from the Papyri where 'the vernacular usage amply confirms the New Testament sense of an "earnest" or part given in advance of what will be bestowed fully afterwards'⁵.

These ideas lie behind two texts in 2 Corinthians:

He (God) has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (or 'first instalment': *ἀρραβών*) (2 Cor. 1:22).

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (*ἀρραβών*) (2 Cor. 5:5).

The context of the second passage is the expectation of life beyond death. In the light of our discussion so far, we may clearly say that Paul means that part of the future bliss is already obtained in present experience, and that this first instalment is itself a guarantee that the rest will be forthcoming. Such an experience is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. But what kind of experience? The answer no doubt lies locked up in the phrase 'in our hearts' (*ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν*) from our first quotation. But it is not clear that we have the key. Modern research has stressed again and again that the heart (*καρδία*) in Biblical thought is not merely the seat of the emotions. Rather it embraces the whole personality. The article in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, after indicating how *καρδία* is the 'central point of man's inner life', the seat of emotion, mind and will, finally ranges 2 Cor. 1:22 under the heading, 'The heart is above all the one central place within man which God addresses, in which the religious life is rooted, and which determines the moral disposition.'

⁴ See the full account in J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 323.

⁵ Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 79.

meanings, which may be fully illustrated from the Papyri, relate to the following uses of the seal: (1) the seal effects a firm closure (whether of a document or a storage jar) and prevents unauthorized tampering; (2) the seal authenticates or guarantees the thing sealed as being the genuine article; (3) the seal brands with a mark of ownership. The New Testament references may be ranged under these three headings.

1. A *final closure*. In Matt. 27:66 we read that the tomb of Jesus was made secure by *sealing* the stone. This is a quite straightforward use of the literal meaning of σφραγίζω. Probably under the same heading is to be classed the metaphorical use at Romans 15:28; σφραγισάμενος αὐτοῖς τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον. It is rather similar to a modern English slang usage, when we speak of 'tying up' a business matter, or the metaphor behind the commercial use of the word 'consignment'. 'Paul means that all the proper steps had been taken with regard to the collection.'⁸

2. *Authentication*. This may be through a definite outward mark, or in a more abstract way. Of the former, St. Paul's description of circumcision as '*a seal of the righteousness which he (Abraham) had by faith*' (Romans 4:11) may be quoted. Circumcision was an outward confirmation of the spiritual reality of Abraham's justification. The same sense of authentication, though without any obvious outward 'seal' is the metaphorical use at 1 Corinthians 9:2. St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as '*the seal of my apostleship*': i.e. the fact that they are Christian confirms the fact that St. Paul himself is a true apostle.

Here also may be mentioned two uses of the metaphor in the Fourth Gospel. John 3:33: '*He who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, (ἐσφράγισεν ὅτι . . .) that God is true.*' Here, from the point of view of the person sealing, rather than the thing sealed, ἐσφράγισεν means 'has attested'. 'He who accepts the witness of Jesus thereby attests that Jesus speaks the words of God as his accredited messenger.'⁹

Probably John 6:27 employ the metaphor in the same way: '*for on him (the Son of Man) has God the Father set his seal.*' (τοῦτον . . . ἐσφράγισεν). The interpretation of ἐσφράγισεν here is extremely difficult, and the commentators are divided. J. H. Bernard and C. K. Barrett are inclined to see here a reference to the baptism of Jesus. E. Hoskyns and R. H. Strachan do not commit themselves, but are content to say, 'God has authenticated Jesus both in his person and his mission'.¹⁰ It would seem most likely that the verse should be interpreted with reference to the fascinating and difficult question of the witness of the Father to Jesus (as in John 5:30-38; 8:17ff.)¹¹ in the light of the rabbinic

⁸ M.M. following Deissmann.

⁹ I.C.C., *ad loc.*

¹⁰ Strachan, *ad loc.*

¹¹ E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 199-203; C. H. Dodd, *Interpreting the Fourth Gospel*, p. 328f.

teaching that God's seal is truth.¹² God authenticates Jesus through the response of those who believe.

3. *Ownership*. In a more or less literal sense this use appears at 2 Timothy 2:19:

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal:
'The Lord knows those who are his.'

But there are far more intriguing applications both literal and metaphorical of the *σφραγίς* idea than this. Professor Lampe shows in great detail¹³ how slaves were tattooed and prisoners branded, and soldiers again tattooed as 'the emperor's men'. With this custom in view pagan worshippers marked their bodies to show that they were the property of the deity, and there are traces of a similar idea in the Old Testament.

It would seem to be a combination of this idea with the idea of a guarantee or authentication which underlies the texts which are the special subject of our enquiry (Ephesians 1:14; 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:22). Lampe points out the difference between these passages and Romans 4:11. This verse speaks of circumcision as a 'sign or seal of the righteousness which he (Abraham) had by faith while he was still uncircumcised'. It is Abraham's *righteousness* which is here sealed by the sign of circumcision, whereas in the former group of passages it is the *persons* of believers which are 'sealed for the day of redemption'. They are thus branded as God's men in Christ, and their redemption is assured. In the Apostolic Fathers such language almost invariably referred to baptism.¹⁴ But how far was this intended by St. Paul?

To prepare the way for an answer to this question we have examined every occurrence of the *σφραγίς* root in the New Testament outside the Apocalypse. Such a procedure is necessary to illustrate the great variety of usage (metaphorical as well as literal) even in quite a limited number of passages. Of the Pauline verses, one and only one incontestably uses the metaphor with reference to an outward mark, and that is circumcision. Two others, however, will sustain no such reference (Rom. 15:28 and 1 Cor. 9:2). 2 Tim. 2:19 is probably not Pauline, and in any case irrelevant. The two passages from the Fourth Gospel seem to speak of attestation as an intellectual or spiritual apprehension. We are not therefore in the position of having to rely solely on the evidence of the Fathers in trying to determine what our texts might mean: within the New Testament itself there is a range of meanings which forbids us to say that the seal *must* mean baptism. It might be used in a far more general metaphorical way.

It would take too long to examine all the occurrences of this word in the Apocalypse. It must suffice to state categorically that there is an equal variety of usage within that one book, and that

¹² W. F. Howard, *Christianity According to St. John*, p. 185.

¹³ *The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 9ff.

¹⁴ Lampe, *op. cit.*, chapter 6.

it is far from certain that there is any reference to baptism in the 'sealing of the saints'. Professor Lampe, for example, prefers a very different interpretation.¹⁵

We may here pause to point out that the patristic evidence is not quite unanimously in favour of the baptism reference. The *Epistle of Barnabas* is especially relevant, as it is probably to be dated between A.D. 70 and 80.¹⁶ This comparatively early work speaks of circumcision as a σφραγίς¹⁷ following Romans 4:11: It is not at all clear, however, that this passage is intending to speak of Christian baptism as the seal, as Lampe claims.¹⁸ Another reference in *Barnabas* (which Lampe does not quote) points quite definitely in another direction:

'And Moses understood, and threw the two tables from his hands; and their covenant was broken in pieces, that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed unto our hearts (ἐνκατασφραγιθῆ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν) in the hope which springeth from faith in him' (Ep. Barn. 4:8).

The context is the contrast between the old and new covenants. To that extent, therefore, the passage might be held to support the idea that baptism is a new circumcision. But the language could hardly be plainer: it is pointing to a spiritual imprinting or engraving of the new covenant on the heart. The Old Testament background will be Jeremiah 31. Possibly there is a reflection of the Pauline teaching we are now to consider. Certainly this statement from the *Epistle of Barnabas* expresses what I believe to be the essential meaning of the Pauline doctrine of the Seal of the Spirit.

THE SEAL OF THE SPIRIT

We have so far established a great fluidity in the use of the metaphor of *sealing* among New Testament writers. We have shown that even in the sub-apostolic period this metaphor did not always mean baptism. We are perhaps in a position to approach the exegesis of the Pauline¹⁹ texts with open minds. We may begin from Ephesians 1:14:

ἐν ᾧ (sc. τῷ χριστῷ) καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἄρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν.

¹⁵ Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 285. Contrast however A. Richardson, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 352.

¹⁶ The view of J. B. Lightfoot, recently confirmed by R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, p. 100.

¹⁷ Ep. Barn. 9:6.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 84, 104. In the opinion of Arndt and Gingrich (s.v. *sphragis*), 'sphragis need be no more than a metaphor for attestation or confirmation here.'

¹⁹ I am not persuaded of the non-Pauline authorship of Ephesians. C. L. Mitton (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 153) claims that Eph. 1:13f. is a conflation of 2 Cor. 1:22 and Gal. 3:14, but for our purposes, (a) an

The sealing is 'with the Holy Spirit', and the relative clause defines more precisely what the work of the Holy Spirit in sealing is. It is a 'first instalment' or 'guarantee' of our inheritance. Our study of ἀρραβών has shown us the deeply inward experiential meaning which Paul attaches to this phrase. It would seem from this verse quite clear, therefore, that 'sealing with the Holy Spirit' is (in Lampe's words) an 'inward experience of the Spirit, which represents the circumcision of the heart'.²⁰

The interpretation of Ephesians 1:14 must, I submit, govern that of Ephesians 4:30:

καὶ μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἐσφραγίσθητε εἰς ἡμέραν ἀπολυτρώσεως.

Here, ἐν might be merely instrumental—precisely equivalent to the τῷ πνεύματι of 1:14. On the other hand, taken on its own, this verse might leave open the possibility that Paul thought (though he did not write) that the believer was sealed *with* water (ὕδατι) *in* the Holy Spirit. But the parallel with 1:14 shows that it is the supernatural influence of the Spirit *in which* believers are sealed that is uppermost in the writer's mind. Thus Westcott comments on Eph. 1:14: 'Here the Spirit is regarded as the instrument by which believers are sealed; in 4:30 as the element, so to speak, in which they are immersed.'

The elucidation of 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 is more difficult.

ὁ δὲ βεβαιῶν ἡμᾶς σὺν ὑμῖν εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ χρίσας ἡμᾶς Θεός,
ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος ἡμᾶς καὶ δούς τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ Πνεύματος
ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν.

The extent to which each participle is to be regarded as referring to a separate act of the Holy Spirit, or perhaps a separate rite of Christian initiation, is uncertain, and rendered more obscure by a difference of reading. Probably we should accept the view of Plummer²¹ and Kilpatrick, reading ὁ after Θεός. In this case, verse 21 (as far as ἡμᾶς Θεός) is best taken as a complete sentence, with Θεός as predicate. What follows then adds an additional point, and this is the force of καί in ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος: 'He not only anointed us, but also (καί) sealed us and gave . . .'²² The whole passage would then be rendered:

'The one who establishes us with you in Christ, and who anointed us, is God; who also sealed us and gave us the first instalment of the Spirit in our hearts.'

'Ephesian Continuator' was nearer to Paul than we are and likely to interpret him correctly, (b) any misinterpretation by a later writer would tend to treat the seal as baptism (in line with patristic writers). This, if our argument is correct, has not happened here.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

²¹ *I.C.C.*, *ad loc.*

²² Plummer, *I.C.C.*, *ad loc.*

These grammatical niceties cannot entirely establish, but do suggest the conclusion that in these two verses St. Paul is putting forward two points, each in a pair of participles, first, that God confirms and has anointed us, and second, that He also sealed us and gave the first instalment or guarantee in our hearts.²³

But what is meant by these metaphorical expressions? The view has been put forward that *χρίσας* refers to an actual rite of anointing in confirmation, which took place even before baptism: *σφραγισάμενος* then refers to the subsequent act of baptism. The evidence for this is late and uncertain and it has been sufficiently refuted by Lampe.²⁴ Our own argument has already suggested a degree of caution in connecting *σφραγισάμενος* with baptism. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether a different exegesis will not succeed both in preserving the apparent twofold stress in these verses, and in keeping closer to characteristic Pauline and New Testament usage.

The phrase *εἰς χριστόν* in itself recalls Galatians 3:27: *εἰς χριστόν ἐβαπτίσθητε*. It is a formula associated with baptism. The natural inference is that if any words here refer to baptism they should be the participles most closely connected with *εἰς χριστόν*, viz., *βεβαιῶν* and *χρίσας*. H. B. Swete adopted this view²⁵ and it is strongly supported by a consideration of Acts 10:38 and Luke 4:18.²⁶ In these passages it is stated or implied that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the moment of anointing which is in view is most readily explained as His baptism. Now our verse plainly contains a play on the word *χριστός*: Christians are anointed into *the* Anointed, and He received His anointing with the Spirit at His baptism. It is through baptism, therefore, that believers are incorporated into the Messianic community which is the Body of Christ.

It is not quite clear that this interpretation will easily fit the only other New Testament reference in which Christians are said to be anointed:

‘But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know’ (1 John 2:20).

‘The anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true’ (1 John 2:27).

Here a purely spiritual anointing seems more appropriate, whether the correct understanding here be of some ‘spiritual

²³ Or possibly, in view of the change of tense and word order, *βεβαιῶν* (present) embraces the whole of what follows, ‘He confirms us, in that he anointed (and also sealed . . .).

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 81–93.

²⁵ *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 192.

²⁶ Cf. Flemington, *The N.T. Doctrine of Baptism*, p. 67, and C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 59.

experience' or the 'word of the Gospel', as C. H. Dodd has argued. But the association of the anointing of Jesus with His baptism may still suggest that the idea of baptism is present here, if not the primary meaning: the Word of the Gospel is the confession of faith made at baptism, if Dodd's view be correct.²⁷

It would seem therefore that while the material for forming any judgment is tenuous, the weight of evidence, if we confine our attention to the primary witness of New Testament usage, is as strong for associating *χρίσας* with baptism as it is weak for suggesting a link between this rite and the root *σφραγίς*.²⁸

Now if we have correctly assessed the grammatical implications of the two verses as a whole, they should be read as positive evidence against identifying the 'seal' with baptism.²⁹ Our case by no means rests on this slender basis, but it does give some support to our previous discussion of *σφραγίς*. 'Who also sealed us . . .' appears to introduce a different point. If we ask, What point?, our previous exegesis of the 'seal' as the experience of the Spirit, otherwise described as the 'first instalment of the Spirit in our hearts', would seem to fit perfectly.³⁰ The one phrase in this passage whose meaning is not in doubt is *δοὺς τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν*, and the fact that this *ἀρραβῶν* gives the meaning of *ἐσφραγίσθητε* in Eph. 1:14 may now be used with some confidence to illuminate our present obscurity.

I conclude that *βεβαιῶν* and *χρίσας* refer to the anointing of the Spirit received (probably) in baptism, while *σφραγισάμενος* defined by *δοὺς τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ Πνεύματος* refers to the experience of this gift. This is the view of C. H. Dodd, who sums up thus: 'The collocation of the words "Christ" and "anointed" shows that Paul has in mind the Messianic consecration as shared by those who are of "the body of Christ" . . . It is not, however, said that Christians are "anointed with the Holy Spirit": they are "anointed" that is "consecrated" in solidarity with Christ, and the "seal" or "guarantee" of this fact is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart.'³¹

²⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 62f. Cf. A. Gilmore (Ed.), *Christian Baptism*, p. 166.

²⁸ Plummer's view that *χρίσας* refers to the commissioning of the apostles for missionary work depends on the question whether or not *ὅν ἑμῖν* is to be carried over to the second *ἡμῶν* or not. In *χρίσας ἡμῶν* St. Paul may be referring only to himself, Silvanus and Timothy, though the whole verse appears rather to be an affirmation of their solidarity with the Corinthian Christians 'in Christ'. Plummer is tentative in his suggestion, and admits that the whole verse may well refer to all Christians.

That *ἡμῶν* should be translated 'me' throughout (Moffatt) is rendered difficult by the careful use of the 1st person singular in the adjoining contexts, both before and after.

²⁹ Not the reverse, as Flemington, p. 67.

³⁰ Swete's suggestion 'receiving the impress of God's character' is attractive, but seems to be without parallel among the multifarious uses of *σφραγίς*.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

THE SEAL AND BAPTISM

Exegesis of the texts concerned leaves us with a purely 'inward stamp'. There remains a rather tortuous argument from Romans 4:11 by way of Colossians 2:11-12 which is sometimes adduced to prove an identity between the 'seal' and baptism in the thought of St. Paul.³²

He refers to circumcision as a *seal* of Abraham's righteousness by faith. He also speaks of baptism as equivalent to a circumcision not made by hands. But the burden of the Colossians passage is the great difference between the inward and spiritual nature of the new covenant over against the outward physical character of the old. As *σφραγίς* in Rom. 4:11 applies precisely to the *physical* sign of circumcision, it would seem distinctly inappropriate to apply it to Christian baptism in the context suggested by Colossians 2. Even if the collocation of Rom. 4:11 with Eph. 1:13, etc., is 'regarded by the whole Reformed school as classical'³³, Lampe seems nearer the truth when he writes, 'Circumcision, other than the "true circumcision of the spirit" such as the prophets foretold, is not likened to baptism by the New Testament writers, but contrasted with it.'³⁴ I conclude that for St. Paul, the seal of the Spirit is primarily the experience of the Spirit's working in life and heart: it is an inward stamp, and can by no means be simply equated with baptism.³⁵

Now Lampe has undoubtedly shown that the complex of ideas denoted by the eschatological gift of the Spirit and entry upon the New Covenant (or spiritual circumcision of the heart) are brought together in baptism. This was the experience of the early church and the teaching of St. Paul: but the point would be better put by saying that baptism is the sacrament of *entry* into this sphere of the Spirit in union with the crucified and risen Christ. It may even be (though it is by no means certain) that the aorist participles in our texts suggest that an experience of 'sealing' was given at the moment of baptism. We would not seek to deny that such an experience may commonly have been mediated through baptism. But was it known *only* in baptism—or (for the mature Christian) even *supremely* in baptism? On such a view we would seem forced to refer the whole of St. Paul's exposition of the life 'in Christ' to the moment of baptism. To do this would be very like the error of the revivalist whose Christian experience has apparently been limited to the moment of his conversion in the distant past.

We are not therefore persuaded by Flemington's attempt to argue from the 'baptismal context' that the seal must be referred

³² Flemington, *op. cit.*, p. 66f.

³³ G. Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, p. 32. Cf. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 56ff.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 83, also p. 5. Cf. Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Concerning Baptism*, p. 43f.

³⁵ Cf. Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

to baptism.³⁶ Being brought into the adoption of sons, putting on Christ in the power of the Spirit and in response to the preached word—these are certainly elements in St. Paul's baptismal theology. But Romans 8 indicates that they are too much a part and parcel of St. Paul's present experience to be limited to the moment of baptism. Flemington remarks, 'that Romans 8 lacks any explicit mention of the rite is probably as accidental as the fact that it equally lacks any mention of faith.' This is surely special pleading.

We require a more flexible interpretation, which reaches with the realities of the Spirit's dealings with us.³⁷ The choice does not lie between baptism and confirmation, or baptism with water and a further 'stage' of baptism with the Spirit. One cannot help feeling that an important reason for Lampe's insistence that the seal must be closely linked with baptism is his healthy dislike of these alternatives. But they are not the only possibilities. The consciousness of life revealed in St. Paul's epistles need not and indeed cannot be represented by a series of rites or any rigid sequence of 'stages'. It is a continuing process within *one* 'life in Christ', yet involving varying experiences of light and shade. Granted that for him, the Holy Spirit is given in baptism: yet it is a gift which is constantly *realized* thereafter, both in the sensitive inwardness of the believer's experience (for 'the love of God is shed abroad in his heart') and in the fellowship of the church, the body of Christ. The gift is once for all: but the realization of the gift is progressive, and the awareness of it in experience, fluctuating.

The seal of the Spirit is concerned with this dimension of Christian experience, which is the ἀρραβών of eternal life. That such life is entered upon in and through baptism is comparatively irrelevant for an understanding of it as God's 'seal'. The guarantee, certainty, or assurance, comes to us not from the rite of baptism, but from the experience of the life of faith.

I would suggest certain ways in which this understanding of the 'seal' is relevant for a proper theological appraisal of religious experience. We may say roughly that baptism stands for the objective and the seal for the subjective aspect of faith.

The Spirit is given sacramentally through baptism. In granting this, we allow for the association of the 'seal' with the rite of Christian initiation. But it is an association, not an identification. Paedo-baptists certainly cannot, and I doubt if Baptists would, claim that the rite in which the Spirit is given is invariably accompanied by an *experience* of the Spirit. Further, baptism is the medium through which the redeeming power of Christ's and resurrection are objectively applied to the newly baptized. It is still a matter objective rather than subjective that the believer

³⁶ Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 60f., p. 62.

³⁷ Cf. Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, chapter 5.

should accept this in faith. But what confirms or guarantees to him that his faith is not misplaced, that this is indeed the act of the living God, and not some superstitious mumbo-jumbo? It is his immediate experience, then or later, constantly, intermittently, or even at one climactic and never-to-be-repeated moment, of the illumination of the Spirit. To define this more closely would be far too long a task: we tried to hint at its wide ranging variety in our brief discussion of ἀπαβών. But it is in this realm of experience that the believer finds the guarantee of his faith, and we have seen that this notion of guarantee is cardinal in the two metaphors of St. Paul's we have been discussing. This then is the seal of the Spirit.

The pattern is the same as that found in the sequence of Mark 8 and 9. Peter confesses his faith in Jesus as Messiah. It is only thereafter that that faith is supernaturally confirmed in the Transfiguration. If this be accepted as a true model of the relation between baptismal faith and the seal of the spirit, there would result clear gain, which we may, in conclusion, tabulate.

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the objective reality of God's grace. He saves us whether we 'experience' anything or not.

2. The Christian life is therefore one of committal in faith to God's revelation in Christ, not a pursuit of exalted experiences.

3. Nevertheless, such experiences do come, and by our exegesis they receive their proper place in New Testament theology. They are the 'seal' or 'first instalment' of the Spirit which guarantees and confirms the affirmation of faith made by us or for us in baptism. In this way we take a step towards a proper evaluation of the dimension of personal experience, which has in fact been cardinal in the life of countless saints and theologians, without surrendering the basic objectivity of the New Testament *kerygma*.