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Believers' Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

SOME little time ago, a prominent Congregationalist wrote the following words in one of the religious journals: "It is Anglo-Catholicism (with an Anabaptist streak in Independency) which is holding up the healing of our divisions in India, in England and elsewhere." I do not wish to dwell on the questionable taste of such an allusion to Baptists by one who invites them to join him. It is sufficient to say that the metaphor by which the largest Free Church in the world is described as a "streak" in Congregationalism shows a singular lack of information about us. I make the quotation simply to illustrate the present need for clearer and more effective Baptist witness. If we are simply a larger or smaller body of Congregationalists afflicted with a rather embarrassing idiosyncrasy of negligible importance, we have indeed no justification for remaining aloof from them and others. But no intelligent and well-instructed Baptist would accept that description of his position. We believe that we give clearer expression to some cardinal truths of the Christian life than does any other of the Churches. Whatever our own shortcomings—and I shall speak frankly of what these seem to me to be—we believe that we have yet a witness to bear to the permanent truths of the New Testament, a witness still needed by the Church in general and the world without. But that witness can be borne only if the truths in question are not merely our opinions or traditions, but also our *convictions*. Does not some of our present admitted weakness lie here?

At your invitation,¹ I propose to speak of "Believers' Baptism and the Holy Spirit," and I do this the more readily because I have been doing it, in season and out of season, for forty years. Congregational polity does not greatly attract me, and certainly would not be sufficient to keep me a Baptist. Nor would the retention of the New Testament *form* of baptism, however valuable in itself, seem to me an adequate reason for refusing to join some other Church in which the permanent truths of the Christian faith found adequate expression. I feel strongly the attraction of the order and dignity of the Presbyterians, and of the spirituality of the Quaker witness. When I was baptised, more than half a century ago, the Baptist presentation of the great Christian verities was the only one I knew, but with larger

¹ Read to the London Baptist Association, January 31st, 1939.

knowledge I have remained a Baptist, growingly convinced of the value of the Baptist witness, chiefly on three grounds. *First*, because it is impossible, in the kind of life we have to live, to combine all the virtues and none of the vices of the different Christian communities within a single system. *Second*, because religion needs a body as well as a soul, and the Baptist form of "body" does express cardinal truths clearly and effectively. *Third*, because a Baptist who believes in the reality of the Holy Spirit can find his way to that true Catholicity which marks a genuine Christian faith while remaining a convinced Baptist.

In regard to our particular subject, I propose to speak first of the relation of baptism to the Holy Spirit as set forth in the New Testament, reviewing the baptism of our Lord, baptism within the primitive Christian community, baptism for the apostle Paul, and baptism in the Fourth Gospel. I shall go on to notice our present emphasis on certain aspects of baptism as compared with that of the New Testament, and to indicate what seems to me the present need and opportunity for a fuller fidelity to the example and teaching of the New Testament.

In the earliest account of the baptism of Jesus, that of the Gospel according to Mark, we read that as soon as Jesus came up from the baptismal waters, He saw the heavens parting asunder and the Spirit coming down upon Him like a dove, whilst a voice from heaven said, "Thou art my Son, the Beloved, in thee have I delight" (i. 10, 11). It should be noticed that in this narrative the vision and the audition are both confined to Jesus, by whom they were presumably imparted to others on some subsequent occasion. Matthew and Luke imply that the vision and the audition were experienced by others on the occasion itself, the former by putting the words spoken into the form of a public declaration (iii. 17), the latter by saying that the dove came down "in bodily shape" (iii. 22). The Fourth Gospel goes further still by stating that John the Baptist saw the vision and bore witness to it (i. 32, 33). It is safest here to take our stand on the testimony of Mark, and to conceive the experience as one belonging to Jesus only in the first instance. The symbolism of the dove has some parallels in contemporary Jewish thought, in which it was linked with the brooding Spirit of God at the creation, according to the first chapter of Genesis. It suggests, therefore, that a creative moment had been reached in the human consciousness of Jesus, a moment in His life comparable with that moment at which God said of the world, "Let there be light." We may compare the similar parallel drawn by the apostle Paul between the first and the second creation, when he declares of the ordinary believer, "It is God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to

give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians iv. 6). We have the best clue to the content of the created consciousness in the mind of Jesus in the words which He hears, apparently best preserved in the form [Western text of Luke iii. 22] :—

Thou art my Son, the Beloved,
To-day have I become thy father. (So Moffatt).

Those words echo two important Old Testament passages with which Jesus must have been familiar, viz., the second Psalm, referred to the Messianic king in Jewish exegesis, and Isaiah xlii. 1: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him." Here again we may compare the way in which Jesus, in the synagogue of Nazareth, applies a similar passage to Himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." We seem, therefore, to be warranted in saying that the moment of baptism marked for Jesus the point at which His earlier filial consciousness, reflected in the story of His boyhood (Luke ii. 40 ff.), is passing into His own way of conceiving the Messianic vocation, and now having the seal of God set upon it. The moment was one which is comparable with the typical prophetic "call" of the Old Testament. We are fully justified in saying that the water-baptism was also for Jesus a Spirit-baptism, as the context of the words quoted from Isaiah xlii. would suggest, "I have put my spirit upon him." The baptism unto repentance which John the Baptist administered was capable of being given a new significance in the experience of Jesus; the Johannine baptism itself looked forward to something beyond itself, and as this something more became Christian baptism. In confirmation of the claim made that the water-baptism of Jesus was also a Spirit-baptism, we note the words of Mark, that Jesus was at once urged by the Spirit (conceived as remaining within Him) into the Desert of Temptation (i. 12, cf. Matthew iv. 1), whilst Luke says that He returned from the Jordan "full of the Holy Spirit" (iv. 1). We must not make our understanding of such words more difficult by trying to read into them the Christology of Chalcedon. They reflect the simpler Christology of the primitive community. They are paralleled by the words of Acts x. 38, which probably refer to the baptism of Jesus. Peter there shows "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, so that He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

We ought not to say that all this has no bearing on the subject of "believers' baptism," on the ground that our Lord was unique. True as that is, His uniqueness was not in having

a nature wholly different from ours, but rather in the use He made of the human nature which He shared with us. Whatever else He was, He was a believer, and as a believer He participated in a water-baptism which was for Him the occasion of that Spirit-baptism through which He is represented as entering upon His mission. His war with the powers of evil was waged in the strength of the power received by Him at His baptism. "By the spirit of God I cast out demons" (Matthew xii. 28). If, then, we plead that the example of our Lord in accepting water-baptism should be followed by believers, we are justified in the expectation that true believers who follow His example may enter into a humbler, yet related, experience of the Holy Spirit for the fulfilment of *their* vocation. Such a creative moment will have for us, as for Him, its long preparation, and its longer or shorter time of fulfilment, but the creative moment will have a significance of its own. We may say, with Dr. Anderson Scott, that "the coming of the Spirit may be described" for us, as well as for our Lord, "as an overwhelming sense of sonship, and an overwhelming sense of brotherhood."

If we are rightly to interpret baptism as practised in the early Church, there are some general facts to be recalled, showing that the Church of those days was primarily a Spirit-guided and Spirit-animated community. Think of the picture of Christian worship which we have in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. That worship has been well called, by a Roman Catholic scholar, "the liturgy of the Spirit." Probably the service began, like Paul's letters, with the benediction. An open prayer-meeting followed, with congregational "Amens," and possibly the Lord's Prayer. Hymns might be sung (like some of those in the Apocalypse) at the suggestion of someone present, as in a Quaker meeting. Portions of the Old Testament were read, and perhaps some of the sayings of Jesus, followed by a word of "wisdom" or "knowledge," opening the meaning of what had been read. Then, it might be, the Spirit moved one or another to "prophesy," that is, to declare some intelligible revelation, or (what the Corinthians specially enjoyed, and Paul rather deprecated) someone uttered those unintelligible sounds, under the influence of religious emotion, which were known as "tongues," and needed skilled interpretation into intelligible language. A closing benediction and the kiss of peace would close this meeting for edification. Here there are certain conventions such as any community which meets regularly must develop, but the supreme control is that of the Holy Spirit, acting through inspired members of the community.

Consider again the Church government. Again there are certain conventional elements, such as groups of elders, and in

some places their assistants, the deacons. But the supreme control is vested in the Holy Spirit, acting through individual members of the community, as when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts xiii. 2), or when the apostles and elders at Jerusalem wrote to the whole Church, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts xv. 28). These are not figures of speech; they imply human voices which uttered the message of the Spirit. The simplest utterance of genuine faith, such as "Jesus is Lord" was ascribed to the Holy Spirit. All the Christian virtues were described by Paul as the fruit of the Spirit. All the capacities of individual members, used in the service of the community, were regarded as the *charismata*, the "graces" or the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit—administration, teaching and interpretation, healing and general helpfulness. The Church is described as "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ix. 31: *paraklesis*). The indwelling of the community by the Holy Spirit makes of it a shrine (1 Corinthians iii. 16), just as did the indwelling of the individual heart by the same Spirit (vi. 19). The Church, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and (contemporary) prophets," becomes "a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians ii. 22). The unity of the Church depends on the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians iv. 3 ff.). Paul's argument for order and peace is the identity of the Spirit as the common source of all the diversity of gifts and energies.

The door of entrance into this Spirit-filled community was the baptism of believers, and it would be strange if this experience alone were divorced from the operation of the Holy Spirit, divinely operative in and through the human acts, just as in all the other operations. But we do not always have to depend merely on such an inference, valid as it would be. At the very outset of the Church's career, on the day of Pentecost, we have the familiar words of Peter, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii. 38). The baptism in, or into, the name of Jesus meant a surrender of the human personality to the ownership of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was normally expected that this would be accompanied by the visible signs that the gift of the Spirit had been received. There were exceptional cases, and these are noted just because they are exceptions to the general rule. Thus the baptism of the Samaritans, which broke new ground, was not marked by the gift of the Spirit, until Peter and John, sent on purpose from Jerusalem, had

prayed and laid their hands on the baptized converts, thus confirming their entrance into the community (Acts viii. 14 ff.). The Cornelius group, responding in faith to the preaching of Peter, showed the power of the Spirit upon them before they were baptized, and this was held to justify their subsequent baptism (Acts x. 44 ff.). The dozen converts at Ephesus, who had been baptized into John's baptism, knew nothing about the Holy Spirit, but when they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, "they spake with tongues and prophesied" (Acts xix. 6). All these instances, therefore, witness to the intimate connection of the gift of the Spirit and the baptism of believers.

When we turn to our most important authority for the inner life and thought of the early Church—the apostle Paul²—the same intimate relation is manifest, though we find the apostle inculcating a higher conception of the Spirit's work than that of "tongues." His most explicit reference is that of 1 Corinthians xii. 13, where he says, "in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body . . . and were all saturated with one Spirit." Here the double reference to water-baptism, as an immersion and a saturation, suggests that the ideal beginning of the Spirit-filled life is at the water-baptism of the believer, which in those days would follow immediately on the credible confession of faith. A believer who did not express his faith by baptism would not then have been regarded as a believer. At the baptism, oral confession of the faith was made, and this was regarded as the decisive moment. Thus Paul is doubtless thinking of baptism when he says, "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans x. 9). From such oral confession, over or in the baptismal water, the creeds of the early Church, such as the Apostles' and the Nicene, took their origin. So again, the great passage in Romans vi. 1-6 derives all its cogency in the apostle's argument from the identification of water-baptism with that Spirit-baptism which equips the believer for his new life. Over against the historical facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, Paul sets the inner experience of the Christian, viz., the definite renunciation of past ways of living, the death to sin, and the consciousness of a new life (life unto God in Christ Jesus). Now, the link between the history and the experience is the act of baptism, in which immersion into water corresponds to burial and suggests death, and rising from the water suggests resurrection.

² Paul was not undervaluing baptism when he disclaimed any considerable part in the baptisms of Corinth, nor was Jesus when His disciples, rather than Himself, performed the rite. The emphasis always fell on the act, not on the administrant.

But this link for Paul is not merely a suggestive metaphor, a mere symbol in the modern and weakened sense of the word "symbol." The whole argument requires that baptism be a constitutive act, and that by it his readers have entered into such mystical union with Christ by means of water-baptism that the new life to which he is calling them is already in some sense theirs. It is possible that we have a fragment of an early baptismal hymn in the words :

Awake, thou that sleepest,
 And arise from the dead,
 And Christ shall shine upon thee. (Eph. v. 14.)

Similarly, when in Ephesians iv. 4-6, the mention of "one Body and one Spirit" is followed by that of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," the reference is indeed to the Spirit-baptism, but not as divorced from the water-baptism through which it was expressed. In Titus iii. 5 "the washing of regeneration" is coupled with "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." "Ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God," says Paul (1 Corinthians vi. 11), reviewing the new Christian status from its beginning in the baptism of a believer. The Church has been cleansed by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians v. 26), i.e., the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom, through the Spirit, baptism becomes sacramental.

The close inter-relation of water-baptism and Spirit-baptism which is implied in Pauline mysticism becomes more explicit still in John iii. 3-8. In the conversation with Nicodemus, four assertions are made in sequence, opening out of each other. Entrance into the Kingdom of God requires that a man be "born from above," that he be "born of water and the Spirit," that spirit is born only of Spirit, and that a mystery comparable with that of the wind (the same word as that for Spirit in Greek as in Hebrew) encompasses the experience of this supernatural birth. If a good Baptist is troubled—as many have been—by this apparent inculcation of baptismal regeneration through water, he may comfort himself with the not unimportant fact that "born of the Spirit" in verse 6 replaces "born of water and the Spirit" in verse 5. The higher element is thus made inclusive of the lower. But this does not warrant us in trying to evade the natural meaning of the whole phrase, that a man is born of water and the Spirit. Water-baptism was in the New Testament times the natural language and occasion and experienced means of the Spirit-baptism of believers. The safeguard against the materialism of a sacramentarian view (which all Baptists repudiate) is that baptism was administered only to

believers, and that their personal faith was the direct and primary link between the Holy Spirit and the power to live the new life which He imparted. But this does not preclude the use of occasions and means. In all our life and thought the spiritual is directly or indirectly mediated by that which is lower than itself. That is the very principle of the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh. The mischief is done when men separate the means from the Agent using the means, and tend towards a quasi-magical control of the higher by the lower. This occurs, according to the judgment of Baptists, whenever it is taught that baptismal grace is *confined* to the use of water over which a formula has been pronounced, and when the baptism is that of an infant, who lacks the essential New Testament condition of personal faith. Let me give an actual example of the extremes to which this can go. When I was a Baptist minister in Scotland, I happened to ask a High Anglican clergyman in the district whether he would require re-baptism if any member of another Church should seek entrance into his community. He replied, "That would depend. In the case of one of your Baptist people, certainly not, for I should be sure, with your method of baptism, that the water had actually been in contact with the baptized. But some of these Presbyterians are so careless with their sprinkling that you can never be sure that such contact has actually taken place." Such a view seems to me to belong to magic rather than to genuine religion, and Baptists have still a mission to denounce it as vigorously as possible.

But how, then, did Paul and his fellows interpret the function of the water-baptism which they linked so closely with Spirit-baptism? I think the truest answer is to be found along the lines of what is known as "prophetic symbolism," which meant much more than an "acted parable." The prophets of the Old Testament did not simply proclaim a word of the Lord; they sometimes began to put it into operation by identifying themselves with it in a personal act, which was already a fragment, as it were, of the whole act of God which they proclaimed. Thus Jeremiah, proclaiming the "breaking" of Judah and Jerusalem, prefaces it by solemnly breaking an earthenware flask in the presence of chosen witnesses, not as the mere accompaniment of his public utterance. He is beginning that which the Lord will Himself complete (xix. 1 ff.). So, in the New Testament, the prophet Agabus binds his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle, as the first step in the binding of Paul by the Jews which it is the predestined purpose of God to accomplish (Acts xxi. 11). The outer and visible act is itself an "earnest," a payment in advance of the whole—the term which Paul himself

applies to the present participation of the believer in the Spirit's power. It is probable that the apostle is, in fact, speaking of the "seal" of baptism when he says that, "He who anointed us is God, who also sealed us, and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians i. 22; cf. Ephesians i. 13, 14), for the "seal" is a frequent figure for baptism in the early Christian literature. The emphasis, of course, falls on the inner experience, but that experience was mediated through the outer act of water-baptism, which began in miniature the real divine process. If this interpretation of the New Testament statements be accepted, we have a view of baptism which removes it from the baser sacramentarianism on the one hand, as it does from otiose "symbolism" on the other. What God has joined together, man has separated. The separating of water-baptism from personal faith has resulted in what theologians call (in reference to the Incarnation) a *communicatio idiomatum*, "an interchange of characteristics," from one to the other. So the water is credited with what belongs properly to the contact of Spirit with spirit, whilst Baptists emphasise faith exclusively as the real thing, until the way is open for the Quaker to say, "Why have water at all?" Baptists, as it seems to me, are pledged to maintain the unbroken unity of the divine gift and the visible act performed by believers in their baptism. They are neither sacramentarians nor anti-sacramentalists. They claim to continue the New Testament attitude towards baptism. Are they to-day wholly faithful in carrying out this claim?

I think that it would be generally true to say that in Baptist Churches of the present time baptism is made almost exclusively the public profession of repentance and faith, in obedience to the command of the Lord. The emphasis falls on the believer's act, rather than on the divine grace of a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Such teaching about personal faith is both true and necessary, so far as it opposes the idea of sacramental grace conveyed by any material means. It is not wholly our fault that we have been forced into too exclusive an emphasis on one side of the meaning of baptism. Perhaps also the rediscovery of Believers' Baptism by early Separatists as a better substitute for the Church Covenant tended to narrow its meaning unduly. But if the interpretation of the New Testament teaching already indicated be sound—and I believe that it would be that of the soundest and most unprejudiced New Testament scholarship—then there is something yet to be done if Baptists are to substantiate their claim to be fully loyal to the New Testament. Baptism is there not only a necessary profession of repentance and faith; it is also a sacrament of grace, as truly as is participation in the Lord's Supper. Just as baptism declares, especially

in the form of baptism by immersion, the believer's surrender to the ownership of the Lord, who died for his sins and rose for his justification, so it declares the divine grace in the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whose aid alone the new life can be lived. I do not, of course, wish to suggest that that side of Christian truth is ignored amongst us. But I do question whether it receives the emphasis it deserves and the emphasis which it receives in the New Testament, and I suggest that one effective way to recover that emphasis is to follow the New Testament teaching about baptism more closely than we are doing at the present time.

The value of such a recovered emphasis would be shown at baptism itself, *provided the previous teaching to baptismal candidates were sufficiently clear*. I am not asking that some ecstatic and emotional experience of an abnormal kind should be encouraged. But it is broadly true that the value derived from a sacrament by believers does in part depend on the ideas and expectations which they bring to it. If they are told that it has no value save as an expression of their own convictions, they may well ask whether such an expression is really binding upon them in our modern and Western world, where the conditions are so different from those of the ancient and Oriental world, for which such a rite was natural and familiar. Even if they decide to be baptized, as an act of obedience to the Scriptures, the value of such obedience does not yet reach to the scope of the New Testament teaching and the demands of the new life. We do teach through the Communion service that the believer depends on the constant renewal of grace, and his faithful use of the means of grace. Such teaching will be much more effective if he has come to the initial act of baptism with the same necessary conception of his dependence on divine grace, and expects to find in baptism the sign and seal of the bestowal of divine grace. This is one of the truths which other Churches can teach us, and this is one of the points in which other Christians, as I believe rightly, find us lacking. Baptists can afford to emphasize the bestowal of divine grace in and through the act of baptism with less risk than any of the Churches, just because Baptists emphasize the corresponding truth that there is no grace where there is no faith. It is, of course, the *act* of faith in baptism, and not the water, which makes the essential condition for the activity of the Spirit. The richer the moral and spiritual preparation for the act in the consciousness of the believer, the greater the opportunity afforded to the Spirit of God.

I am convinced that unless we make more of baptism than we are doing we shall make less—for we shall tend to lose the real justification for our separate existence as a denomination,

at any rate in England. The candidates for ministerial training whom the Churches send to the Colleges rarely show that they have received any adequate training in Baptist principles, especially in regard to baptism itself. The result is that they are often attracted by somewhat nebulous prospects of reunion with other Churches. With that further issue I am not here concerned, though I may say that the more faithful we are to our distinctive principles, the more we shall have to contribute to the universal Church of the future, whatever form it may ultimately assume.

Within our own denomination, all is not well. There is a prior question to any enthusiasm for Personal Discipleship Campaigns and Forward Movements. It is whether our Churches offer the kind of rich spiritual life which in itself should attract disciples and break forth spontaneously in an expanded life. I do not know any greater service which our leaders could render than to call the Churches to take heed to themselves and to the doctrine, beginning with a really honest membership-roll, and a drop in our statistics of perhaps a third, consisting of nominal members. I believe that our greatest need is for an "Internal Mission" such as Yorkshire attempted with much gain to itself, some twenty years ago. To that end, not the least contribution would be a recovery of that New Testament teaching about baptism and of its relation to the Holy Spirit which it has been my privilege to set before you this morning. So we might hope to yield a fuller, because a more intelligent and fruitful obedience to the words of the great Commission, since baptism would more consciously become the act of entrance, not only into the name of the Father and the Son, but also into the name, i.e., into the power, of the Holy Spirit.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.