

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

By the Rev. D. W. B. Robinson

A good starting point for the study of baptism in the New Testament is Peter's exhortation on the day of Pentecost in reply to the question "What shall we do?"

Peter said, "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 Ghost. For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him." Acts 2:38, 39.

There are three points to notice about baptism in this first mention of it in the history of the church:

- (a) Its conditions are repentance, and faith in the name of Jesus Christ.
- (b) Its purpose is with a view to the forgiveness of sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- (c) Its guarantee is the promise of God made to the Jews, their children, and to as many as God shall call. We shall be returning to these points later.

Baptism Not New.

The rite of baptism was not new, however, nor was its use by the church unexpected or unprepared for. Not only had Christ left a command with his disciples to "make disciples . . . baptizing them", but there was the example of John who, a year or two earlier, "baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins". Moreover, this baptism of John is said to have been "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1, see also Acts 1:22 and 13:24). It is therefore interesting that John's baptism is described as a "baptism of repentance unto remission of sins". It had this in common with baptism at Pentecost, that (a) its condition was repentance, and (b) its purpose was for remission of sins.

But we may go even further. Both John (Mark 1:8) and Jesus (Acts 1:5) imply that John's baptism looks forward in some way to the giving of the Holy Spirit. Thus there is a distinct relation between John's baptism and Christian baptism. In fact, so emphatic is the contrast made between John's baptism with water and the later baptism with the Holy Spirit, that one might almost expect that there would not be an outward rite at all when the Spirit was given. Indeed, for the apostles themselves and the first 120 disciples this was apparently the case. But for the present we simply note that there is a connection between John's baptism and that of the church. This justifies us in press-

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ing our search back for the meaning of the rite. For, unusual as John's baptism was in certain respects, as a rite it had some antecedents.

We turn then to consider the meaning of baptism in general, and among the Jews in particular.

The Meaning of Baptizo.

There are two things which determine the meaning of a word: its derivation, and the context in which it is used. Derivation alone may completely mislead, especially in the case of words which come to be associated with ceremonial observances. Nevertheless, derivation is usually the first line to be explored.

The Greek word for baptize is baptizo. It is an intensive or iterative form of another word, bapto. This word bapto means to "dip". In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) for example, bapto is used some 16 times, always transitively. Usually it is employed of the action of taking some (small) object and dipping it in and out of some fluid. It is used, for example, of the priest dipping his finger in blood or water, and of dipping bread in vinegar. It is not used of a person either dipping himself or being dipped.

Baptizo is intensive or iterative. This means an action repeatedly performed, or performed with some special force or effect. In the case of baptizo this usually means dipping a thing in such a way as permanently

Box 6

What is the meaning of baptism? What does it mean to the ordinary Christian man or woman to know that he or she has been baptised? Is baptism merely confession of faith, or is it the means of some benefit being given by God? If there is a benefit, what is it?

Mr. Robinson, who is a Senior Lecturer at Moore College, deals with these questions and others in a series of articles of which this is the first.

to affect it. It is used, for instance, of men being drowned! A good example of the distinction between bapto and baptizo is to be had in regard to a ship. Euripides in the Orestes uses bapto of a ship when he means that it pitches, i.e., it dips its prow. But when baptizo is used of a ship it means that it becomes water-logged, or sinks altogether. There is a variety of similar uses, some of them metaphorical. Baptizo is used of an object being drenched, of a man being drunk (or "soaked") or being drenched in sleep, i.e., in a heavy sleep. Josephus uses it of the great crowd of pilgrims who flood the city of Jerusalem at feasts. It is used of persons being overwhelmed by sorrow or calamity; or of being "up to one's ears" in debt; or of being in deep water, or out of one's depth, in an argument.

Notice how, unlike bapto, baptizo is regularly applied to persons.

Ritual Washing.

Now there are four occurrences of baptizo in the Septuagint. (a) Isa. 21:4, "evil overwhelmed me," is similar to metaphorical uses we have just considered in general classical usage. But the other three are important, as they describe an actual ritual procedure.

(Continued on page 13)

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THE MEANING OF BAPTISM (2)

WHAT BAPTISM MEANT TO A JEW.

By The Rev. D. W. B. Robinson.

We have seen that the religion of a Jew included what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "various baptisms" (9:10). We may take it from this that "baptism" to a Jew was a term wide enough to cover the various types of ritual lustration prescribed by the law, whether these lustrations were performed by sprinkling, affusion or submersion (e.g., Lev. 16:26, Num. 19:13).

The idea common to all was "purification" or cleansing from defilement.

But already in the Old Testament the idea of ritual purification of things and persons in water had been extended to apply to the moral and spiritual condition of men and women.

"Purge me with hyssop," cried David, "and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa. 51:7).

The prophet Isaiah preached: "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well" (Isa. 1:16).

Ezekiel gave the promise: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your filthinesses and from all your idols will I cleanse you" (Ezek. 36:25).

All Israel in Need.

The point about such passages is that they show all Israel to be in need of cleansing from sin, and not merely those who were guilty of ritual defilement such as was involved, e.g., in touching a dead body.

So, when John the Baptist came preaching "a baptism of repentance for remission of sins," he not only called all Israel to confess their sins—the prophets had done this—but he supplied an actual rite of purification in water as the sign of remission of sins, on condition of repentance.

Baptism of Gentiles.

But, even before John the Baptist, another form of baptism was familiar to the Jews; it was the baptism of Gentiles who wished to embrace the Jewish faith, that is, proselytes. Not only was such a Gentile convert circumcised (the sign of God's covenant with His people) but he was also baptised, to signify cleansing from all defilement. The nearest Old Testament precedent would be Naaman. To receive the blessing he desired from Israel's God he had to be willing to submit to baptism in the waters of the Jordan. As a matter of fact, baptism came, for a proselyte, to be even more important than circumcision. Moreover, it could be administered to women as well as men.

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Our evidence for the details of proselyte baptism comes from the 2nd century A.D. and must be used with care, although it is usually held that the practices described in the Jewish Mishnah had been in existence for some time. The following features are of special interest:

(a) Baptism marked the entrance of the proselyte into membership of the Jewish church.

(b) It was apparently self-administered (like Naaman's baptism).

(c) Two witnesses stood by who reminded the candidate of the obligations of the law which he was thus taking upon himself.

(d) As to the mode of baptism, it was apparently regarded as desirable that water should cover the whole person. Some scholars think that this required total submersion; others hold that the washing of the entire person in running water, or even a sufficient quantity of standing water, sufficed.

(e) The children of a proselyte shared the benefits of their father's action. They were therefore forthwith circumcised and baptised. Children born subsequently, however were circumcised, but not baptised, evidently being regarded as "holy" by virtue of their parents' membership of the Jewish church.

It will be interesting to inquire later whether any or all of these features had any influence on the practice of Christian baptism. But in our next article we shall consider the meaning of Jesus' own baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

Bishop Wilton Cash Dies.

The Bishop of Worcester, Bishop W. Wilton Cash, whose retirement was announced in the last issue of the "Record," has died at the age of 75. Bishop Cash went to Egypt as a lay missionary of the Egypt General Mission in 1901, and joined the C.M.S. before his appointment to the see of Worcester.

Billy Graham in Europe.

Nearly half-a-million persons attended evangelistic meetings addressed by Dr. Billy Graham during his recent visit to 12 cities in 7 countries of Western Europe. The greatest numbers were in Germany. Recorded decisions were about 20,000.

The Meaning of Baptism.

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(b) In II Kings 5, baptizo describes what Naaman did in the Jordan.

(c) In Judith 12:7, the word describes what Judith did every night at the fountain in the camp before prayer.

(d) In Ecclesiastics 31:30, the word describes the action of a man after touching a dead body.

In these last three instances, not only is baptizo applied to persons, but it is used in a reflexive or middle sense (they all "baptized themselves") and it is used to describe a ritual washing. Moreover, the last two instances are ritual washings prescribed by the Levitical laws in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament.

When we turn to the New Testament we find that both the verb baptizo and the noun baptisimos are similarly used of Jewish ritual washings. Hebrews 9:10 speaks of the "various baptisimos" (R.W. divers washings), which, together with "meats and drinks" and "gifts and sacrifices" comprise the ordinances of the Levitical system.

Mark 7:4 speaks of the baptisimos of cups and pots and brazen vessels (and couches, according to some mss.). The same passage tells us that when the Pharisees come from the market place they do not eat unless they "baptize" themselves. Some ancient manuscripts here read "sprinkle them: selves." (Whoever was responsible for this alteration probably did it to avoid confusion with Christian baptism, and substituted what he regarded as a synonym.)

Luke 11:38 relates that the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner marvelled that he had not first "baptised" himself before dinner.

A Cult Word.

Two conclusions arise from the foregoing. First, it is clear that baptism is already a ritual act in the New Testament, even apart from the practice of John and the church. This means that baptizo has already become what we may call a "cult-word." For this reason we must be very careful before using the derivation of the word to determine its meaning in the N.T. Clearly, we cannot apply the literal meaning of baptizo, for that would probably mean, if anything, "to drown"! What then does baptizo mean? The chances are that it often means no more than "purify." This is not from its derivation, but from its ritual application. Similarly, the word "Christen," which originally meant "to make Christ's," has, in many instances, come to mean no more than "to initiate," or "to name." Thus, we cannot assume that the use of baptizo in the N.T. tells us anything of itself about the mode of baptism. That can only be learned, if at all, from context or our knowledge of Jewish procedure. Hebrews 9:10 uses baptisimos to cover ritual washings which were performed in more ways than one, by dipping into water, by sprinkling and by putting under running water.

The second conclusion is that baptism as a ritual act is invariably connected with cleansing from defilement. It was thus always, in some sense, "unto remission of sin." Therefore we must look again at the teaching of the Old Testament concerning cleansing from sin, if we wish to understand the meaning of baptism.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

(3) WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

By D. W. B. Robinson.

Before we pass from the baptism of John to that of the Christian Church we must ask what is the link between them. The answer is, the baptism of Jesus Christ Himself. Moreover, the baptism of Jesus supplies the kernel of meaning to Christian baptism.

This is often overlooked. Indeed, the baptism of Jesus is a strangely neglected subject. But, coming as it does on the threshold of the gospel, it interprets Jesus' whole mission and at the same time interprets the meaning of Christian baptism. Many views of baptism are defective because they are not formed in the light of Jesus's baptism.

Four Aspects.

1. First Jesus's baptism was an act of identification. It was not just His individual response to John's preaching. By baptism Jesus identified Himself with sinners. The Voice from heaven indicated Jesus as the Servant with whom the Father was well pleased, and this Servant, we know from Isaiah 53, "was numbered with the transgressors." In His baptism we see Jesus "submitting to be baptised with their baptism, identifying Himself with them in their relation to God as sinners, making all their responsibilities His own. It was a great act of loving communion with our miseries." (James Denny.) All the other baptisms were like a rope of sand till Jesus was baptised. All baptisms of repentance unto remission of sins were vain till they found their counterpart and compensation in one baptism which "fulfilled all righteousness." John baptised the people and they became a community awaiting the Kingdom of God. John baptised Jesus and He became the Chief Member, the Head, of that community.

2. Jesus's baptism was a sign of death. The Voice from heaven which addressed Jesus as the Servant of Isaiah's prophecy implied this. Then on two occasions during His ministry Jesus spoke of Himself being baptised. In Mark 10, 38 He asked: "Can ye be baptised with?" Again in Luke 12, 50 He said: "I have a baptism to be baptised with." In both passages He was plainly referring to His death.

This reminds us that one of the basic connotations of the word baptizo is being overwhelmed by something—debt, calamity, sin, etc. The ultimate overwhelming power is death. As in the Psalms being overwhelmed by

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Sheol (death or hell) is often likened to being drowned or overcome by waves, so Jesus speaks of His coming death as His baptism. We may say that His baptism by John was prophetic of His death on the cross, i.e., it looked forward to it. Early Christians were taught that their baptism, whatever else it may have signified, was baptism "into the death of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6, 3).

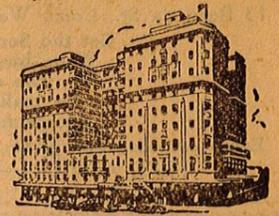
3. Jesus's baptism was crowned with the descent of the Holy Spirit. In one sense we may see this as Jesus's anointing for His messianic function. But it is also the basis of that association of baptism with the Spirit for which Christian baptism has always stood. "Be baptised . . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," said Peter at Pentecost. This leads to the fourth aspect which is closely related.

4. Jesus's baptism was accompanied by God's assurance of His divine Sonship. The Voice here was for Jesus Himself, not the bystanders. "Thou art My beloved Son." Christ did not become the Son of God at the moment of His baptism. But He was designated as such at that moment, and we are probably not wrong in regarding the baptism as a vital experience in the life of the incarnate Son giving Him assurance of the truth. In a measure this is true for us all. Some people speak of "confessing Christ in baptism," and certainly we must confess Christ as a condition of baptism. But of even greater importance is the wonderful truth that the Father confesses us as His sons in baptism. We may not become sons of God in the precise moment of baptism; new birth by the Spirit is as undiscernible as the wind. (John 3, 5-8.) But the word of God accompanies the act of baptism and "assures us thereby of His favour and goodness towards us, and that we are very members incorporated in the mystical body of His Son."

(Next article: What should My baptism mean to me?)

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THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

[4] What Should My Baptism Mean To Me?

By D. W. B. Robinson.

Who is responsible for Christian baptism? On whose authority is it performed? On the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He it was, Who, having Himself been baptised by John, having spoken of His coming death as His "baptism," and having passed through that baptism of death, commended His disciples to "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28, 19.)

I have been baptised, therefore, on the authority of Christ Himself, Who died for me. When I was baptised, the performance of the action was an assurance of the forgiveness of my sins and of the gift of the Holy Spirit from Christ Himself. Some people speak of "confessing Christ in baptism" as if that were the meaning of baptism. But such language confuses a condition of baptism with the significance of the rite itself. We should rather speak of "receiving Christ's assurance of salvation in baptism." To say "I have been baptised" is to say "Christ has saved me." In the beginning of these articles we pointed to the first reference to baptism in the church, in Acts 2:38, where baptism had for its meaning the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The man who trusts "in the Name of Jesus Christ" may look on his baptism as Christ's personal assurance to him that he has been forgiven, and that he has been born again by the Holy Spirit. Such a man should realise, too, that these benefits were secured for him by the death of Christ, of which baptism is a picture. No believer should have the slightest hesitation in assuring himself that in his baptism ("a true type," as Peter calls it, 1 Pet. 3:21) he was made or designated "a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Even the unworthy receiving of baptism, which brings judgment on the unbeliever, does not deprive the rite itself of its character as a witness to the Gospel promise—a visible word," as Augustine called it.

An Important Change.

It is not always realised that in the earliest days of the church baptism was administered to adults immediately upon confession of faith in Christ. So far as we can judge from the New Testament, there was no period of probation to test the genuineness of candidates, and there was no course of instruction to insure that they knew what they were doing. Men with no background were commended to be baptised on the strength of a single gospel sermon. If a man was capable of trusting in Christ as Saviour and

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Lord on his first hearing of the gospel, he was certainly eligible to be baptised. It has truly been said that "faith and baptism were the inside and the outside of the same thing." In such circumstances, the vividness and effectiveness of baptism as God's assurance to the individual of his salvation must have been unusually powerful, accompanying, as it did, the first flush of his faith in Christ. I do not think we have fully estimated the change of our attitude to baptism which has come about by instituting a period of probation or instruction and the separating of the first sign of faith from baptism by a considerable interval of time. To-day, baptism is the culmination of instruction in Christian doctrine. In the New Testament it was the basis and starting point of that instruction!

Nevertheless, whatever modifications have come, the true meaning of baptism is the same as it has always been, and every baptised person should know that this is its meaning. Moreover, we should do all we can to give baptism the prominence it should have in the life of the church. Nothing would solve the problem of indiscriminate baptising more readily than the bringings of baptisms more publicly into the life of the whole congregation. The Prayer Book clearly states that "it is most convenient that Baptism should not be administered but . . . when the most number of people come together; as well for that the congregation there present may testify the receiving of them that be newly baptised into the number of Christ's church; as also because in the Baptism . . . every man present may be put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his Baptism."

(Next article: Why are infants baptised?)

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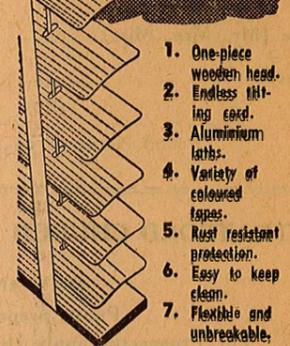
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THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

(5) WHY ARE INFANTS BAPTIZED?

By D. W. B. Robinson.

In all we have said so far we have basic agreement with Roman Catholics on the one hand and Baptists on the other. Despite many differences, it is not inaccurate to speak of "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism."

Our Baptist friends, however, honestly believing that they are following the practice of the New Testament hold that no person should be baptised until he has become a believer and confessed his faith in Christ. In particular they are opposed to the baptism of infants who are incapable of believing. (As far as I know, however, few Baptists carry out the New Testament custom of baptising a person immediately he believes.) The majority of Christians, on the other hand, have always held that the children of Christian parents ought to be baptised as infants.

No Evidence of Practice.

It ought to be said at once that the New Testament provides no decisive evidence one way or the other in the very case we are discussing, namely, the case of children born to Christian parents subsequent to their own baptism. The Baptist is no better off than anyone else if it is a matter of being able to quote an instance from the New Testament. If there is no certain case in the N.T. of the baptism of an infant, there is certainly no case of a child of Christian parents being baptised after he came to believe. Moreover, the cases of baptism which are described in the New Testament do not help the Baptist position, for there is no disagreement about the propriety of such persons being baptised as adults. The question is, did such people baptise any children they may have had at the time or born to them subsequently?

The New Testament does not give us a direct answer to this question. But it certainly gives us an indirect answer. Before dealing with this indirect answer, however, let me mention two pieces of evidence. First, as we noted in a previous article, when a Gentile became a member of the Jewish Church, he was baptised together with his children. Secondly, as soon as the practice of the early church does emerge into the light of history, late in the second century, we find that it was an established custom to baptise the children of believers in infancy.

God's Covenant.

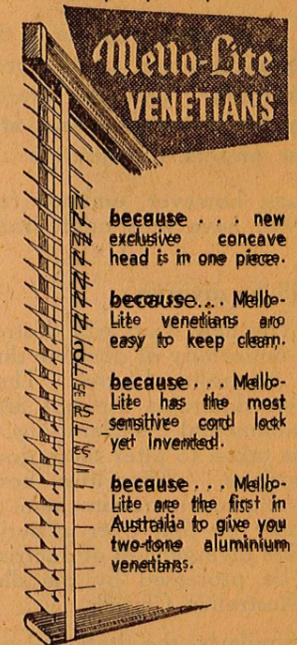
The answer of the New Testament to the question: Should the children

of believers be baptised? is, even if an indirect answer, absolutely decisive. It is that all God's dealings with men for their salvation are in terms of His covenant with His people, and that from the beginning of the Bible to the end a man's children are included with him in that covenant. No biblical truth is more surely established than this. In Genesis 17:10 we find: "This is the covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." Circumcision here is the sign given by God Himself of the covenant He has made with "Abraham and his seed for ever."

When the covenant was renewed through the death of Christ, the promises of the covenant made to Abraham were extended not only to Israel but to "as many as the Lord our God shall call." Circumcision as the sign of the covenant came to an end, but a new sign was given by God Himself. For as Peter stood on the day of Pentecost and summoned the "whole house of Israel" to accept the blessings of the new covenant of the Spirit made available by the gospel, he said: "Repent and be baptised . . . for the promise (i.e. of the Abrahamic covenant) is to you and to your children . . ." (Read also Gal. 3 and Col. 2:11, 12.)

The rest of the New Testament confirms that the children of believers were treated as "within the covenant." 1 Cor. 7:14 asserts that the children of "holy" parents (i.e., parents belonging to God's holy people) are likewise "holy". In Ephesians 6:1 the children of believers are addressed as "in the Lord." They are assured that the promises of God will be fulfilled to them, and that they are, through their parents, proper subjects of the chastening and admonition of the Lord. The various household baptisms of which we read in the New Testament, whether there were young children involved or not, are based on the principle that God's covenant with a man extends to his family. This is brought out vividly in the case of the Philippian jailer. "Believes," said Paul to the man, "and thou shalt be saved and thy house." Then we are told, "he was baptised, he and all his family, immediately." And then finally, "he, having believed in God, rejoiced with all his house." The verb

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is in the singular every time, and every time he carries his family with him!

The Sign of the Covenant.
Thus baptism is the sign of God's covenant and it speaks to us of all the promises and blessings of that covenant. To deny baptism to the infants of believers is to deny part of the terms of the covenant proposed by God. The connection between baptism and faith is, of course, different in the case of infant baptism from the relation in adult baptism. The same word of God is set forth in both types of baptism. The same faith must be exercised by both subjects of baptism. But in the one case baptism (its meaning explained in catechism) awakens faith, and in the other case baptism (explained beforehand) confirms faith.

We have no hesitation in saying, with a recent writer, "Infant baptism is the will of God. It is not merely legitimate; it is obligatory. Christians' children are to be enrolled as junior church members by means of the regular ceremony of admission. There is nothing in the Bible more certain than this. There is no scriptural warrant at all for infant baptism if the continuity of the covenant be denied; but, once it is admitted, infant baptism is so unassailably established as to make further argument superfluous."

(Final article: "How should Baptism be performed?")

(Think on These Things, conducted by June Dugan is appearing in alternate issues until the end of the year.)

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THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

(6) HOW SHOULD BAPTISM BE PERFORMED

By D. W. B. Robinson.

The Church of England prescribes two methods of baptism: immersion (or dipping in water) and affusion (or pouring water on the candidate). Sprinkling is not prescribed.

We may add in passing that the Prayer Book does not restrict pouring to the head, nor does it require either dipping or pouring to be performed more than once, nor does it require that the sign of the cross be made with water.

It is sometimes confidently asserted even by Anglican scholars that in the early church immersion was the usual method of baptism. This assertion is not supported by any facts. So far as I know, there is no certain reference to baptism by immersion earlier than Tertullian, about 200 A.D. Many earlier references to baptism could be applicable to immersion, but they are equally applicable to affusion. So the evidence, at best, is ambiguous. Probably the earliest picture we have of a baptism is in the Catacomb of Callistus at Rome. This catacomb is regarded by the latest research as belonging to the 2nd century, although the painting may belong to the next century. In this painting the candidate is standing in a pool or stream while water is poured on his head. "It is remarkable," says the Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, that in almost all the earliest representations of Baptism that have been preserved to us, this (i.e., pouring of water from vessels over the body) is the special act represented. We shall see that the New Testament evidence points to this method quite as much as, if not more than, it points to immersion.

Three Arguments.

Three arguments often put forward in favour of immersion have, in fact, little or no substance.

1. It is said that the word *baptizo* implies immersion. But, as we have already seen, *baptizo* is a cult word meaning something like 'purify by water' and does not imply an exclusive mode. Any form of washing or ceremonial sprinkling is covered by the term (see Hebrews 9:10).

2. The phrase 'to go down into the water' in Acts 8:38 is urged as implying immersion. But obviously this expression would apply equally well to any method where the candidate stood in water. It cannot of itself imply immersion, unless we are to suppose that Philip was immersed as well as the

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eunuch, for we are told that "they went down both into the water"!

3. The phrase "buried in baptism" in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 is perhaps the strongest argument for immersion put forward. But it rests on a double misunderstanding:

(a) The verb *thapto* which is translated "bury" does not mean "bury" in our sense at all. It really means (to quote Littlell and Scott) 'to honour with funeral rites,' irrespective of the method of disposing of the body. In fact, it is 'frequently used with reference to cremation' (L. & S.).

(b) When Paul says "therefore we are buried with Christ by baptism," he is making a deduction not from the mode of baptism but from the theology of baptism. His argument is this: "since, in baptism, we were baptised into Christ's death, it follows that our baptism should be regarded as kind of funeral. Having thus publicly and formally declared ourselves to be dead, we cannot go back on it. We must continue our experience of unity with Christ 'in his resurrection.' The mode of baptism is not necessarily in mind here at all. The idea of rising is essentially in contrast to deadness, irrespective of the method of the disposal of the body. In any case, our Lord's body was placed in a rock tomb by a lateral movement and his rising may well have been by a similar movement.

Symbols.

The figures of speech used in the New Testament of baptism may help us to arrive at a decision about what mode was in mind. Here are three: **Cleansing**.—Here, affusion is as appropriate as immersion. "Bathing" was of both kinds in the ancient world. Indeed, if the emphasis was on ceremonial cleansing, even sprinkling might be regarded as sufficient (Ezek. 36:25). The Didache, a Christian manual dated in the late first or early second century, prescribes running water as desirable for baptism, but it has the same ambiguity as the New Testament when it comes to deciding whether the candidate was dipped in it or merely stood in it while water was scooped and poured on him. Certainly if there was no running water and only standing water available, the instruction was "pour water on the head three times."

Union with Christ.—This figure might suggest immersion most readily. But, as we have seen, Christ was not "dipped" in the earth at his burial. When he speaks of his own death as his "baptism" and of our sharing it (Mark 10:39), it is possibly the Old Testament figure of the "wave" of death overcoming the victim that he has in

mind. Those who were "brought unto Moses" in 1 Cor. 10 passed "under the cloud" and "through the sea." In neither case were they dipped in the water or in actual contact with it. True, there was water above and around them. But this is as true in affusion as in immersion. Probably the symbolism does not go beyond mere association with water. In 1 Peter 3:21 the flood is a symbol of baptism, even though the ark floated on the top of the waters.

The Giving of the Spirit.—This is the most significant aspect of the meaning of Christian baptism, and affusion is clearly the most apt symbolism. In Acts 2 where Christian baptism first appears, the Spirit is three times spoken of as "poured out." The idea of baptism as a "putting on of Christ" in Gal. 3:27 probably also has affusion in mind; the pouring from above being suggestive of the putting on of a tunic.

In general, the weight of evidence supports copious affusion as probably the most usual mode of baptism in the early church, although by the third century immersion became the rule. There seems to be some emphasis on the fact that the baptised person is inert while the water is the moving agent. If therefore we prefer affusion to-day, the water should be in sufficient quantity to flow freely, if not to cover the whole body. If we prefer immersion, it should if possible be in running water. It is arguable that to stand in the surf in the path of an oncoming breaker would be the most vividly symbolic method of all, although it would pose certain practical problems for the clergyman!

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