

## Chapter 6

### Infant Baptism and Messiah's Threefold Office

The LORD your God will raise up for you  
a prophet like me from among your brethren  
-Deuteronomy 18:15

You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.  
-Psalm 110:4

I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.  
-Psalm 2:7b

The *Baptist Catechism*, reflecting the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, underscored Christ's threefold office.

Q. 27. What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation ([1689] 1794).

English Reformers were indebted to John Calvin whose head-liner in Book 2, Chapter 15, of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* read,

To Know the Purpose for Which Christ Was Sent by the Father, and What He Conferred Upon Us, We Must Look Above All at Three Things in Him: The Prophetic Office, Kingship, and Priesthood  
(1960).

An examination of the subject of infant baptism would hardly be complete without a consideration of Jesus' blessing of the infants. Since Reformers on both sides of the subject highly regard Christ's threefold office, it is fitting that we consider the

matter in light of that office. What was Christ's "purpose" in blessing the infants in Luke 18:15-17, and what he did "confer" upon them?

### **Christ Our Prophet**

Jesus words in Luke 18:6 certainly raise the issue whether quibbling about the candidacy of infants for the grace of God amounts to quibbling about Jesus' own candidacy for the office of Prophet. Jesus announced,

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Luke 18:16).

Do Jesus' words belie any suggestion that he placed his hands upon these "babes" and simulated blessing without actually imparting blessing? If the words indicate that he did in fact impart a blessing, what was the nature of the blessing? Do these words dismiss Jesus as a mere religious functionary or impugn him as a religious charlatan and a deceiver of parents? Do they reveal Jesus as a megalomaniac or the King from whom blessings flow even upon infants? Does the qualifier phrase "of such" suggest that the statement does not specifically relate to the very infants who were brought to him?

Jesus' words "of such" have been interpreted in at least four different ways. The first might be designated the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view, historically identified with Baptists, but certainly not limited to them. J. Rodman Williams, a former Presbyterian professor of systematic theology, adopted this position, namely that Jesus, by using the words "such as these," was giving unqualified admission to the kingdom of God for all children who died before they reached a certain age of moral accountability (Williams 1988-, 3:235). This "across-the-board" temporary guaranty of saving grace was for all children everywhere during the years of spiritual minority--*whether or not they are trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation!* Such a view was set forth in a Baptist confession following the Reformation:

We do believe that little children dying in their infancy, viz. before they are capable to choose either good or evil, whether born of believing parents or unbelieving, shall be saved by the grace of God and merit of Christ their Redeemer, and the work of the Holy Ghost, and so being made members of the visible Church shall enjoy life everlasting. For our Lord Jesus saith, of such belongs the kingdom of heaven. Ergo, we conclude, that the opinion is false, which saith, that these little infants dying before baptism, are damned"[Orthodox Creed, 44, in *Confessions of Faith*, Hanserd Knollys Soc.] (Hastings 1910, 401).

This interpretation of Jesus' words "such as these," if I may so speak, grants salvation to all infants and children who die in their minority years *—totally apart from faith on anybody's part!* Those who insist on baptism *for believer's only* grant salvation where there are no believers! Yet at the same time they deny the visible token of the new covenant to infants whose parents trust in God's covenant promise concerning those infants. Thus Baptists grant eternal life without any expression of faith whatsoever, while they vigorously deny the token of that life to the children whose parents, at least, are believers in Christ!

With respect to children dying in infancy, the *Canons of Dordrecht* offer an alternative which underscores the covenant of grace and divine election:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with their parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy [I, A, 17] (Hoeksema 1977, 148-49).

But in partial defense of particular Baptists, not all who hold a *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view hold it in a universalist

sense. Some insist on, or at least allow for the possibility of, divine election. Among the latter, who allowed that the salvation of infants dying in unbelief may be limited to the elect infants, was nineteenth-century Baptist, Alexander Carson. Though uncertain "whether all infants dying in infancy are saved, or only some infants," Carson argued that "infants are saved without the Gospel" ([1853] 1981, 198, 215).

. . . they are saved just as adults, as to the price of redemption and as to the sanctification of their nature. But they are not saved as adults by the truth believed. That sacrifice which is the ground of the new covenant, is the salvation of saved infants; but there is no part of the word of God, that intimates that it is through faith in that sacrifice. God, who applies that sacrifice to adults only through faith, can apply it to dying infants without faith,--for faith has no merit more than works. It is only the Divinely appointed medium ([1853] 1981, 215).

Regardless of whether the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view is universalist or electionist, the one endorsing what amounts to the historic Baptist position on Jesus words in Luke 18:16 embraces the irony of "salvation without faith," an idea totally foreign to the Bible.

Besides introducing the "salvation without faith" heresy, the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view poses two serious problems--one, theological, the other, practical. The theological problem is that it denies God's biblical prerogative to judge those who mock him and his servants according to 2 Kings 2:23-24 and Psalm 137:8-9. God's judgment upon the wicked frequently included their children (Ezek. 9:3-6; 1 Sam. 15:3; Psalm 21:10; Gerstner 1987, 43).

Two of the severest judgments upon Old Testament clans and communities, which included entire families, are cited in the New Testament as "types" or "examples" of God's eternal punishment-- the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destruction of those families associated with Korah's rebellion

(Jude 7, 11; 2 Pet. 2:4-10). In light of this fact, the judgments cannot be dismissed as though they had no bearing on the subject of infants in the New Testament era.

God's judgment upon Babylon was prophetically depicted by both the Psalmist and Isaiah as extending to her infant offspring.

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,  
happy is he who repays you  
for what you have done to us--  
he who seizes your infants  
and dashes them against the rocks (Ps. 137:8-9).

"I will cut off from Babylon  
her name and survivors,  
her offspring and descendants,"  
declares the LORD (Isa. 14:22).

But these judgments were not limited to the Old Testament. Jesus himself, weeping over Jerusalem, foretold the destruction of his beloved capital city in similar terms.

They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you (Luke 19:44).

The *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view typically removes Jesus' words from their biblical context in which children are covenantally linked with their parents. Obscuring that covenantal link, it violates the unity of Scripture inherent in Jesus' affirmation that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

The practical problem associated with the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view of Jesus' words is that it lends itself to a false presumption on the part of growing children (as well as their parents) during the minority years. This interpretation might even be labeled the "*presumptive-dispensational*" view,

as it suggests to the parents that there is really not a lot they can do for their children spiritually until the children are able to do for themselves spiritually. On the other hand, it announces to the children, "You may live like the devil, but be sure to repent before the age of accountability (whenever that is!)." The adoptionist theology at the root of the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view becomes quite apparent in such a scenario. The proponents of this view somehow forget what Irenaeus knew so well, namely that Christ became an infant that he might sanctify infancy. How tragic whenever antipaedobaptists unwittingly lapse into the kind of presumption typically ascribed to their opponents in the matter of infant baptism! *Nonfiduciary-dispensational* presumption is not the right answer to *baptismal-regenerational* presumption. How much better to affirm with the Psalmist, "All our days pass away under your wrath" (Ps. 90:9)!

A *second* view of Jesus' words "of such" in Luke 18:15-17 is that Jesus was opening the Kingdom door to all infants indiscriminately. This view may be called the *utopian* interpretation. While it is similar to the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* position of the universalist type, the *utopian* view lays claim, not to a temporary dispensation of grace for children dying in their minority years, but to a salvation that is eternally secure--even if the child dies after attaining the age of discretion. This view reflects a diluted version of the Christian faith emphasizing the attribute of God's love to the total neglect of his holiness. The *utopian* view does not find it necessary to make any requirements upon the parents bringing their children for baptism. For *Utopians*, water baptism is strictly ceremonial and idealistic without regard to biblical theology. This interpretation of Jesus' words is based upon a utopian view of humanity and the world in general, as distinct from a view that takes seriously the historic fall of man. The *utopian* view is subject to some of the same criticism applicable to the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view.

Sartelle reflected on such wishful thinking,

Does the Lord look upon the homes of the ungodly in the same way that He looks upon the homes of His people?

There is a great contrast between families given to wickedness and families given to righteousness.

Citing Exodus 20:5 and Psalm 103:17, Sartelle stated,

The favor of the Lord upon one home and judgment of the Lord upon another is plain. How can anyone read His Word and say that the children of Herod are the same as the children of God's people (1985, 27)?

Samuel Hopkins noted from Exodus 20:5-6 that

. . . the moral character of the children of wicked parents, is the consequence of the iniquity of their parents, and is formed by it, as the foundation of the natural evil which they suffer (1811, 2:266).

On the other hand, Hopkins observed that the children of the righteous had a distinct advantage.

. . . so by the promise, which is opposed to the threatening, the love and obedience of the parents affect and form the moral character of their children; so that their piety and obedience do, by the promise, convey spiritual blessings to their children (1811, 267-68).

While God's purpose with the righteous is intergenerational, his purpose with Babylon is to cut off her seed (Isa. 59:20-21; 14:22). John Murray was right--any universalizing of Jesus' words "of such is the kingdom of heaven" would "violate the most elementary canons of proper interpretation" (1980, 63).

The *third* interpretation may be designated the *emblematic* view. According to this view, these particular infants were mere emblems or symbols of those who receive the blessing of salvation. Those who hold this view regard Jesus' words "of such" as conveying the idea of *likeness*, but not *identity* (Carson [1853] 1981, 200). Accordingly, Jesus was saying that people, not specifically *these* infants, but who are *like* these infants in some particular way are the heirs of the kingdom of God. This was the view of Jerome, the translator of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into the Latin Vulgate. Noting Jesus' words "to such as these," Jerome insisted,

It is not these children, but those who are childlike in character, especially in humility and trustfulness, who are best fitted for the kingdom (Geldenhuis 1951, 455 note).

Such a view seems to be supported by Jesus' own words in Luke 18:17:

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

To be sure, Jesus in receiving infants was illustrating a principle of entrance into the Kingdom. Jerome's view, however, poses serious problems. After rebuking his own disciples for obstructing those parents from bringing their infants to him, Jesus spoke gracious words of welcome and blessed these little children. His words, therefore, can hardly be construed so as to exclude from the Kingdom the very children he was welcoming. To suggest that in receiving these infants he was merely play-acting a spiritual principle of entering the Kingdom, while in reality he was excluding the infants themselves, is to undercut Jesus' integrity and to place an unbearable strain upon the syntax of Luke 18:16.

Richard Baxter argued that the reason that Christ gave to his disciples as the basis for not for letting these infants come--namely, "*because of such is the kingdom*"--was the ground of his

great displeasure toward the disciples for trying to prevent their coming. To forbid them was sin on the disciples' part. To admit them was their duty. The Lord's displeasure indicated that "it must needs be the very *species* of Infants that Jesus means are of the Kingdom. . . and not only the Aged humble" (1651, 105-106).

Baxter continued,

It could have been no sin in the Disciples to keep away from Christ those that were but *meer Emblems* of the saved: But it was their sin to keep away *Infants*: Therefore it was not because they were meer Emblems of such as should be saved. For else it would have been the Disciples["] sin to have forbidden all the Sheep or Doves in the Country to have been brought to Christ to lay hands on" (1651, 106).

Even if it be acknowledged that the infants were emblems, the fact is that the Lord commanded that the infants themselves be admitted! If they were emblems, they were not *mere* emblems. Jerome's interpretation therefore, like the *nonfiduciary-dispensational* view, can hardly be regarded as a sound interpretation.

English Reform Baptist, David Kingdon, conceded that the words "to such as these" did not exclude the children themselves, though he insisted that they include *all* children who come to Jesus. Kingdon made a further acknowledgment that was quite remarkable for a Baptist: "Luke employs *brephos* instead of *paidia*, making it clear that the children were babes in arms" (1973, 85, 86).

There is a *fourth* possibility for understanding the meaning of Jesus' words "such as these," and this may be described as the *covenant* view. As a well-instructed Jewish Rabbi, Jesus understood God's spiritual economy, that is, his covenant pattern pertaining to households (John 3:2; Matt. 23:8). More than mere studied familiarity with the covenant, however, Jesus' blessing of the infants is best viewed in terms of his

covenant identity as the God of Abraham (John 8:58), and the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). The God of Abraham honored the faith of parents respecting their children's spiritual well-being while holding them to their covenantal obligations (Gen. 17:7, 9-14; 18:19; Exod. 4:24-26; Job 1:1, 4-5; 1 Sam. 3:11-13; 1 Cor. 7:14). And the blessing of Abraham was to be administered through the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:14, 16, 26).

According to this perspective, Jesus was not issuing a blanket statement regarding all children everywhere--irrespective of faith on the part of the parents. As Hanko insisted, *Luke 18:15-17 is not a proof text for indiscriminate baptizing of children*:

These were Israelitish mothers, mothers of the covenant who lived in the covenant consciousness of the pious women of the old dispensation. The very fact that they came to Jesus with the request that Jesus bless them and pray indicates that they themselves were believing mothers who saw the hope of their salvation and the salvation of their children (1981, 62).

Jesus' promise of the Kingdom, and the spiritual regeneration associated with it (Rom. 14:17), concerned those infants and small children whom parents were bringing to him in faith, thereby demonstrating that these little ones were children of the covenant (Gen. 15:6). The parents' coming provided evidence of their own faith, for Jesus himself said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). In fact, Jesus, in John 6:35, equated *believing* and *coming* through the use of a literary parallelism common to Hebrew poetry:

I am the bread of life.  
He who *comes* to me will never go hungry,  
and he who *believes* in me will never be  
thirsty (*italics mine*).

John Bunyan regarded "coming" to Christ as evidence of the inner calling of Christ.

*Calling goes before Coming: Coming is not of Works, but of him that Calleth. He went up into a Mountain, and called to him whom he would, and they came to him, Mark 3:13 (1979, 391).*

In the case of Luke 18:16, not only the believing parents were *coming*; the infants were *coming* too, for Jesus said, "Let the little children *come* [italics mine] to me, and do not hinder them." But the *means* by which they were *coming* was not appreciated by the disciples, and violates the Baptist principle! For example, the late Reformed Baptist Paul King Jewett insisted, ". . . according to the New Testament, baptism is not something to which a person is *brought*, but to which he *comes*" (1978, 63). Jesus, however, had no objection to the *means* of their coming, as obvious by his command, "Do not hinder them." Jesus honors parents who exercise their covenant responsibility and become the means for their infant offspring to *come* to him, and thereby receive the Kingdom blessing. In keeping with the covenant (Gen. 17:7), he regards the parents' *bringing* as the infants' *coming*. He would hardly have agreed with Tertullian's words of postponement, "Let them come *when they are grown up*" (Wall [1705] 1889, 43).

Jacob Ditzler commented,

To a people who had always had infants in the church, which in his day and for centuries before, was often called the kingdom of God--to a people whose infants were always in the church, Christ said of little children brought in the arms of their mothers--called by Luke "infants"--"of such is the kingdom of heaven." "He that receiveth one such little one in my name receiveth me." Does that look like rejecting them--putting them out (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 712)?

Christ, the Seed of Woman, and the Seed of Abraham, defends the little ones who also constitute the seed along with their parents who believe in him. That ecclesiology is less than fully Christian which recognizes Christ as the Seed, yet fails to embrace these little ones. The following statement from John Bunyan consists well with such a pediatric embrace embodied in Jesus' words and action in Luke 18:15-17:

The Coming-Sinner is not saved because there is none that comes against him; but because the Lord Jesus will not hear their Accusations; will not cast out the coming sinner (1979, 315).

While the Jewish people were heirs to the covenants (Acts 3:25; Rom. 9:4), their own prophetic Scriptures informed them that Jesus was ushering in a day when Gentiles as well would be bringing their infant sons and daughters to him. The same chapter of Isaiah that announced Jesus as "a light for the Gentiles" (49:6) and "a covenant for the people," (49:8) also declared,

See, I will beckon to the Gentiles,  
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;  
they will bring your sons in their arms  
and carry your daughters on their shoulders (49:22).

Since Jesus affirmed all that the prophets had spoken (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:25), who would dare refuse believing parents in the church of Jesus Christ their covenantal privilege of bringing their infant sons and daughters to him?

This *covenant* perspective, therefore, provides a much more consistent, biblical understanding of Jesus' words than either the antipaedobaptistic view, Jerome's view, or the liberal view.

Refusing baptism to infants constitutes an affront to Jesus' prophetic office. Such an affront was apparent in the words of Tertullian: "Let them come *when they are grown up*" (Wall [1706] 1889, 48). The same Jesus who said in Matt.

18:16, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these," also said in John 3:5, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." What right do we have to add "*when they are grown up*" to Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me"--and thereby deny infants the water of baptism which Jesus associated with their Kingdom entry?

Certainly Tertullian regarded the "water" of John 3:5 as a reference to baptism.

For the *law* of baptism has been *imposed*, and the formula prescribed: "Go," *He* saith, "teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The comparison with this law of that definition, "Unless a man have been reborn of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the Heavens," has tied faith to the necessity of baptism (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 3:676).

In the case of the infants, of course, the initial faith must be the faith of their parents covenanting with Christ (Acts 2:38-39). John 3:6 makes it clear that it is the Spirit who effects the new birth and Kingdom entry. Jesus' association of "water" with Kingdom entry in John 3:5, is perfectly consistent with the command in Mark 16:16 and Acts 22:16, and with its function as an outward "sign" and "seal" applicable to the infant offspring of believers (Romans 4:11; cf. Col. 2:11-12).

Tertullian's statement, "Let them come *when they are grown up*," revealed his opposition to Jesus' words. He added to Christ's words thereby twisting Christ's message. This might well reflect his Montanist association. In his *Prescription Against Heretics* Tertullian cited John 16:12-13 to defend the authority of the apostles' teaching. Citing the same passage, however, Tertullian defended the rigorous asceticism of the "New Prophecy." Since Christ had many more things to share which his disciples were not yet ready to bear, it seemed reasonable that the "New Prophecy" *would impose stricter requirements upon Christians than the teaching of Christ and the*

*apostles* (Roberts 1885, 3:253; 4:59-71). Tertullian's embrace of Montanist severity, therefore, may have been the driving force behind his insistence that infants could not come to Christ—they had to wait until they were older!

The Scripture tells us that "in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). Since Jesus is that Prophet whom the Lord promised Moses that he would "raise up from among their brothers," (Deut. 18:18; Acts 3:22), men ought not to add to his words.

Do not add to his words,  
or he will rebuke you  
and prove you a liar (Prov. 30:6).

Despite Tertullian's alteration of Christ's statement in Luke 18:16, his statement does reveal something which ought not to escape the notice of the modern church. It shows that the early church associated Jesus' words in Luke 18:16 with the baptism of infants. Oscar Cullman made this same observation (1950, 76-77). This is of little comfort to opponents of infant baptism who look to Tertullian for support.

### **Melchizedek Priesthood**

The spiritual significance of Jesus' blessing of infants and children can be equally appreciated in the light of his office as High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15). A retrospective glance at the Aaronic benediction provides insight on the nature of priestly blessing. God commanded Aaron and his sons to pronounce his blessing upon the children of Israel in Numbers 6:22-27:

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

The LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face shine upon you

and be gracious to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.'

So they will put my name on the Israelites,  
and I will bless them."

Clearly the Aaronic blessing was intended to be more than an empty ceremony; it was replete with spiritual meaning, content, and efficacy. To regard the Old Testament priestly blessing as a perfunctory act or bare symbol is to miss the biblical significance of the LORD's words "So they will put my name on the Israelites."

Shakespeare's Juliet asked rhetorically, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (Harrison 1948, 484). No Hebrew would have ever made such a statement. In both Old and New Testaments the name conveyed the essence of a person's character and calling. A name change meant a new identity as a person. Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Jacob became Israel, and Simon became Peter.

God's name was so sacred that one of the Ten Commandments prohibited its misuse. The English transliteration of the Hebrew divine name revealed to Moses in the burning bush is "YAHWEH" (Exod. 3:14). It is best translated "I AM" or "I CAUSE TO BE." This name conveyed the many attributes associated with God's character, such as eternity, all-sufficiency, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, grace, mercy, righteousness, and holiness.

God's "name" is used synonymously with his "glory." This can be seen most poignantly in considering God's command to the Israelites to "seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling" (Deut. 12:5). Jerusalem became the divinely designated "place" (2 Chron. 6:6; 1 Kings 12:21) and the temple the specific location or residence for the divine Name. Accordingly, Solomon stated,

My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, "Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart. Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, who is your own flesh and blood--he is the one who will build the temple for my Name" (2 Chron. 6:7-9).

Solomon knew that the Presence of God could be confined within the temple structure (2 Chron. 6:18), but he also knew that the LORD had chosen this specific locale to manifest his Presence in the midst of his chosen people. When God's people would faithfully pray in the temple, God would graciously hear and answer their prayers, in keeping with the promises and the conditions of his covenant. (2 Chron. 6:20-42; 7:11-22). The event which followed Solomon's dedicatory prayer graphically exhibited the temple as the dwelling place of God's Name.

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

"He is good;  
his love endures forever." (2 Chron. 7:1-3)

Such a glorious manifestation of the divine Name within the temple offers positive proof that the conveyance of the divine name via the Aaronic priestly blessing was infinitely more than a perfunctory ceremony. Solomon's dedicatory prayer had been preceded by the entry of the ark of the covenant into the temple, the offering of innumerable sacrifices, and the king himself exercising the role of a priest.

While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them (2 Chron. 6:3).

It is against this Old Testament backdrop that Jesus' blessing the infants must be viewed. God chose to communicate his very Presence to his people via the ministry of his ordained priesthood. There was a *charismatic* dimension (Rom. 1:11) to the ministry of the priest. Something of a profoundly spiritual and divine nature was to occur when Aaron and his sons pronounced the three-fold benediction upon the children of Israel. How much more wonderfully effectual must have been the blessing administered to those whom Jesus touched--even children and infants! And dare his servants in his church expect less who administer baptism *into the triune Name*?

Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, if it means anything, must certainly connote the placement of the divine Name upon the child every bit as much as the Aaronic priestly blessing invoked the sacred Name upon the people of Israel. In a wonderfully real but unmistakably sacred sense, baptism, properly administered, marks the sealing of the covenant children with the divine Name.

The bestowal of the New Testament gift of the Holy Spirit was designated by the apostle Paul as "the blessing of Abraham."

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14).

God's blessing upon his servant Abraham (promised in Genesis 12:2) was administered by the mysterious Melchizedek described as "the priest of God Most High." To him Abraham paid a tithe.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Gen. 14:18-20).

Melchizedek was designated "the king of Salem (lit. 'peace'), and his Hebrew name meant "king of righteousness."

God, in the words of Psalm 110:4, had appointed Christ "a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews properly insisted that Jesus' ministry as high priest far exceeded that of the Aaronic priesthood and rendered it obsolete. The sons of Aaron had derived their ancestry from Abraham who had been blessed by one greater Melchizedek. Christ Jesus, like Melchizedek, is "without beginning of days or end of life" and derives his high-priestly authority, not from human ancestry, but from "an indestructible life" (Heb.7:3,16).

Just as Abraham, was blessed (or given the Spirit), by one greater than himself, and the blessing was transmitted to Isaac and Jacob according to Genesis 17:7, so New Testament believers, along with their offspring, are promised the same blessing (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:9; Isa. 44:3; 59:20-21). This blessing was so closely identified with baptism (Gal. 3:14; 1 Cor. 12:13) that it was designated by John the Baptizer as a *baptism with the Holy Spirit* administered by the Lord Jesus himself (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5). Clearly, therefore, Jesus' placing his hands upon infants and blessing them is related to his role as the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit. Certainly the laying on of apostolic hands was attended by the divine bestowal of the Holy Spirit and his gifts (Acts 8;17-18; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:7). How then can we ascribe a lesser blessing to the hands of the incarnate Son of God, "the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (Heb. 3:1)? However dispensationally delayed may have been the blessing administered by the hands of Jesus (John 7:37-39; 16:7), it would surely have followed with the advent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Oscar Cullman argued as much.

It is of prime importance to recall in connection with the question here raised--whether an infant can be the object of the operation of the Holy Spirit--that this laying on of hands is precisely the question connected with Baptism which accompanies the *imparting of the Spirit*.

Christ's hand, according to the evangelists laid in blessing on the children, is there the instrument of the Spirit, just like the hand which he laid on the sick. Those infants in the Gospels (βρεφη, Luke 18.15) enter through the action of Jesus into fellowship with him. Certainly this is not baptism; yet this event from the very earliest times is quite rightly adduced as a legitimation of infant Baptism, in which nothing else is at stake than the reception of children into fellowship with Jesus Christ: 'Forbid them not!' (1950, 42).

J. Rodman Williams objected maintaining that

the proper use of the texts regarding Jesus' blessing children and taking them in His arms is *not for infant baptism but for infant dedication*. It is altogether fitting that parents should bring forward their infants and small children and that the pastor take the children up in his arms for a blessing. . . . All that is needed is to omit the water, take the infant up in arms, and bless as Jesus did! (1988-, 3:233).

But what did Williams think was conveyed by Jesus' blessing of the infants? Was it not the blessing of Abraham? What other blessing would a Christian parent desire for the child in infant dedication if it is not the blessing of a heart purified from sin? And if it is the blessing of a pure heart that is sought, is that not the blessing of which baptism is the "appeal" (1 Pet. 3:21 RSV) or "pledge" (NIV). And if it is indeed an appeal that is properly connected with baptism, why would Williams want to withhold baptism and thereby put asunder what God has joined together?

If anyone should believe in infant baptism, it is the author of a systemic theology written from a charismatic perspective. Williams lamented the spiritual ignorance and impoverishment of modern Christendom when he wrote that

there is seldom in the traditional churches any expectation that through the laying on of hands an extraordinary spiritual event will take place, namely, the veritable outpouring of God's presence and power (1988-, 2:289).

Williams, who regards the laying on of hands as "a divinely instituted means of *enabling* persons to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (1988-, 2:290), ought not to oppose, as a matter of principle, the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14) being imparted to infants through the laying on of hands. This is especially so inasmuch as Jesus is designated "a minister of the circumcision" (Rom. 15:8 KJV) and performs the circumcision done without the hands of men (Col. 2:11). If it is the blessing of Abraham that is sought at the time of infant dedication, and not a mere sentimental ritual, why would Williams want to insist on withholding the outward covenant sign contrary to Abraham?

In keeping with the promise of Genesis 17:7, the blessing of the Holy Spirit has been promised to the sons and daughters of the covenant.

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants (Isa. 44:3b).

"Nursing infants" were, by the Abrahamic institution, as well as by God's command, part of the assembly privileged to hear Joel's ancient prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit upon the "sons and daughters" (Joel 2:15-16, 28). And in keeping with the institution of the Abrahamic covenant, the sign is to be administered to them (Gen. 17:12). The blessing of the Spirit qualifies them, in God's time, to be partakers of the same sacred symbols which Melchizedek offered Abraham (Gen.

14:18), and which Christ has instituted for his church (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Only these latter tokens of confirming faith should be delayed until their public profession, in distinction from baptism as the token of their admission to the covenant in infancy.

### **Israel's Shepherd-King**

Before addressing the question: What did Jesus convey upon the infants by virtue of his kingly office?, we do well to examine the nature of the Kingdom which Christ represented by virtue of God's designating Him in Psalm 110:4 (cf. Heb. 7:17) a "priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." Since Jesus stands related to the "order of Melchizedek," it logically follows that he himself is Melchizedek's antitype with respect to kingship as well as his priestly office. And the nature of the kingdom is revealed by the Hebrew name Melchizedek which literally means "king of righteousness." As one in the order of Melchizedek, Jesus reigns over that righteousness which (another Psalm declares) is with "children's children" (Ps. 103:17). Minority age does not constitute a twilight light zone with regard to Christ's *justification* of the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Infants are included among the "many" accounted "righteous" by the LORD's Righteous One (Isaiah 53:11b). Christ indeed is our Shepherd-King who carries the lambs in his bosom (Isa. 40:11). This is not to suggest that all baptized children of believers are *chosen* by God ("Through Isaac shall your seed be named" Rom. 9:7), but they are certainly *called* and some are indeed chosen (Matt. 22:14). The evidence of their being chosen, however, is not necessarily coincident with the moment of their baptism, or even with the moment of Jesus' blessing if, on this side of Christ's ascension, we mortals were somehow able to determine that. But if they are indeed chosen by the Chosen One, evidence of Christ's blessing will follow (Matt. 11:25-27; John 6:37; 1 Pet. 1:20).

Describing the Kingdom of God, in eschatological and apocalyptic terms, the prophet Daniel spoke of one

like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

According to the Gospel records, Jesus regularly identified himself as "the Son of Man"--a veiled but unmistakable reference to the apocalyptic figure in Daniel's prophecy.

While the Kingdom Jesus announced has an *eschatological* connection with the Millennium and the New Jerusalem, it also has a *pneumatic* association. The gift of the Holy Spirit represents the earnest or down payment on the future Kingdom inheritance (Rom. 14:17; 2 Cor. 1:22). This *pneumatic* association best accounts for Jesus' statement in Mark 9:1:

I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1).

To overlook the role of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom is to come up short in the effort to understand the nature of Christ's Kingdom. It is in fact to denigrate, albeit unwittingly, Christ's prophetic office as well. For, except for the destruction of the temple, the "kingdom of God" did not "come with power" among Jesus' peers in a literal political/eschatological sense.

The pneumatic association of Christ's kingly office was explicitly set forth by Peter in his Pentecost sermon:

Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. . . . let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:33, 36 NASB).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic vocation and high-priestly ministry, but especially an effect of Jesus' office as the Davidic King (Acts 2:33-36).

Beasley-Murray stated it well.

. . . the idea of possessing the new life of the Spirit now, without which indeed there is no hope of participating in the future kingdom, implies a present experience of the blessings of the age to come (1963, 232).

This pneumatic connection with the Kingdom of heaven is expressed sacramentally in baptism. Beasley-Murray who does not believe in infant baptism viewed baptism as "a sacrament of realized eschatology for the inheritance of the consummated glory" (1963, 232). He apparently overlooked what was so obvious to Jeremias. Jeremias argued convincingly that infants were baptized, according to Acts 2:39, on the grounds that baptism is an *eschatological sacrament*--"an eschatological sealing in the last hour" which would exclude "any limitation of age" (1962, 23, 41).

To refuse baptism to the children of believing parents is to impugn Jesus' office as Israel's Messianic King; for he declared, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16). In this case, "these" were *infants* being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands upon them and bless them.

While some view infant baptism as nothing more than a perfunctory rite, certainly Jesus' blessing of infants and children must be regarded as infinitely more than a perfunctory rite. In taking infants and little children into his arms, Jesus was exercising his own office as the Messiah of Israel graphically fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:11:

He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

Viewed from the context of Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd, his embrace and blessing of infants bespoke a relationship that is eternally secure.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:27-30).

The relationship between the sheep (including the lambs) and the Shepherd is all the more wonderful in the light of the unity that eternally exists between the Father and the Son. In John 1:18, Jesus is described as being "at the Father's side" (NIV) or "in the bosom of the Father" (KJV). Jesus' carrying the lambs in his bosom must be understood in view of his unique, intimate relationship with the Father. Accordingly, Christian baptism signifies a spiritual motion or initiation "in [into] the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19; Hastings 1919, 1:134-35). Baxter was right when he argued that the baptism of infants and minority children was tantamount to receiving or welcoming a child in Jesus' name (1651, 22; Matt. 18:5; Luke 9:47).

After the Word of the Gospel is preached, the faithful undershepherd of the flock receives the infant child from the arms of the parents. He asks for the child's Christian name, addresses the child by name, and proceeds to baptize the child affirming, "I baptize you in [into] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*Bk. Com. Wor.* 1946, 123). Christ calls his own sheep by name (John 10:3). His sheep hear his voice and they follow him. Those infants who only hear the undershepherd's voice do not follow the Chief Shepherd. If they never hear the Chief Shepherd's voice, their membership is limited to the church visible, even if the church should err by receiving them into full communicant membership at some point.

Those infants who not only hear the voice of the undershepherd, but also hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, either immediately or at a later time (1 Sam. 3:3-10), live and are joined to the church invisible. They follow the Good Shepherd. For Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Calvin commented on Jesus' blessing of the children:

Certainly, the laying on of His hands was not a trifling or whimsical sign, and when Christ here offered up prayer, it is perfectly certain that He was not vainly beating the air. But He could not have offered these children to God without giving them purity. And what other prayer did He utter for them then that they should be received into the number of the children of God? It follows, then that they were regenerated by the Spirit in the hope of salvation. In short, even His embracing of them was a testimony that Jesus acknowledged them to belong to His flock. Now if they were partakers of the spiritual gifts which are represented by baptism, it is unreasonable to refuse them the outward sign. It is, indeed, an audacity and presumption full of sacrilege to drive far from the fold of Christ those whom He lovingly holds to His bosom, and to exclude as strangers those whom He does not wish to be forbidden to come to Him (Marcel 1953).

Some protest at this point, "If Jesus' blessing the infants and children conveyed the gift of eternal life, why did he not baptize them?" To ask that question, however, is to introduce another: "Why did he not baptize any adults?"; for John 4:2 informs us that "in fact it was not Jesus who baptized but his disciples." The answer to both questions is that Jesus entrusted the administration of water baptism to his disciples. It is possible that these children had already received water baptism

either by John or by Jesus' disciples. The administration of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, however, was (and continues to be) uniquely Christ's (John 1:33).

Carson raised a salient objection: "If infants were every day brought to be baptized, why did the apostles object to their being blessed" ([1853] 1981, 202)? A study of the Gospel accounts reveals that Jesus' disciples, like many Christians today, frequently had inflated egos. Some even vied for a position of authority at Jesus' right and left hands in the heavenly Kingdom. It may be that they were more interested in their own careers than in this most precious commodity of the Kingdom. Every generation of the church faces this attitude among the flock. Ministers are not immune. How easy it is to value their own ministries more than they value the Savior himself, and adults more than children. It is totally believable that ambitious male disciples failed to take seriously the requests of parents on behalf of the infants. And while infant baptism is important, it is the blessing of Jesus associated with their baptismal promise (Gen. 17:7; Isa. 44:3) that is especially to be desired and sought after. Those who administer baptism, parents who present their children for baptism, and those who are baptized ought to be the special objects of prayers such as the one recorded in Ephesians 1:18-21:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in this present age but also in the one to come.

This chapter has focused upon Luke's account of Jesus' blessing the children in order to emphasize their infancy, for in this case Luke uses the Greek word *brepheos* clearly designating their infancy.

Richard Baxter further noted,

It is yet more considerable, that all these evangelists [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] make full mention of these passages of Christ; and therefore it is evident that they were not taken for small circumstantials, but Doctrines of moment for the Churches['] information (1651, 106).

Baxter offered the following challenge to any doubters:

I desire any tender conscienced Christian, that is in doubt whether Infants should be admitted Members of the visible Church, and would fain know what is the pleasure of Christ in this thing, to read over the Texts impartially, and considerately, and then bethink himself, whether it be more likely that it will please Christ better to bring, or solemnly admit Infants into the Church, or to shut them out; and whether these words of Christ so plain and earnest, will not be a better plea at Judgment for admitting Infants, then any that ever the Anabaptists brought will be to them for refuting them (1651, 106).

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