

CHAPTER 8

INFANT BAPTISM AND THE "RIGHT TO CHOOSE"

People were bringing even infants to him
that he might touch them;
and when the disciples saw it,
they sternly ordered them not to do it.
But Jesus called for them and said,
"Let the little children come to me,
and do not stop them." -Luke 18:15-16a (NRSV)

"Soul Competency" and Religious Proxy

Hershel H. Hobbes, in *The Baptist Faith and Message*, underscored the principle of *soul competency* as foundational to Baptist thinking.

The principle of soul competency in religion is both exclusive and inclusive. It excludes all human interference in religion such as episcopacy, infant baptism, religious proxy, and government authority in religion. "Religion is a personal matter between the soul and God" (1971, 8-9).

Hobbes insisted that he was not speaking of "a competency in the sense of human self-sufficiency" but "a competency under God" (1971, 8). And yet, if the term *soul competency* means anything in its reference to infant baptism, it certainly suggests that the parents must never do anything for their child's spiritual life that the child would be able to do for himself if he were old enough.

When Jesus invited "babies" to come to him, the way in which they were, in fact, coming was by being carried in the arms of their parents (Luke 18:15). Consistent with this fact, Hippolytus issued the following baptismal guideline in Rome about 215 A.D.:

First the little ones should be baptized. All who can speak for themselves should speak. For those however who cannot, their parents or another who belongs to the family should speak (Christensen 1973, 11).

The Baptist principle regards such parental action as an intrusion upon the individual conscience of the child, instead of a matter of covenantal obedience on the part of the parent for the spiritual blessing of the child.

The essence of the Baptist was, and is, the contention that no one can or should be made a Christian without the conscious cooperating of his own will. They asserted the liberty of the individual conscience (Wood 1910, 4).

Paul King Jewett insisted,

... when a professing believer is baptized, there is no possibility that one should have wrought upon him an act whereby he is committed, wholly apart from any choice of his own. When infants are baptized, on the other hand, it cannot be otherwise (1978, 111).

On the basis of the Baptist principle of *liberty of conscience*, or as Hobbes put it, *soul competency* (1971, 8-9), David's autobiographical reference, and Luke's testimony concerning the pre-born John the Baptist, would have to be called into question (Ps. 71:6; Luke 1:15, 41). In both instances there was parental religious intrusion. Since both David and John had parents who were part of the believing Israelite community, it is certain that the parents *imposed* the rite of circumcision. In the matter of John's relationship to God, his

parents played a critical role (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80). If it is argued that God judged John's soul *competent* to receive the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb, the Baptist principle is rendered meaningless, as far as infant baptism is concerned.

Alexander Carson, in opposing infant baptism, had stressed the *voluntary* nature of the Christian faith.

There is a grand distinction between the Jewish dispensation and the Christian. The subjects of Christ's Kingdom are all voluntary. To baptize infants is to profane baptism, because it applies the ordinance to those not appointed to receive it. But to force slaves to receive circumcision is not a profanation, for Abraham's commission warranted force ([1853] 1981, 226).

Soren Kirkegaard regarded infant baptism as "the rape" of cramming the child into "the decisive Christian categories" (Law 1988, 91:117).

It is an unchristian kind of love (it is, in fact, only race-love) for parents to be unwilling to understand that to be a Christian is a decision which defines the single individual as spirit, that in this respect, one person can do nothing for another, that their baptising and instructing neither can nor do guarantee that the children are Christian (Law 1988, 91:117).

The spiritual role of the parent is critical in infant baptism. To be sure, water baptism *per se* can not guarantee the salvation of infants. To acknowledge that, however, does not absolve parents of responsibility for their children's spiritual welfare, whatever regard they should have for the child's *individuality* or "liberty of conscience"--any more than it does for their children's physical welfare. The Bible does not set forth a democratic, individualistic, right-to-choose *modus operandi* for the family, but rather a household pattern of discipleship structured around parental leadership and authority. .

God's covenant involved Abraham in a special parental

assignment to conform his family to God's revealed will.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised for him (Gen. 18:19).

Joshua did not delay issuing a public statement concerning his own domestic religious policy--as though his wife and children had to be consulted in order for him to be absolutely certain that he was not violating their individual rights.

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

Tragically, a modern American Christian father's declaration might rather be something like the following: "As for me and my house, I can only speak for myself." This is the social implication of an entire nation's intoxication with the Baptist principle of *soul competency*. Far worse, it represents the church's cowardly concession to the dictates of this present evil age. Moses, in his advocacy for the church's worship in the Old Testament, withstood Pharaoh's claim upon Israel's children (Exod. 10:8-10).

The New Testament Church was to be governed by elders who managed their families well (1 Tim. 3:4). Their children were to be believers and not subject to charges of being disrespectful or wild and disobedient (Titus 1:6). The assumption behind the apostolic church's polity, like the assumption behind infant baptism, was that parents do control the reins of spiritual leadership within the home--for good or for evil. Because Eli was reluctant to exercise this leadership role in a responsible way, he and his sons were tragically removed from

the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:27-36; 3:11-14). And because Samuel's parenting was modeled after Eli's, Samuel was not able to commend one of his own sons to succeed him as judge of Israel (1 Sam. 8:4-5).

Infant baptism sets the stage for the paradigm of biblical parenting--". . . as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). By American democratic standards, some might consider infant baptism to be "unfair." Properly understood, it gives the parents a distinct advantage in the spiritual formation of their children. Just as the right-to-life of the unborn must be defended by the strong godly authority of the parent and protected by the state, so the spiritual birthright of the newborn must be asserted by the parent's conscientious choice and commitment, as well as that of the Christian congregation. The faithful Israelite father affirmed the covenant promise pertaining to his infant son by circumcising his son on the eighth day; the Christian father or mother affirms the promise by presenting the infant for baptism.

As parents brought their children to Jesus of Nazareth for healing or deliverance from evil spirits, so parents should do the same with respect to their children's spiritual needs today. The covenant blessing, signed and sealed through baptism, may in some people's eyes give the child an "unfair" advantage over the world, the flesh, and the devil--as though the devil should have equal rights! We can be thankful that Monica did not view the matter of Christian parenting in such an "enlightened" way. Though a pagan husband apparently overruled her desire to have her child baptized as an infant, she did not shirk her spiritual duty as a parent. If it had been otherwise, we would have missed out on the *City of God*, as part of our Christian heritage, and the *Confessions* may never have been written. At least, that was Augustine's own perspective on his life (n. d., 13-14, 214-15). .

The faith of a child ought not to be despised, belittled, or questioned simply on the grounds that a main contributing factor to that faith was the spiritual leadership of the parent. The modern social engineers pushing "values clarification" programs in American public schools must certainly applaud the Baptist

principle that "all souls have an equal right to direct access to God" (Hobbs 1971, 9). Such a principle plays into the hands of modern egalitarian, social engineers--the atomizers of American society. It is a secular principle--not a biblical one.

Eugene Genovese, in *The Southern Tradition*, described this modern trend.

The hopeless quest for an equality of condition among all people has generated ever more insidious manipulation of society by elites that pretend to be other than privileged groups (1994, 30).

On the basis of the egalitarian principle, that runs roughshod over social structures and recognizes only the rights of individuals, Samuel could have taken his own mother to court. She dedicated him to the LORD before he was even born and personally took him to the temple and left him there for "full-time Christian service" right after he was weaned! What a violation of Samuel's rights! And what a violation of the children's rights when Baptists insist on dedicating their own infant offspring following Hannah's example! "Hannah's example will simply not fit into Baptist theology" (Bridge & Phypers 1977, 177).

Richard Weaver in *Ideas Have Consequences* traced the modern atomization of society to the triumph of William of Occam's philosophical nominalism which severed the connection between faith and reason, assaulted the universality of ideas, and intensified psychological self-analysis.

The extreme of nominalism appears when men fear, as many do today, to make even those general groupings which are requisite to ordinary activities. We are developing a phobia toward simple predication. Sensing that even expository statement is a form of argument and that argument implies the existence of truth, we shrink back by clinging to our affirmation of particulars. They seem innocuous. Any extension beyond, toward center, may involve duties (1948, 59).

Although a Protestant, Weaver took a stand against Renaissance individualism and tried to rein in the Reformation's "right of private judgment." He has observed, in Genovese's words, that "the plaintive cry of southern conservatives for a reaffirmation of religious faith has faltered on their inability to generate, or even advocate, an appropriate theology or metaphysics" (Genovese 1994, 24-25). Genovese commented, "While piety remains stronger in the South than elsewhere, it is receding and may not prove able to sustain the burden placed upon it" (1994, 25). It is at this point that John Murray's comments in *Christian Baptism* appear patently relevant to the American church:

Infant baptism is one of the ways in which God assures us that the method of His saving and sanctifying operations in the world is not atomistic. The administration of His lovingkindness takes account of the solidarity in accordance with which He has created and governs the human race. The race is not a mere aggregate of the individuals comprised in it. There are institutions in terms of which the members of the race sustain corporate relations to one another. The most basic of such institutions is the family and, as far as the history of the government of this world are concerned, the solidarity established is indestructible (Murray 1980, 89-90).

If one is to reject infant baptism on the basis of the egalitarian principle, he may as well reject intercessory prayer and repudiate the faith of Abraham, Joshua, Job, Noah, Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Lois, and Eunice--all of whom the Scriptures commend for making spiritual "decisions" on their children's behalf. Conversely, he may as well honor Moses for his lack of initiative in his son's circumcision, and Jesus' disciples for their standing in the way of those parents who were bringing their infant children to Jesus! (Exod. 4:24-26; Luke 18:15-17; cf. Mark 10:14a)

The principle that "all souls have an equal right to direct access to God" (Hobbs 1971, 9) is indefensible on biblical grounds. Even adult believers today have a faith that is one step removed from that of the apostles in one sense. They believe on the basis of the revealed testimony recorded and handed down from the apostles. Only the apostles can make the claim of having directly seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1; John 1:14; 17:20; 2 Pet. 1:16-19; 1 John:1-3). Of course, the New Testament which the apostles set forth brings believers into the Presence of the Lord, and in that sense the Spirit's witness may be said to be *inward* if not *immediate* (*Savoy XVIII, II0*)--but the written Word is *mediatory* being handed down from the apostles to succeeding generations.

A child receives his name, his family and place, and his racial and national identity without his consent (Marcel 1953, 203; cf. Luke 1:13, 59-63). Marcel spoke of baptism in terms of the child's "rights"--but from a *covenantal* perspective:

From the judicial point of view, baptism also signifies to adults and to the Church the spiritual rights of the child in the covenant. The child has a *right* to the fulfillment of the promises; he has a *right* to fellowship with Christ; he has a *right* to citizenship in the church with the people of God; he has a *right* to eternal life....The covenant enables us to know the *child's declaration of spiritual rights*, judicially acknowledged by the "vows" of his parents and godparents. We ought to respect and honour these rights; we cannot infringe them without offending God Himself and doing the child an injury. Baptism seals their inviolable character....Who will dare to say that the rights of the child recorded in our Civil Code and the legislations concerning him are of no avail to him because he is incapable of having any knowledge of them? On the contrary they are inscribed in the Law for his immediate good and advantage. To despise them is to attack the child directly and to injure his human status (Marcel 1953, 226).

Richard Baxter would have agreed.

If it be the duty of all Christian parents solemnly to engage their children to God in covenant. . . then they ought to do it in baptism, which is the mutually engaging sign (1651, 109).

Abortion and Infant Baptism

The principles the Frenchman Marcel enunciated expose the inconsistency of modern evangelical Christians who repudiate infant baptism, and yet publicly defend the "rights" of the unborn with respect to a normal physical birth.

Nineteenth-century infant baptism opponent, J. R. Graves, did not share this inconsistency. Defining "persons" as "accountable beings," he insisted that infants were *non-persons* (1876, 762). The philosophical distance between Graves's definition and the twentieth-century judicial tragedy of *Roe vs. Wade* was but a small step. Is it any philosophical wonder, therefore, that the first American president to throw his full support behind the Pro Choice movement should be a Baptist?

Could it be that many antipaedobaptists today are caught in a philosophical dilemma--due to an unconscious carry-over from the J. R. Graves era? They are pro-life when it comes to the matter of the unborn. They would defend the personhood of the unborn on the basis of a passage such as Luke 1:41-44 which records the prenatal regenerative responses of John the Baptist. They would readily affirm the stance of the ancient church described by Tertullian his *Apology* during the late second century:

. . . murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether

you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 3:25).

Yet modern antipaedobaptists oppose infant baptism on the same grounds, implicitly at least, that J. R. Graves opposed it, and on the very grounds the abortionist defends his action--namely, that the infant is a non-person. When pro-choice adults fail to defend the unborn infant's right to life, the infant comes out the victim. Similarly, when the antipaedobaptist fails to defend the spiritual right of the believer's newborn, the infant is left spiritually exposed to the Adversary. Satan's strategy to devour the offspring of the elect "the moment it was born" is taken lightly in the modern world (Rev. 12:4). The Christian parent's faith demonstrated in the act of baptizing his offspring according to the covenant, is like a shield protecting the child from Satan's fiery darts (Eph. 6:17; Prov. 14:26).

Solomon warned,

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute (Prov. 31:8).

To "impose oneself" (at least, to some degree) on behalf of the child's right to physical life, because the child is unable to defend himself against the abortionist, is certainly a Christian act. But so is it a Christian act for Christian parents, and the assembled church, to intervene on behalf of the child's spiritual life at the point of the child's spiritual vulnerability as a newborn infant.

To defend the *personhood* of the unborn on the basis of John's prenatal regenerative responses, while rejecting infant baptism in the face of the same personhood, is a strange inconsistency. The unborn's right-to-life is defended on the basis of a personhood attested by his spiritual response to God. Why then should the covenant seal of baptism be denied in view of the same personhood, since God has provided precious promises to

professing Christian believers concerning the regeneration of their offspring (Gen. 17:7; Isa. 59:20-21)? Can parents who procrastinate in appropriating God's covenant on their infant offspring's behalf expect better things from the Adversary than the abortionist delivers (Rev. 12:4)?

Equally at stake in the modern abortion issue, as in the matter of infant baptism, is the principle of the social solidarity of divine institutions. There is a frightening parallel between the Supreme Court's ruling in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* and the antipaedobaptist mentality. In *Eisenstadt*, Russell Hittinger stated, "the Court declared unconstitutional the most ancient common law of spousal rights and responsibilities." Hittinger illustrated his point by quoting the words of the Court as follows:

The marital couple is not an independent entity with a mind and heart of its own, but an association of two individuals each with a separate intellectual and emotional makeup. If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child (Hittinger 1994, 8).

It is no exaggeration to say that the Baptist principle has done for Christian parents what the Supreme Court did for husbands in *Eisenstadt vs. Baird*. The Baptist principle has denied Christian parents their solidarity with their children within the institution of the family, and the responsibilities attending that solidarity, just as the Court denied the solidarity of the marriage institution in *Eisenstadt*.

Infant Baptism and Original Sin

If, as the Baptists insist, "all souls have an equal right to direct access to God," the question must be posed: "What ever happened to original sin?" Roman Catholic scholar, P. J. Hill, wrote,

After all, the infant was afflicted with original sin without its consent, and besides in the Old Testament God had already instituted a similar remedy for male infants in the rite of circumcision (1967, 2:69).

While we must certainly insist that the *remedy* is in the *covenant* rather than the mere external *rite*, the rhetorical question still needs to be raised: "If Adam's children were made sinners without the children's consent, why cannot the children of Christian believers be made saints without the children's consent?"

Hill traced the antipaedobaptistic "right-to-choose" mentality to the ancient Pelagian heresy (1967, 69). The illusion of Pelagianism was that the newborn was in the same moral state as Adam prior to the Fall. Whether Pelagius actually repudiated infant baptism *per se*, however, is a disputed point (Mackay n. d., 75).

Pelagius's denial of original sin logically made Baptism unnecessary for infants. But in the course of the conflict, in which St. Augustine (d. 430) played a great role, Pelagius attempted to defend the practice of infant Baptism and at the same time to deny original sin. He asserted the necessity of Baptism to enter the kingdom of heaven, but not to obtain eternal life. The full meaning of this distinction still puzzles us today (Hill 1967, 69-70).

Against Pelagius, Augustine argued backward from infant baptism to original sin in order to account for the latter. In so doing, Augustine was appealing to what was obviously a well-established practice in the church (Bridge and Phipers 1977, 38).

Augustine maintained that the church had always insisted that children be baptized; thus, the church would do for the children what they could not do for themselves, viz., demonstrate faith. God had chosen to heal them at the words of another, since they had been wounded by the deed of another (Naglee 1987, 62-63).

J. Rodman Williams conceded the first point, namely that the universal condition of sin and condemnation in human infancy "finds its ultimate root in the sin and condemnation of the one original man" (1988-, 1:268-269). Yet he rejected the idea that God could heal the infants at the words of another. With respect to original sin he was an Augustinian; with respect to infant baptism, however, he was quite Pelagian. More accurately, while Pelagius may have held to infant baptism without having a sufficient theological basis to do so, Williams denied it even though he had a theological basis not to. Ironically, the principle of *proxy* which he opposed in infant baptism was equally involved in the doctrine of original sin (1988-, 3:234).

Williams could have affirmed infant baptism quite consistently with his own views on the solidarity of the human race: "Every person's sin in some sense is *my* sin: his guilt, my guilt; his condemnation, my condemnation" (1988-, 1:271). Williams commended Jonathan Edwards for so identifying with all men as "to act as if their evil were my own . . . so that the knowledge of their sins will provoke in me nothing but a sense of shame" (1988-, 1:271, note 109). Williams obviously esteemed Edwards's sense of covenantal identification with the fallen human race as a genuine expression of biblical piety. Why should he then recoil from a parent's covenantal identification with the sin of his own infant offspring in infant baptism (Job 1:1-5; Ps. 51:5)? As Elizabeth Dodds has noted, Edwards was under no illusions as to the insidious nature of sin even in his own children. For he wrote, "As innocent as children seem to be to us, yet . . . they are naturally very senseless and stupid, being born as the wild ass's colt, and need much to awaken them" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 47).

The problem was that Williams did not hold to his view of original sin with any degree of seriousness or consistency. For he scoffed at the position of the *Westminster Confession* for limiting salvation among those dying in infancy to the elect, as though Calvin also had not insisted that "God's election alone rules as of free right" with respect to infants (Calvin 1960,

2:1337). Williams apparently felt that God was indebted to all infants, and that he had an obligation to save the non-elect as well, or at least to put them in limbo (1988-, 3:235, note 69). For Williams, the problem of original sin in infants was not so serious that God could not overthrow his own eternal decrees in total disregard of it.

The Baptist principle of *soul competency* assumes a certain native innocence in the infant child, an innocence that will remain intact until the child is old enough to make his own spiritual commitments. When Paul affirmed in 1 Corinthians 7:14, that the children of believers were "holy," however, he was not affirming their native innocence. To be sure, some have denied infant baptism, insisting on infant innocence, as if newborns were in a pre-Fall condition, contrary to the statements of David, Paul, and the early church fathers on the matter. The Pelagian heresy is still with us!

Augustine would not have accommodated the theology of twentieth-century Baptist, Beasley-Murray, who declared that "no unbaptized infant is a child of wrath." Beasley-Murray insisted that Ephesians 2:3 had nothing to do with the idea that God's wrath was "directed to a humanity born twisted" (1963, 372, See note also). Herein may lie the root to much of the Baptist resistance to infant baptism--many do not have an adequate doctrine of original sin.

It is a blow to a parent's pride to have to acknowledge his infant son's or daughter's need for the cleansing represented by baptism, but Origen pointed out from Psalm 51 the radical nature of sin and the need for cleansing at birth. The Jews came to John the Baptist confessing their sins--this was a radical act. Believing adults who present their children to the Lord in baptism are engaging in no less a radical act on their behalf. While infant baptism, no less than adult baptism, affirms the gracious provision of the Lord's atoning death, the fact that the application of Christ's death is so desperately needed by a son or daughter--even in the state of infancy--requires a mortifying admission of sin's radical infestation of the family line. It is highly appropriate that parents verbally acknowledge this

depravity, before the Lord and the congregation, at the point of their children's baptism.

Since the Fall of man only the Lord Jesus himself has been free from any taint of sin, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and virgin-born, and having lived a life of total obedience—though being fully tempted (Luke 1:35; Heb. 4:15). The Bible describes, in less than flattering terms, the natural condition of human infancy apart from the redeeming grace of God.

Even from birth the wicked go astray;
from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.
Their venom is like the venom of a snake,
like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,
that will not heed the tune of the charmer,
however skillful the enchanter may be
(Ps. 58:3-5).

On this basis, and in full view of the covenant, the early church fathers practiced the baptism of infants. In three places where Origen speaks of infant baptism he cited among scriptural proofs the Septuagintal version of Job 14:4f.: "No one is pure from stain, yea though he be one day old." He quoted David's words in Psalm 51:5: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (as well as Psalm 58:3), noting that the context of David's statement was the confession of his own need both for *sacramental* and *spiritual* cleansing.

Clean me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow (Ps. 51:7).

Origen remarked,

But the prophets, who have given such wise suggestions on the subject of things produced by generation, tell us that a sacrifice for sin was offered even for new-born infants, as not being free from sin (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 4:631).

Augustine put it this way:

God, the Author of all natures but not of their defects, created man good; but man, corrupt by choice and condemned by justice, has produced a progeny that is both corrupt and condemned. For, we all existed in that one man, since, taken together, we were the one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made out of him before sin existed. Although the specific form by which each of us was to live was not yet created and assigned, our nature was already present in the seed from which we were to spring. And because this nature has been soiled by sin and doomed to death and justly condemned, no man was to be born of man in any other condition (1958, 278-279).

Augustine "linked as complementary doctrines, original sin and the baptism of infants" (Naglee 1987, 58). . . . Commenting on Romans 7:9, Augustine wrote:

The small child, who does not yet possess the ability to reason, is neither under the good nor the bad by an act of his own will. But as the years go by and reason awakens, the commandment comes and sin revives. And when this has begun to attack him as he grows up, then will appear what has been lying dormant in the infant, and it will conquer him and rule over him, or it will be conquered and he will be healed [Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, II, 4, 8, *Patrologia, Series Latina*, XLIV, 679] (Luther 1972, 25:337).

For Augustine, "the guilt of original sin" was pardoned and removed" by infant baptism which inscribes the *sacramentum* upon the soul of the child making grace available. "The propensity toward evil" which Augustine called "concupiscence" is not removed all at once, but is dependent upon a continuous work of grace for its conquest. Only at death is it finally removed (Naglee 1987, 63; Latourette 1953, 179).

Calvin in his day expressed the same thought,

It is foolish to seek in a man on the first day that perfection to which baptism invites us to advance by continued steps throughout life (1960, 2:1354).

John Wesley followed "Calvinistic federalism" claiming that Adam represented the entire human race in the Fall "binding everyone to himself by his behavior and its consequences." Adam's guilt, as Wesley viewed it however, was not transmitted to his progeny in the same sense as his corrupt nature; his descendants share his guilt only by association.

Wesley taught that every new-born had a propensity toward sin, a "bias of nature," and consequently was unable to avoid doing evil, but that Christ's atonement justified the infant from the *guilt* of original sin. "At birth the child is given free will as a benefit of the atonement of Christ." Accordingly, the infant mind was a *tabula rasa* with no innate ideas about God whatsoever, but education would provide a stronger magnetic pull than sin influencing the will, with the assent of the child, to obey parents and God.

Naglee described John Wesley as the forerunner of Horace Bushnell with regard to Christian nurture. Wesley disliked applying the term "conversion" to children's religion, even as Richard Baxter and Count Zinzendorf had insisted that children baptized in the covenant did not need "conversion"--rather the child was in a continual state of grace from baptism to confirmation (Naglee 1987, 27, 207-210, 237).

Therefore no infant ever was, or ever will be "sent to hell for the guilt of Adam's sin;" seeing it is cancelled by the righteousness of Christ, as soon as they are sent into the world (Naglee 1987, 137).

In Wesley's view, Christ the Second Adam had reconciled all men *universally* and unconditionally bestowing the Holy Spirit at birth in the form of prevenient grace--the beginning of regeneration. On this basis, Wesley maintained that God's

covenant of grace was established with Adam and all his descendants after the Fall. This was "the grace of God that hath appeared to all men" of Titus 2:11, or "the true light that enlightens the way of every man" of John 1:9. Preventive (or *preventing*) grace ended the atheism of the natural man causing him to acknowledge the Creator and Lawgiver. Preventive grace was strictly preparatory and represented the bestowal of the conscience. For a child to be saved, preventive grace had to be followed by *convincing* grace and *sanctifying* grace, but *preventive* grace did enable the person to respond to further expressions of grace. While no degree of grace could ever be merited, it could be resisted (Naglee 1987, 31-35).

Naglee's insistence that Wesley's views are "unmistakably those of the Augustinian tradition *via* the sixteenth century reformers" (1987, 64) savors of a special pleading. The Reformers, much less Augustine, would hardly have recognized themselves. Certainly Augustine did not regard preventive grace in such a universal fashion, nor did Calvin view the atonement of Christ as having such universal efficacy, however universal its sufficiency.

Wesley's view had the practical effect of denying the corruption and weakness of the human will--even in the believer--as a result of Adam's sin; thus, it minimized the conflict described in Romans 7:14-20 and invited the "perfectionistic" deception described in 1 John 1:8 (Harmon 1955, 72-74). It also disregarded the dominant role of the divine will in salvation as stated in John 1:13 and 6:13 (Walker [1918] 1952, 516).

Bestowing the gift of a "free will" so universally upon all infants was hardly what Paul set forth concerning the work of the Second Adam in Romans 5:12-21. The "many" who were "made righteous," through the obedience of the Second Adam (Rom. 5:19), certainly were not co-extensive with the "many" who were "made sinners," through the disobedience of the first Adam. Within the context of Paul's letter to the Romans, the "many" who are "made righteous" represented the full number of God's elect (Rom. 9:8)--nothing more and nothing less.

By implication Wesley downgraded the new covenant gift of the new heart (Ezek. 36:26-27) to the level of common grace. He also implied that the gift of salvation was bestowed as a result of "man's will and exertion"--an idea expressly denied by the apostle Paul in Romans 9:16.

Like Wesley, Calvin recognized God's "immediate remedy" for original sin, but only for the offspring of the elect. Answering Servetus's objections to infant baptism, the Geneva Reformer stated,

But though I admit that all the offspring of Adam begotten of flesh bear their condemnation from the very womb itself, I still deny that this prevents God from providing an immediate remedy. For Servetus will not prove that many years were divinely prescribed for the newness of spiritual life to begin. As Paul testifies, although *those born of believers* [emphasis mine] may by nature be lost, they are holy by supernatural grace" (1960, 2:1355).

While Calvin saw the efficacy of Christ's atonement as immediate in infants, he saw it as extending to the infant offspring of believers only, in keeping with the promise of Genesis 17:7. The Atonement, as an efficacious work, did not extend to all newborns universally.

Contrary to Pelagius, Calvin believed that godly parents bore children corrupted by Adam's sin, but, citing 1 Corinthians 7:14, he insisted that the covenant of grace was operative in the offspring of the elect.

For they descend not from their parents' spiritual regeneration but from their carnal generation. Hence, as Augustine says, whether a man is a guilty unbeliever or an innocent believer, he begets not innocent but guilty children, for he begets them from a corrupted nature. Now, it is a special blessing of God's people that they partake in some degree of their parent's holiness. This does not gainsay the fact that the universal curse of the human race preceded. For

guilt is of nature, but sanctification, of supernatural grace" (Calvin 1960, 1:250).

Cornelius Van Til illustrated Calvin's point when he was asked, in his late 80s, how he knew Christ as his Savior since he could not recall a time when he had not believed. Van Til replied to the young theological inquirer, "Because I am a sinner, I don't ever forget I am." And with pointed finger inscribing an exclamation mark in the air, he stated, "Don't you ever forget you are!" (Schlissel 1996). Jewett misrepresented Calvin when he said that the Reformer held that the believer's children were "exempt from the curse of Adam" (1978, 159). While elect infants were redeemed from the Adam's curse, they were never "exempt" from it.

Neither Calvin nor Augustine would have agreed with Count Zinzendorf who rejected the pietist Francke's view that "all children must know the inner struggle and a keen sense of condemnation before they can enjoy the Christian religion." The Count held that

baptized children experience a gradual awakening to their redemption in Christ. This awakening is so gradual that it has no element of repentance, no reversal of conduct, and no sense of remorse. Essentially, the effect of the regenerating process is that, from the time the infant is baptized, children are brought to conscious acceptance of salvation without ever having been ungodly (Naglee 1987, 193).

Augustine's notion that infant baptism canceled the effect of original sin cannot be summarily dismissed as reflecting "the error of baptismal regeneration" (Williams 1988-, 3:235). As Calvin noted, and Augustine so carefully pointed out, *only in the elect* did the sacraments effect what they symbolized (1960, 2:1291). Otherwise the means of grace are perverted into the means of superstition. But the same could be said for the practice of laying on of hands which Williams designated as "the means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit may be received" (1988-,

2:289). Are we to dismiss the practice of laying on of hands in infant dedication (which Williams himself has recommended [1988-, 3:233]) as reflecting the error of "charismatic manipulation"? Surely Williams would acknowledge that not every one who receives the laying on of hands receives the Holy Spirit, just as he acknowledged that the Holy Spirit may be given without the application of human hands (1988-, 2:287). And Augustine affirmed that there could be invisible sanctification without a visible sign, just as there could be a visible sign without true sanctification (Calvin 1960, 2:1290).

The mere application of water baptism certainly does not eradicate the traces of original sin in infants; indeed, regeneration itself will not finally eliminate it until it is completed in the eschatological appearance of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:8; 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:9-12). But infant baptism, properly understood, is a *covenant transaction* between the God of all grace, Christian parents, and the believing congregation on behalf of children conceived in sin. And God's covenant grace clothes the "little vipers in covenant diapers" (Gerstner 1991), much as it clothed the original human couple (Gen. 3:21), and dares to call them *holy* (1 Cor. 7:14). Baptism is the seal of that covenant of grace.

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven (Matt. 18:10).

Some have denied the doctrine of original sin on the basis of Ezekiel 18. The prophet sounded the death knell on the popular proverb: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (18:2). He declared,

The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him (18:20).

The context of Ezekiel 18, Jonathan Edwards argued, was the people's complaining of God's temporal judgment on the covenant nation in keeping with the prophecy of Leviticus 26:39 (1879, 1:226). Edwards correctly pointed out that what was *denied* in Ezekiel 18 was “the communion in the guilt and punishment in the sins of others, that are distinct parts of Adam's race; and expressly, in that case, where there is *no consent and concurrence*, but a sincere disapprobation of the wickedness of ancestors” (1879, 1:225-26). There was nothing in Ezekiel 18 that contradicted the human race's complicity in Adam's transgression and Fall.

For Edwards, the doctrine of original sin was an unmistakably biblical fact. Commenting on Romans 5:14, he wrote,

... it appears in fact, all mankind, during that whole time which preceded the law of Moses, were subjected to that temporal death, which is the visible introduction and image of that utter destruction which sin deserves; not excepting even infants, who could be sinners no other way than by virtue of Adam's transgression, having never in their own persons actually sinned as Adam did; nor could [they] at that time be made polluted by the law of Moses, as being uncircumcised, or born of uncircumcised parents (Gerstner 1991-, 2:95-96).

Ezekiel 18 *does* stand opposed to original sin in one sense, not as a *denial of complicity in it*, but as a *call to turn from it*, and from its eternal consequences through the Gospel.

Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live! (Ezek. 18:30b-32).

The Gospel is the antidote for the futile ways inherited from our fathers (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Ezekiel himself would later spell out God's Gospel promises:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek. 36:25-27).

Those who have heard the Gospel, therefore, and rejected it, are all the more accountable. They, more than others, have no one to blame for their own unregenerate heart, evil actions, and eternal destiny but themselves. For in the Gospel they have the means at their disposal to cast a clear vote of *non-concurrence* with the wickedness of their ancestors!

By the same token, Ezekiel 18 should not be regarded as a denial of the covenant of grace as that covenant embraces the infants of believers, and hence as a repudiation of infant baptism. What is *denied* in this passage is communion in the righteousness and salvation of others to whom one is related through God's covenant of grace, when, instead of *consent and concurrence with that covenant*, there is deliberate disowning of the faith of the parents (Heb. 10:26-30). Just as a son's repudiation of a sinful family pattern by means of the Gospel does not contradict the doctrine of original sin, neither does a son's repudiation of the covenant of grace overthrow that covenant of grace or contradict the propriety of infant baptism. To postulate such a contradiction would be no more appropriate than to suggest that Israel's apostasy contradicted God's covenant with her (Rom. 9:6; 11:1, 28). "Let God be true, and every man a liar!" (Rom. 3:4). Ezekiel 18, therefore, is not a denial of the principle underscored in 1 Corinthians 7:14.

Of course, to rule out infant baptism on the basis of Ezekiel 18:30b, arguing that babies are incapable of repentance, is not only to put an unbiblical time constraint on the covenant; it is to overlook the promise of the “new heart” (regeneration) in Ezekiel 36:26. The gift of the new heart enables human repentance and not the other way around (Acts 11:17-18; 16:14). John the Baptizer, whose ministry was to call people to repentance, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers,” received this new heart during the gestation period in his mother’s womb (Mark 1:4; Mal. 4:6; Luke 1:15).

The Inversion of the Gospel

If "all souls have an equal right to direct access to God," not only must the question be posed, "What ever happened to original sin?", but also "What ever happened to grace?" Christian parents who are ignorant of God's covenant of grace are inclined to wait for their children to exercise "personal faith" and present themselves to the Lord in Christian baptism, as though "faith," rather than the *righteousness* that comes by faith, were the primary focus of baptism. "It is not man who is the principal actor in baptism," Pierre Marcel remarked; "it is God and Jesus Christ, acting through the Holy Spirit, in exactly the same manner as in the preaching of the Word" (1953, 160).

Geoffrey Bromiley provided biblical perspective in the following statement:

The fulfillment of the covenant in and with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means the word of promise has been succeeded by the word of accomplishment, and the Old Testament signs of anticipation have been succeeded by the New Testament signs of recollection. If this is so, then it is no less perverse to treat baptism as the sign of faith than to treat circumcision as the sign of the faith of

Abraham. Indeed, if this is possible, it is even more perverse. It is false to the New Testament and destroys the whole balance of the Christian gospel and the Christian life. It substitutes an anthropocentric meaning for the theocentric meaning. It puts the "I" and its decision in the place of God and his decision. It gives the primacy and honor to man and his work and not as it should to God and his work. It gives this work of man an apparent importance of its own in independence of Jesus Christ and the atonement and the Holy Spirit and regeneration. It finds the critical point in our turning to God rather than his turning to us and his turning us to himself. In other words, it turns the gospel upside down. In so doing it misses the real meaning and purpose of the gospel ordinance or sacrament (Bromiley 1979, 36-37).

The distinction between baptism signifying "faith" *per se*, or the "righteousness" that comes by faith, like the issue of original sin, is no superficial matter. For the *righteousness* that comes by faith is the *righteousness* that extends to "children's children" (Ps. 103:17) and marks them as "holy" (1 Cor. 7:14). Indeed, it is the difference between baptism having man as its focus, and baptism having God as its focus. Those who base baptism on a "human decision" primarily, and rule out infant baptism on that score, invert the Gospel of God's grace turning it into a gospel of human choice. If God is dependent upon a child's reaching a so-called age of accountability before He applies the redemption of Christ to the child's life, then He is bound to an Arminian scheme and cannot be the God of all grace. Certainly Paul asserted the Gospel priority of God's righteousness over men's decisions when he stated,

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made

sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:18-19).

As if to remove any doubt as to when this Gospel begins to affect a man's life, the apostle described his conversion as the time

when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15).

To a great extent the antipaedobaptistic mood in America followed on heels of the Great Awakening with the gradual triumph of Arminianism in American theology. Arminianism with its individualistic character went hand in hand with the rising new republic. Dr. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., in a 1986 inaugural address entitled "Where Have all the Tulips Gone?", noted that men like Samuel Niles and Samuel Webster embodied this rising trend as they suggested that not even God had the right to charge a man with sins committed before his birth! For them the doctrine of original sin was the theological equivalent of taxation without representation (Brand 1991, 122). The Puritans had held to a world view that was Christian:

For from him and through him
and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever!
Amen. (Rom. 11:36).

The nation was well on its way toward the adoption of a principle that would radically impact the world-view, not only of the nation, but of the church as well: "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." And the Baptist idea in time would appear much more democratic than would the practice of infant baptism.

During the aftermath of the eighteenth-century Great Awakening, Horace Bushnell observed a demise of the organic conception of the church and the family. Bushnell noted the revival's positive effect but cited the rise of modern individualism as its downside:

The merit is that it displaced an era of dead formality, and brought in the demand for a truly supernatural experience. The defect is, that it has cast a type of religious individualism intense beyond any former example. It makes nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace. It takes every man as if he had existed alone . . . ([1888] 1903, 187-88).

Bushnell pointed out that Jonathan Edwards, fifteen years after the great revival, expressed grievous concern as to whether some of the primary means of grace such as "family education and order" were being neglected among the new converts. "If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual." Bushnell noted that Samuel Hopkins devoted 60 pages in his systematic theology to the "nature and design of infant baptism" as though "to supply some defect suggested by [Edwards] his mentor" (Bushnell [1888] 1903, 188-89). While Arminianism arose in New England largely through men like Charles Chauncy who opposed the revival, it was soon imbibed by the evangelical proponents as well (Brand 1991, 111-144).

Herman Hanko wrote,

Arminianism is individualistic. It teaches that God deals only with men as individuals. Each man stands alone as an individual before God, and the fate of each man is decided by the decisions which that individual man makes with respect to Christ. But Scripture teaches something far different. After all, God visits the iniquity of the *fathers* upon the *children* unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him. And while it is certainly true that each individual man is responsible before God for

what he does, nevertheless, the fact remains that God considers each man as part of a larger organism. God deals with a man in the light of the whole organism to which he belongs (1981, 79).

Hanko went on to mention various organisms to which men belong: "race," "nation," life span, family, circle of friends--citing Matthew 11:20-24; Psalm 80:8-14; Isaiah 5:1-7; John 15:1f.; and Romans 11:16-24.

Beasley-Murray objected to this organic rationale insisting that neither the story of Achan (Judges 7) nor anything else in the Old Testament on that level could have been written in the Acts of the Apostles (1963, 316). And yet Paul's ordering the Corinthian church to cast out the offending brother is based upon this very principle of social solidarity (1 Cor. 5:6). Such is also the case with Jesus' prophetic denunciations of those communities that rejected his ministry (Luke 10:8-15).

The Baptist movement, as can be historically observed, is a reaction against something that is basic and primary. The irony is that the Baptist movement cannot sustain itself in its pure classical expression, except as a reaction. For wherever it triumphs and infant baptism fades, it seems to invariably introduce the practice of infant dedication--a practice that, as a matter of principle, would have been regarded as unnecessary and even anathema to its original proponents. This phenomenon can readily be observed in the *Renewal Theology* of J. Rodman Williams, formerly a Southern Presbyterian professor of theology. While Williams rejected infant baptism, acceding to the views of Karl Barth and Paul King Jewett (1988-, 3:229-237); nevertheless he maintained that it was "indeed important for infants and little children to be brought to Christ for His blessing. . ." (1992, 3:233-234).

Williams rejected infant baptism because of the *proxy* principle involved (1988-, 3:234), as though the same principle were not involved in infant dedication. He agreed with Tertullian who said, "Let them come when they are grown up" (1988-, 3:236 See also note 75). Yet Tertullian was rephrasing the words of Christ which Williams claimed had no relation to

baptism (1988-, 3:236, 232-233). It is all the more amazing, therefore, that Williams would recommend, contrary to Tertullian, that infants "be brought to Christ for His blessing" in infant dedication. As is typical with so many who reject infant baptism, Williams wanted to devour his paedobaptistic cake and still have a portion of it.

When there is no longer a basis for separatist reaction, that is, when Congregationalists accede to Baptist principles and Presbyterians are covered into silence on the issue, it quite naturally follows that Baptists begin dedicating their infant offspring. This represents a tacit concession on their part to the truth of the covenant principle regarding the believer's offspring, and a contradiction of their own principle of *soul competency*.

Surprisingly, leading contemporary Baptist theologians seem little concerned with the theology and implications of dedication, apparently taking it for granted as a natural and proper way of marking the birth of children to Christian parents, yet its implications are immense, and if thought through, might be seen to compromise the whole Baptist position (Bridge & Phypers 1977, 175-176).

The Ancient Landmark

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