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WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR ANYONE? PART II: ADDITIONAL STUDIES

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I. Baptismal Realism in Church History

I asserted in part one of this essay that the Christian tradition has held to some kind of baptismal realism. In this brief survey I will offer substantiation for that, both from the early patristic period and from the developing Reformed stream.

There are good treatments of the topic for the patristic period in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); see pages 193–99 for the earlier period, and 207–11 for developments in the third century. Another source is Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 [1910]), 2:247–65. I do not aim to add to these or to revise them; my discussion is focused on the aspects of the subject that touch on the language used. A helpful discussion for the Reformed confessions is E. V. Gerhart, "Holy Baptism: The Doctrine of the Reformed Church," *Mercersburg Review* 15 (1868), pages 180–228, which argues that baptismal realism is part of the Reformed tradition.

A. Greek Patristic Sources

First, consider the early patristic period. Justin Martyr (about AD 100–165), in his *First Apology* (about AD 152), describes the Christian sacraments. In 61:2 he tells us that the one who has been persuaded and come to believe will receive "forgiveness of past sins" (τῶν προημαρτημένων ἄφεσις, cf. 61:10), while in 61:3 the person will be "born again" (ἀναγέννησις, ἀναγεννάω, cf. 61:10); one receives both benefits at baptism. In 66:1 Justin speaks of the person baptized as "the one who has

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been washed with the washing that is for forgiveness of sins and unto a second birth" (ὁ λουσάμενος τὸ ὑπὲρ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ εἰς ἀναγέννησιν λουτρόν). Justin also calls the baptism an "enlightenment" in 61:12: "this washing is called enlightenment" (καλεῖται τοῦτο τὸ λουτρὸν φωτισμός).

Justin's language reflects the New Testament when he calls baptism a "washing" (λουτρόν, λούω: 61:4, 10, 12, 13; 66:1). The idea of entering into forgiveness also appears in the Bible, where baptism is "into or for forgiveness" (εἰς ἄφεσιν): compare Mark 1:4 (John's baptism), "a baptism of repentance *for the forgiveness* of sins" (βάπτισμα μετανοίας *εἰς ἄφεσιν* ἁμαρτιῶν); Acts 2:38 (Christian baptism), "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness* of your sins" (μετανοήσατε καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *εἰς ἄφεσιν* τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν). To connect baptism with "new birth" is also biblical, although Titus 3:5 uses the term παλιγγενεσία ("the washing of regeneration," λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας) rather than ἀναγέννησις for the idea. (For a discussion of New Testament terms for "regeneration," see section III below.) The New Testament uses "enlightenment" terms for conversion (Eph. 1:18); and perhaps a baptismal reference occurs as well in Hebrews 6:4 ("those who have once been enlightened" [τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας]), in a passage describing the horror of apostasy in view of the privileges enjoyed; and Hebrews 10:32, which looks back to the earlier days of the audience's discipleship.[1]

Like Justin, Irenaeus (died ca. AD 202) uses the term "regeneration" (ἀναγέννησις) to describe baptism (see section IV below); in fact, he uses it in apposition. In his *Against* Heresies 1.21.1 (ca. A.D. 180), some people have been instigated by Satan "to a denial of baptism, which is regeneration to God" (εἰς ἐξάρνησιν τοῦ βαπτίσματος τῆς εἰς θεὸν ἀναγεννήσεως).

Moving forward, we find stark realism as well in Cyril of Jerusalem's (about AD 310–386) *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. For example, he calls those about to be baptized "those being enlightened" (φωτιζόμενοι, *Procatechesis* 1; compare Justin). At the same time Cyril is able to warn his audience about the danger of hypocrisy by recounting the episode of Simon Magus (*Procatechesis* 2):

Simon Magus once came to the washing: he was baptized, but he was not enlightened; and though his body he dipped in water, yet his heart he did not enlighten	προσῆλθέ ποτε καὶ Σίμων τῷ λουτρῷ ὁ μάγος· ἐβαπτίσθη, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐφωτίσθη· καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἔβαψεν ὕδατι, τὴν δὲ καρδίαν οὐκ ἐφώτισε πνεύματι· καὶ κατέβη μέν τὸ σῶμα,

[1] The Syriac New Testament uses the term *ma'mûdîta'* ("baptism") in both places.

with the Spirit; and though his body went down, and came up, yet his soul was not buried with Christ, nor was it raised with [Christ]	καὶ ἀνέβη· ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ οὐ συνετάφη Χριστῷ, οὐδὲ συνηγέρθη

Cyril uses purification terms when he says that "baptism is a *cleansing* of sins" (βάπτισμα . . . ἐστιν ἁμαρτημάτων *καθαρτήριον*, *Catechetical Lecture* 2:6).

Cyril is like Justin in his use of "enlightenment" terms, and in his calling baptism a "washing" (λουτρόν). He also mimics the New Testament appropriation of "cleansing" language (although his specific word, καθαρτήριον, does not appear in the New Testament or LXX). As already mentioned in the first part of our study,[2] he does provide a sense of distinction between the sign and the signified in his warning about Simon Magus. By his use of συνετάφη ("buried with," from συνθάπτω) and συνηγέρθη ("raised with," from συνεγείρω) Cyril is evoking Romans 6:4 (about baptism).[3]

Finally, consider the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381), which says, "we confess one baptism *for the forgiveness* of sins" (ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα *εἰς ἄφεσιν* ἁμαρτιῶν); again, this is using wording along the lines of the New Testament itself.

We can indeed see that the Greek Patristic authors in general held to a form of baptismal realism in which baptism conveys "new life," or "union with Christ." I am sure that it is possible to read these statements as implying that what *we* would call "baptismal regeneration"—the benefit of "regeneration," which in our contemporary evangelical usage is something that cannot be lost—is "automatically" conferred by baptism. But we should be careful of supposing that these writers mean the same thing by their words that we would mean if we said them. To

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[2] See "What Does Baptism do for Anyone? Part I," 27 (point III.B).

[3] For a recent and thorough study of Cyril, see Donna R. Hawk-Reinhard, *From Χριστιανοί to Χριστοφόροι: The Role of the Eucharist in Christian Identity Formation according to Cyril of Jerusalem* (PhD thesis, St Louis University, 2011). On pp. 303–17, for example, Hawk-Reinhard examines the terminology that Cyril uses for those who are being baptized—a discussion that displays the strong realism that ran through Cyril's sacramental theology. The context of Cyril's treatment will of course favor an optimistic stress, namely, the expectation that those baptized will live worthily of their privileges. At the same time, as Hawk-Reinhard notes, the right response is crucial: "baptism with water alone was not sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven: the person who was baptized must also be found worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit so that he or she is born of both water and the Spirit" (314). That is, Hawk-Reinhard confirms the observations above about Cyril's version of the sign-signified distinction.

begin with, Justin's work is an apology, and thus would by the very nature of the case lack the kinds of nuance we would need for a full "doctrine" of baptism. Further, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed does make technical distinctions in Christology, using terms not found in the Bible; but in its statement about baptism it does not go beyond the Bible itself (probably its interests lay elsewhere than in defining the effects of baptism). And finally, in a work aimed at catechumens, Cyril explains that baptism as a ceremony does not have an automatic effect.

For these reasons it seems more likely to me that these authors use "new birth" language, not for what *we* call "regeneration," but for the new life of a member of the people of God—that is, their language reflects the administrative character of the Bible. Thus the questions we ask would not have been before them in quite the same way as they are before us. I do not doubt that some people from this period did in fact take this administrative language and treat it as if it said more than it does; I cannot be sure what these authors themselves would have said if presented with the questions we have faced. But in any event my reading of the biblical language as administrative or phenomenological adequately accounts for what we find in the patristic period.

B. Reformed Confessions

The Scots Confession of 1560, cited earlier,[4] says simply this about the effect of baptism (Article 21):

> Wee assuredlie believe that be Baptisme we ar ingrafted in Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, be quhilk our sinnes ar covered and remitted.
>
> We assuredly believe that by Baptism we are ingrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted.

The (French) Gallican Confession of 1559 is similar to the Scots Confession, though a little longer; in Article 35 it says,[5]

> baptism is given as a pledge [or "testimony," *témoignage*] of our adoption, for by it we are grafted into the body of Christ, so as to be washed and cleansed by his blood, and then renewed in purity of life by his Holy Spirit.

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[4] "What Does Baptism do for Anyone? Part I," 24 (point III.A).

[5] Compare the German *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), answer 74: Infants "are also by Baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian Church."

The English Puritan Westminster Confession of Faith (1647; hereafter WCF), chapter 28, is much longer, taking seven paragraphs. The Westminster theologians said that baptism is "not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life" (para. 1). The Divines include a more technical notion of "efficacy" than what we find in ordinary language (para. 6):

> The *efficacy* of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

The language of the WCF, no doubt due to conflicts in the intervening years, is more analytical than that of the earlier ones (which is more ordinary and phenomenological); it is working with a specific idea of regeneration as the beginning of the Christian life, the point at which one is effectually called. Further evidence of this increase in technicality is the connection with election in paragraph 6: it seems to be concerned with explaining cases in which the baptism does not "take," showing that they were still valid baptisms.

The earlier Reformed confessions (in this case the Gallican and the Scots) use "realistic" language in talking about the effects of baptism: by it one is grafted into Christ or his body (and perhaps these are taken to be equivalent). If we suppose—and it seems reasonable to me to do so—that the makers of the WCF saw themselves as being in continuity with their predecessors, then we may suggest that the added qualifications are not intended to correct the earlier confessions or to disagree with them, but to clarify distinctions.[6] The realistic language of the earlier confessions is closer to the language of ordinary religion, which means that it reflects the way that ordinary Christians should normally view their baptism; that is, with gratitude, confidence, and obligation. The more analytical language of the WCF reflects the way that theologians must think about the subject, and the way that pastors must handle the anomalies presented by delayed conversion of a covenant child, or even apostasy. It is widely held that the WCF gives more emphasis to divine

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[6] This intended continuity with the rest of the Reformed churches is a running theme throughout Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009); Letham's chapter 14 specifically addresses the sacraments.

election than do the earlier confessions. I hardly think that this represents a conviction about the subject different from that of the earlier Reformers; they were all "Calvinists," after all. But in practical terms, the idea of election comes in as an explanation *after the fact*; that is, it explains why I should have believed in spite of all my sin. This after-the-fact recognition is the only way in which God's decrees are normally accessible to human beings: we are creatures, and we know as creatures, not as the Creator.

Taken in this light, we can speak of membership in the people of God as "union with Christ" (because the church is his body), as the earlier confessions do, in order to recognize the privileges into which baptism has admitted us and our children. At the same time, if we need to get analytical we can speak of "that union which the elect have with Christ" (Westminster Larger Catechism 66), especially when we need to explain difficulties or to warn against complacency.

Further, we have noted that Westminster uses a technical definition of "efficacy," namely, the bestowing of living and lasting participation in Christ. In this sense a baptism is "efficacious" only for the elect, even when the person comes to faith later than the time of the baptism. Therefore baptism for the non-elect is not "efficacious" *in this sense*; it does not follow, however, that Westminster denies efficacy *in every sense*. That is, one commonly hears from evangelical Presbyterians that "nothing happens" when a non-elect person is baptized; but that is not what the WCF itself says. The Puritan confession has not denied what the earlier Reformed confessions affirm, namely, that a proper baptism really does join a person to the people of God, and in this way to Christ himself, and thus ushers him into a web of relationships and influences through which he may participate in the life of Christ mediated through the people of God. The Westminster language clarifies that there is some aspect in which this union is different for the elect and non-elect, but it wisely does not pretend to give us criteria by which we humans can distinguish the two.

The language of Westminster is not anti-realistic about the sacrament, mind you: it does speak of grace as "not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost," in accord with God's own plan. Nor does Westminster in any way deny the possibility that infants of believing parents may indeed be "regenerated" and have a faith of their own. (Even when the Larger Catechism 177 requires that those who partake of the Lord's Supper must be "of years and ability to examine themselves," this does not deny that genuine faith can be present in those below this age, nor even that it might be *normally* present in children of pious homes.)

The Assembly that produced the WCF also published a Directory for the Publick Worship of God; its section on baptism allows ministers to speak along very realistic lines of a child that has been brought for baptism:

> That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh: That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized.

These words, being the language of everyday religion, are closer to the way the Gallican and Scots confessions described the benefits of baptism.

At the same time, the WCF (28, para. 5) sets a limit on how far an allowable realism may go; it denies that baptism is either an absolute requirement for "regeneration" or an infallible bestower of "regeneration":

> Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect his ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

I conclude from all this that the realistic language of the earlier Reformed confessions is like the language of the Bible, and even like the language of the early church (if I have read that correctly). That is, the realism refers to ritual or administrative status, and should be taken phenomenologically.[7] It serves a valid purpose, and so does the technical language of the WCF; the point is that each serves a different purpose, and thus they should not be played against each other.

We should note as an aside that Reformed writers have varied in the meaning they assign even to the term "regeneration." Nowadays we take it to refer exclusively to the event at the beginning of genuine Christian life on the part of an individual. That seems to be the sense of the word in the Westminster language. However, the Dutch theologian Gisbertus Voetius, writing in 1648, said: "Regeneration is instantaneous, or

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[7] This is why I see no need to appeal, in the case of baptism, to the principle of WCF 27:2, where the "sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified" results in "the names and effects of the one [being] attributed to the other," since I read the biblical texts as speaking primarily about ritual status. I note that the WCF itself neither specifies any baptismal texts to which we should apply this principle, nor does it invoke the principle in its chapter on baptism—unlike what it does with the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper (WCF 29:5).

happens in an instant. When it is termed successive by some, this is to be understood of the whole complex or collection of the term in the first few moments."[8] This indicates that, at least before Voetius' time, the definition of the term had not become fixed, and Calvin (*Institutes* 3.3.9) is an example of wider usage of the term, referring to the whole of what we call "sanctification."[9]

II. Ezekiel 36:25–27, John 3:5, and Baptism

Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord declares that after the people of Judah return to the land from the Babylonian Exile, he will address the spiritual and moral conditions that led to the Exile in the first place. Chapter 36 is given over to the subject, and verses 22–31 provide us with the flavor of the promises:

> 22"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

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[8] Cited in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978 [German original 1861]), 519.

[9] The texts and translations in this section come from the following sources. The English of the relevant portions of Justin Martyr are available in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:247–48; and J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1968), 65–66. The Greek is cited from Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Die Ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 70–71, 74. For Irenaeus, I use the Ante-Nicene Fathers edition for English, finding the Greek in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*. The Greek text for Cyril of Jerusalem is in St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995 [1951]). The creeds and confessions come from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998 [1931]), vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds*, and vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*. The English given above is a mixture of these English renderings and my own.

> [28]You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. [29]And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. [30]I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. [31]Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. [32]It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

There are many prophetic themes for us to notice here: the interest in the nations (Gentiles), among whom Israel was called to vindicate the holiness of the LORD's name, so that these nations would come to know the true God; God's people living in God's land under his rule and protection; God's intention to honor his own name; and the importance of true piety—that is, covenant reality—among the people of God.

For our purposes I will focus on verses 25–27, especially since that is thought by many to be the background for John 3:5, "born of water and the Spirit." Note that the prophet speaks of "sprinkling clean water" on the people; this is likely an image based on the water used for cleansing after touching a dead body (Num. 19:13, 20, where "water" is "sprinkled" or "thrown" [Hebrew *zaraq* (זרק)]), the idea being that the "idols" defile like a dead body (since they are themselves dead). The result of being cleansed in this way will be moral cleanness, with the Spirit causing the people actually to live in obedience to their God.

Other texts that associate moral impurity with uncleanness include Numbers 5:19 (adultery); Jeremiah 32:34 (abominable idols make the temple unclean); Ezekiel 22:15 (a whole range of wrong doings, vv. 1–13); 24:13 (generally Jerusalem's unfaithfulness, especially idolatry and bloodshed); 36:17 (idolatry and bloodshed); 39:24 (unfaithfulness to the covenant); and Zechariah 13:2 (idols and false prophets). In Ezra we find "uncleanness" used to describe the idolatrous and immoral practices of the Gentiles: 6:21 (one who "separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land," that is, a Gentile convert to the Lord); 9:11 (the abominations of the Canaanites before the Israelite conquest).

The theme in Ezekiel 36 is that Judah has been exiled because the people have been unfaithful to the covenant, and have thereby defiled the land and profaned the holy name of the Lord among the nations; nevertheless this will not be the end of Israel's story, as the Lord intends to return them to the land and to renew covenant faithfulness within them, with a view toward bringing the Gentiles to know the true God. Specifically, Ezekiel calls this renewed situation a "new heart" in verse 26, which the Lord will give them (compare 18:31, where they had been

exhorted to get a new heart in order to avoid exile). The very similar 11:19 refers instead to "one heart" (*leb ekhad* לב אחד), probably meaning that it will no longer suffer from divided loyalties (compare Jer. 32:39; 2 Chron. 30:12; Ps. 86:11). This will result in God's Spirit dwelling within (or among) the people, moving them to lives of obedience, the very thing that the covenant had aimed at to begin with.

Ezekiel uses the image of "clean water" sprinkled on the people as the means by which God effects this change. We may refer to this as "symbolism" employing the Levitical cleansing ceremonies, but we would not be cooperating with the prophet if we say that the water is *merely* symbolic; that is, Ezekiel, a priestly prophet, shows a clear sense of both the sign-signified distinction (witness the judgment on the house of the Lord in chapters 6–10), and the purpose of the ritual system to foster moral holiness (witness the restored sanctuary after the exile, 37:26–28; chapters 40–48). Therefore, we should see Ezekiel not as discarding the sign and thus breaking the nexus between administrative status and moral status, but as pledging the thing signified by the ceremony.

Does this help us understand John 3:5 (as the Nestle-Aland margin suggests)? Consider the context:

> 2[Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless one is born again* [ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν] he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless one is born of water and the Spirit* [ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not marvel that I said to you [singular], 'You [plural] must be born again.' 8The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
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> 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"[10]

[10] Italics in Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Several observations are in order here: First, the expressions "be born *again*" (or *from above*) and "be born *of water and the Spirit*" are equivalent, as we can see from the strong parallelism between verses 3 and 5.

Second, the matter of being "born of God" has already appeared in John's Prologue (1:13, ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν), which is the text that previews the themes that the whole Gospel expands on. There it refers to the special provision by which God enables one to believe in Jesus (see also 1 John 5:1).

Third, we note that Nicodemus is a Pharisee, and that this Gospel presents the Pharisees as the guardians of the people's moral and theological well-being (as in 1:24, interviewing John the Baptist; 7:47–48, setting the example for the whole people of disbelief in Jesus; 9:13, examining the man born blind whom Jesus had healed; 12:42, having influence to put someone out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus). The Pharisees are concerned with seeing and entering the kingdom of God, but Jesus says to Nicodemus that they (note the plural "you" in v. 7) must themselves be "born again," which seems to indicate that Jesus did not consider the Pharisees to have a living participation in the life of the covenant (compare 5:46–47: he says the Jewish leaders do not really believe Moses, otherwise they would believe him, too).

Fourth, Ezekiel 36:25–27 connects "water" (v. 25) and "the Spirit" (v. 27), and refers to God's work of enabling his people to have a genuine participation in the life of the covenant; in fact, Jesus expresses surprise that "the teacher of Israel" does not understand these things (v. 10), which implies that these matters were part of the Old Testament background that he shared in common with them.

All these considerations make it reasonable to suppose that Ezekiel's prophecy is indeed the interpretive backcloth for these words of Jesus.[11] Perhaps the idea is that the down-payment that we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah, where the people of restored Judah (sixth and fifth centuries BC) really did commit themselves to the covenant, hardly guaranteed that their descendants in the time of Jesus would automatically have that same reality. Indeed, the work of John the Baptist, with his cleansing ceremony, was a way of preparing the people for the One Who Was Coming; that is, it addresses their uncleanness and calls them to repentance and cleansing. Thus we can see John as

[11] For agreement, see A. J. Köstenberger, "John," in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 415–512, at 434b.

implementing this part of Ezekiel's message (John, like Ezekiel, was a prophet from a priestly family): the people needed again to be cleansed.[12]

There is thus a sense in which John 3:5 does indeed have a "baptismal" implication, since John the Baptist was employing a ceremony with water. If the Christian church adapted John's ceremony into Christian baptism, then the common Christian reading of John 3:5 as referring to Christian baptism (as found, for example, in Chrysostom's Homily 25 on John) has an explanation. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

We may observe that John's particular usage of "born again" terminology comes close to what is now the standard sense of "regeneration" in Reformed theology. We can see that from the fact that both Ezekiel and Jesus are speaking within the people of Judah, and are referring to the way particular persons lay hold of (or are laid hold of by) the realities of the covenant. That is, it is possible that other places in the New Testament that use "new birth" language—such as 1 Peter 1:3, 23 (using ἀναγεννάω) and Titus 3:5 (using παλιγγενεσία)—are speaking of the new life a person enjoys as a member of the people of God, without delving into what *we* would mean by the "personal regeneration question"; but the stress here in John 3 (and likely the other texts in the Johannine material about being "born of God") is on the particular person and his appropriation. (Section III below discusses this further.)

Further, we can speak of the water as "emblematic" of the personal transformation so long as we do not smuggle in the qualifier *merely*. That is, we certainly should recognize that both texts (Ezekiel 36 and John 3) have in mind a supernatural action, and that it is conceivable to receive the sign but lack the signified. Indeed, divine promises do not cancel out the personal responsibility of covenant members. At the same time, there is no reason why the water cannot convey the blessing, nor is there any reason why God cannot have planted the "new heart" in a person before the water ceremony.

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[12] Gary T. Manning Jr., *Echoes of a Prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in the Literature of the Second Temple Period*, JSNTSS 270 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 186–89, discusses John 3:5. Manning concludes that Ezek. 36:25–27 is part of the backcloth, along with Isa. 44:3 ("I will pour water on the thirsty land . . . I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring"). He takes John as primarily using water as a symbol of the Spirit, based on his reading of John 7:37–39; hence he interprets John 3:5 as "born of water, that is, of the Spirit." This is grammatically, and even stylistically, possible for John, though I do not think Manning's point on John 7:37–39 quite captures what John is saying there; but that is another matter.

Christian audiences, I have said, have read John 3:5 as speaking of baptism; perhaps the very first audience of this Gospel did the same. I do not see how they could avoid it except by a *tour de force*. In the sense that baptism is an heir of the washing promised by Ezekiel, that is legitimate. At the same time all of our qualifications about the sign and the signified apply.

III. Baptism and "Regeneration"

What, then, is the best way to describe the connection between baptism and regeneration? Does the act of water baptism *bestow* regeneration, does it *symbolize* how regeneration takes place, or is it *testimony* to an already-accomplished regeneration—or is there some other relationship? People from a variety of Christian perspectives have offered explanations for a text such as Titus 3:5 ("by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit") along each of these lines.

There are several difficulties inherent in the way we ask the question. What do we mean by "regeneration," and do the Bible writers mean the same thing as we do? What is the relationship between regeneration and saving faith—and what exactly *is* "saving faith"? Why are contemporary evangelicals reluctant to attribute beneficial "spiritual" effects to a "physical" ordinance? The discussion in part one of this essay has offered some thoughts on the latter two questions; here we will attend to the first one.

There are three expressions in the New Testament for "regeneration" or "being born again":

- παλιγγενεσία (Titus 3:5, "regeneration"; Matt. 19:28, "regeneration / new world")[13]
- ἀναγεννάω ("to cause to be born again": 1 Peter 1:3 [active], 23 [passive])[14]
- γεννάω ("to beget"; passive "to be born / begotten") with either ἄνωθεν ("again / from above": John 3:3, 7) or ἐκ [τοῦ] θεοῦ ("of God": John 1:13; cf. 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18)

There is no reason why all of these terms *must* refer to exactly the same thing, nor is it entirely clear that they correspond to what has now

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[13] Formed from πάλιν,"again," with γενεσία (feminine of γενέσιος "pertaining to birth"; cf. Matt 14:6). Not used in LXX.

[14] Formed from γεννάω, "to beget," with prefix ἀνα- (which can imply repetition). Not used in LXX.

become the meaning of "regeneration / new birth." Reformed theologian John Murray defined "regeneration" this way:[15]

> Regeneration is a change wrought by the Spirit in order that the person may savingly respond to the summons, or demand of the call, embodied in the gospel call. God's call is an efficacious summons and therefore carries with it, carries as it were in its bosom, the grace that ensures the requisite response on the part of the subject.

It is the result of the "effectual calling."

As mentioned in section II above, the use of γεννάω with ἄνωθεν or ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ in the Johannine material corresponds to Murray's definition of "regeneration": their focus is on the particular person and the new capacities God works into his life. This kind of new birth is necessary if someone wishes to "enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5), or if he is to "believe in the name" (John 1:12; cf. 1 John 5:1). Such a person is distinguished by his "practicing righteousness" and rejecting sin (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 5:18); his love, especially for fellow Christians (1 John 4:7); and his overcoming the world (1 John 5:4). We may call this "regeneration in the narrower sense."

As indicated in section I, when an early writer such as Justin Martyr or Irenaeus spoke of baptism bringing a "new birth," he used the noun ἀναγέννησις (which is related to ἀναγεννάω); it seems plausible that the "new birth" he was describing was the entry into the new life, the new web of relationships that baptism bestows by initiating a person into the covenant people. We may call this "regeneration in the ritual or administrative sense." So the question is: do all the New Testament texts and terms use the narrower sense, or do some allow the administrative sense of "regeneration"? I will argue that a "new birth" in the ritual or administrative sense fits the usage of παλιγγενεσία and ἀναγεννάω in the New Testament.[16]

Consider Titus 3:5:

> [God] *saved* [ἔσωσεν] us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewal* [διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως] of the Holy Spirit.

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[15] John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:172.

[16] The Talmud contains the declaration that "one who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born" (Yebamot 22a), in a context dealing with his legal relationships; perhaps this echoes an earlier Jewish usage of "new birth" language in an administrative mode, similar to the New Testament.

Since the context (vv. 1–10) is the good order of the Christian community that Titus is serving, it is reasonable to take the term *saved* in its membership-in-the-saved-people sense (cf. the discussion of 1 Peter 3:21 in part one),[17] and *regeneration* as "entry into the new life of the community," a new life into which baptism ushers a person. That is, the administrative sense suits Paul's discussion.

Consider 1 Peter 1:3, 23:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has *caused us to be born again* [ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, . . . *since you have been born again* [ἀναγεγεννημένοι], not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

Here we have the verb, ἀναγεννάω, "to regenerate"; the term that Justin Martyr and Irenaeus use for the "regeneration" produced at baptism (ἀναγέννησις) is the noun related to this verb. Justin's and Irenaeus' use is compatible with the emphases of 1 Peter, if we take them both as administrative, and this fits the context of 1 Peter.[18] In context, 1 Peter is addressing members of the Christian community, who are to "grow up *to* salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (2:2–3), that is, to enter into eternal glory through a life of persevering faith and obedience. Perhaps the audience consists largely of people in the early stages of their Christian commitment,[19] since 1 Peter likens them to "newborn infants" (2:2), probably picking up the idea of the "new birth" in 1:3, 23.[20] The author expects his audience to embrace the privileges and responsibilities they have by virtue of their place in the Christian community, as he says in 1:14–16 (using Lev. 11:44):

> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

As the Leviticus reference indicates, the "newborn infants" are to make sure that they lay hold of their ritual status from the heart, and live it out.

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[17] See "What Does Baptism do for Anyone? Part I," 30–31 (point III.B).

[18] I am leaving out all discussion of whether to take 1 Peter as a baptismal homily (an idea once popular but now largely rejected); my conclusions are intended to be independent of the outcome of that argument.

[19] See Jeffrey de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 45: "1 Peter is addressed to young converts in this liminal phase, as evidenced in the emphasis on conversion."

[20] Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter*, 110.

In order to discuss the relationship of baptism to "regeneration," we need to clarify which sense of "regeneration" we have in view. If we mean it in the ritual or administrative sense, i.e., entry into new life as a member of the people of God, there is no conceptual or theological difficulty with saying that baptism brings about "regeneration" (as in the circle diagrams I used to illustrate this idea in part one).[21] If we mean regeneration in the narrower sense, i.e., as the result of effectual calling, then the only affirmation possible is that it is in God's hands: further than that we ought not go.

IV. Baptizing Infants

Certainly as a Presbyterian I embrace what is called "infant baptism," that is, I insist that the sign of membership in the people of God is rightly applied not only to previously unchurched adults professing their faith, but also to the newborn children of believers. There are, however, several versions of what such a practice means for the baptized person, as discussed in part one. But it will perhaps be of use to say why the perspective I am advocating here favors the practice in general.

In this section, I will focus primarily on the positive case for baptizing Christians' infant children. Of course, there is much literature out there, some of it good and lots of it unhelpful. In the background of this presentation, I have kept in mind those scholars who have argued capably for the "believer's baptism" position, and I count among the best of those recently produced the collection of essays edited by Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006). For the sake of space, and in view of my own goals here, I will simply make a few brief comments on the relevant essays, rather than supply an extensive review and reply. The most important essays in this collection for my purposes are:

- Robert Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts" (35–66)
- Thomas Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers" (67–96)
- Stephen Wellum, "Baptism and the Relation between the Covenants" (97–162)
- Steven McKinion, "Baptism in the Patristic Writings" (163–188)

Stein's essay repeats the common "no mention of children in the household baptisms" line of argument, without engaging the echoes that

[21] See "What Does Baptism do for Anyone? Part I," 26–29 (point III.B).

I will argue for here. Schreiner's essay does not really account for the occasional nature of the New Testament letters, in which baptism is not their topic; hence, in my judgment, one cannot draw out a full "doctrine" of baptism from these letters. McKinion's essay, which treats the second century (pp. 169–73), simply overlooks the key passages in Polycarp, Justin, and Irenaeus (see below).

Although I will give a fuller treatment to Wellum's argument elsewhere,[22] as it relates to the idea of the "new covenant," it is worthwhile to mention a few points here.[23] In Wellum's understanding, Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 31:29–34) "entails that *all* those within the 'new covenant community' are people, by definition, who presently have experienced regeneration of heart and the full forgiveness of sin" (105, italics his). That is, the circles I used in part one (point III.B, "Baptism and Membership in the People of God") no longer apply in the "new covenant community." Now quite apart from the exegetical question of whether that does indeed follow from Jeremiah (as opposed to, say, being a description of the ultimate fulfillment, which is still future), Wellum's description certainly does not match what we find as the New Testament authors deal with the actual churches to which they write. For example, Paul can cite examples from Israel's wandering in the wilderness, examples whose very point is that one can be a member of the people without the heart reality of true faith (1 Cor. 10:1–5). In fact, Paul goes on to say that "these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did" (1 Cor. 10:6). Paul can also remind the churches that the members must "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast," if they wish finally to be presented "holy and blameless and above reproach before" God (Col. 1:22–23). The author of Hebrews insists that "good news came to us [first-century Jewish believers in Jesus] just as to them [the people of Israel following Moses]," and he is concerned that "no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (Heb. 4:2, 11).

Hence, it does not follow that the empirical Christian communities are "by definition" only composed of people "who presently have experienced regeneration of heart and the full forgiveness of sin." Jesus' Parable of the Sower and the Soils (Luke 8:4–15 and parallels) explains

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[22] This will appear in the larger work to which the two parts of this essay belong, in a chapter devoted to "The New Covenant and Redemptive History."

[23] My previously published comments on the "new covenant" idea include "Echoes of Aristotle in Romans 2:14–15: Or, Maybe Abimelech Was Not so Bad After All," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 13:1 (Spring 2010): 123–73, at 134–36; "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 1–23, at 11–13.

why this is so: there are people who "receive the word with joy," but only "believe for a while" (Luke 8:13). There is no hint that a human administrator of God's people could have told the difference between these and the fruitful ones, nor that he should even try to erect a pattern of church life designed to do so; therefore Wellum's thesis fails.

A full study on the whole of the patristic evidence on baptism comes from Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Besides giving a comprehensive treatment of its material, the book also supplies a sustained apologetic for several Church of Christ distinctives, especially full immersion as the right application of the Greek word βαπτίζω; no analogy between baptism and circumcision; and a strong kind of realism, in which baptism becomes a necessary part of the Christian life (one might not even be a "Christian" or "regenerate" in the narrow sense without it). This book deserves first of all our gratitude for its exhaustive coverage; it surely ought to become a standard work on the subject. It also deserves a full review, which I hope to provide in due course. Ferguson relies on common baptistic theological arguments (such as, since Acts does not *say* there were children in the households that were baptized, we are not at liberty to assume that children were present), which I find unsatisfactory; but his handling of the patristic evidence (which I consider below) is surprisingly biased as well.[24]

Because Ferguson is convinced that infant baptism is actually an aberration from the New Testament pattern, and from the early Christian practice right after the New Testament, he must seek an explanation for its rise and eventual dominance in the Christian world. He proposes that it derives from the emergency baptisms of the sick and dying, which were then applied to sick infants, and soon to all infants (just in case). This proposal leads him to read the evidence in odd ways. For example, in discussing Chrysostom (p. 545), he asks, "Are the infant baptisms defended by Chrysostom [quotations on pp. 544–45], therefore, emergency baptisms?" Ferguson goes on to cite a passage in

[24] My discussion here focuses on the question of whether infant baptism has precedent in the early church, and therefore I am not engaging Ferguson's argument that "immersion" is the mode that the Jewish, New Testament, and early patristic sources imply. I will simply note that, by the treatment in part one, one cannot substantiate immersion as the right sense of the relevant words. Nevertheless, since "ceremonial drenching" appears well-supported by the Jewish evidence, my interaction with Ferguson's argument does supply a critique of what we might call a "sacramental stinginess" that is rampant in many churches that I know, namely, the idea that somehow we may be satisfied with the barest minimum of the physical elements in the sacraments.

Chrysostom's Homilies on Acts (Homily 23, on Acts 10:23–24), which has the following line:

> those who have been enlightened [baptized], whether because they received it as children or having received it in sickness and recovered.

In his footnote giving the reference, he says, "One should note the *linking of child baptism and sickbed baptism*" (emphasis added).

This assertion is astonishing, even to the reader of the passage in English. There is no explicit *linkage*; rather, they look like elements in a list. (By the way, I certainly agree with the interpretation of "enlightened" as "baptized"; see section I above.) And when one checks Chrysostom's Greek, the impression from the English becomes certainty: the construction is οἱ μὲν . . . οἱ δέ. These are two elements in a list; the only "linkage" is what makes them items in the list. (Perhaps it has to do with the perceived level of awareness or dependency on the part of the baptizand, since Chrysostom goes on to refer to those who received baptism in health.) The whole context is about how baptism obligates one to live *dia theon*, for the sake of God, regardless of how one received the sacrament.

In this example, then, and the others he offers, Ferguson's case for the aberrant origin of infant baptism sounds like special pleading.

Finally, I mention an article by Anthony N. S. Lane, "Did the Apostolic Church Baptize Babies? A Seismological Approach," *Tyndale Bulletin* 55:1 (2004): 109–30. Lane surveys many of the same patristic passages that I will cover below, and offers a helpful methodology, based on the pattern of "seismic" effects of the apostolic practices on later centuries. After noting that even when patristic authors object to infant baptism they do not object to it *in principle* (that comes many centuries later), he concludes that the best explanation for the patristic data is that there was some variety of practice in the apostolic era. My only addition to his case is that the possibility of such variety does not imply the apostolic legitimacy of that variety.[25]

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[25] I will leave out of consideration the idea that George B. Caird advanced in his *New Testament Theology* (L. D. Hurst, ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), namely: "In the first century baptism was administered exclusively to converts, who were then baptized with their whole household. But children born to parents already Christian were not baptized in infancy or later in adulthood, because they had already been born into the household of faith" (224–25). I know of no evidence in the patristic writers for such a program, and it is hard to believe that an apostolic practice of this significance would be lost so quickly, leaving no traces.

A. Biblical and Theological Arguments

It is often said that there are no biblical texts that say, one way or the other, whether the infants of believers should be baptized; therefore, the argument goes, the case for infant baptism or exclusively believer's baptism is an inferential one. I do not grant this point so readily, but I acknowledge how difficult the whole argument is. The first point to establish, then, is where the burden of proof lies. I will suggest that it lies on those who wish to deny the sign of membership to the infants of Christian believers. Consider John Frame's version of this burden-of-proof position:[26]

> We can assume continuity with the Old Testament principle of administering the sign of the covenant to children, unless New Testament evidence directs us otherwise, and this is the paedobaptist approach. Or we can assume that only adult believers are to be baptized, unless there is New Testament evidence to the contrary, and this is the antipaedobaptist (="baptist") approach. On the first approach, the burden of proof is on the baptist to show New Testament evidence against infant baptism. On the second approach, the burden of proof is on the paedobaptist to show New Testament evidence for it. In this case, deciding the burden of proof pretty much decides the question, since there is little explicit New Testament evidence on either side and since the two parties are essentially agreed on the Old Testament data. It seems to me that the first approach is correct: the church of the New Testament is essentially the same as the church of the Old.

I intend to fill out and strengthen Frame's argument, both by establishing the continuity principle he asserts, and by showing that some of the New Testament evidence is more explicit than Frame is aware.

To begin with, God's covenant with Abraham was for him to be God both to Abraham and to his offspring (Gen. 17:7). In such a context the infant (male) children receive the sign of covenant membership (circumcision in Genesis 17), with the glad prospect that one's own children will be heirs of the covenant, and thus part of the means by which the promises to bring blessing to the whole world through the family of Abraham will come to fruition (cf. Ps. 100:5; 103:17–18). Because that fruition requires the faithful embrace of the covenant on the part of the particular members of the people, the children are thus obligated to love, trust, and obey God (cf. Gen. 18:19). Christians are the proper heirs of Abraham (Rom. 4:11–12); and Gentile believers are

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[26] John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 270.

"grafted in" and "share in the nourishing root of the olive tree," that is, of the people of God (Rom. 11:17).

This is a common argument, and I think it is right. But we can take it a little further when we consider some New Testament statements that clarify the relationship of the old era and the present one. In Romans 4:13, Paul says that the promise to Abraham and his offspring was that "he would be *heir* of the world" (τὸ *κληρονόμον* αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου). If we search for texts in Genesis that speak of Abraham being an "heir" (κληρονόμος and related terms), the best candidate is Genesis 15:7, where God says that he brought Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldeans "to give you this land *to inherit*" (ὥστε δοῦναί σοι τὴν γῆν ταύτην *κληρονομῆσαι*). In other words, the Romans reference represents (Gentile) Christian believers as heirs of the promises made to Abraham, but those promises have been expanded from "this land" (Palestine) to "the world." The relationship is therefore *continuity with expansion*. This is clear as well in Peter's words in his Pentecost speech (Acts 2:39):

For the promise is *for you and for your children* and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.	*ὑμῖν* γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ἐπαγγελία *καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν* καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν· ὅσους ἂν προσκαλέσηται κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν·

When he says it is "for you and for your children," he is adapting words from the Old Testament (Deut. 29:28):

But the things that are revealed belong *to us and to our children* . . .	τὰ δὲ φανερὰ *ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ἡμῶν*

This is an expansion, then, and not a revision: it keeps the older system ("for you and for your children") and *adds* the inclusion of the Gentiles ("all who are far off"; see Acts 22:21; Mic. 4:3; Joel 3:8; 1 Kings 8:46) into the offer.

Further, there are several places that speak of a "household" being baptized (e.g., Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:16), and of promises to households (Acts 11:14; 16:31) and household conversions (Acts 10:46–48; 18:8; 1 Cor. 16:15). This use of the word "house" (usually οἶκος, as "household") reflects Genesis 17:27, where the males of Abraham's "house" (οἱ ἄνδρες τοῦ *οἴκου* αὐτοῦ) received the sign of circumcision. Add to this the assumption that children of believing parents are members of the people (Acts 21:5; Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21; 1 Tim. 3:4–5; Titus 1:6) and the unity of the household in blessing (2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19; cf. 1 Cor. 16:15), and we

can see why it is right to admit the infant children of believers to membership in the covenant family.

It is worth pointing out that these New Testament passages repeat a strongly attested pattern from the Old Testament. For example, consider Acts 11:14 and 16:31, "you will be saved, you and [all] your household"(σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ [πᾶς] ὁ οἶκός σου). The "you" in the verb inflection is singular, and is addressed to the head of the household; the rest of the "household" is included with him. Compare Genesis 7:1, "Go into the ark, you and all your household" (εἴσελθε σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκός σου εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν); Deuteronomy 14:26, "rejoice, you and your household" (εὐφρανθήσῃ σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου); Deuteronomy 15:20, "you shall eat it, you and your household" (φάγῃ αὐτὸ . . . σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου). Compare further Deuteronomy 26:11, "you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house."[27] The household is included, not simply in the general privilege of association with covenant members, but in the specific privilege of covenant membership and therefore of covenant participation. Jeremiah's expectation of the "everlasting (or new) covenant" includes the idea of covenant reality that blesses the children of covenant members: "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them" (Jer. 32:39).

One implication of this discussion is that the frequently raised question of whether there were any young children actually present in these household episodes is irrelevant: Luke has employed the Old Testament way of describing the events in order to invite his readers to interpret the events in the light of the Old Testament principles. Therefore it does not matter whether or not children were present: we cooperate with Luke's use of the Old Testament manner of speaking by seeing these events in their continuity with the Old Testament pattern.

We see this further in the way that believing Gentiles, once "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12) have been made "fellow citizens with the [Jewish] saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). Since we are members of this same people of God as the believing descendants of Abraham, it stands to reason that we enter this people just as they did; at least, if there was a change in the way of entry, we might have expected a clear discussion of it—together with an explanation of why the love of God has been contracted so as to exclude our children.

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[27] For the opposite side, namely, of inclusion in punishment, cf. Gen. 12:17, "The LORD afflicted *Pharaoh and his house* with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife."

B. The Early Patristic Evidence

It is clear that by the time of Chrysostom (d. AD 407) and Augustine (d. AD 430), the churches were regularly baptizing their members' infants.[28] Those who think of this as an aberration from the apostolic pattern must then explain how it came about in the first couple of Christian centuries. However, on close inspection the evidence, which is largely inferential, supports the conclusion that the early church baptized its infants and counted them as Christians from as early as the apostolic period itself.

The church father Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John and suffered martyrdom for his Christian faith somewhere between AD 155 and 167.[29] The imperial official presiding at his execution urged him to "revile Christ" and thus avoid death, but the elderly Polycarp replied, "I have been serving him for eighty and six years, and he has done me no wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" This would take us back to between AD 69 and 81 for the beginning of this service, when John was still alive. In Polycarp's day one dated his discipleship from his baptism, and, since most take the "eighty and six years" to be Polycarp's age at his death, we are on solid footing if we suppose that Polycarp began his discipleship with his baptism as an infant during the age of the apostles.[30]

Justin Martyr (AD 103–165), in his *First Apology* (ca. AD 150–55), tells us that "many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years" (15:6). The phrase translated "who have been Christ's disciples from childhood," however, would be better translated, "who were *made disciples* to Christ from [when they were] children" (οἳ ἐκ παίδων *ἐμαθητεύθησαν* τῷ Χριστῷ); it uses the passive form of the verb in Matthew 28:19 ("*make disciples* [μαθητεύσατε] . . . baptizing them"). That is, the baptism is what "makes them disciples" (in the administrative sense we

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[28] Lane, "Did the Apostolic Church Baptize Babies?" 120, indicates that "No one seriously doubts that infant baptism was practiced by the beginning of the third century." However, it is not clear that this was the *uniform* practice until later.

[29] See Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 223, for the difficulties in dating.

[30] McKinion, "Baptism in the Patristic Writings," omits all mention of Polycarp (perhaps he was looking for what he took to be explicit references). Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 363, suggests that this need not mean any more than the date of Polycarp's conversion—even though Ferguson himself has presented the evidence for how the early Christians dated the beginning of their discipleship from the time of baptism!

have already discussed), and it did so while they were yet young children.[31]

Irenaeus (d. ca. AD 202) wrote his great work *Against Heresies* (ca. AD 180) especially to refute the various forms of incipient Gnosticism. Although he wrote in Greek, there are parts of the work for which only a Latin translation survives. In a famous passage from this Latin portion, Irenaeus tells us (2.22.4):

> For He came to save all through means of Himself—all, I say, *who through Him are born again to God*—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be "the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence," the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all.

The phrase "who through Him were born again to God" may suggest their conscious conversion (the sense in which we often use the expression in evangelicalism), although the mention of "infants" should make us hesitate. The Latin for "were born again to God" is *renascuntur in Deum*. The editor of this section of the Ante-Nicene Fathers edition (A. Roberts) comments here,

> *Renascuntur in Deum.* The reference in these words is doubtless to baptism, as clearly appears from comparing book iii. 17, 1.

That this editor is right appears from the passage he refers to (3.17.1, also in Latin):

> Giving to the disciples *the power of regeneration into God,* Jesus said to them, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The editor for this passage (W. H. Rambaut) explains "the power of regeneration into God" (Latin *potestatem regenerationis in Deum*) with reference to a passage from earlier in the work, which had used the

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[31] Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church,* treats this text the same as he does the passage from Polycarp, without considering the force of the Greek. McKinion does not mention it at all, focusing instead on a passage in *First Apology* 61—a focus that treats an *apology* as if it were a systematic theology!

expression "the regeneration to God" as a paraphrase for baptism (1.21.1). The chief difficulty for this identification comes from the fact that the Greek of book 1 survives, and "the regeneration to God" is ἡ εἰς θεὸν ἀναγέννησις (see section I above). This Greek expression undoubtedly lies behind the Latin *regeneratio in Deum* in 3.17.1; no doubt Irenaeus' Greek for "the power of regeneration to God" was something like τὴν δύναμιν τῆς εἰς θεὸν ἀναγεννήσεως. But how do we justify connecting the phrase *renascuntur in Deum* (2.22.4) with these, since there is a verb, *regenero* ("I regenerate"), to which the noun *regeneratio* is related, and 2.22.4 uses the verb *renascor* ("I am born again")? The syntax of both 2.22.4 and 3.17.1, where Latin *in Deum* perfectly renders Greek εἰς θεόν, moves us strongly in that direction. And then when we realize that the Latin Bible translates the active form of Greek ἀναγεννάω with *regenero* (1 Peter 1:3), and the passive form with *renascor* (1 Peter 1:23), we see that we must agree with these editors: surely Irenaeus' Greek at 2.22.4 used some passive form of ἀναγεννάω (perhaps something like ἀναγεννῶνται εἰς θεόν, using the present passive to match the Latin).

Thus we come back to what Irenaeus had said in 2.22.4: "all, I say, who through Him are *regenerated to God*—infants, . . ." According to Irenaeus' own usage, this refers to infants who were baptized and thereby made members of God's people.[32]

Conclusion

The presentation I have given in part one of this study, on the meaning of baptism, together with my analysis of how important figures from the early church thought about the rite (section I here), fits well with my understanding of how infants are to be brought ritually into God's family by baptism; it also explains well the early patristic testimony to infant "regeneration" by means of baptism.

In view of this discussion, I conclude that we are thinking biblically when by baptism we bring the infant children of Christian believers into membership in the people of God.

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[32] Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 363, allows that this passage from Irenaeus *might* refer to infant baptism, but decides that on the whole it probably does not. Ferguson concludes (308), based on the differing Latin verbs, that Irenaeus is not talking about infant baptism in 2.22.4; but he shows no awareness of the likely explanation for the two Latin verbs, as evidenced by their rendering in the Vulgate (1 Peter 1:3, 23). McKinion omits this passage altogether.