

Preamble

In 1997, I published *Battle for the Church*. It has been put to me that two of its chapters – an examination of infant baptism – would make a separate work, and ought to be published as such, *including footnotes*. In meeting these suggestions,¹ I have also drawn on other material in the book to form Appendix 1 to show that dipping is essential to the ordinance of baptism. Although I have made some changes – not only to enable the two chapters to stand on their own, but to include recently published material, and, of course, the aforesaid footnotes – this work is substantially the same as the original. Indeed, because of those recent developments, my stance has become even more firm. And you will see why, reader, when you read what is being said and written today by some Reformed infant-baptisers.² On one point, however – not directly connected with the subject in hand – I have altered my position since 1997. At that time, I had reservations about the usual Reformed view on the law (Calvin’s threefold use), but I have now gone further; I am convinced that Christ’s law in the new covenant is not the law of Moses. This important topic makes only a

¹ Since I want the arguments of infant baptisers fully weighed, I have also supplied generous (some will say over-generous) extracts (in which, if necessary, I have modernised punctuation and the like without altering the sense). Or, to start as I mean to go on, some who object to my copious extracts might use John Milton’s words to put it more bluntly and say they find here ‘a paroxysm’ or ‘horse-loads of citations’ (Milton pp75,305). However, as I have said in earlier books, I know how much I appreciate extensive quotes; I can only ask the indulgence of readers who do not. And there is a further point. I am conscious that it is altogether too easy to caricature the position of those I disagree with. While the use of extensive extracts will not avoid this danger entirely, it will, at least, allow those I quote a fair crack of the whip, and make it more difficult for me to build a man of straw in order to set fire to him. Finally on this point, perhaps it might not be out of place to repeat the words of J.H.Plumb: ‘The most valuable part of [Winston] Churchill’s volumes [on his life of Marlborough] lies in [his] extensive quotations’ (Plumb p134).

² And not only them. To my amazement, there is a sinister development among Baptists. And so serious is this movement, I intend to publish a separate book on it (which I shall denote by *Baptist Sacramentalism*) as a companion volume to this present work.

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fleeting appearance in this book, and has no effect on its argument. It will, however, assume a much larger role in a book I hope to publish on the believer and the law.

Some, no doubt, will object to this present publication,³ both in its content and tone, calling it divisive, far too polemical. Well, there is no point in denying it – this book *is* passionately controversial, and trenchantly so.⁴ But lest there should be any misunderstanding, let me say – without any hint of patronisation whatsoever – I wholeheartedly acknowledge that those I have (principally) in my sights,⁵ take

³ Some, it seems, want to avoid all discussion of baptism. The InterVarsity Press, for example, ‘have generally steered clear of books on baptism since we prefer not to take sides on the issue’ (Cross: ‘The Evangelical sacrament’ p197, quoting from a private letter from the Senior Editor in the USA in 2004), ‘though he [the Editor] proceeded to note the occasional recent exceptions’.

⁴ As for the work being *too* polemical, so be it! I have not undertaken the work lightly, and I have wrestled with the accusation. While I do not condone Martin Luther’s virulent language as he grew older, I empathise with his ‘apology’ for it: ‘I see that that which is treated quietly in our age soon passes into oblivion, no one caring about it’ (Mark U.Edwards p214). (This is the only quotation from Mark U.Edwards. When I quote Jonathan Edwards, I will use ‘Edwards’). Milton again: On ‘a controversy of great importance... I resolved... to stand on that side where I saw... the plain authority of Scripture leading... with this opinion, which esteems it... unlike a Christian to be a cold neuter in the cause of the church... [Speaking of] Luther... his own friends and favourers were many times offended with the fierceness of his spirit; yet... he thought it God’s will to have the inventions of men thus laid open, seeing that matters quietly handled were quickly forgot... When God commands to take the trumpet, and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man’s will what he shall say, or what he shall conceal. If he shall think to be silent as Jeremiah did... he would be forced to confess as he confessed: “His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay”. Which might teach these times not suddenly to condemn all things that are sharply spoken or vehemently written as proceeding out of stomach [by which I (DG) mean argument for argument’s sake], virulence and ill-nature, but to consider rather that... no man can be justly offended with him that shall endeavour to impart and bestow, without any gain to himself, those sharp but saving words which would be a terror and a torment in him to keep back’ (Milton pp105-106,128,298-299; see also Milton pp126-129).

⁵ As will become clear, these are believers of a Reformed persuasion.

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Scripture as seriously as I do, deplore the present state of baptism, and want to reinstate it to its biblical position. I applaud this aim. It is mine.

But even so, I must write this polemical work. Why? The fact is, with the passing of only a few years since the publication of my *Battle for the Church*, there is even more need to stress the New Testament doctrine of baptism – and to fight (spiritually, with words) for it. A sacramental⁶ approach to Christ's ordinance is increasingly widespread.⁷ I view this development with horror. But it is not enough for me to throw up my hands in revulsion, and walk away; I must do what I can to warn the unwary of the incoming tide.

Not that I want to open old wounds and make divisions in Christ's church! Certainly not! I raise the issue because of its importance.⁸ And

⁶ By a 'sacrament', I mean the idea that grace is conferred by performance of a rite. I will have to use the word; it is in the literature, and many Reformed writers and others more-than-like it. John Calvin had a high view of the word (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp491-511). D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones was not so keen: 'It is unfortunate that this word should ever have been used... Personally, I try not to use this term' (Lloyd-Jones: *The Church* pp26-27). It is, to me, an abomination. See Newton pp74-81; and below. To anticipate an objection: No, I am not confusing sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. But they are connected. Both are unbiblical, and the former leads to the latter – whatever the Reformed might say. I will return to the point.

⁷ Not least – and this amazes me – among Baptists! This is what I meant when, a few moments ago, I noted recent trends among Baptists. Take Stanley K.Fowler in 2006, summarising the views of those who are involved in this contemporary Baptist development: 'An accurate interpretation of the Bible demands that baptism be viewed as an effective sign; that is, [as] a sacrament... Something is missing when conversion is not sacramentally sealed' (Fowler p155). The Reformed, of course, have long been sacramentalists – but even here it is on the rise. See end note on p7 for excursus: 'The resurgence of sacramentalism'.

⁸ I hope I will be allowed Calvin's justification: 'Should anyone think me more prolix than the subject is worth, let him reflect that, in a matter of the greatest moment, so much is due to the peace and purity of the church, that we should not fastidiously object to whatever may be conducive to both'. Furthermore, reader, I hope you will join me as I echo Calvin again: 'Let us enquire into [infant baptism's] origin. Should it appear to have been devised merely by human rashness, let us abandon it, and regulate the true observance of baptism entirely by the will of the Lord' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p529).

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also because of its relevance. The fact is, not a few erstwhile Baptists are being attracted to infant baptism today because they are impressed with the logic of the covenant theology which buttresses the practice – which, they imagine, is all thoroughly worked out. They are also taken with the household names of leading Reformed theologians who have advocated the practice; surely, so many distinguished and spiritual men can't be wrong, can they? Furthermore, as I have said, there is an increasing interest in sacramentalism – and in the most surprising quarters!⁹ And sacramentalism and infant baptism have been walking companions for many a long year.¹⁰

Note Calvin's reference to 'the church'. He was raising a very important point, and I will have much to say about it.

⁹ David Wright spoke of what he considered to be 'several signs of hope' 'early in the third millennium'. These include 'the growing evidence of sacramental thinking among Baptist theologians' – which I have already noted and intend to tackle. Wright, Emeritus Professor of Patristic and Reformed Christianity, Edinburgh – a Reformed historian holding to infant baptism – deploring the long history of (as he saw it) the debasing of baptism by the way infant baptism has been practiced (sadly, he did not recognise that baptism has been debased by infant baptism itself – not just by corruptions of it!), wished to see a more sacramental approach to it; in other words, that those who use the term, and argue for the effects of infant baptism, would mean it (Wright: *What...?* pp10-11,87-102). The same goes for the sacramental Baptists he spoke of. For the post-Puritan 'degeneration' or 'deterioration' (as sacramentalists see it) of the supper from Calvin's position to Ulrich Zwingli's, see Davies Vol.2 pp323-325,531. Sacramentalism is the issue. Wright, however, when, a few months after the appearance of his book, he published an article in which he tackled the question of what to do next, failed to mention sacramentalism (Wright: 'Christian' pp163-169). Given his own emphasis in his book, and the emphasis in the articles and advertisements in the edition of the journal which published his article, this omission, when dealing specifically with the way forward, was serious, and failed to convey the full picture. I refer to the *Evangelical Quarterly* April 2006. (Throughout, by 'Wright' I mean David F. Wright. When on occasion I refer to N.T. Wright, I do so in that form; similarly for Shawn D. Wright).

¹⁰ As Rich Lusk, a modern-day advocate, put it: 'The infant-baptism question hangs, at least in part, on the question of baptismal efficacy... Without a robust understanding of what *God* does in baptism, the grounds upon which infant baptism rested became very tenuous... The logic of infant baptism is tied to its efficacy... A sacrament, by definition, includes the bestowal of the thing signified' (Lusk: 'Paedobaptism' pp96-100, emphasis his).

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Well, before they adopt infant baptism, I invite those who are contemplating the step to hear what these theologians have said; I encourage them to weigh their ‘thoroughly worked out’ arguments; I would like them to take a look at their expositions of Scripture; and I ask them to take a glance at what the practice leads to. ‘Look before you leap’, is my advice. Cultivate the Berean spirit: ‘These were more fair-minded... in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so’ (Acts 17:11). That is all I ask.¹¹

I have, therefore, two main purposes in this publication; one negative, the other positive. *First*, I am writing *against* the views of infant baptisers, trying to show that their arguments do not stand up under biblical scrutiny. Of course, I do not pretend that this book exhausts the subject. Much has been written on the question – and written by authors far more able. Even so I want to say something about it, perhaps to supply an introduction for those who may not be aware of the arguments which infant baptisers use – and their consequences. And that leads me to repeat my next reason for writing. *Secondly*, I write *for* those who are contemplating adoption of infant baptism. Before they take the step, I want to warn them of the consequences. ‘Look before you leap’, I say again.

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So, reader, this is how this book came to see the light of day, this is what it is about, and this is the tone in which it is written. Do you wish to read on? While the responsibility for it is entirely my own, of course, I thank those who were kind enough to read the manuscript and make detailed observations and suggestions – Jon Bevan, Simon Gay, Jack Green, Nigel Pibworth, Andrew Rome and the late David Wright. As always, I thank Nigel for the many books and articles he has plied me with – as good as a library, he is knowledgeable with it! I pay tribute to him yet again. I thank my wife, Mona, who, as before, has given me sterling help with source-checking and proof-reading. Only those who have tried it, know what is involved. My thanks also go to Audrey Broomhall, Margaret Harvey and Carol Saunderson who

¹¹ See end note on p9 for excursus: ‘Honest disagreement must be allowed and expressed’.

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kindly read the typeset manuscript, and made many helpful comments. The responsibility for every error which remains is, of course, entirely my own.