

THE APOSTOLICAL ORIGIN OF INFANT BAPTISM.

[From Schaff's "Geschichte der Chr. Kirche."]

As the apostolic church was a missionary church, the most of those baptized into it, were grown persons. Infant baptism has force and meaning, only in the fact of a parent church already existing, and the presumption of Christian education, which of course could not be expected of heathen or Jewish parents. Thus in our day, a Missionary begins his work, with the instruction of adults, not with the baptism of children.

The question, however, presents itself, whether, in addition to the baptism of adults, which, in the nature of the case, took place most frequently, there was not also in congregations already established the Christian baptism of infants, similar to circumcision, its type, which, the patriarch Abraham having first received as a seal of the righteousness of faith, (Rom. iv: 11,) forthwith performed upon his son Isaac, on the eighth day after his birth (Gen. xxi: 4); and which was made the sign of the covenant to all his posterity, (Gen. xvii: 10, &c.). This question, we feel bound to answer affirmatively, although in doing so, we have opposed to us, not only the Baptists, but also the authority of some distinguished Pædo-baptist divines; for instance, the venerable *Dr. Neander*, who denies that infant baptism was practised in the apostolic church.* It is true, there is no direct historical proof in support of it, to be met with in the letter of the N. T. nor in those passages in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the baptism of whole families is spoken of (Acts xvi: 15-30-33; xvii: 8, comp. x: 44-48 and I Cor. i: 16) inasmuch as children are not expressly mentioned, and it is possible that the families were composed exclusively of grown persons. Still less is there any passage to prove the contrary. We must have recourse accordingly to the spirit of the bible, which contains far more than is just expressed by its letter; and if thence appears that infant baptism is necessarily included in the very draft and design of primitive Christianity, we will be able, in the total absence of proof to the contrary, to arrive at tolerable certainty that it was actually practised.

* A. H. I. 279, &c. Still, we must not overlook this important distinction, that according to Neander, infant baptism was developed from the pure spirit of Christianity, although it was not practised until towards the close of the second century, whilst the Baptists pronounce it to be an unscriptural and unchristian innovation.

The strongest ground in favor of infant baptism; in connexion with and as a part of a well ordered Christian church, and with a sufficient guarantee of a pious education—for it is only upon this condition that we maintain it at all—lies in the universality of the very idea of Christ, which includes humanity itself. He is both able and willing to redeem all men, of every age and sex and description and condition of life. In the presence of the Saviour of the world, all these distinctions are lost in the general need and capacity of all men for salvation. A Saviour, who was only able and willing to save adults and not infants, would not be the Christ he is represented to be in the Gospel. There is no warrant whatever, in the word of God, for the exclusion of a part of our race, on account of their age, from the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, and our best feelings, and deepest and most inward religious consciousness revolt at a particularism, so gross as this.² In the significant parallel, Rom. v: 12, &c., the Apostle makes it very prominently to appear that the kingdom of righteousness and life, according to its divine intention and inward power, is altogether as comprehensive, indeed still more comprehensive and effectual, than the kingdom of sin and death, to which it is admitted children are subject, and that the gain and advantage secured to us by the second Adam far more than compensate for the loss and injury received from the first. It is for this reason, he repeats the expression, "much more," in the second member of the sentence, (ver. 15

² And yet this is the inevitable consequence, and in fact the very principle assumed as a primary truth, by the Baptists. Dr. Alexander Carson their most learned apologist, asserts without reserve in his work (Baptism in its mode and subjects, p. 173,) that children cannot be saved by the Gospel, or by faith. "The Gospel has nothing to do with infants; nor have Gospel ordinances any respect to them. It is good news; but to infants it is no news at all. They know nothing of it. The salvation of the Gospel is as much confined to believers, as the baptism of the Gospel is. None can ever be saved by the Gospel who do not believe it. Consequently by the Gospel no infant can be saved." When therefore Baptists assume, as they generally do, that children are saved, without baptism or faith, or the Gospel, they upset the fundamental principle of Christianity that out of Christ there is no salvation, and that by faith in him only are we saved. "Infants who enter heaven," says Carson, "must be regenerated, but not by the Gospel. Infants must be sanctified for heaven, but not through the truth as revealed to man." (Is there then any other truth for this purpose, than that which is revealed? If there is it must be a contradiction, and such an outward anti-evangelical truth can never be saving.) "We know nothing," he adds, "of the means by which God receives infants; nor have we any business with it." Precious comfort to be sure for Christian parents, particularly, when standing by the graves of their children!

-17). As is Jesus himself, so is his church exalted above every limitation of nationality and tongue and kindred and age. The similitude of the heaven, which leavens the whole lump (Math. xiii : 33) is intended to represent the inward power of the kingdom of God to pervade all classes and conditions of human life, and when the Lord, after the solemn declaration that all power in heaven and earth was given him, commands his disciples, to make disciples (*μαθητευσατω*) of *all nations*, by baptizing them in the triune name, and by teaching them his doctrine; there is no reason to think that it was to be limited to those who were of mature age. Or do none but adults belong to a nation, and not youth and children and infants?

In harmony and close connection with this, is the beautiful idea, so clearly expressed already by *Irenaeus*, the disciple of Polycarp, and the faithful bearer of tradition from within the sphere of the labors of St. John, namely, that Jesus Christ became a child to children, a youth, to those who were growing up, and a man to those of mature years, and in thus entering into the various states and stages of the development of man's earthly life, he sanctified every age and period of life, his infancy, as well as his adult age.* According to the Baptist view, the childhood of Christ is robbed of its deeper significance and most precious comforting efficiency.

But now, on the other hand, *Faith* is necessary as the indispensable condition of salvation, as the organ by which we embrace Christ and appropriate to ourselves his benefits; and here it is that we come into conflict with the main exegetico-dogmatic argument of the Baptists. Christian baptism, as they say, presupposes, objectively, the preaching of the gospel, subjectively, repentance and faith; infant children, however, can neither

* Irenaeus says, adv. Haeret. III, 22, from a most inward consciousness of the full meaning of the incarnation, omnes enim per semetipsum venit salvare, omnes, inquam, qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, infantes et parvulos et pueros et juvenes et seniores. Ideo per omnem venit aetatem et infantibus infans factus sanctificans infantes, in parvulis parvulus, sanctificans hanc ipsam habentes aetatem, simul et exemplum illis pietatis effectus et iustitiae et subjectionis, in juvenibus juvenis, exemplum juvenibus fians, et sanctificans Domino. That, by renascuntur in Deum, Irenaeus refers to baptism, as the sacrament of regeneration, by which the infant is dedicated to God. Neander himself admits in his Eccles. Hist. vol. I, p. 537, where amongst other things said concerning this expression of the Church father, he adds, "Thus, the practice of infant baptism is derived from the deepest conception of the very nature of Christianity, ruling our minds upon the subject."

understand preaching, nor can they repent and believe; therefore they ought not to be baptised. As it regards this, the major proposition is correct enough, the minor, in this expanded form, is false, and with it the conclusion falls to the ground. The connexion of baptism with the preaching of the gospel, and with faith, is beyond dispute evident, in part from the words of the institution of the sacrament, Math. xxviii : 19, and particularly Mark xvi : 16, "He that (*first*) believeth, and (then) is baptized, shall be saved," and in part from the examples given us in the Acts of the Apostles, according to which, the preaching of the missionary and the faith of the hearer, always precede and prepare for the baptismal act, Act. ii : 37, &c.; viii : 5, &c.-35-38; ix : 17; x : 42-48; xvi : 15, 33; xviii : 8; xix : 5. But here, we must not forget the limitation, overlooked by the Baptists, that in all these instances, the instruction given was very brief and summary, a mere announcement of the principal historical events of the gospel, and with it, but a low grade of faith, previous to their introduction into the church, and that their more perfect instruction in the apostolic doctrine, and their growth and improvement in faith took place after their regular connexion with the church. Primitive Christian baptism was neither compulsory, as for instance, the baptism of the Saxons by the command of Charlemagne, nor yet a mere baptistic form, communicating nothing that was not possessed before, but simply sealing and confirming the already existing life of faith. The Apostles never demanded formal regeneration as a *condition* of baptism, but the earnest sincere longing of the soul after salvation in Christ, which was actually proposed and offered in baptism, and was sealed and afterwards developed and promoted by the other means of grace. "Repent," said Peter to the three thousand, who, on the day of Pentecost, after hearing with an earnest desire for salvation a single brief discourse, were baptized, "and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Thus he places, both these blessings, the negative and the positive as the fruit and effect, not as the preliminary condition of baptism. This view is also confirmed by the frequently misunderstood passage, Math. xxviii : 19, which should be rendered, according to the original: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, (by) baptizing them (*βαπτίζοντες*) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and (by) teaching (*διδασκοντες*) them to obey all that I have commanded you." Here it is evident that "to make disciples" to Jesus (i. e. true Christians) is not one and the same thing as

"to teach," but comprehends more than this, and indicates the object to be attained in the use of both the means to be employed, baptism, and the teaching which is to succeed it.¹ If it were possible to become a confirmed Christian without baptism, and so also without a connexion with the church, the church would be altogether useless, at least not necessary, and to this the Baptist theory also conduces, which always misapprehends the nature and pedagogical significance of the church, as an institution indispensable to salvation, and considers it simply in its ground as an association of saints. Besides to insist upon regeneration and conversion as a necessary preliminary condition to baptism renders this also impossible, or at least requires that it should be indefinitely postponed; inasmuch as God has not furnished us with the gift of infallibly searching the heart.

As it respects, however, the second proposition in the Baptist argument, that is the inability of children to believe, from which is deduced their inadmissibility to baptism: we admit it fully, if by faith we are to understand, a *self-conscious free* surrender of the heart to God. This can only take place after we have attained to consciousness—and for this we can fix upon no definite period—and thus infant baptism needs to be subjectively completed by means of catechetical instruction and confirmation, in which the believer having attained to spiritual maturity confirms his baptismal vows, and with full and free determination gives himself up to God. For this reason too, the baptism of the children of unbelievers, though they may be professing Christians, has really no significance, and is a profanation of this sacred rite, inasmuch as in such cases there is no sure warrant for the religious education and training demanded by the baptismal vow. The great error of that assertion, however, lies in this, that the conception of faith generally, and with it the efficiency of the Holy Ghost, is bound to a particular stage of the development of human consciousness, and is made dependent upon it. The true ground and condition of salvation lie generally, not in any thing subjective, as belonging to the creature, but in the depths of the divine compassion; and in faith itself we

¹ The Lutheran interpretation here is inaccurate and misleading, in rendering *μαθητεύω* also, to teach.

² Dr. H. Martensen, the Danish divine, is accordingly perfectly correct in saying (Christ Baptism, and the Baptist Question. Hamb. 1843, fol. 34). "The more general infant baptism becomes in the world, the more fully are the words of the Saviour accomplished, that the nations are made disciples, by baptism and teaching."

must be careful to mark different grades, from the first bud, to the ripe fruit. It commences already with our religious susceptibility and unconscious yearning towards God, and a childlike confidence in a higher power. It is not altogether a product of our own thinking or knowing, or feeling, or willing, but it is a work of grace and of the Divine Spirit, limited to no age, or stage of consciousness, but is like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, and when and whither it will.³ Faith does not produce the blessings of salvation, it only receives them, and only in the receptive way, as the organ of appropriation, and not as productive, is it saving in its operation, inasmuch as otherwise, our salvation would flow forth from a creature source. This receptivity for the divine, is to be found however already in the child, and indeed purer, and less obscure than in later years. By virtue of its religious constitution and frame of mind it is accessible to the influences of grace, and may really be born again. To deny this, is, to send all children without exception to hell. For they too have been conceived in sin, (Ps. 51: 5) are flesh born of flesh (John iii: 6), and by nature the children of wrath (Eph. ii: 3 comp. Rom. iii: 22-24) and without being born again of water and the Spirit, no one can ever, according to the unequivocal and express declaration of the Lord Jesus, enter into the kingdom of God, (John iii: 5.). "He that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi: 16. When therefore Baptist divines admit at least some children into heaven without regeneration and faith, they must to be consistent hold the Pelagian view of original sin and guilt or else open another way to salvation, of which the gospel knows nothing, and which stands in open contradiction to all this. There are however, in the scriptures, passages directly to the point, which place this susceptibility of the infant mind to Divine influences, beyond all doubt. If we even overlook the remarkable case of John the Baptist, who, "in his mother's womb, before he was born," was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke i: 15-41), we nevertheless are assured from Matth. xviii: 2-5; xix: 14, 15; Mark x: 14, 15; Luke xviii: 16, 17, that the Saviour of the world himself took children into his arms, and blessed them, and spoke to them encouragingly of the kingdom of heaven; declared indeed peremptorily, that adults themselves must become children again, must partake of their simple, confiding, susceptible dis-

³ Comp. such passages as Rom. xii: 13; Gal. v: 5; 1 Cor. xii: 3-9; 2 Cor. iv: 13; Eph. ii: 8; Col. ii: 12; Phil. i: 29; Jac. iii: 8.

positions, in order to have part in the kingdom of heaven. Shall the Church then refuse baptism to those dear little ones, whom the Son of God embraced? Shall the Church reject as incapable and unworthy of her communion, the very persons, whom the Head of the church held forth as a pattern to all who wished to be his disciples? It is much more reasonable to infer from all this, strange as it may seem, that every baptism, even that of grown persons, is in fact infant baptism, inasmuch as Christ has declared the childlike spirit to be an indispensable condition of our entrance into his kingdom; and as baptism, moreover, as the sacrament of regeneration, demands of every one receiving it, penitentially to forsake their previous evil ways, and in faith to commence a new course of life consecrated to God.

The same objections, which are urged against the Christian baptism of infants, may with equal plausibility be made against the Jewish rite of circumcision on the eighth day. For this too was not an unmeaning ceremony, but a holy sign and seal of the covenant, by which the person circumcised assumed the obligations, and at the same time was admitted to the privileges and blessings of the covenant of the law, (Gal. v: 3), which strictly taken could in like manner only be done, after he had attained to self-consciousness, and in the exercise of his own free will. If however, it be said that the circumcision of the Jewish children rested upon a divine command as is undeniably the case, Gen. xvii: 12, Levit. xii: 7, we can nevertheless, from this type derive a strong argument in favor of infant baptism, inasmuch as this has in a manner, certainly taken the place of the other, and for this reason is called the "circumcision of Christ," (Col. ii: 11, 12) with this great difference, it is true, that the ancient covenant, with all its arrangements was nothing more than a shadow of better things to come, whilst the new covenant of grace is the image and essential reality itself (Heb. x: 1, Col. ii: 17). If then the first, according to the promise of Jehovah (Gen. xvii: 7, &c.) includes the whole posterity of Abraham, why this much more, far surpassing as it does the other in riches and fulness and depth. In this comprehensive sense, and in accordance with the analogy of the command of circumcision, must the Apostles as Jews have understood the injunction of the Saviour to baptize all nations, and if the children were to be excluded it would be some where mentioned. In fact, Peter at the feast of Pentecost in calling upon his hearers to be baptized, expressly declares this extension of the blessings of the gospel to children: "For the promise (the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost) is to you, and your chil-

dren, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

This important idea of an organic connexion between Christian parents and their children, and their being included in the same covenant duties and privileges meets us also in the writings of St. Paul. He regards the children as already belonging to the congregation, and enjoins upon them to obey their parents, "in the Lord," Eph. vi: 1, Col. iii: 20, which properly speaking, is only possible upon the presumption of their being engrafted into the body of Christ, and this is effected by baptism. In 1 Cor. vii: 14, he makes a very significant distinction, between heathen and Christian children, and speaks of the first as unclean (*ακαθάρτα*), the latter on the contrary as holy (*αγια*) in virtue of their organic connexion with a believing father, or believing mother. As in a mixed marriage, of which he is speaking immediately before, the mightier divine power of the sanctified Christian wife prevails over the darkness of her heathen husband, so she also exerts a controlling influence upon their posterity. God is stronger than Satan. How much more must this be the case, when both parents are walking in the fear of God, and are thoroughly pervaded by the Spirit of faith! By all this, Paul does not pretend to deny the natural corruption of the children of Christians; but he teaches unequivocally that the blessings of the covenant pass over to them, and remove the curse, so that those, who in themselves were unclean, are by grace consecrated to God, and brought under holy influences. Here it is true the baptism of infants is not mentioned, but the idea of their baptism and the authority for it are necessarily implied.¹ For if the children, in virtue of their birth from believing parents are already included in the covenant of grace, why should they be shut out from the sacrament, which impresses upon it the divine seal, and gives it, so to say, its proper validity? It is true that the passage, together with the claim and the right to baptism, is limited to the children of such parents, as are, or

¹This also Neander substantially admits when in speaking of the passage mentioned, he says Ap. II. l. fol. 282. "From the point of view here presented by Paul, though it does testify (?) against the existence then of infant baptism, we find still the fundamental idea, from which infant baptism afterwards must and did develop itself, and by which it was to be justified in the spirit of Paul: the acknowledgment of the preference that could be given to children born in a Christian communion, in allowing them by baptism to be consecrated to the kingdom of God, and thereby, from their first development, to spread abroad an immediate sanctifying influence."

at least one of them, believing, inasmuch as it is only in connexion with a Christian family life, that this *διδασκαλία*, which, according to the command of Christ, is to follow baptism, and with it the maintenance and evolution of baptismal grace, can be expected to result in a substantial and confirmed life of faith.

If then the admissibility and propriety of infant baptism are grounded in the need which all have of salvation, in the very idea of primitive Christianity, in the extent and compass of the covenant of grace, in its analogy to circumcision, and in the organic, spiritual and bodily relation which believing parents sustain to their offspring; so may we suppose it extremely probable that its introduction would correspond with the first independent existence of a Christian congregation, and we have under such presumption every reason to believe that it was actually practised, when we read in the N. T. more than once, of the baptism of whole families, without any restriction whatever, (as we would have to expect, according to the Baptist theory); such for instance, as the household of Lydia, and the Jailer of Philippi, and Stephanas of Corinth; which are mentioned particularly as examples, though doubtless there were many similar cases, and it would be remarkable and contrary to daily experience, to take for granted that all these families were without children.

It is true that it has been attempted to set aside this exegetical result, by the testimony of a single witness, the well known polemic, *Tertullian*, who lived toward the close of the 2nd century, and from it to show that it had a proportionably later introduction. But this polemic himself most conclusively shows, that infant baptism did exist in his day, and with it the institution of sponsors. What is still more, *Tertullian* knew that the whole church *praxis* was against him, and he stood forth as a reformer in opposition to it. Had he referred to antiquity, and could he have spoken against infant baptism as an innovation, something new, he would doubtless have availed himself of this advantage. But he only calls in question, not its apostolic origin, not its admissibility, or propriety, but only its *expediency*. He considered it dangerous, inasmuch as according to his Montanistic view, an individual committing a mortal sin after baptism, must be shut out from church communion, and in all probability would be lost. Upon this ground, he advised that, not only infants, but also *grown* persons, who were not yet married, and had not taken upon themselves the vow of chastity, should put off their baptism, until they were fully secured

against the temptation to licentiousness.' This whole controversy of *Tertullian* rests—which Neander, Gieseler, and others appear not to have noticed, or at least have not brought forward—upon mistaken impressions, in which the church did not participate, and has nothing more than the force of an *isolated private judgment* in opposition to the prevailing theory and practice, and proves clearly the very reverse of that which it has often been attempted to show. Just so much may we with tolerable safety infer from it, that infant baptism, at that time, was not yet authoritatively established, but was left pretty much to the free will and judgement of Christian parents. Otherwise, *Tertullian* would scarcely have assailed it, so vigorously. As, however, in this particular, the spirit of the age was against him, his opposition, which by the way, was also in contradiction to some of his own principles, produced not the slightest effect, and died away without an echo.

This was made perfectly evident in the following century. The African church itself, in a council at Carthage in the year 246, decreed that it was not necessary even to defer baptism to the eighth day, as was the case in circumcision, but that it might be performed (not must) on the second, or third day, after birth; and *Cyprian* who had the greatest veneration for his preceptor *Tertullian* maintained this view. So entirely at that time already was every trace of the controversy against infant baptism obliterated, that the only question concerning it at issue was, whether according to Jewish analogy, they must delay it for at least eight days! At the very same time, *Origen* of Alexandria, the most learned representative of the Greek church, who was himself baptized soon after his birth (an. 185), and at the death of *Tertullian* was 35 years old, speaks in the most unequivocal terms of infant baptism as an apostolic tradition, and a general church observance. If however from the silence of the church historians previous to *Tertullian*' in relation to in-

'Non minore de causa, he says *inimpti quoque procreandi*, in quibus tentatio præparata est iam virginitas per maturitatem, quam viduis per vacationem, donec aut nubant, aut continentia corroborentur. Consequently, according to *Tertullian*, baptism would have to be confined to superannuated and married persons, and monks and nuns! and yet he maintains on the other hand, that we can only be saved through the water of baptism, nec aliter quam in aqua permanendo salvi sumus. The wide difference between the standpoint of *Tertullian* and that of the Baptists, in the whole controversy, must be evident to any one possessed of any historical or critical skill. It is therefore perfectly absurd for the Baptists to refer as they do, with so much zeal, to the African church father.

fant baptism, we are to draw a conclusion against its practice, we should not forget, first that we have altogether very few written memorials of those times, and that there are many other points also in regard to which we are entirely in the dark; and then in the great missionary zeal of the age, and the rapid extension of the church, proselyte baptism would be most prominent, and in the nature of the case, would attract most attention. Still however there are not wanting, in the writings of CLEMENT of Alexandria, IRENAEUS and JUSTIN MARTYR, indications that show more or less clearly the existence of infant baptism. Especially is the passage, already cited from Irenæus, of the regeneration and sanctification of the period of childhood, by the childhood of Jesus, taken in connexion with his decided churchly habit of thought, and his close union of regeneration and baptism, a proof not only for the idea, but for the actual practice of infant baptism in his day. From this church Father, we may conclude back with great safety to his venerated preceptor POLYCARP, and he was the disciple and personal friend of ST. JOHN, the favorite apostle of Jesus Christ.

Translated by

Baltimore, Md.

B. C. W.

A DEVOUT MINISTRY.

Jesus Christ prayed, although he united in His person the attributes of the true Godhead and of perfect humanity. Prayer was his joy. Hours at a time he spent in devotion, not only now and then or at long intervals, but regularly and frequently. Why was this? Christ was perfectly holy. Could He not have exemplified the virtues of a perfect religion without the aid of prayer? In Him were hid all the treasures of infinite wisdom. Could He not have taught the plan of redemption and revealed the destiny of the world, without seeking additional knowledge in prayer? He had all power and authority in Heaven and on earth. Could He not have performed miracles, made a sufficient oblation for the sins of men and have risen from the grave, triumphing over the power of death and hell, without receiving new strength by holding formal, outward communion with God?

With Him prayer was not a matter of mere choice—not something which he could omit or perform with equal propriety. Nor did he pray because compelled to do so by the circumstances of Providence, or any power extraneous to himself. But He was impelled to prayer by an inward necessity—by the constitution of his person; not because he had committed sin or was liable to it and therefore required pardon or purification—nor because there was any deficiency in the resources of his divine-human nature for the purposes of his mission. He prayed just because He was very God and very man. The Son communes with the Father and the Father communes with the Son.

It belongs necessarily to the complete idea of an intelligent being that it thinks and utters its thoughts. Men think and speak through the medium of human language. Angels think and communicate their thoughts to each other, but of the manner in which this is done we know little or nothing. God thinks. The triune absolute Being, of whom angels and men are the reflection, communes with Himself under the highest form of perfection. The three self-existent and co-eternal persons, constituting in mysterious union the only true God, think simultaneously. To know and to think are identical. In other words, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, commune or hold fellowship with each other necessarily. Such communion belongs to the idea of their being and reciprocal relation, as demanded by sound philosophy and as revealed in the Scriptures. There are various passages, that clearly presuppose or indicate this fellow-