

THE RELATION OF INFANTS  
TO CHURCH,  
BAPTISM AND GOSPEL IN  
SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY BAPTIST  
THEOLOGY

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# The Relation of Infants to Church, Baptism and Gospel in Seventeenth Century Baptist Theology

## 1. GENERAL BAPTISTS

**I**T is not always sufficiently recognized that when a group of Separatists broke away from the practice of infant-baptism in the early 17th century, they abandoned a sacrament that hitherto had furnished answers to certain far-reaching questions. Involved was not only an understanding of the nature of baptism itself but also the nature of the church and the meaning of the Gospel. The baptismal debate raised both soteriological and ecclesiological problems.

Baptists had to conduct the debate on two fronts. The first, and that which claimed the greater part of their attention, was against those who had inherited the Genevan position, including the majority of Dissenters. The second was against the Anglicans who during the first half of this century were still engaged in the task of fashioning themselves as a church catholic and reformed, treading as they did the precarious path of the *via media*. On both fronts Baptists were opposed to a baptism administered to infants, albeit from the standpoints of different theological pre-suppositions. Their theological opponents saw to it that Baptist writers were not allowed to ignore the problems attendant upon the exclusion of infants from baptism. Paedobaptist sniping compelled them to fight a rear-guard action which, in the spirit of the times, they did with diligence and vigour. The fact that they did serves as a healthy rebuke to our contemporary Baptist thinking. There has been a blithe lack of awareness that the withholding of baptism from infants does raise ecclesiological and soteriological questions regarding the status of infants. A study of the position reached by our forebears may provide guide-lines as we wrestle again with the problem in the modern baptismal debate.

The Genevan baptismal tradition passed into English Protestant Dissent. The merit of it lay in the fact that it clearly defined the place of infants within the church. Beginning from the covenant conception with its emphasis upon divine sovereignty and the divine initiative of grace, it was able to lay claim to the analogies provided in the experience of the covenant people of God in Old Israel. The covenant was to embrace those who first entered into it, together with their descendants. Infants were born into the covenant community, heirs of the blessings of the covenant, a relationship signified and sealed in the circumcision of the male infant. In the New Israel, the infants of believers are to be reck-

oned heirs of the covenant, and baptism, on the analogy of circumcision, is to be administered as the sign and seal of the covenant. This baptismal doctrine was readily applicable to the Separatist view of the church as a separated and covenanting community, including within its covenant the children of believers.<sup>1</sup> Apart from defining the relationship of the infants of believers to the church it also implicitly described their relationship to the Gospel. The covenant community was the elect community, election being the prerogative of God's sovereignty and the way in which His grace was manifested. Baptism was the seal of the infant's election through birth in the elect community. He shared in a "federal holiness". His relationship to the Gospel was thus in the same category as his parents, the relationship of election.

The Anglican position placed far more emphasis on the sacramental action of baptism. In baptism an infant was engrafted into the church of Christ. There was the recognition that he was brought to baptism as a child bearing the burden of the sin and guilt of his progenitor. Baptism was a place of regeneration, giving him that new nature by which in the years of discretion he might be able to accept for himself the promises made on his behalf. It was to be administered to every child born within the parish. The faith or otherwise of the parents was not a discriminating factor. With such a soteriological content it was inconceivable that baptism should be withheld from any child to whom it was possible to administer it. Baptism so understood was of course more consistent with the viewpoint of the ultimately triumphant Arminian party within the church than with the Puritan emphasis. The latter, however, had willingly inherited the conception of the *Volkskirche* which the Reformation had left unaltered, and they would have administered baptism to any infant for whom it was sought.

The question of the relationship of infants to the Gospel and the place of baptism within it, was acutely raised in the matter of children dying in their infancy. The Reformed baptismal doctrine did not make the salvation of an infant contingent upon baptism. Calvin himself discussed panic attempts to baptize infants *in periculo mortis* as sheer superstition. The Anglican position on the fate of infants dying unbaptized was equivocal, leaning slightly to the side of charity. In addition to these doctrinal factors, two other considerations must be borne in mind. The first is the high rate of infant mortality in the seventeenth century which made the question all the more acute. The second is the connection between baptism and salvation present in the popular mind at that time. The legacy of the centuries since Augustine could not be eradicated in a matter of decades. There was a horror attached to the death of an unbaptized infant that prevailed more than the charitable re-assurances of the most eminent divines.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike their Particular Baptist counterparts, the General Baptist

confessions explicitly exclude children from the fellowship of the church and the rite of baptism.<sup>3</sup> The key to the understanding of this exclusion lies in the inseparable connection between church and baptism in General Baptist theology. It was a connection that was forged by the spiritual genius of John Smyth. Smyth's pilgrimage "from the profession of Puritanisme to Brownisme, and from Brownisme to true Christian baptisme"<sup>4</sup> is now familiar. But it must briefly be re-stated if the place of infants in the theology of his General Baptist successors is to be appreciated.

As has already been stated, the Reformation left virtually untouched the conception of the *Volkskirche*. For a Catholic community crossing national frontiers in its obedience to Rome, it substituted the national church owing its allegiance to the sovereign. In England particularly the national church swore allegiance to the "godly prince" who was regarded as a pillar and safeguard of reformation.<sup>5</sup> No party within the church had any desire to disturb this settlement, strengthened as it was by the parish system inherited from the medieval church. It was the conviction of the Separatists, and Smyth among them, that the national church with its comprehensive inclusion of the residents of the parish within its membership, could not embody the Reformation insights of faith and grace. Thus they separated, not in order to create a "perfectionist" church, but a confessing church.

Smyth had hard things to say about the "parish" conception of the church. Such a church was a "mixed" community in which the "saints" mingled with the "openly wicked and profane".<sup>6</sup> To Smyth such a community could not carry the name of church. The church consisted of those who by free consent had covenanted together. The members were "saints" — separating from all known sin, ecclesiastical or otherwise, doing the whole will of God, growing in grace and knowledge and persevering to the end.<sup>7</sup> Such a community would not be "perfectionist", inevitably containing hypocrites.<sup>8</sup> Yet that hypocrisy stemmed from an inward denial of the characteristics of the Christian man. The parable of the wheat and the tares had its relevance here rather than the use to which it was put as an apologia for a comprehensive national church. Smyth resorted to the Calvinistic distinction between the visible and the invisible church, claiming that not all who were members of the visible church were numbered in the invisible, nor were all those outside the visible church necessarily not of the invisible church.<sup>9</sup>

Smyth's rejection of the Church of England as a "mixed" community led him to identify it, as had the Separatists, with Anti-Christ. Given this position he was compelled to consider the relationship between the validity of a church and the validity of its sacraments. Other Separatists had rejected the baptism of the Church of England as of anti-Christ. They did not, however, demand another baptism where Anglican baptism had already been received.

This probably owed more to the fear of being charged with anabaptism than any other consideration. Neither did they reject infant baptism; the Calvinist doctrine of baptism admirably suited their doctrine of the covenanting church. For Smyth, however, this would not do. Baptism received from Anti-Christ was baptism into Anti-Christ and therefore invalid.<sup>10</sup>

In Amsterdam his reasoning pursued its logical way. In 1609 he published *The Character of the Beast* which was a rejection of infant-baptism as "the most unreasonable heresy of all Anti-Christianism",<sup>11</sup> and a defence of his action in baptizing himself and the rest of the members of his church. His argument was now to double back in the way it had come. The Church of England was a "mixed" community and therefore Anti-Christ. Yet how did it come to number amongst its members the reprobate as well as confessing Christians? The answer lay in the initiating sacrament of baptism whereby all were admitted into the church apart from faith and repentance. To define the church in one way and baptism in another, to reform the church but not its initiating sacrament, was simply to prune a corrupt tree. The axe should be laid at the root, the baptism of infants.<sup>12</sup>

Two emphases thus emerged from Smyth's reasoning: baptism was associated with *conversion* and with *initiation into the church*. The first emphasis determined who was to receive baptism. Baptism was first of the Spirit, it manifested itself in confession with the mouth, upon which confession baptism was to be administered.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis is confessional, not perfectionist. The second emphasis secured the truth that the nature of the church and of baptism are mutually determinative. There can be no true church without baptism for baptism "is the visible form of the church".<sup>14</sup> Hence the experience of infants lay outside the sphere of conversion, and they could not be reckoned amongst the members of the church, neither were they proper recipients of its initiating sacrament. Smyth argues all this with Richard Clifton in terms of the Calvinist covenant baptismal theology, but as this later occupied the attention of the Particular Baptists, reference need not be made to it at this stage.<sup>15</sup>

Smyth's doctrine of baptism was carried over into the theology of the General Baptists. Its twin emphases are reflected in the seventeenth century confessions.<sup>16</sup> The confessions are explicit in their rejection of children as the proper subjects for baptism or membership of the church. The ecclesiological content of baptism is also stressed time and again, often in language that would suggest that they regarded baptism as the *effective* means of incorporation into the church.

Consideration of the status of infants could not avoid the vexed question of original sin and the effectiveness of the work of Christ

on their behalf. Smyth in his pre-Amsterdam period maintained a thorough-going Calvinistic view of original sin :

“ . . . all infants are carnal, being conceived and born in sin, being the children of wrath, until the Lord work his work in them, which when he doth I know not.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet for him there was no association between baptism and original sin. Baptism was for repentance, its relevance lay in the sphere of responsible experience. Repentance lay altogether outside the experience of infants therefore baptism was not applicable to them.<sup>18</sup> Smyth drew a distinction between sin as a state and sin as an act. Smyth's claim that baptism should be withheld from children brought from Clifton the retort that this was to keep them outside the visible church and in fact to damn them. Smyth replied with a partial agnosticism as to the status of infants. He fell back on his Calvinism pointing out what any good Calvinist should well have known, that there was no contingent link between baptism and election. If an infant was elected then baptism could not affect the issue one way or the other. Until election could be made sure and evidenced baptism should be withheld rather than that the church, not knowing the inner counsels of God, should administer it indiscriminately to elect and non-elect.<sup>19</sup> The advantage of the infants of believers did not lie in their receiving a “dark pedagogical baptism” but the fact that they were under the gospel and had “the daily institution and education of faithful parents”.<sup>20</sup> Smyth's definition of the status of infants in Calvinist terms of election was no more and no less satisfactory than a definition in terms of a Calvinist covenant baptism. A deeper soteriological question was begged by both.

In Amsterdam the Smyth community passed through a revolution in their understanding of the atonement that was to be as far-reaching as their submission to a confessional baptism. They came as Calvinists believing in an atonement that was effective for the elect only, they left as Arminians believing that Christ had died for all mankind. It has been traditionally believed that this change was due to their contacts with the Mennonites. The matter is surrounded with so much uncertainty that the assertion is highly questionable. The doctrinal statements of Smyth after he had broken with Helwys and was seeking fellowship with the Mennonites are a far remove from the emphasis that Helwys was to bequeath to the General Baptist churches on his return to England. The contention of Lonnie D. Kliever<sup>21</sup> that the acceptance by Smyth and his people of a confessional baptism was a logical development of a position already taken before their arrival in Amsterdam and owed nothing to Mennonite influence, seems to be a fair reading of the facts. Similarly their soteriology would appear to owe more to the Arminians than to the Mennonites. It was their doctrine of the atonement

that was affected, being broadened to include all mankind. They remained Calvinist in their understanding of original sin and of the prevenience of grace in the act of faith.<sup>22</sup> Their theology was to reflect the paradoxical tension between God's initiative and man's response which was evaded by the extremes of the Calvinist assertion of irresistible grace and the Mennonite assertion of free-will.

From the soteriological position reached in Amsterdam emerged the Second Adam doctrine<sup>23</sup> that was to play a large part in later General Baptist attempts to formulate a theological explanation of the status of infants. Research into the origins of this conception would undoubtedly throw valuable light on the origins of the General Baptist soteriology. The Second Adam doctrine makes its appearance in a work by Helwys that preceded his return to England — *A Short and Plain Proof that no Infants are condemned*. The title of the work clearly indicates its intent and demonstrates that from the beginning Baptists were not unaware of the problem posed by the exclusion of infants from baptism. Helwys develops the distinction between original sin and actual sin already noticed in Smyth's work. The factor of human responsibility, implicit in a confessional baptism, is seen as the cause of divine judgment upon human sin. God is not the author of sin. Yet sin is not solely a matter of individual responsibility for there is an involvement of all humanity in the sin of Adam. Over against Adam stands Christ, the Second Adam, in whose work humanity is as much involved as in the sin of its progenitor. The condemnation of Adam's sin has extended to all mankind, but the Lord,

“ . . . by grace in Christ, hath freed Adam, and in him all mankind from that sin of Adam.”<sup>24</sup>

In considering infants Helwys brings together his idea of sin as a personal responsibility and his belief that the death of Christ was for all. He attacks those who would assign infants to hell before they know the difference between right and wrong. His argument is mainly directed against Calvinists who limited the effect of Christ's atonement. For him Christ's death is as far-reaching in its effect as Adam's sin. An infant outside the sphere of moral responsibility and therefore outside the sphere of consenting sin is within the salvation won by the Second Adam.

The distinction between original sin and actual sin was carried further in the consideration of the fate of infants dying unbaptized. From the “Standard” Confession<sup>25</sup> and a work by Henry Hagger, *The Foundation of the Font Discovered* (1653), it is apparent that the General Baptists held a doctrine of the two deaths. The punishment for original sin for which no repentance has been shown is the second death, the death of the soul. A child dying in infancy dies in the salvation won by Christ. His dying is the inheritance of mortality, the first death, which in Adam he shares with the whole



human race. There being no actual sin, sin of consent or responsibility, infants are not subject to the second death. Hagger, in a passage in which he argues that there is no distinction between the children of believers and those of non-believers in the effect of Christ's work of atonement, states :

“ . . . for it is appointed for all men to dye, and after cometh judgment; but the Scripture doth not say that any shall be judged according to their original sin, or condemned for Adam's transgression . . . Rev. 20, 13, 1 Cor. 5, 10 . . . therefore no ground to fear the salvation of children in their non-age : for although they must dye for Adam's sin, yet Christ is become their resurrection, and they have no actual sin to be judged for.”<sup>26</sup>

The “ Orthodox ” Confession is also uncompromising in its assertion that infants dying are saved “ whether born of believing parents, or unbelieving parents . . . by the grace of God, and merit of Christ their redeemer, and work of the Holy Ghost, and in being made members of the invisible church, shall enjoy life everlasting ”.<sup>27</sup>

The various strands which have been seen to run through General Baptist theology in the seventeenth century are clearly seen in the work of Thomas Grantham. Grantham's work is of a standard that would seem to demand that far more study be made of it than has been. His description of the church moves from a narrow definition in terms of the confessional church to a broad definition in terms of Christ's atoning work for mankind. It is both “ A company of men called out of the world by the voice or Doctrine of Christ, to worship one true God according to his will ” and “ The whole number of the saved ones, from the beginning of the world to the end thereof ”. Included in “ this vast Body ” are “ such only as fall in Adam, and have no personal guilt of their own, together with all such in every Age and Nation as fear the God of Heaven, and work Righteousness ”.<sup>28</sup>

For him, as for Smyth, baptism is inseparably bound up with the nature of the church. “ Baptism is so essentially, formally and universally necessary, to the visible being . . . of the universal church, and of every member of it, as that it is the distinguishing mark between those that are and those that are not visibly of it . . . ”<sup>29</sup> Baptism admits to the privileges and responsibilities of membership in the visible Body of Christ. It should not be thought of in terms of status but of service. Infants, by his definition, belonged to the wider sphere of the invisible church as membership of the visible church carried with it a responsibility that infants could not bear. Baptism in itself admitted to membership of the church, to the fellowship of the Lord's Table, and to the duties of membership.<sup>30</sup> If withholding baptism from infants was to be taken as damning them, Grantham replied that salvation was not tied to the sacra-

ment. The salvation of infants is assured because "God hath not tied this Mercy to any Ritual, or thing to be done by us, but by the Obedience of Christ, and his Pre-grace, sanctifies them in a manner unknown to us".<sup>31</sup> It should be observed in passing, however, that Grantham does not speak in the same tones about baptism when he is considering those who have reached the years of consent. For them wilfully to reject the baptism of repentance for the remission of their sins is to "reject salvation itself, because they put the Word of Life from them; for though it be not the cause of Eternal Life, yet it is the Way in which God has promised to give life: Mark 16, 6 . . .".<sup>32</sup>

Grantham elaborates further on the status of infants when dealing with wider soteriological questions. In the General Baptist tradition he asserts the doctrine of original sin, describing it as "the *filum certissimum*, or leading Thread to all other Iniquities, Mankind being hereby corrupt, *Ab origini*, and wholly deprived of the glory of God, without the intervening Mercy of a Saviour".<sup>33</sup> He repeats the doctrine that man's mortality, the first death, is the punishment come upon all mankind through Adam's disobedience. Again, there is the assertion that infants dying have suffered thereby the punishment of original sin and that over and above that they have no sin of which they can stand condemned.<sup>34</sup>

Grantham too makes great use of the "representative" figures of Adam and Christ. He recalls the covenant made with Adam, Gen. 3, 15, claiming that this covenant was fulfilled in Christ and has never been repealed. All infants, regardless of parentage, are members of the Catholic Church by virtue of that covenant.<sup>35</sup> In a passage reminiscent of Helwys he speaks of Christ being life and immortality, "which he preached to whole Adam, Gen. 3, 15, and then took whole Adam into his Grace and Favour".<sup>36</sup> There are echoes too of Irenaeus as he describes Christ recapitulating what had been lost in Adam. The remarkable emphasis, however, that appears in Grantham's work is his view of mankind's involvement in the work of Christ. Mankind does not stand outside the Body of Christ waiting to be gathered in. It is the Body of Christ out of which men can sin themselves in the years of responsibility. Infants are "in a visible state of salvation, and so of the Universal Church of God, and cannot be put out of that blessed state, till by their voluntary departure from God, by choosing sinful ways, they destroy themselves".<sup>37</sup> Grantham sums up his position succinctly in a passage that reflects the virility of so much of his writing:

"In this second Adam, the Repairer of Mankind, do I place the salvation of all men, and of the Infant Race, I say, seeing they never sinned against the second Covenant, nor can any other sin them out of the Mercy of God; their Will to that Grace being not tied to Man's Will, it follows that they shall not be hurt of the second Death . . .".<sup>38</sup>

It is obvious that Grantham refused to recognize any distinction between the children of believers and those of non-believers in the effectiveness of the work of Christ on their behalf. All, as beneficiaries of the work of the Second Adam, were numbered in the universal church, though none could enter into the privilege and responsibilities of the visible church. Yet if Grantham denied to the children of believers a unique status he nevertheless maintained that they stood in a unique relationship to the visible church. It was a relationship of prayer and pastoral concern.

At the heart of that relationship stood the Christian home itself. A child of believing parents was cradled in prayer from his earliest years.<sup>39</sup> Upon parents was laid the responsibility of bringing up their children in an atmosphere of family devotion in which they would be taught to pray and to understand the scriptures.<sup>40</sup> For the General Baptists there was no distinction between the "missionary" situation of the first generation and the "church" situation of the second generation. Each new generation had to be led to the consent of faith of their own volition and enter the service of God in the visible church. They did not look to a sacramental act to convey a status, but rather stressed the need for the holy and tender relationship of the Christian family to evoke a living faith. Grantham is even willing to concede to the presbyterians that infants of Christian parents were "holy by prerogative of seed".<sup>41</sup> As the children of Christian parents they could be said "to be related to the visible Church, being in a more visible state of Beatitude, as being then given to God in the Name of Christ from the Womb . . .".<sup>42</sup> Yet this did not justify the administration of baptism.

Grantham provides evidence that there may have been some form of Dedication Service in General Baptist churches. His language is a little ambiguous, however, and it is not clear whether or not he is referring to a specific service. Taking the example of Jesus in the blessing of the children he claims that the children of Baptist parents are "devoted to God by the Prayers of the Church . . . and accordingly we do dedicate (them) to him from the Womb . . .". He exhorts the Paedobaptist churches to be content to follow Christ's example in his blessing of the children and not, by baptism, to do something altogether different and not commanded by Him. They should do to their infants as Christ did to them which were brought to him, either by praying for them themselves, if capable, or by presenting them to Christ's Ministers that they might do it for them in the most solemn manner . . .".<sup>43</sup> It is clear that with the reference to the prayers of the church and the part that would be taken by the minister it is at least possible that there was some form of service for infants.

## 2. PARTICULAR BAPTISTS

In the foregoing pages, dealing with the General Baptists, the path that led to their acceptance of believers' baptism was traced. The Separatist group led by John Smyth of Gainsborough had its roots in the Puritan wing of the Church of England with its strongly Calvinistic character. Their separatism led them to regard the church from which they had broken away as Anti-Christ, a judgment which they held in common with most Separatists. It led them to consider the relationship between an "invalid" church and the sacraments it administered. Other Separatists had claimed that baptism received in the Church of England was valid and that there should be no further baptism upon entrance to a Separatist church. The Smyth group however was not content to rest there, if the church was "invalid" then its sacraments must be equally so. Here the argument doubled back. The "invalidity" of the established church lay in its "mixed" membership, its bounds being marked by territorial and not confessional limits. Yet that "mixed" membership was itself the result of the indiscriminate "parish" baptism of infants. Hence any true reformation of the church must include reformation of its initiating sacrament, the nature of the church must determine the nature of baptism and *vice versa*. This logical progression in Smyth's ecclesiological thought coupled with his fresh examination of the scriptural theology of baptism led him to the re-constitution of his church in Amsterdam on the basis of a confessional baptism.

The General Baptist position was a logical out-working of English Separatist thinking. The seeds of the Amsterdam baptism were already present whilst the group were in England, and we should not look to the Mennonites for an explanation of Smyth's acceptance of believers' baptism. It should also be borne in mind that the manner in which their doctrine of baptism was arrived at was determinative for future General Baptist understanding of the doctrine. It was fundamentally a sacrament of initiation into the church. The Amsterdam period is important in that it led to the acceptance of an Arminian soteriology, but even at this point it should be remembered that the group that seceded under Helwys and returned to England, remained Calvinistic in their understanding of such crucial issues as original sin and the prevenience of grace in faith. They remained virtually untouched by Mennonite theology of the type which Smyth himself came to accept.

The pattern of events in the emergence of the Particular Baptists has marked similarities to that of the General Baptists. Yet these should not confuse for us certain significant differences. It has been generally thought that the General Baptists owed much to their contact with the Dutch whilst the Particulars were wholly indigenous. It has been demonstrated that the former is at least

doubtful, and there are reasons to suspect that the latter is questionable. Glen H. Stassen in his article *Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptist*<sup>44</sup> has effectively demonstrated the introduction of emphases in the Particular Baptist theology of baptism that can be traced to Menno Simons' *Foundation Book*.

The *Stinton Repository* traces the emergence of the Particular Baptists in London over the period between 1616 and 1645.<sup>45</sup> In 1616 Henry Jacob founded an independent Puritan congregation in London, the beliefs of which can be traced in the *Confession and Protestation* which they published. They rejected the "parish" conception of the church and stressed the independency of each congregation. Yet in their attitude to the Church of England they were equivocal compared with the uncompromising attitude of their Separatist brethren. Whilst deploring its "mixed" membership they nevertheless considered that there were "weighty occasions" when it would be right for their members to communicate with the parish churches. In 1630 a secession took place owing to a difference of conviction in the matter of baptism in the established church. A member of the Jacob church had had his child baptised in the parish church. A Mr. Dupper urged that equivocation should cease and that the congregation should reject the parish church in the way that other Separatists had done. This the congregation felt unable to do, with the consequence that Dupper and ten others seceded. The incident tells us nothing about the doctrine of baptism that was held by the Jacob congregation. It does not appear that Dupper's objection was to infant baptism as such. In 1633 another group was given a friendly dismissal, again the reason being the congregation's attitude to the Church of England. The *Stinton* records state that this secession took place "Mr. Eaton with some others receiving a further baptism".<sup>46</sup> The crucial question remains unanswered. Why this "re-baptism"? It is tempting to see here a similarity with the General Baptist rejection of the validity of Anglican baptism, after all the point at issue was the validity of the Anglican church. But it is impossible to be dogmatic.

In 1638 there was a third secession of six members who were of "the same judgment with Sam Eaton" who joined themselves to John Spilsbury. These ". . . being convinced that Baptism was not for Infants, but professed Believers joyned with Mr. Jo : Spilsbury . . ." <sup>47</sup> In this development there is nothing inconsistent with that which took place amongst the General Baptists. The departure comes with Richard Blunt's stress upon the importance of the *mode* of baptism and his advocacy of the death-burial-resurrection *motif* as symbolised in immersion. There follows his visit to the Collegiants in Holland, an off-shoot of the Mennonites, and the baptism of the members of the congregation by immersion upon his return. In 1644 the first Particular Baptist Confession was published and this, together with the other Particular Confessions of the seven-

teenth century (with one notable exception), are evidence of the radical departure in baptismal theology that they made. The death-burial-resurrection *motif* is dominant. References to the sacrament as an initiating ordinance are almost non-existent, the only exception being the 1655 Somerset Confession which in Article XXIV states that the baptised are ". . . thus planted in the visible body of Christ".<sup>48</sup> Lumpkin states that there were General Baptists within the area of the Western Association and that the Confession, with its less rigid Calvinism, may have been an attempt to include both General and Particulars within it.<sup>49</sup> The Confessions make no explicit references to children and their status apart from one in the 1677 London Confession. This reproduces unaltered a statement on "Elect infants dying in their infancy" from the Westminster Confession on which it is modelled.<sup>50</sup>

Against that brief, if familiar, background the Particular attempts to describe the status of infants must be seen. Unlike the General Baptists, the contingent bond between baptism and church did not lie at the heart of their theological attempts to deal with the problem. The matter was rather discussed in Calvinistic terms of the covenant: here they began, believing that a right understanding of the covenant was essential to a right understanding of the church and the proper recipients of baptism. Within that framework they sought to describe the relationship of children to the church. Inevitably involved for them too, were the doctrines of election and original sin. Both of these were factors in the thorny problem of children dying in their infancy.

The idea of continuity between the Old Israel and the New Israel was basic to the Calvinistic-Separatist view of the church. Throughout is revealed the one gracious purpose of God in election and redemption. As Israel was elected to be the people of God by an act of sheer grace, so the church consists of the elect whom God has chosen in His grace. What was prepared and fostered in Israel, received its completion and fulfilment in Christ, and was carried into the whole world by the church. This view would certainly have been shared by the Particular Baptists. Dispute arose at the point of analogies between the old covenant relationship and the new. This is especially true of the place of children within the covenant people. Under the old covenant a child born of Jewish parents shared in all the benefits and promises of the covenant. The mark of the covenant in the male Jewish child was circumcision, whereby the covenant was sealed in him and he was numbered amongst the people of God. The Separatists held that the practice of the old covenant pre-figured the new. The children of believers were beneficiaries of the covenant relationship together with their parents. The sign by which the covenant was sealed to them was baptism administered, as it had been in the old covenant, in the infancy of the child.

The Particular Baptist writers of this period did not endeavour to deny the continuity between the old and new covenants. Rather they claimed that the types and ordinances of the old were themselves subject to Christ and to be interpreted in the light of the work of Christ. Christ Himself marked the transition from the old to the new, but there was also in Christ a break between the old and the new. Captain Paul Hobson wrote of Christ in His prophetic office, in which He is infinitely superior to Moses. Christ is the expositor of Moses not Moses of Christ. In Infant-baptism men "make the old Testament expound the new, whereas the new should expound the old; Christ should, and doth expound Moses".<sup>51</sup> Henry Lawrence claimed that to make circumcision determinative for baptism was "to sende us to schoole to the old covenant" and was a denial of the sufficiency and faithfulness of Christ as law-giver.<sup>52</sup> Francis Cornwell argued that the old covenant was given until the time of "Reformation, Heb. 9.10. Namely until Christ the substance of all the shadows was come, and crucified Eph. 2, 14, 15".<sup>53</sup>

In addition to their insistence upon the prior authority of Christ, the Particulars also drew attention to the difference in the two covenants. In his *An Exercitation about Infant-Baptism*, submitted to the Westminster Assembly in 1646, John Tombes drew attention to the differences between the Abrahamic covenant and that enjoyed by believers.<sup>54</sup> Israel, as the people of God, was a nation. The ordinances administered belonged to her function as a nation as well as her covenant relationship with God. When the covenant passed through Christ, from the old to the new, it passed to a spiritual seed. The significance of the place of Christian believers in the age-long covenant imperfectly seen in the Abrahamic covenant, was not their physical descendancy but their possession of a faith and trust similar to that of Abraham. Neither could the principle of natural descent hold good amongst believers, as salvation and interest in the covenant did not rest upon this. Similarly, the nature of the covenant community had changed as between the old and the new. The community of the old covenant was a closely-knit racial group, for whom the promises of God were bound up in their fate and destiny as a political entity. The community of the new covenant was a multi-racial community, called out of the nations by God's free grace. For them the covenant was not affected by any hopes or aspirations of nationhood.

The question of generation was bound up with that of the circumcision analogy. Particular Baptists denied any "fleshy privilege"<sup>55</sup> to the infants of believers, claiming that the new covenant did not recognise "fleshy seed", the new covenant knowing none and owning none "to be the seed, but such as are Christs".<sup>56</sup> The circumcision analogy was dealt with by Henry Lawrence in his

work *Of Baptisme* (1646) in Chapters II-XIII. He raises five points on the matter :

(a) The difference in qualification between circumcision in the old covenant and baptism in the new. Holiness in the old was a matter of status, in the new a matter of regeneration and character.<sup>57</sup>

(b) The argument already encountered that the ordinances of the old covenant are not determinative of the new. He insists that an institution must be seen to be of God.<sup>58</sup>

(c) The sense in which believers are to be regarded as the heirs of Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant itself was subject to considerations other than those of natural descent. Ishmael and Isaac were both sons of Abraham, but the former was rejected and the latter accepted. In Abraham there are two seeds, the children of the flesh and the children of promise.<sup>59</sup>

(d) The discontinuity between the old covenant and the new is marked by the fact that a Jew cannot claim a New Testament ordinance on the grounds of his natural descent from Abraham, neither can any Gentile receive baptism on the ground of prerogative of birth. Baptism is administered "upon their fearing God, and working righteousness, and having their hearts purified by faith".<sup>60</sup>

(e) The final argument deals with the challenge that the denial of baptism to the infants of believers means that the privileges of Christians are less than those of the Jews. Further reference will be made to this below, it is sufficient to note at this point that Lawrence stands by the principle that the church is to consist of "saints really so and no other . . .".

The Particular Baptist understanding of the covenant thus excluded children from membership of the visible church. Francis Cornwell re-iterated the principle that baptism was to be administered only to such as believed in Christ and so could continue in the Apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.<sup>61</sup> Apart from considerations of the nature of the covenant, the Particulars stressed that baptism itself admitted the baptised to all other privileges and responsibilities in the life of the church. Robert Garner asks, "Are they meet to be added unto the body in baptism, who are in no ways meet to partake in the privileges and liberties of the body? Who are in no ways meet to walk with the body in doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, in prayers, and in other liberties?"<sup>62</sup> There was opposition to anything in the nature of a "sacramental dichotomy". To grant baptism was in itself to grant the right to communion; the church could not demand certain requirements for one and something wholly other for the second. Paul Hobson states that there is a unity between the two, ". . . the oneness that is between the ground that (Christ) layes down for men to be baptised, & the ground he layes down for men to break Bread".<sup>63</sup> Baptism was thus regarded as admit-



ting to the wholeness of life in the Body of Christ and was not to be regarded as partial incorporation.

The Baptist exclusion of infants from membership of the church was judged by some to be tantamount to excluding them from the Kingdom of God. The charge raised an issue that lies at the heart of the problem of the place of children within the church, viz. the relationship of the church to the Gospel. John Tombes denied that the blessings of the Gospel were tied to either church or sacrament.<sup>64</sup> It was impossible to impose limits, even churchly limits, to the gracious activity of God. Tombes did not let the matter rest there however. Like a good Calvinist he turned to a familiar concept and applied it to the place of children in the church. The requirement of faith and repentance excluded them from membership of the visible church but this could not exclude them from the invisible church known only to God. Salvation was bound up in the mystery of election. The church finally was to consist of the elect and reformed doctrine did not identify the elect either with all the baptised or with all members of the visible church. To say that infants should not be baptised and numbered among the visible church was not to deny their election. If they were elect infants then salvation was still not carried outside of the church, as they were members of the invisible church.<sup>65</sup> The argument may not appear convincing, but it simply exploited a weakness of the Calvinist doctrinal system in which there was an incompatibility between a limited election and a free baptismal grace.<sup>66</sup>

Even as election could not be tied to baptism neither could it be tied to natural descent. John Tombes claimed that one could be no more certain of the election of the infants of believers than of those of unbelievers, the mercy of God was ever free.<sup>67</sup> Henry Lawrence was more optimistic, believing that even as God's love had been revealed in the election of the parents so it would be revealed in the election of the infants, but "to make God consider (as the object of children's election) the faith of their parents, is worse than the opinion of the Arminians who make faith and works foreseen the object of every particular man's election . . ."<sup>68</sup> The ground of hope for a child's salvation lay not in baptism but in election. It was to the child's "best advantage" that baptism should be withheld until election had evidenced itself in faith and obedience.<sup>69</sup>

If the Particular Baptist understanding of covenant, church and baptism excluded children, they nevertheless recognised, as had the General Baptists, that the infants of believers stood in a particular relationship to the church. John Tombes could speak of the children of believers as being "born in the bosom of the Church, of godly parents, who by prayers, instruction, example, will undoubtedly educate them in the true faith of Christ . . ."<sup>70</sup> The twin influence of home and church were ever regarded as the

priceless inheritance of the child of Christian parents. A bold attempt to describe the relationship of the child to the church is made by Henry Lawrence. He discusses 1 Cor. 7.14, in those days as in these a familiar plank in the paedobaptist platform.<sup>71</sup> He suggests that the willingness of the husband to continue cohabiting with the wife (v. 12, 13) will mean that the husband is within a spiritual influence and may also consent to the Christian education of his children. Because the husband lives with his wife, and the children are within the sphere of Christian education, it can be claimed that they are sanctified, in so far as they are preparing for faith and obedience: "so as the unbelieving parent and the children of mixed birth, may be called as Tertullian sayes, *Candidati timoris*: and as afterward by others, *Candidati fidei*, Probationers or competitors for feare and faith . . .".<sup>72</sup> The sanctity of husband and children is not one of status, such as justified the baptism of infants, but of influence. It is because husband and children, through the wife, are within the scope of Christian influence, that they stand in a holy relationship to the church. "There being already wrought a good pleasure, or willingness to abide and cohabe on the unbeliever's part, husband or wife, and the children in that respect being subject to Christian education, and to the beholding of holy examples, true conversion and faith, which brings them into a state of salvation, may be in time accomplished in them . . .".<sup>73</sup> It is the providence of God which has brought unbelieving partners and the children under such a spiritual influence. It is under this influence that they may be led to faith. Lawrence quotes Calvin as distinguishing between sanctification which refers to regeneration, "which belongs to the elect of God", and that which refers to being prepared or destined for a certain end: ". . . so those unbelieving parents by their willingness to abide with believers, and their children in regard of the opportunity of a holy education, seem to be as it were, destined or prepared for regeneration, and for that state which accompanies salvation; and in that respect as, in a large sense, may be called sanctified or holy".<sup>74</sup>

To such as these the church stands in a position of responsibility. Their relationship to the church provides grounds for hope that they will come to faith: ". . . the church within whose pale they seeme by a providence to live, and to be cast, ought to have a more especiall eye after them, and care of them, by virtue at least of that generall injunction, 'As you have opportunity do good to all men, especially to the household of faith'; under the shadow of which these are come".<sup>75</sup> Lawrence has here given a clear picture of the relationship of the child to the church. He is under the shadow of the church and, by virtue of his parents' faith and his own Christian education, he is preparing for the full life of the church and initiation by baptism at the appropriate time. His

transition from a passive relationship to an active participation is marked by the awakening of faith within him and his own trust in Jesus Christ. It is the duty of the church to exert its influence upon those within its sphere of teaching, example and Christian love.

The final aspect of Particular Baptist teaching on this subject that needs to be examined are the related issues of original sin and the status of the unbaptised infant. The matter was dealt with along four lines.

(1) The first may be described as an optimistic agnosticism on the status of infants. Baptism without faith and repentance was no baptism. Further, although Anglican sacramental teaching rooted an infant's salvation in baptism, those who were in the reformed tradition could not regard baptism in the same way. The attitude of Calvin himself has already been seen.<sup>76</sup> Salvation rested upon election. Such attempts as were made to describe the relationship of infants to God must be in terms of God's revelation of Himself in Christ. So Christopher Blackwood could observe, "First, the Scripture has not revealed to us any thing clearly, concerning the salvation or damnation of infants. . . . It is most likely that infants as well as others, are saved by the presentment of the satisfaction of Christ to God's justice for originall sin . . ." <sup>77</sup> The argument has similarities with that employed by General Baptists, except that Blackwood would limit the benefit of Christ's atonement to "elect infants only" <sup>78</sup>

(2) The argument of moral responsibility. The distinction is made, already encountered in General Baptist teaching, between original and actual sin. It is interesting to note, however, that the distinction between the first death and the second death does not occur. The argument is employed in another way. Christopher Blackwood denied that the Scriptures taught that men were damned for original sin alone, apart from actual sin. Infants who died innocent of actual sin were to be regarded as "saved through the presentment of the satisfaction of Christ's death to God's justice . . ." <sup>79</sup> In similar vein, Jeremiah Ives denied that the child was to suffer for the sin of the father, and believed that a child dying without sin of its own volition might well be saved "although they are not taught inwardly or effectually" <sup>80</sup> Robert Garner too speaks of baptism as being a confirmation and witness of remission of sins through the Holy Spirit. He asks, "Are Infants meet to have repentance and remission of sinnes preached to them through the Name of Christ? and to be baptised in his Name for the remission of sinnes? Are they meet to have remission of sinnes, through Christ, witnessed to their heart in baptisme, by the Holy Spirit, who neither know their sinne, nor know Christ, nor know the Holy Spirit, in his gracious and comfortable operation?" <sup>81</sup>

The emphasis upon moral responsibility is, to an extent, a de-

parture from Calvinism. It was created by the doctrine of baptism held by the Baptists. The Calvinist teaching of irresistible grace is better suited to infant baptism. Such a baptism is a witness to prevenient grace and when faith, and repentance are awakened a man can look back to his baptism knowing that his salvation rested in the act of God in Christ apart from any response or participation of himself. The price of such a baptism was that it was administered to those who later proved evidently not to be of the elect, as well as the elect themselves. The Baptist position laid an emphasis upon man's response. They still believed that this response was made solely by the grace of God, yet nevertheless it had to be evidenced and then gathered up into the sacrament of baptism. Such an emphasis upon response leads to an emphasis on responsibility. Once it had been said that man's response to the Gospel of Christ is a decisive part of entry into the Christian faith, the sweep of irresistible grace in faith had lost something of its absolute nature. A child is unable to respond to the Gospel and has no knowledge of sin. His sin is the sin of nature not of wilful commission. Through the work of Christ the sin of nature is forgiven — there being no wilful commission, there can be no repentance. Therefore, original sin is not a barrier to the salvation of an infant who dies without baptism. Baptism belongs to a realm of experience to which he has not attained. The child cannot be held responsible and damned for the sin of his nature.

(3) The third line of argument has already been encountered in John Tombes in his *Examen* of Stephen Marshall's Westminster sermon on baptism. It is the unwillingness to tie the grace of God to the channels of church and baptism. Marshall had claimed that Baptists fell between two stools, either unbaptised infants perished in their birth-sin or such sin had to be denied. Tombes countered, "May it not be said that some, or all infants are saved, notwithstanding their birth-sin, by the grace of God electing them, putting them into Christ, uniting them to him by his Spirit, forgiving them their birth-sin through Christ's obedience although they be not baptized?"<sup>82</sup>

(4) This point arises from the third. The Particular Baptists saw the child in his immediate relationship to God Himself and to the work of Christ. One is tempted to say that at this point they were more Calvinist than Calvin! Church and sacrament arose out of the work of Christ. Men were saved through the free, electing grace of God. In that redemption they could claim no qualification, no virtue, no contribution towards it. They were not saved because they were in the church, they were in the church because they were saved. They were not baptised because of their parents' faith, baptism appealed for its justification only to the God-given faith and repentance of the candidate and his experience of Christ. Such an experience stemmed from free grace, perhaps mediated

through the influence of Church and Christian parents, but not caused by such influence. For the Calvinist Baptist man's salvation rested utterly and entirely upon God's election. The same was true of infants. They were to be seen in the light of the work of Christ. Both Blackwood and Garner assert that infants are in relationship with God through election, and such relationship can extend to "the Infants of believers, & unbelievers, of Turkes, & Indians . . .".<sup>83</sup> Salvation depends upon God's election and not upon parentage. The elect are known only to God, but because they are his through free grace and not for the faith of their fathers, there can be no limit set to God's election.

Thus what had begun as an ecclesiological problem was worked through to a soteriological conclusion. The terms within which the Particular Baptists had to work made it more difficult for them than for their Arminian brethren of the General Baptists. Within the framework of their Calvinism however, it can be claimed that their attempt was consistent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A. Peel and L. H. Carlson (eds.), *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Broune*, Non-conformist Texts, pp. 256, 258, 262; W. L. Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 93, 94.

<sup>2</sup> cf. C. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Cambridge, 1912, Vol. I, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Lumpkin, *ibid.*, pp. 120, 228-29, 318.

<sup>4</sup> W. T. Whitley (ed.), *The Works of John Smyth*, Cambridge, 1915, "The Character of the Beast", (1609), p. 564.

<sup>5</sup> cf. N. Sykes, *Old Priest and New Presbyter*, Cambridge, 1956, and more recently, W. Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, London, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, (1609), *op. cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>7</sup> *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church*, (1607), *ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Paralleles*, etc., *ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>9</sup> *Principles and Inferences*, etc., *ibid.*, p. 251; *Paralleles*, etc., *ibid.*, pp. 353-54.

<sup>10</sup> *Paralleles*, etc., *ibid.*, pp. 455, 466, cf. pp. 514f.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 567.

<sup>12</sup> *The Character of the Beast*, pp. 565, 659.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 567, 586, 611.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 659.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 579ff.

<sup>16</sup> Lumpkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 120, 182, 228, 317.

<sup>17</sup> *The Character of the Beast*, p. 638.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 567, 568.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 641.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 609.

<sup>21</sup> "General Baptist Origins: The question of Anabaptist Influence", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXXVI (October, 1962).

<sup>22</sup> Lumpkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-18, 178, 306-07.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 178, 228.

<sup>24</sup> *A Short and Plain Proof*, pages unnumbered.

<sup>25</sup> Lumpkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 225, 226, 228.

- 26 H. Hagger, *The Foundation of the Font Discovered*, 1653, London, pp. 59f.
- 27 Lumpkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-31.
- 28 T. Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, (1678), 2nd Treatise, Pt. II, p. 3.
- 29 *ibid.*, p. 178.
- 30 *ibid.*, Book 2, p. 6; cf. *The Controversie Concerning Infants Church Membership Epitomized*, London (1680), pp. 38-39.
- 31 *The Infants Advocate* (1688), p. 23.
- 32 *ibid.*, p. 13.
- 33 *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Chapt. IV, pp. 77f.
- 34 *ibid.*, Book II, Section II, pp. 4f.
- 35 *The Controversie . . . Epitomized*, pp. 6-8.
- 36 *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 37 *ibid.*, p. 46.
- 38 *ibid.*, p. 20.
- 39 *ibid.*, p. 19.
- 40 *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book III, Chapt. 12, Sect. III, pp. 67-69.
- 41 *ibid.*, Book II, Sect. II, pp. 5, 6: A reference to the use of 1 Cor. 7: 14 in Presbyterian paedobaptist apologetic.
- 42 *ibid.*
- 43 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 44 *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4 (October, 1962).
- 45 *Baptist Historical Society Transactions*, Vol. I.
- 46 *ibid.*, p. 220.
- 47 *ibid.*, p. 231.
- 48 *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. W. L. Lumpkin, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 167, 199, 209, 291.
- 49 *ibid.*, p. 202.
- 50 *ibid.*, p. 265.
- 51 *The Fallacy of Infant Baptism Discovered*, London, 1645.
- 52 *Of Baptisme*, London, 1646, pp. 189-190.
- 53 *The New Testament Ratified with the blood of the Lord Jesus is the Magna Charter of Believers in Jesus the Christ dipped*, London, 1646, p. 21 (Annexed to Robert Whittle's *An Answer*).
- 54 *op. cit.*, pp. 2-4.
- 55 Francis Cornwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
- 56 Thomas Collier, *A discourse of true Gospel blessedness in the new covenant*, London, 1659, p. 17.
- 57 *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.
- 58 *ibid.*, p. 187.
- 59 *ibid.*, pp. 198-199.
- 60 *ibid.*, pp. 235-236.
- 61 *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- 62 *A Treatise of Baptism*, London, 1645, pp. 16-17.
- 63 *op. cit.*, p. 13; cf. Christopher Blackwood, *The Storming of Anti-Christ*, London, 1644, p. 19f.
- 64 *Examen of the Sermon of Mr. Stephen Marshall about Infant Baptism*, London, 1645, p. 33.
- 65 *ibid.*, p. 33.
- 66 See P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, p. 642.
- 67 *Examen*, etc., p. 32.
- 68 *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.
- 69 *ibid.*, p. 156.
- 70 *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
- 71 *op. cit.*, pp. 271f.; cf. John Tombes, *Exercitation*, etc., pp. 14f., Robert Garner, *A Treatise of Baptism*, pp. 13f.
- 72 *ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>76</sup> See above p. 243.

<sup>77</sup> *The Storming of Anti-Christ*, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, Part II, p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> *Infants Baptism Disproved*, London, 1655, p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Garner, *op. cit.*, p. 63; cf. C. Blackwood, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 5.

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## THE PRESENT CRISIS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

### NOTES

(Concluded from page 274)

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism* gives one form of philosophical Existentialism in its bearing on ethics. D. Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers From Prison* introduces the reader to religionless Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> For a critical study of Act-agapism and Rule-agapism see P. Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (Scot. Jour. of Theol. Occasional Papers, No. 11).

<sup>6</sup> See my own critical study, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New Studies in Ethics, published by Macmillan).

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> For a very lucid and reasonable discussion of the subject see G. J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (New Studies in Ethics, published by Macmillan).

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 119.

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