



# UPDATE

*Issue 61*  
*Spring 2010*



*...well if he's going to be an Olympic swimming champion  
he needs to start training as soon as possible...*

## **In this issue:**

"Household baptism" -  
differing viewpoints

Vicar's Integrity (wrongly)  
challenged

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and policies

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...and a moving personal  
testimony

## Coalition!

“Each should be fully convinced in their own mind” Rom 14.5

I am conscious that the very title will be a give-away as to drafting period - election time! We all now know how the British Constitution has managed to create a coalition between parties (in that case political ones) from such apparently widely differing standpoints for the common good (we hope!)

But the BI constitution lives within coalition! Paramount to our objectives is baptism itself—that it should be administered with integrity and in accordance with Canon Law. But within that, we carefully recognise the differing stances of our members ranging from those deeply unhappy about infant baptism and those equally unhappy that some members can hold that viewpoint at all!

In April, the Church press contained a letter from a lady ordinand, who having taken Scripture as her guide, was provoked to write publicly about her view that she could find no proof text either for or against infant baptism, Her *provocateur* contended she should withdraw from ordination as she was unable to advise her potential congregation correctly. Suffice it here to say that even the gentle response from your Vice Chair provoked an even stronger riposte.

The issue appears in different guises in this edition. As a total precedent we borrow from a policy statement from an American community church which sets out what seems a most irenic policy allowing full membership to those who either support “household baptism” or who do not. But the key to that policy seems to be that the parents have to have faith; a dividing line for many of us who feel outrage at the most extreme baptism of children where the parents have absolutely no intention of meeting the minimum requirements of the promises.

However it is one of the great things about our fellowship that even though committee, council and members have such diverse views, we share in common the desire that baptism should be administered with integrity.

And again we are united in the belief that for the children both of believing and unbelieving parents, the service of thanksgiving for the gift of a child is a fully valid alternative. So without apology we set out articles containing these diverse views; we are proud, not apologetic, for the diversity (coalition!) within our fellowship,

# "Household Baptism"

By Scott Sauls, Greentree Community Church

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It is the regular practice at Greentree Webster to baptize two groups of people. The first group consists of men, women, and children who demonstrate both a genuine faith in Jesus Christ and a desire to join the Greentree church family (i.e., "believer's baptism"). The second group consists of the infants and children of our church members. Perhaps one of the most common questions asked of us is, "Why do you baptize infants and children who have not yet made a public profession of faith in Christ?" The simple answer to this question is that (1) while we firmly believe this is not an issue over which Christians should divide, yet (2) we are convinced that both the Bible and early church history support the practice of household baptism, which includes infants and young children. Following are some of the factors that have led us to this conclusion.

## **Biblical Rationale**

It is the belief of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and of Greentree Webster that God's covenant of grace (His promise to be our God and have us as His people), in a mysterious way that we cannot quite grasp, extends to the children, "offspring," or "seed" of believers. Such children, we believe, therefore have a right to the covenant sign, which in the New Testament is baptism (in the Old Testament the sign was circumcision). Following is a detailed reasoning of why we, at the request of those who share our beliefs on this matter, will baptize infants, as well as other children in a believing household who have not yet made a profession of faith.

**God's covenant  
of grace ..  
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children of  
believers**

## **In the New Testament, baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant.**

Colossians 2:11-12 teaches that baptism is the full expression of circumcision. The covenant of circumcision required that the infant male be circumcised as a newborn infant (Genesis 17:12), and this covenant was to be an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:13). Physical circumcision is clearly no longer in effect (Galatians 6:11-18), but the covenant it represents is still in effect (Romans 2:29). The new outward sign of this "everlasting" covenant with believers and their children is baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Therefore we believe it follows, then,

Acts 2:38-39 describes baptism with virtually the same language and terms with which Genesis 17:9-14 describes circumcision. The promise connected with baptism in Acts 2:38-39 explicitly includes the children of believers, as did the promise connected with circumcision in Genesis 17:9-14. No mention of a required age or profession of faith is made with respect to such children

As circumcision was a requirement for the Old Testament household (Genesis 17:10, 12-13), so we believe, was baptism for the New Testament household (Acts 16:15, 31-33, 1 Corinthians 1:16). Never once are children said to be excluded from a household baptism, except in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, who obviously had no children.

There is no biblical command given for believers to cease the application of the covenant sign with their children.

**In the New Testament, believers' children were regarded as members of the covenant community.**

In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus said that God's Kingdom belongs to little children (from the Greek *brephe*, which literally means "baby" or "infant").

In Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21 Paul addresses children (from the Greek *tekna*, meaning "child") as believers in Christ. He speaks to them as he would any saint, regardless of age.

**Paul refers to the children of believers as "holy" (..set apart for God)**

In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul refers to the children (*tekna*) of believers as "holy" (meaning set apart for God). The word translated "holy" (*hagia*) is the exact same word used elsewhere by the apostles in reference to believers (translated "saints" – see Ephesians 1:1 for example) The New Testament assumption, then, is that children of believers should be regarded and treated as believers unless or until they prove themselves to be covenant breakers

In 2 Timothy 3:15, Timothy is said to have known the Scriptures from infancy (*brephe*)

In Luke 1:15, John the Baptist is said to have been filled with the Spirit, 'even from his mother's womb'.

The New Testament suggests nowhere that the sign of the covenant (previously circumcision now baptism) is to be withheld from the children of believers until they make an informed profession of faith in Christ.

### **Disclaimer**

Our position on household baptism does not reflect a belief that baptism itself saves a child. In order to be saved, a child must possess his / her own personal faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. The initial seeds of faith may or may not be in chronological union with the time of baptism. When a child professes faith at some point after baptism, that is the time in which the baptism and all that it signifies takes full effect. Until that time, the child's baptism is regarded as the sign of the child's inclusion in the church community (and all its benefits, except the Lord's Supper) by virtue of his / her parents' faith and the promise of God to be "their God and the God of their children."

**When a child professes faith ..., that is the time in which the baptism and all that it signifies takes full effect.**

### **Historical Rationale**

It is a well-attested fact that household / infant baptism was the universal practice of the early church. No reputable biblical historian or scholar, whether Presbyterian or Baptist or otherwise, will dispute this fact.

Irenaeus (a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John) speaks of infant baptism as a universal practice in the early church. Tertullian (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century) acknowledged the universal practice of infant baptism

Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries) spoke of infant baptism as the common practice of the early church.

These things being the case, were household (and consequently infant) baptism *not* the New Testament church practice, then the conclusion must be made that a full reversal of the early church's practice occurred immediately following the death of the last apostle. Because there is neither biblical nor extra-biblical evidence indicating so much as a debate about this issue in the first or second centuries, such a reversal is extremely unlikely. We conclude this in a large part because there is a wealth of documentation about virtually every other theological debate and/or alleged "heresy" in the early church.

## **Greentree Webster's Attitude about Household Baptism**

We encourage household baptism at Greentree, but *do not require* it of those who cannot accept it. To us the biblical and supporting historical teaching seems clear, so we encourage Greentree parents to have their children baptized. However, parents who are not convinced of our position are *not* required to have their children baptized in order to be active and fully received church members, and will not in any way be pressured to do so. **This is an issue about which we are happy to disagree without it being any hindrance at all to full Christian fellowship. (Editor's emphasis)**

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## **Why? Oh why?**

### **Long-standing Member Canon Walter Goundry takes a saddened view of household baptism within our coalition!**

Why did the Church decide to baptise infants? We cannot rewrite the past, but also we cannot write it in stone. If the interpretation of 'whole households' excludes children, children being no different from servants (Gal. 4.1), and history tells us it was later, what pushed the Church this way? We know Tertullian wrote against it.

If it was theological, what was the theology? Was the belief that as a result of the Fall everything and everybody was condemned? The conclusion in that case is that the sooner we get out of this position the better. Until recently 'limbo' suggested this. Was baptism seen to be the equivalent of circumcision? Were the pressures also socio-cultural? Whatever the reasons for the introduction of infant baptism, the baby seems to have gone down the plug hole with the bath water.

In one sense then this is an ideal opportunity to change our practice. Many parents want to mark a birth but do not want to make promises which they know they can't and won't keep. At this level the Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child fits the bill exactly. I also believe it is theologically sound! It took the Church almost four centuries of discussion, some of it bloody, to produce a story, a meta-narrative, a big picture, an understanding of God, Creation and human beings. That story united a very disparate and disorderly world, more in the west than in the east. That story provided foundation stones for 2000 years of western life. That is a remarkable achievement. That story has been unravelling and not without some good reasons for more than a century. The chaos of western life consequently is all too apparent. Bishop Nazir Ali recently called for a shared story to do the same for our world now.

In fact slowly but surely it is taking place. Theologians and scientists who are Christians are producing a new story. I am not sure that all theologians or scientists, and certainly not the Church at large, are aware of the challenge which this new story puts to our current belief and practice.

This is not the place to go into all the details of this new story but briefly it looks a bit like this. Evolution suggests that the theology of the Fall is not a true account of the spiritual state of creation and human nature, if evolution suggests the restoration of nature and natural theology, (the way God works) if evolution suggests a progressive revelation of God by himself and of himself to humans in their development being progressively more able to receive and interpret it, culminating in our Lord and the promise in the Spirit of more to come. In practical terms we as humans stand where Adam stood, at the beginning, through being created with unlimited potential.

A thanksgiving for birth, a thanksgiving for creation, a new life is exactly right, theologically right and sound, leaving the door open as Jesus did for growth, an acknowledgement of our commonness, created by God. We have to overcome the desire to be wanted and loved, valued in a small community (which is right) but that makes us define ourselves by those we exclude and destroy. If we are to identify ourselves by our differences then we need to be careful how we do it. Jesus, against his culture, talked to women, to Samaritans and a Syro-Phoenician woman and rewrote some laws, including the Sabbath.

G K Chesterton was especially scathing of those who downplayed the human and common:-  
“human was human before it was Christian”, “no Church manufactured legs by which men walked or danced, either in pilgrimage or ballet”, “once men sang round a table in chorus, now one man sings alone because he can sing better”, before long “only one man can laugh because he can laugh better than the rest.” “There is no innate contradiction between our earthly natural lives and our supernatural destiny. Even mere existence reduced to its primary limits was extraordinary enough to be exciting. I am ordinary in the correct sense of that term, which means an acceptance of order, a Creator and Creation, the common sense of gratitude for creation, life and love as gifts permanently good.”  
John Drane: “An easy assumption is that there is an easy divide between what is secular and sacred”. “Christians operate with an unhealthy and certainly unbiblical mindset which places God in opposition to his world.”

**If we are to identify ourselves by our differences then we need to be careful**

I have quoted these at length. There are of course others, because they make further sense for Christians who believe in evolution. Further, they give us the beginnings of a theology of thanksgiving for all without distinction and leave baptism for those of Christian faith later.

This appraisal of our theology makes us ask questions too about the Eucharist and the atonement (the meaning of the cross). Just as it is possible to have different theologies of atonement, exemplarist and penal,, so it is with other doctrines, and still remain faithful to scripture. My favourite Psalm is 139:- “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well...”

A national/international Church needs a common practice. A common practice will only come from a common theology. With regard to baptism, many clergy do their best in difficult circumstances with more or less success, but if what works in one place for whatever reason, is not acceptable universally, then such practice would not do. For example, what seems to succeed in the “Sssh Free” Church (cf, Update 60) would not be good enough. Specifically in that account it looks as though children are admitted to communion because we read: “devise a service that is radically inclusive of children on the basis of their full membership of the Church through baptism”. Full membership of the church means the right to receive communion.

I am not against children being admitted to communion, or indeed anyone else for that matter, for I think our vision of God in the Eucharist is too small and too narrow. Cathy Ross in ‘Creating Space, Hospitality as a Metaphor for Mission’ writes that hospitality is important. The gospels have much to teach us about meals. But that is another story!

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### **Time to look at our web site for wisdom !**

<http://www.baptism.org.uk/ratcob.htm>

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Again we want to reiterate that BI respects differing views relating to infant baptism and indeed to the attestation from the early historical writings (“Patristic Evidence”) The following pages taken from our web site were written many years ago by **Bishop Colin Buchanan**. Here we have both scriptural and historical argument in favour of infant baptism.

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In terms of the world Churches, to baptise infants, far from being an obvious practice, is actually a highly divisive and misleading one.

If, as is claimed, the Pentecostalist strand of evangelical Christianity has numbers now in excess of 400 million (ranking second only to the Roman Catholics), then these, plus the Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Independent Evangelical Churches, and many smaller anti-paedobaptist denominations, provide a great phalanx of opponents of infant baptism.



So we cannot affirm in the face of this phalanx that we simply continue infant baptism because it is a received tradition, or, say, an evangelistic opportunity.

There has to be a better rationale, or we should discontinue it. We cannot stay here on bad arguments, but merely note the folly of resting on unsure grounds.

Clearly in the New Testament baptism was given to adult converts as part of imparting the gospel to them and of registering their response. Was it then given to infants?

**We.. can hardly live with a good conscience .. if, in our heart of hearts, we know that infant baptism is actually unbiblical and misleading.**

The earliest actual 'camera-shot' evidence that infants were baptised is admittedly not in the New Testament, but in the writings of Tertullian in North Africa around 190-200 AD, where he is trying to change what was then current practice by urging that infants should *not* be baptised. So the practice existed in the second century - when did it begin? Was it there from the start, perfectly traceably in Scripture itself?

The following lines of evidence, when put together, point to the answer 'yes'.

1. The Old Testament sign of the covenant of God, circumcision, was given to infants - yet its meaning, according to Paul, was that of a sign of the righteousness which comes through faith (Rom 4.12).

Yet baptism is also - indeed far more so - a sign of the righteousness which comes through faith (cf Rom 6.3-4, Gal 3.26-27).

If circumcision could properly belong to infants before they professed faith, is there not a strong possibility that baptism is also open in appropriate cases to infants?

2. The baptism of proselytes (converts to Judaism) is known in the late first century AD, and families so baptised brought their children into baptism with them.

Certainly, in the atmosphere of Roman Empire women could become Jews in their own persons, which may have suggested the need of a ritual initiation other than circumcision.

If the practice began round the Empire before the 20s AD, then it is a clear background factor in the New Testament. It would add to the likelihood that converts to Christ took their children into Christian baptism with them.

There were proselytes present on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.10), and they heard that the heart of their existing Judaism was in fact Jesus Christ, that the promise was to them *and to their children*, and that they were now to be baptised into the name of Christ (Acts 2.38-39).

If their children had been baptised into Judaism with them, it is almost unimaginable that they did not now take their children into Christian baptism with them.

3. There are the New Testament references to 'households' being baptised: Lydia's (Acts 16.15); the Philippian jailer's (Acts 16.33), Stephanas' (1 Cor 1.16) – and possibly also Crispus' (Acts 18.8). These do not quite say that infants were present among those being baptised (in other words, we still lack 'camera-shot' evidence), but the broad inclusive word for a whole household neither distinguishes the ages of those baptised, nor suggests that all were above a certain age, nor rules out any groups as being part of the 'household'.

These unselfconscious, passing mentions of New Testament practice are almost of themselves determinative.

4. We need to look at the baptism of adult converts in the New Testament also. They were baptised *on the spot*; indeed it is almost appropriate to say they were *converted in the water* - in principle they entered it as applicants, they emerged from it as converts (see, eg, Acts 2.38-41, Acts 8.35-38).

**...our  
theologising  
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practice.**

So there was no probationary period leading from first profession of faith to later baptism, such as there has been usual in most parts of Christian history and missionary practice since then.

Of course, there have been good pastoral reasons for the introduction of probationary or 'catechumenal' preparation, and there may be good pastoral reasons for preparation for adult baptism today. But the archetypes in the New Testament show no such preparation, and our theologising about baptism must work from the archetypes and not from later adjusted practice.

Baptism came at the very beginning of the Christian life, as true 'initiation'. Amongst its many meanings was that it established a basis of *treating people as believers* thereafter.

The baptised are believers; and the believers are baptised. If in Acts 10 the Spirit falls upon Gentiles (which had hardly been anticipated), then all that Peter can say is 'Quick! Get the water! We cannot leave these new believers unbaptised a second longer! (Acts 10.44-48).

The New Testament does not allow for unbaptised believers; all that can be said to them is 'Quick! Get the water!'; and thus delaying the baptism of the children of believers runs the risk (or underlines the policy) of creating a category of unbaptised believers as they grow up.

5            Lastly, in this cumulative argument, there persists a question from the New Testament: 'How should believers bring up their children?' If the answer is 'As unbelievers to be later converted,' then baptism is certainly inappropriate. But is that the answer?

**The New Testament does not allow for unbaptised believers;**

If children in believing homes are being taught to pray to God as 'Father' and to trust in the love of Jesus, who is present with them, then they are in fact being *treated as believers* from the start, and should then be baptised from the start. To treat them in other respects as believers (even in a tentative way) and yet not to baptise them is to fly in the face of the New Testament use of baptism.

How then do we fit our understanding of infant baptism into the whole picture of baptism? The New Testament provides a great range of baptismal *motifs*: repentance, conversion, adoption, rebirth by the Spirit, being united with Christ in his death and resurrection, becoming a disciple, being put under the headship of Christ (or the name of the Holy Trinity), being transplanted into the body of Christ, walking in newness of life morally, and becoming an inheritor of eternal life and of the final resurrection.

It appears reasonable to suggest that everything that is involved in being Christian at all is symbolised in baptism.

Thus we go on to say that, whether baptism is given to an infant or an adult, thereafter that baptised person has the same symbolism of the same baptism pertaining to him or her as a baptised person, irrespective of when the baptism was given.

And it should be noted that the appeal to baptism in the New Testament is not an appeal to remember one's baptism (as though one could recapture the exact psychological state in which one underwent baptism and to respond to its meaning) both tasks for the here and now, not dependent upon whether one's memory can 'pick up' the actual experience.

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## **Editor's Comment**

Our Web site incorporates several responses to COB's rationale and we can do no better than refer you to those pages and the cross references which continue to dialogue within our "coalition". It's intriguing to see how definitive individual writers are as they state their own "position" (see David Perry's latest article against patristic evidence below). As Editor I withhold my own views but ask for mutual respect for all viewpoints based on scripture and study under the Holy Spirit!

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## **Time to challenge an assumption**

David Perry

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*"The assumption of the general practice of infant baptism [from New Testament times] has obscured the significance of the fact that, although we know the names of many children of Christian parents in the fourth century not baptised until their teens or later, explicit testimony is lacking that would permit us to name the first Christian baptised as an infant whose baptism was not a case of clinical baptism." Ferguson , Baptism in the early Church (2009) p. 626*

Note the phrase "explicit testimony is lacking". Perhaps we should start from the contrary assumption that baptism was from the very beginning a rite for adults or, in Jewish terms, for those who were beyond the age of bar mitzvah and now responsible for their actions.

If we assume there was no baptism of infants, there is nothing in the New Testament to conflict with that assumption and everything to support it. Consider just the following:

John the Baptist's baptism of repentance was aimed at those of adult status. John and the crowds around him would have found inconceivable the idea that infants and young children should undergo a baptism of repentance

Jesus was baptised by John as a 30 year old.

Jesus blessed the little children; he did not ask them to be disciples. Jesus' disciples (the Twelve and the Seventy) were adults and it is the continuity of that group which evolves into Followers of the Way and into Christian fellowships dotted around the ancient world.

These four considerations create a presumption that Christian baptism would be for those old enough to be responsible for their actions.

Consider also the unsuitability of infants as candidates for baptism, John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus was crucified and Stephen was stoned. Jewish-Christian antagonism was there from the start. Could the first Christian congregations really have thrust baptism upon babies and young children? With the threat of persecution hanging over them they would surely have kept them out of the firing line, hopefully bringing them up to seek baptism when mature enough to accept the daunting implications of confessing Christ in a hostile world.

Acts 8.12 tells us explicitly that “men and women were baptised” – no mention of babes or children and Acts 9 records that Saul went to Damascus to arrest “both men and women”. This contradicts the notion that “household” baptisms did include babies, which is a hypothesis with no supporting evidence.

**The attempt to equate baptism with circumcision ... is misguided.**

Becoming a Christian was a grown up activity that was entered into through responding to the Gospel, e.g. Rom. 10.10 “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” This all presupposes a process of evangelism and catechesis prior to baptism.

The first Christians were already circumcised. John the Baptist baptised circumcised Jews. The direct link between John's baptism and that of the infant Church cannot be overemphasised. When asked by what authority he operated, Jesus replied “The ministry of John the Baptist, was it of God or man?” John the Baptist shows no interest in circumcision and warns his hearers not to say “We have Abraham for our father”.. The word circumcision never crosses Jesus' lips except as part of an argument over the Sabbath in John 7.22. St Paul says bluntly “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avail anything but a new creature”. To say that baptism is the Christian version of Jewish circumcision is as unreasonable as saying “football is the new cricket.”

## **Vicar's Baptismal Integrity (wrongly) challenged**

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*The Lancashire Evening Post* reported that Mary (names changed - Ed) and her civil female partner were "denied a private christening for their nine-month-old daughter. They said that they were "disgusted" and "not welcome in the Church of England". The minister had point blank said himself that doing this christening would depend on how the congregation would take to us, being parents in a same-sex relationship"

A diocesan statement said that Mr Nunn had explained to them that their proposed baptism would be expected to conform to the normal practice of the C of E. "This would include the couple attending St Matthew's regularly prior to the baptism, taking part in baptism preparation, and the baptism being conducted during a public Sunday-morning worship service."

This led to a letter saying "*the decision was flawed since Canon B21 only says that it is desirable that baptisms take place "on thus a request for a special service cannot be refused. In any case, no event in a church is "private" and there is no canonical reason why "the opinion of the congregation" must be sought. If that is not sought in the case of the children of heterosexual couples, then the Priest-in- Charge's decision was clearly discriminatory.*

*The only one of the three supposed norms put forward by the diocese which is legal is the need for "taking part in baptismal preparation" (Canon B22.3). Apart from this, "No minister shall refuse . . . or delay to baptise any infant" (Canon B22.4).*

*It appears that the Priest-in-Charge has failed in his duty, and that the diocese has supported his failure. It is to be hoped that the lesbian couple are able to find a more welcoming and law-abiding priest down the road."*

One reply pointed out the above ignores the rite of Holy Baptism's Pastoral Introduction (*Common Worship*, page 345), which states that "*The wider community of the local church and friends welcome the new Christian, promising support and prayer for the future*".

A committee member living in the diocese took the trouble to find out THE FACTS and as the minister preferred to avoid perpetuating the issue we contented ourselves with a letter to the correspondent including the following:

*"I think you will agree it was wrong of you to assume that the cleric "failed in his duty" and was not "law-abiding". What was not reported was that (a) the "couple" don't live in his parish anyway [requiring at the very least that*

*permission be sought from the priest of their residential parish], and (b) the child in question is in local authority care, raising questions about whether they can request a baptism anyway.*

*The minister concerned has been law abiding where many clerics fail viz the right to delay for “taking part in baptismal preparation”. That Canon also requires that “the provisions relating to godparents...are observed”; we do not know whether three qualified (baptized and confirmed?) godparents were nominated do we?!*

*You rightly quote Canon B21 as saying it is “desirable” that baptism shall normally be “administered at public worship when the most number of people come together” – but omit quoting the very clear reason - “that the congregation there present may witness the receiving of them that be newly baptized into Christ’s Church, and be put in remembrance of their own profession made to God at their baptism”. How sad that once again there are many churches where even this provision is ignored often for allegedly pragmatic reasons. The spirit of the law is more important than a tendentious legalistic interpretation.“*

Needless to say our irenic letter was rejected by the first correspondent! It does however underline the point in our introduction to Update - people with strong views need to have these based on scripture and law and not just pragmatic views! AND TO KNOW THE FACTS!

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## **Resources**

**We are always encouraged when people email us to say how much they value the resources on our web site - especially those researching baptism as a generic issue and those seeking to introduce effective baptismal policies. Less frequently we are asked for advice on DVDs and CD materials and here we have to say choice is limited. However we include here two reviews of high quality material suitable for use in baptismal preparation or in schools.**

**Of particular general value is the ReQuest portfolio.** The CDs of *Christianity Unpacked* have been distributed free of charge to almost every school in England Scotland and Wales. Anyone who is unable to find a copy in their school can e-mail them and they will send them a copy free of charge (<http://www.request.org.uk/teachers/resources/offer.htm>). The web site can be reached through [www.request.org.uk](http://www.request.org.uk) ).

BI members will be pleased to see a recent addition of a section on the Thanksgiving Service which owes a little to your Editor’s influence!

Faced with 32 new year 6 children and a range of topics from journeys through to believing and belonging, any new teacher would be thrilled to find a readymade site for resources and materials.

I was one such teacher in Autumn 2009, with both the challenge and opportunity to teach RE in a 'different' way, having the chance for the first time to be unapologetically Christian in the bias of the teaching! Working in a Church of England School, with a Christian head teacher allows me the real privilege of bringing Christianity to life for these fabulously enquiring and uncompromising minds.

Our first unit was believing and belonging, giving the chance to introduce the children to the idea of infant and adult baptism and thanksgiving. The children had no difficulty in accepting the differences in these ceremonies, and even commented on how they thought it was good that 'one religion' had lots of different choices!

They were intrigued by the adult baptism, and what was very good was the interview with the young man- this kind of 'real person' really brought the meaning of the ceremony to life for the children. As a church school, we were able to follow this up with an interview in class with another young Christian from a Youth Group , which allowed the children the chance to practise questioning, listening and note-taking skills, as well as deepen their understanding of why Christians feel the need to baptise at all.

The site has a good factual section on the Bible, which formed our next unit 'Sacred Texts', including a section called 'The Bible – a Guide for Life'. For some children in the class, this was one of the few times they had ever been given an idea of how the Bible could help them in life, and being able to provide this guide to them , talk to them about the reality of the text , and how it is relevant now, was a real opportunity.

The Request site is generally easy to use, but as with most, does have little glitches, including not knowing what is on a page before you get to it, being very text heavy, and some of the videos of dramas are a little tired looking and could be improved . I would love to see more cartoon style drama clips, interviews with children on the site and some more interactive tools to use on screen in the lesson.

I will definitely keep using the site for the rest of this year. It has helped with lesson preparation, and given me 'food for thought' about how the subject can be best taught.

Thank you Request- it is lovely to have free materials, especially those with a genuine Christian theme!





## First Steps – A Parents’ Guide To Baptism (DVD – CPAS)

**This well-established product recently reissued in DVD format is reviewed by Andy and Julie Robinson**

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**Julie** . This is a resource that Andy and I have used on-and-off for the last few years when visiting parents interested in Baptism. As a tool for a baptism visitor one thing that commends itself is its length. With a running time of 10 minutes it fits neatly into the usual sort of baptism visit and doesn’t leave parents looking at each other awkwardly wondering when it’s going to finish!

**Andy** - It begins with some possible reasons why parents bring their children for baptism, and then goes on to introduce baptism as the start of a journey, emphasising the role of parents in their children’s spiritual development. The middle section talks about the basics of Christian belief and then the DVD moves on to the baptism service before a final summary which mentions the possibility of a thanksgiving service for those who are not ready to commit to the baptismal promises.

**Julie** – The DVD has a friendly, informal approach, although I did find the tone of the narrator slightly patronising at times! However it is suitable for parents to watch with children over the age of 4 who are being baptised, or the older siblings of babies. The delivery is clear and the cartoon format very accessible for little ones. Elizabeth (who is 4) loved watching it with us and was very interested in the bit where “the world was all messed up”!

**Andy** – I did find the strong emphasis on the Fall caused problems with one family that I visited. I think the mother had had quite a difficult and strict religious upbringing and had maybe had sin “rammed down her throat”. For this family at least the DVD was less than helpful. But I think, in most cases, the approach is fairly acceptable and thought provoking.

Andy and Julie Robinson

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An increasing use of our web site has been the specimen services and suggested baptism policies. Readers wanting more information are invited to look at <http://www.baptism.org.uk/Practice.htm> where numerous services and resource materials are indicated. A somewhat different emphasis for a policy is offered on page 18/19.

## **The Parish of Ledsham with Fairburn – proposed policy on baptism of children and Christian Initiation**

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In order to fulfil our Christian mission it is important that the church should take every opportunity it can to teach people the Christian faith and help people to become part of the worshipping community. Baptism and confirmation can provide such an opportunity, but in the case of baptism, more often than not, children are baptised and then not seen again in church. This is unfortunate, especially since the baptism service requires parents and godparents to promise to bring up the child within the life of the church.

Experience suggests that if a family who is already attending church requests baptism for a child, they are likely to continue coming to church after baptism. If a family requests baptism when they are not already attending church, the baptism is likely to be a one-off visit to church. This is contrary to the baptismal vows, and also is foreign to the intention of our Lord, who charged the apostles to 'make disciples and baptise them in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.' A disciple is someone who is being taught. If there is no ongoing contact with the church there is no opportunity for this teaching. It is proposed therefore that baptism will normally be offered only when people are already a regular part of the worshipping community.

It is important to handle all enquiries in an encouraging way, and to make people feel welcome. There are many people outside the regular worshipping community who request baptism not fully understanding the nature of the commitment they are making, but who could benefit greatly from the pastoral offices of the church. The appropriate pastoral service to offer to begin with is the thanksgiving service for the gift of a child. This has most of the benefits of a baptism, and can be a great blessing, without requiring families to make promises they are not ready for. For some it can even become a first step towards being more integrated in to the life of the church. It can also be a preparatory step towards baptism.

But for those who are looking for the church to offer a one-off blessing service to celebrate with them the life of their child, a thanksgiving service is ideal. A baptism can follow later, after a period of preparation which will normally involve some regular attendance at services. In this way, people will understand more fully the nature of the promises they will be required to make at the baptism service. Godparents should also be regular churchgoers. Baptisms will normally be carried out at a main Sunday service eg. a parish communion or family service.

Confirmation is an opportunity for people (often children of about eleven) to publicly declare their own allegiance to the faith they were baptized into. It requires a period of preparation. In the Anglican church it has traditionally been seen as the gateway to receiving communion, but there is no necessary connection between the two, and in many other branches of the church, communion is given much earlier. In the Orthodox Church, for instance, communion is given as soon as a child is baptized. The Diocese of York produced guidelines in 2007 for the admission of baptized children to Holy Communion before confirmation. It is proposed that this parish adopts a policy of admitting children to communion as soon as they are old enough to want to receive it, if their parents are in agreement. The parish will follow Diocesan guidelines on this.

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## **Keeping watch!**

Further deregulation of Holy Communion?

**John Hartley keeps an eye open for “de-regulation” by the back door!**

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A couple of years ago the Bradford Diocesan Synod heard a plea from one of its rural deaneries about throwing the boundaries of admitting people to Holy Communion a bit wider. The parish from which it had come was concerned about large parties of people attending infant baptisms which took place during the main services of Holy Communion. The visitors all stolidly sat through the communion part of the service, remaining seated while the regulars went up to receive communion. How could these visitors be made to feel welcome in the service? The parish had (so it seems) asked the bishop for permission to admit the visitors to communion irrespective of whether they had been confirmed or not, and the bishop had replied that this permission was not in his power to grant. So couldn't the Church of England change the rules?.

On that first occasion the motion was simply to allow baptized persons to receive communion, but that didn't get through. The C of E has, after all, hedged about with rules the admission of unconfirmed children to communion. The motion would effectively sweep all those rules away, lead to babies taking communion, and remove any connection between communion and confirmation. It was felt there were better ways of welcoming the crowds of visitors into church life, not least by the provision of non-eucharistic services

However, it was recognised that there is a real problem, so a working party was set up to have another look at the question. And this February a revised version of the motion did get through the synod

The new motion - "that this Synod requests General Synod to make provision, by regulation under Canon B15A(1)(c), for the admission to Communion of baptised adults who are not yet ready to be confirmed" - was proposed for rather different reasons. Gone were the large parties of visitors - in their place were the committed Christians who had grown up in other denominations and so had never been confirmed, indeed who disbelieved in the whole rite of confirmation, but who now worshipped in their own local Anglican churches. Isn't it strange that we can give communion to unconfirmed Baptists who join us occasionally, but if they cease to be Baptists, join us and declare themselves to be members of the Church of England then we can't give them communion any more (because they are not "desirous to be confirmed")?

People like me, with an eye on the pressures towards indiscriminate baptism which these kinds of moves put on us, voted against the motion ... but even I can see that our present system is in a mess, and there is little rationale for the current Canons. Indeed, the Canons were explicitly drafted to provide for future changes to the position, by allowing the General Synod to make regulations allowing others to receive communion. In the event I was in a clear minority, as the Synod passed the resolution by 56 votes to 7

I guess it will be up to the General Synod, eventually, to decide exactly how the "regulations" are to be formulated. Yet I'm deeply troubled about how it will work out. It is in the nature of regulations to be pernickety, as a quick glance at the ones about children and communion shows. And we may solve the problem about Baptists, but we'll still have it for the Salvation Army (which, not administering any sacraments, doesn't insist on baptism for its members). Will these new regulations really give the impression of a new welcome to visitors to join us ... or will they simply convey the idea that we have ceased to care about any sort of discipline in the administration of the sacrament of Holy Communion?

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## **And now for something completely different!**

We publish personal testimony from a man who asks what seems a pretty straightforward question "Have I been baptized?". This is an inspiring story about baptismal integrity from a quite different standpoint. Neil contacted me after finding our web site valuable and I felt we should all share his story. I read it with wonder—that God can work in such unexpected and marvellous ways. I'd welcome your views . **(Ed)**

## **Am I baptised?**

### **Testimony of Neil Perry.**

I sought an answer to this question all my adult life. Twice I underwent a rite of baptism but I had no understanding of what I was doing. The problem was that I had a pathological fear of God which eclipsed any sense of life-giving grace. Here I reflect on my journey in the light of scripture, tradition and psychology.

I was not baptised as an infant because my mother was from a Brethren tradition. From the age of eight, I suffered from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Specifically, I developed an obsessive terror of God, death and judgement. I became convinced I was evil, God hated me personally and I might be predestined for Hell. I found little comfort in the Bible, my interpretation of God's word grotesquely contorted by fear. I was totally unequipped to deal with these fears, theologically and psychologically. At fourteen I asked to be baptised following a crippling bout. Shortly after, I was baptised by sprinkling and confirmed, the idea being that I would take 'preparation' classes afterwards. Sadly, this didn't happen.

At nineteen I joined a Charismatic house-church which taught that sprinkling was not a valid baptism and was "re-baptised" by full immersion, though again I missed any preparation. My OCD went undiagnosed until I was forty-one, whereupon I was treated by a Christian psychologist and was cured in little over a year. I learned that my struggles were an illness. I knew assuredly, for the first time, that God loved me, had saved me and would keep me - but was I truly baptised? Was my original baptism valid if it was done out of fear, not love? Was it valid anyway because it was by sprinkling instead of full-immersion? Was my second baptism a complete renunciation of the first? Was the second valid, as it was "In the name of Jesus" only?

Answers had to wait two years until I had migrated from Charismaticism to an Anglican, Sacramental tradition. At one baptism the congregation was sprinkled while being adjured "Remember your baptism into Christ". As some drops hit my face, my breath was taken away by a wave of relief and a sense of cleansing. I had encountered the life-giving affirmation of baptism for the first time. I was amazed by this church's emphasis on baptism; having long been convinced of the tokenism of Anglican baptism, I found myself faced with a rich, coherent theology. At the congregational renewal of baptismal vows at the Paschal Vigil on Holy Saturday I determined to crack this nut.

My spiritual director helped me glimpse God's perspective on my situation: "The fourteen year-old Neil is a terrified lad who is seeking me but can only look through the dark glass of his OCD (1Cor 12.13). He has no confidence in my judgement of him and fearful, not yet perfected in love (1Jn 4.17-18). But in grace I will not break this bruised reed (Isa 42.3). At his 'second' baptism the glass is a little less dark. Nevertheless he is doing all of this for me." This kairos moment unburdened me of guilt and fear. I saw that it was not my sin but my brokenness that was the heart of the issue.

It was recommended that, I enquire about renewing my baptismal vows. In the relevant sections of CW:Christian Initiation. I experienced another kairos moment on hearing the section title, “Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism”. The word “appropriating” electrified me and expressed all I was looking for - to experience the good of what I had already been through. Initially, my preparation consisted of attempting to forge a sound theology of baptism; I found [www.baptism.org.uk](http://www.baptism.org.uk) particularly edifying but increasingly focused on devotional reflections. My principal reference being “Seeking Life” by Esther de Waal.

I was struck by the intensely mystical baptismal liturgy of the early church, so very far removed from the ‘production line’ baptisms practised in some quarters today. The liturgy concluded with the newly baptised being commissioned to go and make disciples (Matt 28.19). I found this exhilarating and equipping; I was free to serve without fear (Lk 1.74). In my teens, smothered by my obsessive fear, I had experienced only the ‘burial’, as if “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death” (Rom 6.3-4a). Now I read Paul’s statement to completion, “...in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom 6.4b-5). In the words of Cyril of Jerusalem, “Baptism is a burial and a resurrection”. I accepted I was not just buried but resurrected (Col 2.12); raised, hidden, and living in Christ (Col 3.1-4). In my former tradition, baptism was seen as a bare act of public confession of faith. I had always sensed that there was more to it than that. Now I learned that, “a sacrament not only signifies but also efficaciously confers by sanctification” (Hugh of St Victor). I was finally ready to appropriate these blessings, “For a gift is not just given; it must also be recognized, claimed, received” (De Waal).

On All Saint’s Day 2009, I renewed the baptismal vows I had made 30 years earlier. The words of the Decision were definitively mine, no more doubt nor torment. In recognition of the validity of the baptism I was to affirm, I wore an alb throughout the liturgy, not just after the vows. This was an immensely important act connecting me with my troubled past and redeeming it (Isa 61.10). The Lectionary readings were stunningly relevant: the Lord swallowing up death forever, his people rejoicing, having waited for him (Isa 25.6-9) and particularly Lazarus being called out of death and released from his binding grave-clothes (Jn 11.32-44)!

As torrents in summer,  
Half dried in their channels,  
Suddenly rise, though the  
Sky is still cloudless,  
For rain has been falling  
Far off at their fountains;

So hearts that are fainting  
Grow full to o'erflowing,  
And they that behold it  
Marvel, and know not  
That God at their fountains  
Far off has been raining!”

Verses from Longfellow’s “The Nun of Nidaros” were quoted in the homily: reflected my spiritual director’s insight; no matter how dry and barren my life has been, God’s love has rained torrentially, albeit unseen until now. The Wilderness could rejoice (Isa 35.1-4).

In conclusion, my appropriation of baptismal vows has given me the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen (Heb 11.1). I know that faith is not predicated on perfect obedience or the whim of a belligerent god, it is the willing gift of a gracious God (Eph 2.8-10)

Neil would be happy to correspond with anyone wishing to enquire about his story. Contact at [webmaster@stmarysoldbasing.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@stmarysoldbasing.org.uk)

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## ABOUT JOINING BAPTISMAL INTEGRITY

*Do you have concerns with the way baptism is practised within the Church of England? About mismatches between people's expectations and what the Church is offering? On how pastoral practice relates to mission and evangelism? On the role the service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child should have within the Church? Would you like the fellowship of others, both lay and ordained, who are deeply concerned with all aspects of Christian initiation?*

BI is the one organisation devoted exclusively to this subject. It is a fellowship open to non-Anglicans as well as members of the Church of England. You will see that BI allows for a variety of positions about the practice of baptising infants.

### BAPTISMAL INTEGRITY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

FROM: ..... (full name)

Address: .....

.....Postcode .....

Tel: ..... E-mail: .....

I confirm that I support the aims and methods of Baptismal Integrity and enclose a cheque for £ ..... Suggested membership donation is £10 or £3 for "concessions"

**Gift Aid:** As a registered charity Baptismal Integrity is able to claim Gift Aid. If you would like to donate in this way, please complete the declaration below. You can cancel this declaration at any time by giving us notice.

#### GIFT AID DECLARATION

I want BI to treat as Gift Aid my donation of £ .....  
and any future donations until further notice

Signed: ..... Date: .....

Please send me a Standing Order form

**Please send form to:** Rev David Perry, 11 Middle Garth Drive, South Cave, Brough, East Yorkshire HU15 2AY

# BAPTISMAL INTEGRITY

Registered Charity 1067112

[www.baptism.org.uk](http://www.baptism.org.uk)

## Our Objectives

- i) to bring to an end the indiscriminate administration of infant baptism,
- ii) to demonstrate that baptism is the sacrament instituted by Christ for those becoming members of the visible church,
- iii) in a spirit of loyalty to the traditions of the Church of England, to seek to clarify the provisions relating to the administration of baptism in the Canon Law of the Church of England in the light of a true theological understanding of the responsibilities thereby undertaken, and
- iv) to promote within the Church of England legitimate debate and review of the biblical, theological, pastoral and evangelistic aspects of Christian initiation.

## Our Stance

- A) Baptismal Integrity affirms the propriety of baptizing the infants of practising Christian believers and also of deferring baptism until later years.
- B) Baptismal Integrity affirms the relevance and value of the Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child.

## Our Organisation

**Committee:** Bishop Colin Buchanan (President), Rev Stephen Corbett (Acting Chair) Roger Godin (Vice-Chair), Ms Sallie Bassham (Treasurer), Mrs Carol Snipe (Secretary), Rev David Perry (Membership Secretary) Rev Andy Robinson and Mrs Julie Robinson, Rev Andii Bowsher, and Rev Dr John Hartley.

**Council of Reference:** Rev Mark Earey, Rev Dr Paul Kirby, Ven Gordon Kuhrt, Rev Clifford Owen, Rev Ian Robins

**Main Contact :** Roger Godin, The Stables, Capland Lane, Hatch Beauchamp, Taunton TA3 6TP. Tel: 01823 480606; [roger.godin@baptism.org.uk](mailto:roger.godin@baptism.org.uk)

## Our Editorial Policy

All views expressed (including those of officers) are those of the individuals writing, and do not necessarily indicate Baptismal Integrity's policy. In line with our fourth aim, we will publish articles which may challenge our position, and we welcome feedback and comments. We reserve the right to edit contributions, but we do consult writers to make sure that views are not misrepresented.