

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

THE RITE OF INITIATION AND DEDICATION INTO THE
NEW COVENANT

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CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

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FOREWORD

The Revd. (Dr) I.U. Ibeme was not only one of our Tent- Maker Ordinands, but a friend - long before my Consecration (as Bishop). My acquaintance with some of his younger ones as my members then at Bida gives me insight to their Christian conviction.

He has experienced Christianity as a Theological Student, as a Medical Practitioner and as a Senior Parish Priest. These experiences culminated in the writing of this book. His is not an uninformed write-up as we witness all over the place.

Christians of all Denominations and non-believers who seek to understand this universal "*Christian Baptism*" can definitely get unadulterated biblical and spiritual understanding from this simple spiritual book. A remarkable book that, does not only give the etymology of the important words and phrases, but also relates their contemporary usage and examples.

I recommend the book to all and sundry who wish to cast away the thick cloud of ignorance and heresy surrounding Christian Baptism.

Rt. Rev. Dan Yisa,

(Bishop of Damaturu) Trinity 2001.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my late mother,

Mrs. Gloria Uduoyibo Ibeme,

Who got me Baptized on my fourteenth day,

Whereby I was initiated into the

New Covenant of Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian Baptism, in the last 500 years, has been one of the most controversial and confusing issues in the Church. The first 1500 years of Church history had upheld Christian Baptism as a symbol of unity because at Baptism all Churches agree, including Western Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, African Coptic, etc. They all used the same Matthew 28 baptismal formula, demanded similar Apostles' Creed and ministered baptism to believers and all their children, whether minor or mature. This was the unanimous stand during the 16th century Protestant Reformation. All the leading Reformers like Luther, Calvin, Crammer and the Presbyterians all criticised a small radical group called the Anabaptists as unscriptural and unapostolic. The Anabaptists however refused to give heed to the Reformers. Since then, the historic baptismal unity of the Church has become jeopardised.

The Anabaptist movement was born out of an over-reaction to the developments in the Church during the Middle Ages. With the adoption of Christianity as state religion in Europe, state laws gave every child the right to baptism irrespective of the faith of the parents; and the Church acquiesced to such a grave error! Again because it is more convenient to baptise by the modes of affusion (i.e. Sprinkling) and effusion (i.e. Pouring), the Church gave the impression that these were the only acceptable modes. While opposing these developments, the Anabaptists unfortunately, also rejected the apostolic practice of baptising believers and their households.

In the course of this, the Anabaptists redefined the Church to exclude all children, even those born of Christian parents. They also gave Christian Baptism a new interpretation: controverted its formula, its mode and its object, and altered its requirement, its significance and its subject. The Church has had to live with this controversy and anomaly with many well-meaning Christians finding themselves on either side of the divide. Yet the Anabaptist contention may not be merely a matter of controversy. It is apparently a matter of life and death, a matter of divine indignation and personal danger.

This brief write-up (deliberately made short for easy reading and affordability) aims to look at Baptism from its apostolic traditional roots with the hope of clearing the confusing issues, recapturing its original meaning and highlighting the scriptural, apostolic practice. It is my prayer that this scanty effort would serve a useful purpose to the Church of Jesus Christ.

"Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things." (2 Tim. 2:7).

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CHAPTER ONE

THE WORD, "BAPTISM"

A. BAPTIZO IN THE SCRIPTURE: A WORD USAGE STUDY

Christian Baptism has encountered several controversies, misconceptions and misuse over the years. This has been mainly because *the common thinking about and usage of the word "BAPTISM" in recent times is not the same with that of the Scriptures*. For instance, most arguments, theories, doctrines, practices and traditions about Christian Baptism are based on man-made but UN- BIBLICAL issues which are:

- (1) By what mode must one be baptised INTO WATER?
- (2) What must be the FIRST EVIDENCE of one baptised INTO THE HOLY SPIRIT?

These concepts take root from our worldly minds and certainly not from the inspired writings of the Bible. Christ was interested in covenanting souls into His Name and Body eternally, but the world is concerned about temporary immersion into the water element. Christ's focus was on the eternal purpose of the Holy Spirit Baptism, but the world is splitting hairs on what the first temporary evidence must be. As Christians supposedly guided by the Scripture, we must strive to abandon our mundane Gentile ways of thinking and learn to think like the Scripture in order to avoid being in error. Let us now get our thought and usage right.

First, *the Bible does not talk about Baptism INTO ("eis" Greek) Water!* Are you surprised about this? Rather the Bible talks about Baptism WITH or BY ("en" Greek) Water!

Second, *the Scripture does not talk about Baptism INTO ("eis" Greek) the Holy Spirit*, rather it speaks of using the Holy Spirit to do Baptism i.e. Baptism WITH or BY ("en" Greek) the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the Scripture always talks about Christian Baptism as a baptism:

1. (a) INTO ("eis" Greek) THE NAME of the Three-One God (Matt. 28: 19).

(b) FOR/INTO ("eis" Greek) REMISSION of sins (Acts 2:38).

(c) INTO ("eis" Greek) THE NAME of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16;19:5).

All the above refer to Water Baptism or **Ritual cleansing Regeneration**. (i.e. INITIATION).

2. (a) INTO ("eis" Greek) Christ (Jesus) (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

(b) INTO ("eis" Greek) (Christ's) Death (Rom 6:3-4).

(c) INTO ("eis" Greek) (Christ's) Body (1 Cor.12:13)

All these refer to Spirit Baptism or **Spiritual renewing Regeneration**. (i.e. INCORPORATION).

Note that the Greek preposition `eis' is always consistent in its use relative to Baptism in the N.T.. However the English translators are not always consistent in their renderings of the word, hence the variations. Consistency in renderings is generally maintained more in the Revised Version, American Standard Version and J. N. Darby's Version

Fourthly, the Word of God distinguishes Christian Baptism from other baptisms such as: INTO Moses (1Cor. 10:2) and INTO THE NAME of Paul (1 Cor. 1:13,15) and INTO John (Acts 19:3), though the usage is still with the same "eis".

Fifthly, the inspired writings speak about Baptism taking place at (not into) the Wilderness (Mk.1:4), at (not into) Bethany (Jn.1:28), at (not into) Jordan (Matt.3:6), at (not into) Cornelius' House (Acts 10), at (not into) Jerusalem (Acts 2), at (not into) Philippian Jail (Acts 16), at (not into) Samaria (Acts 8).

By now I believe it has become a bit clear to us that many of us are mistaken about the use and meaning of BAPTISM and BAPTISE. Following the Scriptural sense and usage of the word, Baptism is done:

(i) AT a *place* (Bethany, Jordan, Wilderness etc) not into these

(ii) WITH or BY an *agent* or *instrument* (Water, Holy Spirit, Fire, Sea, Cloud, Blood), not into these, and

(iii) INTO a *recipient subject* (the Lord or the Lord's name, Moses, John, Paul's name).

Again whenever Baptism is mentioned in the Bible, the key question is not WHAT MODE or WHERE or WHEN but usually INTO ("eis" Greek) WHOM was the Baptism done? (Acts.19:3). May God help us to think in Scriptural terms to avoid error as Jesus put it in Matt. 22:29:

"*You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures.*"

You may have observed from the foregoing that we have two aspects to Christian Baptism:

1. Baptism into the Lord's NAME (with Water) - Ritual Initiation - relating to our being covenanted unto ritual temporal safety out of the destructive claims of Satan into the gracious claims of the Name of Christ and

2. Baptism into the Lord HIMSELF (with the Holy Spirit) - Spiritual Incorporation - relating to our being converted unto eternal salvation out of the depraved nature into the divine nature in Christ.

We could therefore raise the proper scriptural matters which are: How should water, fire and the Holy Spirit (i.e. the Agent) be applied to the person (i.e. Object) who is being baptised INTO the Lord or the Lord's name (i.e. the Recipient/Subject)? Should the water, fire, and the Spirit be poured on, sprinkled on or fall upon the baptised object; or should he/she be made to drink or be dipped in (and out) of the water and the Spirit? Which mode is Scriptural? We shall look at these later. But what then does *BAPTIZO* mean in the Scriptures?

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B. BAPTO, BAPTIZO AND BAPTISMA: A WORD MEANING STUDY

Apart from using the Greek word `*baptizo*' with unscriptural prepositions, another aspect of the Baptism discussion over the years is giving unscriptural meaning to the word "*baptizo*"

First, "*bapto*" is known very well to have two meanings:

(1) to dip momentarily into something, and

(2) to dye (a fabric) into a new or particular colour whether by dipping, smearing, sprinkling, pouring, dabbing etc.

However Christians of the Anabaptist descent have chosen to stick to giving *baptizo* the same meaning with *bapto* in relation to only momentary dipping, though they add that this dipping must be immersion until covered completely by the water INTO which one is baptized. ***Surprisingly the Scripture never used bapto to describe the baptismal process nor used baptizo to describe a dipping anywhere in both Old and New Testaments.*** Neither does the Scripture anywhere talk about baptism INTO water but WITH water.

If *baptizo* were to mean dipping, it could not be momentary dipping INTO water, but permanent dipping INTO Christ. On the other hand if it were to mean dyeing, it could not be with water but certainly with the nature (i.e. colour) of Christ. This is the only way *baptizo* could make any contextual sense as used in the Scripture where Baptism is always INTO Christ or INTO Christ's Name.

In classical secular Greek literature, *baptizo* conveys the sense of an "overwhelming influence" by the receptive element into which an object is baptized. For example:

1. A **sunken** ship is said to be **baptised** into the sea.
2. A **drowned** man is said to be **baptised** into the river
3. A **drugged** man is said to be **baptised** into the opiate drug.
4. A **drunken** man is said to be **baptised** into wine.

The import of *baptizo* in all these is "*overwhelm*" not "*whelm over*", "*overpower*" not "*cover over*". Even when the overwhelming substance is put into the man (e.g. opiates and wine), the man is still said to be baptized into the substance without necessarily meaning dipping or immersion. Paul tended to imply this in 1Cor. 12:13:

"We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body ... given the one Spirit to drink."

In the Scripture, there are two figures of baptism:

(1) *The Baptism of Noah*: in which Noah and his household **sailed on** the flood and may have been **sprinkled** by the rain and were saved due to Noah's righteousness (Gen. 7:1). *It was those who were immersed into the flood that perished!* (1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:6;

Gen.7:11-23). Also note that it was specifically because of Noah's faith and righteousness that he and his household were saved (Gen. 7:1; Heb. 11:7).

(2) *The Exodus Baptism into Moses*: in which the Israelites (including infants) walked on the seabed of the Red Sea following the pillar of cloud and fire in front of them and were delivered. *Again, it was the Egyptians who were immersed into the Red Sea that perished!* (1 Cor. 10:1-2; Exd. 14:28-29). Also note that Moses was once delivered as an infant by being put on (not into) the same Red Sea (Gen. 2:1-10).

Again the Scripture refers to *Jewish water cleansing rituals* with the words 'baptisma' and 'baptizo' as in *washing* of hands and feet as well as utensils (Mark 7:4), *washing* of hands before meals (Luke 11:38) and other *washing* rituals (Heb. 9:10). These washings were called baptisms because they were meant to cleanse and purify. When Jesus turned water into wine in Cana, this was with pots used to store water for such Jewish purifications/baptisms (Jn. 2:6).

Therefore Baptism does not consist in immersion but in experiencing a transforming and purifying influence. Is it any wonder then that the Scripture speaks of Baptism INTO Christ (and not into Water). So it is a process whereby one is subjected to the overwhelming purifying influence of Christ (not water influence!), whereby one is dedicated to Christ (not to water!). **Besides, the foregoing tends to show that water immersion in the Scripture means perishing rather than cleansing or covenanting.** *We can therefore confidently say that water immersion, sprinkling, pouring, washing or even drinking are of no consequence as regards the meaning, efficacy or validity of Christian Baptism (1 Peter 3:21).*

We conclude then that one is NOT baptised into water nor into the Holy Spirit, rather Baptism into Christ's Name is done with water symbolising **rebirth** (John 3:5; Tit.3:5) whereby we are **washed, cleansed** and **purified** from our defilements and sins. By baptism into the Name of Christ, we are **added** to the Church (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 11:21, 24) by the authority (and on the merits) of Christ, which He has bestowed on the Church. *This initiates us into the New Covenant community: consecrating us to Christ and translating us unto covenant temporal safety.* We have neglected this **ritual power of Water Baptism** to our peril. (In the Middle Ages they had magnified the ritual to overtake the Spiritual.)

The Scripture also says we are sanctified, regenerated and born anew with the Holy Spirit (not only with water and the Word), by Whom we are incorporated into Christ's Body (1 Cor. 12:13); this obviously refers to Spirit Baptism done by Christ Himself. This is the inward counterpart of Water Baptism. It renews us unto eternal *salvation* (i.e. reconciled to God and being conformed to be like Christ both now and in coming glory).

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CHAPTER TWO

THE RITE, "CHRISTIAN BAPTISM"

A. THE MATTER IN CHRISTIAN BAPTISM: NOT MODE BUT EFFECT

From our discussion in Chapter 1 on the contextual use of Baptism in the Scriptures, we can now understand why St. Paul speaks of Baptism as a:

- (1) Washing of water with the Word (Eph. 5:26)
- (2) **Washing** of regeneration and **renewal** of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5)
- (3) Incorporation into Christ's Body by drinking of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13);

and St. Peter added the description:

- (4) Pledging of good conscience towards God (not merely the washing of bodily dirt) (1 Pet. 3:21);
- (5) Likened to being saved from the flood into 'The Ark' (i.e. 'The Risen Christ'). 1Pet. 3:20-21.

and from St. Luke we understand Baptism as:

- (6) Means whereby believers were added to the Church (Acts 2:41; 5:14).
- (7) Washing sins away by calling on God's name (Acts 22:16).

The teachings of the Scripture, on the whole, show that Water Baptism has the powerful effect of cleansing and initiation to enable participation in, and identification with the New Covenant community of Christ.

On the other hand, Spirit Baptism has the effect of recreating and renewing the inner man to be in Christ and like Christ.

*Christian Baptism therefore does not imply a mode but an effect or grace for which it serves as **means, sign and seal**. Under the Scriptural meaning and usage of Baptism, all our theories and arguments about our choice mode for baptism crumble into utter emptiness, if not foolishness! May God help us.*

The symbolic meanings of Christian Baptism are several in the Scriptures and none of these seems to respect much of our dramatic modal concepts of Baptism as commonly peddled today. For instance, the Scripture talks of Baptism as symbolising the following:

- (1) Death (to sin), burial (with Christ) and resurrection (to new life) Col. 2:12-13; Rom. 6:3,6.
- (2) Circumcision without bands. Col. 2:11-12
- (3) Putting-off of the old man Col. 2:11-12
- (4) Quickening with the Spirit. Col. 2:13.
- (5) Putting-on of Christ. Gal. 3:27.
- (6) Regeneration (New Birth) with water and the Spirit Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5.
- (7) Pledge of good conscience towards God. 1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 26:18.

Note that all these meanings are to be reckoned and appropriated inwardly and spiritually by faith, not acted out dramatically in Baptismal modes.

Baptism is a MEANS OF GRACE (i.e. means of ministering, appreciating and appropriating God's redeeming grace). In the Scripture, God promises and pledges certain graces in Baptism, such as: *Remission of Sins* and *Giving of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38). However, these promised graces are on the condition that those coming to Baptism also come with promises and pledges of *Repentance* (Acts 2:38), *Faith* (Acts 20:21) and *Good Conscience* (1 Pet. 3:21).

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B. CHRISTIAN BAPTISM: AN INITIATION RITE

Ordinarily Christian Baptism is the initiation sign and seal of the New Covenant in Christ. It replaces every other initiation sign and seal of any other covenant including circumcision (Rom. 4:11; Gal. 5:6; 6:15). The Christian faith and community are covenant faith and community, and so need initiation for admission or entrance. We therefore conclude that:

1. Baptism certainly connotes permanent (not momentary) new change (i.e. regeneration, transformation, translation) in its meaning and purpose. Baptism confers a new status, authority and right to the baptised, who thereby becomes sanctified (or consecrated) and adopted in Christ both ritually and really, symbolically and spiritually.

2. Baptism certainly means washing (Acts 23:16), cleansing and sanctifying (Eph. 5:26), regeneration and renewal (Tit. 3:5) and sprinkling clean (Heb. 10:22; Ezek. 36:25).

3. As the *Sign* of the New Covenant, Baptism *symbolises* both God's pledge and ours for which it also serves as a *reminder* as in the case of the rainbow sign:

. "*The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. This is the sign of the covenant...*" (Gen. 9:16,17).

It is also the *Deposit of claims and Seal of ownership* upon our lives - body and soul (Eph. 1:13,14; 2Cor. 1:21,22), guaranteeing the promises by God and us, which are made on either side through Christ (Acts 2:8; I Pet. 3:21). This is why Ritual outward Baptism is called a *Sacrament* (i.e. "holy sign" or "solemn pledge symbol") of the New Covenant of Christ.

4. *Baptism is the valid Christian rite of initiation INTO the Name of Christ (by water) and incorporation (I Cor. 12:13) INTO the Body of Christ (by the Spirit). By Baptism the baptisand is added (Act 2:41), introduced, assimilated, involved, engrafted, included (Eph. 1:13) INTO the Name and Body of Christ. By baptism, we are made to be IN Christ, IN UNION WITH (Rom. 6:5) or HAVE PART WITH (John 13:8) Christ. By Baptism then we are subjected unto the permanent transforming influence of Christ who is the author of a perfect and eternal salvation.*

5. As an initiation rite, there is only ONE Baptism, just as there is only one regeneration, one newbirth, one Church, one Christ and one Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6). *Therefore, to rebaptise a second time, someone who has earlier been baptised INTO Christ's Name is grave error.* This is the error of ANA-BAPTISM. Christian Baptism like circumcision can only be ONCE FOR ALL. Could you imagine one circumcised as a child being recircumcised later as an adult? Except if complete emasculation would be done (Gal. 5:12)!

6. Baptism therefore represents the Christian rite of passage from death to life, from darkness to light, from damnation to salvation in Christ. Baptism marks the *conception (not the perfection)* of the New Life. Baptism serves to *initiate (not to consummate)* the Christian life.

To be saved or to be Christian is not only being **morally** converted to Christ but also entering **formally** into the New Covenant relationship with God through Christ. ***This New Covenant is so powerful that it supersedes and nullifies every other covenant whether Jewish or Gentile (Heb. 8:13; Col. 2:13-15)*** and brings everyone into union with Christ (Eph. 2:15-17). The New Covenant of salvation in Christ is holy, so Baptism both initiates and sanctifies us unto this New, Holy, and Saving Covenant of Christ.

7. Whether in the Scripture or outside the Scripture we know that covenant initiations have no age barrier for children of covenant-parents anywhere. *Age barrier is only necessary when one is born to a non-covenant household.* **Adult Baptism therefore, could only be meant for converts who are not born to Christian parents.**

Regenerate Faith (not intellectual faith) is necessary for the **Baptismal Rite**, but for the minors their faith or 'regenerateness' is discerned by, ascertained in, or based on the power of their parent's faith - so did Christ **declare** the children of believers as "*little ones who believe in Him*" (Matt. 18:6). Likewise, Christ severally **demonstrated** that, based on the faith of their parents, children of believers have faith to be healed (Matt. 8:5-13; 9:18-25; 15:28; 17:14-18; Jn. 4:49-53). In addition, Apostle Paul was so **persuaded** about Timothy (2Tim. 1:5) and other children of believers:

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." (1Cor. 7:14).

It is so strange that those who do Child Blessing and Child Dedication, (which are in fact **partial** forms of Infant Baptism without water i.e. **Dry Infant Baptism**), also depend on the power of the parents' faith, yet they deny such power from their children for the New Covenant initiation. **Believers, who do not recognise the necessity, validity and power of full baptismal initiation for their little children, thereby reject Christ's instituted provision for their households. Such a wilful violation of the New Covenant would certainly give the Devil the advantage to cause 'woeful' havoc against such households and lay claim on their 'cut-off' children, (See pp. 43, 44 & 49).** But for how long would believers allow this dangerous blunder to continue?

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C. BAPTISM AND DEDICATION

1. *Baptism cannot be substituted nor be preceded by any dedication because Christian Baptism is the only true and valid DEDICATION in the New Covenant.* The Apostolic Church apart from Baptism practiced no other form of Dedication, Blessing or Naming Ceremony. These non-baptismal or dry-baptismal ceremonies are modern man-made innovations, which serve no effectual purpose, except to sooth the guilt produced by the refusal to baptise children.

It is important to note that all firstborn males were usually the only ones presented before the Lord as dedicated in the Old Testament (Exd. 13:2, 12 - 15; Num. 3: 44 -51; Luke. 2:23; I Sam. 1: 24). Yet, none of such firstborn males could be so presented except he was first circumcised into the Old Covenant (Gen. 17:14). *Therefore, no child of a Christian home could be duly dedicated except he/she was first baptised into the New Covenant.* Without first being covenanted there is no sense whatsoever in being dedicated. **To belong to either the Old or New Covenant Community, whether as a child or an adult, one must first be ritually initiated (Gen. 17:11-14; Acts 2:41), not only by claims of birth or faith.** Without being baptised first, no one could ever duly belong to the Christian covenant community merely by dedication, by naming or by blessing.

2. Dedication **is not** a *sufficient rite* for children of believers. They deserve **full initiation** into their parents' covenant - *into covenant safety, sanctity and participation.* Full Christian initiation is only by Baptism. *In any case, if Baptism is not acceptable for children, why dedicate them to a covenant into which they cannot be initiated?*

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D. TYPES OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM:

There are two types of the one and same Christian Baptism (John 3:5; Tit.3:5):

1. *Real Baptism:* into the Body of Christ, which is *done by Christ Himself* on the believer through the *agency of the Holy Spirit*. This is an inward experience *converting* one to the Lord and into the invisible Church (i.e. the *organismic* Body of Christ), cleansing the conscience from the guilt of sin (Heb.9:14; Ps. 51:10; Isa. 1:16b; Ezk.36:26). This is the *Newbirth of the Spirit* and is an *inward* consciousness. It is *Spiritual Regeneration* with the Holy Spirit - a **renewal** (and Incorporation) into Christ. This is an Anointing seal (2Cor.1: 21,22). This Baptism effects not only our safety but also our *salvation* (1Pet. 3:21c); it not only translates but also transforms inwardly *Spiritual Baptism borders on the moral, the real and spiritual nature.*

2. *Ritual Baptism* into the Name of Christ, which is *done by the Church* (called by Christ's Name) on the believer through the *agency of water*. This is an outward sacrament *covenanting* and consecrating one to the Lord and into the visible Church (i.e. the *organisational* Body of Christ), cleansing the body from the defilements of sin (Acts 22:16; Heb. 9:13; Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:16a; Ezek. 36:25). This is the *Newbirth of water* and is an *outward* ceremony. It is *Ritual 'Regeneration'* with Water (and The Word) - a **washing** (and Initiation) into Christ's Name and the visible Church called by His Name. This is a Cleansing seal. (Heb. 10:22b). This Baptism does not effect our 'salvation' but our *safety* (1Pet. 3:21a); it does not transform but translates. As a **covenant ritual**, *Water Baptism borders on the formal, the symbolic and spiritual status*.

It is important to note that being ritually initiated into a divine covenant, though quite beneficial (i.e. for temporal covenant safety), does not guarantee ultimate security (i.e. eternal salvation) - **either for adults or for infants**. This is true both with the *Old Testament* circumcision or baptism into Moses (Josh. 5:5-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-6) and the *New Testament* Water Baptism (Acts 8:13,16-23; Jude 1:4-5). **Only Spiritual Regeneration of the heart** (when it accompanies Ritual Initiation) **brings and guarantees eternal salvation**.

Ritual Baptism and Spiritual Baptism are not interchangeable but complementary. The two should not be confused but be distinguished for clearer understanding. Often Ritual Baptism, which has been the subject of theology and doctrinal controversy over the centuries, has been interpreted either *sacramentally* (i.e. in terms of Spiritual Baptism) or *modally* (i.e. in terms of method of water application). This has led to complications, confusion and difficulties in theology and doctrine - having obliterated spiritual baptism without making water baptism plain either. This ought not to have been so. How could the mode swallow up the purpose? Or the means of grace swallow up the grace itself? **The truth is that Water Baptism does not only symbolise Spirit Baptism but also initiates into the New Covenant (not into water)**.

Real (*Experiential*) and Ritual (*Sacramental*) Baptisms in the New Testament could be likened to the Old Testament circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16) and circumcision of the flesh (Gen. 17:11 - 12) respectively. **The basis for Christian Baptism is the "Blood Baptism" (i.e. Death) of Christ on the Cross-, which is appropriated by faith, ministered by rite and applied by grace**.

There are also two ways in which the name of Christ is applied in relation to Baptism, which we must again distinguish:

1. *Baptism INTO the Name of Christ*. "INTO" ("eis" Greek) refers to the EFFECT of Baptism on the baptised. This indicates entering into relationship with Christ and is a usage peculiar to Baptism.

2. *Baptism AT or IN the Name of Christ*. "AT or IN" ("en" Greek) refers to the AUTHORITY with which the Church could do anything including Baptism. Hence, while the Church baptises people INTO ("eis" Greek) Christ's Name, the Church also baptises with the authority, which it has AT or IN ("en" Greek) Christ's Name (Acts 2:38; 3:6; 4:10). This is the same sense the Bible talks about preaching IN (*en*) the Name Luke. 24:47), or asking IN (*en*) the Name (Jn.14:13-14), or healing IN (*en*) the Name (Acts 3:6), or even bowing AT or IN (*en*) the Name (Phil. 2:10).

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E. BY WHAT MODE THEN SHOULD WE BAPTISE?

We know that water was used for Ritual Sacramental Baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47; Matt. 3:6; Jn. 3:23; I Pet. 3:20 - 21) but *nowhere in the Scriptures are we told exactly how this water was or must be applied*. Attempts to use *bapto* and *baptizo* to establish this are futile as the Scripture is not helpful in this direction. The closest, most detailed description of baptism in Scripture is Acts 8:36. But the *going down into the water* by both Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch was clearly distinguished from the **baptism** of only the Eunuch subsequently. The *going up from water* by both men was clearly after the *baptism* had finished. Same was the case of Christ, who after being baptised came out of the water and was praying, at which time the Holy Spirit then descended on Him. (Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21).

Nevertheless, there are ample instances where the Scripture refers to various modes of applying water for baptismal and similar ritual purposes. These include the following:

1. DRINKING

(a) Used when referring to Christ's Baptism into suffering, blood and death. Matt. 26:39, 42; Mark 10:38, 39; Lk. 12:50.

(b) Used in describing the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. John 4:10, 13:13; 7:37 - 39; I Cor. 12:13.

2. SPRINKLING:

(a) Commanded in the Law (Num. 19:13 - 18)

(b) Predicted by the Prophets (Ezek. 36:25)

(c) Fulfilled in Christ (Heb. 9:13,14)

(d) Preached by the Apostles (Heb. 10:22)

3. WASHING (OF PART OF THE BODY)

(a) As done in other ceremonial purification (John 3:22-26; Exd. 30:18-20; Lev. 8:6; Ps. 51:7; John 13:5-11)

(b) With water in a river (John 1:26-28)

(c) With water from a water pot (John 2:6)

(d) With water from other containers (Exd. 30:17-21)

(e) A very common descriptive word for baptism used in the Scriptures (Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 10:22).

4. POURING:

(a) Used by God in the Holy Spirit Baptism (Ezek. 36:27; Acts 2:17; 10:45; I Cor. 12:13).

(b) Most likely mode used at house baptisms (Acts 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:33; 19:5) and at mass baptisms (Acts 2:41; and 4:4).

(c) Seems to be similar to FALLING by the Holy Spirit UPON the believer at Spirit Baptism (Acts 1:8; 2:3; 10:44).

5. IMMERSION:

(a) Derived from the meaning of the Greek root-word "*bapto*" which means "to dip momentarily" as well as "to dye into a new colour"

But we have already seen that the Scripture never used *bapto* to describe Baptism, nor used *baptizo* as being INTO water, rather it used *baptizo* as being INTO Christ or His Name.

(b) Appears to be probably figured in Rom. 6:4 and Col.2: 12 (However see 1 Cor. 10:1,2; I Pet. 3:20; Mk. 7:4 where *baptizo* could never mean immersion).

(c) A likely mode at river baptisms (Acts 8:36-38)

(d) Often practiced by the early Church.

Purification and incorporation into Christ with water does not depend on the amount of water or extent of its application (John 13:8-10), but on our attitude towards God and the efficacy of Christ's work before God (I Pet.3: 21-22). As the power of the anointing oil does not depend on its quantity, so it is with the baptismal water.

In the Anglican Church from its ancient beginnings in the 1st and 2nd Century AD as with other ancient churches and at the Reformation together with Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian (and later Methodist) denominations, we have always baptised either by immersion or by pouring (or even by sprinkling) depending on circumstance and convenience.

NOTE: Those who, like the Anabaptists insist on immersion could only be excusable inasmuch as they recognise that Christian Baptism is not into water but into Christ; also that immersion is merely one of the (not the only) valid modes of water baptism

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F. A RESUME

So far we have now understood that Ritual Sacramental Baptism done by the Church is right and valid if ministered:

1. AT or IN the Name of Christ (i.e. on the authority of Christ);
2. WITH water by any Scriptural mode; and
3. INTO the Name of the Trinity or INTO the Name of Christ. This is how the Scripture thinks and talks about Baptism.

We must endeavour to imbibe these in order to avoid error and confusion.

We have also seen that the Scripture does not speak of Baptism or "*baptizo*" INTO water but usually INTO the Lord and His Name. Baptism should therefore be understood to mean:

- = To be made a part of Christ (not of water);
- = To be made to look like Christ (not like water);
- = To be made subject to Christ (not to water);
- = To be put into Christ (not into water);
- = To sign/seal our initiation into the New Covenant with Christ (not with water) **as Christ commanded and instituted.**

Water is only the element that serves as agent; it is not the subject of baptism. This is the context in which the Scripture speaks of Baptism. When we depart from this and pervert the subject of baptism from Christ to water, we cease to enjoy the support of the Scripture.

We have agreed that Baptism is the covenant symbol or sign, initiation ceremony, cleansing ritual as well as a necessity for proper Church membership and Christian discipleship. From Matt. 28: 19-20 we could clearly see the process of disciple making:

1. EVANGELISE - Preach the Gospel of Christ to all nations.
2. BAPTISE- Initiate the believing INTO the Name of the Lord.
3. CATECHISE - Teach the baptised to observe all that Christ has commanded.

In recent times this sequence of the discipling process has been disregarded under the pretension of spirituality and ecclesiastical caution which is actually a defiance of the Great Commission. Many now baptize only after they have done **all** catechising. ***But how could the unbaptised outsider be taught the mysteries meant for initiated insiders.*** Moreover, who could ever **finish** catechising the Gospel mystery? Who could? And how long would this take anyway? Baptism is not congratulatory or consummatory but initiatory. Who then should we baptize with this manner of Baptism

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CHAPTER THREE

CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM

A. WHO SHOULD WE BAPTISE?

According to the Scriptures the Church should baptise:

1. Citizens of all nations without distinction, to whom the Gospel has been preached (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 20:21).
2. Those who give regenerate response to the Gospel i.e. repentance, faith and coming for baptism (Acts: 2:31-41).
3. These citizens of all nations who respond to the Gospel may be INDIVIDUALS or HOUSEHOLDS (Acts 16:14-15; 1Cor. 1:14-16).

Baptism is a *necessary accompaniment of faith for all believers and their dependent households as soon as possible* (Act 2:38 - 41; 16:14-15, 30-34). By faith one is converted or committed to Christ, but by Baptism one is regenerated or covenanted unto Christ and His Church. Christian Covenant Baptism, as a Sacramental Ritual, ought to be received by all Christians in order:

= To be admitted/initiated into or added to the Church of the New Covenant (Acts 2:41).

= To receive the New Testament graces of *sin-removal* and *Spirit-bestowal* (Acts 2:38,39)

= To seal the Newbirth (Acts 3:5' 10:47- 48).

= To symbolise what the Holy Spirit has actualised. (I Cor. 12:13; Acts 10:47)

= To fulfil the Great Commission **as instituted by Christ Himself** (Matt. 28: 18 -20 Luke. 24: 44 - 43).

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B. THE ERROR OF ANABAPTIST BAPTISM

Since the Anabaptists of the 16th Century Reformation, the issue of the propriety of households of believers being baptised as in the Scriptures and as practiced by the Apostles has been a matter of controversy. The Anabaptists question the baptism of minors (i.e. infants and children) who have not reached the age of discretion and as a rule rebaptise such persons when they reach adulthood. In fact, **the Anabaptist founding fathers outrightly rejected the membership of children in the Church.** This was based on a redefinition of the Church.

The Anabaptists rejected the age-old scriptural concept of the Church as a Covenant Community. To them the Church could only be a Discretionary Adult Cult, which is a Gentile gnostic concept. With this redefinition of the Church, the Anabaptists, despite warnings from Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Crammer, and other Reformers, set out to exclude children from the Church and from the rites of the Church. To them there is nothing like a *Christian Home* but only a *Christian Adult Believer*. However, when this position was found to be wrong, the later descendants of the Anabaptists modified the definition of the Church to vaguely include children. Then they innovated a form of ***Dry Infant Baptism*** called 'Dedication', thereby making their adult "Believers' Baptism" a form of ***Wet Confirmation***.

Now this is a very problematic position as the fundamental question still remains unanswered. What is the Visible Church? Moreover, how does one become admitted to its membership? And who are those qualified for such admission? Are dedicated children admitted to the Church? If not, to what then are they dedicated? And if so why are they later baptised again in adulthood? Or what then is Baptism? Until these questions are clearly answered on scriptural grounds, the Anabaptist view must be rejected as erroneous and unsafe.

But the Anabaptists' contention is not plausible on scriptural grounds. The first error of the Anabaptists is that of *re-baptism (ana-baptism)* for those who have already been baptised (as infants or by non-immersion modes). With their descendants, they have diverted the purpose and meaning of baptism:

- (1) from INTO Christ to INTO water;
- (2) from cleansing (washing) to dipping (immersion);
- (3) from covenant initiation symbol to congratulatory maturation symbol;
- (4) from *baptizo* to *bapto*;
- (5) from means of God's grace to means of man's witness.

(6) from seal of *regeneration* (for adults and children) to seal of *confession* (for adults only).

Further than these, they have denied the humanity of childhood! According to divine wisdom, revealed in the Scripture infants are numbered among the images of God, among humans and among citizens of nations, who as sinners need Christ as Saviour. Can anyone deny these facts? Discretion is a *social* measurement but the Divine Lord measures *spiritually*.

Is it not strange that the Anabaptists deny infants the right of full humanity because they are judged as lacking the ability to understand the adults? Yet, the adults are not denied their humanity for not understanding the infants! The concept that children are spiritually sub-human is of Gentile origin and led to idolatrous child-sacrifice, infanticide and abortion over the ages before the Christian era. The Church fought these concepts and practices until these were out-lawed. Is it not surprising that after the Anabaptists denied the full humanity of infants, abortion again began to be legalised in some 'Christian' nations!

Gentile cultures, since before the time of Abraham till today, usually reserve circumcision until puberty and adolescence as a sign of maturity and licence to participate in sex and marriage. But for Abraham, God gave INFANT CIRCUMCISION as a covenant sign (Gen. 17:11-14), and *as a sign and seal of righteousness by faith* (Rom. 4:11a). The 'Anabaptist' Gentiles of Abraham's time must have disagreed with Abraham and would have re-circumcised (anacircumcised) Abraham's children at puberty, probably by outright mutilation (concision) (Phip.3: 2) or emasculation (cutting off) (Gal. 5:12) as St Paul said!

In fact, there was such opposition to INFANT CIRCUMCISION by Moses' Gentile wife, Zipporah, who would have preferred ADULT CIRCUMCISION for Moses' children. However, when God wanted to kill Moses for succumbing to such popular mundane ideas, Zipporah had to do an emergency INFANT CIRCUMCISION by herself, against the wish of her unscriptural, Gentile mind! (Exd. 4:24 - 26). In the New Testament, Jesus likewise pronounced a woe against any person through whom *the offence of spitefully excluding children of believers from the matters of His Kingdom* shall come (Matt. 18:5- 7,14). In fact, Christ was very angry with the disciples when they stopped little children from "**coming**" (i.e. being brought) to Him (Mark 10:14-16).

Who really told the Anabaptists and their followers that God (who is not a mere man) cannot communicate to minors? Or that infants and children cannot be regenerate (Lk. 1:15), believe (Matt. 18:6a) and take covenant responsibility (Gen 17:14). In their scrupulous but unscriptural thinking they have erred from the revealed truth; ***verily, they have erred like Zipporah in Exodus 4; yea, like the Disciples in Mark 10***, thereby provoking ***divine***

indignation. They have limited their God with social discretion! And many have followed after their error! Such despising of covenant children, which in fact despises the God of the Covenant, was met with **divine rejection** in Gen. 17:14 and **divine condemnation** in Matt.18:6-7.

There was no loss of communication between God the Father and Christ when He was an infant. No wonder Jesus taught us that Angels of little ones behold the face of the Father always, so we should not despise them (Matt. 18:10); also *that the little ones born to believers, as such believe* (Matt 18:6); that the Kingdom of God is also for them (Matt.18: 3; Mk. 10:14); that they should be **allowed to come** (be brought) **to Jesus** (Mark 10:14) and be **received in His name** - by baptism? (Matt 18:5). Where on earth did the Anabaptists get their doctrine from? And why are some still continuing in and defending their error?

If it is true that minors cannot receive the covenant sign with their households, then they cannot be part of the covenant fellowship to which their households belong nor partake of the blessings of such covenants. But the God of covenant, the originator of household has never worked (and will never work) that way, with His covenant people (Gen 17:10 - 15, Matt 18:14). *Refusal to baptise minor offsprings of Christian parents means that such infants and children have no portion in the Church and so no portion in Christ* (Gen 17:14). When a covenant infant fails to be initiated, it is **guilty of breaking the covenant** and obviously becomes vulnerable to the dangerous influence and claims of other covenants. God's way is thus:

"All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives - also the stranger who is in your camp,...that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath,... just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but also with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today." (Deut. 29:10-15).

Another erroneous Anabaptist teaching is their so called "believers' baptism" by which they mean that baptism is therefore a sacrament of *belief* no longer a sacrament of *regeneration*, it is a washing of *belief* not a washing of *regeneration* (Tit. 3:5), it is a *believing* of water not a *newbirth* of water (Jon. 3:5). Now this is absurd, but beyond that, it is entirely unscriptural. The Anabaptists agree with the Bible that regeneration is not produced by the will of man, nor merited by faith and repentance, rather we repent and believe unto salvation after God has already regenerated us by grace: i.e. quickened us (Eph.2:4-8), and opened our hearts to respond to the Gospel (Luke. 24:45; Acts 2:38; 16:14). More emphasis should be on

"**regenerates' baptism**", rather than on "**believers' baptism**", thus stressing our dependence on God's **grace** not on Man's **works**.

The conclusion of the matter is that the Anabaptists were over-reacting against the medieval practice of *indiscriminate baptism* of children, whether their parents were Christians or not. But the Anabaptist's solution is equally unscriptural and unapostolic. They even excluded children entirely from Church membership initially. The proper scriptural response should have been to insist on **covenant household baptism of believers and their children**.

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C. THE PLACE OF CHILDREN BAPTISM IN THE CHURCH:

From the Apostolic times whole households of believing parents have always been baptized irrespective of age, like the households of Cornelius (Acts 10), of Lydia (Acts 16:15), of the Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:33) and of Stephanus (I Cor. 1:16). None of these references excluded children, women and servants, all of which are known from the Scriptures to make up the biblical covenant household (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:10-14; Deut. 29:10-15). It is in fact against God's will to exclude children (Mark 10:14).

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.... Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones... Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt. 18:6, 10 and 14).

Christ passed through infancy and childhood (instead of just coming as a full adult man as Adam and Eve at creation and as Christ would come at end-time), in order to show us that His grace and Gospel have definite place for infants and children. No one has the right to declare infants and children as sub-human and excluded from entering into divine covenant together with their fellow human adults. Or was Jesus less than Saviour and Son of God when He was an infant? The Angels would have said so to the shepherd (Luke 2:10 -16).

About 230 AD a Church Father called Origen wrote: "**THE CHURCH HAS RECEIVED A TRADITION FROM THE APOSTLES TO GIVE BAPTISM EVEN TO LITTLE CHILDREN**". Origen was baptized as an infant about 185AD. So were his parents (who were also born to Christian parents) baptized in about 150AD. Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna in AD 156 declared that he had been a Christian from infancy. He was born about 69AD to Christian parents. So infant baptism is as old as the New Testament. The evidence for this is still found in church

denominations with antiquity dating back to 1st and 2nd Century AD such as the Greek, Roman, Anglican, and Coptic Churches who have always known no other than household baptism from ancient times.

The recent and strange claim that Infant Baptism was not practiced in the apostolic times has no basis either in the Scripture or in the traditions of the Early Church.

It is a false and deceitful claim. The Apostles and the Fathers could not have so soon defied Christ's warning in Matt. 18:1-7,10,14 and rebuke in Mark 10:14.

Despite these **warnings** by Christ, the Anabaptists and their followers still claim that there is no clear specific teaching of the Scripture insisting that infants of believers *must be* baptised! But they forget that there is no clear specific scriptural teaching that these children *must not be* baptised either. **After all, women's participation in Holy Communion has no clear specific mention in the Scripture, yet we know they should.**

Christians who keep their children away from Baptism, for whatever reason, keep such children away from Christ and His New Covenant. Such children ought to be kept away from the Church because, despite their tenderness and helplessness, God puts them under condemnation (see Gem 17:14). He who rejects the means of grace is not fit for the reality of the same grace. This is what the opposers of infant baptism mean (as some Anabaptist founders of the 16th Century taught), though they may not always be aware of this. But thanks be to God for the authoritative witness of Origen and the Church Fathers from whom we also learned authoritatively that the New Testament was actually written by the Apostles.

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D. VALUE OF INFANT BAPTISM

The historic practice of baptising infants who belong to believing households has much value such as:

1. **Dedication to God:** Infant Baptism affords us the means to dedicate infants to the Name of Christ by an ordinance instituted by Christ Himself, making the child ritually clean and holy as Saint Paul says in I Cor. 7:14. Any other dedication before baptism and apart from it is certainly a "Strange fire" (Lev. 10:1-2) and has little or no meaning.

2. **Possession of Covenant Privileges:** In divine covenants, those who have the covenant sign on them are those who enjoy its privileges. (Gen. 17:14)

3. **Initiation into Church Membership:** Baptism is the only valid and true symbol of initiation into Church membership instituted by Christ in the New Testament.

4. **Acknowledgment of Childhood as from God:** Rejection of children at baptism is rejection of the Boy Jesus and a rejection of legitimate procreation and infancy as gifts from God. The Saviour who was once an infant could not have come to save only adults. No, He couldn't have.

5. **Witness to the Grace of God:** Infant baptism shows us that God is gracious to us in our helplessness. All we have in Jesus are by grace, not of works so that no one will boast (Eph. 2:9).

6. **Acceptance of the Full Humanity of Infants:** Infant baptism portrays the fact that children are *bona fide* members of humankind for whom Christ died and to whom salvation is offered in Christ. As such, the Kingdom of God and the Church of Christ are for them also (Mk. 10:14). This also assures us that Christians who lose their sense of discretion, as when they grow senile from aging or when insane or unconscious, do not by such lose their faith, their baptism and their hope of the Kingdom

7. **Confirmation of the Covenant Solidarity of the Household:** The unity of the family or household is ordained and respected by God in all covenant matters (Exd. 20:6). The New Covenant of Christ adopts us into God's own household, even when we are just born again as spiritual babies. We should not be surprised therefore, that it involves even infant members of our households and upholds the unity of the household.

8. **Testimony to the Extent of the Power of the New Covenant:** Both in its binding and blessings, the New Covenant is not limited to individuals and adults, but extends to households under them including their infant offsprings. **Every child in this world is conceived and born under the laws, curses or blessings of his/her parents' covenants (Ps. 51:5; Gal 4:4).** Therefore, he/she qualifies (*and is bound*) to bear the sign of such covenants. *Covenant initiation signs are symbols and marks/seals of claim on the life of the initiated.*

This is consistent with all divine covenants in the Bible and the Christian New Covenant could not have been meant to be an exception without explicit teaching to that effect.

9. **Avoidance of the Offence of Covenant Violation:** Preventing the children of covenant homes from being initiated into the divine covenants, to which their parents belong, is a serious offence that gravely provokes divine indignation leading to severe punishment. This applies to the household of Abraham (Gen. 17:12-14), of Moses (Exd. 4:24-26), and of Christ's disciples (Matt. 18:5-7; Mk. 10:13-16) and so, of all Christian parents.

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E. WHY WE SHOULD BAPTISE BELIEVERS WITH THEIR CHILDREN:

1. GOD'S NATURE WARRANTS NO OTHER WAY.

God described Himself as the God who blesses or punishes parents with their children (Exd. 20:5,6). This God does not change (Mal 3:6) from Old to New Testaments till End - time.

2. THE CALL OF GOD PROMISES SO.

The Old Covenant initiatory sign of circumcision was the seal of incorporation into Israel and justification by faith (Rom 4:11). It was **limited** to males of Israel with age minimum of eight days (Gen 17:10-14). Females depended on the covenants of their fathers or husbands (Num 30).

The New Covenant initiatory sign of Baptism is the seal of regeneration into Christ and justification by faith (Tit. 3:5; Rom. 4:11a). It is **open** to both males and females of all nations without age minimum mentioned anywhere (Matt 28:19). The New Covenant promises salvation for "*you and your household*" (Acts 16:31) or "*you and your children*" (Acts 2:38,39).

3. GOD'S COVENANTS DEMAND SO.

Both the Old and New Covenants include children as members of the household, so that children usually share with their parents in all covenant commands (Exd. 20:10, Duet. 29:11-13; 30:2), promises (Duet. 30:6; Acts 2:39; 16:31), blessings (Exd. 20:6, Acts 11:14; 1Cor. 7:14) and allegiance (Jos. 24:15; 2Tim. 1:5): *except such children renounce or break their parents' covenant* (Gen 17:14; 2 Chron 7:20-22). Such is the magnitude of the covenant power of parents over their children.

While the Church disregards this parental covenant power, Satan and his demons who know this covenant rule, exploit it in possessing and tormenting children of demonised households.

Such children could only be free when they renounce or break such covenants (Col.3: 6-10; Eph.2:1-2) through deliverance and covenant breaking ministrations.

Strange enough those who doubt the power of the New Covenant initiation (i.e. Baptism) on infants are usually quick to believe the power of demonic covenant initiation on the same infants, especially in Africa: they would organise deliverance for such affected persons even after conversion to Christ. How we demean God's power in our presumed devotion to Him! May the Lord have mercy.

In relation to God's redemptive reach towards man, the Scripture is replete with three covenant principles:

- * that of solidarity of the covenant household,
- * that of covenant signs as seals of covenant grace and promises, and
- * that of covenant initiation for individuals as well as for households (including infants).

4. GOD'S KINGDOM ALLOWS IT. Participation in the New Covenant sign and grace or in God's Kingdom has no age barrier for believing households (Luke. 15:17) because God is able to relate with all, both adults and children (Luke. 1:15; Matt. 21:15,16; Rom. 3:21-23).

5. CHRIST'S GOSPEL TEACHES SO. Matt. 18:1-10,14 and Mark 10:13-16 teach us that if any Church does not consider believers' children as fit for admission into the New Covenant community as with their parents and other adults, such a Church offends Christ and provokes His wrath and indignation. Moreover, there cannot be any valid church admission without the sign of Baptism. Dedication, Blessing or Naming Ceremony cannot admit any one into the Church validly.

6. TRUE CHURCH TRADITION HAS ALWAYS BEEN SO.

We have no biblical example of New Testament **believers who did not baptize their children because they were too small for the Kingdom.** Nor does the Bible ever teach **believers within the church to withhold their children's baptism till they come of age.** Instead, we find believers with their children among Christ's disciples (Matt 18:2) and as members of the Apostolic Church (Acts 21:5; I Tim 3:4,5).

In agreement with the Scripture and the Apostles, early Church Fathers (like Origen and Irenaeus) and Reformers (like Luther, Calvin and Crammer) all preached and practiced household covenant baptism including infants. This should be our conviction also, if we believe the Scripture.

7. THE WHOLE SCRIPTURE SUPPORTS NO OTHER WAY.

It is certainly against the teaching of Christ and the tradition of the Apostles to despise children of believers as unfit for the New Testament signs and grace. Apart from the ideas and scruples of the Anabaptists and their descendants, there is no scriptural basis in the Old and New Testaments to question baptismal initiation of believers' children into the New Covenant of Christ.

If **household covenant baptism** (including infants) satisfies the above seven tests of Christian truth, we must therefore TAKE HEED not to despise children (Matt. 18:10), but rather, do God's will concerning them (Matt. 18:5,6,14). In this way we and our little ones shall escape the inevitable offence and the woe (Matt. 18:7). BELIEVERS WHO FAIL TO INITIATE THEIR CHILDREN (THROUGH BAPTISM) HAVE DISCLAIMED SUCH CHILDREN SPIRITUALLY. ***If indeed, we deny this TRUTH that the faith of parents avails for their little children, we expose our households to grave danger, both of God's fiery wrath and Satan's fiery darts!*** May God help us.

Finally, is it not time for the Church to take heed and do the right thing? Is it not time to stop exposing ourselves and our children to the risk and danger of the Anabaptists' error? ***The Anabaptists' doctrine may appeal to our Gentile `cultic' thinking; but should we continue to condone it despite the fact that, as a reactionary innovation, it is obviously unscriptural, unapostolic, anti-covenant, pro-Gnostic, based on works rather than grace, against family solidarity and in fact unrealistic and untenable?*** If the Church must be Christian, then its doctrine and practice, especially of baptismal initiation, must be Christian not mundane, scriptural not popular.

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CONCLUSION

Christian Ritual Baptism is a baptism with water, into Christ's Name (not into water). It is also the initiation rite into the New Covenant in Christ. It was instituted and commanded by Christ and has been practiced from the Apostles down through the ages, for all believers and their dependent households.

If however there is an event of one deciding to refuse baptism for a child from a believer's household (as has come to be, since 16th Century), then two horrible consequences are inevitable:

1. First is a **woe** by Christ, on the adults through whom the offences has come (Matt. 18: 5-7,10,14). Similar to the case of infant circumcision, this woe could lead to death (Exd. 4:24-26).
2. Second is **cutting-off** by God, of the unbaptised (i.e. uninitiated) child from his/her parents' covenant with God, which the child is thereby, accounted guilty of breaking (Gen. 17:12-14).

This is probably why there is an instinctive guilt when children are not baptised. **This guilt, terror and vacuum is usually assuaged with innovative ceremonies like Dedication, Blessing, Church Naming** - all of which have no apostolic examples as initiatory rites nor could such ceremonies be of any validity without **prior** baptismal initiation.

In accordance with God's eternal purpose and will (Matt 18:14) therefore, children of believers should be baptized by any biblical mode into the Name of Christ (as members of their believing or covenant households). Thereafter, God expects that they should be trained up in the faith (Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:19) amongst the faithful (as initiated members of the visible Church). **Their baptism with water** (as with the adults) **is an outward and initiatory means of grace - the *Newbirth of Water* and the *Washing of Regeneration*: cleansing, dedicating and certifying them fit to partake in the SAFETY and SANCTITY of the New Covenant community and benefit from other means of grace.** Such a child, according to God's promise (Prov. 22:6) usually grows up BELIEVING Christ as the Son of God, Lord and Saviour (John 20:31; 2Tim. 3:15, 16). Such a child therefore is by right a believer in that sense (2Tim 1:5; Matt. 18:6), though the child could gather other sinful beliefs and practices also.

Nevertheless, as the child comes to the age of discretion, he/she needs to be made to realise that to have been baptised means to have put on Christ and died with Him and so be bound to inevitably obey Him and not live in sin (Rom. 6:1-4,11-14). This would specially encourage the child to consciously renounce all sinfulness of the world and of the flesh and pledge allegiance or commitment to Christ alone in a decisive manner (1 John 5:13 and 2:12,15). This, in itself, is CONVERSION (i.e. Repentance/Renunciation). Though it does not have to correspond necessarily to the time of Newbirth, conversion or godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9-11) is however the SUREST PROOF (not the means) of the Newbirth of the Spirit (1 John 2:29; 3:10) or Spirit Baptism, which is the inward reality of grace.

This is the relevance of the practice of delayed Confirmation (Acts 8:14-17) and Renewal of Baptismal Vows in all historic denominations. **Confirmation is simply a special altar-call done before a Bishop, usually accompanied with ratification of baptismal vows and the laying on of hands for spiritual strengthening and fullness (Acts. 9:17; 14:21-23; 19:6; Heb. 6:2).**

It is pertinent to note here that delaying confirmation was not common in the apostolic times; it came to be practiced due to logistic and administrative constraints on Bishops of large dioceses and later support by pastoral arguments. Withholding communion till after confirmation was introduced in 1281 by Archbishop Peckham as incentive for parishioners to seek confirmation, which was then being neglected. Since then this decision has been supported by other arguments based on the need to avoid taking Holy Communion except one *examines* oneself and truly *discerns* the Lord's body, as the Apostle Paul cautioned the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

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