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**The theology and practice of baptism**

**amongst British Baptists,**

**1900-1996.**

**Volume 2**

**by**

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## **PART FIVE**

### **1967-1996**

#### **Chapter Eight.**

#### **Ecumenical Developments.**

The period from the early 1960s to 1996 has witnessed greater ecumenical activity and advancement than any other time in the history of the Church. Within this movement, Baptists have continued to play a major if ambiguous role. To illustrate this and the place of debates about baptism within this development, five key 'processes' will be examined: the developments leading up to and following the publication of the report *Baptists and Unity*, the *Ten Propositions*, the F&O document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Inter-Church Process, and Local Ecumenical Projects/Partnerships.

It becomes increasingly clear that the baptismal question is so bound up with other ecumenical issues that it has come to have a subordinate place to them. It has often become subsumed to the ecumenical process itself, in its various phases, and therefore cannot be separated from these broader developments. It will also become clear that the majority of Baptist writing and discussion of baptism has occurred within the ecumenical context. This has led to polarized positions on baptism within the BU. Non-ecumenical Baptists have stayed largely where they were, seemingly content with what has been written on baptism in previous generations, whereas those Baptists involved ecumenically have developed their baptismal understandings, evincing a growing charity towards paedobaptists and those Baptists who have become more open towards regarding the two forms of baptism as complementary. As such, it is true that the Baptist discussion of baptism has become one in which only a relatively small number of writers and Baptist churches have been involved, specifically, those involved ecumenically.

**Baptists and Unity: Before and After.**

The Nottingham F&O Conference has been rightly recognized as a watershed date in modern British ecumenism with its call for Church unity by Easter 1980,<sup>1</sup> though, at first, it was barely acknowledged amongst Baptists.<sup>2</sup> However, in time, it came more and more to the fore.<sup>3</sup> In November 1964, the BU Council referred the matter of the Nottingham recommendations to the Advisory Committee on Church Relations (ACCR) which drew up an interim reply which was considered by the Council on March 9, 1965.<sup>4</sup> It commented that before long Baptists would have to 'give clearer indication than they have so far done as to their attitude to some of the major questions involved in the movement for the greater unity among the Christians of this and other lands' and acknowledged the 'considerable divergences of view among Baptists' which made it 'the more important that they study and face together the questions raised at Nottingham'.<sup>5</sup> In view of this, the ACCR asked the Council to empower it to prepare a comprehensive statement to help clarify and shape British Baptist opinion and policy regarding both the changing pattern of Church relations

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, amongst the most recent literature J. Matthews, *The Unity Scene* (n.d., [but c.1987]), chapter 6 'Unity Begins at Home', 81-96; T. F. Best, 'Local Ecumenical Projects', in N. Lossky *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1991), 628; E. Welch and F. Winfield, *Travelling Together. A Handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships* (1995), eg, p.5, but implicitly throughout the book, as it deals specifically with LEPs which originated out of Nottingham 1964; R. Nunn, *This Growing Unity. A handbook on ecumenical development in the counties, large cities and new towns of England* (1995), 1 and 15.

<sup>2</sup> Notification of it was given in August, see 'The Unity We Scek', *BT* August 20, 1964, 7, and 'Church Union By 1980?', *BT* August 27, 1964, 1-2, and then afterwards by Rev. Ron Cowley of Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol, 'Sense of Urgency is Felt in Unity Discussions', *BT* October 29, 1964, 2.

<sup>3</sup> See the editorial, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* March 18, 1965, 5; 'Baptists and Church Unity. Need to make their position clearer', being the report of the Advisory Committee to the BU Council the preceding week, *BT* March 18, 1965, 8; John Hough's report on the Whitsuntide BCC Conference, 'Is the goal Co-operation or Unity?', *BT* June 17, 1965, 2; R. Cowley, 'Unity Movement Speeding Up', *BT* November 4, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix II 'Report on the Resolutions of the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference Adopted by the Council of the Baptist Union, 9th March, 1965', in *Baptists and Unity* (1967), 57-60. On the prehistory of the report see 'Terms of Reference', *Baptists and Unity*, 4. A brief outline of the origin of *Baptists and Unity* is also set out in W. M. S. West, *To Be A Pilgrim. a memoir of Ernest A. Payne* (Guildford, 1983), 140-141.

<sup>5</sup> 'Report on the Resolutions', 58.



and the more general question of Christian unity 'and to ensure by careful consultation that the statement takes account of the different theological and ecclesiastical opinions within the denomination'.<sup>6</sup> It recommended that Baptists, as asked by the BCC resolutions, should again consider the issues of open and closed membership and open and closed communion, on which the Council had issued a report in 1937, but that this time closer attention be paid to the theological issues involved.<sup>7</sup> It argued that Baptists be fully represented in such consultations and 'that they will share with others in the consultation with sympathy and a recognition of the problems which face all the Churches in this field'.<sup>8</sup>

The resulting document, *Baptists and Unity*, was presented to the Council in November, 1966,<sup>9</sup> and adopted, though by no means unanimously, in March 1967.<sup>10</sup> The report highlighted baptism, local church autonomy, episcopacy, communion, creeds and confessions, and church-state relationships as the major areas of

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6 'Report on the Resolutions', 58.

7 'Report on the Resolutions', 58. See 'Section II.2 - Worship' where all BCC member Churches were asked to re-examine and clarify their practice and regulations about intercommunion and reconsider the theology underlying them, see Appendix I 'British Council of Churches First British Faith and Order Conference, September 12th-19th, 1964. Texts of Resolutions from the Sections Passed at the Conference', in *Baptists and Unity*, 53. The 1937 report was *The Report of the Special Committee* appointed to examine Baptist, Congregational and Presbyterian union.

8 'Report on the Resolutions', 59. 'Section III.1 - Membership' had requested consultations to deal with the varying doctrines and practices of Christian initiation and the problems arising for member Churches, 'Texts of Resolutions', 54.

9 *Baptists and Unity*, 4-5. This was the result of the responses to the 1965 interim statement submitted by 16 Associations, 13 minister's fraternals and 11 churches. The Council meeting was reported in, 'Baptists and Church Relations', *BT* November 24, 1966, 9. The ACCR was made up of its chairman, Dr. George Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon's College, Dr. Leonard Champion, Principal of Bristol College, Rev. William Davies, Area Superintendent for South Wales, Rev. W. J. Grant, Area Superintendent for the East Midlands, Rev. R. L. Child now retired in Oxford, Rev. A. S. Clement, Home Secretary of the BMS, Dr. Morris West of Dagnall Street, St. Albans, and four laymen, Mr. Horace F. Gale of Bedford, Mr. E. E. Ironmonger of Oxford, Mr. J. Godfrey Le Quesne, QC, of Hampstead, and Miss M. Russell of Hitchin.

10 'Not Yet Ready For Unity', March 16, 1967, 1 and 8. The report was presented to the Council by Dr. George Beasley-Murray. At the meeting, Rev. Leslie Larwood, of West Croydon, believed that official adoption of the report would jeopardize denominational unity, to which Dr. Champion responded by reminding the Council that it was the answer to the Nottingham Conference and a Baptist answer was needed.

disagreement, and advised against pressing for organic union by 1980 as it would damage denominational unity and its witness.<sup>11</sup> On baptism, it stated that the 'maintenance of baptism as a rite to be administered upon a personal profession of faith is generally regarded as the distinctive characteristic of Baptists'.

In assessing whether the rigid maintenance of believer's baptism was a ground of separation from other Christian traditions, three issues needed to be borne in mind: the widespread desire to overcome the difficulties raised by indiscriminate infant baptism; new theological and practical insights into the rite of Christian initiation and the general acceptance of the validity of the Baptist position; and the fact that most modern union schemes provided recognition of both believer's and infant (or sponsored) baptism, insisting that in the latter case full membership depended on a later personal profession of faith. So-called 're-baptism' was then identified as the primary sticking point: 'It is clear that at the present time Baptists are not all of one mind as to how far for the sake of greater Christian unity it is or might be right to go in recognising infant baptism in this modified or supplemented form. Most Baptists feel an additional hesitation if it is insisted that the recognition of both current forms of baptism must exclude the baptism on profession of faith of anyone baptized as an infant'.<sup>12</sup>

After a brief study of the biblical and theological principles concerning the unity of the Church,<sup>13</sup> the report admitted, 'There is probably no other major denomination in which there is such widespread doubt concerning the present desire and movement to recover the unity of the Church'.<sup>14</sup> Three proposals, then, required consideration. The first distinguished between the concepts of the unity of the Church and the union or reunion of the churches: the former being a gift from God, the latter a work of his

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<sup>11</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 20-21, and 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 42-44.

<sup>14</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 45.

people resulting in organizational structures. Secondly, Baptists needed to take more seriously the fact that Paul set baptism in the context not only of faith, but also unity. Beyond the faith confessed in baptism lay the fellowship and mission of the Church. 'The unity of the Spirit is known in mission activity, and the wholeness of the baptismal understanding of unity requires the continued participation in mission'. Thirdly, it is in the local church that Baptists find their Christian life centred. If these statements genuinely reflected Baptist convictions, then within them lay the challenge to face up to contemporary events. If this truly was what the Spirit was doing in the present, then 'ought it not to be of concern to us?' Clearly opinions differed as to how the Church's unity is known and expressed, thus participation in the discussions was called for, 'that we may together learn the mind of the Spirit for the Church to-day'.<sup>15</sup> This led to the conclusion, 'That Christian unity is of great importance, urgency and complexity', and that Baptists needed to give much closer thought to the issues involved. That no plan of church union or scheme had to date been put forward to which Baptists could assent,<sup>16</sup> 'their close study of current discussions and negotiations, whether as official "observers" or not, is of great importance'. The report believed that it would be a mistake for the BU, and perhaps some others, to press for organic union by 1980 'lest it endanger denominational unity, and thereby seriously weaken the witness Baptists have to make'. Nevertheless, 'Baptists are right in sharing in the exploration of what covenanting together might mean and the conditions on which it might become possible for Baptists'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 45-48.

<sup>16</sup> This was an echo of George Beasley-Murray's contribution to the BU Living Issues booklets in which he admitted that reunion presented special difficulties as no scheme in any part of the world had to date satisfactorily solved the problem of infant baptism for Baptists, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Reflections on the Ecumenical Movement* (1965), 12-13, and also Beasley-Murray, 'I Believe in this Movement - But...The Way Will Be Long and Hard', *BT* March 11, 1965, 8. He also expressed dismay at the proposed date of 1980 on the grounds that it was Churches not simply enthusiasts which needed to be reunited.

<sup>17</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 49-50. The call for the preservation of denominational unity recurred a number of times, eg, E. E. Ironmonger, 'Unity of the denomination', *BT* October 12, 1967, 7.

*Baptists and Unity* was formally received and adopted by the Council at their March meeting in 1967.<sup>18</sup> It advocated cautious yet continued involvement, a position which received considerable support,<sup>19</sup> though many believed it should have pressed for unity,<sup>20</sup> whilst others, most notably the conservative evangelical BRF, opposed both positions, for which they were themselves taken to task by J. A. Anderson who accused them of threatening to split the denomination, a claim renounced by Theodore Bamber.<sup>21</sup>

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- 18 The Council agreed that *Baptists and Unity* should be sent to the churches and Associations for careful study, and to the BCC and member churches of the BWA. The ACCR was also instructed to review the situation in a year in the light of the responses received and the progress of discussions by the BCC, and to report back to the Council no later than November 1968. See *Baptists and Unity*, 51. The importance of *Baptists and Unity* was indicated by reference to it in John Huxtable's chapter on 'Key Documents on Unity', *A New Hope for Christian Unity* (Glasgow, 1977), 101-102. Huxtable, citing sections of the 1948 'Baptist Doctrine of the Church', sought to call Baptists to full participation in the ecumenical movement, challenging them to participate in what the Spirit was doing in 'drawing churches out of isolation into discussion and activity together', p.102. Comments on *Baptists and Unity* had to be submitted by the first week of April, 1968, see W. W. Bottoms, 'We Cannot - And Shall Not - Go Back to Rome', *BT* April 11, 1968, 8.
- 19 Editorial, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* March 16, 1967, 5, which highlighted the lack of consensus over baptism and the place of children in the life of the British Church as major factors. See also the report of the BU Council debate, 'Consider these points, Unity Report Urges Baptists', *BT* March 16, 1967, 9; Rev. Roger Hayden of Northampton, 'Baptist Unity Report is Ahead of Us', *BT* April 20, 1967, 4, and also his contribution to 'Baptists and Unity', *The Fraternal* 146 (October, 1967), 24-26.
- 20 Eg. Mr. Robert Browne, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* March 23, 1967, 4 (this was not Rev. Robert D. Browne of High Street, West Bromwich); so too the letters of H. Howland of Woodford Green, Essex, and A. Thatcher of Bristol, *BT* April 20, 1967, 4; and a group of ten from Manchester who believed denominational unity would not be jeopardized and that Baptists had a valuable contribution to make to a United Church, 'Astonished and distressed', *BT* March 30, 1967, 3, the group being J. MacFee, R. S. MacFee, G. Creer, R. Wilkinson, E. Blakeley, S. J. Lockwood, Enid Welford, Michael Welford, A. D. Redhouse and M. Redhouse. Walter Bennewith of Watford, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* April 13, 1967, 3, declared that he would have signed with the Manchester group given the opportunity.
- 21 J. A. Anderson, a deacon from Epsom, 'Revival or Dissidence?', *BT* December 14, 1967, 3-4; T. M. Bamber of Paignton, 'Evangelical Doubts About Questions of Unity', *BT* January 4, 1968, 4. Bamber noted that since the last BU Council meeting in November, six churches had withdrawn from the BU. See also D. P. Kingdon, *Baptists at the Crossroads* (1968), details of which are reported by W. W. Bottoms, 'But at Which Crossroads Do Baptists Stand?', *BT* February 29, 1968, 6. This was an address given in 1967 but published in pamphlet form by the BRF in early 1968. In it, Kingdon severely censured the BU for lack of theological rigour, and was himself heavily criticized by Walter Bottoms. For his review and defence of the BU's position, Bottoms was himself applauded, Mr. Kenneth L. Savage of Watford, 'Baptists at Crossroads', *BT* March 14, 1968, 5, and denounced, Rev. Dennis S. Floodgate of Portsmouth, 'Baptists at Crossroads', *BT* March 7, 1968, 4; Rev. John C. Beyer of Sheffield, 'Baptists at Crossroads', *BT* March 14, 1968, 5; Rev. Ronald S. Luland of Bedford, *BT* March 21, 1968, 4, and Haddon Wilmer of Leeds, 'Baptists at Crossroads', *BT* March 28, 1968, 3. Rev. Stanley Voke of Walton-on-Thames, 'Baptists and Unity', *The Fraternal* 146 (October, 1967), 26-27.

Whilst many favoured continuing ecumenical participation,<sup>22</sup> there were also those who refused to accept assurances that full union would not be the outcome and so called for withdrawal from the movement.<sup>23</sup> But there were also those who believed in unqualified participation in everything that was happening ecumenically and that the official BU report did not go far enough. Most prominent of these were a group of five ministers from the West Midlands area who, after meeting together over a six month period, produced their own response, *Baptists for Unity*.<sup>24</sup>

The group noted that those Baptists fully committed to the ecumenical movement had no such unifying organization as the BRF and also criticized *Baptists and Unity's* caution for reasons of denominational unity.<sup>25</sup> For them, discussion of ministry, sacraments and the relation of church and state, were scarcely of any interest.<sup>26</sup> The Church should be talking to the world, and instead of being concerned with its own life, it should be concerned with the lives of those to whom it is sent. 'It is in this sense that we have no great interest in questions about valid ministries and

criticized the report for not having contained a single representative from the conservative evangelical wing who had serious reservations about ecumenical involvement, and for being 'beclouded by a sacramental emphasis which can easily send us off in another direction', as was evidenced in the absence of reference to the substitutionary atonement.

- 22 Eg, Dr. Raymond Brown of Upton Vale, Torquay, 'Cool It - This subject needs light - not heat', *BT* April 4, 1968, 6 and 8 (being the fourth in a series of articles); W. W. Bottoms, 'We Cannot - And Shall Not - Go Back to Rome', *BT* April 11, 1968, 8, for whom the Baptist contribution to the life of the true Church was essential.
- 23 Rev. Frank S. Fitzsimmonds, a tutor at Spurgeon's College, 'Should we now pause in our progress towards unity?', *BT* March 14, 1968, 7, who argued against ecumenism's proceeding in a way which would compromise principles, believing that Baptist independence in ecumenical matters did not imply non-co-operation, though personally he did not think the ecumenical movement was the way forward (this was the first of a series of five special articles looking at the Church unity movement from different perspectives).
- 24 The booklet was prepared by Michael Taylor of Hall Green, but had grown out of written contributions by members of the group. They were Robert Brown of Hearsall, Coventry, Peter Coleman of Darkhouse, Coseley, Roger Nunn of Walsgrave and Shilton, and Donald Smith of Birmingham Bible Institute. The group had received encouragement and help from Principal K. C. Dykes of Northern Baptist College since 1967, and Alec Gilmore.
- 25 They declared, 'We believe that...we can wait too long before joining the conversations', and that, 'Denominational unity, insofar as it can be regarded as an isolated issue, cannot therefore be an overriding concern...', M. Taylor (ed.), *Baptists for Unity* (1968), 8-9. Though Taylor is not credited as the editor, it is stated on p.5 that the final draft of the book was his work.
- 26 Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 15-16, citing approvingly the work of Albert van den Heuvel, *The Humiliation of the Church* (1967), 188-89.

sacraments, in baptismal controversy and debates about Church order'. They doubted whether preoccupation with F&O questions would ever provide the road to Church unity and renewal, and that entry into deeper truth would be attained not by arguing out an agreed basis for co-operation, but by actual co-operation.<sup>27</sup>

The group regretted the emphasis on Church unity and truth which implied there could be no such unity until all agreed about doctrinal statements or about questions of ministry, membership and Church government,<sup>28</sup> advocating instead a more pragmatic line. Obstacles could best be removed, not by solutions to problems, but by temporary working agreements which readily admitted the existence of problems thus enabling Christians to live with them and work together. 'We are all aware, for example, that Church unity will wait for ever if the issue of baptism has to be settled first, but already many Christians see the wisdom of letting different baptismal practices live side by side in the one fellowship'.<sup>29</sup>

There followed a suggested 'Agenda for Baptists', which fell into two sections,<sup>30</sup> the second of which dealt with temporary working agreements which included polity, episcopacy, ministry, membership (including baptism) and worship (including communion).<sup>31</sup> In seeking to reach a working agreement on baptism three groups of people had to be kept in mind: fully committed believers; those not committed but who had been drawn into the life and worship of the Church - the catechumenate; and

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 17 and 19.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 20. This is a clear allusion to LEPs.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 22-24. The first included practical steps which they recommended the BU should take immediately. First, the Baptist Assembly should empower the BU to inform the BCC that Baptists would join other Churches in a covenant 'to work and pray for the inauguration of union'. Second, the Assembly should authorize the BU to enter negotiations for union with the Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ, and that this would be aided if, like the CU, the BU should become the Baptist Church and that the BU Council and the Associations should thereby take decisions on behalf of the local churches. Third, local Baptist churches should act together 'in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately'.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 24-31.

those outside the Church altogether. In the case of children belonging to the third group, they saw no objection to a service called 'The Blessing of Infants' to which all could be brought indiscriminately.<sup>32</sup> To aid this, indiscriminate infant baptism should be stopped and children should be admitted to the catechumenate at a service for the dedication of infants, but infant baptism should be accepted as an alternative practice. Children of Christian parents clearly belonged to the catechumenate, and for these infant baptism would admit them into the Church, whilst for Baptists a service of dedication would admit them to the catechumenate. This would require that both infant and believers' baptism would exist side by side, and that those who became members of the Church by admittance to the catechumenate followed by believers' baptism or those admitted by infant baptism followed by an affirmation of personal commitment to Christ 'should be equally acceptable to all'. Those in the catechumenate should be baptized into membership when they had reached the age of personal moral responsibility and committed themselves to Christ, and those infant baptized should also recognize that personal commitment was an essential part of Church membership. In both cases, the person would enter the first group, the committed fellowship of believers, and in both instances the laying on of hands and admittance to communion would follow.<sup>33</sup>

They continued, stating that Baptists should be as discriminating over re-baptism as they wished others to be over infant baptism.<sup>34</sup> Such a Church in which two forms of baptism existed, they believed, would 'continue for a very long time', though this did not mean that it would be a permanent solution to the problems. It remained to the Spirit 'to increase our understanding of the baptismal experience and of what it means

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<sup>32</sup> In this, the group agreed with the views of A. Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity* (1966), 100-103, and the report *The Child and the Church* (1966), 33-34.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 30, 'If we are to accept both forms of baptism and have respect for differing ways of entering the Church whilst at the same time rejoicing that it is one Church into which all are baptised, then it seems to us that we ought not to deny these things by re-baptising those baptised as infants'.

to be members of Christ's Church, in order that we may unify our baptismal practice'.<sup>35</sup>

*Baptists for Unity* concluded that Christian unity must be outward and visible, though they recognized that it might not happen, and questioned whether the will for it existed amongst Baptists. They then suggested that perhaps it was time for local Baptist churches wishing to move ecumenically either to enter local schemes of union or seize the initiative and apply for membership in the proposed United Reformed Church.<sup>36</sup> Many joined with them in pressing for organic union with the Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ,<sup>37</sup> whilst others claimed that following *Baptists for Unity* would mean Baptists losing their distinctive witness.<sup>38</sup>

This was followed by the official report *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*, which was presented to and adopted by Council in March 1969.<sup>39</sup> From the responses received, it

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 30. They further believed that wider acceptance of the catechumenate as an essential part of the Church, together with the understanding that membership is more concerned with commitment to Christ and his mission than sealing personal salvation, were most important witnesses to the missionary nature of the Church.

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Baptists for Unity*, 32-33. This was reviewed by Walter Bottoms, 'An Agenda for Baptists for Unity', *BT* April 11, 1968, 8, who also noted that the pro-unionists had nothing like the BRF for making their views known. He warmly received their contribution but warned that the views expressed were potentially divisive.

<sup>37</sup> Eg, Mr. Brian G. Cooper of Coventry, 'Not Organic Union - then what can it mean?', *BT* April 4, 1968, 3; Rev. Dr. Howard Williams of Bloomsbury, 'Baptists for Unity', *BT* May 9, 1968, 4; Rev. Ernest Clipsham, 'Could this, at last, be the way forward?', *BT* May 16, 1968, 6, who advocated federal union.

<sup>38</sup> Rev. Frank V. Mildred of Middlesborough, 'Baptists for Unity', *BT* April 25, 1968, 4. The BRF continued to try to ensure that the interests of ministers and churches were safeguarded against the BU's membership of the BCC and WCC, see T. M. Bamber, 'Why Revival Fellowship took its decision', *BT* January 15, 1970, 3. Such views were answered by the likes of Dr. D. S. Russell, 'Baptists and inter-Church relations...', *BT* October 22, 1970, 2, the fourth in a series of articles on the BU. *Baptists for Unity*, however, did prove to be the catalyst for a meeting of eighty ecumenically committed Baptists at Hothorpe Hall, Market Harborough, in December 1968, which led to the formation of the Baptist Renewal Group (BRG). See A. Gilmore, 'Now "unity" Baptists get together', *BT* December 5, 1968, 16, being a notice of the meeting the following Friday; 'Now Baptist Unity Group Formed', and A. Gilmore, 'Unity Baptists Slip Into Gear', *BT* December 26, 1968, 1 and 2 respectively. At the centre of the BRG were Alec Gilmore and Paul Rowntree Clifford.

<sup>39</sup> '*Baptists and Unity Reviewed* (1969), 10, and 'Council Endorses Unity Report', and 'What the Review Says', *BT* March 20, 1969, 1 and 8, and 8-9 respectively. It was accompanied by an Assembly resolution which would endorse the conclusion of the 1967 report, specifically continuation of membership in both the BCC and WCC, with an added clause recognizing the liberty of each church to either engage in or refrain from participation. Similarly, the decision



appeared that the majority of churches agreed with the conclusion of the 1967 report.<sup>40</sup> In presenting the resolution to the Assembly, Dr. George Beasley-Murray noted that Baptists felt the ecumenical tensions more than others,<sup>41</sup> and the Assembly went on to endorse the report.<sup>42</sup>

The same year, the BCC's *Report of the Inter-Church Enquiry into Baptismal Practice* surveyed the baptismal practices among participating churches, optimistically concluding that, 'it appears that there is now no obstacle to the mutual recognition of baptisms among churches which use the Trinitarian formula.'<sup>43</sup> This assessment was clearly premature. That no broad basis for such a conclusion existed is also illustrated by the BCC's 'Common Certificate of Baptism', jointly published with SPCK in 1972, which was intended for use either for infants or adults, simply

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whether or not to share in areas of ecumenical experiment was to be left to the local church or Association. Of those who responded to the 1967 report, many remained cautious yet committed, whilst many others were reported as anxious for co-operation at the local level, especially in mission, see *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*, 3-4 and 9. The composition of the ACCR, had by now changed since the 1967 report, the two Superintendents having been replaced by Rev. J. H. G. Adam of the Eastern Area and Rev. G. W. Haden of the Metropolitan Area, Mr. H. F. Gale and Miss M. Russell also having departed, replaced by Mr. J. V. Beaumont and Mrs. S. C. Crowe, and Rev. Frank Goodwin who left Tredegarville, Cardiff, in 1969 to become the Director of Evangelism of the London Baptist Association, and Rev. S. E. L. Larwood of West Croydon increased the number of ministers from three to five. The others remained the same under Dr. Beasley-Murray's chairmanship.

<sup>40</sup> *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*, 9. The conclusions are set out in *Baptists and Unity*, 49-51, and *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*, 14-15. The Review document was drawn up on the basis of submissions from 655 of a total number of 2,214 BU churches, 17 Associations, several minister's fraternals and a number of individuals, so p.3. Roughly a third of the churches and half the Associations had replied, see also the Editorial, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* March 27, 1969, 5.

<sup>41</sup> 'Baptists feel ecumenical tensions more acutely than other Christians', *BT* May 8, 1969, 2.

<sup>42</sup> 'Unity Report Endorsed', *BT* May 1, 1969, 1 and 16. 1,125 voted for it, 356 against, and this meant continued Baptist involvement in the BCC and WCC. However, those who had opposed it did make their voices heard, eg, Rev. D. K. Blades of Alperston, London, Rev. A. David Edwards of Thornbury, and J. W. Clarke of Great Baddow, Essex, all voted against it, 'Assembly Debate on Baptists and Unity', *BT* May 15, 1969, 4. The letters both for and against kept coming in to the *BT* for quite a while after the vote. Their fears were not assuaged by Sir Cyril Black who, in preparation for becoming BU President, expressed his hope that he could help people see the value of both ecumenical discussion and co-operation, see 'Crusader...', *BT* April 23, 1970, 6. See also the account of his Assembly presidential address, 'Love, Truth, Unity', *BT* April 30, 1970, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Cited by R. M. C. Jeffery, *Ecumenical Experiments: A Handbook*, (1971), 5, quoted by Father James M. Cassidy in his Birmingham PhD thesis, 'Membership of the Church with Special Reference to Local Ecumenical Projects in England', Part 1 'The L.E.P.s', 'Introduction'. 4. All references to this thesis are from a draft copy supplied by Father Cassidy.

stating that a person had been baptized with water in the name of the Trinity. Though it was endorsed by nineteen major British churches,<sup>44</sup> it was rejected by the Baptists and the Orthodox Church.<sup>45</sup>

In 1965 it was reported that the proposals for the Congregationalist-Presbyterian union envisaged baptism administered either to adults on profession of faith or to children of believing parents, who would be received into membership after a public profession of faith.<sup>46</sup> These moves towards Congregational-Presbyterian union, prompted Rev. Ernest Clipsham to ask whether Baptists might not find a place within the URC. While there would be no way infant baptism would be abandoned, he commented that there were no exclusive claims being made for infant baptism, in fact the process of initiation was incomplete until infant baptism was ratified by an affirmation of faith in Christ and commitment to the Church. Baptists, he urged, had a responsibility, even obligation, at least to consider the possibility.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Ten Propositions.**

In early October 1972 the Congregationalists and Presbyterians finally united to form the United Reformed Church (URC).<sup>48</sup> The impact of this long awaited union

<sup>44</sup> Including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Methodists, Congregationalists and Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.

<sup>45</sup> On the Common Certificate, see, 'Churches agree on single certificate of Baptism', *BT* August 24, 1972, 1. In 1979 a BCC proposal recommended consideration of the possibility of a common certificate of church membership, but this was rejected by the Baptists, Church of England and Roman Catholic Church, see CTE 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership Report', (final draft, 1997), §23.

<sup>46</sup> 'Outline of a United Church', *BT* March 11, 1965, 1. It must be recognized that this practice was nothing new in paedobaptist communions which have never denied believer's baptism for new converts.

<sup>47</sup> E. Clipsham, from 1964-67 Ministerial Recognition of the BUGB&I, from 1967 Director of Studies and Librarian for the BU at Southampton Row, 'Could we have a place in this church?', *BT* May 25, 1967, 6. Of the URC proposals Clipsham wrote, 'Indeed after a careful and sympathetic consideration of this document and its implications, many may well ask the question; dare we any longer stand apart?'

<sup>48</sup> Notification of this was given under the heading 'New Church is formed - with someone knocking at the door', *BT* October 12, 1972, 2, referring to the interest of the Churches of Christ, the irony being that after having broken off union talks with the BU in the early 1950s because they regarded the Baptist doctrine of baptism as too low, they were eventually to ally

was quick to follow. Sir Cyril Black admitted that Baptists were being challenged by the newly formed URC and the merging of three Methodist bodies into the Methodist Church in 1932. These had caused many to ask with whom the Baptists should unite, but for Black this question remained rhetorical until someone could solve the problem of how such a union could be brought about and answer the question of how far ecumenical enthusiasts were really willing to go. He believed that when the terms were eventually spelled out they would be unacceptable to the majority of Baptists. Of the enthusiasts he asked: 'Are they prepared to accept a weakening of our insistence that the baptism of believing penitents is the only baptism known in the New Testament, by accepting infant sprinkling as an alternative form of baptism? Further...would they accept, as would quite likely be required, a limitation on our right to baptise those who have been the unconscious recipients of sprinkling in infancy, but...have become convinced that they ought to go through the waters of believers' baptism?' Black believed that in all probability all these principles would be sacrificed.<sup>49</sup>

The following week, Peter King reported that the URC was being urged to ask the Church of England and other Free Churches on what terms they would be prepared to negotiate for union. The call originated in an unofficial unity conference held in Oxford the previous week in which Dr. David Russell had participated. This had led to the establishment of a Consultative Committee of representatives from churches willing to be involved, recommendations to be taken to the participating churches by the summer of 1974. At the initial meeting Dr. Russell had pleaded that conversations

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themselves with two Paedobaptist communions in 1981. In order for the Union to take place, the Congregational Union had had to become the Congregational Church. This included reorganization due to constitutional changes, one of the effects of which was to bring to an end the oldest united association in the country, that of the Bedfordshire County Union of Baptist and Congregational Churches, which had to form separate denominational unions, see 'The Union that was formed in 1779...', *BT* August 29, 1968, 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> C. Black, 'Are We Dragging Our Feet?', *BT* January 11, 1973, 8. Rev. Philip Clements-Jewery of Botley responded, asserting that the separation of believers was sin, that it was not truth that divided but 'sheer, stubborn rigidity', and that in any case, the compromise spoken of by Black was hypothetical, P. Clements-Jewery, 'Yes, we are dragging our feet', *BT* January 25, 1973, 4. Stan Hardy of Ilford came out in support of Black and his position on believer's baptism in 'Where are we going?', *BT* January 25, 1973, 4.

should have in mind 'visible unity' and not necessarily 'organic union'.<sup>50</sup> At the March meeting of the Council, George Beasley-Murray urged that it was vitally important that the BU be involved from the outset so that they would be able to help form the agenda for future conversations.<sup>51</sup>

In May, the URC formally issued an invitation to the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists to attend talks about talks.<sup>52</sup> The need for Baptist participation continued to be pressed<sup>53</sup> and in time the Churches Unity Commission

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- <sup>50</sup> See P. King, presumably the minister of Cecil Road, Enfield, 'Churchmen call for unity moves', *BT* January 18, 1973, 1 and 12. Other addresses at the conference were given by Rev. Arthur Bonser, the East Midland Area Superintendent, who asked that any future scheme should provide a real and genuine choice with regard to believer's baptism, and Dr. Morris West, since 1971 President of Bristol Baptist College, who, on the basis of *Baptists and Unity*, declared Baptist willingness to share in discussions on ways to further mission and unity. David Russell later reiterated the point that union talks were not the only way to demonstrate Church unity at the September meeting of the "talks about talks". He again cautioned against either organic or structural union, see 'Church union? Talks team will point to other ways...', *BT* September 27, 1973, 1 and 12. The talks were attended by the Church of England, Methodists, BU, URC, Roman Catholics, Churches of Christ, Congregational Federation, Independent Methodists, Countess of Huntingdon Connexion, Moravians and Wesleyan Reformed Church.
- <sup>51</sup> 'Big vote for unity talks', *BT* March 22, 1973, 6. Beasley-Murray's position was supported by Dr. West, Chairman of the ACCR, in the report he submitted to the Council. The motion was carried with only five abstentions.
- <sup>52</sup> 'Unity: Come and Talk', *BT* May 17, 1973, 1.
- <sup>53</sup> Eg, 'Commit yourselves to unity, churches urged', *BT* February 14, 1974, 1 and 12; 'Council Supports Unity Commission', *BT* March 21, 1974, 6-7, the resolution put to the Assembly is reported on p.7; 'BU council calls for support for commission', March 28, 1974, 3. The Assembly debated the proposal on Tuesday April 30, and voted overwhelmingly to send representatives to the Commission. The resolution was put by Dr. West and seconded by Mr William Booth who reiterated the point that Baptists should play their part and make their distinctive contribution, see Sydney Clark, 'Baptists Will Support Unity Commission', *BT* May 2, 1974, 8.

(CUC) was set up.<sup>54</sup> Progress reports were published,<sup>55</sup> until, in January 1976, *The Ten Propositions* were finally issued.<sup>56</sup>

The Propositions were published with explanatory notes. The note on Proposition 5 stated that mutual recognition of membership was dependent on the prior agreement on Christian initiation, envisaging this possibility that baptism was a complex reality which needed to be considered in its totality. 'The whole meaning and effect of the baptismal rite itself cannot therefore be tied to the moment of its performance'. Baptism looked forward to the future in which God's purposes were brought to victory. As the sacrament of faith it should be regarded as a pattern of divine address and human response. 'The total process of Christian initiation includes the washing with water and sharing the bread and wine: it is baptism reaching its conclusion in the Eucharist'. As each tradition stressed the importance of instruction either before believer's baptism or in preparation for confirmation or its equivalent rite, the commentators argued that, 'On such understandings movement from one covenanting Church to another, though properly requiring appropriate admission to fresh rites and

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<sup>54</sup> The decision for Baptist membership in the CUC was approved at the March 1974 BU Council meeting, see *A Statement to the Churches in membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (March, 1976), n.p., 1.

<sup>55</sup> Eg, 'Unity Talks Have Made Progress', *BT* April 3, 1975, 12; and D. S. Russell, 'An Ecumenical Bird's Eye View', *The Fraternal* 175 (February, 1976), 5, noted these explorations into 'visible unity' ~~was~~ <sup>part of</sup> a process which would mean an examination of what constituted Christian initiation, how this related to the mutual recognition of members and ministers, adding, 'Already in these discussions the question of baptism has been raised and a sympathetic hearing given to the claims of believers' baptism'.

<sup>56</sup> They are set out in *Local Church Unity. Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects and Sponsoring Bodies* (CCLEPE, revised edition 1985), foreword by Rev. Douglas Sparkes, at the time of publication Moderator of CCLEPE as well as Deputy General Secretary of the BU, Appendix F 'The Ten Propositions', 58. Proposition 4 sought the mutual recognition and welcome to communion without condition of communicant members in participating churches. Proposition 5 stated, 'We agree that, as from an accepted date, initiation in the covenanting Churches shall be by mutually acceptable rites.' Proposition 6 stated, 'We agree to recognize, as from an accepted date, the ordained ministries of the other covenanting Churches, as true ministries of word and sacraments in the Holy Catholic Church,...'. Proposition 7 agreed that the covenanting Churches would 'respect the rights of conscience, and to continue to accord to all our members, such freedom of thought and action as is consistent with the visible unity of the Church'.

responsibilities, would not involve any supplementing of the "initiation" already received'.<sup>57</sup>

The proposals marked a shift away from previous schemes for a United Church, and instead invited Churches to consider whether mutual recognition of membership and ministries, accompanied by a declaration of intent to build upon this, might not be a more productive way forward. It was this basic change of approach which lay behind *The Ten Propositions*.<sup>58</sup>

Dr. West presented the document to the March BU Council, recommending it be sent to every church.<sup>59</sup> This was agreed to and January 31, 1977, was selected as the final submission date, after which the Council would then be informed of the churches' responses and a reply to the Commission would accordingly be made. West explained:

The approach to visible unity is now not through union schemes but through the making visible of the unity which all believers have by being in Christ together. The motivating purpose is not to create one united structure but to see how the needs of the local church may best be met in the developing relationships and in their mission to the world: not structural union but realise and manifest unity in Christ in the congregations in their worship and on the frontiers of their mission is their aim.

The way ahead envisaged in making visible the unity is through mutual recognition of members and ministries, a sharing of table fellowship and by a declaration of intent by all those Churches willing to build on such a foundation towards closer relationships and more effective mission.

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57 'Unity Commission spells out a challenge: The Propositions', *BT* January 8, 1976, 5. This understanding of baptism as a process which would have made possible the mutual recognition of initiatory rites, though eventually failing at this point, was later to reappear in the *Called to be One* process and the 1996 document *Believing and Being Baptized*.

58 This was in line with the earlier suggestion of Dr. Russell, 'whether mutual recognition of membership and ministries, accompanied by a declaration of intent to build upon this, might not open up the way at once to table fellowship, closer relations and more effective mission.' See 'Towards a New Era?', *BT* March 18, 1976, 1. The words are those of Dr. West, see his advocacy of the Propositions below.

59 W. M. S. West, 'The New Approach', *BT* March 18, 1976, 7-8. Details in this paragraph are from p.7. Copies of the *Ten Propositions* were sent to all churches along with a statement from the BU's ACCR, see 'Towards a New Era?', *BT* March 18, 1976, 8.

West commented that Proposition 5 'sets out what is implied by the present practice of most of our open membership churches'. He further sought to clarify that 'the phrase mutually acceptable rite does not mean one common uniform rite', but rather that 'Christian initiation is understood to be a process made up of various elements, for example instruction in the faith, confession of it and later baptism in the name of the Trinity, reception into church membership - and so on - elements which may vary in order and timing but which are essential before the process is completed. What will turn out to be mutually acceptable to all those seeking to be involved in furthering Church relations remains for further discussion.' Over the past twenty five years, he remarked, Baptist participation in ecumenical developments had moved believer's baptism 'more and more into the centre of the discussion', and Proposition 5 reflected that development. West acknowledged the difficulty such a position on initiation would have for closed-membership churches, and asserted that their views needed to be respected.

In *A Statement to the Churches*, the BU set before the churches the propositions accompanied by notes. On Proposition 5's 'mutually acceptable rites' three notes were made. First, this phrase did not mean 'one uniform common rite'. Second, the understanding of initiation as a process would involve Baptist willingness to recognize and receive members who had passed through the initiatory process of other Churches, adding, however, that, 'A proper freedom must be maintained for Christian judgment over so-called re-baptism to be exercised in the living pastoral situation'. It was later noted that Proposition 7 was an attempt to preserve freedom of conscience, particularly relevant to Baptists on the matter of 're-baptism'. Third, this would require closed-membership churches to give careful consideration to admitting members of other denominations.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *A Statement to the Churches in membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (March, 1976), n.p., but 2-3. This statement had been received by the BU Council on March 10, 1976, from the ACCR.

The responses from the churches were collated and reported by Jim Wisewell in April, 1977,<sup>61</sup> and the BU Council debated its response at its November meeting. The first denominational body to do so, it was reported that after detailed debates within the Council, painstaking study by the ACCR and the responses of the churches, the BU could not unconditionally recommend that the churches accept the *Ten Propositions*. Dr. West told the Council, 'It may well be that for us the end of the road of the Churches' Unity Commission is in sight, as indeed the commission's life comes to an end next year, but that does not mean the end of the journey'. At present, he explained, 'We haven't sufficient agreement...to join the Covenant road. Too many questions remain unanswered.'<sup>62</sup> It was, however, the ACCR's judgment that even so, Baptists ought to continue to walk with other churches in the truth of the Gospel, highlighting the main difficulties for Baptists as unity, membership, ministry, covenanting and the local and universal understanding of the Church. On unity, Baptists believed in unity in life and mission, not structure.<sup>63</sup> One of the documents by the CUC had described mutually acceptable rites, but for Baptists the matter revolved around whether or not a faith response to the Gospel was being made by an individual. Many Baptists felt that the CUC appeared 'to be papering over the cracks of a fundamental disagreement on baptism which really needs to be brought right out and discuss[ed] frankly.'

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<sup>61</sup> J. Wisewell, Secretary of the Sussex Association, 'Unity...it's sure to divide!', *BT* April 21, 1977, 7. From 1,749 sent the *Propositions* and accompanying ACCR document, 962 churches replied. When the larger churches had been taken into account, this meant that some 70% of the BU membership had responded. The replies, in general, were cautious. By a two to one majority, churches had welcomed the suggestion that 'instead of trying to work-out a blueprint of a United Church there should be a mutual recognition which would involve both ministers and members'. Many churches had also reported that they were already involved in co-operating at a local level, but even among these there was suspicion of denominational or national schemes.

<sup>62</sup> This paragraph is taken from 'We Cannot Say Yes', *BT* November 17, 1977, 1 and 6.

<sup>63</sup> This fact provided the title to the official BU reply, *Visible Unity in Life and Mission. Reply by the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland to the Ten Propositions of the Churches' Unity Commission* (1977), probably edited/compiled by Neville Clark.



*Visible Unity in Life and Mission* was applauded at the Council meeting. Rev. Paul Rowntree Clifford, another committed ecumenist, recognized that the reply represented the majority, but urged that the CUC be informed that there were 'different minds amongst us'. He also felt that as a tradition, Baptists should humbly acknowledge their own weakness: 'Believers' Baptism witnesses to a regenerate church membership but it does not guarantee it. We ourselves have problems'.<sup>64</sup>

*Visible Unity*, it was claimed, represented the views of the majority of Baptist churches, though it recognized that there would be some who would have wished it went further and others who would have wished it had not gone so far. While unable to make an unqualified recommendation to the churches, the report was careful in its attempt to offer some constructive indications as to the kinds of understandings upon which a covenant might in fact be possible. This involved asking questions of other members of the CUC, most notably on baptism, the historic episcopate, freedom of conscience and the doctrine of the Church. It concluded expressing the clear determination of Baptists 'to remain in close fellowship and consultation with other Churches'.<sup>65</sup>

Proposal 5 invited agreement that no supplementary rites of initiation should be sought of those moving from one covenanted church to another. In itself this would not prove a stumbling block to Baptists, nevertheless clarification would be needed on what grounds and within what context progress at this point could be made. 'Most Baptists would approach the issue of the recognition and reception of members of

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<sup>64</sup> Hugh Cross welcomed the report, but added, 'we have not yet shown that local ecumenical projects warm our hearts', whilst Mr. John Beaumont encouraged member churches to use the document to let others know how Baptists felt and thought. See 'It may be the end of this road but it's not the end of the journey', *BT* November 17, 1977, 6. John Beaumont, at the time a member of the BU Council representing the London Baptist Association, later became chairman of the General Purposes and Finance Committee. P. R. Clifford's ecumenism is reflected in both the title and contents of his autobiography, *An Ecumenical Pilgrimage* (West Ham Central Mission, 1994). The Roman Catholics and Congregational Federation also stepped out of the covenant scheme. This is an important correction to, for example, J. Matthews, *Unity Scene*, 83, who mentions only the Baptists' and Catholics' withdrawal.

<sup>65</sup> *Visible Unity*, 'Preface' and p.1.

paedobaptist Churches by reference to whether or not a faith response to the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ had in fact been made'. On the negative side, no automatic recognition of infant baptism as true baptism could necessarily be given. 'We do however believe that it would be costly delusion to imagine that the creation of mutually acceptable rites of initiation indicates profound theological agreement on the baptismal issue'.<sup>66</sup>

Concerning Proposition 7's 'rights of conscience', questions of baptism pointed to but one of many areas in which difficulties might arise, and baptism provided a test case. If the covenant included the practice of mutually acceptable rites of initiation, then covenanting Baptist churches would have to observe the commitment they had freely accepted. However, on so-called 're-baptism', if any Baptist church which covenanted as proposed continued to preach believers' baptism on grounds of conscience, it would negate the covenant relationship itself whenever they urged believers' baptism on individual paedobaptists seeking the transfer of their membership. Therefore, such an issue of conscience needed to be faced and settled before entry into covenant. 'However, we could not commend to our churches any covenant which involved a bar to the administration of believers' baptism in the case of a paedobaptist whose conscience might lead him or her to the conclusion that fidelity to Scripture and the Gospel required such baptism'.<sup>67</sup>

Rejection of the *Ten Propositions* was clearly not the end of Baptist ecumenical involvement, merely the rejection of the scheme as put forward by the CUC at this time. A considerable number of ministers, a few laymen and a number of churches were deeply distressed by the negative official reply to the *Ten Propositions*. Rev. David Rowland believed that the starting point ought to be that God makes no distinction between Christians on grounds of methods of initiation, denomination or

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<sup>66</sup> *Visible Unity*, 2-3.

<sup>67</sup> *Visible Unity*, 3. The report concluded expressing the wish to remain in close fellowship and consultation with partner Churches and believing that the model of diversity in unity adopted by the Commission constituted the most promising avenue for further advance, p.9.

rites of ordination and stated that assent to the *Ten Propositions* would not have implied a scheme of organic union.<sup>68</sup>

On January 14, 1978, forty Baptists met at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, feeling that the Union's report did not adequately represent them and that the CUC should be informed about this as knowledge of their support might influence future decisions about covenanting together. They believed that the *Ten Propositions* did form a promising basis for the mutual recognition of ministers and members and that many others wished to be associated with such views. They therefore invited interested parties to write to Rev. Rodney Ward of Alvechurch, Birmingham.<sup>69</sup>

Support for the group was not long in coming.<sup>70</sup> The final meeting of the CUC in Birmingham recommended that a Churches' Council for Covenanting in England (CCC) should be established comprising representatives of the churches still interested in pursuing a covenant scheme.<sup>71</sup> Five of the denominations were prepared to do so: the Anglicans, Churches of Christ, Methodists, Moravians and URC, whilst

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<sup>68</sup> D. Rowland of Oxford, 'No distinction', *BT* December 1, 1977, 5.

<sup>69</sup> 'We Want to Covenant', *BT* January 26, 1978, 5. Among the 36 signatories were Rev. Dr. Michael Ball of Pontypridd, Rev. P. R. Clifford President of Selly Oak Colleges, Rev. Hugh Cross of Grove Hill and Highfield, Hemel Hempstead, who was to become Ecumenical Officer for England for the BCC from 1979, Rev. Norman Fairbairn from Penarth, Rev. Michael Taylor Principal of Northern Baptist College, Rev. David Tennant, General Secretary and Director of Training of the Birmingham Council of Christian Education and Tutor in Christian Education at Westhill College, Selly Oak, and Rev. David Wilcox of Abingdon. It is clear that Birmingham ministers and the Selly Oak Colleges played an important role throughout this period in maintaining Baptist interest and involvement, even if in an observer capacity, in the ecumenical developments at this time.

<sup>70</sup> Eg. Rev. Ernest Clipsham of Warrington, 'Covenant Welcomed', *BT* February 2, 1978, 5. At a meeting arranged by the Working Group on LEPs and the Baptist Renewal Group at the Baptist Assembly, Rev. David Savage, chairman of the Group and the Merseyside Ecumenical Officer, reported the disappointment of Baptists involved in LEPs over the official response. Speakers at the meeting included Hugh Cross, Rev. John Nicholson at the time the BCC's Ecumenical Officer for England, David Wilcox, Michael Ball and David Russell. Roger Nunn was chairman of the Baptist Renewal Group. See 'Spell out unity issues, call', *BT* May 11, 1978, 12. On this meeting see also David Savage, 'Unity: next steps', *BT* November 9, 1978, 6, which reported on the Assembly meeting, and announced that a day conference was going to be held at the Selly Oak Colleges on January 13, 1979. The meeting, however, did not take place until later in the year. The autumn CCLEPE conference passed the resolution to go to the CUC declaring that in LEPs the churches had already begun covenanting, see H. Cross, 'Unity? Churches are already covenanting', *BT* September 21, 1978, 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> 'Set Up Unity Council, Churches Told', *BT* September 28, 1978, 1.

the BU, Roman Catholics and Congregational Federation maintained observer and consultative status.<sup>72</sup>

Whilst the denominational leadership was giving a cautious yet committed response to the ecumenical state of affairs, stressing the importance of denominational unity,<sup>73</sup> the pro-ecumenists<sup>74</sup> launched the '1980 Group'. The Group convenor was one of the emerging leaders of Baptist ecumenism, Roger Nunn of Manvers Street, Bath.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> W. Bottoms, 'Five churches are ready to take next step', *BT* November 23, 1978, 4. The final report of the CUC was published the week after its last meeting, and it anticipated that the most controversial element would be Proposition 6 - the recognition of one another's ministries, see *Final Report on the Churches' Response to the Ten Propositions*, and details are from Bottoms' article. Meeting about the same time, the BU Council was addressed by the new chairman of the ACCR, Rev. Neville Clark, a tutor of South Wales Baptist College, who said, 'Our concern for unity in mission should positively drive us to continue this involvement'. The Council agreed to participate fully in further developments, see 'Unity: we must still be involved, Baptists urged', *BT* November 23, 1978, 5.

<sup>73</sup> This is reflected in two addresses to the Baptist Assembly, one by Dr. David Russell reported in, 'Strengthen your unity, Baptists urged', and by Dr. Morris West, who had been one of the denomination's representatives on the CUC, 'My Plea', both in *BT* April 26, 1979, 8 and 10 respectively.

<sup>74</sup> A group of 28 pro-unity Baptists had met in Bristol in 1979 under the chairmanship of Rev. Ron Cowley, General Superintendent for the Western Area. At the meeting John Nicholson reported that the CCC had decided to draw up a covenant which it would submit to the Churches in 1980. This gave the group the impetus to form an organization of Baptist churches and individual members who were committed ecumenically. Its fivefold task was to define the contribution which Baptists could make to the future shape of the English Church; to create groups to work on the issues which required such redefinition; to share in negotiations with Churches following the outcome of the CCC in 1980; to encourage commitment to visible unity; and to produce a scheme to enable churches to remain in formal association with each other and the BU. For this purpose, a group was appointed to bring the organization into being during the Nottingham Baptist Assembly in 1980. This group was made up of Rev. Vivien Baggs, Free Church Chaplain at Birmingham University, Hugh Cross, David Dale (details of whom are unknown), Rev. Keith Lamdin of Devizes, Rev. Roger Poolman, Pastor-Secretary of the Northants Association, and Roger Nunn (Convenor). See H. Cross, 'Baptist group take forward step in search for unity', *BT* October 4, 1979, 12.

<sup>75</sup> John Tall, 'Call for wider commitment', *BT* May 22, 1980, 2. Its aims were based on the desire to see formal shape to wider Church commitment and to make plain that they were prepared to share in schemes for visible unity while remaining loyal to their Baptist views and remaining in fellowship with both the BU and their local Baptist associations. The Group was comprised of 150 men and women and 12 churches, and set up regional groups to examine various subjects (the Midland Group looking at baptism) in order to discuss them more fully at a day conference at the time planned for Birmingham in October. Another of the group, Dr. David Rowland, wrote an article on his ecumenical commitment in which he stressed his belief that it was important that baptism was not made a precondition to sharing communion, 'Confession of an Ecumaniac', *BT* August 7, 1980, 4.

When the 1980 Group was dissolved in the autumn of 1981<sup>76</sup> it was succeeded by the Fellowship of Baptist Churches for Covenanting (FBCC).<sup>77</sup>

Whilst the CCC continued its work, committing itself to reach a decision by mid-1982,<sup>78</sup> Baptist involvement continued in two forms. The first was in the presence of official observer-consultants,<sup>79</sup> the second through the 1980 Group, who believed that the door still remained open for Baptists to join in the covenanting if they wished.<sup>80</sup> At the March 1981 meeting of the Council, Paul Clifford described *Visible Unity* as 'not a significant contribution', even though it had kept the Union committed in company with other Churches to the search for visible unity, whilst George Beasley-Murray again repeated that Baptists had a responsibility to the whole Church and needed to continue their participation.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Cooper, 'Move on unity planned for autumn', May 14, 1981, 4. The major problems continued to be identified as *episcopacy*, "re-baptism" and lay presidency at communion. The 1980 Group had been initially set up for a trial period of twelve months, after which the Group was willing to be disbanded if there was no good reason for its continued existence, an outcome they did not at the time envisage.

<sup>77</sup> It was formed at a meeting in Birmingham on October 31, which included 170 people and 54 churches, see 'Baptists form a new group', *BT* November 5, 1981, 1. 'Unity and the Baptists', *BT* July 8, 1982, 2, a week before the Church of England rejected the covenant, stated that 30 churches had joined the FBCC. Which figure is correct is uncertain. The FBCC's constitution stressed the desire of its churches to remain in full membership of the BU while seeking to share in the steps towards covenanting being taken by other denominations. The FBCC's first moderator was Rev. Chris Ellis of Swindon Central Church, supported by Rev. David Good of Sutton as secretary and Rev. Simon Dalwood of Christ Church, Cotham, as treasurer. Ten others were elected to the Council, and 3 BU representatives could be co-opted, underlining the desire to remain within the BU.

<sup>78</sup> J. Tall, 'It's the best way forward, say churchmen', *BT* June 26, 1980, 6. The CCC published *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant* (1980), and continued to work for visible unity not organic union.

<sup>79</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Now the crunch', *BT* January 29, 1981.

<sup>80</sup> H. Cross, 'Church of England says yes to next step on unity', *BT* March 5, 1981, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Wortley, 'Unity: we have a responsibility to the whole Church, the council is told', *BT* March 19, 1981, 4. The importance of the Baptist contribution continued to be regularly raised, eg, H. Cross, 'Where do we stand now?', *BT* July 16, 1981, 2, and Peter Wortley, 'Unity: they want to have their cake and eat it...', *BT* February 18, 1982, 1 and 3, who said that Baptists should have a say in the ongoing conversations 'not least on Christian initiation and ministry', p.3. The Council also received a further document whose intention was to prompt and assist the discussion of the covenanting proposals: *Baptists and Visible Unity: an interim statement* (1981), cited by Neville Clark, 'Visible unity: where do we go from here?', *BT* October 15, 1981, 7.

It soon became evident that the fate of the covenanting scheme rested heavily on the Church of England decision due in the summer of 1982. Neville Clark described as engaged in 'wishful thinking' those who imagined that the rights of conscience provision would resolve any of the problems, with the possible exception of the case of insistent pressure from an individual for so-called 're-baptism'. What still awaited final clarification was whether and in what way Baptist congregations could in the end relate to the covenant currently under consideration. Clark further saw moves to limit covenanting to national Churches as liable to exclude those bodies, such as the BU itself, which were comprised of associations of local churches.<sup>82</sup>

The covenant scheme, though endorsed by the URC and Methodists, was narrowly rejected by the Church of England, and the covenant discussions came to an end.<sup>83</sup> Addressing the annual meeting of the Bristol Baptist College, Dr. West said that the initiative for any further developments now lay with the Anglicans.<sup>84</sup> By December 1983, even Roger Nunn was speaking of unity by national covenanting as dead in England.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, interest in unity continued. Rev. Bill Hancock, the South Eastern Area Superintendent, reported a renewal of Baptist interest in local co-

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<sup>82</sup> N. Clark, 'Visible unity: where do we go from here?', *BT* October 15, 1981, 7.

<sup>83</sup> H. Cross, 'Covenant for unity: church votes yes by a whisker', *BT* May 27, 1982, 1 and 6; 'Unity: now the second church says yes', *BT* July 8, 1982, 1; H. Cross, 'No! By a whisker to the unity proposals', *BT* July 15, 1982, 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> W. Bottoms, 'Next unity move "up to CofE"', *BT* October 14, 1982, 3. Ruefully, Ruth Matthews of the Grove Hill LEP, Hemel Hempstead, remarked that if Baptists were afraid that their particular insights, such as baptism and the place of the local church, would be lost if they joined in then perhaps they were not trusting enough in God who would lead people into truth, Rev. Ruth Matthews, 'Covenanting', *BT* November 11, 1982, 11.

<sup>85</sup> R. Nunn, 'When the churches can become signs of hope', *BT* December 8, 1983. The pages of *The Baptist Times*, eg, reflected this. Only a series of four articles on baptism appeared throughout the whole of 1983, all by Rev. Raymond Burnish from Powerscourt Road, Portsmouth, a series extracted from his Nottingham PhD which he had recently completed. See R. Burnish, 'Early risers in the Early Church', *BT* August 18, 1983, 4; 'Inquisitors or Befrienders?', *BT* August 25, 1983, 4; 'Backwards or forwards?', *BT* September 1, 1983, 4; 'White robes told of new life', *BT* September 8, 1983, 4. Each article examined various early Church practices and drew lessons from them for contemporary practice. His thesis was published by the Alcuin Club and SPCK no.67 as *The Meaning of Baptism. A Comparison of the Teaching and Practice of the Fourth Century with the Present Day* (1985).

operation since the covenant scheme had folded,<sup>86</sup> a view supported when Hugh Cross reported that Baptists were presently involved in 80 LEPs and that this was the way forward ecumenically, though it did not hide areas of difficulty, particularly the on-going issue of 're-baptism'.<sup>87</sup>

Twice in a decade, then, the BU had taken soundings among the churches as to the ecumenical movement and the level of Baptist involvement. In 1967, *Baptists and Unity* affirmed that fidelity to Scripture compelled the search for a more adequate visible expression of the God-given and God-intended unity of Christ's Church. In 1977, *Visible Unity* had to take into account two new factors: the increase of Baptist involvement in LEPs and the influence of the charismatic movement.<sup>88</sup> Hesitations on the *Ten Propositions* had focussed, as in previous generations, primarily on matters of baptism and episcopacy, but, with the development of LEP's in the mid-1960s, the issue of rights of conscience had also become a very real issue. Since the 'official' rejection of the *Ten Propositions*, Baptists had had only consultant observer status.<sup>89</sup>

What, then, had been achieved through all this? When Dr. George Beasley-Murray presented *Baptists and Unity* to the 1967 Baptist Assembly he stressed the importance of Christian unity and that Baptists needed to answer what part they should play in it and that problems that still needed to be faced included baptism. For him, the point was what outward expression Union should take, and noted that as far as Baptists and ecumenism were concerned nothing new had happened since 1888, the year of the

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<sup>86</sup> 'Baptists taking keener interest in unity', *BT* January 26, 1984, 1, reporting Hancock's address given to clergy at a Week of Prayer Consultation at Eastbourne.

<sup>87</sup> Margaret Jarman, 'Unity? "To be real it must be local"', *BT* November 29, 1984, 6.

<sup>88</sup> On LEPs see the section 'Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEPs)' below. On the charismatic movement see the section on 'The Holy Spirit and the Charismatic Debate' in chapter 9 below.

<sup>89</sup> N. Clark, 'Visible unity: where do we go from here?', *BT* October 15, 1981, 7.

Lambeth Quadrilateral.<sup>90</sup> The situation was summed up in 1980. Now that Easter 1980 had arrived, 'The scene does not appear to have changed much'.<sup>91</sup> But would the developments in the 1980s bring about a new situation, especially through the work of the F&O branch of the WCC?

**Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM).**

The origins of the *BEM* text have been well documented in a number of publications and need only the barest mention here in order to set the present discussion within its proper context.<sup>92</sup> The Third F&O Conference at Lund in 1952 had marked a significant shift in approach to the ecumenical task, moving from comparative study to seeking convergence on vital theological issues.<sup>93</sup> The suggestions and emphases coming out of Lund led to the establishment of four theological commissions whose final reports were presented to the 1963 Montreal F&O Conference.<sup>94</sup> In preparation for this, the commission on 'Christ and the Church' found itself more and more involved with the issue of baptism. A preparatory study

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<sup>90</sup> 'No "Selling Out" to Rome', *BT* May 4, 1967, 1-2. For Beasley-Murray, ecumenical discussions should go on, but not to Rome. Of this address, Rev. Anthony Noles of Bow, London, 'Baptists and Unity. Unpersuaded', *BT* May 11, 1967, 3, wrote that it would cause many to be pro-ecumenical, but many, like the writer, remained unconvinced.

<sup>91</sup> J. H. Y. Briggs, 'When the Quest for Church Union Pointed to a Day Sixteen Years On...', *BT* April 3, 1980, 9. This article was incorrectly attributed to Mr. John Briggs, Senior Lecturer in History at Keele University, who had not attended the Conference at Nottingham in 1964 as the article stated, but was written by Paul Ballard of University College Cardiff. Information from Mr. John Briggs.

<sup>92</sup> The substance of this sketch has been gleaned from five of these sources, Günther Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order, 1963-1993* (Geneva, 1993), especially vii-ix, 6-9, 22-25, 104-05; *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No.149, (Geneva, 1990), 3-16; W. M. S. West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism? Louisville 1979', (being a slightly amended form of an article published in the American journal *Midstream*), *BQ* 28.5 (January, 1980), 225-226, and his 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 68-74; M. Thurian, '*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (the "Lima text")', in Lossky *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 80-83.

<sup>93</sup> This is conveniently set out by Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order*, 7, and also discussed by W. M. S. West, 'Lund Principle', in Lossky *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1991), 633-34.

<sup>94</sup> These commissions examined 'Institutionalism', 'Christ and the Church', 'Worship' and 'Tradition and Traditions'. Again, Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order*, 7, lists the titles of the published interim and collected papers.



was carried out on that subject by the European section of the Theological Commission, the result of which was presented to the Working Committee of the F&O Commission at New Haven, Connecticut in 1957.<sup>95</sup> Further work continued up to 1959 in both the USA and Europe, during which time it became clear that something needed to be said about the meaning of baptism and its relationship to the unity of the Church. The report *The Meaning of Baptism* was prepared by a joint meeting of the two theological commissions and went before the Working Committee meeting in Spittal, Austria, in 1959.<sup>96</sup> *The Meaning of Baptism* was then taken before the full F&O Commission at St. Andrews in 1960, to which Dr. Leonard Champion had by now been appointed, where it was presented by Neville Clark. It now formed the second part of the larger document *One Lord, One Baptism: The Meaning of Baptism*, to which George Beasley-Murray had contributed.<sup>97</sup> A sub-committee was set up at St. Andrews to look at the meaning of baptism and the comments made by Clark and this committee pointed to the necessity for further work. These included points which were taken up and re-emphasized in *BEM* some twenty years later.<sup>98</sup>

The Fourth World Conference on F&O in Montreal was divided up into five sections whose reports drew on those of the four earlier theological commissions and much additional material. Section IV on 'Worship and the Oneness of Christ's Church' included ecumenical perspectives on baptism and the eucharist. This received further reflection at the 1971 commission meeting in Louvain, Belgium, which produced *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist*. Here it became clear that there was the

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<sup>95</sup> For details of this report see West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 62-63 and nn.17-19.

<sup>96</sup> Ernest Payne evidently played an important role at this meeting, having been appointed to the F&O Commission with C. T. Le Quesne in 1952. See 'Faith and Order Commission Paper 27: Minutes of the Working Committee, 1959, Spittal, Austria', 12-16, cited by West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 63-64, for the discussion of the baptismal issue. Payne here made reference to Neville Clark's *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* and also his essay on 'The Theology of Baptism' in the volume *Christian Baptism* (1959) edited by Alec Gilmore.

<sup>97</sup> For an outline of *One Lord, One Baptism*, see West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 65-66. Clark's role in this is discussed by West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 66-67.

<sup>98</sup> 'Faith and Order Commission Paper 31: Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission 1960, St. Andrews, Scotland', 122-23, cited by West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 67-68.

possibility if not of consensus then of convergence, not only on the meaning but also on the actual practice of baptism. With this sense of hope it was agreed that the member churches of the WCC should receive the document and be invited to comment on it.<sup>99</sup> Consideration of the responses took place at Accra, Ghana, where the document *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry* (1974) was produced. West has noted the general agreement on the definition of baptism itself and the implications of the sacrament, but commented that the document spoke 'too glibly of a common baptism which unites us all in Christ'. As a result of Baptist concerns over this phrase it was agreed that the 'Introduction' should make clear that the document was not a consensus of all that was in the text but rather a summary of shared convictions and perspectives to help lead the churches closer together.<sup>100</sup> The final document was *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry* (F&O Paper No.73, 1974). West has also drawn attention to the fact that this document was 'the outcome of a new ecumenical process - that of consultation with Churches and response'.<sup>101</sup>

F&O Paper 73 was discussed at the Fifth WCC Assembly at Nairobi and became known as *BEM* before this was adopted for the Lima text. To this the BU responded suggesting that there was need for genuine, rather than apparent, agreement and indicated that the cracks had been plastered over at certain points. Also, there was a failure to recognize that at the heart of the issue of infant and believer's baptism were ecclesiastical differences. Finally, the document over-simplified the question of so-

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<sup>99</sup> See West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 226. Though no British Baptists had been present at Louvain, the Baptist presence was in the person of Dr. Günther Wagner of the Baptist Seminary in Rüslikon. The importance of the Louvain meeting is stressed and outlined by West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 70-71, most importantly being the decision that there needed to be a consideration as to whether there could be a consensus document prepared on baptism, eucharist and ministry. At Louvain Dr. West was elected to the then Working Committee of F&O, being the only Britain amongst eight Baptists on the F&O Commission.

<sup>100</sup> West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 71-72.

<sup>101</sup> West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 226.

called re-baptism.<sup>102</sup> Nairobi was followed by a consultation at Crêt Bérard, Switzerland, in 1977, where further responses of the Churches were considered and a way forward was planned. The report *Towards an Ecumenical Consensus: Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry - A Response to the Churches* (F&O Paper No.84) was the fruit of these deliberations, amongst which was the recommendation that the F&O Commission should initiate a consultation with Baptists 'to explore the issues involved in the debate on infant baptism and believer's baptism which remain many and complex and need to be addressed at this time if we are to move forward in the agreement on baptism'. This recognized that one approach in seeking a way forward was to confront positively the two practices of baptism and to see how far within the two practices there was a possibility of *movement* towards consensus and mutual recognition.<sup>103</sup>

An important landmark on the way to *BEM* was the Louisville Consultation on Baptism, held at the Southern Baptist Seminary in 1979, the BU being represented by George Beasley-Murray, Morris West and John Nicholson.<sup>104</sup> The importance of this meeting lies in the fact that it was the first time that an equal number of believer-Baptist and paedobaptist scholars had met to try and find some kind of consensus in the understanding and practice of baptism. Keith Clements has rightly noted that this consultation coincided with a heightened debate on Christian initiation and church membership among British Churches.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Sketch taken from West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 72.

<sup>103</sup> West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 226.

<sup>104</sup> Nicholson was chosen because of his experience of LEPs in England in which both forms of baptism were practised, see J. F. V. Nicholson, Association Minister of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, 'Baptism in Context: Further Reflections on Louisville 1979', *BQ* 28.6 (April, 1980), 275.

<sup>105</sup> K. W. Clements, 'Baptism', in C. Davey (ed.), *British and Irish Churches respond to BEM. Analysis and Implications of the British and Irish Churches' Responses to the Lima report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1988), 9-10. He also drew attention to the Common Certificate of Baptism used by some churches, and also the 1983 BCC's Division of Ecumenical Affairs working party which reported on the whole question of Christian initiation and membership in *Christian Initiation and Church Membership*, as well as the British Churches' responses to *BEM*. The importance of Louisville to British Baptists was

*Towards an Ecumenical Consensus* had listed points which it was believed showed an emerging agreement, so West, who had been present at Crêt Bérard, formulated a series of questions which needed addressing so that there could be some clarification as to how near to or how far from consensus the two traditions were.<sup>106</sup> These covered the meaning of baptism, the ecclesiastical differences underlying baptismal differences, seeing Christian initiation as a process which included baptism in water in the name of the Trinity, instruction in and confession of the faith, the activity of the Holy Spirit, participation in the Lord's Supper, what similarities in Christian nurture revealed about the differences over baptism, including discussion of the catechumenate, and the question of the authority and justification for baptism.<sup>107</sup> West further noted that guidance was needed on whether the consensus process would be promoted through the co-existence of the two forms of baptism. This would, then, raise the issue of 're-baptism', problems over which were beginning to become evident in the Church of North India (established in 1970).<sup>108</sup>

Beasley-Murray set out the evidence for believers' baptism, in which he primarily discussed the difficulties which Baptists commonly experienced in ecumenical conversations, with the secondary intention of perhaps shedding some light on these

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reflected in the number of articles about the consultation and that the report was published in the *BQ*. On these articles see the discussion below.

<sup>106</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Toward A Possible Agenda', *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 13-20.

<sup>107</sup> West, 'Toward A Possible Agenda', 14-17.

<sup>108</sup> In October, 1970, A. S. Clement, Home Secretary of the BMS, had reported that one of the first bishops in the newly united Churches of North India and Pakistan was to be a Baptist, Rev. J. K. Maharty. The Church's baptismal policy included both infant and believer's baptism, but ruled out re-baptism. See Alberic Clement, 'Churches Unite in India and Pakistan - Baptist will be one of the first bishops', *BT* October 29, 1970, 2. By 1978 it had become clear that Church Union schemes were not operating as Baptists had hoped when it came to the issue of so-called 're-baptism'. The Constitution of the Church of North India stated that situations of believers baptized in infancy but seeking believer's baptism were to be referred to the Bishop. However, the Bishop of Patna had forbidden pastors to carry out such requests, see Alberic Clement, Home Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, 'Bishop turns down "re-baptism" request', *BT* June 22, 1978, 1. For some of the background of the Church of North India from a Baptist participant and focussing specifically on the matter of re-baptism, see Rev. Leslie Wenger, a retired missionary living in Norwich, 'Faith, baptism and church order', *BT* February 8, 1996, 11.

matters to the others involved in the consultation.<sup>109</sup> After a discussion of the authority for believer's baptism from Matthew 28:19, the nature of baptism itself, the issue of the relationship of faith and baptism and between the faith of the individual and that of the community, the ecclesiological implication of the baptism of believers, the place of children and the role of the catechumenate, and finally the issue of re-baptism, Beasley-Murray concluded, on the one hand, by encouraging the possibility that Baptists could accept others on the grounds of their initiation into the body of Christ, rather than their infant baptism. On the other hand, if infant baptism could not comprehend the significance of baptism as expounded in Galatians 3:25, Colossians 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:21, and was therefore a different baptism, then application of baptism 'at the time of profession of faith of one who has been baptized as an infant' was at least arguable. Such, he believed, should be allowed in Paedobaptist churches, when requested, 'and could be understood sympathetically when such people confess Christ in Baptist churches'.<sup>110</sup>

The final report, as well as the published papers, show that no such consensus was possible.<sup>111</sup> Clear signs of bridge-building from both sides were evident, and for some the bridge was sufficiently complete to allow mutual recognition of each others'

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<sup>109</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Authority and Justification for Believers' Baptism', *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 63-70. This was preceded by a paper on 'The Authority and Justification for Infant Baptism', by Joseph Eagan, S.J., 47-61. For their contributions, both Beasley-Murray and Eagan were criticized by Chris Ellis, a member of the Ecumenical Team Ministry at Central Baptist Church, Swindon, in his 'Relativity, Ecumenism and the Liberation of the Church', *BQ* 29.2 (April, 1981), 89, as typifying the traditional approaches adopted by apologists for each respective position - Eagan mainly being concerned with a theological defence of the development of infant baptism in the post-New Testament church and its appropriateness for the contemporary Church, while the Baptist contribution was primarily an exegetical examination of the relationship of faith to baptism in the New Testament. 'Bluntly put', he asserted, p.88, '*the difference can be said to rest upon the acceptance or rejection of Tradition as a valid and authoritative norm over and against Scripture*', italics his. However, Ellis's criticisms of Beasley-Murray and Eagan lose much of their force when it is recognized that Beasley-Murray's intention was, first and foremost, to explicate the Baptist position and the difficulties they encountered in ecumenical discussions.

<sup>110</sup> Beasley-Murray, 'The Authority and Justification for Believers' Baptism', 70.

<sup>111</sup> 'Editorial Introduction', *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 3. The papers and the final report were all reproduced in this issue of *Review and Expositor*. The consultation resulted from and was concerned with Faith and Order Paper No.84, *Toward an Ecumenical Consensus: Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*. The final report, 'Baptism: Report of the Faith and Order Consultation, Louisville 1979', was published in *BQ* 28.5 (January, 1980), 232-239.

practices, whilst for others the gap had narrowed sufficiently to allow mutual respect and facilitate growing understanding. Five significant areas of agreement emerged.<sup>112</sup> First, that the most clearly attested practice in the New Testament was of believer's baptism. Second, the statement that the personal faith of the recipient and continuous life of the church were essential for the full fruit of baptism. Third, that both forms of baptism required similar and responsible attitudes to Christian nurture and a serious development of the concept of the catechumenate. Fourth, that the pressures of contextuality always bore down on the understanding and practice of baptism. Fifth, that indiscriminate baptism was an abuse to be eliminated.<sup>113</sup>

The Consultation's success also lay in the fact that it had happened at all<sup>114</sup> and many positive suggestions were made as to the way forward. West wrote of it: 'the impression gained...was not only a real striving to mutual understanding but a search for perhaps a new approach to bridge the baptismal divide'. Glimpses of this new approach, he continued, appeared when neither infant nor believer's baptism were the starting point for discussion, but rather, for example, God's activity in Christ initiating the Gospel, or of the community of God's people receiving and communicating that Gospel, or the response of the individual within that community to the Gospel, 'then the issue of baptism, whether infant or believer's, looks rather different. Maybe the baptismal issue needs to be approached by all Churches in this overarching perspective of God, His community, and the individual responding within that community and world'.<sup>115</sup> Later, when he reflected on the consultation, West

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<sup>112</sup> 'Report of the Consultation With Baptists', in *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 101.

<sup>113</sup> 'Report of the Consultation With Baptists', 101-02. This report continued by outlining the Consultation's discussion on authority and justification for baptism, sacrament and faith, ecclesiology and contextuality, pp. 103-107.

<sup>114</sup> West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 230.

<sup>115</sup> West, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 231-32.

remarked that it had got the questions right and had also been right to emphasize the issue of contextuality.<sup>116</sup>

This latter issue was taken up by John Nicholson, who had been involved in the discussions on contextuality and so he limited his reflections on the consultation to this area. He had also earlier been involved in the conference on Christian initiation sponsored by the BCC at Damascus House, Mill Hill, three weeks before Louisville,<sup>117</sup> which had identified four factors as affecting baptismal practice: theology; law, including both Canon Law and Baptist Trust Deeds; pastoral concern; and the social context.<sup>118</sup> Reflection on both consultations led Nicholson to realize that the English context for the baptismal dialogue was unique in several ways. First, probably the majority of Baptist churches were open membership and did not require baptism as a condition of membership. In addition, many other churches whilst still legally closed membership, allowed other Christians the privileges and responsibilities of membership as much as they could. Open-membership churches were (and still are) rare amongst Baptists in the rest of the world.<sup>119</sup> Second, there were between fifty and sixty congregations in membership with the BU and at least one other denomination, twenty of which were Union Churches founded before the 1969

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<sup>116</sup> West, 'Baptists in Faith and Order', 73. See the whole of his article, 'Towards a Consensus on Baptism?', 225-232.

<sup>117</sup> J. F. V. Nicholson, 'Baptism in Context: Further Reflections on Louisville 1979', *BQ* 28.6 (April, 1980), 276. The Damascus House meeting had been set up in response to requests from CCLEPE, the BU Council in its response to the Ten Propositions, *Visible Unity*, 'Preface', n.p., and the F&O Commission's invitation for Churches in certain regions to discuss together their response to *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognised Ministry*. Nicholson's input is reflected in the final report's reference to the practice of an unnamed Oxford LEP (possibly Blackbird Leys) which included both paedobaptists and believer-baptists, and which held a service for the celebration of new life including opportunity either for infant baptism or for infant blessing with or without the dedication of the parents, 'Report of the Consultation With Baptists', 107.

<sup>118</sup> See Nicholson, 'Baptism in Context', 276-77, citing *Christian Initiation*, BCC Department of Ecumenical Affairs duplicated report, March 1979, and *Baptism: Some Historical and Social Considerations*, BCC Department of Ecumenical Affairs, duplicated paper, March 1979.

<sup>119</sup> Nicholson, 'Baptism in Context', 277. According to Nicholson the questionnaire sent out by the BU in 1976 concerning the Ten Propositions had contained a question on the conditions of membership, and the clear majority of those churches responding claimed to practise open membership - but it was difficult to ascertain the exact proportion.

Sharing of Buildings Act, being joint members of both the BU and CU. Third, the *Ten Propositions* had challenged the English Churches to recognize each others' members and ministers. Though the BU had not been able to proceed with the covenant, if the Churches involved in the CCC did manage to reach agreement on such a covenant, this would renew the challenge to Baptists to reconsider their attitude to paedobaptists and to define more closely what they understood by 'diversity in unity'. Fourth, there was the charismatic factor which raised the whole question of the relationship between water and Spirit baptism. Nicholson concluded: 'For me therefore the most valuable lesson from Louisville was its stress on contextuality, because that has helped me to see the particular elements in our English context which we have to face in our teaching on, and practice of, baptism'.<sup>120</sup>

The Lima text of *BEM* is a considerably revised form of the Accra document.<sup>121</sup> Its greatest challenge to Baptists lay in its call that 'Any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided'.<sup>122</sup> Churches were also invited to regard infant and believers' baptism as 'equivalent alternatives'.<sup>123</sup> *BEM* also admitted that, while the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age could not be excluded, 'baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested

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<sup>120</sup> Nicholson, 'Baptism in Context', 277-79. Quotation from p.279. Nicholson spoke of the 'English' situation because 'the historical, cultural and ecumenical context is quite different for Baptists in Scotland, Ireland and Wales', p.276. A second study on contextuality was that of Ellis, 'Relativity', 81-91.

<sup>121</sup> See Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order*, 8, 23 and 104-05; L. A. Hoedemaker, the Dutch Reformed theologian from the University of Groningen, 'Toward A Consensus on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 7-9. This comes out most clearly in the comparative study of the Accra and Lima texts by G. Wagner, Professor of New Testament at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüslikon, Zürich, 'Baptism from Accra to Lima', in M. Thurian (ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on baptism, eucharist and ministry* (Geneva, 1983), 12-32.

<sup>122</sup> *BEM*, 4, 'IV Baptismal Practice', §13. See also the section on 'Towards Mutual Recognition of Baptism' (§15-16), p.6.

<sup>123</sup> *BEM*, 5, 'Commentary 12'. In order to overcome their differences, believer baptists were encouraged to seek to express more visibly the fact that children were placed under the protection of God's grace, paedobaptists were called to guard against indiscriminate baptism and take more seriously their responsibility to nurture children to mature commitment.



pattern in the New Testament documents'.<sup>124</sup> Though this did not go far enough for Baptists, it nevertheless demonstrated that their ecumenical presence and contribution had made an impact.

Through *BEM* the F&O Commission invited all churches to consider and then respond to the *BEM* text by the end of 1984.<sup>125</sup> The BU therefore asked Associations, ministers' fraternals, Superintendents, Colleges, church meetings and diaconates and a number of individuals to consider *BEM* and to submit their replies to the General Secretary, Rev. Bernard Green, by November 1983.<sup>126</sup> These were then analysed and drawn together for the ACCR by its chairman, Neville Clark. This was then taken to the BU Council and approved by it in November 1984.

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<sup>124</sup> *BEM*, 4. In his study guide issued to students of Bristol Baptist College, Keith Clements remarked that 'over the years, our understanding of believers' baptism has been moving more and more into the centre of the discussion and has become more and more recognised as being true both to the biblical understanding and to the practice of the Early Church', 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Background, Procedure and Suggestions for Study and Comment', 2.

<sup>125</sup> *BEM*, x. In Britain, *BEM* was accompanied by a study guide prepared for the BCC by Rev. John Matthews, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Seven Studies by John Matthews based on the Faith and Order Paper No.111 of the World Council of Churches 1982* (n.d., but probably 1982-84). Its use was recommended, eg, by Bernard Green in his 'Foreword' to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The response of the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland to the Faith and Order Paper No.111 of the World Council of Churches, 1982* (1985), n.p.. In 1983, M. Thurian and G. Wainwright edited *Baptism and Eucharist. Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, F&O Paper No.117 (Geneva, 1983), which brought together a wide selection of liturgies of baptism and the eucharist with commentaries on the traditions and texts included, for the purpose of aiding current understanding and practice of the two sacraments. 'The Baptist Tradition', pp.66-74, included an order for believer's baptism from Payne and Winward's *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* (1960), and orders for 'Christian Initiation' and 'Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving' from A. Gilmore, E. Smalley and M. J. Walker (eds.), *Praise God* (1980), and 'A Baptist Service of Thanksgiving on the Birth of a Child' from Morris West.

<sup>126</sup> According to the supplement from the ACCR included with the official BU response, 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', in M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM. Official responses to the 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' text, vol.1*, F&O Paper 129, (Geneva, 1986), 74-75, comments were received from 16 Associations, the Superintendents' Board, two Baptist Colleges, and a number of other groups. Several such study documents have been traced. In March 1983, students at Bristol Baptist College, under the supervision of Rev. Keith Clements, received a 5 page, typed preparation document to aid their discussions, 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Background, Procedure and Suggestions for Study and Comment'. Also the East Midland Baptist Association produced their own study guide, *Growing Together. I - Baptism. A Study Guide to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (n.d., but presumably 1983), prepared by Rev. Keith Hobbs of Grimsby. It contained 5 studies made up of *BEM* extracts, along with case studies, mainly from an imaginary LEP, with questions. It is not known whether the later study guides on eucharist and ministry appeared. It was itself the result of the EMBA's own ACCR.

In its official response, the BU declined to comment on the minutiae of *BEM*, but drew attention to major points of difficulty or hesitation.<sup>127</sup> It began by agreeing with the five strands setting out the essential meaning of baptism, noting the significant place accorded to faith and recognizing the danger of indiscriminate infant baptism.<sup>128</sup> Three specific reservations, however, emerged, the first and last both highlighting the ambiguity surrounding *BEM*'s use of 'baptism'. First, attention was drawn to the language which marked all subsequent discussion where, 'We are told that baptism *is...gives...initiates...unites...effects...* It has to be asked what is meant by "baptism" where this sort of language is constantly used'. Second, *a priori* consent could not be given to a universal bar on *BEM*'s 'any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided'. The BU stated that this was 'wholly unacceptable in its present form since, on some interpretations, nothing could pass through so restrictive a sieve'. For 'where the individual involved is convinced out of an instructed conscience that Christian obedience requires believer baptism', Baptists maintained that person's right to be so baptized irrespective of accusations of 're-baptism'.<sup>129</sup> Third, the response noted that 'a total process of Christian initiation wherein, at some point, all the necessary elements - including responsible faith-

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<sup>127</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The response of the Council of the Baptist Union*. It was subsequently published under the title 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', in M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM. Official responses to the 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' text*, 70-77. It is from this later version that all subsequent quotations and references are taken. The BU's response to *BEM* was whole-heartedly supported by Douglas McBain, Superintendent for the Metropolitan Area, in 1991, 'Worthy of Trust', in M. I. Bochenski (ed.), *Evangelicals and Ecumenism - When Baptists Disagree* (1993), 30-31.

<sup>128</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 70. The five-fold meaning was participation in Christ's death and resurrection; conversion, pardoning and cleansing; the gift of the Spirit; incorporation into the body of Christ, and the sign of the kingdom. See *BEM*, 'II. The Meaning of Baptism', 2-3. In this it is important to realize that *BEM* achieved a great deal of theological convergence but there was no such convergence on the practice of baptism.

<sup>129</sup> On this see the similar comments made by Neville Clark and Paul Beasley-Murray at the BU Council when it received the ACCR's response to *BEM*, 'All one body we...but we bump a bit', *BT* December 4, 1984, 7. The subtitle of the article is also informative, 'Council is told, young people don't care about discussions like these'. Also, the BU's Working Group on LEPs (WORGLEP), a sub-group within the ACCR, later commented: 'In two swift sentences it prescribes a universal sacramental norm', adding, 'Two immediate comments can be made: it requires a considerably longer commentary; it does not work'. See 'Rebaptism in Local Ecumenical Projects', undated and anonymous two page document used at the October 1989 meeting of WORGLEP.

commitment - find a place' offered the most promising path toward mutual recognition of baptism, but this fact underlined *BEM's* 'arguable ambiguity in its references to "baptism"'.<sup>130</sup>

*BEM* had requested that all churches consider four specific questions. To the second of these,<sup>131</sup> the BU responded that, more important than whether the BU could recognize the text as an 'expression of the apostolic faith' (the first question), was the extent to which the text enshrined 'a basis for mutual recognition'. *BEM's* 'Preface' spoke of 'consensus' and 'convergence', but it was felt that what required keener debate was what measure of articulated baptismal and eucharistic agreement and agreement on patterns and orders of ministry, was necessary for 'living in communion with one another'. No clear and coherent answer was offered, but the reply acknowledged that 'the question presses upon us particularly in relation to the issue of baptism'.<sup>132</sup> Finally, in response to question four,<sup>133</sup> it stated that further work on baptism could be usefully done only in the wider context of Christian initiation.<sup>134</sup> Dr.

<sup>130</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 70-71, italics original. There are two typographical errors on the first and second point, where reference in *BEM* is purportedly at 'B1' and 'B13'. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The response of the Council of the Baptist Union*, 1, rightly locates the references at 'I.1' and 'IV.13'. On the third point, Keith Clements, in his overview of the responses to the baptism section of *BEM*, 'Baptism', 15-16, explained Baptist hesitancy over the apparent tendency of *BEM* to make baptism itself operative of that which it signifies. This ambiguity became especially problematic for Baptists when it was not clear whether 'baptism' meant a rite of water-baptism per se, or that rite together with the faith-commitment of the person baptised. Douglas McBain described as an inevitable feature of ecumenical statements this ambiguity of language allowing formal assent in the teeth of suspected unbridged disagreement, see McBain, 'Worthy of Trust', 30-31.

<sup>131</sup> This read: 'the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith'.

<sup>132</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 73-74.

<sup>133</sup> This read: 'the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today"'. On Baptist participation in this see K. W. Clements, 'Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today. Baptist Reflections on this Faith and Order Project', *BQ* 33.2 (April, 1989), 63-71, and also his 'A Response to the Faith and Order Commission Document No.140', in W. H. Brackney and R. J. Burke (eds.), *Faith, Life and Witness* (Birmingham, Alabama, 1990), 48-53, being a paper presented to the BWA's Commission on Baptist Doctrine.

<sup>134</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 74. Many of the BU's responses were noted in the volume *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses*

David Russell<sup>135</sup> recognized that *BEM* had achieved 'a goodly measure of "convergence".... [but] this falls short of "consensus", not least in the report's interpretation of baptism and the nature of the Church to which baptism testifies'. It made claims for the 'rite' of baptism 'which, in the Baptist mind, belong to the total process of Christian initiation which includes a responsible faith-commitment on the part of the one baptised'.<sup>136</sup>

A supplement, prepared by the ACCR, was appended to the official BU response. On baptism, it identified the unanswered question of 'What is a Christian?' as lurking behind *BEM*'s discussion of baptism. Baptists, once again, found themselves effectively in a dialectic with their ecumenical partners. Baptists based their faith and practice on scripture, much of the debate reflected in *BEM* was based on scripture *and* tradition, and this was reflected in how the supplement continued. 'If the starting point is a New Testament inseparability of conversion and baptism, certain conclusions may arguably follow. If the starting point is tradition, the implications may be importantly other. It may be objected that such questions are falsely posed because they proceed from a starting point which is not that of the report. *It must be retorted that this is in fact the baseline from which many Baptists by conviction move*'.<sup>137</sup> In conclusion they wrote:

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(Geneva, 1990), F&O Paper No.149, 21, 37, 39, 42 n.15, 48-49, 59 n.16, 60 n.18, 65, 102. In its warm reception of F&O Paper No.149, 'Comment. Our voices must be heard...', *BT* August 16, 1990, 2, reiterated the BU's response to *BEM*, that while there was a growing convergence, 'agreement on fundamentals there is not'. On *BEM*'s assumption that the two practices of baptism concerned only differences of understandings of baptism, the commentator stated that 'in reality they reflect basic differences on the doctrine of the church, its membership and on the Christian life itself'.

<sup>135</sup> Dr. Russell's ecumenical involvement included work with the BCC and as a member of the WCC's Central Committee from Uppsala in 1968 to Vancouver in 1982, so D. S. Russell, 'The Ecumenical Role of Baptists', in Franklin H. Littell (ed.), *A Half Century of Religious Dialogue, 1939-1989: Making the Circle Larger* (New York, 1989), 112-131. All citations to this article are taken from Dr. Russell's typescript of this article, see p.2. On Dr. Russell himself, see J. H. Y. Briggs (ed.), *Bible, Church and World. A Supplement to the Baptist Quarterly Published in Honour of Dr. D. S. Russell* (Baptist Historical Society, 1989), and on his ecumenical involvement especially G. W. Rusling, 'David Syme Russell: A Life of Service', 15-17; D. M. Thompson, 'Baptists and the World Fellowship of the Church', 61-62.

<sup>136</sup> Russell, 'Ecumenical Role of Baptists', 12.

<sup>137</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 75-76, italics added. This interpretation is supported by Clements, 'Baptism', 18, who wrote, 'To explore the nature of the gap between

In its Preface, the BEM report states: 'If the divided churches are to achieve the visible unity they seek, one of the essential prerequisites is that they should be in basic agreement on baptism, eucharist and ministry.' Comment from our Baptist constituency makes clear that this apparently self-evident statement conceals as many questions as it answers. What understanding of visible unity is here intended? What measure and kind of basic agreement is here required? Part of the felt difficulty with the total presentation of both baptism and eucharist is a sense that these sacraments are being filled with an exclusive theological weight which is more properly attributed to the deeper realities of which they are the visible signs and to which they bear witness, and that it is upon these deeper and more pervasive realities that unity is properly founded.<sup>138</sup>

### **The Inter-Church Process (ICP).**

The real starting point of the Inter-Church Process (ICP)<sup>139</sup> was the 1984 Spring Assembly of the BCC, though it was not until May 1985 that the ICP was formally launched<sup>140</sup> with the circulation of an introductory document eliciting twenty six responses which were published in 1986.<sup>141</sup> For the next few years, the Baptist constituency was fully updated.<sup>142</sup> The findings of the three regional conferences for

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the two approaches to baptism, which churches on both sides feel still exists despite BEM, it is evident that some recognition of differing *basic presuppositions* on both sides will be necessary', italics added. He then proceeded to discuss the basic unanswered question, 'What is a Christian?'

<sup>138</sup> 'Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', 77.

<sup>139</sup> Information from a 6 page A4 mailing from the BU entitled 'The Way We Have Come', from ~~the~~ Bernard Green to all ministers and churches, April 1991. Further details are provided in Douglas C. Sparkes, 'Not Strangers But Pilgrims', *The Fraternal* 218 (April, 1987), 20-25, and B. Green, 'Churches Together in Pilgrimage', *The Fraternal* 226 (April, 1989), 26-27.

<sup>140</sup> The 1984 BCC Assembly resolved to consult all member churches and national Councils of Churches on their readiness to share in 'a process of prayer, reflection and debate together centred on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its calling in and for the world'. It was heralded by the *BT* as a 'Major boost towards church unity', May 23, 1985, 3.

<sup>141</sup> The resulting study booklet was called, *REFLECTIONS - How Churches view their life and mission* (1986).

<sup>142</sup> This was done by means of the *BT*, the BU Annual Reports, the Assembly popular report, letters circulated to every church and *The Fraternal*. See the notes above and below. See, eg, the letter which Bernard Green wrote to all the churches in his capacity as General Secretary of the Union, asking that the BU's proposed membership of the ICP be fully discussed in every Baptist church and that they make their own response to the matter. Dated December 1987 it stated, 'On the basis of the initial responses we shall send provisional comments to the Inter-Church Steering Group and initiate a full debate in the November BU Council 1988. The final proposals will be available by the end of December 1988. The March 1989 Council will then need to prepare proposals for a major debate and decision in the 1989 Baptist Assembly'. A process of consultation was also set up in the regional Baptist Associations, and further documents were circulated. 1988 was marked by study, discussion, prayer and initial responses. In September 1988 a 4 page document was sent to all churches setting out practical steps for local churches to follow in discussing the issues, and later *Questions and Answers*,

England, Scotland and Wales held in 1987, were sent to the British and Irish Conference at Swanwick. It was this conference which issued the Swanwick Declaration,<sup>143</sup> and has proved to be yet another ecumenical landmark, marking a shift in emphasis from declared co-operation between Churches towards commitment.<sup>144</sup> Swanwick was significant, not simply for the Declaration, but because it was felt to be a conviction arrived at by Christians of all denominations and at all levels and not the result of a dialogue between Church authorities.<sup>145</sup>

The build up to the 1989 Leicester Assembly was tense,<sup>146</sup> some feeling that matters were progressing with undue haste,<sup>147</sup> which prompted a number of denominational leaders to try and calm fears.<sup>148</sup> In all this, baptism was hardly

another four page document, was sent to every church, in which Bernard Green addressed ten major questions raised during the preceding few months. The book *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (1989) being sent to each BU church in January 1989 along with a four page commentary compiled by the ACCR containing revised proposals for the ICP. *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage: Including definite proposals for ecumenical instruments* (1989), and 'Churches Together in Pilgrimage. A Commentary by the Baptist Union Advisory Committee for Church Relations on the revised proposals of the Inter-Church Process', (January, 1989). The former was a document dealing largely with practical and structural issues, no reference to baptismal policy or theology was included.

- <sup>143</sup> The Swanwick Declaration is reproduced in, amongst other places, *Not Strangers But Pilgrims. Report of the Swanwick Conference, 31 August to 4 September 1987* (n.d., [but probably 1987]), 3-4, and *Called to be One* (1996), 1-2. 15 BU representatives attended.
- <sup>144</sup> 'It is our conviction that, as a matter of policy at all levels and in all places, our churches must now move from co-operation to clear commitment to each other...', *Not Strangers But Pilgrims*, 4.
- <sup>145</sup> So the WORGLEP document *After Swanwick, Practical guidance for Baptists seeking Christian unity* (unpublished, n.d., but presumably 1987), n.p., but p.1.
- <sup>146</sup> Eg, Rev. Michael McGill of Green Street Green, 'No', and Rev. Michael Bochenski of Leamington Road BC, Blackburn, 'Yes', *BT* March 9, 1989, 10-11, and 'The Inter-church debate', 'Yes', M. Bochenski, 'No', M. McGill, *BT* March 16, 1989, 8-9.
- <sup>147</sup> 'Members uneasy at pace of inter-church process', *BT* November 17, 1988, 8, reporting Neville Clark, chairman of the ACCR, who spoke of the 'unseemly haste of the process', yet concluding an inconclusive BU Council debate saying more time would not help.
- <sup>148</sup> Eg, Rev. Douglas Sparkes, 'We Baptists have so much to gain', *BT* February 16, 1989, 8; Rev. Colin Marchant, BU President, 'We don't compromise our principles by working with others', *BT* March 2, 1989, 5; J. H. Y. Briggs, 'It's a serious matter', *BT* March 16, 1989, 5; W. M. S. West, 'So what if the Assembly says yes and my church says no?', *BT* March 23, 1989, 5, who, citing the last phrase of the first Declaration of Principle, stated clearly that should the Assembly vote be yes this did not commit local churches to be involved, and similarly that should the vote be negative then this would not prevent local churches participating. The bulk of the article, however, was to try and dissuade those against the ICP not to leave the BU if the decision was in favour of it.

mentioned,<sup>149</sup> if at all. The Assembly vote took place on April 19, 1989,<sup>150</sup> and allowed dissenting churches to write and indicate this to the General Secretary,<sup>151</sup> though the BU Council, advised by the ACCR and its chairman, Mr. John Briggs, who presented the resolutions, strongly backed participation in the ICP,<sup>152</sup> it being stressed that the BU had not entered into any form of organic union, that each local church remained free to respond as it felt led, and that Baptist representatives were continuing to maintain a clear and unashamed Baptist witness in which mutual respect for one another's conscience and integrity were of paramount importance.<sup>153</sup>

On August 31, 1990, the BCC ceased to exist,<sup>154</sup> and the following day in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Southwark, Churches Together in England (CTE) was inaugurated.<sup>155</sup> A vital principle accepted by all involved was that each denomination would continue to operate according to its own creed or confessional basis and within

<sup>149</sup> The majority of references to baptism in the *BT* in both 1989 and 1990 came in the form of accounts of baptismal services, often accompanied by photographs. The specific references, for example, to the theology of baptism or the baptismal issue within the ecumenical context were few indeed and usually very brief.

<sup>150</sup> By the decision of the BU Council, the Leicester vote had been altered from a simple majority to a two thirds majority if the proposal were to be carried. See 'Council gives strong backing to Inter Church Process', *BT* March 23, 1989, 1 and 13, and 'BU continuation in CTE proposed', *BT* February 9, 1995, 2. In fact, 73.97% voted in favour of membership (1035 for, 364 against), see *Baptist Union Annual Report 1989* (Didcot, 1990), 10.

<sup>151</sup> According to *FAB* no. 7 (n.d., [but Autumn, 1992]), 10, by 1992, 80 churches had written to the General Secretary expressing their dissociation from the decision, whilst 'more than 25 churches' had resigned membership of the BU before the Bournemouth Assembly in April 1991. On p.2, these figures were confirmed by David Coffey in his answers to *FAB* questions.

<sup>152</sup> 'Council gives strong backing to Inter Church Process', *BT* March 23, 1989, 1 and 13.

<sup>153</sup> A letter from Bernard Green to all BU churches dated September 1990.

<sup>154</sup> The BCC's final assembly was noted by David Hall, 'Future hopes as BCC flame is put out', *BT* April 5, 1990, 1 and 6.

<sup>155</sup> Brenda Forward, 'Going forward in faith and mission', *BT* September 6, 1990, 1 and 13. This was followed a week later, August 8, with the inauguration of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI). A transcript of the televised service was published by the members of the Days Lane Baptist church, Sidcup, Kent, accompanied by a commentary which sought to expose what they considered to be the unbiblical nature of all that was going on, *Advances in Ecumenism in 1990 or The End of Protestantism?* (n.d.), prefaced by Rev. Stuart Pendrich, who personally resigned his membership of the BU. The church, too, eventually left the Union because of its staying within the ICP. The booklet was distributed and sold by *FAB*

its normal authority structures. Thus the BU's participation in no way compelled individuals or churches to participate.<sup>156</sup>

One outcome of the 1989 Assembly vote was the formation of an anti-ecumenical group which developed around the FAB newsletter and the figure of Rev. David Rushworth-Smith of Crich Baptist Church, Derbyshire.<sup>157</sup> With regard to the place of baptism within the ICP, some Baptists have tended to retreat from constructive dialogue into dogmatic assertion and implicit denunciation of anyone, Baptist or otherwise, who disagrees with them. This position is nowhere better illustrated than in a FAB booklist distributed at the Baptist Assembly in 1991, recommending Terry Griffith's *The Case for Believer's Baptism*. The accompanying endorsement stated that the booklet 'makes it abundantly clear that baptism by immersion for believers is the biblical standard. What has happened at Milton Keynes, in the ecumenical experiment, could not have taken place if the teaching in this book had been accepted by everyone on the committee in charge'.<sup>158</sup> In other FAB literature the issue of

<sup>156</sup> The mechanisms for review of membership of the ICP were built into it, and for the BU this was initially to be in 1993. However, in practice, this did not prove possible and it would not be until 1995 that the BU reviewed its commitment to CTE and CCBI. This delay of two years came under condemnation from *FAB*, see no.6 (n.d., [but probably Spring 1992]), 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> All *FAB* and later *It's FAB* newsletters and leaflets include the statement of the following words or something similar: 'A newsletter linking those evangelical Baptist Churches in Britain which are unhappy about "Churches Together" (that is CTE, CYTUN & ACTS)'. A brief note on its origins is included on the back page of *FAB* no.8 (n.d., [but pre-the Nottingham Assembly, so Spring 1993]), n.p., but p.8. Rushworth-Smith stated that his views, as editor, why Baptists should not be involved were threefold: '(i) Because the very nature of the [ICP] precludes Baptists - it is not the kind of movement that Baptists should be involved with; (ii) Baptists, by their very calling and beliefs, cannot identify with confusion and vague doctrines - they are "those who live by the Bible"'. It is clear from reading their material that another reason, perhaps even the major one, was that, in distinction from the BCC, Roman Catholics were now involved. A fundamentalist, almost 'hyper' Protestant and reformed emphasis permeates much of the *FAB* newsletters and the books and booklets they distribute and endorse. Their concern is that the WCC and ICP are both <sup>allegedly</sup> linked with New Age syncretism and the movement towards One World and a One World Church. Seldom does any theological argumentation occur or is any desire expressed for open dialogue. *FAB* representatives have held a number of discussions with David Coffey on various issues. The origin of the name 'FAB', evidently arose when a young Pastor rang David Rushworth-Smith in September 1990, and said that their opposition to the Leicester vote was 'fab' (fabulous), and it stuck. *FAB* no.7 (n.d., [but Autumn 1992]), 12. Their active campaign for Baptist withdrawal from the ICP has included mailing all ministers on several occasions advocating their views and threatening resignations from the BU if matters did not go their way. However, after the 1995 vote to remain within the ICP, *FAB* was disbanded.

<sup>158</sup> 'Books on the Subject of the Inter-Church Process and Matters which are Connected' (Crich, n.d.), a two sided A4 sheet. *FAB* also made numerous references to and often cited C. H.



baptism has only rarely surfaced, for example when Rushworth-Smith contended that the Baptists' special role in the contemporary Church included the assertion that 'the biblical form of initiation into the visible Church is through baptism by immersion into water of those who have been justified', believing that the modern ecumenical movement would challenge this special role and put an end to Baptists being set apart from other denominations. If such occurred, he asserted, it would not be long, 'following integration', before the subject of the initiation of believers, amongst other doctrines, would become a point of disagreement and lead to a breakaway group forming.<sup>159</sup>

In response to those within the BU who were discontented with the Union's position, Rev. David Coffey, the BU General Secretary, through the Faith and Unity Executive (FUE, formerly the ACCR), convened a consultation at Fairmile Court, Cobham, Surrey, in December 1991, when six ministers from churches which dissented from the Leicester vote met with six representatives of the BU.<sup>160</sup> Six of the papers, three from each side, were published in March 1993 and entitled *Evangelicals and Ecumenism - When Baptists Disagree*.<sup>161</sup> Though baptism does figure in the

Spurgeon's attitude towards ecumenism, as, for example, when they quoted, 'If we could find infant baptism in the Word of God, we should adopt it...But, we have looked well through the Bible, and cannot find it, and do not believe that it is there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Holy Scriptures, unless they themselves first put it there', from Spurgeon's autobiography, *The Early Years*, quoted in *FAB* no.8 (n.d., [but Spring 1993]), 4.

<sup>159</sup> David Rushworth-Smith's leaflet, *Baptists have a special role* (Crich, n.d., [post 1989]).

<sup>160</sup> Those in favour of membership of the ICP but who did not contribute to the resultant publication were John Briggs of Keele University, chairman of the ACCR, and Trevor Hubbard former Area Superintendent of the North Western Area. Those against membership were Rev Adrian Argile of Leyland, Alan Bailyes of Bethel English Baptist Church, Tonypandy and representative of the East Glamorgan Association on the BU Council, and Rev. Neil Walker of Dereham Road, Norwich, see 'Introduction' to Michael I. Bochenski (ed.), *Evangelicals and Ecumenism - When Baptists Disagree* (1993), 11.

<sup>161</sup> Those in favour of participation, Michael Bochenski, Senior Minister of Dagnall St., St Albans; Mrs. Faith Bowers a member of Bloomsbury Central, London and sub-editor of the Baptist Historical Society; Rev. Douglas G. T. McBain, General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area; and Rev. David Coffey, General Secretary of the BU; and against, Rev. Robert J. M. Amess, Senior Minister of Duke St., Richmond; Rev. Dr. John Balchin, Senior Minister of Purley Baptist Church, formerly a tutor at London Bible College; Rev. Andrew Rigden Green, Senior Minister of Upton Vale, Torquay. Many of Robert Ames' views had been expressed earlier in his book *One in the Truth: Fighting the Cancer of Division In The Evangelical Church* (Eastbourne, 1988), as had David Coffey's in his *Build That Bridge*.

book, it does not hold a prominent place and references to it are often brief, descriptive and illustrative, in keeping with Andrew Rigden Green's concluding study on 'The Anti-Ecumenical and the Pro-Ecumenical Mind', in which he discussed 'Levels of Truth', dividing primary truths from secondary ones. In the former he listed Christ, salvation, authority and the Church, in the latter types of church government, differences on the parousia, and baptism 'where Evangelicals clearly disagree and yet co-operate'.<sup>162</sup> This relegation of baptism into 'adiaphora'<sup>163</sup> reflects the marginal place baptism has come to hold in much contemporary ecumenical debate which starkly contrasts with the central place it has held throughout the larger part of the twentieth century.<sup>164</sup>

During the winter of 1992-93, the FUE solicited the views of ministers and churches on the working of CTE, and, as agreed, the CTE Review Group was set up in September 1993. In June 1994, this Group completed its report which encouraged continuation in the ICP whilst attempting to dispel fears that uniformity was the movement's goal.

CTE's first residential Forum met in July, 1991, a short time after the Seventh Assembly of the WCC in Canberra where an agreed portrait of the unity of the Church had been produced. However, it quickly became clear in the Forum that the differing interpretations of what was meant by 'the visible unity of the church' was

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*Conflict and Reconciliation in the Church* (Eastbourne, 1986). In neither book did baptism figure prominently.

<sup>162</sup> A. Green, 'The Anti-Ecumenical and the Pro-Ecumenical Mind', in *Evangelicals and Ecumenism*, 52.

<sup>163</sup> Literally 'matters of indifference', ie, those beliefs or practices which the Reformers regarded as being tolerable, thus allowing them to adopt a more pragmatic approach thereby avoiding unnecessary confrontation.

<sup>164</sup> This impression is supported by the discussions held towards the end of 1991, in which David Coffey, newly appointed General Secretary, met with FAB representatives and replied to questions submitted by those associated with FAB. These were eventually published, after a short delay, in the autumn of 1992. Questions 16 and 18 brought forth mention of baptism, but only briefly so. See *FAB* no.6 (n.d., [but around Spring, 1992]), pp.7-8 respectively. Here, p.2, David Coffey stressed his firmly held evangelical convictions but believed that it was important to participate in ecumenical discussions and that this involvement did not imply compromise.

leading to considerable misunderstanding and frustrating attempts at deepening unity. This led, in 1993, to the establishment of the 'Called to be One' process, the purpose of which was to discover precisely what the member churches of CTE understood by the phrase 'the visible unity of the church'.<sup>165</sup> This resulted in the book *Called to be One*.<sup>166</sup> Of the five substantial papers presented to the Working Party during this three year period, 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership' was prepared by Dr. Morris West.<sup>167</sup>

A provisional Baptist response was drawn up by the FUE and sent on their behalf to the Rev. Canon Martin Reardon, Convenor of the Working Party, by Keith Jones in October 1994. Again baptism did not figure prominently in the response. Four models on how 'visible unity' was understood were tentatively offered, reflecting the diversity of Baptist opinion: the mutual recognition of other denominations at every level, including faith, conversion, baptism, eucharist, ministry, mission and ecclesiology; a unity between local communities who recognized in each other a sufficient amount of the true church to share in mission and to commend members and ministries, allowing diversity of practice around the core of faith in Christ and the Gospel sacraments of baptism and communion; such unity would be expressed by 'Christian unity' rather than structural, ecclesial, denominational or church unity, in a similar way to the

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<sup>165</sup> To this end Seven Questions were distributed to the twenty two member churches of CTE, thirteen of which responded, the BU amongst them, as did twenty three of the fifty county ecumenical bodies in association with CTE.

<sup>166</sup> An accompanying popular study booklet was published in the summer of 1996, compiled by Helen Lidgett, *Called to be One: The Workbook* (1996), followed by a video *Called to be One* (1996).

<sup>167</sup> Details in this paragraph are taken from *Called to be One*,<sup>(1996)</sup> vi-vii and 1-5. Two Baptists served on the Working Party which produced the text of the book, having met nine times between August 1994 and October 1995 - Rev. Roger Nunn, Field Officer (South) of CTE who is based at Baptist House in Didcot, and Rev. Dr. Hazel Sherman, tutor at Birmingham University, formerly a tutor at Bristol Baptist College. The texts of the Swanwick Declaration and Basis and Commitment of Churches Together in England are included in. *Called to be One*, 1-2. The whole process will climax in the July 1997 CTE Forum in Swanwick when representatives of the member churches, associated bodies and intermediate councils will meet.

Evangelical Alliance; post-denominational fellowship in which there was mutual acceptance of each other's members, ministers, sacraments and statements of faith.<sup>168</sup>

From the time the BU first committed itself to join CTE and CCBI in 1989, baptism had rarely been prominent in the discussions, yet again illustrating the peripheral place the rite has <sup>come</sup> to hold within Baptist thought and reflection on ecumenical developments, and this despite the BU's initiative, linked to the series of consultations called *Towards 2000*, which sought to encourage Baptist Identity.<sup>169</sup> Taking the letters column and articles in the *Baptist Times* as a barometer reflecting the importance attached to baptism in relation to ecumenical developments or Baptist life as a whole,<sup>170</sup> then it must be concluded that baptism has dropped from any prominent place in the denomination's agenda and a more pragmatic approach to the issue has been adopted.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> *Churches Together in England: 'The Called to be One' process. Provisional Answers to the Seven Questions* (October, 1994), n.p., Question 3, Models A-D.

<sup>169</sup> On *Towards 2000*, consultations and accompanying documents, see chapter 9 'Baptist Identity' below. Baptism also received only the briefest of mentions in a review document circulated to all the churches in preparation for the spring 1995 Plymouth Assembly debate on whether to remain in CTE and CCBI. The questionnaire comprised ten questions, which themselves contained subsections. Question six asked, 'in what areas [of ecumenical involvement] are there joys/enrichment or tensions/difficulties?', and rather vaguely asked for positive or negative comments on six areas one of which was 'Issues around baptism', see 'Review of our membership of *Churches Together in England* and the *Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland*' (1994), n.p., but p.3. The background to this questionnaire was that during the winter of 1992-93, the Faith and Unity Executive had solicited the views of ministers and churches on the working of CTE, and, as agreed, the CTE Review Group was set up in September 1993. In June 1994, the Review Group completed its report which encouraged continuation in the ICP whilst attempting to dispel fears that the movement was moving towards uniformity, and it was this that immediately preceded the questionnaire sent to all churches on the pattern of their involvement with ecumenical bodies with a view to drawing up the wording for the Plymouth Assembly proposal.

<sup>170</sup> See the 'Conclusion' below.

<sup>171</sup> Following the 1995 decision to remain within CTE and CCBI, Alec Gilmore, 'Ecumenism: New Rules of Engagement?', *BT* June 1, 1995, 5 and 13, expressed his opinion that matters of faith and doctrine within the ecumenical context had either been settled or that Baptists had learned to live with them, existing problems having more to do with power and administration, quote from p.5. Ian Burley, 'Baptists and Unity', *BT* July 6, 1995, 8, criticized the statement as pragmatically true in much ecumenical life, asking, 'What has been settled? By whom? With what have we learned to live? With what consequences? For whom?'

The run up to the Baptist Assembly in Plymouth 1995 where the decision whether to remain within the ecumenical instruments or not would be decided was marked by a whole array of articles and letters discussing the pros and cons of Baptist commitment to CTE and CCBI, but only a few ever mentioned the issue of baptism,<sup>172</sup> and fewer still did more than simply refer to it.<sup>173</sup> The proposal to remain within the ecumenical instruments was vigorously opposed,<sup>174</sup> and alternative proposals were tabled,<sup>175</sup> only to be defeated.<sup>176</sup> At the Assembly itself, two identical

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<sup>172</sup> See Philip Clements-Jewery of Hamlet Baptist Church, Liverpool, 'Unashamed Ecumaniac', *BT* January 19, 1995, 6; in a negative letter regarding ecumenical involvement, Rev. Guy Finnie of Portsmouth implicitly mentions baptism through reference to the 'doctrines of regeneration and ecclesiology (lying at the heart of our faith)', 'Questions on the road to unity', *BT* February 16, 1995, 9; 'BU Council to decide CTE proposal for Assembly', *BT* March 2, 1995, 3; Mrs. Rita Armstrong of Clevedon, wife of Rev. Ronald Armstrong a retired minister, 'Let's tackle the prejudice and misunderstanding', *BT* March 16, 1995, 10.

<sup>173</sup> These include David Coffey's article in which he argued for continued involvement, referring to the article 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium', in which leading American Evangelicals and Catholics expressed their growing common resolve about Christian faith and mission. In the lists of differences and disagreements were whether sacraments and ordinances were symbols or means of grace, and whether baptism was a sacrament of or a testimony to regeneration. Coffey later remarked, 'In our own Union...there is a diversity of viewpoint on sacraments and ordinances', see D. Coffey, 'It's Time to Cross Some Bridges', *BT* March 30, 1995, 7 and 11, quotation from p.7. David Coffey and Keith Jones made the same point in 'Misunderstandings and Disagreements' in the *Baptist Leader* no.11 Spring 1995, 1-2. See also Coffey and Jones, 'Committed, But Critical' in *SecCheck* no.11 Spring 1995, 2, 'Because so much of our understanding of the Gospel is enshrined in believers baptism, the link between Baptism and belief cannot be compromised', further observing that the nature of ecclesiology and ministry required lengthy debate and that co-operation necessitated a strong trinitarian basis. *SecCheck* along with the *Baptist Leader* are the official mailings from David Coffey and Keith Jones to ministers and church secretaries sent out three times a year. The first editions came out in the Autumn/October 1991. David Rushworth-Smith responded to Coffey's article in 'The Inter-Church Process: A bridge too far?', *BT* April 20, 1995, 15, pointing to the Union's continuing involvement ecumenically as disruptive of Baptist unity, a position also expressed by Rev. G. Bryn Jones of Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, 'More Heat - and even a little light', *BT* April 6, 1995, 7.

<sup>174</sup> 'BU continuation in CTE proposed', *BT* February 9, 1995, 2. The report was challenged by Rev. David Gardner of Burwell, Cambridgeshire, who believed that the simple five point summary of the 1994 Review Group's report was insufficient and was actually pushing Baptists into ecumenical involvement, and that the questionnaire circulated had not asked the direct question whether Baptists wanted to continue membership with CTE and CCBI, D. Gardner, 'CTE Review: Painting a Different Picture', *BT* February 23, 1995, 11, a response to 'BU continuation in CTE proposed', *BT* February 9, 1995, 2. According to Roger Nunn, the lengthy 1994 report does not make any reference to baptism, in a letter to the author dated April 4, 1995.

<sup>175</sup> See eg, Rev. Ian D. Burley of Huddersfield, 'Constructive proposal from FAB', *BT* February 23, 1995, 11, and Rev. F. R. Cook of Govilon, Gwent, 'Assembly proposal "divisive"', *BT* March 16, 1995, 11.

amendments were proposed, one for CTE, the other for CCBI,<sup>177</sup> only to be rejected when the Assembly's morning session on May 6 ratified membership of the two bodies with an increased majority.<sup>178</sup> In spite of the vigorous and often heated debate, it is again worth noting the increasingly marginal place accorded to baptism. Of the three articles specifically on baptism published in the *Baptist Times* during 1995 only one was by a Baptist, Robert Burt, a deacon of the church at Newcastle-under-Lyme,<sup>179</sup> the remaining two by a Methodist,<sup>180</sup> yet it is manifestly clear that most of the contentious theological issues surrounding baptism are no nearer resolution now than there were at the beginning of the century, despite some of the excellent theological work that has been done by Baptist and other scholars.

The fruit of nearly three years work, *Called to be One* was published in early 1996. In three major chapters the various understandings of the meaning of the words 'Church', 'unity' and 'visible unity' in the participating denominations were comprehensively discussed, setting out the differences and also convergences and challenges.<sup>181</sup> Apart from descriptive references to the place of believer's baptism

<sup>176</sup> 'Council affirms continuing Baptist membership of CTE', *BT* March 16, 1995, 2. At this meeting, the chairman of the Faith and Unity Executive, Mr. John Briggs and Rev. Ruth Bottoms, chair of the Church Relations Committee, proposed and seconded the proposal which, after debate, was carried. At the same meeting, Keith Jones reported that 91 churches still in membership with the Union had registered as having opted out.

<sup>177</sup> 'Amendments tabled to Assembly resolution on CTE and CCBI', *BT* April 27, 1995, 3. See also I. D. Burley, 'The Plymouth Vote', *It's FAB* no.13 (December, 1994), n.p., but p.1-2, and 'The Plymouth Assembly', *It's FAB* no.14 (April, 1995), n.p., but p.1, which sets out the amendment.

<sup>178</sup> 'Assembly confirms CTE and CCBI membership', *BT* May 11, 1995, 1, and 'Baptists plan active role in inter-church process', *BT* May 18, 1995, 3. For CTE the voting was 986 Yeses, 107 Noes, 28 Abstentions, with 22 Welsh Abstentions, and for CCBI 924 Yeses, 213 Noes and 30 Abstentions. This represented an increase of the majority over 1989, 90.21% for CTE and 81.27% for CCBI. It is perhaps worth noting that this was the first weekend Assembly.

<sup>179</sup> R. Burt, 'Questions About Baptism?', *BT* March 16, 1995, 13.

<sup>180</sup> A former Baptist minister, George Thompson Brake, who returned to the Methodist ministry in 1971, 'Baptism: Symbol of Grace', *BT* August 3, 1995, 9; 'Baptism and the Activity of God', *BT* August 10, 1995, 7. He also wrote the 'Open Line' column 'Methodist Questions', *BT* July 27, 1995, 6, which dealt with baptism within, chiefly, Methodism. One is left only to wonder why the editor had to turn to a Methodist for two articles on baptism.

<sup>181</sup> These are followed by chapters on the participants' experiences of unity, models of unity, the way forward, and five appendices on Church and mission, initiation and membership,

within BU churches,<sup>182</sup> baptism was only dealt with at any depth in Appendix B on 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership', which was the work of Morris West.<sup>183</sup> Though common ground with Paedobaptists lies with acknowledgment that baptism is a 'once-for-all sign of entry into the Christian church', it reported that some Baptists see infant baptism as at best incomplete, but by most as no baptism at all, thus requiring true baptism for the first time by immersion. Some Baptists were prepared to regard infant baptism as part of a process of salvation which needed completion through an act of personal profession of faith but not necessarily by immersion baptism in water.<sup>184</sup> Yet in the whole matter, Baptists pressed for the rights of conscience of each candidate for baptism and a minister's obligation to baptize a candidate who had been baptized in infancy, whether confirmed or not, should they feel strongly that this was God's will.<sup>185</sup>

It was acknowledged that the words 'baptism' and 'membership' clearly did not mean the same thing in all churches, so *Called to be One* issued four challenges 'if they are to make their baptismal unity more visible'. First, the meaning of the word baptism and the nature of sacrament and symbol needed further exploration. Second, mutual understanding of one another's processes of initiation, of which at least four

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eucharistic communion, ordained ministry, authority and decision-making, concluding with suggested rules of good practice.

<sup>182</sup> Such as the mention of the second BU Declaration of Principle that baptism is of believers in the name of the Trinity, *Called to be One*, 17; that Baptists include baptism along with the Bible and agreement in faith as visible elements or bonds of unity, p.19; the value placed on the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist (interestingly not using the word ordinance), but recognizing the difficulty that a major emphasis on the sacraments as a focus of unity would have, p.22; recognition of the tension in LEPs between infant and believer's baptism and the development of understandings within them on baptism and membership, pp.24 and 34; that whilst most Baptists did not regard infant baptism as proper and complete baptism, most Baptist churches did not require someone baptized in infancy to be baptized before admission into membership, p.51; an outline of the Baptist pattern of entry into the Church by baptism on profession of faith, p.68; and, that most Baptist churches practised open communion, only a very few restricting it to baptized believers, p.71.

<sup>183</sup> Appendix B on 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership', *Called to be One*, 67-70.

<sup>184</sup> This is probably a reference to *Believing and Being Baptized*, on which see below and chapter 9 'Three Important Studies: Baptism and Re-baptism'.

<sup>185</sup> *Called to be One*, 67.

patterns had been identified.<sup>186</sup> Third, churches should discuss their understanding of the church and membership to see whether they are mutually exclusive or complementary. Fourth, the possibility should be investigated of belonging to more than one church.<sup>187</sup> To believer-baptist churches the cessation of admitting into church membership those never baptized was suggested; the refraining of baptizing by immersion those baptized in infancy, brought up in and having confirmed their faith; re-consideration of the sense in which children belong to the church; and the suggestion to all churches that a suitable rite of reaffirmation of vows should be developed for those already either infant or believer baptized.<sup>188</sup> It was further noted that the BU 'is not happy to speak of infant and believer's baptism as a *common baptism*'.<sup>189</sup> It would appear, then, that recognition of a 'common baptism' is a goal of the ICP, or at least, a significant majority within it.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> See *Called to be One*, 68: baptism on profession of faith; baptism and chrismation followed by communion; baptism, usually of infants, accompanied by profession of faith from parents/godparents, followed by a later confirmation and reception into membership; and the experience of transformation by the Spirit not marked by any outward rite.

<sup>187</sup> *Called to be One*, 69-70.

<sup>188</sup> *Called to be One*, 70.

<sup>189</sup> *Called to be One*, 68, italics theirs, though the report does say that the four challenges issued to the churches should not be seen as enough in themselves 'to assure the churches that there is a *common baptism*', p.70, italics theirs. On this, see chapter 9 'Common Baptism' below.

<sup>190</sup> Initial responses to *Called to be One* were published from four ecumenically committed Baptists, two of whom briefly mentioned baptism. The text of these reviews was published in *SecCheck* 14 (Summer, 1996), 2-3, and *Ecumenical News* 4 (June, 1996), 3-8. The former is the source used here. Rev. Dr. Hazel Sherman highlighted challenges to the churches, amongst which she included 'do you need to think again about how those who were baptised as infants might be welcomed as believers in your church, while doing justice to the baptism administered by another Christian church?' In this she did not deny the freedom of conscience, but rather wished Baptist churches to consider the question. Rev. Tony Peck, minister-secretary of the YBA, was encouraged by the seriousness with which the different understandings of baptism were taken. Rev. Michael Cleaves, Baptist Team Minister in the Ecumenical Parish of Stantonbury, Milton Keynes, merely queried the generalization and asked for substantiation of the statement on p.51 section 6.28 vii, that 'most Baptist churches...do not require someone, already baptised as an infant, to be baptised as a believer before being admitted into membership'. A fourth review was included by Rev. Alan Bailyes, Moderator of the Church Relations Committee and minister at Bethel English BC, Tonypany, but this did not discuss the baptismal issue. On the debate on 'common baptism', see chapter 9 below.



## Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs).<sup>191</sup>

### **Baptismal Policy in LEPs.**

More significant than the call for Church unity by Easter 1980,<sup>192</sup> the Nottingham F&O Conference gave birth to the concept of 'areas of ecumenical experiment',<sup>193</sup> which became known as Local Ecumenical Projects in 1973, this being changed to Local Ecumenical Partnerships in 1994.<sup>194</sup> LEPs superseded Union Churches, which were affiliated to both their Unions, practised believer's and infant baptism and were served by ministers of one or other denomination. Though considerable discussion

<sup>191</sup> An LEP exists where 'there is at the level of the local church a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life and/or buildings of more than one denomination, and a recognition of that agreement by the appropriate denominational authorities', *Local Church Unity. Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects and Sponsoring Bodies* (revised edition, 1985 [original edition 1975]), 4. The revised edition has a 'Forward' by Rev. Douglas Sparkes, at the time (June, 1985), Moderator of CCLEPE.

<sup>192</sup> One of the reasons why the Covenant for unity by Easter 1980 never materialized was because, 'no one did sufficient work to follow it up', so R. M. C. Jeffery, *Case Studies in Unity* (1972), 45, cited by J. Matthews, *Unity Scene*, 82. Bi-lateral unity negotiations which were under way at this time proved to be another reason for the covenant failure. In 1964 the Congregational Union had become the Congregational Church, a necessary step towards the formation of the United Reformed Church (URC) with the Presbyterian Church in England in 1972, though a number of churches did not so unite, forming the Congregational Federation. The URC was joined by the Reformed Association of Churches of Christ in 1981. In 1972 an insufficient vote in the Synod brought the scheme for union between the Church of England and the Methodist Church to an end, as did the later attempt at union between the Methodists, Moravians, URC and Church of England in 1982. These failed negotiations led to a shift of emphasis within the ecumenical movement from schemes striving for organic union to local schemes, a fact reflected in the increasing number of LEPs. For details of the above, see Matthews, *Unity Scene*, 82; Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 4-5; brief details concerning the negotiations up to 1977 between the URC and the Churches of Christ, specifically relating to the baptismal issue, are to be found in D. Bridge and D. Phipers, *The Water That Divides. The Baptism Debate* (1977), 200-201, citing *The negotiations between Churches of Christ and the United Reformed Church*, Joint Committee Interim Report, (1975), eg, p.3.

<sup>193</sup> The Nottingham Conference passed the following resolution: 'Recognising that visible unity will only be realised as we learn to do things together...as congregations, this Conference invites...member Churches...to implement the Lund call to "act together in all matters, except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately." In particular it requests them... 3. To designate areas of ecumenical experiment, at the request of local congregations, or in new towns and housing areas. In such areas there should be experiments in ecumenical group ministries, in the sharing of buildings and equipment, and in the development of mission'. Taken from 'Introduction. Churches Together in England Consultation on the Future of Local Ecumenical Projects, Swanwick, 21-23 March, 1994', in *Pilgrim Post* no.21 (May-June, 1994), 15. Both the Nottingham and Lund Conferences discussed primarily theological matters, but both also realized that progress towards visible unity would only take place if theological convergence was accompanied by local action.

<sup>194</sup> Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 4-5 (though it ought to be noted that the change to 'Partnerships' is wrongly dated as 1995 on p.5); Nunn, *This Growing Unity*, viii.

took place in the 1930s and again in the early 1950s as to whether it would be possible or desirable to establish further churches of this kind, the discussions proved inconclusive. Little resulted until in the mid-1960s when Union Churches were established on a new estate at Ramsgate and Bristol, and when Arundel Baptist and Congregational churches united.<sup>195</sup>

The growth of LEPs has been greatly aided by the comity agreements between the main denominations in Britain (Anglican, Free Church and Roman Catholic) which often owed their origin to negative factors such as land restrictions in both new towns and older areas,<sup>196</sup> financial and property considerations, and diminishing congregations.<sup>197</sup> Localized co-operative evangelism has also led to the development of LEPs, where variations in doctrinal stand on baptism and faith-commitment has not been seen as a barrier to co-operative evangelism and even church planting.<sup>198</sup> The

<sup>195</sup> See *Baptists and Unity*, 13 n\*\*. *With Charity and With Conviction. Report of the Working Group on Local Ecumenical Projects of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (1984), 6-7, noted that, after the formation of the URC in 1972, some Union Churches were now in partnership with the URC, others with the Congregational Federation, and added that, although they were often still referred to as Union Churches 'there is no doubt that in type they are indistinguishable from a local ecumenical project and should be regarded as such'. Consistent with this position, *With Charity and With Conviction*, included Union Churches in its section on LEPs in partnership with Congregational or United Reformed Churches, pp.18-21.

<sup>196</sup> So T. G. Dunning, 'Instant Unity', *The Fraternal* 148 (April, 1968), 7, 'Land [in some of the new housing estates] because of its scarcity and cost must be carefully allocated. Readiness is shown in some cases to set aside one or two sites for the christian church. It would be foolish to contend in such circumstances that every denomination should have the right to a site... These are certainly special cases but surely they call for instant united action rather than no action at all!'

<sup>197</sup> See *Baptists and Unity*, 38. St. Thomas's Anglican church and Mulehouse Road BC, Crookes, Sheffield, which began joint worship in 1977 when the Baptist church was very small and in financial difficulties and the Anglican church was undergoing extensive refurbishment, the LEP eventually being inaugurated in October 1982, see Robert Warren, *In The Crucible. The Testing and Growth of a Local Church* (1989), 7 and 144; 'DCP', *Wendover. Our God Reigns* (1993), n.p., but 1-2, mentions the financial situation that both the Baptist and URC churches were in, both also having buildings in need of costly structural work.

<sup>198</sup> Such co-operative ventures have taken place in Milton Keynes, Telford, Mosborough and Swindon, see Keith G. Jones, 'Baptist Evangelistic patterns and Inter-church Relations. A perspective from the United Kingdom', an unpublished paper presented to the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation, July 1994, 3-4. Advocates of LEPs are quick to stress that the major reasons for their formation are positive, chiefly missionary, 'that the world may believe', see, eg, K. G. Jones, *From Conflict to Communion* (1996), 9, 'it is in the very working together of diverse communities who trust in the same Jesus, that the mission of God finds response in people of faith'. Later, p.25, he warned that it was 'normally unwise to come to the point of sharing a building simply on the basis of cutting

most important factor enabling the growth of LEPs has been the 1969 Sharing of Buildings Act.<sup>199</sup> Prior to this, Baptist LEP involvement had been hindered by Trust Deed stipulations which made such sharing difficult if not impossible. However, the Act has enabled different traditions share the same building.<sup>200</sup>

*Baptists and Unity* stated that the BU should share 'whenever possible, in co-operation with local Baptists, in the designation of "areas of ecumenical experiment"'.<sup>201</sup> *Baptists and Unity Reviewed* recommended that the decision to participate in areas of ecumenical experiment and the sharing of church buildings, were matters for the local church or the Association. When such involvement was decided upon, the BU's role should be to supply advice and safeguard Baptist property.<sup>202</sup> This policy encouraging active participation was reasserted in the 1984

costs in order to survive. You cannot move into such a relationship with much hope of success unless there is also a positive mission vision and a desire to get to know more and share more with other traditions of Christians'. Also Fred Crix, *Tap Roots No.15: Anglican-Baptist L.E.P. in Milton Keynes* (n.d., but c.1980), n.p., but p.1, 'The reason [for the LEP] was to enable the Church [with a capital C] to engage more effectively in mission to a rapidly expanding area within the new City of Milton Keynes'. 'Tap' stands for Teams and Projects, a CCLEPE group. Jones, 'Baptist Evangelistic patterns and Inter-church Relations', 4-5, dismissed objections that this kind of evangelistic co-operation only led to a message reduced to the lowest common denominator and that it was impossible to evangelize with those not sharing the same theological and ecclesiological determinatives. In contrast he asserted four benefits: '1. The attractiveness to those evangelised... 2. There is an enhanced confidence and vision of those who participate... 3. It is possible to develop more attractive and better publicized programmes... 4. There are more insights to draw upon.' These could clearly be labelled pragmatic considerations not matters of principle and no mention was made of baptism.

<sup>199</sup> Details of which are set out in the CCBI/CTE/CYTUN book *Under the Same Roof. Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969* (1994). See also *The Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969: Guidelines prepared by legal representatives of the Church (Revised 1983)* (1983), published by CCLEPE by the BCC. See also Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together* 44-45; and *Local Church Unity*, 30-31.

<sup>200</sup> The Act's purpose had been to enable congregations of different traditions to use the same building for worship at different times, and could not have foreseen the ecumenical developments for which it has been used, making possible the partnership between churches well beyond what was originally envisaged by the legislation.

<sup>201</sup> *Baptists and Unity*, 50. This was endorsed by *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*, 15. The BU's Working Group of the Church Relations Committee later welcomed the 1975 *Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects*, stating that its implications for procedure would be examined and adequate machinery for dealing with them would be devised, noted in *Local Church Unity. Guidelines*, 44.

<sup>202</sup> *Baptists and Unity Reviewed* (1969), 10, reference being made to the 'Report of the Ad Hoc Group on Areas of Ecumenical Experiment', approved by the BU Council in November 1968. Any attempts by the BU to direct such matters could be interpreted as interference with the independence of the local church. The affairs of LEPs are overseen by the Sponsoring Bodies, most of which have now been absorbed into what are called 'Intermediate Bodies'. Baptists are

report *With Charity and With Conviction*, which recommended that any LEP applying for BU membership should be examined by the ACCR who would ensure that Baptist interests would be safeguarded. It further noted that whether a Baptist minister was present or not, the Baptist element would want the freedom to teach and advocate believers' baptism.<sup>203</sup>

The first detailed examination of so-called rebaptism and baptismal policy in LEPs was by Rev. Keith Jones, General Secretary of the progressive and pro-active YBA.<sup>204</sup> Jones' *Baptismal Policy in LEPs* sought by reference to past experience in LEPs to act as an interim contribution and discussion starter to the on-going baptismal debate.<sup>205</sup>

Jones noted that the agreements and constitutions produced at the inauguration of LEPs often stated that the baptismal issue would be dealt with as a 'pastoral concern', which invariably meant that decisions were taken by the ministers *in situ*, usually

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usually represented by the Area Superintendent and/or the Association Secretary and perhaps other local representatives of the Baptist community who may sit on a formal council with elected and appointed representatives from the various denominations. See Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 35--36. For further and more detailed information on the Sponsoring Bodies, see Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 47-55; R. Nunn, *This Growing Unity*, 15-30; *With Charity and With Conviction*, 10-11. All of the participating denominations in the LEP like to ensure that the constitutions protect key elements of denominational identity, but for Baptists, several further steps are appropriate. The BU's Local Ecumenical Committee examines and approves all LEP constitutions and some Associations also share in this, particularly if they are trustees of the Baptist church involved, Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 37.

<sup>203</sup> *With Charity and With Conviction* (1984), compiled by Rev. Douglas Sparkes, Assistant General Secretary of the BU, § 41 on p.12, and §49 on p.14. This was produced by the Working Group on Local Ecumenical Projects (WORGLEP), whose parent body was the ACCR, chaired by Neville Clark. The BU Council recommended that General Superintendents and Associations be encouraged in their active participation in sponsoring bodies and in the support offered to Baptists in LEPs, and invited other Baptist churches to consider whether participation in such a project might be God's will for them, see p.5.

<sup>204</sup> It is not surprising that Baptists were the first to directly tackle the thorny issue of rebaptism for the simple reason that Baptists are the only ones who, because of their practice of the baptism of believers, create the 'problem'.

<sup>205</sup> K. G. Jones, *Baptismal Policy in LEPs. A Discussion Document* (1983, revised 1989), 'Introduction'. Though first compiled in 1982 for the Commission of Christian Witness in order to assist Baptist churches who were contemplating entering LEPs, then published a year later. It is from the 1989 edition that all quotations have been taken. The importance and usefulness of this document is reflected by its recommendation as 'A good airing of the issues' by the 2 page document 'Ecumenical Pack Mini Index', circulated at the May 23, 1988, meeting of WORGLEP.

with little or no reference to the constituent churches in the LEP or denominational agencies.<sup>206</sup> Frequently it had been reported that Methodist, URC and Anglican clergy had issued a blanket veto on the baptism as a believer of anyone who had been baptized, in whatever circumstances, as an infant.<sup>207</sup> Dissatisfied with this state of affairs, Jones insisted that 'a proper debate on the local and practical pattern of Baptism in LEPs must be held and guidelines incorporated into new LEPs at their commencement'.<sup>208</sup> This Jones set out to do.

Jones identified three Baptist inconsistencies which presented real difficulties to their ecumenical partners. First, on baptism and church membership, the oddity of baptism without requiring membership, or the admission to membership on 'profession of faith' without requiring any form of baptism at all. Such practices would need to be abandoned in an LEP. Second, paedobaptists often regarded as arbitrary the Baptist refusal to baptize under a certain age and question the underlying theology. Abolition of such exact prescriptions might be required, provided it did not lead to a false division between baptism and membership of the believing community. Third, in their advocacy of infant dedication, Baptists tended to use paedobaptist

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<sup>206</sup> This practice was indirectly confirmed by *With Charity and With Conviction*, §55, p.14, which suggested that in order to avoid unnecessary distress, the LEP and the principal representatives, including the General Superintendent, 'ought to anticipate before a particular request [for re-baptism], what factors should govern the response...Meanwhile the LEP, the sponsoring body and the denominational leaders should endeavour to discover how such difficulties in other LEPs have been resolved to determine what progress can be made in the given instance'.

<sup>207</sup> Jones, *Baptismal Policy in LEPs*, 1. Jones noted that united constitutions often dealt with baptism in a formula on the lines of 'We shall use the rites and customs of our respective churches', or 'Baptism and re-baptism shall be regarded as a pastoral issue'. He continued, 'this seems to mean that the Ministers of the constituent denominations agree in private the course of action to be followed which generally results in a blanket exclusion of the possibility of believers baptism to anyone who has, at some stage, been baptised as an infant'.

<sup>208</sup> Jones, *Baptismal Policy in LEPs*, 2. On p.1 he had already expressed this: 'The proposition of this document is that agreement on Believers' Baptism needs to be reached *before* a constitution is agreed for a project and a sharing agreement effected. Basic ground rules of decision-making and the possibilities for "re-baptism" must be set out in principle to avoid later heartache in the situation'. That Jones' views have been acted on is shown by the observation that now in LEPs including Baptists, a working agreement on baptismal practice has to have been worked out beforehand and incorporated into the LEP's constitution. In practice, this can take various forms, the importance of which is reflected in the detailed discussions in *Believing and Being Baptized* and the *Called to be One* process and book. See also its discussion in Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 19, 27 and 60.

arguments, which was why some Baptists had replaced this with a simple service of thanksgiving for the child's birth without any substantial promises. In so doing, Baptists did not recognize that children of believers relate in a different way to the church family than the children of outsiders. Though he did not believe that the debate could be settled in so short a compass, Jones maintained that in reaching agreement with others, Baptists needed to be aware of their own problems.<sup>209</sup>

After summarizing the positions on baptism of the Baptists' major ecumenical partners, Jones set out his most important work towards a possible agenda for agreement. Developing the views of the likes of Professor James Dunn of Durham University,<sup>210</sup> who linked baptism-conversion-initiation, he suggested that Baptists recognized the rite and see its forms as practised by others as different in sequence and order in time. In LEPs Baptists needed to acknowledge the churchmanship of others. From this starting point, a possible baptismal agreement could be established around the following elements. First, in each shared building there needed to be a font and baptistry. Second, baptism should be understood as both an act of God and a response of the church and individual and, thereby, part of the conversion-initiation rite. In the case of believers it would always be linked to church membership, in the case of infants it would need to be completed in confirmation and reception into full membership. Third, three models of baptismal practice were possible. 'Model A: Denominationalism' involved a shared church/LEP which agreed that those of other denominations could be baptized as believers even if baptized in infancy provided they transferred to the Baptist roll. 'Model B: Complete Ecumenism' where, in a shared church/LEP, once baptized meant always baptized, so Baptists could only baptize as believers those who had never received any baptism. 'Model C: The Baptismal/Initiation Rite' in which a shared church/LEP agreed that if someone had been infant baptized, but not confirmed and received into the church, the baptismal

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<sup>209</sup> Jones, *Baptismal Policy in LEPs*, 3-4.

<sup>210</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament (1977)*.

rite was regarded as incomplete. Such a person could seek the complete rite of baptism-initiation as a believer by either baptism or confirmation. Were B or C to be adopted, Baptist membership of an LEP should note that their freedom of conscience was put within limits and that to break the pattern would be to cast the whole of the LEP's constitution into disarray. He also recommended the availability of both services of infant baptism and infant thanksgiving, the Baptist church refusing to accept anyone on profession of faith who had never been baptized, the responsibility to nurture children within the Church and to bring them to complete the baptismal-initiation rite, the development of a service for the renewal of baptismal vows for those who never completed the full baptismal-initiation rite, and that the Baptist church carefully consider the inclusion of the laying on of hands as part of the service of baptism and reception into membership and communion.<sup>211</sup>

As well as pioneering work on the theory of baptism, the YBA has also led the way with work on baptismal practice.<sup>212</sup> As Jones had previously made clear, his work was in part based on the actual experience of Baptists in LEPs. Along with the late Methodist minister <sup>of the Gillington LEP</sup> Rev. John Shaw, Keith Jones worked on some embryonic ideas<sup>213</sup> which were discussed with regard to the LEPs in Rawdon and Beeston

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<sup>211</sup> Jones, *Baptismal Policy in LEPs*, 5-6.

<sup>212</sup> The YBA also produced its *Position Paper of the Yorkshire Baptist Association Council on Baptist Church Planting in an Ecumenical Context* (July, 1989). This paper concluded that there was a place for Baptist church planting if the emphases they wished to contribute to the whole Church were not evident in an ecumenical congregation or in the existing congregations of other denominations (8), but they did so asking Baptists to appreciate the anxiety of other denominations over what they call "rebaptism" (9a) and other denominations to understand the emphases that Baptists wished to bring to the Church's witness in any local situation (9b).

<sup>213</sup> This information is from a letter from Keith Jones, 25 April 1996. John Shaw sadly died in 1982. According to Rev. Tony Peck, Shaw's successor as minister of the church in 1984 and Secretary of the YBA since 1991 (details from a telephone conversation held on April 1, 1996), the reason for Shaw and Jones' solo work was due to the failure of the Methodist Church to suggest any strategy on baptism in LEPs. According to Mrs. June Rossington, treasurer of Gillington Baptist Church, in a letter of 18 June 1996, numerous approaches were made to the Methodist Church to which no specific guidance was offered, so the church 'finally worked it out between us and then submitted it for acceptance'.

Hill.<sup>214</sup> Later, with the Methodist, Rev. Ivan Selman, these were clarified in the constitution ultimately negotiated for Girdlington Methodist/Baptist church, formed in 1979 when the two congregations moved in to share the Methodist building. Negotiations had taken several years before they were finally completed when the constitution was agreed in November 1984, a process which had been greatly aided by the options discussed by Keith Jones' *Baptismal Policy in LEPs*.

Everything in the Girdlington constitution flows from the fact that individuals shall be members either of the Methodist or Baptist church (3.(a)).<sup>215</sup> On baptism it declares the church's intention to maintain the integrity of both Methodist and Baptist understandings and practices of baptism (8a (i)) by adopting a 'flexible approach' (8a (ii)). After setting out the usual practice of the Methodists and Baptists (8b (i) and (ii)) it declared that it would be left to the Baptist church's discretion whether they baptized as believers any previously infant baptized in other churches, 'but in the interests of the unity of the congregation this should not be applied to Methodists' (8c), unless the candidate maintains the desire so to be baptized, in which instance they would transfer their membership to the Baptist roll (8d (ii)). All this took place within the policy that, whatever form of baptism, it was such an important step that candidates or parents of infants 'should proceed with the full knowledge of all the options that are available to them' (8e).<sup>216</sup>

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214 Unfortunately requests for copies of the constitutions for Rawdon or Beeston Hill have not been fruitful.

215 *Girdlington Methodist/Baptist Church Constitution* (1984). All references will be to the relevant section and point - in this instance 3.(a). This method will be followed in discussions of all constitutions and all references will be contained in the main text of the thesis in parentheses.

216 In practice, Mrs. June Rossington, in her letter of 18 June 1996, admitted that the prohibition on 're-baptizing' one of the Methodists in the church 'does not work out as we know several Methodists who have been baptised by total immersion as believers whilst at college or university or 3 in the River Jordan...and they are all remaining within the Methodist membership'. The LEP has received permission to instal a baptistry and when baptisms take place both Methodist and Baptist ministers take part in the service and the communion which follows, during which candidates are received into the Baptist membership. Prior to the installation of the baptistry other local Baptist churches were used and the Methodist members went along too. Mrs. Rossington added that the Baptists in the LEP 'would have no objections at all to young Methodists being baptised as believers as a sign of their personal response to Christ, and remaining Methodists'. According to the present Baptist minister of the church,



The importance of the work towards baptismal policy agreement is reflected in the minutes of WORGLEP where 're-baptism' was a constantly recurring matter which received considerable discussion.<sup>217</sup> One of their documents stated, 'Lightly to perform what many will see as "rebaptism" will appear to strike a destructive blow at the churchmanship of ecumenical partners; it is a shallow basis for the fruitful movement into unity. On the other hand, blanket refusal to respond to a request for believers' baptism made by a convinced and instructed conscience that has seriously weighed the issues may seem to deny Baptist convictions and damage discipleship'.<sup>218</sup> A later discussion stated that 'behind the baptismal controversy was the theology of the nature of the church and whatever resolution of the ['rebaptism'] issue was adopted there would be a need to avoid "unchurching" others'.<sup>219</sup>

In April 1987 WORGLEP sent a letter of enquiry to 71 LEPs, 41 of which replied, and these constitute the largest and most detailed source of information concerning 'rebaptism' in LEPs with Baptist involvement, bearing testimony to the fact that baptismal practice has been very much developed at local level. Only two replies failed to answer the question, three indicated that it was not a live issue, two that it was currently not an issue but could become one, whilst one referred such requests to the nearest non-participating Baptist church. Five churches indicated that rebaptism was not practised, of which only one was opposed on principle, one had had a rebaptism but was presently reconsidering its attitude in future, another offered the

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Rev. Brian Tucker, in a letter dated 2 April 1996, there have been no developments since his arrival in 1993 and no Methodist infant baptisms. He adds, 'Oddly, the only baptism of a believer that has taken place, which I conducted, was of a girl whose reception into church membership was to be at a different Methodist church'.

<sup>217</sup> I am grateful to Rev. Dr. Paul Sheppy of Barnoldswick for access to these minutes, minutes which cover the period 1988 to 1991.

<sup>218</sup> 'Baptists and LEPs', n.d., and anonymous, n.p., but p.1, written before the May 23, 1988 meeting of WORGLEP.

<sup>219</sup> Minutes of the WORGLEP meeting April 26, 1989, c). The apparent 'unchurching' of paedobaptists was a regular concern for Baptists discussing these issues, see, eg. *With Charity and With Conviction*, §54, p.14.

renewal of baptismal vows by immersion following the New Zealand rite,<sup>220</sup> two churches distinguished between those infant baptized and not confirmed and those so baptized and confirmed, and twenty five stated that rebaptism was possible. Of these twenty five, in three churches rebaptism meant becoming a member of the Baptist church with no possibility of multiple membership, most referred to the importance of counselling and rebaptism only as a concession to persistence in the request, three deferred the decision to the church (one of which also said the matter was referred to the Sponsoring Body), two left the decision to the minister though one questioned this practice, three particularly referred to indiscriminate infant baptism affirming that where this had occurred rebaptism could be administered with a clear conscience,

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220 The only other place in the world to have LEPs similar to those in Britain is New Zealand, where they are known as co-operative ventures, see T. F. Best, 'Local Ecumenical Projects', 628-29. Here, those baptized in infancy but wishing to express their faith are not 'rebaptized' but offered a service of renewal of baptismal vows using the symbolism of immersion in water. This service has been adopted by a number of LEPs with Baptist involvement, including the LEPs at Southgate, Bury St Edmunds, and Whaddon Way, Milton Keynes - this was their practice in 1987 as expressed in response to the WORGLEP enquiry of April 1987, see 'The "Rebaptism" Controversy' (1988), 1 and 3. However, many have felt, to say the least, uneasy about this rite. So 'Ecumenical Pack Mini Index' (WORGLEP, n.d.), p.2. At their meeting May 23, 1988, they admitted, 'it must be said that many Baptists, as well as others, are distinctly uneasy about its use'. A more open view of the New Zealand rite was expressed by Dr. Paul Sheppy, 'Life-Cycle Liturgies', a lecture given to the JLG's Sarum Conference: Life Cycle Liturgies, September 24, 1996, 4: 'Its restatement of the baptismal vows and its invocation of the Spirit seem to many to question the original baptism; but it is, in my judgement, a more sophisticated response than its critics allow'. Later he added, 'Baptists are not unfamiliar with this sort of procedure, and I cannot be the only Baptist minister to have reminded those previously baptised who are present at the baptism of a new believer of their opportunity "at this time, in this hour" to consecrate themselves afresh to Christ'. The BCC's Division of Ecumenical Affairs appended the note to the New Zealand rite that they had a number of reservations about its use: that it would be understood by many as baptism, as suggested by one of the questions put to the candidate (Question 5), the individual nature of the rite itself might strengthen the danger that it would be confused with baptism, and that those who rejected their infant baptism might also reject this service in view of its emphasis that it is not baptism, see 'Order of Worship: Rite of Renewal (Authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, November 1977, for use in congregations)', (a 3 page duplicated A5 sheet which included a 'B.C.C. Division of Ecumenical Affairs Note', n.d.). Such a view was not put forward in the WORGLEP document, 'After Swanwick. Practical guidance for Baptists seeking Christian unity', 3, 'there is everything to be said for holding a Service of Renewal of Baptismal Vows, and this could incorporate the symbolism of immersion so long as the words used leave no doubt as to what is intended'. Such a rite as the New Zealand reaffirmation has also been discussed in the CTE 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership Report', §§11 and 74, the latter stating that 'The Working Party was very clear that such services of re-affirmation should not make use of water in such a way that they could be confused with baptism'.

whilst one church reported that applicants had to be interviewed by two interviewers representing both persuasions.<sup>221</sup>

In January 1990, CCLEPE published its *Constitutional Guidelines* for LEPs. On 'Baptism and Membership' it stipulated that 'Baptism shall be administered according to the rite and practice of each denomination, and shall be set, in normal circumstances, within an act of congregational worship'. However, the accompanying note 4b observed that where a Baptist church was involved, 'consideration will need to be given to the procedures to be adopted where there is a conflict of practice'. It further noted that where 're-baptism' was an issue, LEPs and their sponsoring bodies had evolved various conditions and interim solutions, 'eg, that only Baptist (not multiple) membership is possible, that the applicants have not made a previous Profession of Faith at a Confirmation, etc.'<sup>222</sup>

After several years of work, the ACCR, through its sub-group WORGLEP, and the Methodist Church Ecumenical Committee finally published what has become known as the *Concordat* in 1991<sup>223</sup> which, as in the Girlington constitution, has sought to maintain the integrity of both the Baptist and Methodist theologies and practices of baptism whilst adopting a flexible and sensitive approach to this delicate pastoral issue (A i) and ii)) which has the potential to destroy LEPs. The *Concordat* was not only modelled on, but in its wording is almost identical to, the Girlington baptismal

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221 Details extracted from the summary by Douglas Sparkes, 'The "Rebaptism" Issue' (January, 1988), which noted that Baptists were involved in over 80 LEPs. The document itself is 4 pages of A4, 'The "Rebaptism" Controversy', compiled by Douglas Sparkes (January 7, 1988). A later WORGLEP document reported that 'in about two-thirds of the churches who replied re-baptism occurred', and classified the conditions as fourfold: only Baptist membership was possible; there could be no question of multiple membership; only in line with the "conscience clause of the 1980 proposals; there might be referral to the Sponsoring Body; where there has been "indiscriminate" baptism', 'Rebaptism in Local Ecumenical Projects' (n.d., but discussed at the October 9, 1989 meeting of WORGLEP).

222 *Constitutional Guidelines for a Local Ecumenical Project* (1990), 5, model 'Constitution', section '4 Baptism and Membership, 4a NOTE and 4b NOTE'.

223 *Baptist/Methodist Agreement on Baptismal Policy Within Local Ecumenical Projects* (n.d., but 1991). From this point referred to as the *Concordat*. The text is also to be found in Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, Appendix 5, 107-109.

policy.<sup>224</sup> It stipulates that should a Methodist decide to be 're-baptized' this can only happen if his/her name is transferred to the Baptist roll (C.4).

In 1996 a Baptist-URC policy was agreed,<sup>225</sup> and presented something similar to the *Concordat* as 'the simplest baptismal policy' for LEPs which have separate Baptist and URC membership rolls (6). However, it presents an alternative which underlies the exceptional nature of 're-baptism', and differs from the *Concordat* in that it permits recourse to outside persons when agreement cannot be reached. Only if a service for the renewal of baptismal vows and/or personal confession of faith (7c.iii) is refused will the request be granted provided the minister(s) and church meeting(s), after consultation, agree that the applicant is willing to transfer their membership to the Baptist roll. Should disagreement arise, help and advice is to be sought from the intermediate bodies and the Baptist General Superintendent and URC Provincial Moderator (7d).

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224 The work on the *Concordat* had recommenced in 1988, see WORGLEP minutes May 23, 1988, p.2, when the Methodist, Rev. Ivan Selman, suggested the possibility of such an agreement should be re-examined. However, it is not known when the idea had been first put forward, though it is known that a draft 'Concordat for Baptist/Methodist LEPs' existed by May 1988 as a WORGLEP document, though this was to be considerably revised for its final form. From October 1989, Rev. Michael Bochenski of Blackburn and Rev. David Staple, Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council, did a great deal of work on behalf of WORGLEP on the text, see WORGLEP minutes for the meeting held at Inter Church House, London October 9, 1989. Four draft Constitutions went before this meeting of WORGLEP, entitled 'Model Constitutions for Local Ecumenical Projects', which was based on and amplified paragraphs 79-81, 'Decision Making Processes', of *With Charity and With Conviction*, 17. Model A represented shared decision making between a Baptist and another Free Church; Model B a developed form of constitution for a Baptist church making decisions in common with at least two other Free Churches; Model C was for a Baptist church involved with an Anglican parish church; Model D demonstrated the relationship between four major denominations, Baptist, Methodist, URC and Anglican. On the second page of this document, it was stated that 'Each of the constitutions...provides for some measure of common decision making on baptismal policy. In some [LEPs] the topic of Infant and Believers baptisms is not constitutionalised, but left on one side as a matter of pastoral practice. Where this is done it is normally by advice from the regional sponsoring body. These models are all taken from sponsoring bodies who prefer to have some clarity of view on baptismal policy in the approved constitution'. It is not known what happened to these four draft constitutions, though some material was clearly used in the *Concordat*.

225 *Baptist Union of Great Britain/United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines for Baptismal Policy in Local Ecumenical Partnerships* (n.d., but 1996). The agreement has also been printed in full in *Ecumenical News* 3 (April, 1996), 2-4, and was officially published in October 1996 as a 6 page document.

The negotiations on these two policy-documents were aided by the fact that the two sides, the Baptists on the one and the Methodists and United Reformed Churches on the other, were facing two separate problems. The Baptists were seeking to preserve the freedom of the person infant baptized, subsequently coming to faith and wanting to be baptized, whilst the Methodists and URC's problem was that believer's baptism was being asked for by their own members in good standing.<sup>226</sup>

A third<sup>227</sup> way of handling requests for re-baptism<sup>228</sup> was suggested which distinguishes between those only baptized and those also confirmed. Group 1 examining 'Baptism and "Re-Baptism"' stated that 'it would be inappropriate to re-baptise those who were baptised in infancy and who have already made a personal and public profession of faith in confirmation or formal admission to church membership'. Any so baptized but not confirmed who 'out of an instructed conscience' requested baptism as believers 'should be placed under Baptist discipline and practice prior to baptism as believers and to reception into Baptist membership'. Where congregations worshipped separately, the use of the *Concordat* was encouraged as the framework for baptismal policy and practice.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> This observation was made by Mr. J. H. Y. Briggs.

<sup>227</sup> That there are only three ways of handling such requests is acknowledged by the CTE 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership Report', §§66-69, which admitted, §70 'Our working Party has not thought of any other sort of track, apart from these three, which might provide a way forward agreed by both [paedobaptists and believer baptists]'.

<sup>228</sup> This came from the March 1994 Swanwick CTE 'Consultation on the Future of LEPs', on which see below.

<sup>229</sup> 'Report of Group 1: Baptism and "Re-Baptism"', version agreed by the final plenary session on March 23, *Pilgrim Post* 21 (May-June, 1994), 16. This suggestion, obviously predated the Baptist/URC guidelines. Group 2, dealing with church membership, noted that most churches recognized that incorporation involved 'a baptismal process expressing the faith of the church and of the individual'. It also reported that many joining LEPs combining Anglican and Free Churches, sought membership of more than one tradition, 'Multiple Membership', defined as 'through a joint Initiation or Confirmation Service, certain denominations [generally Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed and sometimes others, but not Catholic] can confer full initiation and communicant status on the same candidate simultaneously', see 'Report of Group 2: Church Membership', *Pilgrim Post* 21, 17. The *Pilgrim Post* is edited by Rev. Roger Nunn. When annual returns are sent to the participating denominations, those on separate denominational membership rolls are reported accordingly, whilst the total of those having multiple membership are to be divided especially by the number of traditions in the LEP. In the 'Vision for the Future of LEPs', agreed in the final plenary session on Wednesday March 23, it was stated that 'Reconciliation will express the mutual acceptance of all

The 1994 CTE 'Consultation on the Future of LEPs'<sup>230</sup> also recommended the establishment of a high level group to explore 'a deeper understanding of baptism and to search with urgency for more comprehensive guidelines'.<sup>231</sup> The group first met at Inter-Church House, London, on Friday January 27, 1995, and their last meeting was in December 1996. A number of Baptists have been actively involved,<sup>232</sup> including Dr. Morris West as a consultant.<sup>233</sup> The minutes of the six meetings are confidential, however, the final report is scheduled for publication in early-mid 1997.<sup>234</sup>

In his paper, West contends that whilst the Churches might come to a short-term *modus vivendi* on one or more of the immediate points of ecumenical tension, any long-term solution will depend on tackling the fundamental issues.<sup>235</sup> Elsewhere, in a

members, ministries and sacraments in a form we cannot yet see in detail...', see *Pilgrim Post* 21, 15.

<sup>230</sup> 'Churches Together in England Consultation on the Future of Local Ecumenical Projects, Swanwick, 21-23 March 1994', *Pilgrim Post* 21 (May-June, 1994), 15-18. It was at this meeting that LEPs were re-designated Local Ecumenical *Partnerships*.

<sup>231</sup> *Pilgrim Post* no.21 (May-June, 1994), 16.

<sup>232</sup> These are Rev. Chris Ellis of Cemetery Road, Sheffield, Dr. Paul Fiddes, Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, Rev. Dr. Roger Hayden, General Superintendent for the Western Area, and Rev. Keith Jones.

<sup>233</sup> Amongst the many papers considered by the Group have been a number of Baptist documents, the Baptist-Methodist *Concordat*; George Beasley-Murray's 'The Problem of Infant Baptism: An Exercise in Possibilities', first published in *Festschrift Günther Wagner*, edited by the Faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüslikon (Berne, 1994), 1-14; a draft of the Baptist-URC agreement; *Believing and Being Baptized*; and, from its first meeting, Dr. West's report on 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership'. The meetings have been chaired by Canon Martin Reardon, an Anglican Canon and General Secretary of CTE.

<sup>234</sup> 'Churches Together in England Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership Report', to be published in 1997, presumably edited by Canon Martin Reardon. All references to the final document are taken from the final draft of the report dated 10th January, 1997, and because pagination of the draft might be different from the published version, references are made to paragraph only (the whole document is divided into paragraphs). The origins and issues examined by the Group are outlined in §§1, 2, 4, 5 and 8.

<sup>235</sup> Confirmed by a discussion with Dr. West on his paper, August 22, 1995. See W. M. S. West, 'Churches Together in England: Called to be One. Christian Initiation and Church Membership. A Report', (1995), 1-2. A slightly revised form of this paper was published under 'Ecumenical Notes and Documentation. Churches Together in England: "Called to be One". Christian Initiation and Church Membership: a Report', in *One In Christ* 1996-3, 263-81. These fundamental issues, are surely an echo of the 1952 Lund F&O Conference, at which, so Barry Till, an ecumenical veteran, noted the question was asked, 'Can we go on forever and ever, round and round in the same circle explaining ourselves to one another?', B. Till, *The Churches Search for Unity* (Harmondsworth, 1972), 239. It was at Lund that frustration over this circularity surfaced, resulting in the emphasis changing from discussion of peripherals to essentials, known as the Lund Principle which questioned 'whether they [the

discussion of the Lund Principle, he has expressed his belief that the question of the churches acting together except where deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately is still being asked, adding the positive impression, 'I have a feeling that, particularly locally, it is being dodged and fudged rather less than it used to be'.<sup>236</sup>

The issue of LEPs was also taken up in *Believing and Being Baptized* which espoused adoption of the *Concordat* as providing the way forward most in tune with its own position.<sup>237</sup> In such an LEP, the Baptist partner had already accepted the restraints of working through a process of consultation and counselling rather than acceding immediately to the enquirer's request and such voluntary restriction of baptismal liberty could be extended to the participating Baptist congregation declining to baptize those who had already received both infant baptism and confirmation within their own tradition.<sup>238</sup> Such restraint, however, could not be adopted as a general Baptist policy for LEPs, for its imposition could not be made on a Baptist congregation, though it could be adopted if the congregation so wished. If this was to happen the BU working through its Local Ecumenical Committee should still approve the constitution and baptismal policy.<sup>239</sup> The importance of this liberty

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participating churches] should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately', cited by Nunn, *This Growing Unity*, 13, and also by J. Matthews, *Unity Scene*, 22. Matthews, also notes that it was from Lund onwards that 'conversations' for union became the adopted way forward in place of 'acting together', p.22. Lund marked Morris West's introduction into the international ecumenical scene as a Youth Delegate on behalf of the BU, see his 'Baptists in Faith and Order', in Clements (ed.), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century* (1983), 60.

<sup>236</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Swedish milepost on the road to unity', *BT* August 13, 1992, 6.

<sup>237</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized: Baptism, so-called re-baptism and children in the church* (1996), 30-31, see also p.26, guideline 'c)'.

<sup>238</sup> In this, the committee were following the proposals made at the 'Consultation on Local Ecumenical Projects' at Swanwick in March 1994, see *Pilgrim Post* 21 (May-June, 1994), 16, see *Believing and Being Baptized*, 51 n.8.

<sup>239</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 31-32. The role that the BU's Local Ecumenical Committee has taken on in approving church constitutions and policy documents runs the risk of quasi-presbyterianism, something foreign to Baptist ecclesiology. It should be noted that both of the official baptismal agreements concerning LEPs have referred to the BU's official rejection of *BEM*'s position that 'any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided', such being 'wholly unacceptable in its present form since, on some interpretations, nothing could pass through so restrictive a sieve...we cannot agree that an *a priori* universal bar should

of conscience, to pursue baptism or not, also emerges in *Called to be One*, which notes that some Baptists see infant baptism as at best incomplete,<sup>240</sup> but by most as no baptism, thus requiring 'true baptism for the first time' which would be by immersion. It then notes how some Baptists are prepared to regard infant baptism as part of a process of salvation which needs completion through an act of personal profession of faith but not necessarily by immersion baptism in water. Yet in the whole matter, Baptists press for the rights of conscience of each candidate for baptism and a minister's obligation to baptize a candidate who has been baptized in infancy, whether confirmed or not, should they feel strongly that this was God's will.<sup>241</sup>

These proposals amount to a 'flexibility of approach to baptism', the theological basis for which being the belief that 'baptism cannot be claimed to be *essential* either for salvation or for membership in the Universal Church of Jesus Christ'. Such a position, they believed, was consonant with historic Baptist convictions, following on from the basic conviction that those baptized as believers 'will *already* have come to personal faith in Christ and be in the way of salvation'. The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is of the essence of Christianity, taking priority over all symbolic acts however much such acts are vehicles of grace. The committee recognized that

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operate'. In so doing they have highlighted the importance of the freedom of the individual's 'informed conscience', see *Concordat*, B.iv), and *Baptist/United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines*, 3.

<sup>240</sup> An example of this was Rev. Jonathan Edwards, Baptist minister of the Southgate Church, Bury St. Edmunds (Baptist, URC and Anglican). The church was founded in 1970 when a church worker was appointed and what meetings there were took place in a school. Regular worship began in 1974, and the building (part of the community centre) was opened in 1976. The church was founded when Rev. David Harper was pastor of Garner Street BC, Bury St. Edmunds. Baptism was left out of the original setting up of the church, where, originally, membership was organized so that people were accepted provided they had been initiated at one of the other town churches - either christened or baptized. Edwards commented that the baptismal policy was mixed, respecting the conscience of those who come. He also stated that though a Baptist minister, he personally administers infant baptism because he was the pastor of the people, confessing he did not believe it was wrong, though he believed it was not best. Information from Rev. J. Edwards speaking to probationary ministers at an Eastern Area Probationer's Day (the only one of its kind), organized by the Eastern Area General Superintendant, Rev. David Harper, at the Southgate church, May 22, 1990. Edwards admitted that the church's policy was not constitutionalized, but followed the ethos of the fellowship. They did rebaptize those christened, it being left to the minister's discretion whether to do so or not. Edwards also noted the existence of the New Zealand rite of the renewal of baptismal vows, though noted that this had not been adopted by the church.

<sup>241</sup> *Called to be One*, 67, Appendix B on 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership', B4 p.67.



Christian initiation is a confused matter and 'what really matters is the Christological and Trinitarian *centre* of the acts of initiation'. This was not to imply that baptism was optional, for it was necessary for genuine discipleship. The obedience of discipleship, however, had always to be set within the context of salvation, and salvation was a process. Even when conversion had taken place a long time before, baptism could still 'be a moment of renewal and growth in the Christian life'. But when someone had been baptized in infancy, then other factors involved in discipleship had to be weighed against this, 'namely a concern for the oneness of the Body of Christ which is broken by disagreement on this issue, and respect for the way that fellow members in the Body of Christ have heard the call to discipleship. It is in an attempt to resolve these claims of discipleship, and not because baptism is thought to be unimportant, that believers' baptism should not be insisted upon'.<sup>242</sup>

Keith Jones argues that within unity there is space for diversity of practice, variety in the form that Christian communities may take and discussion on important issues,<sup>243</sup> and that Churches, including the BU, need to move from competition through co-existence to co-operation, and this for the purpose of going and making disciples.<sup>244</sup> In LEPs, he wrote, there will always be provision for believers' baptism, stating that 'Our freedom as local Baptist communities means that we are less restricted than most in reaching local agreements on these matters'.<sup>245</sup> He continued: 'We will always want to secure the place of believers' baptism'. 'Constitutions must make provision for the Baptist community to be able to baptise as a believer someone previously baptised in infancy. However, this issue needs to be handled with sensitivity'.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 34-35, italics theirs.

<sup>243</sup> Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 9.

<sup>244</sup> Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 18.

<sup>245</sup> Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 26.

<sup>246</sup> Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 26. He noted the agreements already reached on baptismal policy with the URC and Methodists and mentioned that discussions were

## Baptismal Practice in LEPs.<sup>247</sup>

Whilst all these official discussions have been taking place, much has been happening at grassroots level within local churches. It is important to note that LEP constitutions are not static but developing, learning and changing according to experience and also as some of the sponsoring denominations produce official guidelines on baptismal procedure.<sup>248</sup>

An ecumenical landmark took place in August 1965 when Baptists and Congregationalists united to form what was effectively the first LEP in Cotham, Bristol.<sup>249</sup> The following January, the Methodists joined and Christ Church, Cotham Grove was formed.<sup>250</sup> In the Spring of 1968, the Provisional Sponsoring Body, set up

underway with other traditions. The baptismal issue, Jones rightly noted, pp.30-31, also has relevance to the issue of ministry. In team ministries, which allowed a differentiation of tasks, problems over baptism could be overcome, but in single ministries, if the minister is a Baptist, then others have to be brought in to perform an infant baptism, 'as Baptist ministers sign the Declaration of Principle...which precludes them conducting infant baptismal services'. This limitation on what Baptist ministers are able to do has implications for the mutual recognition of ministry. As the full and mutual recognition of ministers would compromise the issue of baptism, Baptist ministers could, for example, only seek 'Authorised' status from the Methodist Church not 'Recognised and Regarded'. This despite the fact that ministers of other traditions are treated as if they were Baptist ministers, their names appearing in the BU Directory, they are entitled to attend the Assembly, be elected to the BU Council and be involved in Union life as if they were fully accredited.

<sup>247</sup> Up until 1994 LEPs have been classified into four types: 'Local Covenant', abbreviated to LC, previously known as 'ecumenical Parishes'; 'Shared Building' [abbreviated to B]; 'Shared Congregational life' [abbreviated as C]; 'Shared Ministry' [abbreviated as M]. See *With Charity and With Conviction*, 9, following the CCLEPE document, *A Pattern for Local Ecumenism* (1984), 5, D.26. See also Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 12-15. This classification has continued to be used up until 1996, when the sixfold classification, which was the result of the work of a small working party set up by the 1994 CTE Group for Local Unity in 1994, was adopted: congregations in covenant (signified 1); single congregation partnership (2); shared building partnership (3); chaplaincy partnership (4); mission partnership (5); education partnership (6), see Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 19-22, which reproduced details from the earlier *Ecumenical News 2* (February, 1996), a BU newsletter for Association Ecumenical Officers. The new classification was first used in the *BH* 1996-97, 47, but because this new classification is so new the old classification has been used in the references below.

<sup>248</sup> This development can be seen by comparing, eg, the development at the Whaddon Way Church, and Central Church, Swindon. See North Bletchley LEP (Anglican/Baptist), *Interim Policy on Baptism* with *The Whaddon Way Ecumenical (Anglican/Baptist) Church Constitution* (24th February 1994), and Central Churches, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism* (1976) with Central Church, Swindon, *Constitution* (February, 1995). Details of the developments will not be mentioned here, but sufficient examples concerning baptism and membership are discussed below.

<sup>249</sup> 'Two Bristol Churches Unite', *BT* August 5, 1965, 1.

<sup>250</sup> 'Free Churches Unite', *BT* January 6, 1966, 16.

after the Nottingham Conference, reported on proposals for a new ecumenical experiment in Donesholme in Corby, involving Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists. In it, new members would be admitted by baptism (whether immersion, affusion or sprinkling) and by a public confession of faith, accompanied by the laying on of hands and participation in communion. Participation of believer baptists created anomalies which could only be overcome by mutual forbearance and charity, so parents in the church would be free, it was announced, to choose either baptism or dedication for their infants.<sup>251</sup>

In these early days, individual LEPs exercised considerable freedom in the procedures they adopted, though these always had to be ratified by the Sponsoring Bodies, and these tended to focus on providing rites for infants. For example, in 1968 the United Church of St. Luke at Billingham on Teeside (Baptists, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian), replaced the service of infant baptism with a 'Service of Thanksgiving, Naming and Blessing of a Child'.<sup>252</sup>

In 1981, Michael Quicke remarked that in the search for a way forward on the baptismal question there had been 'both pragmatism and Charity'.<sup>253</sup> An example of such pragmatism can be seen in Central Churches, Swindon, which in 1976 produced an interim statement which claimed that it was possible for two forms of baptism to co-exist but that it helped 'if nothing is written down. Our experience is free to grow if

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<sup>251</sup> 'One-Church Scheme for New Era', *BT* April 18, 1968, 1 and 12.

<sup>252</sup> 'United Church Decides Against Christenings', *BT* October 3, 1968, 9. Similarly, Baptists and Congregationalists in Sydenham, London, came together in January 1969, and their agreement included one service for infant presentation followed by reception into the church family, or, if requested, infant baptism. There was also one service of believer's profession of repentance and faith and reception into membership. See Frank Henry Smith, 'Working for Unity', *BT* April 10, 1969, 12. Subject to the solving of Trust Deed problems, the Baptist church was going to be sold and the Congregational site re-developed.

<sup>253</sup> Rev. Michael Quicke, minister of St. Andrew's Street BC, Cambridge, 'The Current Debate on Baptism: a background paper', in W. M. S. West and M. J. Quicke, *Church, Ministry and Baptism. Two Essays on Current Questions. An occasional paper* (1981), 19, published after the *Ten Propositions* and at the time of the covenant proposals.

we agree about what we are going to do but are not tied down to written policies'.<sup>254</sup> In other LEPs the problem had either never been encountered or the issue remained unresolved. For example, membership of Wendover Free Church (Baptist/URC), part of Wendover LEP,<sup>255</sup> 'shall be upon profession of faith normally sealed by Baptism of believers by immersion or sprinkling, or Confirmation of Baptism previously administered to infants', candidates having been examined and recommended by visitors (3. Membership b) iii.). However, the present minister, Rev. Ruth Bottoms, chairman of the BU's Church Relations committee, writes that, though the church would have a problem with someone from Wendover Free Church (and presumably the Anglican church too) seeking 're-baptism', 'perhaps somewhat illogically', the church would not have a problem with someone in the same position requesting believer's baptism but from outside of the Wendover church. Though she recounts that this latter situation has in fact occurred once in her two-year ministry in the church, nevertheless the church's constitution has nothing to say on the matter.<sup>256</sup>

The best known example of the co-existence of the two forms of baptism as a matter of Christian charity, is the seventeenth-century Bunyan Meeting Free Church, Bedford. Its constitution states, 'Baptism either by Immersion or sprinkling is administered as occasion may require, according to announcement'. Brian Stevens, the church secretary writes, 'It is an informal agreement that the minister is prepared

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<sup>254</sup> Central Churches, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism*. When the churches became Central Church, Swindon, in 1978, this policy was adopted, and ratified in October 1981. Describing itself, the interim statement said, 'What follows, therefore, is a statement how far we have got. It should not be seen as a statement of what we think will always be the case'. On constitutions, Warren, *In the Crucible*, 149, after commenting that baptismal practice was an issue which needed to be considered in any constitution, remarked how they were 'advised not to tie the hands of future generations by making this document too full and detailed'.

<sup>255</sup> Wendover LEP is Baptist, Anglican, URC and Roman Catholic, B, C and M. Wendover Free Church was formed in April 1983 when the Baptist and URC joined together and at Advent in 1985 they moved into the Roman Catholic church, a Sharing Agreement being signed in January 1987, the Anglicans joining in July 1992 - details from *Wendover. Our God Reigns* (April, 1993), a 3 page leaflet by 'DCP'.

<sup>256</sup> Rev. Ruth Bottoms, in a copy of a letter to Canon Martin Reardon of CTE dated June 17, 1996. She then goes on to express her expectation that the church will work through the Baptist-URC agreement.

to administer both forms of baptism'.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, when in 1988 the newly formed Waterloo United Free Church (Baptist-URC), Liverpool, stated, 'There are no particular theological problems ahead. We will practise two forms of baptism. One difficulty we are overcoming is finding hymns with which we are all familiar'.<sup>258</sup>

Many LEPs set out from the point of first inquiry what the options are when parents approach them for infant baptism. Central Churches, Swindon, offered the parents infant baptism, a service of thanksgiving for the birth of the child and of dedication of themselves as parents,<sup>259</sup> whilst other LEPs also add a service of naming which require no promises from the parents.<sup>260</sup> Rev. Ruth Matthews has acknowledged that

<sup>257</sup> Brian Stevens in a letter dated September 7, 1996. Membership there is open - 'Admission to the Church is made as simple as possible consistent with the assurance that those who join are trusting in Christ, and are seeking to walk in holiness of life' - and letters of transfer, certificates of membership and other such credentials from the applicant's previous church are taken as satisfactory for admission into the church. So, 'Rules for the Government of the Church, approved and adopted at a Church Meeting held on April 2nd, 1958 and amended at the Church Meetings held on November 27th 1991 and September 29th 1993'. Ferndown United Church accepts believers in membership with other Baptist or United Reformed churches by letters of transfer or commendation with the approval of an ordinary church meeting (Membership.5.), whilst a letter of commendation followed by a visitation from two church members is required for those from other Churches (Membership. 6).

<sup>258</sup> 'Members will be strangers no longer', *BT* February 18, 1988, 3.

<sup>259</sup> Central Churches, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism*; North Bletchley [Whaddon Way Church, B and M] LEP (Anglican/Baptist), *Interim Policy on Baptism*, section (1). 'Whaddon Way Ecumenical (Anglican/Baptist) Church' is known by its shorter 'Whaddon Way Church'. It became an area of ecumenical experiment in July 1973, see *The Whaddon Way...Constitution* (24th February 1994), 1, for its history, also 'Cof E to link up with Baptists', *BT* November 15, 1973, 12. Since the 1994 Constitution parents are offered a Service of Thanksgiving, or Infant Dedication or Infant Baptism (4.5.1), p.5. Bowthorpe LEP, Norwich, (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, URC, Roman Catholic and Quaker, being a LC, B, C and M), has used an explanatory leaflet for parents, 'Bowthorpe Babies'. This invites parents to a simple Dedication Service, explaining, there is also a growing number who *are* convinced Christians (such as Baptists) who prefer a Dedication Service for their babies. They believe baptism should wait until the children are old enough to decide for themselves to follow Christ'. Only after this is infant baptism mentioned. Details in Quicke, 'Current Debate on Baptism', 19. Further details about the church are contained in Ray Simpson, Anglican minister of the LEP, *How We Grew A Local Ecumenical Project*, Grove Pastoral Series No.17, (1984), especially 10, 20-21. The LEP was formed around 1977-78, see p.7, which unfortunately does not give a precise date, though the building was opened in January 1979, p.9.

<sup>260</sup> At Blackbird Leys, Oxford, (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, URC, B, C and M, established as an area of ecumenical experiment in 1974), all parents of new-born infants are invited to a session in which the three choices are offered them - standard infant baptism, thanksgiving for the child and dedication of the parents with the same promises as in infant baptism, or a naming and blessing service with no commitment from the parents, all three occurring in a liturgy for the 'Celebration of the gift of life', see Quicke, 'Current Debate on Baptism', 19, who noted that the majority still (in 1981) opted for infant baptism. Rev. David Rowland,

this kind of procedure provides a point of tension for Baptist ministers in LEPs who are expected to practise and prepare parents for infant baptism.<sup>261</sup> What is clear is that the process of accommodation within LEPs has not always been for Baptists to give ground on infant baptism, as, for example, the Bingley Woods LEP (Anglican-Baptist) has adopted <sup>service of</sup> a ~~a~~ Thanksgiving as its normal practice.<sup>262</sup>

Where there is no question of re-baptism, baptism is often set out as being administered along denominational lines or an ecumenical rite. For example, Grove Hill Church (Anglican/Free Church) has only a provisional constitution which states, 'Baptism shall be administered according to the rite and/or practice of one of the constituent denominations, or according to an ecumenical rite approved by the Sponsoring Body, and shall be set, in normal circumstances, within an act of congregational worship'.<sup>263</sup> According to its December 1995 standing orders, Central Church, Swindon, arranges a meeting between those seeking to become members by

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 'Grass-roots Ecumenism', *The Fraternal* 206 (January, 1984).<sup>24</sup> writes of Blackbird Leys that 'to many from both Baptist and Catholic traditions that functionally there was a close parallel between infant baptism and infant dedication as also between Confirmation and Believer's Baptism', and equally a marked distinction between infant and believer's baptism. 'There was also a strong agreement that infant baptism or blessing could not be linked primarily with the faith of the parents, as a sort of vicarious faith for the child, but should be firmly grounded in the action of God in Christ and the faith of the church. In the service at Blackbird Leys it is the church which declares its faith and the parents are asked if they wish their children to enter the fellowship of those who share this faith. Promises are made by parents after the blessing or baptism as a response to the free gift of God's love, not as a condition of its sacramental expression'. Bowthorpe LEP rejects indiscriminate infant baptism, and so offers non-church families a service of blessing and dedication which incorporates elements of the Jewish and Baptist services and of the Alternative Service Book's service of Thanksgiving for Childbirth, see Simpson, *How We Grew A LEP*, 20.

<sup>261</sup> 'What is different about LEP Ministry?', in *Ministry in Local Ecumenical Projects* (CCLEPE, 1985), 14. In the same volume and in an article following Ruth Matthews', Margaret Mascall (a non-Baptist), included in her summary of key issues in ecumenical ministry (which had emerged from the previous essays) the implications of baptismal and eucharistic diversity in practice and interpretation, 'Theology of Ministry in LEPs', p. 30. Such are further highlighted when the second Baptist Declaration of Principle, which has to be assented to and signed by all Baptist ministers seeking accreditation, is remembered, which seems to preclude any other forms of baptism: 'That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...!'

<sup>262</sup> Information from J. H. Y. Briggs.

<sup>263</sup> Information from the church in a letter dated October 5, 1996. All information concerning Grove Hill is taken from this letter unless otherwise stated. Grove Hill was set up when the shared building was opened in 1977 and consists of two united Anglican/Free Church congregations and a Roman Catholic congregation which shares the building with one of the Anglican/Free Church congregations.

confessing their faith in baptism and/or confirmation with the pastoral minister who organizes preparation classes for them.<sup>264</sup> Ferndown United Church accepts both believers' and infant baptism, provided infant baptism is seen as the initial step in the process of Christian initiation to be followed by a personal and public confession of faith and commitment to Christ before entering membership (Membership 1.).<sup>265</sup> Here, when the minister is a Baptist, any infant baptisms will be conducted by a URC minister brought in for the occasion, and *vice versa* (Membership. 3.).<sup>266</sup> Whaddon Way Church offers adult converts not baptized in infancy the choice of baptism with confirmation or believers' baptism (2).<sup>267</sup> To facilitate the two forms of baptism and the corresponding two modes, many LEPs have both a font and a baptistry,<sup>268</sup> but this is not true of all of them.<sup>269</sup>

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264 *Central Church, Swindon - Local Ecumenical Project Standing Orders* (December, 1995), 3.2.1.

265 *Constitution of the Ferndown United Church, Wimbourne Road, Ferndown, Dorset* (n.d.), the church, Baptist and URC, was formed in 1985, being a LC, but also a shared ministry, a fact not recorded in the *BH* 1995-96, 121, the ministry usually alternating Baptist-URC (Ministry. 1.).

266 At Christ Church and Upton, Lambeth, the practice in the 1940s was that when a Baptist minister was in pastorate, eg, Rev. Theo Valentine, the church secretary conducted any infant baptisms, a practice which has presumably continued. Information from J. H. Y. Briggs.

267 North Bletchley LEP (Anglican/Baptist), *Interim Policy on Baptism*, and this practice has continued, see *The Whaddon Way ...Constitution* (1994), (4.5.2), p.5.

268 Eg, Bunyan Meeting Free Church, which has a covered baptistry and a table font which is brought out when required; Christ Church, Westminster Bridge, had a baptistry and font installed in the new building erected in the 1950s. Previously, during F. B. Meyer's pastorate, a baptistry had been installed in the school-room. Christ Church, Cotham, Bristol, had a baptistry installed into the Methodist building, both reported by I. Mallard, 'The Administration of Baptism', *The Fraternal* 171 (September, 1974), 39-40; the new Anglican-Baptist Emmanuel church building in Weston Favell, Northampton, sited both the font and open baptistry together, see 'Baptistry Beside the 18th Century Font', *BT* January 9, 1975, 1; Church of Christ the Cornerstone (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic and URC, B, C and M), Milton Keynes, dedicated in March 1992; Grove Hill Church; Abbeydale, Christchurch LEP, Gloucester (being Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and URC, shared B, C and M), has both in their new building built in 1995.

269 Eg, St. Luke's LEP, Sheffield (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, URC, B, C and M), meeting in the former Anglican church which had no baptistry, see 'First baptism' (being in a hydrotherapy pool), *BT* May 24, 1990, 3; Ferndown United Church (Baptist/United Reformed), which had to hire a portable baptistry for the two believers baptized at the morning service on Sunday October 27, 1996, photograph and caption in *BT* December 5, 1996, 16. The church is, however, making arrangements for having their own baptistry in the building. Understandably it has often been the case that it has taken time for LEPs using a paedobaptist building to install a baptistry. Eg, concerning the LEP made up of Higham Hill

Anticipating the *Concordat* by over a decade, and therefore also the Yorkshire LEPs and the work of Keith Jones by a few years, Central Churches, Swindon, in 1976 agreed that rebaptism was only possible, though in no case necessary, on the grounds of conscience, and that any such applications would be looked at with four considerations in mind. First, was the infant baptism undertaken by believing parents who sought to keep their vows or was it <sup>d</sup>iscriminate? Second, had there ever been an outward profession of faith by the candidate, and if so, why was a second public profession now considered important? Third, what considerations led to the request? Fourth, what would be the effect of such a baptism on the fellowship of the churches involved?<sup>270</sup> According to its February 1995 Constitution,<sup>271</sup> Central Church now states that baptism shall be administered according to the rite and practice of each participating denomination (4.1). In the case (4.1.1) of someone baptized in infancy who, after pastoral consultation, maintains their wish to be believer's baptized, the church follows the procedure of the *Concordat* (C.2 and C.4). If a URC member is involved, the same kind of pastoral consultation takes place as in C4 of the *Concordat*, the Provincial Moderator of the URC also being consulted. If a second baptism takes place the URC member's name is transferred to the Baptist roll. Clearly aware of the Baptist-URC discussions on the matter, the following is added, 'This procedure shall be superseded in the light of any national agreement on baptism which is subsequently made between the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church'. Similarly, other LEPs will explore other options which will often include a public confession of faith,<sup>272</sup> believer's baptism only being permitted after a full consultation between the individual and the minister(s), church council and church

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BC and St. Andrew's Parish Church, Walthamstow, it was reported in 1987 that, after three years of their partnership, they were still working out their baptismal policy and planning for the inclusion of a baptistry, see 'Baptists move in with Anglicans', *BT* May 21, 1987, 6.

<sup>270</sup> Central Churches, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism*.

<sup>271</sup> Central Church, Swindon, *Constitution* (December, 1995).

<sup>272</sup> Eg. Grove Hill/Woodhall Farm LEP, Hemel Hempstead, 'Policy to be followed when a person baptised as an infant requests baptism by immersion', agreed at Church Council September 19, 1995.



meeting(s).<sup>273</sup> However, certain LEPs reject the possibility of such a 're-baptism' because 'it would deny the validity of their infant baptism'.<sup>274</sup>

The general practice has become that when so-called 're-baptism' has taken place, the candidate is transferred to the Baptist membership roll.<sup>275</sup> Many LEPs have a single membership and a single membership roll, in which case their denominational allegiance is recorded next to their entry on the single register,<sup>276</sup> whilst others have a common roll and also denominational rolls.<sup>277</sup> It is the hope that when members

273 Eg, Grove Hill/Woodhall farm LEP, 'Policy to be followed...!'

274 North Bletchley LEP (Anglican/Baptist), *Interim Policy on Baptism*, (1982), (3), 'To those who have been baptised in infancy *and* confirmed, or who have been baptised as believers, but who subsequently have a conversion experience, we will offer a service of Renewal of Baptismal Vows', italics added. However (4), converts infant baptized but *not* confirmed 'will be offered Confirmation, preferably according to an Ecumenical Rite. However, if they ask for Believers' Baptism that request is open to agreement in the usual way by the Baptist Membership', such people will not be eligible for Anglican membership. The prohibition of 're-baptism' of those infant baptized and confirmed has been ratified, *The Whaddon Way...Constitution* (1994), (4.5.4), pp.5-6. Mr. Fred Crix, a member of the ministerial team at Whaddon Way Church, *Anglican-Baptist L.E.P. in Milton Keynes*, n.p., but p.2 records the first occasion when the church's agreement to prohibit the re-baptism of someone infant baptized and confirmed actually became tested. Both the Anglicans and Baptists wished to accede to the lady's wish, but the Bishop rejected it. She was baptized in another Baptist church but was received into the membership at Whaddon Way. Some LEPs seem to lurk in a twilight zone between allowing 're-baptism' and rejecting it. Eg, Rev. Ray Simpson of Bowthorpe, *How We Grew A LEP*, 21, wrote, 'Our leaders felt we must have a place for freedom of conscience, and have no pastoral "no-go areas", but that we must find an option other than "re-baptism"'. He then recounted how a group from the church returned from the Dales Bible Week which had propagated 're-baptism' and stated they had to be baptized by Simpson or go elsewhere. So, at a joint evening service at a neighbouring Baptist church, Simpson joined the minister in baptizing the people, 'but when we came to those who had already been baptized as infants, I used the words "I renew your baptism", and made clear that, as far as I was concerned, this was no more than a renewal of the original baptism'. Later, some of those so baptized left and joined a house church.

275 So Central Churches, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism*. 'Re-baptism', as such, is also possible at Emmanuel, Mosborough (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, URC, LC, B, C and M), and Beaumont Leys, Leicester (Baptist, Anglican, Congregational Federation, Methodist and URC, B, C and M), mentioned by Quicke, 'Current Debate on Baptism', 19.

276 Eg, *The Whaddon Way ...Constitution* (1994), 4.4, p.4. It is important to note the changes that have taken place in the Whaddon Way Church's constitution. Denominational allegiance is now shown only if the person requests it or 'as a result of Believer's Baptism of a person baptised in infancy, when the person shall be identified as a Baptist'.

277 North Bletchley LEP (Anglican/Baptist), *Interim Policy on Baptism*, (1982), (10), 'The name of each member of the integrated congregation shall appear on a joint membership roll, and, where applicable, on a denominational roll as well' - there will be some new converts who do not have and do not wish to have any denominational affiliation, who simply want to be members of the LEP. Their names only appear on the common roll. Section (10) continues by noting that in the case of someone baptized in infancy and later baptized as a believer 'he/she shall be entered on the denominational roll as a Baptist'. This is also reported by F. Crix,

move from an LEP they will be able to be accepted as full members of, in the case of Whaddon Way Church, the Anglican or Baptist churches they go to.<sup>278</sup>

In many LEPs all candidates for membership are trained together, whether coming through infant baptism and confirmation or believer's baptism,<sup>279</sup> and frequently joint baptism and confirmation services are held.<sup>280</sup> Reception into membership can then take place immediately<sup>281</sup> or at the next communion service.<sup>282</sup>

*Anglican-Baptist L.E.P. in Milton Keynes*, n.p., but p.1. In the Panshanger LEP, in Hertfordshire, established in 1971 or 1972 (Baptist, Anglican, URC and Methodist), those coming to faith for the first time and who become members either through believer's baptism or by confirming the vows made for them in infancy become 'common' members, Jenny Price, 'Grass-roots Ecumenism', *The Fraternal* 206 (January, 1984), 18-19. See also Central Church, Swindon, *Living with two forms of Baptism*, ratified October 1981, then in 1995, *Central Church, Swindon...Standing Orders*, 3.2.1, which notes that new members 'will be received into Central Church and thereby into each of the participating Churches (Methodist, Baptist & URC), their names being entered on the Central Church roll and each of the denominational rolls', ie, multiple membership. For denominational statistics each multiple member counts as one third of a member when calculating the number of each denominational roll. The *Constitution*, 4.6 states, 'There shall be a Common Roll, including multiple members, and a separate roll of members shall also be kept for each denomination, multiple members being included on each roll'. Grove Hill Church has a joint membership, and those who have been members of a church elsewhere are welcomed into membership and a record is kept of their previous denomination.

278 *The Whaddon Way ...Constitution* (1994), (4.5).

279 So Central Churches, Swindon, see H. Dunscombe, *Footprints of Faith. A History of Central Church, Swindon* (second edition, 1990), 115. The 1995 *Constitution*, 4.3, states, 'All candidates for membership who are becoming full members of a local church for the first time shall be instructed in the traditions of all the participating denominations'.

280 Central Churches, Swindon, see H. Dunscombe, *Footprints of Faith*, 115; Grove Hill Church, where baptism is immediately followed by confirmation along with those being confirmed after having been infant baptized, those baptized and confirmed this way become joint members; Bowthorpe, Simpson, *How We Grew A LEP*, 16; *The Whaddon Way ...Constitution* (1994), (4.5), 'Whaddon Way Church affirms the validity of both the Anglican and Baptist traditions. Services of both Baptism and/or Confirmation will normally be held according to an ecumenical rite with both Anglican and Baptist participation'.

281 'Four denominations receive new members', *BT* October 24, 1996, 15, reported such a joint service at Kingston Park, St. John the Evangelist LEP (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and URC, being a single congregation partnership), Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, in which one Baptist was fully immersed, whilst another was baptized but not by immersion, then the seven new members were confirmed into full membership of the four (Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and URC) denominations, and this was followed by communion, the elements being distributed by the Methodist and URC ministers, whilst the Baptist (Rev. Jenny Price) and Anglican ministers blessed the younger children. The LEP was formed in 1986, and the Baptist church only joined in 1996.

282 Eg, Central Church, Swindon, see Dunscombe, *Footprints of Faith*, 115.

Generally, those involved in LEPs do not suspend their membership of their own denomination, rather they worship in LEPs as Anglicans, Baptists, etc., their membership, therefore, is not suspended through belonging to an LEP.<sup>283</sup> More broadly within LEPs, Baptist believers are able to share in a number of forms of membership.<sup>284</sup> 'Multiple membership' is possible where through a joint initiation (including believers' baptism) and confirmation service in which certain denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and URC) can confer full initiation and communicant status on the same person simultaneously.<sup>285</sup> 'Extended membership' is conferred without any further initiation rite on members of LEPs whose denominations allow it.<sup>286</sup> When it comes to membership returns,<sup>287</sup> in the instance of a sharing agreement separate membership rolls are required for each denomination. Many LEPs keep one list, but identify the person's tradition alongside their name. In other instances the membership is divided equally between participating churches for the purpose of denominational returns. So, for instance, Ferndown United Church near Bournemouth, reports those on the Baptist roll and URC roll separately, whilst the total with multiple membership are divided by two and that figure is sent back to the central bodies.<sup>288</sup> In other LEPs,<sup>289</sup> everybody on

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<sup>283</sup> See *BH* 1995-96, where, at the beginning of its list of churches notes, 'In Local Ecumenical Partnerships the number in brackets below the number of Baptist members indicates the total number of church members in the LEP'. So, for example, the LEP at Girdlington records 38 Baptist members, under which, in parentheses, occurs the number within the whole LEP fellowship, in this case (87), see *BH* 1995-96, 141.

<sup>284</sup> These are outlined by Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 62-63.

<sup>285</sup> That this pattern is followed is confirmed by Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 27.

<sup>286</sup> The many issues surrounding 'extended membership' are thoroughly examined in the CTE 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership Report', see especially §§76-86.

<sup>287</sup> Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together*, 63-64. 'Multiple membership' affords to every LEP member not previously in membership with any church the right to be a member of each denomination involved in the LEP. 'Extended membership' would enable every LEP member previously in membership elsewhere to be regarded as a member by every other participating denomination in the LEP. Such provisions would not apply when the member left the LEP to join a single denominational church elsewhere. Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 27-28, notes that extended membership has been discussed over the past twenty years as a possible option where Free Churches are involved, though none of the major Free Churches have taken the initiative on the issue.

the electoral roll is counted as a member of all the denominations involved, or the list is divided according to the tradition from which a particular person or family comes. The initiation practice reflects this. The person joining the church is welcomed into that particular community. Cassidy notes that the confirmation/reception into full membership/believer's baptism is more often than not a joint service with all participating traditions involved, and this after a course of preparation based on the local church, thereby expressing the full entry into the local church and the Christian Church.<sup>290</sup> As yet, however, there is no national agreement on the shape, content and timing of membership returns.<sup>291</sup>

Reference needs to be made to the results of a 1994 BU questionnaire in which churches were asked to indicate the level of their ecumenical co-operation at every level. Though an undisclosed number did not reply, of the returns 81% were involved in sharing worship, 61% shared in house groups, 59% in evangelism, 40% in social action and 58% in joint prayer. Though the exact percentages of churches who responded and those that did not is not mentioned, this shows an increased involvement of Baptist churches within the ecumenical movement.<sup>292</sup>

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288 Information from Rev. Godfrey Butler, Baptist minister at Ferndown from the spring of 1996.

289 According to Cassidy, 'Membership of the Church', 'Part 1: The L.E.P.s', chapter 3 'The Ecclesiology of Local Ecumenical Projects', 37, where in n.175 he ascribes this to information from clergy involved in such situations, though he makes no mention as to whether any Baptists are involved in these situations.

290 Cassidy, 'Membership of the Church', 'Part 1: The L.E.P.s', 37, records having been told of one church with a Baptist presence, in which the anomalous situation had occurred of the admission to communion of children as yet to receive believer's baptism, because their peers, baptized in infancy, had been admitted under the rules of another participating denomination.

291 A problem does, however, arise for those converted and brought up solely within an LEP when they leave that fellowship and go to a different area without an LEP church. Then the problem arises as to which denomination they belong to, a matter made all the more significant when the person was baptized in the LEP as a member of that church without any previous membership. So Cassidy, 'Membership of the Church', 'Part 1: The L.E.P.s', chapter 3 'The Ecclesiology of Local Ecumenical Projects', 36.

292 Jones, *From Conflict to Communion*, 39 n.9.

What Baptist churches involved in LEPs have learnt, then, is a pattern of accommodation in which two forms of baptismal theology and practice have come to be practised side by side. The importance of the ecumenical context of Baptist life is shown by the observation that *Believing and Being Baptized*, the most recent BU document dealing with baptism, is addressed specifically to Baptists in LEPs, as it seeks to develop policy for LEPs, but it is not relevant to non-LEP Baptist congregations.

### **The Way Forward.**

In December 1996 the Faith and Unity Executive Committee held a special consultation to reflect upon the submissions from the churches, Associations and colleges to *Called to be One*, so that a draft response could be drawn up for consideration by the Executive in January and by the BU Council in March 1997.<sup>293</sup> The CTE Forum in July 1997 will then discuss all the responses.

A 'first version of our provisional response' was published in January 1997, and it is important to note the direction it is taking.<sup>294</sup> The Executive examined<sup>d</sup> the suggested models of unity (6.11-19) and understood Baptists to be most at ease with the pattern of 'Unity in reconciled diversity' (6.17). Acknowledgment (6.9) ~~was~~ made that some within the ICP 'believe we now share a common baptism', remarking that 'This is not true for all member bodies of CTE and must be addressed in an honest way'. Several times, Baptist inconsistencies in their own practice of baptism are noted<sup>295</sup> and the

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<sup>293</sup> See *Ecumenical News* 3 (April, 1996), n.p., but p.1, and *Ecumenical News* 5 (October, 1996), n.p., but p.1.

<sup>294</sup> 'Draft Response of the Council of the Union to the Report *Called to be One* of Churches Together in England Prepared for the Forum of CTE in July 1996', in *Ecumenical News* 6 (January, 1997), n.p., but pp.1-6. This is divided up into sections corresponding to the chapters and sections of the *Called to be One* report, and these will be followed in the main text, referring to both *Called to be One* and the 'Draft Response'.

<sup>295</sup> These inconsistencies being the unacceptability that Baptist churches admit the unbaptized to membership, noting that more reflection was needed on the link between baptism and membership in the body of Christ, referring to the discussion in *Believing and Being Baptized* (6.28 vii). This is reiterated in B16i, to which is added acknowledgment that the baptism of some has not led to membership, and 'We recognise the failure of our churches in these

Executive asks other members of CTE to 'consider the starting point of visible unity - "our common faith in Jesus Christ" - rather than baptism' (6.9).

On Appendix B 'Christian Initiation and Church Membership', the draft states, 'We are anxious not to comment at too great a length', directing attention to what is said in *Believing and Being Baptized* (B). In a manner reminiscent of the BU's <sup>s</sup>response to *BEM* much agreement is found with what baptism means theologically 'but we note how this is often divorced from the practice of CTE member bodies. We want to challenge paedo-Baptists to clarify what they mean by the word "signifies". Are we to understand that at the moment of infant baptism an infant is regenerate and salvation is secured?' (B7).<sup>296</sup> Awareness of the CTE's 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership' which has examined the subject of children and communion, comes out in the statement that children not baptized as believers are not usually encouraged to take communion (B16iii). Finally, 'We see no objection to the use of a suitable service of re-affirmation for those who wish to re-affirm their baptismal vows', a practice which finds parallels to the annual covenant renewal service which some Baptist churches have, which contains elements of personal rededication (B17).

Though the final report of the CTE's 'Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership' also falls outside the remit of the present study, it is necessary to outline briefly the Group's findings as these will play an important role in future developments. The Working Party focussed their attention primarily on the issues of 're-baptism' and 'extended membership', but also on the admission of children to communion, as these were the most pressing issues within LEPs which include both believer's baptist and paedo-baptist churches. Each of these subjects are examined,

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respects but, in calling their attention to this, it must be understood our ecclesiology is such that each congregation is independent. It can be encouraged but not coerced into a uniform practice'. B16ii noted the move amongst BCs to refrain from baptizing by immersion those already baptized in infancy, bought up in the faith and who have already professed that faith either in confirmation or some other way. However, Baptists feel obliged to baptize such a person if they strongly feel this is God's will for them.

<sup>296</sup>

Reference here is to the comment, 'Baptism signifies the rebirth of a person as a Christian by the grace of God. It is therefore a once-for-all event' (*Called to be One*, B7, p.68).

some of the fundamental theological questions underlying them are considered and ways forward are proposed. Three principles are recommended which are believed to be important for any satisfactory arrangement in an LEP: first, that before a new LEP's constitution is drawn up there should be discussion of these three issues and that clear agreement should be established on how they will be handled. Second, that the same process should happen when existing LEPs are reviewed. Third, that pastoral sensitivity and a measure of flexibility should always be exercised in difficult cases in consultation with the Sponsoring Body or appropriate representatives, and that details in constitutions should be amended to include this.<sup>297</sup> The Report notes three ways of handling a request for 're-baptism' and expresses the fact that no further proposals suggested themselves:<sup>298</sup> the Baptist-Methodist *Concordat*; the 1996 *Baptist-United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines*, and the proposal from the March 1994 Swanwick Consultation on the future of LEPs that only those infant baptized but *not* confirmed or formally admitted to church membership should receive believer's baptism.<sup>299</sup> From these the Working Party made the following recommendations: that Anglicans and Baptists try to agree bilateral national guidelines on so-called 're-baptism'; that as a short term measure, LEPs, in agreement with their church authorities, should be given freedom to decide on which of the three approaches they will adopt; and that national Churches whose congregations share in LEPs commit themselves to finding together a long-term way forward on 're-baptism'.<sup>300</sup>

On 'extended membership', the Group recommended that churches explore the issues involved and suggested the reintroduction of the catechumenate and that the

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<sup>297</sup> 'CTE Working Party Report', §§65.

<sup>298</sup> 'CTE Working Party Report', §70.

<sup>299</sup> 'CTE Working Party Report', §§67-69. §70 a) added a note that in open membership BCs people have been accepted into membership on the basis of a personal profession of faith, and concurred with *Believing and Being Baptized*, 25 and 29, which urged the non-acceptance into membership of persons as yet not initiated in any way into the Church of Christ.

<sup>300</sup> 'CTE Working Party Report', §§70-71.

Free Church concept of associate membership might provide possible ways forward. They also recommended each denomination consult on permitting extended membership within their own understandings and practices of church membership.<sup>301</sup> Finally, on the admission of children to communion, they invited all denominations to take the situation of LEPs into consideration as they discuss this matter and added their own recommendation that only those baptized should normally be so admitted.<sup>302</sup>

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301 'CTE Working Party Report', §§82 and 85.

302 'CTE Working Party Report', §§89-90. An abbreviated form of the final draft (agreed by the BU Council on March 10, 1997) was published in *Ecumenical News* 7 (March, 1997), n.p., but pp.1-2, and was also made available on request as 'Response of the Council of the Union of the Report *Called to be One* of Churches Together in England prepared for the Forum of the CTE in July 1997' (dated 10/3/97), being a 8 page A4 document.



## Chapter Nine.

### New Perspectives and Developments in the Theology of Baptism.

With the covenanting proposals and particularly the inception of LEPs in the early 1960s, the importance and influence of the ecumenical movement has become an increasingly powerful and prominent factor in British church life, which has led, amongst many other things, to new developments in the baptismal debate and new perspectives on old baptismal issues. Six examples have been selected to indicate these developments and perspectives in Baptist baptismal theology, after which three potentially landmark studies, all from 1996, will be examined as they might be indicators as to possible directions in which Baptist thought will develop into the twenty-first century.

#### Introduction.

Baptists have continued to draw attention to the impoverished nature of Baptist baptismal theology. Dr. Haddon Willmer of Leeds University wrote, 'no-one who knows Baptists can pretend that all is well on our side: anti-sacramentalists, believing it is of the essence of faith not to be ritually embodied, are countered by advocates of Pauline sacramental realism who, in turn, cannot carry with them many who value baptism highly only as an act of witness. Apart from the question of its divisive effect, our thinking and practice of baptism need reform if they are to build up Christians in the faith'.<sup>1</sup> A *Baptist Times* editorial in 1974 noted the renewed Anglican interest in baptism, commenting that one of the temptations among Baptists was to think they were so right about baptism that they had become convinced that no questions remained to be asked and that there was no need for the re-examination of their faith and practice. 'On the contrary, there are many questions that Baptists have

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<sup>1</sup> H. Willmer, 'Twice-Baptized Christians - A Way Forward for Church Reform and Unity', *The Fraternal* 175 (February, 1976), 12.

not settled': the place of the infants of Christian families in the Church, the relation between faith and baptismal action, should children be baptized and should the rite include the laying on of hands?<sup>2</sup> Paul Beasley-Murray admitted that time and again Baptists downgraded baptism to a simple witness to Christ, when it really involves commitment to Christ, his way and his people,<sup>3</sup> whilst at the close of the period, Christopher Ellis admitted that Baptists still have 'a wide range of views about baptism', and the differences 'begin when it is asked: 'What does *God* do in baptism?'"<sup>4</sup>

### **Christian Initiation.**

The most significant development in the debate has been the shift from the either-or of believers' baptism or infant baptism, which had effectively come to an impasse as arguments were repeated with no suggestion of any possibility of the convergence of views, to discussion of the broader subject of Christian initiation.

It is difficult to pinpoint just when the baptismal debate developed into the broader discussion of Christian initiation. Dr. Morris West has tentatively located it in the 1950s in the BCC's 'Consultation on Entry into the Church'.<sup>5</sup> West also identified it in

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<sup>2</sup> 'Baptism', *BT* October 17, 1974, 2. The editor at this time was Geoffrey Lodes.

<sup>3</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, 'We are really not so scriptural about baptism...', *BT* April 19, 1984, 4, a contribution to his series on the Great Commission. The impoverishment of Baptist baptism was also highlighted by Rev. Frank Cooke, who retired from Andover BC in 1990, 'Post-Easter people', *BT* April 26, 1990, 14, and added that 'most Baptists are afraid of New Testament baptism'. Many preparing for baptism are told firmly not to expect anything to happen. 'We are so afraid of full New Testament baptism that we have created a folk religion which accepts the separation of water and spirit baptism (which the New Testament never does) and have down-graded it to be public declaration of a decision to follow Christ'.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water. Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers* (Oxford, 1996), 23. He reiterated this, p.27, commenting that 'It is no easy task to present Baptist teaching on baptism. As already indicated, there is a wide spectrum of interpretation about the meaning of the rite, and a survey of Baptist writings on baptism will show that many contributors have been concerned with polemical issues over and against the rest of the Christian church'. He proceeded with the comment, 'They have been primarily concerned with *who* is a proper subject of baptism - i.e. a believer as opposed to an infant - and the *method* of baptism - i.e. baptism by immersion rather than sprinkling'.

<sup>5</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Churches Together in England: Called to be One. Christian Initiation and Church Membership. A Report', (1995), 1-2. A slightly revised form of this paper was

the F&O Theological Commission on *Christ and the Church* which met in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Payne commented that 'in this whole matter of Christian initiation the greater casualness of recent generations is being reversed', and he located the beginning of the turnabout amongst Baptists with the introduction of a service of infant dedication/presentation, followed by the work of Wheeler Robinson and his plea for the recovery of the New Testament emphasis on the Spirit. Further impetus came from the infant baptism controversies of the 1930s and onwards, though Baptists were slow in recognizing what was taking place in other denominations.<sup>7</sup> This development from the traditional discussion of baptism to that of initiation has been a gradual and partial one, for the old form of the debate has continued despite this and other developments in the line of approach taken to the issues.

Baptist developments on initiation, according to Payne, were led by Neville Clark, the contributors to *Christian Baptism* and *The Pattern of the Church*, and Alec Gilmore,<sup>8</sup> and was being worked out through F&O, Baptist involvement in the

published under 'Ecumenical Notes and Documentation. Churches Together in England: "Called to be One". Christian Initiation and Church Membership: a Report', in *One In Christ* 1996-3, 263-81. He reiterated the 1950s as a possible date in a conversation held on March 5, 1997. The 'Consultation on Entry into the Church' was arranged by the BCC's F&O Secretary, David Jenkins, and met under the chairmanship of the Methodist Dr. Marcus Ward.

<sup>6</sup> So W. M. S. West, 'Baptists and Faith and Order', in K. W. Clements (ed.), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century* (1983), 61-63, where he noted that a preparatory study was made by the European Section of that Commission whose report was presented to the F&O meeting at New Haven, Connecticut in 1957. The Commission itself was the response to a suggestion made at Lund that such a Commission should be set up to discuss christology and ecclesiology. D. M. Thompson, 'Baptism, Church and Society in Britain Since 1800', unpublished Hulsean Lectures for 1983-84, 85-86, reported that the beginning of this approach is to be located a decade earlier when he noted that 'the language of "Christian Initiation" to cover the cycle of rites which begins with baptism and ends with first communion, and did much to popularize this approach to the problem', was adopted by the Church of England's Joint Committee reports in the 1940s: *Confirmation Today* (1944) and *Baptism Today* (1949).

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Payne, 'Baptists and Christian Initiation', *BQ* 26.4 (October, 1975), 154, being a lecture given at the Central Area Ministers' Retreat at High Leigh, February 10, 1975. Amongst the developments in other traditions Payne listed the works of Brunner and Karl Barth, followed by his son Markus Barth, the Anglican Joint Committees of the 1940s, Dom Gregory Dix, G. W. H. Lampe, the Methodists H. G. Marsh and W. F. Flemington, the Church of Scotland Commissions and the work of T. F. Torrance, and also F&O and the negotiations leading to the United Churches of India, pp.154-55. He added, p.155, 'Baptists have been impelled to do some fresh theological thinking about their position and to examine their practice.'

<sup>8</sup> Eg, N. Clark's *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* <sup>(1956)</sup> and editorship with R. C. D. Jasper of the JLG book *Initiation and Eucharist* (1972), and A. Gilmore's *Baptism and Christian Unity* (1966), so Payne, 'Baptists and Christian Initiation', 155-57. See Clark's

Church of North India, the BWA's discussions with both Lutherans and Reformed Churches, and in LEPs. The challenge of this shift in emphasis was 'to give careful thought to what Christian initiation should include and imply, and to guide our churches to more satisfactory procedures. Once it is recognized that the ceremony of baptism is only one part of a process or progress, we shall find ourselves not only closer to our founding fathers, but closer also to many of our fellow Christians of other traditions'.<sup>9</sup>

Christian initiation first surfaced as a major issue for Baptists when, in 1967, Rev. Victor Hayward<sup>10</sup> proposed that as there were two ways of entering the Church in the New Testament (by conversion or by birth into a believing family), so there were two baptisms and two types of faith (personal decision and that of parents). 'In either case, the local church has the responsibility of satisfying itself of the presence of faith, whether avowed, or given by prevenient grace through birth into a godly

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assertion that baptism and eucharist are theologically inseparable, N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* (1956), especially chapter VII 'Towards a Theology of the Sacraments', 71-85. In his essay on 'The Theology of the Sacraments', in A. Gilmore (ed.), *Christian Baptism* (1959), 324, Clark wrote, 'It is the response to the Word which the Spirit empowers that makes baptism Christologically congruous and ethically meaningful. Existence in Christ is churchly existence, that is to say, baptismal and eucharistic existence'. He insisted that the general pattern of initiation in the primitive Church was baptism, laying on of hands and first communion, and that this pattern should be restored, p.324. This is not to say that Baptists did not use this terminology earlier, as many Baptists have been prepared to see baptism as initiatory into the Church, simply to say that Clark appears to have been the first (or at least amongst the first) Baptist to use it within this modern way.

<sup>9</sup> Payne, 'Baptists and Christian Initiation', 156-57, quotation from p.157.

<sup>10</sup> His article was originally intended to be a letter to Dr. Beasley-Murray, prompted by his dissatisfaction with George Beasley-Murray's answer to his questions on the Baptist-Paedobaptist controversy and the Baptists' impoverished theology of infants and children in Christian households, as expressed in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (1966), and *The Child and the Church* (1966). See V. E. W. Hayward, then of the Division of Studies of the WCC, 'Can our Controversy with the Paedobaptists be Resolved?', *BQ* 22.2 (April, 1967), 50. Hayward's article was reviewed by W. W. Bottoms, 'Faith, Baptism, and the Church', *BT* June 29, 1967, 6. Hayward has been cited by Paedobaptist apologists in support of their practice and as evidence that some Baptists accept the legitimacy of infant baptism, eg, Martin Reardon, *Christian Initiation - A Policy for the Church of England. A Discussion Paper* (1991), 12. On Reardon's views see Rev. John Nicholson, General Superintendent of the North Eastern Area, 'Infant Baptism - a rite in search of a theology?', *BT* June 20, 1991, 6, who notes Reardon's reference to Hayward. That infant baptism is a practice in search of a theology had earlier been argued by N. Clark, 'The Theology of Baptism', 320. In all this, Hayward, as many in a similar position had before him, asserted his loyalty to Baptist convictions, but that he parted company with them in seeking to do justice 'to the facts regarding children of believing parents', 'Can our Controversy', 51.

household'.<sup>11</sup> He believed that it was New Testament principles not practice which was determinative for the contemporary Church, maintaining that basic differences between New Testament times and the present needed to be recognized as pertinent to the discussion, and that certain principles were to be found in the New Testament in a germinative, undeveloped form. There were, therefore, three fundamental differences between New Testament times and the present day: modern individualism stood at odds with the corporate psychology of both the Old and New Testament; the New Testament was uninterested in the personality of little children; and the New Testament Church existed in a missionary situation.<sup>12</sup> From these he argued for the likelihood that infants were included within household baptisms, that the concept of vicarious faith confirmed this belief and that this was confirmed by faith found in little children.<sup>13</sup>

The logical conclusion of Hayward's views, according to George Beasley-Murray, was that 'Baptists ought not only...soften their attitude to infant baptism..., but they should introduce it into their own churches forthwith, without waiting for reunion schemes...'<sup>14</sup> 'The peculiarity of baptism in the New Testament lies in its embodiment of *both*... - grace and faith, redemption and repentance. The real issue here is not between Baptists and Paedobaptists, but between a view of grace that takes seriously the role of faith and the essentially Catholic view of grace which sees it as operative through the means that God has given his Church, irrespective of the condition of the

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<sup>11</sup> Hayward, 'Can our Controversy?', 63.

<sup>12</sup> Hayward, 'Can our Controversy?', 52-53.

<sup>13</sup> Hayward, 'Can our Controversy?', 53, 54-58 and 58-60 respectively. Reviewing Victor Hayward's article, Walter Bottoms echoed his call for Baptists to 'reform the shocking readiness of many of their congregations to receive into full membership Christians who have never been baptized'. He further denounced the omission of the laying on of hands and claimed that there should be no distinction between baptism and public entry into membership, W. W. Bottoms, 'Faith, Baptism, and the Church', *BT* June 29, 1967, 6. These criticisms were made by Hayward, 'Can our Controversy?', 63.

<sup>14</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'I Still Find Infant Baptism Difficult', *BQ* 22.4 (October, 1967), 225. Beasley-Murray examined household baptisms and the concept of solidarity, and the place of children in Baptist thought, pp.227-28, 228-31 and 231-35 respectively, and disagreed with Hayward's use of them in defence of his position.

receiver'.<sup>15</sup> If Hayward was right about vicarious faith then 'what reason is there for limiting the significance of infant baptism' and not pouring into it "'the whole Gospel in its entirety'"?<sup>16</sup> But, he asked, 'where is there in the whole New Testament a single line that suggests a modified doctrine of baptism, formulated with a view to its application to infants?'<sup>17</sup> Hayward's speculative argument from silence was unacceptable to Beasley-Murray because there was no evidence for it in the apostolic records, 'whereas there is a great deal of evidence in those records for the administration of baptism to men who repent and believe, and a fairly consistent doctrine of the significance of that baptism. That this leaves ragged edges in our doctrine and practice regarding the place of children in the Church should not be permitted to justify making the position worse by confusing the doctrine and practice of baptism'. The chief difference between the two men was that Hayward 'puts the two baptisms into the primitive Church and I view [infant baptism] as a later ecclesiastical development'. There was no possibility of putting the meaning of believer's baptism into infant baptism. 'I feel that the confusion of having two baptisms in the Church is so great, I could wish that infant baptism were abolished and replaced by some sort of service of infant blessing, whereas Mr. Hayward feels infant baptism to be desirable'.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Beasley-Murray, 'I Still Find', 233, italics his.

16 Beasley-Murray, 'I Still Find', 234, quotation from Adolf Schlatter, *Die Theologie des N.T.*, ii p.495, cited on p.231 where Beasley-Murray quoted Schlatter's statement: 'The blessing that is bestowed upon the baptised man does not consist in an individual gift of grace, nor in a particular religious condition, but in a union with Christ, by which the totality of God's gifts are obtained. For which reason the baptismal preaching consistently uses the whole Gospel in its entirety for the interpretation of baptism'.

17 Beasley-Murray, 'I Still Find', 235.

18 Beasley-Murray, 'I Still Find', 235-36. In his reply, Hayward protested that Beasley-Murray had ignored his contention that he was arguing for 'discriminate' infant baptism, 'that only those infants should be baptized of whom at least one parent is a communicant member in good standing, able to give a reliable promise of real Christian nurture'. Accepting Beasley-Murray's criticisms of his argument for 'vicarious' faith, Hayward changed his language to that of 'derived' faith, Hayward, 'Infant Baptism: A Further Comment', *BQ* 22.6 (April, 1968), 313-14.

Christian initiation was a major factor in the F&O consultations at Crêt Bérard and Louisville, preliminary to the issue of *BEM*.<sup>19</sup> At Louisville, George Beasley-Murray admitted that Baptists no more believed in re-baptism than other Christians did, but he explained, 'Where...it is believed that faith is integral to baptism, it is not unnatural for it to be held that such baptism is deficient of that which makes it the baptism instituted by Christ. Infant baptism is then viewed as an ecclesiastical rite, performing an important function within the Church, but it is not to be claimed as biblical baptism. To baptize on profession of faith on <sup>e</sup> who has received infant baptism is regarded as the the first application of the baptism commanded by Christ in the Great Commission'.<sup>20</sup>

Morris West believed that real progress towards the coexistence of both forms of baptism could be made if agreement could be reached on the issue of the initiation process. If one accepted that such a process contained infant baptism, would Baptists be saying that infant baptism was 'of itself baptism or am I simply accepting that others see it so and that I accept the sincerity of that belief about infant baptism without thereby accepting the practice?' He asked whether the consensus process could be furthered through the co-existence within the Church of two forms of baptism, noting, for instance, the pastoral problem of 're-baptism' in the Church of North India. From the point of view of believers' baptism there had been no baptism and therefore it was no re-baptism. While a number of Baptists would hesitate to re-baptize if the person had already completed the process of initiation, West rightly stated that 'probably a much greater number would baptize such a person without any

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<sup>19</sup> On *BEM* see chapter 8 above. The whole notion of Christian initiation underlies the whole of the baptism section of *BEM* (1982), 2-7, and is reflected, for example, in its assertions that the 'need to recover *baptismal unity*' is at 'the heart of the ecumenical task', see Commentary (6), p.3, and it is used as an example of Church union schemes including believer-baptist and infant-baptist traditions where 'it has been possible to regard as equivalent alternatives for entry into the Church both a pattern whereby baptism in infancy is followed by later profession of faith and a pattern whereby believers' baptism follows upon a presentation and blessing in infancy', Commentary (12), p.5.

<sup>20</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Authority and Justification for Believers' Baptism', *Review and Expositor* 77.1 (Winter, 1980), 69-70.

qualms of conscience'. This presented paedobaptist churches and churches where the two forms co-exist with very real problems.<sup>21</sup> Within the context of the Louisville Consultation, 'this is a situation which is being lived with in a number of contexts but which require much further and frank discussion as to the best way forward'.<sup>22</sup> Later, West wrote:

The idea that Christian initiation is a process which includes baptism in water in the name of the Trinity, instruction in the faith, confession of faith, activity of the Holy Spirit, reception of Holy Communion, has been canvassed much over the past 30 years or so. The argument is that, whilst there is a variety of order within the various Churches in their initiation processes, there is nevertheless a recognition that in an acceptable process all the elements are involved. What is different is simply the order of the various elements in the process. But it may well be that such an approach begs certain questions, notably that of the doctrine of the Church. It may be argued that those who practice infant baptism and those who practice believers baptism start from different 'models' of the Church. Those practicing infant baptism see the Church as an ontologically given community into which a child is incorporated, whereas Baptists and those practising believer's baptism, view the Church as a community which is constituted by the activity of God on the individual who responds consciously and believes and so becomes a participating member of the community.<sup>23</sup>

Michael Quicke concurred: 'any act of initiation presupposes an ecclesiology and Baptists have a fundamentally different understanding of the Church from paedobaptist communion'.<sup>24</sup>

Alec Gilmore noted the variety of practice amongst Baptist churches concerning the relationship between baptism and church membership. Some churches treated

<sup>21</sup> On initiation as a process and the question requiring consideration, see West, 'Toward A Possible Agenda', 14-15. On the possible co-existence of both forms of baptism, see p.17

<sup>22</sup> West, 'Toward A Possible Agenda', 17.

<sup>23</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Towards A Consensus on Baptism? Louisville 1979', *BQ* 28.5 (January, 1980), 227. That this is recognized from the Paedobaptist view is reflected in the comments of Martin Reardon, *Christian Initiation - a Policy for the Church of England* (1991), cited by J. Nicholson, 'Infant baptism - rite in search of a theology?', *BT* June 20, 1991, 6, who reports, 'Reardon acknowledges that Anglicans come to different conclusions on baptism because of their different understanding of the nature and boundaries of the Christian community', adding his own comment that, 'This is where the fundamental difference lies between Anglicans and Baptists, and this is where theological dialogue needs to start'. This was supported by the Synod's 1991 decision to continue to practise 'indiscriminate infant baptism', on which see J. Capon, 'Chester CoE clergy reject indiscriminate baptism', *BT* June 20, 1991, 2, and J. Nicholson, 'Infant baptism remains "open" to all', *BT* July 18, 1991, 9.

<sup>24</sup> M. J. Quicke, 'The Current Debate on Baptism', in W. M. S. West and M. J. Quicke, *Church, Ministry and Baptism* (1981), 16.



baptism and membership as two different things, whilst some open membership churches regarded baptism as unnecessary. Still others accepted young candidates for baptism but saw no need of it for older believers. Others used sprinkling instead of immersion when there were problems over the latter. Some closed membership churches waived baptism if a doctor's certificate was presented, others insisted on believer's baptism whatever the situation. 'If you have seen all these variations in approach...there can therefore surely be no reason why members of other communions should listen to us'. He admitted, 'the fact is that our Baptist doctrine of baptism has always been in a bit of a mess if by that we mean that it has been enormously varied...'. Gilmore opposed 're-baptism' by Baptists and advocated the mutual recognition of initiation as proposed by the CUC. Total baptism, he continued, is all four elements: immersion, individual response to what God has done, reception of the Spirit and entry into membership, but there existed considerable variety amongst the Churches in weighting them though there was 'a basic common understanding'. 'If we could begin here, instead of from the old infant baptism/believer's baptism controversy, we may soon begin to see that other Christian communions are nearer to us than we think'.<sup>25</sup> Mr. D. Beaumont believed that if God accepted Anglicans, Salvation Army or Quakers, then, who were Baptists to reject them? When open membership was practised conscientiously it was a valid solution, the matter not being that of baptism, but whether one was a Christian.<sup>26</sup>

The traditional line was expressed by Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray who believed Baptists were being pressured into equating believer's baptism with infant baptism and confirmation, and asserted that only when Jesus' Lordship was being confessed

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<sup>25</sup> A. Gilmore, 'Baptism: Gateway to the Church', *BT* July 22, 1976, 4. Gilmore's overview of the variety of Baptist procedures concerning baptism and membership demonstrate the fact that still, after nearly four centuries of discussion, apologetic and heated argument, the issues remain the same and the positions unreconciled.

<sup>26</sup> D. Beaumont of Dinas Powis, South Glamorgan, 'Membership', *BT* February 24, 1977, 5. He suggested that a letter of transfer from a previous church, of whatever tradition, ought to be acceptable, but where none was provided, a suitable confession of faith should suffice when supported by reports from church visitors.

by faith was baptism really baptism. By all means, he agreed, Baptists should recognize each others' standing in Christ, but the dishonest use of Scripture for the sake of unity would be to sell the Christians' birthright. The authority of Scripture needed to be asserted over tradition. The baptismal service was a great evangelistic event, though, with the realization that it was also a church event, many churches had unfortunately come to link it with communion. Whilst theologically there was much to commend this, evangelistically, he believed, it was a retrograde step. Above all, he contended, baptism ought to be a Spirit event, as it clearly was in the New Testament.<sup>27</sup>

In his capacity as consultant to the 'Called to be One' Process, Dr. West reflected on forty years of personal involvement within the ecumenical movement when he spoke of the 'tendency to maintain the status quo' which had characterized the quest for unity. The net result of four decades of dialogue had been that most Paedobaptist churches had come to see believer's baptism and infant baptism as two alternatives existing side by side, but never as a both/and.<sup>28</sup> This period had seen a growing mutual recognition of each others' baptism, a fact marked principally by *BEM*, but West asked whether participating churches in the 'Called to be One' Process could affirm the statement, 'Mutual recognition is but a staging post on the road to the visible unity of the church'.<sup>29</sup>

West identified five issues as arising from the contemporary context of the Christian initiation debate which 'direct urgent and pertinent questions to the process upon

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<sup>27</sup> Rev. Dr. P. Beasley-Murray of Altrincham BC, 'Make the most of baptism', *BT* October 23, 1980, 12. This was one in his series of articles on 'Things I would say to my fellows Baptists'. Rev. Peter Coleman of Watford disagreed, arguing for the link of baptism with communion, and that the most obvious way for baptism to be made a Spirit event was to adopt the laying on of hands. Such a service, he believed, would be theologically right, liturgically right and made the most of baptism for the candidate, the church member and the outsider, P. Coleman, 'Making the most of baptism', *BT* November 13, 1980, 5.

<sup>28</sup> W. M. S. West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 1-2. This paper was prepared for the CTE Working Party on Baptism and Church Membership which first met in January 1995, Dr. West attending as a consultant.

<sup>29</sup> West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 2-3, quotation from p.3.

which we are engaged'. First, the existence of LEPs exerted pressure towards closer unity. The application of locally agreed processes of initiation leading to membership raised serious questions by their inability to develop beyond the local situation. Secondly, there was the kind of ecumenicity based on a defined doctrinal basis, such as the Evangelical Alliance and charismatic networks, and not on the answer to the questions which have traditionally occupied the ecumenical process such as 'Called to be One' itself.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, there was the question of the relationship between bilateral conversations (eg, the Anglican-Methodist talks) and the multilateral debate (eg, *BEM* and the many BCC and WCC reports). Fourthly, additional to denominational diversity, there was now cultural diversity, eg, the Black majority churches. Fifthly, since *BEM* and the response volumes associated with it, great efforts had been made to define the theological issues which lie at the heart of unresolved differences. Perhaps these and other documents which point beyond mutual recognition could help future developments.<sup>31</sup> In the present situation, West proceeded, at least four different patterns of entry into the Church exist, therefore, the concept of baptism and membership clearly did not mean the same thing in all churches, though there had been a growing mutual recognition of each other's baptism.<sup>32</sup>

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30 These were noted by Alec Gilmore, now retired and serving as Ecumenical Officer for the Sussex Baptist Association, in his critical appraisal of the document *Called to be One*. In 'An establishment view of church unity?', *BT* April 18, 1996, 10, Gilmore states, 'if you really want to know how far we have come [in 50 years of ecumenical activity], the only conclusion to be drawn is "not very far"'. He criticizes *Called to be One* as 'an in-text for professional establishment ecumenists, who have a set agenda, often reflecting their problems not ours, problems on which they wish to focus our attention', these being the Church and visible unity, ministry and ordination, initiation, eucharist and membership, authority and decision making, renewal and mission. However, the issues confronting the churches are different: church planting, the Toronto Blessing, women priests/ministers, 'gays in the Forces', concluding, 'This is not a local church document. It is establishment!'. His second article raised other grass-root issues, 'Building Pyramids', *BT* April 25, 1996, 15, for example, problems between charismatic and traditional churches, and the question of church decline and survival.

31 West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 4-8.

32 West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 9-10. First, baptism upon personal profession of faith, which was the practice, amongst others, of the Baptists. Secondly, baptism and chrismation, usually of infants, followed by communion, with no later profession of faith. Thirdly, baptism of candidates, usually infants, accompanied by a profession of faith by parents or Godparents, with confirmation later, as in Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. Fourthly, amongst Pentecostal churches there is also required evidence of baptism in the Spirit.

To test the present position on mutual recognition, West had sought responses from the participating churches in 'Called to be One' and presented the findings in his paper. Ten denominations had responded.<sup>33</sup> The Baptist response noted that open membership churches were generally willing to accept letters of transfer from other Free Churches, but not in the same way from an Anglican church, and certainly not from a Catholic or Orthodox one. In the latter cases, a profession of faith from the person would be required and an acceptance of the ethos of the receiving church. Baptism, however, would not be the inevitable requirement for membership. In closed membership churches, no-one would be accepted into full membership without believer's baptism, though many such churches have associate memberships which allows those from other traditions virtually all the advantages of membership except voting on matters stated within the Trust Deed.<sup>34</sup>

These results led West to conclude that such mutual acceptance of baptism is widespread, giving added credence to the concept of 'common baptism'. However, some responses also indicated that beyond mutuality of baptism consensus became divergence which in turn became difference, and herein lay the seeds of continuing divisions on the whole process of Christian initiation. Therefore, if 'Called to be One' were to be a serious exercise in ecumenical exploration it would have to embark on potentially demanding journeys, exploring ecclesiology, sacramentality and the sources of Christian authority. Four basic issues, he proposed, could surely be agreed upon. First, mutual acceptance of baptism on the basis that it is in water in the name of the Trinity. Whilst some Baptists did not accept such mutuality, others questioned the necessity of baptism for membership. Secondly, the meanings of sacraments and sacramentality were used differently between Western and Eastern churches, and within the West between Catholic and Protestant. Third, the doctrine of grace was

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<sup>33</sup> These are set out by West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 11-18. These were the Baptists (BU), Church of England, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church, Moravian Church, Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, URC, Salvation Army and Society of Friends.

<sup>34</sup> West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 11.

differently perceived by the churches, and could not be separated from consideration of the Holy Spirit in relationship to both sacraments and grace, which were the basic issues underlying the merely symbolic and the quasi-magical understanding of sacramental grace. Fourthly, the issue of ecclesiology needed to be placed on the ecumenical agenda.<sup>35</sup> a point that was taken up in the 'Called to be One' process and book.

West concluded with discussion of what '*legitimate diversity*' means within ecumenical discussions, raising the matter of what range of issues and viewpoints are open for discussion and what those are for each participating church. Progress in the area of baptism and church membership, he believed, could only take place when this matter had been clarified. He suggested that a potentially fruitful context in which the baptism and membership issues could develop would be examination of the theology of the child,<sup>36</sup> for which there were three reasons. First, the subject had not yet occupied much ecumenical time and could therefore bring a fresh perspective to the debate. Secondly, the relationship of the child to the church had been raised already by the Church of England and Baptists, the latter now asking whether infant baptism says something to them and encouraging Baptists to draw the practice of infant dedication into the whole process of Christian initiation. Thirdly, because this subject would also raise the related issues of grace, the Holy Spirit, eucharist, ecclesiology and conversion.<sup>37</sup>

*Believing and Being Baptized* has adopted a different approach and builds on the premise that salvation is a spiritual journey in which the two elements of the grace of God and the faith of believers are active, in which baptism 'is *normally* to be received

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<sup>35</sup> West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 18-21.

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted in this regard that George Beasley-Murray's 'The Problem of Infant Baptism: An Exercise in Possibilities', from *Festschrift Günther Wagner*, edited by the Faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschtikon (Berne, 1994), 1-14, was also considered by the Working Party.

<sup>37</sup> West, 'Churches Together in England: A Report', 22-24.

near the beginning of entrance upon Christian discipleship'. For those who come to faith from outside the influence of the community of faith baptism will be located relatively close to conversion. However, those nurtured within a Christian family and the fellowship of the Church 'will have grown through various stages of trusting Christ', so, for them, 'baptism marks the decisive point within their whole journey of salvation', providing a moment when they emerge from childhood into a clear profession of faith and discipleship, at which God bestows his Spirit graciously in a new way for new responsibility. Therefore, the 'image of baptism as a place of special encounter with God along the road of salvation, or as a high point on the journey of increasing wholeness, underlies the rest of this document'.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of both salvation and initiation as processes is to be found also in Christopher Ellis' study of the sacramental theology of baptism which is based on three observations, the first of which is that

recent ecumenical studies of baptism have tended to emphasize the whole *process* of initiation, indicating that baptism is a focus of a larger process. The gift of the Spirit is seen as being at work in the reception of a child into the family of God, the nurture of a young faith, the confessing of faith, the commissioning in confirmation, and the ongoing discipleship and incorporation into the body of Christ.

The importance of this for Ellis is that it removes some of the historical pressure to identify the moment and means of God's activity, encouraging the view of baptism as a process of initiation for the believer and part of the ongoing life of the people of God. 'Baptism is not an isolated event but a focus of what is continually taking place'.<sup>39</sup> He argues that the activity of God is not restricted to the sacraments,<sup>40</sup>

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38 *Believing and Being Baptized. Baptism, so-called re-baptism, and children in the church. A discussion document* (1995), 10-12, italics theirs. See the whole of section II 'Baptism and the journey of new life: or "Pilgrim's Progress"', 9-12, which is the first substantial section, section I being 'The context of this document', 7-8.

39 C. Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', in P. S. Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water. Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers* (Oxford, 1996), 36. The other observations are that seeing baptism as a part of a process enables the broadening of the understanding of baptism as a sign. While only part of the whole, baptism should never be referred to as 'only a sign', as, through baptism, the understanding of the freedom of God acted as a pointer to his activity elsewhere; and, baptism is both subjective

leading to his overall conclusion that, 'The freedom of God means that He is free to work through the means of grace that He has given to His church', and that the Spirit operates beyond as well as within the church. 'Again, baptism becomes a focus of divine activity but not its entirety: the act is Christocentric, and its fulness is in its centre - not its boundary'.

In his examination of 'Baptism and Creation', Paul Fiddes investigates five motifs connected with water: birth, cleansing, conflict, journey and refreshment, followed by consideration of the communication and scope of grace.<sup>41</sup> Different traditions have tended to overstress one of the five motifs at the expense of the others, Baptists stressing baptism as a boundary marker for believers, the fifth motif, 'a moment of separation from past life and commitment to new kingdom values'. Despite its potential for a richness of meaning, Baptists have sometimes narrowed it to an act of obedience.<sup>42</sup> Baptists have traditionally claimed that only believers' baptism has been able to adequately draw upon the whole range of water-symbolism, so Fiddes challenges them to explore such imagery as 'descent into the womb' to understand and value more the prevenient grace of God involved in the nurture of a child in the Christian community before it comes to 'birth' and 'this may lead them to affirm some of those aspects that are vividly presented in...infant baptism. A reflection upon the strong element of initiation in these motifs may also lead Baptists more consistently

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and objective, as the very symbolism links the believer and the church with that which it signifies, pp.36-37.

- <sup>40</sup> Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 35. This position Ellis defended by reference to the book of Acts which 'testifies to the untidiness of the Holy Spirit'. In Cornelius' case the Spirit was given before baptism, but after in the case of the Samaritans evangelized by Philip, p.33, see his discussion of 'The Freedom of God', pp.33-35. On p.35 he concluded, 'A constant theme is that God is not restricted by the sacraments as the only means whereby He may graciously work in the lives of men and women. Any theology that is developed concerning baptism as a means of grace must make room for this inconvenient, yet gloriously inspired, belief in the freedom of God'.
- <sup>41</sup> P. S. Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', in Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections*, 47-57 and 57-61 respectively.
- <sup>42</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 61-62. The evidence presented in this dissertation argues strongly that Baptists have 'often' narrowed baptism's meaning to an act of obedience.

to practise the sequence followed in other Christian churches, that a person must be baptized before sharing in the Eucharist'.<sup>43</sup> Earlier Fiddes had written:

Baptists should in fact be quite willing to recognize that there are elements of *both* faith and divine grace in the act that is called infant baptism. There is the prevenient grace of God, already at work deep in the being of the child, giving life and wholeness, and enticing it towards a personal response of faith to Himself in due time. There is the faith of parents and the Christian community, supporting and nurturing the child as it grows. Most Baptists will also recognize that the completed sequence of infant baptism and later personal faith in Christ sealed in confirmation constitutes initiation into the church as the body of Christ, and many Baptist churches in Britain do not therefore require baptism of believers in this situation. When salvation is seen as a process or a journey, [as in *BEM*], many Baptists can readily perceive different combinations of grace and faith at different stages of the journey and can find various ceremonies appropriate to mark the stages.<sup>44</sup>

Liturgically this shift of emphasis to that of initiation was explored by Neville Clark,<sup>45</sup> who presented a baptismal eucharist which, he proposed, was the 'goal towards which the catechumenate moves', having already stated 'The two sacraments belong together. Baptism, laying on of hands, and first Communion, is the pattern of Christian initiation'.<sup>46</sup> In this he was followed by the orders in the three most recent ministers' manuals. Payne and Winward deliberately and consecutively set out orders for the dedication of children, believer's baptism, the laying on of hands, reception into church membership and the Lord's Supper,<sup>47</sup> stating in the rubric at the beginning of the baptismal service, 'Since we are baptized into the Church, it is desirable that

<sup>43</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 62.

<sup>44</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 60.

<sup>45</sup> Clark had become involved in the work of the F&O Commission from the 1960 meeting in St. Andrews, on which see West, 'Baptists and Faith and Order', 65-68.

<sup>46</sup> N. Clark, *Call to Worship*, *Studies in Ministry and Worship* 15, (1960), 58-59 and 54 respectively. Clark had wrestled with these and related issues the year previously in his essay 'The Theology of Baptism', eg, 324-25. R. E. O. White's *Biblical Doctrine of Initiation* (1960), does not strictly come into this discussion of Christian initiation as it focussed on New Testament baptism, though the second of his three criticisms of infant baptism was that it split 'the single New Testament initiation rite, so introducing endless and costly confusion', pp.300-02. As such Richard Kidd is misleading to include it as an example of Baptist studies on Christian initiation despite its use of the word in the title, see Kidd, 'Baptism and the Identity of Christian Communities', in *Reflections*, 98 n.5.

<sup>47</sup> E. A. Payne and S. F. Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship. A Manual for Ministers* (1960), 123-61. Such consecutive arrangement of the services was not followed by either of the two later service manuals.



Baptism should, *if possible*, be followed by the Lord's Supper, at which the reception of new members should take place'.<sup>48</sup> Gilmore, Smalley and Walker entitled their baptismal section 'Christian Initiation', which opened, 'Among Baptists of late there has been a growing tendency to bring closer together the act of baptism, reception into membership and admission to communion', whilst other denominations had moved towards seeing 'the wholeness of Christian initiation in terms of strengthening the links between baptism, confession of faith (or confirmation) and communion'. 'One result of this theological discussion for Baptists is that the act of baptism as a confession of faith is increasingly seen as a part of a larger act of initiation which often then finds expression in one service of baptism and communion'.<sup>49</sup> They identified five essential elements in the whole process of initiation: the reading of Scripture and the reasons for engaging in Christian initiation; profession of faith and commitment; prayers; baptism in the name of the Trinity, possibly with the laying on of hands; and reception into membership and admission to communion.<sup>50</sup> The most recent manual similarly states: 'Believers' baptism, reception into membership at the Lord's Supper, and the laying on of hands, all relate to our *one initiation* into the Body of Christ. These elements *may* take place within a single act of worship, or they may be divided between morning and evening services, or two Sundays'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 127, in the original the whole of the rubric is italicized, but this was altered in order to highlight the 'if possible', which reflects the position of many, perhaps even the majority, of churches which would not follow this pattern.

<sup>49</sup> A. Gilmore, E. Smalley and M. J. Walker, *Praise God. A Collection of Material for Christian Worship* (1980), p.137. To support this position they provided a baptismal eucharist at which the baptized were accepted into membership, p.138.

<sup>50</sup> Gilmore, Smalley and Walker, *Praise God*, 137.

<sup>51</sup> *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship. A guidebook for worship leaders* (Oxford, 1991), 93, italics added. See also Paul Beasley-Murray's discussion of this pattern of baptism followed by communion at which the baptized are received into membership, and its traditional alternative of 'Gospel proclamation' which is not followed by communion, the latter being the pattern he prefers, though on pragmatic grounds that the service is best used for evangelistic purposes, *Faith and Festivity. A Guide for Today's Worship Leaders* (1991), 103-16. He had earlier expressed these views in his 'Make the most of baptism', *BT* October 23, 1980, 12.

According to Morris West, the debate on Christian initiation has achieved two things.<sup>52</sup> First, it has forced Baptists to take seriously what they do throughout the Christian life, from infancy, through conversion and profession of faith, to baptism and membership of the local church, and to communion. However, it must be acknowledged that Baptists have not been able to find an agreed pattern for this process either in theory or practice. Secondly, it has misleadingly suggested to their ecumenical partners that infant baptism followed by confirmation is equivalent to believer's baptism and membership. Clearly, discussion of Christian initiation has provided another perspective through which to see old questions and has raised new ones. The old questions include infant baptism and sacramental interpretation of baptism, the new ones include the charismatic debate and the movement towards common baptism.

### **Infant Baptism.**

Many Baptists have continued to dismiss infant baptism outright. For them, because it has no basis in scripture, it is invalid<sup>53</sup> and therefore the issue of re-baptism is a non-issue.<sup>54</sup> However, not least because of the new perspective of Christian initiation and

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<sup>52</sup> W. M. S. West in a conversation on March 5, 1997. To his basic outline details have been added to exemplify both the positive and the negative aspects of the debate.

<sup>53</sup> So, eg, D. Pawson, 'Cross-Examination', in D. Pawson and Colin Buchanan, *Infant Baptism Under Cross-Examination*, Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship No.24 [being a sequel to C. Buchanan's *A Case for Infant Baptism*, No.20 (1973)], 5-18, who, from the outset declared, 'the case must be established within the bounds of Holy Scripture', p.5; Rev. Dr. Bruce Milne, tutor at Spurgeon's College, '*Children of Promise: The Case for Baptizing Infants* by Geoffrey W. Bromiley', *BQ* 29.5 (January, 1982), 235-36; T. Griffith, 'Look, Here Is Water', *Mainstream Newsletter* 27 (January, 1988), 3, and his *The Case for Believers Baptism*, A Spurgeon's Booklet, (Eastbourne, 1990), 11-27, where he dismissed the historical, scriptural and theological arguments put forward for infant baptism

<sup>54</sup> Eg, Rev. Anthony Jones of Millom, Cumbria, 'Baptism and christening', *BT* July 23, 1992, 8. Jones admitted that he had moved from a Methodist church to an open membership Baptist church where he was welcomed into membership on profession of faith, 'but it was made clear that this was out of respect for my conscience' as the church did not recognize his christening. He concluded, 'Like Eric, I do not practise rebaptism. However, I will gladly baptise (once!) any who profess faith in the Lord, regardless of what ceremonies they have been through in infancy'. Also Colin Stutton of Chatham, Kent, 'Queries on Baptism and Eucharist', *BT* July 30, 1992, 13, 'infant baptism is not really baptism at all in the eyes of Scripture. Consequently, to be baptised as an adult, having repented and believed, is not rebaptism but merely scriptural baptism'. There is little doubt that these views accurately represent the majority of non-ecumenically involved Baptist ministers and churches.

the formal and informal developments in baptismal practice within LEPs, some Baptists have been encouraged to look afresh at infant baptism. Some have rejected infant baptism but recognized the right of all believers to follow their conscience.<sup>55</sup> Others have adopted a more conciliatory position which has set both forms of baptism side by side, largely because they have been writing for a general Christian readership, though it is usually obvious which form they advocate.<sup>56</sup> There have been, however, an increasing number of Baptists willing to part company with the traditional Baptist rejection of infant baptism. A few examples will indicate the variety of approaches adopted.

The pattern of the mutual recognition of the two forms of baptism is the commonest way Baptists have lived with the reality of two forms of baptism.<sup>57</sup> Prior to the establishment of the CUC, Dr. David Russell voiced Baptist concern over the practice of indiscriminate infant baptism, declaring that it was a stumbling block even to Baptists who were prepared to accept infant baptism with confirmation as an alternative pattern of Christian initiation.<sup>58</sup> Walter Bottoms similarly viewed

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55 Eg, D. Pawson, *Water Baptism* (1992), 'Appendix. Baby or Believer?', 59-64, where, after dismissing the purported scriptural basis for infant baptism, he answered the question, 'what is to be done about those who come to repentance and faith, ask for baptism, but are refused because they were "christened" as a baby'. He later wrote, 'While respecting the views of other Christians and churches, the answer must be sought from the Lord himself. This means searching the Scriptures..., asking the Spirit of truth to say whether what is there said about it has happened or has not yet happened', p.63. In this, Pawson can be taken to be speaking for a great many Baptists, though the wording might well be different.

56 Eg, R. P. Martin, *The Worship of God. Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids, 1982), chapter 8 "Baptism and Christian Unity", 124-44; Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth. A Handbook of Christian Belief* (1982), 232-35; Nigel Wright, *The Church* (1984), 'Infant Baptism and Confirmation', 21-22, and 'Believers' Baptism', 22-24; Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Should Babies be Baptized?', 'Yes' p.238, 'No' p.239, in Donald English *et al* (eds.), *An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (new edition, 1992), originally published in 1982 as *The Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*.

57 Mutual recognition is the logic of open membership and, to a lesser extent, closed membership churches which have a supplementary roll. Mutual recognition, of course, does not legitimize those open membership churches which allow into membership those never baptized by any means.

58 'Indiscriminate baptism "an obstacle to unity"', *BT* September 28, 1972, 1-2, being the report of an address to a Leaders' Conference in Birmingham. Russell's views are also to be seen in 'Church Union? Talks team will point to other ways...', *BT* September 27, 1973, 1, where he told the Church Unity talks about talks that union was not the only way to demonstrate Church unity.

indiscriminate infant baptism as a cause for concern for Baptists who continued to press solely for believer's baptism. However, he believed that recognition of their own principles need not alienate Baptists from Paedobaptists, citing several Baptist church covenants which allowed both forms of baptism and which 'have existed happily in this way for centuries without compromise of principles'.<sup>59</sup>

In their concluding chapter, the Baptist-Anglican writing team of Donald Bridge and David Phipers explored 'a working compromise', asking Christians on either side of the dispute to make concessions to each other.<sup>60</sup> Three considerations would point the way forward. First, recognition of the principle of regenerate membership would entail 'baptists' recognizing that there would always be some Christians who wished to baptize their children, and paedobaptists recognizing that indiscriminate infant baptism debased the rite and scandalized their brethren.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, the belief that all Christians in good standing with other denominations needed to be confirmed was to be eschewed. Thirdly, all baptists should relax their demand for rebaptism when admitting Christians in good standing with paedobaptist churches, for 'If baptists would be excused confirmation they must likewise excuse rebaptism'.<sup>62</sup> The authors believed that 'Christians must work together while the problems are being solved'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> W. W. Bottoms, 'Baptism', *BT* December 7, 1972, 11, being a comment on the reprinting of Beasley-Murray's *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*. Bottoms believed it to be a timely re-issue because of the new situation in inter-church relations and any suggestion of talks with Baptists and the URC. Beasley-Murray personally disagreed with Baptists who recognized the validity of infant baptism, but argued that Baptists should refrain from demanding baptism of those baptized in infancy who wished to join a Baptist church. *Bottoms however was mistaken and the book was never reprinted. Information from Dr. Beasley-Murray.*

<sup>60</sup> Rev. Donald Bridge, minister of Frinton Free Church, and David Phipers, an Anglican teacher in Derby training for the auxiliary pastoral ministry, *The Water That Divides. The baptism debate* (1977), 191-95.

<sup>61</sup> Bridge and Phipers, *Water That Divides*, 196-97.

<sup>62</sup> Bridge and Phipers, *Water That Divides*, 197-98. Like *Baptists for Unity* (1968) before them Bridge and Phipers admitted that a problem existed with no final solution and argued for the priority of mission, similarly arguing that baptists recognize a complete initiation complex involving instruction, confession of faith, baptism and the laying on of hands in any order, *Water That Divides*, 199. In all this, the Church of North India was held up as a source of hope and inspiration as to what could be achieved, pp.199-200.

<sup>63</sup> Bridge and Phipers, *Water That Divides*, 199.

Michael Quicke<sup>64</sup> believed <sup>that</sup> 'The possibility of the two patterns [of initiation] enjoying a rich theological relationship rooted in the breadth of man's experience of God and response to him gives us a new perspective and opens up several possibilities for both sides to work through...'.<sup>65</sup> The four English College Principals have argued that the Declaration of Principle's phrase 'That Christian baptism *is* the immersion in water...' is open to two possible interpretations. The verb 'is' could be understood as narrowly exclusive, or it 'could provide a strong centre whilst also allowing space on the boundaries for other possibilities'. Baptists, they believed, need 'a genuine openness to others'.<sup>66</sup> *Reflections on the Water* included in its introduction the statement that, 'Though this is not...a polemical volume, the Baptist essayists do believe that the reflections *can be best seen* when it is believers who are baptized'.<sup>67</sup> Paul Fiddes urged Baptists to recognize 'that there are elements of *both* faith and divine grace in the act that is called infant baptism': the prevenient<sup>†</sup> grace of God already at work in the child and enticing it in time towards a personal response of

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<sup>64</sup> M. J. Quicke, 'The Current Debate on Baptism: a background paper', 11-23, in W. M. S. West and M. J. Quicke, *Church, Ministry and Baptism. Two Essays on Current Questions. An Occasional Paper* (1981), 11-23. This was written at the request of the ACCR in response to the 1979 BCC Assembly in Belfast request that churches 'consider how far the two classic patterns of Christian initiation can be seen as acceptable alternatives', see p.11. Quicke listed the two patterns of initiation as: first, infant baptism, nurture in the Christian community, confirmation/reception into full membership on profession of faith and admission to communion; second, thanksgiving for childbirth and dedication of parents, nurture in the Christian community, baptism upon profession of faith and admission to communion. Somewhat surprisingly, Quicke did not include reception into full membership within the second pattern. Quicke's paper was later reprinted in *BQ* 29.4 (October, 1981), 153-168. The earlier Occasional Paper is the source of all references. Quicke believed that by setting the two patterns within their processes of initiation, the dilemma of re-baptism could be ameliorated if Baptists stressed the renewal of baptismal vows, though he recognized that, for most Baptists, pastoral considerations could not exclude totally the practice of so-called re-baptism, pp.20-23.

<sup>65</sup> Quicke, 'Current Debate', 23.

<sup>66</sup> R. L. Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare. A study of the Declaration of Principle* (1996), 38. Later, the Principals wrote: 'In the current debate on infant baptism and so-called "rebaptism" (as in...*Believing and Being Baptized*...), we require a declaration that provides Baptists both with strength of principle and a genuine openness to others', p.38.

<sup>67</sup> 'Introduction', probably by Paul Fiddes, *Reflections on the Water. Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers* (1996), 2, italics added.

faith, and faith in the support and nurture of parents and the Christian community.<sup>68</sup> The growing comfort of many Baptists with the existence of infant baptism was also reflected when Richard Kidd spoke of his inability to choose infant baptism for his children 'any more than I would expect someone baptized as an infant and responsibly exercising discipleship in another tradition to seek another baptism as a believer'.<sup>69</sup>

Two radical proposals are worth mentioning as they show the extent to which some Baptists have felt able to go. Frustrated by the impasse of what he called 'the weary and inadequate denominational apologetic', Dr. Haddon Willmer offered 'speculations' which might contribute towards the coming of 'a united church freer for the fulness of the Gospel'.<sup>70</sup> If the proposed union between the URC and Churches of Christ were successful, 'a united church would come into being in which not only would infant baptism and believers' baptism be practised, but individuals might be allowed, however grudgingly, to be baptised both as infants and as believers'. This suggestion was momentous as it breached the centuries-long taboo against re-baptism.<sup>71</sup> He adduced a number of points in support. First, such a church would have to distinguish clearly between them without denying either and, second, in such a situation, infant baptism would no longer be loaded with all the meaning of believers' baptism.<sup>72</sup> 'The two baptisms cannot be telescoped into one without loss of clarity. Each requires the other: not one being dominant in one church, the other in another

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<sup>68</sup> P. S. Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', in Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections*, 60.

<sup>69</sup> R. Kidd, 'Baptism and the Identity of Christian Communities', in Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections*, 97.

<sup>70</sup> Rev. Dr. H. Willmer of Leeds University, 'Twice-Baptized Christians - A Way Forward for Church Reform and Unity', *The Fraternal* 175 (February, 1976), 16. He recognized that 'on all sides...baptism is in a crisis...the bulk of theorizing about...baptism is still trapped by our divisions into apologetic for either paedobaptism or believers' baptism, although the baptismal crisis is plain to see on both sides of that divide. The theories do not overcome the crisis partly because they are developed within the terms laid down by the basic structures of the crisis'.

<sup>71</sup> Willmer, 'Twice-Baptized', 12. He believed that to manipulate baptisms merely to achieve unity was unprincipled and trivializing, for reform was needed too, but this could only come about 'in a united church which practises both forms of baptism, not merely allowing them but rejoicing in both, and conscientiously free to let Christians be baptised both as infants and as believers'.

<sup>72</sup> Willmer, 'Twice-Baptized', 12-13.

church, but both together accepted in one church, practised happily and offered freely to all Christians'.<sup>73</sup>

None of this, Willmer believed, infringed the principle of 'one baptism' as already it was accepted that many baptisms of different individuals were one baptism by virtue of the trinitarian name and water. 'We see that both infant baptism and believers' baptism are one': unity can be seen in the events of baptism - confirmation - first communion, despite their being divided over time; it can also be seen in the New Testament reports of many different baptisms and their varying interpretations 'which...cannot be brought to a simple unity in which all the meaning might be realized in one act. All this is to say that the unity of baptism does not depend, and has never depended, on a unity to be discovered in some feature of the event of baptism itself, or in interpretations which are part of the baptism, except in the name of God'. Willmer then asked: 'Then why should it be made to depend on its being performed only once to each person?', a position he justified with the argument that persons exist at two quite different levels: the unconscious, passive level of infancy and the conscious, purposive, individualized level of adulthood. 'People are neither one nor the other, but become both and remain both, and this is not helped by denial. 'Yet as churches, we make a claim for baptism as a complete initiatory rite - it suffices to make a man a Christian - only to refuse to administer it in a way that shows we have some understanding of the full scope of manhood. A united church with a reformed baptismal practice could do that'.<sup>74</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Willmer's views received neither support nor opposition.

Another controversial attempt has been implemented by Eric Blakeborough who believed that there is little hope of reconciling the two practices of baptism.<sup>75</sup> His

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<sup>73</sup> Willmer, 'Twice-Baptized', 15.

<sup>74</sup> Willmer, 'Twice-Baptized', 15-16.

<sup>75</sup> E. Blakeborough, *Permission to Be* (1992), 50-51. For him, the difference between the two baptisms reflects a theological rivalry between those who stress the objective aspect of the sacrament and those who stress the subjective - infant and believer's baptism respectively.

church in Kingston-upon-Thames has 'no single understanding of baptism'. They agree with believers' baptism but not in re-baptism, which has led the church to recognize three kinds of baptismal experience. First, the baptism of believers by immersion on profession of faith is the usual mode. Secondly, those infant-baptized who wish to reaffirm their baptism are invited to dip their hand in the baptistry water and make the sign of the cross. Thirdly, those impelled by conscience to be immersed are allowed to do so though it is made clear that this is reaffirmation not re-baptism.<sup>76</sup> For his views and practice,<sup>77</sup> Blakeborough, a self-confessed liberal/radical and probably the most controversial contemporary Baptist figure, was accused of having moved away from both Scripture and the BU's Declaration of Principle.<sup>78</sup>

The greatest surprise to Baptists is the modified position on infant baptism adopted by George Beasley-Murray.<sup>79</sup> In his most recent work,<sup>80</sup> he explored the 'possibilities'

<sup>76</sup> Blakeborough, *Permission*, 53-55.

<sup>77</sup> E. Blakeborough, 'Knowing God in Baptism and Eucharist', *BT* July 9, 1992, 10, being the second of a series of four extracts from *Permission to Be*. It was reviewed by Douglas McBain, 'Journey towards wholeness', *BT* July 23, 1992, 12, who described John Bunyan Baptist Church, Kingston-upon-Thames, 'arguably the least conventional and the most radical of all our Baptist churches today', the church being the base for the Kaleidoscope Project which provides residential, social and medical facilities for about 300 drug users. For his work there, Blakeborough was awarded the MBE. *Permission to Be* is a book on the broad theme of spirituality and its changing patterns in the church today. Of his views on baptism, McBain writes, 'there is a sense of appreciation of ecumenical variations in baptism and in the Lord's Supper'. Further details concerning the church and Kaleidoscope are to be found in Blakeborough's *No Quick Fix. A church's mission to the London drugs scene* (1986), his *Called to be Giants. The Faith which Inspired a City Mission* (1987), and also 'God is in You' in Josephine Bax (ed.), *Meeting God Today. A Lent Course* (1990), 53-65, being an interview with Blakeborough.

<sup>78</sup> Rev. Anthony Jones of Millom, 'Baptism and christening', *BT* July 23, 1992, 8; by Walter Andrews of Lincoln, and Colin Stutton of Chatham, 'Queries on Baptism and Eucharist', *BT* July 30, 1992, 13.

<sup>79</sup> The surprise will undoubtedly be lessened by four factors: first, many Baptists do not read very widely, particularly when it comes to academic books and articles; Beasley-Murray's views occur in a book neither readily available nor easily accessible in Britain; the fact that the book has not been reviewed in any British Baptist journal or paper, and appears to be comparatively unknown; and the relatively unimportant position the issue of baptism now appears to hold amongst British Baptists, except amongst ecumenically involved Baptists, most of whom will welcome Dr. Beasley-Murray's shift in position.

<sup>80</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem of Infant Baptism: An Exercise in Possibilities', in *Festschrift Günther Wagner*, edited by the Faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüslikon (Berne, 1994), 13. He continued: 'for long I gave the answer "No" to the question [whether Baptists could acknowledge discriminate infant baptism]...This was due to my conviction that Paedobaptist apologetic for infant baptism depended too much on traditional



of a rapprochement between believer's baptism and paedobaptism when infant baptism is seen as attesting 'the commencement of the work of grace within the baptized with a view to its blossoming into fulness of life in Christ and his Body the Church as the individual's life progressively opens to Christ'.<sup>81</sup> This could be supported by recovery of the catechumenate, especially if focus was placed on 'initiation', that is, the whole process of leading individuals to Christ and into the Church.<sup>82</sup> He pleaded 'that churches which practise believer's baptism should consider acknowledging the legitimacy of infant baptism, and allow members in Paedobaptist churches the right to interpret it according to their consciences'. Practically this would involve believer-baptist churches refraining from 're-baptism'.<sup>83</sup>

The shift in emphasis to the perspective of Christian initiation and with it the associated view that salvation is a process<sup>84</sup> has enabled more Baptists than ever

interpretations, which appeared to me neither to face the realities of history..., nor to relate adequately to the New Testament theology of baptism'. Beasley-Murray's views were appreciatively welcomed by Morris West, 'Baptist theology of the child', *BT* June 30, 1994, 6, who commented that Beasley-Murray was not suggesting the acceptance of the practice of infant baptism, for he maintained that the scriptural norm is the baptism of believers, but that, in West's words, 'we should, as Baptists, contribute more positively and actively to the wider debate which is going on about infant baptism and its place within the whole of Christian Initiation'.

81 G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem', 9, citing the Anglican, O. C. Quick, *The Christian Sacraments* (1932<sup>2</sup>), 168-74, as an example of this point of view.

82 G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem', 13, following the suggestions made at the Louisville Consultation by the Jesuit, Joseph Eagan, 'The Authority and Justification for Infant Baptism', *Review and Expositor* 77 (Winter, 1980), 60-61. For paedobaptists the catechumenate would involve infant baptism followed by an extended catechumenate leading to confirmation and adult entrance into the Christian community, or a religious ceremony for infants at birth. In believer-baptist congregations an extended catechumenate leading to baptism-confirmation-eucharist would have to be adopted.

83 G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem', 13-14. He remained, however, 'not sanguine enough to believe that members of believer-baptist churches will be convinced by the arguments within this essay', even though many groups of churches, most notably the Waldensians in Italy, have for centuries proceeded along these lines. He further drew attention to his sub-title, believing it to be 'at least in harmony with variations in the experience of baptism among the earliest believers recorded in the New Testament', the 'great lesson' of which 'is the freedom of God in bestowing his gifts', p.14. The passages cited are Acts 2:37-38; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 11:1-18; 18:24-19:6. Beasley-Murray's essay has received little attention so far; the only reference to it discovered by the writer being the appreciative use of it by D. F. Wright, Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University, 'Scripture and Evangelical Diversity with Special Reference to the Baptismal Divide', in P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright (eds.), *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, 1994), 265, 267-68.

84 See the above discussion on Baptists and Christian initiation. That this view of salvation as a process is now firmly established amongst Baptists is to be seen in its acceptance in some of

before, in theory and practice,<sup>85</sup> to develop a greater appreciation of infant baptism and to keep the way open for future possible developments ecumenically.

**Sacramental Interpretations.**<sup>86</sup>

The work of scholars and ministers during the previous period (1938-66) had opened up the way for the widespread acceptance by Baptists of the language and theology of 'sacrament', and the ecumenical climate had made the issue unavoidable, even if undesirable to some mainly conservative evangelicals who also opposed all ecumenical involvement. Hence, Baptist sacramentalists constantly reiterated the necessity for personal faith in order to avoid an unbiblical sacramentalism. Baptists, Dr. Russell asserted, stood for evangelical faith, renouncing 'all notions of sacramentalism which would see the sacraments as less than ethical acts and all notions of sacerdotalism...' Salvation is by grace through faith, and regeneration belongs to the realm of personal faith and commitment to Christ and is not to be contained within any rite of infant baptism however ecclesiastically and sacerdotally correct. Baptism testifies to the evangelical doctrine of salvation, being an ethical sacrament, associated closely with baptism of the Spirit, and a Church sacrament by which the believer marks their entry into the fellowship of God's redeemed people.<sup>87</sup>

George Neal believed that the growing Church unity movement ought to be leading Baptists to re-examine their beliefs and practices. However, this was not happening. Of the books written by Baptists, Neal commented that 'few Baptists seem either to

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the most recent writings on baptism: see M. J. Quicke, 'Current Debate', 13 and 16-17; P. S. Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 34; G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem', 12; *Believing and Being Baptized* (1996), 9-12; Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 44-45; and both C. Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', and Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', in Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections*, 36 and 60-61 respectively.

85 This conclusion takes into account everything that has been noted in chapter 8 above, particularly in the discussion of baptism in LEPs.

86 Many of the sacramental interpretations of baptism have been included in the discussion in other sections of the present chapter. Therefore, to avoid repetition only several examples of baptismal sacramentalism need outlining.

87 Dr. D. S. Russell, 'Two Wings...?', *BT* October 1, 1970, 7, being the first of six articles.

have read the books or felt the impact of their rich and far-reaching conclusions'. He continued: 'In view of the fact that believer's baptism is the one main doctrine and practice that kept Baptists separate, we should do more serious work on this'. With all its theological and spiritual consequences, baptism 'is the supreme gift we can offer to a united Christendom'. In short, this was a plea 'for Baptists to adopt a true biblical and theological interpretation of baptism as a sacrament'. He observed, 'There seems to be an inability to unite FAITH AND *sacramental action* together'. An impartial and objective look at the New Testament showed baptism to be a rite that did things, that is, a sacrament. This fear of sacramental baptism was most unfortunate, as it revealed a failure to discern that Baptists alone could emphasize the sacramental nature of baptism without the danger of undermining the need for personal faith.<sup>88</sup>

In a second article, Neal expanded his views that in the New Testament baptism did something, for it was closely associated with the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, the gift of the Holy Spirit, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, indeed it was necessary for salvation. As such, the Roman Catholic sacramental interpretation was closer to scripture than the Baptist symbolic interpretation. But there was a mid-point, which was baptism with faith. 'It is only an unbiblical attitude and irrational fear that insists that the act of baptism is neither very important, nor part of God's way of channeling blessing into the lives of converts'. God had joined together repentance, baptism, forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit, so why should Baptists divorce them? The evidence of scripture was overwhelming that baptism was a sacrament, but the fact was that many Christians practised unbiblical baptism. If the teaching of the New Testament and its significance for the Christian was fairly faced 'we will do great service to the Catholic Church'. 'Because man is both body and spirit, and is impressed equally by the outward signs and the inner spiritual experiences, he needs

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<sup>88</sup> Rev. George Neal of Sundon Park, Luton, 'Let's sort ourselves out on baptism', *BT* June 5, 1969, 6-7, emphasis and italics his. This appeared after the publication of *Baptists and Unity* and *Baptists and Unity Reviewed*. The books Neal was referring to were Beasley-Murray's *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962) and White's *Biblical Doctrine of Initiation* (1960), in addition to which he recommended the use of Stephen Winward's *The New Testament Teaching on Baptism* (1952).

both aspects in his religion for it to be completely satisfying to the whole man'. Baptists were able to provide both the inward and the outward, for believer's baptism alone adequately interweaved the inner experience and outward manifestation.<sup>89</sup>

Responses to Neal's article in large measure vindicated his views that many Baptists still refused to face up to the baptismal sacramentalism so eloquently and clearly set out from scripture by the likes of Beasley-Murray and White. Neal was accused of misinterpreting Romans 6:4-5 and John 3:5.<sup>90</sup> L. J. Stones expressed concern that baptism effected that which it symbolized. His problem over baptism as a sacrament was due to the delay of baptism until after conversion, rather than understanding it as conversion-baptism. 'The impossible situation is that if baptism is a sacrament we have to tell those who profess faith in Christ that they must wait for baptism before they can receive those blessings, such as forgiveness and regeneration'.<sup>91</sup>

On the relation of baptism to conversion, Paul Beasley-Murray contended that the traditional evangelical understand of conversion was limited. 'Baptism is faith in action' and as the believer is buried and raised with Christ in it, therefore, 'Baptism is...no optional extra. It is part of the conversion process'. So far from being antithetical to grace and faith, as commonly held in Protestantism, 'baptism is the sacrament of justification by faith'. 'To say, "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith" is tantamount to saying "As many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ"'. This was a challenge to paedobaptists, but equally it was a challenge 'to the many Baptists who are anti-sacramentalists at heart. Conversion involves faith expressed in baptism. A decision alone is insufficient'. Therefore a

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<sup>89</sup> Neal, 'The Bible is serious - and so clear about baptism - And we should be too', *BT* June 12, 1969, 9. Amongst the passages cited in support of his position were John 3:5, Romans 6:4-5, Acts 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21.

<sup>90</sup> Mr. C. B. Hyde of Stotfold, 'Does Baptism Separate Us?', *BT* June 26, 1969, 3, and Brian Bowers of Bloomsbury, London, 'Repentance', *BT* July 3, 1969, 3, respectively.

<sup>91</sup> Rev. L. J. Stones of Stoke St. Gregory, Somerset, 'Is Baptism a Sacrament?', *BT* November 27, 1969, 3.

'decision for Christ' which did not involve repentance, baptism and church membership 'is not true conversion'.<sup>92</sup>

In his survey of Baptist booklets on baptism between 1960-1980, Dr. Raymond Burnish drew attention to the diversity of approaches to baptism as illustrating 'both the independency of Baptists, and their stress on the inward faith rather than the outward symbol, and upon God's work in the candidate's life before baptism, expressed in the baptismal rite, rather than upon what the sacrament accomplishes in itself'. He concluded: 'the Baptist theology of baptism and liturgy of baptism stress the importance of the personal faith and commitment to Christ of the candidate. Although they take the view that the inward and spiritual grace is more important than the outward and visible sign they still see baptism in sacramental terms, emphasizing the way in which baptism unites the candidate to Christ and grants his participation in the death and resurrection of Christ'.<sup>93</sup>

In 1996 George Neal returned to the subject, reiterating his earlier view that too often Baptists belittled the importance of the sacraments. One way for Baptists to take the sacraments seriously, he proposed, was to accept the word 'sacrament' over the use of the weaker and safer word 'ordinances'.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Christopher Ellis began his

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Beasley-Murray, 'The Big Decision', *Leadership Today* (October, 1988), 24-25. He also noted baptism's place in making disciples, that in the New Testament it is a rite of initiation, therefore a corporate act whereby a person enters the new community of the people of God and that baptism without church membership was, according to the New Testament, a nonsense.

<sup>93</sup> R. F. G. Burnish, *The Meaning of Baptism*, Alcuin Club Collections No.67, (1985), 160 and 166. This is an adaptation of his 1983 Nottingham PhD thesis. Burnish also presented a paper to the Tyndale Fellowship Study Group on Biblical Theology and Christian Doctrine which that year examined 'Baptism' in 1988 entitled 'Baptism in Ecumenical Theology' (unpublished, 1988).

<sup>94</sup> Rev. George Neal, now retired in Devon, in an extended series of articles on worship, 'The Sacraments: more than mere symbols', *BT* July 18, 1996, 10. He later wrote: 'Baptists, of all people, need never be afraid of the sacramental principle because of their emphasis on personal faith before calling oneself a Christian. Because of this they should have no fear of something objective being done in Baptism and Communion'. It is necessary to make the most of baptism as it is only done once, something that can only be done when the sacramental note is emphasized 'believing that is that when we are baptised something great and wonderful happens, with the church community present also believing something mighty is happening by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit'. This event includes the believer's ordination to service, provision of the Spirit, assurance of God's acceptance, forgiveness of all

study on the sacrament: 'It may come as a surprise to many Christians that most Baptists do not refer to baptism as a sacrament'.<sup>95</sup> If applied to the contemporary British Baptist scene,<sup>96</sup> Ellis' comment does not reflect the contemporary situation. If applied to Baptists world-wide, however, ~~then~~ it would be generally true. But contrary to Ellis, the evidence is overwhelming that the majority of Baptists are comfortable with the use of the word 'sacrament' applied to baptism and the Lord's Supper. This position is confirmed by the overwhelming evidence which points towards widespread Baptist acceptance and use of the term 'sacrament'. In fact, it is now difficult to find written sources which only use 'ordinance'.<sup>97</sup>

It is clear, then, that Baptists have generally accepted the word 'sacrament' and use it with comfort. However, this does not mean that Baptists have widely taken on board a sacramental interpretation of baptism. The evidence strongly suggests that there continues to be a divide between the most eloquent theological expressions of

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sins, baptism being 'the first real act of worship for the new Christian followed...by...first Communion...'

<sup>95</sup> Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 23.

<sup>96</sup> The various contributors to *Reflections* 'tend to concentrate upon [the English] cultural context', see p.2. The present study, however, is focussed on 'British Baptists' by which is meant those Baptist churches in the Baptist Union of Great Britain, for which Ellis's comment is no longer true, though it was undoubtedly the case for the larger part of the present century.

<sup>97</sup> One of the problems in all this is, of course, that most Baptists are not writers! Amongst those writers who use only 'ordinance' see, eg, Rev. J. J. Brown of Dagenham, 'Baptists and Some Contemporary Issues', *The Fraternal* 153 (July, 1969), 7 and 8; Fred Bacon, *Church Administration. A Guide for Baptist Ministers and Church Officers* (1981), 113 [repeated in the revised and enlarged second edition of 1992, p.135], and also 'Modal Church Rules' (n.d.), section '4. Ordinances', in Bacon, pp.171-72; 'Modal Rules for a Baptist Church' (n.d.), in Roger Poolman and John Barfield, *Church Administration*, CTP D4 (1989), Appendix II, sections 'II. Membership (a)' and 'III. Ordinances', pp.58 and 59; and somewhat surprisingly Nigel Wright, *Challenge to Change*, 174, who earlier mentioned baptism as part of the believer's initiation into Christ, p.80, as a sign of the outpouring of spiritual power, p.79, and as a sign of conversion, p.161. It is not clear from these passages whether these authors would reject the use of 'sacrament' to baptism, rather these sources *only* use ordinance in reference to the rite. Others, however, use 'ordinance' in a way that would seem to exclude any sacramental understanding of it, eg, S. Ibbotson, 'The Variety of Worship', in D. Slater (ed.), *A Perspective on Baptist Identity* (Mainstream, 1987), 65; and Rev. Guy Finnie of Northern Parade, Portsmouth, and a member of the FAB Council of Reference, *What is the True Church?* (Crich, n.d., [but early 1990s]). This was written as part of FAB's drive to put an end to Baptist participation to the ICP, see chapter 8 above. He claimed that the doctrine of regeneration supported by the ICP was flawed, and the presence within it of sacramentalists who suppose 'that by use of outward signs a saving grace envelopes his soul' was further reason for Baptist non-participation. This statement was followed by use of the term 'ordinance'.

baptismal sacramentalism and the grass-roots view of the rite which continues to emphasize its subjective aspect, as a profession of faith, an act of witness and obedience and little more.<sup>98</sup>

In the main, then, the sacramental aspect of baptism has been unaffected by the shift of focus to Christian initiation, except in the most recent studies. Two examples will show this, both from the volume *Reflections on the Water* which builds on the ideas of baptism as a journey and as a divine and human drama. Viewing salvation/conversion as a process is a key element which has enabled this broadening of the discussion to Christian initiation.<sup>99</sup> Christopher Ellis has sought 'to give meaning to a Baptist use of the word "sacrament" with regard to baptism', which clearly reflected his belief that previous attempts had not been successful.<sup>100</sup> Baptist antipathy to the term 'sacrament', he argued, whilst in part due to a reaction against tractarianism, was predominantly a response to the Roman and Reformed Churches' institutional commitment to a comprehensive state church.<sup>101</sup> Baptists were free of this precisely because they understood baptism to be a divine-human encounter,<sup>102</sup>

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98 See, eg, a testimony from a recently baptized lady speaking at the Cambridgeshire Baptist Association annual assembly at Histon BC, June 1, 1990, who gave as her reason for baptism. 'Baptism is a thank you for what he [Jesus] has done'; a brief report in the New Road BC, Bromsgrove church magazine (March, 1995) which commented that the four candidates 'testified to their faith, and why they had chosen to be baptised'; the testimony of a Baptist man aged 38, 'Baptism was only a follow-up to giving my life which was the really wonderful thing', in J. Finney, *Finding Faith Today. How Does it happen?* (Swindon, published jointly by the Bible Society and CTE, 1992), 109. For other examples see the testimonies reported by S. Gaukroger, *Being Baptized* (1993), 2-9.

99 Eg, Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', in *Reflections*, 36, 'seeing baptism as a part of a process enables us to broaden our understanding of how baptism may operate as a sign. While it may be only a part of the whole, it should never be referred to as "only a sign" since it provides a lens through which the Spirit's activity may be viewed in the world and in the ongoing life of the church'.

100 Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 24. He defined 'sacrament' as suggesting 'the power of symbols to link us to the depths of reality, and points us to the use by God of material means to mediate His saving action', p.36.

101 Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 29-30. He maintained that within such state church systems, *ex opere operato* theologies objectify God's activity 'within the institutional processes of liturgical activity, thus enabling church and state to control the dispensing of salvation'.

102 Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 38.

and the faith they saw as essential to the rite 'is the recognition that faith involves trust and reliance upon the grace of God. Therefore, if faith becomes the key pivot of divine activity, that very faith looks to God's graciousness and offers not an anthropocentric but theocentric understanding of what happens in baptism'.<sup>103</sup>

Building on Ellis's idea of sacraments, Paul Fiddes stressed that sacraments were pieces of matter which God takes and uses as places of encounter with himself, grace transforming nature, grace being nothing less than God's gracious coming to his people and his world. Generally, Baptists had shied away from the 'stuff' of creation, despite the inherent potential of total immersion and the involvement of the person and the community at every level of this 'multimedia drama'.<sup>104</sup>

When the drama of baptism is properly arranged, 'the contact with the element of water should arouse a range of experiences in the person baptized and in the community that shares in the act', evoking a sense of descent into the womb, a washing away of what is unclean, encounter with a hostile force, a passing through a boundary marker and reinvigoration. Water, thereby, becomes a place in the material world that could be a rendezvous with the crucified and risen Christ. Anticipating the accusation that such a kaleidoscope of natural motifs would suggest that baptism means anything and everything and therefore nothing in particular, Fiddes emphasized that the controlling event was the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>105</sup> The symbolism of water resonates on both the levels of creation and redemption,

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<sup>103</sup> Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 30. On p.38, Ellis wrote, 'Christians must acknowledge that faith itself is a gift and the human response is a part of the divine action'.

<sup>104</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 48, illustrated this reluctance to fully use the stuff of creation by reference to the concealing of baptistries, the emphasizing of the testimony over against the use of water, and the insulating of the minister from the water by the use of waders, a practice whose passing away he regarded as fortunate.

<sup>105</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 57-58. On these five water-motifs, see the discussion of Fiddes' essay under the section 'Christian Initiation' above.



concerning both natural phenomena and human history.<sup>106</sup> When the baptismal candidate, or the witnessing community, encounters God anew through this particular water 'they will be the more aware of the presence of God in other situations where water is involved in birth, conflict, cleansing, journey, or refreshment'.<sup>107</sup> Though many Baptists 'can readily perceive different combinations of grace and faith at different stages of the journey and can find various ceremonies appropriate to mark the stages', Baptists nevertheless

find important dimensions of baptism missing in the rite as applied to infants, so that it is hard to use the word baptism with any fulness of meaning. A Baptist will certainly find something lacking in the faith expressed there, as the infant himself or herself can vow no personal allegiance to Christ as Lord. But it is not only faith that lacks fulness. It needs to be understood in ecumenical conversations that a Baptist will also want to say that the scope of *grace* in such baptism is narrower than in the baptism of believers.<sup>108</sup>

Grace is not a supernatural substance but the gracious coming of God as supremely personal into relationship with his creatures. If salvation is understood not as a momentary event but a journey of growth, then baptism provides a point within the process when 'God draws near to transform persons in a special way. Salvation cannot be isolated within the act of baptism...but it can be "focussed" there in the moment when the Christian believer is made a part of the covenant community of Christ's disciples. Using an element of His creation, water, God offers an opportunity in baptism for a gracious encounter which is rich in experience and associations'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 59, 'There is no merely random collection of images here; they refer to the activity and self-disclosure of the God who relates Himself to every dimension of the life of His universe. Baptism into the body of Christ means a new depth of relationship between the believer and Christ; it must also involve a new relationship between the believer and the whole community of those who are consciously in covenant partnership with God in Christ (the church - 1Cor 12: 13). But further still, in the light of the commitment of the triune God to the body of the cosmos, baptism means a new relation of believers to as yet unredeemed humanity and to our whole natural environment'.

<sup>107</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 59.

<sup>108</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 60, italics his.

<sup>109</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 60-61.

Too often the Church had narrowed the meaning of baptism, different traditions over-emphasizing one of the five motifs over the others. The Roman Catholic Church had majored on the imagery of cleansing, infant baptism being the washing away of original sin and original guilt, thus enabling a theology in which infants are seen as the 'proper' subjects of baptism. Baptists, on the other hand, had tended to stress baptism as a boundary marker for believers, stressing it as the moment of separation from past life and commitment to new kingdom values. Despite the rich potential of meaning, they have sometimes narrowed it to 'following Christ through the waters of baptism', a mere phase on a pilgrim journey. Baptists like Fiddes, however, could argue that 'only the baptism of believers at a responsible age can adequately draw upon the whole range of water-symbolism and enable the baptismal pool to be the focus for God's creative-redemptive process'. Baptists, he noted, should be more alert to the width of the range of significance. Reflection on the birth motif with its strong element of initiation, should lead Baptists more consistently to practise the sequence followed by other Churches of baptism followed by eucharist.<sup>110</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit and the Charismatic Debate.**

The question of the relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit is not a new one, but the charismatic movement has provided a new perspective in which to view it and has raised awareness of the role of the Spirit in baptism.

With its British origins in the early 1960s<sup>111</sup> the charismatic movement<sup>112</sup> has come to be a major factor and contributor to the 'ecumenical texture' of British church

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<sup>110</sup> Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 61-62. Believers' baptism underlines a final allegiance to Christ alone which is not worked out as a private individual but within the whole human community. It is the entrance to church membership which carries with it the responsibilities of active discipleship under the Lordship of Christ, Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation', 63.

<sup>111</sup> Its origins are set out by D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), chapter 7 'The Spirit Poured Out: Springs of the Charismatic Movement', 229-48. Later he argues that charismatic renewal is largely an expression of cultural modernism, see p.275. He also observes how the presence of charismatic Christians within the Roman Catholic Church has served the ecumenical process by breaking down the Protestant-Catholic divide, p.256, something that it has also done within Protestant denominations. Bebbington dates the first contacts of the charismatic movement in Britain as taking place in 1963, p.229. See also

life.<sup>113</sup> As well as the establishment of many new churches,<sup>114</sup> it has affected many churches within the traditional denominations, many Baptist churches amongst them,<sup>115</sup> sometimes for good and sometimes for the worse.<sup>116</sup> Not least, the charismatic movement has challenged Baptists who were 'in danger of losing sight of the charismatic dimension of the Christian life in general and of Christian initiation in particular'.<sup>117</sup> Many Baptists are key figures in the charismatic movement and have

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Derek Tidball, at the time Head of the Mission Department of the BUGB, *Who Are The Evangelicals. Tracing the Roots of Today's Movements* (1994), *passim*. Tidball agrees with Bebbington that charismatic movement owes much to the influence of contemporary culture, p.53.

- 112 Here the 'charismatic movement' is used as an umbrella term which takes into account the various branches of the movement, including separated church networks including the charismatic house churches, restorationist churches, the new churches and other new wave churches, and also many mainline denominational churches which are also charismatic, eg. charismatic Baptist churches, charismatic Anglican churches etc..
- 113 Paul Fiddes, 'The British Church Scene: Issues of Identity for Baptists in Discussion with Others', paper presented to the BWA's Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Inter-Church Relations, meeting in Montreal, July 8-13, 1991, unpublished (1991), 2: 'I want to suggest in this paper that beliefs about, and styles of, church and ministerial leadership within the charismatic movement have actually shaped Baptist response to ecumenical ventures. It is impossible to tear apart the woof and warp of the ecumenical-charismatic texture of life on the British church scene, in which questions of Baptist identity are posed'. This 'Ecumenical Dimension' is also discussed in the 'The Report presented to the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, March 1978, on the movement for Charismatic Renewal', edited by Alec Gilmore and published in P. S. Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal. A Baptist View* (1980), 7. The Working Group which produced 'The Report' comprised Revs. Donald McKenzie, Edmund Heddle and Geoffrey Rusling representing the Ministry Department, Mr. John Briggs and Rev. Donald Black representing the Mission Department, Rev. Hugh Logan representing the General Superintendents, and Dr. David Russell, the General Secretary of the BU, see Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 41.
- 114 On these see, eg. Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom. The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (1989<sup>3</sup>), especially Part One 'The Establishment of the Kingdom: A History', 23-121. Dr. Walker's background is within Pentecostalism, though he has recently joined the Orthodox Church, and he is now Senior Lecturer in Theological Education, King's College, London, and Director of the C. S. Lewis Centre.
- 115 Fiddes, 'Issues of Identity for Baptists', 2, writes, 'Baptist identity has been challenged and influenced strongly in recent years by the charismatic (or "renewal") movement and even by its associated fringe of "Restorationism"'.
- 116 Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?*, 220, notes that, like the ecumenical and feminist movements, the charismatic movement has been a source of division. That it has also been a source of both numerical and spiritual growth has been demonstrated by P. Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson, *Turning the Tide. An assessment of Baptist Church Growth in England* (1981): this study itself comes from within the Church Growth movement (the third wave - see below).
- 117 'The Report', 6.

written much on the subject.<sup>118</sup> There is a great deal of evidence for charismatic inroads into Baptist life,<sup>119</sup> a process which has been greatly enhanced by the existence of Mainstream, which has drawn together evangelicals and charismatics.<sup>120</sup>

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118 The most prominent of the 'Baptist' charismatic leaders is David Pawson, formerly minister at Gold Hill and the Millmead Centre, Guildford, but involved in itinerant ministry since 1979 - *Fourth Wave. Charismatics and Evangelicals: are we ready to come together?* (1993); Nigel Wright, minister at Ansdell BC, Lytham St. Annes (1973-86), tutor in Christian doctrine at Spurgeons (1986-95), subsequently minister at Altrincham - *The Radical Kingdom. Restoration in Theory and Practice* (1986), *Lord and Giver of Life: An Introduction to the Person of the Holy Spirit*, a booklet from the Christian Training Programme (CTP no.C7), (1990), and with Tom Smail and Andrew Walker, *Charismatic Renewal* (1993, 1995<sup>2</sup>), all references are to the first edition; and Rev. Rob Warner (though he does not use the title 'Reverend'), former Religious Book Editor for Hodder and Stoughton, minister at Herne Hill (1989-1995), then a member of the ministry team at Queen's Road BC, Wimbledon (from 1995) which has been a prominent church linked to the Toronto Blessing, on which he wrote *Prepare for Revival* (1995), and see also his earlier *Rediscovering the Spirit* (1986). Another leader is the former Baptist minister Terry Virgo, who left the BU to set up a Restoration church in Hove, see Walker, *Restoring, passim*, and D. McBain, *Fire Over the Waters. Renewal Among Baptists and Others from the 1960s to the 1990s* (1997), 76-78. McBain's book gives details of Baptist involvement in the renewal movement and sets this against the background of wider developments in the renewal movement.

119 See Peter Brierley (ed.), *Christian England. What the English Church Census Reveals* (1991). In the 1989 English Church Census Baptist overall strength was recorded as 199,400, see p.164 Table 61. 83% of this figure was BU, totalling 166,100, p.40 (the other Baptist traditions are also listed on p.40). Of the total Baptist strength, 22% classified themselves as charismatic evangelicals, p.164 Table 61 (giving the figure a total of 43,000 Baptist charismatics, see p.162 Table 60), an increase of 13% from 1985 (see p.164 Table 62), which is the first year that such statistics were available. Though this 4 year gap between figures does not give an idea of the long-term trend (p.166), it does, for present purposes, indicate the strength of the charismatic movement amongst BU churches, as it is unlikely that the charismatic movement has made an impact of any note within the other Baptist bodies, except for the Jesus Fellowship [formerly Bugbrooke Baptist church, which is the only Baptist church ever to have been expelled from the BU, see 'Not what we regard as a Baptist church', *BT* November 27, 1986; the Jesus Fellowship is also discussed by McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, 144-45, who also records their practice of rebaptizing all those they received into their fellowship, and the complaints the BU received about this from neighbouring BCs], which consists of a total of 900 members (p.40, Table 10). Therefore, if we take the number of Baptist charismatics to be 43,000 out of a total of 166,100, then 26.4% of the BU is charismatic. The importance of the charismatic movement within BU churches is also reflected in 'The Report', 1-8.

120 Its full title is 'Mainstream Baptists for Life and Growth' and was formed in 1979, and revolves around its *Mainstream Newsletter* and annual conferences. In 1993 Mainstream developed into 'Mainstream - a Word and Spirit Network'. One of its founders was Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeons College, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 268, to which McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, 82-85, adds himself, Dr. Raymond Brown, Principal of Spurgeon's, Rev. Peter Grange of Kirby Muxloe, Rev. Clifford Roseweir of Redhill and Secretary of the Home Counties Association, and Rev. Patrick Goodland of Gorsley. See McBain's chapter on Mainstream and the Word and Spirit Network, pp.108-28. See also Michael Bochenski, 'A Word and Spirit Network - the story so far', p.9, 'A Word and Spirit Network' by the Mainstream Executive (these are listed on p.18), pp.10-11, and Mark Abernethy of Bushey Meads, 'Reflections on a Word and Spirit Network', pp.12-15, all in *Mainstream Newsletter* 50 (June, 1994).

Analysts and participants of the movement have defined four 'waves' in its development. The first wave was Pentecostalism, the second the charismatic movement itself, the third was the signs and wonders movement associated with John Wimber and the Vineyard churches and the Church Growth movement coming out of Fuller Theological Seminary, California,<sup>121</sup> the fourth wave is the (hoped for) integration of charismatics and evangelicals.<sup>122</sup>

A key tenet of both the first and second wave has been that 'the baptism of/with/in the Holy Spirit' is an experience subsequent to conversion (a second blessing) and separate from baptism in water.<sup>123</sup> Paul Fiddes set the charismatic debate within the wider discussion of Christian initiation noting how their ecumenical partners have urged Baptists to accept that 'the relation between the prevenient grace of God and the response of human faith can be expressed in different ways' and that they ought 'to recognise the sequence of infant baptism and later confirmation as one of those ways'. He noted that the charismatic movement has also exercised an influence here 'in encouraging the view that spirit-baptism is a further stage beyond water-baptism'.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, 98-99, discusses Wimber's understanding of the baptism in the Spirit.

<sup>122</sup> See Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?*, 72-73; Pawson, *Fourth Wave*, especially 56-61. The Toronto Blessing is a phenomenon which has come out of the third wave of the movement, originating in the 'Airport Vineyard Fellowship', Toronto. D. Pawson has also written a book on the Toronto Blessing, *Is the 'Blessing' Biblical? Thinking Through the Toronto Phenomenon* (1995).

<sup>123</sup> See Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, eg, 129, who writes, p.131, 'Restorationists are aggressively Baptist', stressing that believers' baptism 'is not an option for Christians but an essential part of the restored church', views which owe as much to Brethrenism as to Pentecostalism. Their view that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is a second experience quite separate from conversion is taken from classical Pentecostalism. They believe that the "baptism" is the initiation into the power of the Holy Ghost. Most Restorationists believe that the initial sign, or evidence, of the baptism is speaking in tongues. There is no dogmatic ruling on this, however'. See also Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?*, 27 and 112; and Donald Bridge and David Phipers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church* (1973), who, in Part II, discuss in detail 'The baptism of the Spirit and spiritual gifts', 101-45, their own conclusion being that 'the baptism of the Spirit is not an experience subsequent to conversion but the initial conversion experience itself' with no necessary connection between this experience and speaking in tongues, p.117 which summarizes their discussion on pp.109-16.

<sup>124</sup> Fiddes, 'Issues of Identity for Baptists', 3, though he adds that this influence does not come in the rigid form of a 'second blessing' as in older Pentecostalism.

The baptism in the Spirit first arose as an issue for Baptists in the early 1970s, prompted not least by the visit to Britain of the American leader of the Jesus People, Arthur Blessitt.<sup>125</sup> There were those who were persuaded by Pentecostalist and charismatic contentions that 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit' was a post-conversion experience,<sup>126</sup> whilst others called for leaders in the denomination to write on the subject.<sup>127</sup> In time, such teaching did appear.<sup>128</sup> In 1980 Fiddes rightly observed that acceptance of a two-stage initiation has led to the separation of water baptism from Spirit baptism in Baptist churches, with the tendency to regard the latter as the 'real thing', while the former is treated as an optional sign. This had led to another reason for the anomalous situation of Baptist churches having non-baptized members, it often being seen as 'more important to be a believers' church than a baptised church'.<sup>129</sup>

Earlier, Michael Walker had written, 'It could be argued that because we have emptied baptism of its sacramental character, because we have been afraid to believe that God acts in grace and pours out His spirit in water baptism, we now see the sundering of water and spirit. There is now a "second" baptism, a "second" blessing,

<sup>125</sup> There were many reports of Blessitt's impact in the *BT* throughout 1972.

<sup>126</sup> Eg. A.V.C. 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit', *BT* April 13, 1972, 3, who believed that the baptism was evidenced by the gift of tongues; whereas Mrs. E. Constable of Cambridge, 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit', *BT* June 1, 1972, 3, urged Baptists to seek this blessing, but said that tongues was not essential to it.

<sup>127</sup> So V. G. Tucker of Enfield, 'Holy Spirit Baptism', *BT* May 4, 1972, being a response to the letter by A.V.C.. This call for more teaching was echoed by the BU's Working Group on the Charismatic Renewal in 1978, see the 'The Report', 6.

<sup>128</sup> Eg. D. McBain, 'Baptism in the Spirit', *BT* June 19, 1975, 2, being the first of five articles over successive weeks which dealt with tongues, healing, deliverance, and concluding with the way forward. For details of McBain's articles and others before and after, see McBain, *Fire*, 81 and the notes on p.207. The most substantial BU response to this request was the 1978 'Report' from the BU's Working Group and Fiddes' *Charismatic Renewal* which was a commentary he provided to accompany 'The Report'.

<sup>129</sup> Fiddes, 'Issues of Identity for Baptists', 3, who then added, 'It is a matter of sad irony that because it has been regarded as "Baptist" to deny any meaning to infant baptism at all, it has become supposedly "Baptist" to make baptism of believers an optional matter!' Earlier, also p.3, Fiddes remarked that this two-stage theology among paedobaptist churches, 'has tended to support the time gap between baptism of infants and confirmation', but, 'The question that arises for Baptists therefore, is whether it is really part of our identity to find *no value or meaning in infant baptism whatever*', italics his.

something more that has to be done before we are brought fully to Christ'.<sup>130</sup> A *Baptist Times* editorial explicitly noted the widespread neglect of the Spirit's place in baptism,<sup>131</sup> a comment which reflects that so much of the work by Baptist sacramentalists in previous decades had not penetrated the core of Baptist thought.

Reviewing James Dunn's *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Neville Clark sketched the author's indictment of Pentecostalism's separation of Spirit baptism from conversion-initiation, by claiming that Spirit baptism was an experience which followed conversion, separating water-baptism from faith by understanding the rite as a confession of a commitment already made. Rather, Dunn argued, the gift of the Spirit or Spirit-baptism was the focal point of the conversion-initiation reality which was what made a person a Christian. The implication of this, Clark noted, was that if Dunn's case had been made, which he believed it had, 'then infant baptism must go. And a great many other contemporary views must go as well - or cease to pretend New Testament sanction'.<sup>132</sup>

It is probably true to say that the majority of Baptists follow the evangelical line which understands baptism in the Spirit to be conversion.<sup>133</sup> However, several have

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- <sup>130</sup> M. J. Walker of Beckenham, 'How Sacramental is Baptism?', *BT* March 30, 1972, 4, a review of J. K. Howard's *New Testament Baptism* (1970).
- <sup>131</sup> 'The Neglected Spirit', *BT* May 18, 1972, 5. Throughout 1972 there were a considerable number of letters on the related issues of baptism of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, Pentecostalism and the Jesus People.
- <sup>132</sup> N. Clark, 'Baptism by water and by the Spirit', *BT* November 5, 1970, 6. See J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today*, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 15, (1970). Clark's conclusion included criticism of much Baptist practice and views of baptism, as well as paedobaptist ones. Dunn's book was critically reviewed by R. E. O. White, 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit. James D. G. Dunn', *BQ* 24.2 (April, 1971), 93-94.
- <sup>133</sup> So D. McBain, 'Baptism in the Spirit', *BT* June 19, 1975, 2; Rev. John Balchin, lecturer in Theology and New Testament at London Bible College, *The Church*, in the 'I want to know what the Bible says about' series, (Eastbourne, 1979), 61-63; Fiddes, *Chrismatic Renewal*, 35; Donald Mackenzie, 'Frank questions on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit', *BT* December 13, 1984, 4, one of a series seeking to stimulate discussion of Frank Cooke's presidential study booklet on Ephesians, *The World at One* (1984); R. P. Martin, 'Worship in New Testament Churches', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (1989), 71, 'the coming of the Spirit was, from all the evidence we have in Acts, Paul, 1 Peter, Hebrews, the Pastorals and 1 John, nothing less than the life-transforming event of conversion-baptism in which the Spirit's power in human experience was clearly evidential...', and also his *The Spirit and the*

wanted to remain undogmatic about this. John Peck noted the ambiguous use of the phrase in Scripture, claiming, 'The biblical argument is not water-tight enough for the idea to be a dogma'.<sup>134</sup> Nigel Wright rejected the interpretation of many but not all charismatics that baptism in the Spirit has to do with empowering and equipping, and with the mainline view that it is the Spirit's work of regeneration, ie, conversion. In their place he advocated a 'fluid interpretation' which recognized 'that in the New Testament the idea...is fuller than we realise. It is a fluid term which points to the life-changing reality of life in the Spirit of God'.<sup>135</sup>

Whilst the third wave focussed on other matters, chiefly signs and wonders,<sup>136</sup> the fourth wave has returned to the matter of initiation chiefly, as far as Baptists are concerned, through the writings of David Pawson.<sup>137</sup> Pawson presented his fullest

*Congregation. Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids, 1984), 27, 'Paul's point is that, according to his standards, in the life-in-Christ to which *all* are introduced by baptism and the gift of the Spirit...', italics added; Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers* (1992), 15, who described baptism as 'a believer's personal Pentecost'; G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Baptism', in G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, 1993), 60-66, discusses 'Baptism and the Spirit on pp.63, 'Clearly Paul associates baptism and unity with Christ and all that follows from it on the basis that for him baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit are ideally one, just as conversion and baptism are part of one process'; M. Turner, *The Holy Spirit*, 44-46.

<sup>134</sup> John Peck, a Baptist minister, at the time Head of the Koinonia School of Christian Practice and lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Theology at a Suffolk College, having been a tutor at the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow (1965-78), *The Holy Spirit*, in the 'I want to know what the Bible says about' series, (Eastbourne, 1979), 110. He identified, pp.126-27, three possible uses of the term: the gospel-norm was that Spirit-baptism took place at conversion; however, in practice conversion is often followed by a period marked by worldliness which is terminated by introduction into life in the Spirit which may take the form of a definite crisis/baptism in the Spirit; or it could be used of an experience of 'self-abandonment to God' and associated with tongues-speaking, usually emphasizing enduement with power.

<sup>135</sup> N. Wright, *Lord and Giver of Life*, 61. On p.62 he observes, that some argue 'that all Christians have been baptised in the Spirit (ie, have entered into new life) and also that all Christians need to be baptised in the Spirit (ie, to enter into the experience of the Spirit's power). This may sound like saying everybody is right. Actually it is saying that the truth about the Spirit is bigger than all of us. Those who disagree over this subject may well be stressing different aspects of the total truth'.

<sup>136</sup> Baptist examinations of signs and wonders include Donald Bridge, formerly minister of Frinton Free Church, but at the time Warden of the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, *Signs and Wonders Today* (1985); and most recently the theological volume by Rev. Dr. Max Turner, Director of Research and Vice Principal of London Bible College, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now* (Carlisle, 1996).

<sup>137</sup> It should be noted, however, that having left the Baptist ministry in 1979 for an independent, itinerant and cross-denominational ministry Pawson stands very much on the periphery of Baptist life, though he does command considerable support and is held in high regard in churches of the evangelical-charismatic wing of the BU.



views in his argument that Christian initiation is a complex of four distinct 'spiritual doors': repentance towards God, believing in the Lord Jesus, water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit,<sup>138</sup> arguing that all four are essential for entrance into God's kingdom. This means that many 'Christians' were badly 'delivered' (birthed), initiation either taking years to be completed or remaining incomplete.<sup>139</sup> Whilst heralded by some,<sup>140</sup> he has been strongly criticized, most notably by George Beasley-Murray, who rejected Pawson's insistence that the book of Acts is the yardstick for understanding the gift of the Spirit, his separation of the baptism of the Spirit from the experience of Christ in conversion and his use of the accounts in Acts 8 and 19 as normative rather than exceptional.<sup>141</sup> Pawson's views have not found wide acceptance outside charismatic circles, and certainly not within the BU.

In his *Fourth Wave*,<sup>142</sup> Pawson discussed what he considers 'probably the most critical difference between charismatics and evangelicals, and the one over which there may be the greatest reluctance to reconsider traditional positions', and he did so by focussing on the 'two greatest gifts of God': the objective gift of his Son and the

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<sup>138</sup> D. Pawson, *The Normal Christian Birth. How to give new believers a proper start in life* (1989), the main thesis being set out in the first 6 chapters, pp.11-90. The remainder of the book is taken up with examination of biblical passages, followed by discussion of the pastoral issues. His ideas received their first airing in his *Truth to Tell* (1977), chapter 9 'Got a Conversion Complex', 99-108.

<sup>139</sup> Pawson, *Normal*, 3.

<sup>140</sup> Eg, Michael Hooton, 'The Normal Christian Birth by David Pawson', *The Fraternal* 228 (October, 1989), 26.

<sup>141</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Christian Initiation - the discussions must go on', *BT* December 14, 1989, 17; also by Rev. David Slater of Kingsbridge, 'Pawson on Initiation', *Mainstream Newsletter* 33 (July, 1989), 12-13.

<sup>142</sup> Pawson seems to have been the originator of this term. He regards *Fourth Wave* as a sequel to his *Normal Christian Birth*, see *Fourth Wave*, 12. He says that *The Normal Christian Birth* attempted a synthesis between charismatic and evangelical insights on the single issue of Christian initiation, whilst the later work arises from the former one, which it briefly summarizes, but it broadens its discussion beyond the initiation issue to include discussion of theology, prophecy, glossalalia, worship and holiness. Pawson's views are also set out in his contribution to the 'Explaining' series of booklets, *Water Baptism* (1992), which was well-received by Michael Fanstone of Frinton Free Church, 'Helpful, refreshing treatment of baptism', *BT* November 5, 1992, 11. Pawson's views and ministry have been discussed at many points by McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, *passim*.

subjective gift of the Spirit, and how they relate to each other.<sup>143</sup> In his attempt to bring the two groups together, he exhorted charismatics to understand that receiving the Spirit is not repeated (there is no second blessing), and evangelicals that believing in Jesus is not the same as receiving the Spirit.<sup>144</sup> Acceptance of these two facts, and the necessary adjustments in practice, Pawson believed, would serve the process of charismatic-evangelical integration.

Derek Tidball believed that Pawson has hit the nail on the head on initiation and the other areas he discussed,<sup>145</sup> but Rosemary Davis objected to Pawson's line of reasoning that those who have not experienced the baptism of the Spirit do not belong to Christ and thus are not saved. She further believed that he then contradicted himself by suggesting that those who believe in the Lord Jesus are on the 'Way' and, should they die, would go to heaven. 'Have I missed something, or is he trying to have his cake and eat it?'<sup>146</sup> It is too early to tell whether anything will develop from this fourth wave debate on initiation,<sup>147</sup> though Dr. David Middlemiss's detailed assessment of the charismatic movement reflects the fact that discussion of the baptism of the Spirit no longer holds the important place it once did,<sup>148</sup> and this observation suggests that Pawson's attempt to return the initiation debate to the centre of the charismatic-evangelical agenda has not succeeded.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Pawson, *Fourth Wave*, 89-90.

<sup>144</sup> Pawson, *Fourth Wave*, 90-92 and 93-96.

<sup>145</sup> D. Tidball, 'Clear exposition of charismatics and evangelicals', *BT* April 1, 1993, 6.

<sup>146</sup> Rosemary Davis of Redhill, Surrey, 'David Pawson's "Fourth Wave"', *BT* April 15, 1993, 6. She is referring to Pawson's comments, *Fourth Wave*, pp.96-97.

<sup>147</sup> Therefore, Tidball's conclusion is correct: 'Whether the vision of the Fourth Wave - the phase during which evangelicals and charismatics are integrated - is fulfilled we wait to see', Tidball, 'Clear exposition of charismatics and evangelicals', *BT* April 1, 1993, 6.

<sup>148</sup> D. Middlemiss, *Interpreting Charismatic Experience* (1996), in which there are only a few references to baptism in the Spirit, most of which are descriptive. Middlemiss's book has grown out of his Glasgow University PhD on the charismatic Movement. He was formerly Assistant minister at London Road BC, Lowestoft, and then minister at Portrack, Stockton-on-Tees.

<sup>149</sup> This conclusion is further supported by the absence of it being taken up by any other writers.

The most detailed Baptist studies of the charismatic movement have been done by Paul Fiddes. In the earlier of the two<sup>150</sup> he agrees with the BU's Working Party that 'baptism in the Spirit' cannot be separated from a theology of water-baptism.<sup>151</sup> It is here, he believes, that Baptists have a contribution to make to the theology of the Holy Spirit, though they have often failed to do so because of an impoverished understanding of water-baptism 'as no more than a human witness to faith'.<sup>152</sup> The 1978 report recommended that 'more direct teaching on the Holy Spirit should be incorporated into baptism/church membership classes or their equivalent',<sup>153</sup> to which Fiddes added that this should be set in the context of the need to teach a fuller understanding of baptism, 'so that candidates should have a higher level of expectation about what they may receive from God in their baptism'.<sup>154</sup> For Fiddes, water-baptism in the New Testament is truly a sacrament because it is the God-appointed meeting place for the believer who comes in faith and God who comes in grace, and this possesses a corporate dimension, for 'baptism is immersion into the Spirit and into the Church as the body of Christ'.<sup>155</sup>

Fiddes then took into account the contextual issue, that whilst in the New Testament repentance, faith and baptism 'were so closely connected in time that they clearly

<sup>150</sup> The earlier commentary on 'The Report' is the most relevant to the present study. In his later work, Dr. Fiddes examined the theology of the charismatic movement, concluding that it 'points to the need for the mysterious and hidden work of the Spirit to be focussed in a particular objective event', though no conclusive theological arguments had been offered 'for that event's being other than the usual entry of believers into the community of faith through confirmation or believers' baptism. Moreover, the theologians of the Charismatic Movement have argued impressively that there is no reason why these events should not be called 'baptism in the Spirit', whatever process of salvation has already preceded them in time', 'The Theology of the Charismatic Movement', in David Martin and Peter Mullen (eds.), *Strange Gifts? A Guide to Charismatic Renewal* (Oxford, 1984), 28-29. Fiddes also pointed out the tendency of charismatic theologians to want to hold water and Spirit baptism together whilst at the same time holding them apart as well, 'adding that the original initiation in the Spirit needs to be brought to conscious awareness in a deliberate subsequent experience', p.26.

<sup>151</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 30, referring to 'The Report', 6.

<sup>152</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 31.

<sup>153</sup> 'The Report', 6.

<sup>154</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 31.

<sup>155</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 31-32, citing extensively from the New Testament.

formed one event of Christian initiation', this no longer pertains as 'The Church as a whole today...is in the situation of having separated initial faith in Christ more widely from the act of baptism'.<sup>156</sup> 'Some theological development is needed then to relate water-baptism to conversion', such thinking underlying both paedobaptism and believers' baptism, it being 'the conviction of Baptists that baptism *after* rather than *before* a conscious act of faith in Christ makes most sense of the lofty New Testament claims about the grace of God given in baptism'. To understand baptism, therefore, as a mere witness of what has taken place is a wholly inadequate view of baptism.<sup>157</sup>

It must be admitted that Baptists have not risen to the opportunity articulated by 'The Report' and Dr. Fiddes to provide either a fuller doctrine of the Spirit or doctrine of baptism. Baptist discussions of the role of the Spirit in baptism continue to be many and varied, and, it must be added, usually brief,<sup>158</sup> though many continue to draw attention to this weakness in Baptist baptismal theology.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 33. He immediately continues: 'Nor does it seem possible now to make them simultaneous'.

<sup>157</sup> Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 33, italics his.

<sup>158</sup> Eg, Michael Quicke, 'Baptist Beliefs', no.2 in the *Baptist Heritage Series* of leaflets (n.d., but probably 1980s), 'The Holy Spirit is intimately bound up in the repentance, trust and action which is signified in believers' baptism'; P. Beasley-Murray, *Believers' Baptism*, no.2 in the *Baptist Basics* series of leaflets (1993), who discusses baptism as a sign of the Spirit's presence and that candidates should expect God to bless them 'anew with His Spirit', and also his *Radical Disciples. A Course for New Christians* (1996), 9, he rather vaguely says baptism 'is often associated with the gift of God's Spirit'; Donald Monk, *John's Portrait of Jesus* (CTP manual, 1992), 26, where Christian baptism is 'an experience in which [Christians] *may* look for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit', italics added; Max Turner's article on 'The Holy Spirit', in J. B. Green, S. McKnight and I. H. Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, 1992), 341-51, includes brief discussion of the Spirit in baptism throughout this article.

<sup>159</sup> Eg, the anonymous article 'The Principles We Uphold', *BT* July 29, 1976, iii, 'Not enough emphasis has been given to the belief that the Holy Spirit is present in baptism bringing joy and new power to the candidates. As they give themselves to God in Christ so He gives power to them, through the Holy Spirit, to rise and walk in newness of life'. This article which outlined the five basic principles based on the plaque hanging in Regent's Park College, which appeared in a *BT* supplement on 'Baptist History and Principles'. The article also asserted that, 'The main thing is not how much water is used, not the method, but the condition of the one baptised'. See also P. Beasley-Murray, 'Make the most of baptism', *BT* October 23, 1980, 12.

**Common Baptism.**<sup>160</sup>

Whilst the issue of 'common baptism' has been debated since the 1950s,<sup>161</sup> and has been discussed within national ecumenical schemes<sup>162</sup> and particularly within F&O,<sup>163</sup> it was not until 1996 that it became an issue for British Baptists when it was raised by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali.<sup>164</sup> In response, Keith Jones maintained that churches did not agree on a common baptism, and, as a member body of the CCBI, the BU did not accept the infant baptism of other traditions, even though the matter was presently under discussion.<sup>165</sup> Later he added, 'As Baptists we remain unconvinced about the validity of infant baptism and have a strong conviction that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a clearer starting point'.<sup>166</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized* declared that, while commendable, recognition of a common baptism was

- <sup>160</sup> Though a very recent debate as far as Baptists are concerned, this subject is examined in detail because it will be one which will probably come to occupy more and more attention as an issue within ecumenism in the forthcoming years.
- <sup>161</sup> Emmanuel Lanne, 'Baptism', in Lossky *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 79-80.
- <sup>162</sup> 'Common baptism' figured in 'The Covenant' considered in the final report *Covenanting for Union in Wales* in the early 1970s, section 4 (a) which stated, 'We recognise the members of all our churches as members of Christ in virtue of their common baptism and common calling to participate in the ministry of the whole Church', quoted by Rev. Paul H. Ballard, a lecturer at University College Cardiff, 'Baptists and Covenanting', *BQ* 24.8 (October, 1972), 375.
- <sup>163</sup> See *BEM's* discussion of incorporation into the Body of Christ: 'Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our *common baptism*, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity', *BEM*, II.D.6, p.3, italics added.
- <sup>164</sup> M. Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester, keynote address to the third biennial CCBI Assembly, "Koinonia" - local, national and worldwide', being an edited extract of his address. *BT* March 7, 1996, 3 and 13.
- <sup>165</sup> This was an allusion to *Believing and Being Baptized*. For details of Jones' position see 'Deputy General Secretary reacts to Bishop's speech', and 'CCBI delegates find evidence against "ecumenical winter"', *BT* March 7, 1996, p.2. According to the former report of the session, Jones received warm applause when he said that discussions of these issues should be treated with more care, and people be asked to avoid implying that things had been resolved when they had not, requesting a greater willingness to face honestly the questions which divided the member bodies.
- <sup>166</sup> Jones, *From Conflict to Communion* (1996), 20. He proceeded to recommend the discussion of *Believing and Being Baptized* on this point. The same point was made by him in *Ecumenical News* 2 (February, 1996), n.p., but p. 1.

'hardly possible', and such a desire was better expressed by the recent focus on *koinonia*.<sup>167</sup>

Some Baptists, however, are willing to accept 'common baptism'. In his ecumenical theology, Christopher Ellis stated that 'In facing the claims of its Lord, the church is encouraged to seek the unity which comes from sharing a common baptism in a common Lord'.<sup>168</sup> Leslie Wenger expressed the wish, 'Would it not be wonderful if we all, of various denominations, recognised that there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body, one Spirit"...?'<sup>169</sup> In the autumn of 1996, CTE released a video also entitled *Called to be One*.<sup>170</sup> The video included an interview with Keith Jones in which he clearly set out the Baptist position on 'common baptism'. 'Baptists, like many other Christians believe in one baptism...But the question then is, What is our understanding of baptism, what is involved in baptism, when does baptism take place?...we believe there's still much work to be done between the different traditions'. After reference to *BEM* and acknowledging that Baptists could accept much of what it said about the meaning of baptism, he continued, 'we tend to want to say we're not agreed about baptism, we recognize that we must work at that and for

<sup>167</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 23 and 21.

<sup>168</sup> Christopher J. Ellis, *Together on the Way. A Theology of Ecumenism* (1990), 22. This was published by the BCC in the summer of 1990 in order to coincide with the launch of the new ecumenical bodies and was a companion volume to John Matthews' earlier descriptive account, *The Unity Scene* (n.d., but c.1986) providing, as its subtitle informs, a theology of ecumenism. It was well received in the review 'The life of the church is in its mission', *BT* September 20, 1990, 6.

<sup>169</sup> Rev. Leslie Wenger a retired BMS missionary, retired in Norwich, 'Denominations need one another', *BT* November 28, 1996, 6. Though not mentioning 'common baptism', his 'with differing insights into truth and practice', in the context of the theme of his letter suggests this.

<sup>170</sup> *Called to be One*, the video (1996), quotations have been transcribed from the video. The script for the video was written by Geoff Crago of Milestone Communications, producers of the video for CTE, working with Roger Nunn, see 'Defining a Common Baptism', *BT* September 26, 1996, 1. The fact that Nunn was presumably the chief source of information used in the script gives added credence to the admittedly few yet clear references to the goal of a common baptism in the video. *Called to be One* has also been followed up by a workbook in which the issues relating to the text are set out for group discussion, see Helen Lidgett, *Called to be One. The Workbook* (1996). Earlier, the *Ecumenical News* had reported, no doubt with approval, the ten topics identified by *Called to be One* on which sufficient convergence was needed if progress is to be made, the seventh of which was 'Unity might be expressed in a common understanding of baptism'. See *Ecumenical News* 4 (June, 1996), n.p., but p.3.

<sup>the</sup> present we'd rather talk about our one faith in Christ as the basis of our common action rather than our "common baptism", which is a phrase we don't believe yet we all adequately understand'.<sup>171</sup>

The *Baptist Times*' review of the video opened: 'Further progress by the churches in reaching a common understanding on baptism is one of the priorities on the road towards church unity, according to...Keith Jones'.<sup>172</sup> This rather provocative leader prompted Rev. David Gardner of Burwell, Cambridgeshire, to challenge the ambiguity of Jones' position. 'I would have thought that all Baptists are unhappy with the phrase "our common baptism" as a basis for church unity'. Gardner, an opponent of CTE, did not believe that the process set in motion would change direction, believing that there would eventually be an 'agreement to a form of words which keeps the participants happy, but which will be given different interpretations by the various denominations involved - another ecumenical fudge!'<sup>173</sup>

In a JLG paper, Paul Sheppy<sup>174</sup> stated that probably the majority of Baptists did not regard paedobaptism as valid and so they '(re-)baptise on the grounds that the previous event has neither soteriological nor ecclesiological significance'. However,

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<sup>171</sup> The quotation is an accurate transcription of Jones' remarks in the video. This quotation, then, is different in that it is fuller than the one reported in 'Defining a Common Baptism', *BT* September 26, 1996, 1. In the video Jones continued, 'We're conscious much needs to be done', he then referred to *Believing and Being Baptized*, in which 'we're challenging our churches to look at the issues involved there and to reflect again on how we can be of help and sensitive particularly in [LEPs]. So work continues. We've not reached a conclusion. We're on a journey together'. In the same video, Mary Tanner of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity expressed her personal vision of the future in terms of a *koinonia*/communion made visible by local sharing and witnessing to a common faith, and sharing a common baptism and sharing the eucharist together, a community served by a single ministry with a ministry of oversight. That her words are included in an official CTE video add weight to the view that a common baptism is firmly on the agenda of CTE.

<sup>172</sup> 'Defining a Common Baptism', *BT* September 26, 1996, 1. It then quoted the section of Jones' contribution transcribed from the video and noted above.

<sup>173</sup> D. Gardner of Burwell, Cambridgeshire, 'Common Baptism "a fudge"', *BT* October 17, 1996, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Rev. Dr. P. Sheppy of Barnoldswick and Secretary of the JLG, 'Life-Cycle Liturgies', unpublished paper presented to the JLG Sarum Conference on Tuesday September 24, 1996, 2-3, in which he had presented a series of reflections upon pastoral practice with respect to birth, marriage and death. In it he had not only dealt with baptism and briefly the matter of the subjects of the rite, but had also examined the issue of 're-baptism (so-called)'.

'Baptists who do immerse those who in infancy were signed with water in the name of the Holy Trinity are charged with aspersion...the validity of the sacrament practised by their sister Churches'.<sup>175</sup> The 'bland assertion of Lima that we all believe in one baptism', he continued, 'was only approximate to the truth, since the baptism in which we believe is variously defined, believed in, and liturgically celebrated'.<sup>176</sup> In his reply to Gardner, Sheppy assured him that in his forthcoming address to the January 1997 WCC conference on 'Becoming a Christian: Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism' he would 'challenge the bland assumption behind the phrase "our common baptism"'. As a committed Baptist who was also ecumenically committed he declared, 'The two are not mutually exclusive'.<sup>177</sup>

The traditional view which opposes any concessions to the validity of infant baptism and confirmation was reiterated by Gardner in his reply to Sheppy, and he drew attention to two articles which detailed the 15% drop in baptisms from 1994 to 1995.<sup>178</sup> Gardner noted how Baptists were being encouraged to co-operate 'with any and every church of all denominations whatever their theological persuasion', adding, 'and that means we rarely talk about, let alone proclaim, our biblical and Baptist

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<sup>175</sup> He continued: 'I hope you will not find it indelicate in me if I observe that a number of my friends who were Baptist ministers and now exercise their ministry in other places have had to be "re-ordained". The validity of our orders, of our sacrament, has been impugned no less. Our effort did not do the trick. Mind you, none of us really accept one another's orders'. Sheppy, 'Life-Cycle Liturgies', 3-4.

<sup>176</sup> Sheppy, 'Life-Cycle Liturgies', 4.

<sup>177</sup> Sheppy, 'No fudge on common baptism', *BT* October 31, 1996, 6. This whole issue has not been served by such woolly comments as that made by Michael Quicke on Ephesians 4:5, that 'no matter how many different emphases and understandings about entering the church they all add up to one baptism', see Rev. M. J. Quicke of St. Andrews' Street BC, Cambridge, 'The World at One. Study No. 20', *BT* November 29, 1984, a series inspired by Frank Cooke's BU President's study booklet on Ephesians.

<sup>178</sup> 'Annual Baptisms Drop Below 4000' and 'An Open Letter from the Evangelism Office', *BT* October 31, 1996, 1 and 5 respectively. According to the former of these reports, if current trends continued baptisms might decrease by a further 20% in 1996. Gardner, D. Gardner, 'Drop in baptisms', *BT* November 14, 1996, 6, drew attention to the coincidence that these reports were published in the same issue as Sheppy's letter, implicitly suggesting a correlation between what he saw as a weakening of the Baptist position on baptism and the decline in its practice. Apart from Gardner's letter, the only letter on baptismal decline suggested a re-think on evangelism given the present situation of both church and society, Rev. Dr. Geoff Walters of Ashford, Kent, 'Baptismal decline? Rethink evangelism!', *BT* December 12, 1996, 10.



distinctives'. Those who followed the Swanwick Declaration's aim to move 'from co-operation to commitment', he derided, 'want all to accept each other's membership and each others baptism'. This would lead, he believed, to anyone converted in a Baptist church, but christened/baptized<sup>in</sup> infancy, not being encouraged to be baptized on profession of faith, which would result in an even greater drop in the number of baptisms. He further contended that the term 'evangelism' be rescued instead of the "fudge" word "mission", for 'we will need to remember that we practice believers' baptism. After all, the words of Jesus say, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them..."<sup>179</sup>

The contemporary ecumenical movement appears to operate under the assumption that once the issue of baptism and re-baptism has been sorted out then other matters relating to ecclesiology, eucharist and ministry will more easily fall into place. *Believing and Being Baptized* noted this with the remark that 'the direction in much ecumenical debate is *from* the act of baptism *to* the nature of the Church and ministry', a fact which has led to 'Bafflement...as to why Baptists will not apparently take what is widely seen to be the "easiest" step of recognising a common baptism as the basis for unity'. However, as Baptists 'our direction of thought is *from* the nature of the church *to* the meaning of baptism'.<sup>180</sup> According to Dr. Fiddes, ecumenical partners who have been steadily moving towards the position of a 'common baptism' received *Believing and Being Baptized* with consternation when they realized that the majority of Baptists were still unwilling and unable to accept infant baptism and confirmation as equivalent to believer's baptism.<sup>181</sup> The general grass-roots Baptist

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<sup>179</sup> D. Gardner, 'Drop in baptisms', *BT* November 14, 1996, 6.

<sup>180</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 22, italics original.

<sup>181</sup> In a conversation which took place at Regent's Park College on Monday December 18, 1995. Similarly, this consternation extended to Rev. Roger Nunn, one of the leading Baptist ecumenists, who expressed his dismay at the report. The committee which drew up *Believing and Being Baptized* can be taken to represent fairly the views of the denomination in that it sought to review three ways in which Baptists would respond to the question whether infant baptism was a valid kind of baptism. The three solutions were: 1/ The Lima solution, following the 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document which proposed equal validity; 2/ believers' baptism as normative and infant baptism as possessing derived validity; 3/ that

position on 're-baptism' has been summed up by Dr. David Russell who noted that there are differences of interpretation when a person baptized in infancy requests believer's baptism, but, 'Whilst anxious in no way to deny the "churchmanship" of paedo-baptists, most Baptist ministers would accede to such a request made on the grounds of Christian conviction and conscience, especially if the person concerned had previously made no Christian profession'.<sup>182</sup>

With all these considerations, was it possible to affirm still the 'one baptism' of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed? If such were possible for Baptists, the report asserted that it must not be taken to mean that infant baptism and believers' baptism were simply the same act, or that someone could not undergo both rites, but it could be affirmed in the sense that there 'is still one immersion into the death and resurrection of Jesus through the Spirit'. This was how the committee interpreted Ephesians 4:5's 'one baptism', seeing confirmation in Jesus' understanding of his death as a baptism (Mark 10:38-39), this being the baptism believers share in union with Christ. 'There is therefore, we believe, one baptism despite diversity of practice, and this need not be reduced to a notion of "common baptism"'.<sup>183</sup>

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infant baptism can only truly be called baptism when it is completed later by personal faith. Though the majority of the committee would follow none of these proposals, several accepted derived validity for infant baptism, and only one accepted the Lima solution. See *Believing and Being Baptized*, 13-15. This indicates the committee was split 5-3-1 respectively, a view confirmed by Dr. Fiddes. Because of this, p.16, '*This report will therefore reflect the variety of view represented by these two groups* (the majority and minority views between which it had become clear that there was 'a considerable amount of common ground'), in an attempt to mirror the diversity of views held among Baptists more widely, and yet at the same time affirm what is distinctive about the Baptist understanding of baptism', italics original.

<sup>182</sup> D. S. Russell, 'The Ecumenical Role of Baptists', in F. H. Littell (ed.), *A Half Century of Religious Dialogue, 1939-1989* (New York, 1989), 10. It ought to be added that many would baptize someone infant baptized who had previously made a Christian confession.

<sup>183</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 36. The idea of 'common baptism' is to be found in the only statement formally adopted by the Canberra Assembly of the WCC in 1991, the statement on unity, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: gift and calling*, in the second of four elements of visible expression of the church's unity, 'a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship'; see *The Report of the Canberra Assembly*, 173, quoted in *Called to be One*, 46. Paragraph 15 of Section iii of the report from the fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago, 1993, states, 'A common baptism also expresses the paradigmatic nature of the Church in the world as an inclusive community where men, women and children of different cultures and races can participate freely on an equal basis, where social and economic inequality can be surmounted, and where there is respect for different traditions and capacities, confirmed by the bonds of love for brothers and sisters and in fidelity to the Triune God', quoted in *Called to be One*, 70.

*Called to be One* acknowledged that the words 'baptism' and 'membership' clearly did not mean the same thing in all churches and therefore issued four challenges 'if they are to make their baptismal unity more visible'. First, the meaning of the word baptism and the nature of sacrament and symbol need further exploration. Secondly, mutual understanding of one another's processes of initiation, of which at least four patterns have been identified.<sup>184</sup> Thirdly, churches should discuss their understanding of the church and membership to see whether they are mutually exclusive or complementary. Fourthly, the possibility should be investigated of belonging to more than one church.<sup>185</sup> To churches practising believer's baptism the report suggested the cessation of admitting into church membership those never baptized; refraining from baptizing by immersion those baptized in infancy, brought up in and having confirmed their faith; re-consideration of the sense in which children belong to the church; and suggesting to all churches that a suitable rite should be developed for those already either infant or believer's baptized to reaffirm those vows.<sup>186</sup> It was further noted that the BU 'is not happy to speak of infant and believer's baptism as a *common baptism*',<sup>187</sup> though the report did say that the four challenges issued to the churches should not be seen as enough in themselves 'to assure the churches that there is a *common baptism*'.<sup>188</sup> Clearly, then, a recognition of a 'common baptism' is a goal

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This is also the goal stated in *Called to be One*, 70, which speaks of the move towards a common baptism. In contrast, the Baptist response to this is seen in Gethin Abraham-Williams and Keith Jones, 'The Baptist Union of Great Britain', in Welch and Winfield, *Travelling Together. A handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships* (n.d., but 1995), 74, also note that, by and large, Baptists do not accept infant baptism as a variant of believer's baptism.

<sup>184</sup> See *Called to be One*, 68: baptism on profession of faith; baptism and chrismation followed by communion; baptism, usually of infants, accompanied by profession of faith from parents/godparents, followed by a later confirmation and reception into membership; and the experience of transformation by the Spirit not marked by any outward rite. These were those identified by West in his consultative paper, on which see above.

<sup>185</sup> *Called to be One*, 69-70.

<sup>186</sup> *Called to be One*, 70.

<sup>187</sup> *Called to be One*, 68, italics theirs.

<sup>188</sup> *Called to be One*, 70, italics theirs.

of the ICP, or at least, a significant majority within it,<sup>189</sup> and that at present the BU dissents from this position.

### **Baptist Identity.**

It is almost ironic that amidst all the ecumenical developments since the 1960s and the corresponding developments and new perspectives on baptismal theology and practice, there has been a growing concern for Baptist identity most of which has been non-controversial.

From the late-1960s to the end of the 1970s interest in Baptist identity was served mainly by the continuing availability of some older works and the reprinting of others.<sup>190</sup> But from the 1980s this was to change as new material was published in a wide variety of sources. This process was instigated at the turn of the 1980s by a number of BU reports which fuelled calls for the re-examination of Baptist

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<sup>189</sup> Initial responses to *Called to be One* were published from four ecumenically committed Baptists, two of which briefly mentioned baptism. The text of these reviews was published in *SecCheck* 14 (Summer, 1996), 2-3, and *Ecumenical News* 4 (June, 1996), 3-8. The former is the source used here. Rev. Dr. Hazel Sherman, a member of the *Called to be One* working group and minister in Brecon, highlighted challenges to the churches, amongst which she included 'do you need to think again about how those who were baptised as infants might be welcomed as believers in your church, while doing justice to the baptism administered by another Christian church?' In this she did not deny the freedom of conscience, but rather wished Baptist churches to consider the question. Rev. Tony Peck, minister-secretary of the YBA, was encouraged by the seriousness with which the different understandings of baptism were taken. Rev. Michael Cleaves, Baptist Team Minister in the Ecumenical Parish of Stantonbury, Milton Keynes, merely queried the generalization and asked for substantiation of the statement on p.51 section 6.28 vii, that 'most Baptist churches...do not require someone, already baptised as an infant, to be baptised as a believer before being admitted into membership'. Rev. Alan Bailyes, Moderator of the Church Relations Committee and minister at Bethel English BC, Tonypany, also included a review, but this did not discuss the baptismal issue.

<sup>190</sup> See, for example, Sydney Clark, 'Why I think this book is still a treasure', *BT* December 31, 1981, 8, who discussed the merits and value of Wheeler Robinson's *Baptist Principles*, editions of which were still being printed in 1966 and available for many years afterwards. This was advertised in the *BUD* 1973-74, 18, which also listed amongst the titles on Baptist principles available from the BU's Publications Department F. B. Meyer's *Seven Reasons for Believer's Baptism*, H. Cook's *What Baptists Stand For*, R. E. O. White's *Invitation to Baptism*, Stephen Winward's *Your Baptism and New Testament Teaching on Baptism*. A third edition of Morris West's *Baptist Principles* was published in 1975. Roger Hayden's *Baptist Union Documents, 1948-1977* (1980), made available to a wide readership some of the most important BU documents since 1948, beginning with the 1948 'The Baptist Doctrine of the Church'.

principles.<sup>191</sup> These bore fruit in the publication of several information packs which included leaflets on baptism as well as other Baptist principles and other materials on Baptist heritage and identity.<sup>192</sup> Baptist principles have been directly and indirectly discussed in histories of the Baptists,<sup>193</sup> in the many pamphlets whose purpose is to introduce Baptist beliefs to newcomers or inquirers,<sup>194</sup> and Baptist writers who have contributed numerous articles to various dictionaries.<sup>195</sup> In 1982 the BU adopted a

<sup>191</sup> *A Call to Commitment. Baptist Christians through the 80s* (1980), 8, which included the challenge 'to know what it means to be "a Baptist Christian" today'. Amongst its many proposals for action was that literature be produced including material on discipleship, post-baptism and Baptist principles, *Call to Commitment*, 9. This was a report presented to the BU Council and the Baptist Assembly by Dr. Russell, General Secretary of the BU, in the Spring of 1980. It presented a 'strategy for action', p.1, 'Introduction', arising out of the responses made to the report *Signs of Hope* (1979). *Call to Commitment* was mistakenly dated as 1981 by L. G. Champion, 'Whither the Baptists?', in J. H. Y. Briggs (ed.), *Bible, Church and World. A Supplement to the Baptist Quarterly Published in Honour of Dr. D. S. Russell* (1989), 64, and it was reviewed by Barrie White, 'Shedding light on issues that Baptists need to debate', *BT* December 31, 1981, 2.

<sup>192</sup> In 1982 the "'Baptist Basics" Series' was produced including seven leaflets which included Peter Wortley's '3. What is a Baptist Church?', Robert Mills, '5. For those Visiting Applicants for Church Membership' and Paul Beasley-Murray, '6. Why Baptism and Church membership?', each of which included discussion of baptism. This was followed by the 'Baptist Heritage Series' (n.d., but post 1982 because they were published with the new BU logo of the cross-fish-waters of baptism), which included Michael Quicke's '2. Baptist Beliefs'. These packs were followed by 'Baptist Basics' (n.d., but 1993, see 'Baptist Union prepares definitive new information pack', *BT* September 2, 1993, 1), which included Paul Beasley-Murray's 'Believers' Baptism', Brian Haymes' 'Why be a Baptist?', David Coffey's 'Church membership', Keith Jones' 'The Lord's Supper' and Michael Quicke's 'Visiting New Church Members'. This pack was accompanied by the 15 minute *Baptist Basics Video*.

<sup>193</sup> These include the major new series of Baptist histories which were first planned under the editorship of Dr. Ernest Payne, but edited first by Dr. Barrie White until his illness caused him to retire, when he was replaced by Dr. Roger Hayden. See B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (1983), reissued and enlarged with the help of Rev. John F. V. Nicholson in 1996; Dr. Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (1986); J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (1994); and the final volume, in preparation, by Dr. W. M. S. West, *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century*. Roger Hayden contributed one of the volumes to the CTP course (G3), *English Baptist History and Heritage* (1990), unit 7 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Ordinance or Sacrament?', 97-106.

<sup>194</sup> Eg, 'What Baptists Believe' (n.d., but probably 1980s), a 4 page, A5 photocopied (or perhaps even stenciled) leaflet, published by the BUGB whilst still at Southampton Row; *Who'd be a Baptist?* (1995), an 8 page, A4, glossy pull-out brochure, on which see 'Brochure to explain "Who'd be a Baptist?"', *BT* May 4, 1995, 17; *Basix* (1996), a 16 page pocket-sized booklet.

<sup>195</sup> See G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Baptism, Wash', in C. Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Volume I:A-F* (Exeter, 1975), 143-54; S. F. Winward, 'Baptist Spirituality', in G. S. Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (1983), 36-38; S. F. Winward, 'Baptism. 5. Baptist', pp.62-63, and K. W. Clements, 'Baptist Theology', pp.61-62, both in J. G. Davies (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (1986); John Briggs, 'Making Disciples - Baptizing Them', in Robert Banks, J. H. Y. Briggs *et al* (eds.), *The Quiet Revolution* (Oxford, 1989, originally published as *Christianity: A World*

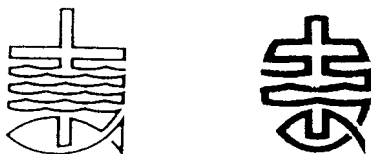
logo to support its new corporate identity, and this was refined in 1991.<sup>196</sup> This domestic debate on identity has been mirrored in the EBF<sup>197</sup> and the BWA.<sup>198</sup>

In 1991 the new General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary of the BU, David Coffey and Keith Jones, instigated a year-long series of consultations held throughout the regions.<sup>199</sup> After these 'Listening Days', the BU Council's first ever residential

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*Faith* in 1985), 66-71, which discusses Baptists on pp.67-69 [this was also published in booklet form under the same title, see J. H. Y. Briggs, 'The History of Baptists on the Move', *BT* September 3, 1985, 8]; G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Baptism. 1 Biblical Theology', pp.69-71, and R. F. G. Burnish, 'Baptism. 2. Historical and Systematic Theology', pp.71-73, Raymond Brown, 'Baptist Theology', pp.75-76, all in D. F. Wright and J. I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, 1988); G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Baptism', in G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, 1993), 60-66; R. E. O. White, 'Baptize, Baptism', in W. A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 50-53, White also contributed 'Baptism for the Dead', p.49.

<sup>196</sup> The logo is used on all BUGB material. The main components of the logo are three Christian symbols: the cross, the fish symbol and the water which 'speaks of the Baptist distinctive practice of believers baptism', the whole logo being drawn with one continuous line. In 1991 the logo was further developed by being made elliptical 'to demonstrate our place within the world community'. Details from a BUSheet giving details of the new logo and how it can be used in printing materials, n.d., but probably 1991. On the logo see also 'Baptists launch new identity', *BT* September 26, 1991, 2.



<sup>197</sup> Eg, Rev. Grenville Overton of Newbury, who presented a paper on Baptist identity to the EBF, a copy of which has not been obtained, see 'Consultation on Baptist Identity', *BT* October 10, 1991, 5, gave notification of the European Consultation on Baptist Identity to be held in January 1992.

<sup>198</sup> These discussions have gone on throughout the 1980s and 1990s, see the two volumes William H. Brackney and Ruby J. Burke (eds.), *Faith, Life, and Witness. The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance - 1986-1990* (Birmingham, Alabama, 1990), which includes papers from the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation', including Keith W. Clements' paper 'A Response to the Faith and Order Commission Document No.140', 48-53, and the Commission on Baptist Heritage, which includes John H. Y. Briggs' 'Baptists and Higher Education in England', 92-115, and 'Towards a Baptist Identity: A Statement Ratified by the Baptist Heritage Commission in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, July, 1989', 146-49, which was prepared by John Briggs; and William H. Brackney and L. A. Cupit (eds.), *Baptist Faith and Witness. The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1990-1995* (Birmingham, Alabama, 1995). British Baptists have presented a number of papers to these Commissions, for instance: P. S. Fiddes, 'The British Church Scene: Issues of Identity for Baptists in Discussion with Others' (1991); P. Beasley-Murray, 'Celebrating the Faith In Baptism', unpublished paper for the Baptist Worship Study Commission (1991); Michael Quicke, 'Developing the Debate on "Baptist Identity"', (unpublished, 1992), presented to the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation.

<sup>199</sup> The 'Listening Day Process' led to the report *A Five Year Plan Towards 2000* (1991). Of this Nigel Wright, 'Baptist Identikit', *BT* February 27, 1992, 8, wrote that the proposal of the 5 year

meeting gave their broad approval to a ten year programme entitled 'Towards 2000' which focussed on mission and strengthening the Baptist family.<sup>200</sup> Part of this programme was realized in the publication of *AIM 3*<sup>201</sup> and Paul Beasley-Murray's *Radical Believers*.<sup>202</sup> This process culminated in the 'Denominational Consultation' at Swanwick in September 1996,<sup>203</sup> which led to the setting up of a seven-strong Denominational Consultation Reference Group responsible for monitoring progress

plan to establish a clearer Baptist identity risks being seen as yet another dose of "oughtery and mustery", banging the big bass Baptist drum'. Wright nevertheless stressed the importance of this, suggesting that the theme of Baptist identity be transposed into the key of mission. 'Only a church which displays the need for personal conversion and commitment as is illustrated in believers baptism will be able to call people to this conversion. Infant baptism obscures the vital truth that we must enter the kingdom of God on our own account not be smuggled in on someone else's ticket'.

- 200 See 'At the Baptist Union Council', a 4 page pull-out supplement, *BT* March 19, 1992, 7-10. Pages 8-9 set out the vision of 'Towards 2000', key-words being Mission, Identity, Associating and Resourcing. For the initial report of the residential meeting held at Kimmel Hall, North Wales, see 'Towards 2000: A Call to Prayer for a Baptist agenda for the 1990s', *BT* March 5, 1992, 8-9. This resulted in the publication of the report *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000 incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (1993).
- 201 *AIM 3* was the final manual in the *Action In Mission* programme. *AIM 1* (1988) was a step-by-step evaluation survey for use in a local church and its neighbourhood and was the vision of the late Secretary for Evangelism, Rev. Tom Rogers. This material was later condensed in what became known as *AIM 1 - Simplified* (1990). *AIM 2 - Mission* (n.d.), provided material for churches to move on from *AIM 1*. This was accompanied by a book by Nigel Wright and David Slater, *A Theology of Mission* (1990). In their discussion of personal conversion, Wright and Slater describe baptism as the initiation rite which 'marks the end of the process of conversion and is the sign of regeneration', though it is more than a human response and a mere symbol for it is the God-appointed occasion for 'the Holy Spirit to work into the life of the person being baptised those things symbolised by baptism', p.48. Later, p.49, they state that 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit brings us into the Body of Christ', but do not explain how this relates to water-baptism. *AIM 3* (1992), prepared by Dr. Derek Tidball, is a discipleship course for the nurture of new believers. Section 2 Part 3 discusses believers' baptism and sets out the basic biblical theology of baptism as traditionally interpreted by Baptists. For those with learning difficulties BUild (The Baptist Union Initiative with people with learning difficulties) produced 4 booklets which adopt a simple picture format where words are kept to a minimum: *Joining the Church* by Susan Wright (1991), discusses baptism and communion.
- 202 P. Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers* is published in the same format as a CTP manual, though it was not one of that series of distance learning courses run by the BU. It discusses baptism at a number of points, but chiefly in its first chapter 'Confessing the Faith - the baptism of believers only', 9-22. P. Beasley-Murray's *Radical Disciples* was a brief, Bible-study format follow-up booklet.
- 203 On this see, eg, D. Coffey and K. G. Jones, 'The Denominational Consultation' in both *BaptistLeader* and *SecCheck* nos.13 (Winter, 1995), 1-2; 'Beyond 2000 - What Kind of Union?', *BT* May 9, 1996, 7; 'Questions for Consultation', *BT* May 23, 1996, 1; K. Jones, 'What shape the Union?', *BT* July 4, 1996, 12; D. Coffey, 'My vision for 21st century Baptists', *BT* August 15, 1996, 2; David Dewey, 'Mission Tops Consultation Agenda', *BT* September 12, 1996, 1, and various reports on p.2; and the *BT*'s 4 page guide to the 'Denominational Consultation'. *BT* October 3, 1996, 7-10, which was also published separately and mailed to all churches via their secretaries; and D. Coffey and K. G. Jones, 'Guard the Vision' in both the *BaptistLeader* and *SecCheck* nos.15 (Winter, 1996), 1.

and clarifying the issues raised.<sup>204</sup> Throughout the 1990s, then, Baptist identity has been an important part of Baptist life, though discussions of baptism have been relatively few, and those that there have been have been largely undertaken within Baptist ecumenical commitment.<sup>205</sup>

However, not all of this discussion of Baptist identity has been non-controversial. That the ecumenical situation now provided the undeniable context even for Baptist discussion of its own principles is reflected in the 1989 YBA Bible study booklet *Fellowship in the Gospel*. Its fourth study, whilst based on the Declaration of Principle, used baptism to raise three questions: what it teaches about the nature of the Church; the place of children in the church family, the Kingdom and at communion; and its significance for someone who has been a committed believer for many years.<sup>206</sup> Only the first of these cannot be said to have been an important subject within ecumenical discussion at the time.

The ecumenical climate also provided the background for the earlier *A Baptist View* series.<sup>207</sup> The volume on baptism by John Matthews of the Swindon Tabernacle

204 'Council agrees Consultation process', *BT* December 12, 1996, 2. See also the whole issues of the *Baptist Leader* and *SecCheck* nos. 16 (Spring, 1997), which provide progress reports on the Consultation, and includes details of the seven members of the Reference Group. The Consultation proposals are primarily if not exclusively organizational, there having been no discussion of baptism or any other issues of theology so far.

205 For example the reports *Believing and Being Baptized*, which is concerned chiefly, not with baptismal theology *per se*, but the ecumenical dilemma of re-baptism, and Baptist involvement in the Called to be One process is also explicitly ecumenical. For the ecumenical dimension of *Something to Declare* and *Reflections on the Water* see '1996: Three Important Studies' below.

206 *Fellowship in the Gospel. A series of six studies on Baptist principles and practice in belonging to the Church* (1989), 19, prepared by the Doctrine and Theology Group of the YBA, which comprised Rev. John F. V. Nicholson (Convenor), General Superintendent of the North Eastern Area, Rev. Iain Collins of York, Rev. David Morris of Headingley, Rev. Anthony Peck of the Central Bradford Fellowship, Rev. Susan Thompson of Sheffield, and Dr. Haddon Willmer.

207 These appeared in 1976 and 1978 under the editorship of Alec Gilmore with the assistance as advisory editors of Dr. Rex Mason, Senior Tutor at Regent's Park College, and Peter Saunders, a tutor at the South Wales Baptist College. The ecumenical context of the series was stated in the 'Editor's Introduction' which appeared at the beginning of each volume, which ended, 'We hope...to help Baptists to a new grasp of the traditions they have inherited and to inform others of what it is that makes Baptists the distinctive people that they are', eg, in Dr. Gordon W. Martin, tutor in Church History and Theology at the Scottish Baptist



included a summary of the classical Baptist position on baptism which included the statement that the practice of infant baptism had no basis in scripture, confused the true meaning of baptism and was based on false understandings of the nature of faith and the church.<sup>208</sup> However, Matthews' personal position was perhaps reflected in his earlier statements that in the household baptisms of the book of Acts children could have been included and probably were, and that personally he opposed indiscriminate infant baptism, suggesting he accepted discriminate infant baptism.<sup>209</sup> Himself a committed ecumenist, Matthews accepted the sacramental nature of baptism, maintaining that it was the combination of the human response to divine action which made it so.<sup>210</sup> His position is seen most clearly in his opposition to re-baptism. Neville Clark had proposed that it was not the practice of the early Church which is determinative for present day practice but the theology of the early Church. From this Matthews argued that the Church stands in between the announcement of the Kingdom of God in Jesus and the completion of the Kingdom of God in the parousia. Its place in the middle meant 'that everything the church does is in some sense provisional or interim', it pointing backwards to the historical events of the cross and resurrection and forwards to the fulfilment of those events, baptism being 'the sign given to the church to show this inseparable link with Christ's own living, dying and rising and also with the hope of a creation restored and complete'. This did not mean the Baptist case was unassailable 'since baptism is a sacrament of the gospel and not

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College, *The Church. A Baptist View* (1976), which also includes throughout brief discussions of baptism, but which raises nothing new or controversial. The ecumenical dimension was highlighted in the review of the first four books in the series by Rev. Robert S. Smart of Darlington, 'Authority; Baptism; Church; Ministry', *The Fraternal* 178 (January, 1977), 25-26. See also the review 'Studies in Baptist principles', *BT* July 29, 1976, vii, reviewing also B. R. White's *Authority*, G. W. Martin's *Church*, and John Nicholson's *Ministry*. Fiddes' *Charismatic Renewal* was the last to be published in this series.

208 J. Matthews minister of Swindon Tabernacle, *Baptism. A Baptist View* (1976), 16-17, the point on infant baptism is on p.17.

209 Matthews, *Baptism*, 7 and 15 respectively. Matthews, with his wife Ruth, were prominent leaders in the establishment of the Central Churches Swindon, on which see chapter 8 above.

210 Matthews, *Baptism*, 19. He continued, 'The promises of God meet with the faith of the Christian community and with the personal faith of the believer and the whole is signified in symbolic ritual. God has so ordered the life of his community that he does act uniquely through baptism'.

of our faithful response to the gospel', and such a view clearly affected the Baptist view of re-baptism. 'If baptism is interim and not final, if it always points beyond itself to some future fulfilment, then one can hardly justify a second baptism on the ground that the first was provisional to a greater degree!'<sup>211</sup>

In his *Radical Believers*, Paul Beasley-Murray skillfully sketched Baptist beliefs on baptism, for which he was highly commended by Brian Haymes, though 'Not every Baptist would agree with his 'way of seeing and saying things', the book's style and temper being a 'welcome invitation to a discussion'.<sup>212</sup> While it is unclear precisely which matters Haymes was thinking of, clearly non-sacramentalists would be uncomfortable with Beasley-Murray's association of baptism with the gift of the Spirit and its accompaniment with the laying on of hands,<sup>213</sup> whilst others would perhaps object to his assertion that baptismal practice should be so reformed that only in exceptional cases would it be possible to be baptized without becoming a church member.<sup>214</sup>

The most contentious treatment of Baptist principles was by Dr. Brian Haymes,<sup>215</sup> in fact his work was the catalyst for a particular phase in the Baptist identity

<sup>211</sup> Matthews, *Baptism*, 20-21, quotations from p.21, referring to N. Clark, 'The Theology of Baptism', in A. Gilmore (ed.), *Christian Baptism* (1959), 306-26. Later, Matthews, *Baptism*, discussed re-baptism at greater length, pp.24-26. Matthews also defended the connection between baptism and membership and opposed their frequent separation in Baptist churches, pp.26-28.

<sup>212</sup> B. Haymes, 'A Baptist voice with integrity and open-minded commitment', *BT* December 3, 1992, 14.

<sup>213</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers*, 15-17.

<sup>214</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers*, 14.

<sup>215</sup> B. Haymes, Principal of the Northern Baptist College, *A Question of Identity. Reflections on Baptist Principles and Practice* (Leeds, 1986). Originally the chapters were lectures presented to the Yorkshire Baptist Ministers' Fellowship Annual Retreat and Conference in February 1986. Haymes set out his thesis right from the start, p.1: 'I propose...to set forth and defend a thesis. It is in three parts; (1) that there are important features of Christian identity to which Baptists have born witness as a way of being Christ's Church. (2) that these features are worth developing and guarding because *it is for more than our own good* that Baptists be true to their inheritance. (3) that we are presently in danger of neglecting these features and in some instances actually betraying them'. The italicized section shows consciousness of the ecumenical context in which Baptist identity has to be discussed. On the same page he drew attention to his own **ecumenical** commitment and experience, then added, 'It is my personal

debate.<sup>216</sup> Haymes' discussion of baptism is almost entirely confined to two pages within his larger discussion of the doctrine of the Church, the former arising out of the latter.<sup>217</sup> He rejected the charge that believers' baptism stressed more the human response whilst infant baptism stressed God's grace, and described the Baptist interpretation of baptism as merely a personal act of witness to faith as 'selling the Baptist understanding short', for believers' baptism 'is an affirmation of the saving grace of God. As such I think we Baptists ought to be much bolder in thinking of the sacramental nature of the action'. Baptism is a fruitful meeting point between God and his church, 'his church' because more than the individual candidate is involved.<sup>218</sup> Of closed membership, Haymes said "'in spirit Yes, in law no'" for the former would make a religious rite the basis of Christian fellowship, something which Paul rejected in his Galatian letter. The relationship between baptism and church membership 'is too important to be overlooked'. Those who stressed the individual nature of baptism

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experience and observation of others that ecumenical involvement does strengthen denominational awareness. My suspicion is that you will find the most convinced Baptists as Baptists in the various forms the ecumenical movement takes'. He then mentioned Ernest Payne and David Russell as examples, to which can be added a great many more which are listed, for example, in the last paragraph of Anthony R. Cross' 'Rev. Dr. Hugh Martin: Ecumenist. Part 3', *BQ* 37.3 (July, 1997), forthcoming. See the review by Rev. Peter West of Shepherds Bush Tabernacle, 'A Question of Identity, by Brian Haymes', *The Fraternal* 216 (October, 1986), 24-25.

216 So Rev. David Slater of Kingsbridge and Secretary of Mainstream, 'Editor's Note', *A Perspective on Baptist Identity* (Mainstream, 1987), 5, who reported that the papers included in that volume came out of the Mainstream consultation held in September 1987 organized by the mainstream Executive 'as a response to the debate about Baptist identity currently being raised within the denomination'. Nigel Wright, 'The Baptist Way of Being the Church', in Slater (ed.), *Baptist Identity*, 41, directly identified Haymes' work as sparking off this particular round of the discussion, which was encouraged by Rev. Bernard Green, General Secretary of the BU. Mainstream returned to the theme of Baptist identity at their January 1995 conference, see 'Rob White: "Baptist distinctives"', *BT* February 2, 1995, 14, though baptism was not mentioned in the report.

217 Haymes, *Question of Identity*, chapter 2 'The True Church', 6-12. Concluding his opening chapter he reiterated his position, p.5: 'My argument is that there is such a thing as Baptist identity and that it is important for the good of the whole church that it be preserved. I do not think that such identity consists in particular doctrines in themselves, such as believers baptism or the gathered church, but in their unity, a way of being Christ's church in the world'. Nigel Wright, 'The Baptist Way of Being the Church', in Slater (ed.), *Baptist Identity*, 41-45, challenged Haymes' ecclesiology by advocating a link between Baptist and Anabaptist ecclesiology, objecting to Haymes' use of 'the Baptist way of being the Church' with its openness to other ways of being the Church, whereas Wright, an advocate also of restorationism, contended that, 'The New Testament presents us with a picture of variety in unity. The unifying factor is not how the Church was organized in this or that particular culture but the New Testament theology of the Church and its ministry', pp.44-45.

218 Haymes, *Question of Identity*, 9-10.

offered an unbalanced interpretation for there are no private deals with Jesus. To be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into his body, making the baptized members of his church, 'and for Baptists that always takes the form as the local fellowship of believers'. He charged Baptists who baptize without it leading to the privileges and responsibilities of membership as not having grasped the full significance of baptism, the Church or the fellowship of Christ. 'When this happens we are in serious risk of loss of identity, not just as Baptists, but as Christians'.<sup>219</sup>

Opposition came almost entirely from Mainstream.<sup>220</sup> What is surprising about this debate is the relatively marginal place baptism occupied,<sup>221</sup> though Derek Tidball did criticize him for having given insufficient attention to believer's baptism.<sup>222</sup> The reason for this is not wholly obvious. It could be due to the Haymes' relative absence of discussion of baptism, or a reflection of its non-contentious status in what was an

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219 Haymes, *Question of Identity*, 10. On p.7 he referred to baptism as the sign of entry into the Church and as such is for believers only.

220 See Slater (ed.), *Baptist Identity*, which included contributions from Dr. Derek Tidball, Senior Pastor of Mutley BC, Plymouth, Dr. Barrie White, Principal of Regent's Park College, Rev. Alasdair Campbell, research student at Spurgeon's College, Rev. Nigel Wright, lecturer in Biblical and Historical Theology at Spurgeon's, Rev. Stephen Ibbotson of Peterborough, and Dr. George Beasley-Murray. Dr. Beasley-Murray was the one contributor from outside of Mainstream.

221 Evidently baptism was not among the contentious issues of this particular debate, which was understood by Mainstream to be between a theological liberal, Dr. Haymes, and themselves, conservative evangelicals, who believed they represented the majority within the denomination. So Slater, 'Editor's Note', 5, '[This booklet] is an attempt to speak from the more conservative and evangelical perspective within the denomination. Although making no pretence of speaking on behalf of all such Baptists in Britain, we believe these papers represent the views of many Christians who worship in local Baptist Churches', adding, 'Nevertheless, each author writes on his ~~own~~ behalf'.

222 D. Tidball, 'A Response to "A Question of Identity"', in *Baptist Identity*, 12. It can be said that the same applies to Mainstream's volume. Whilst they, in turn, might reply that they were responding to Haymes' discussion, it should be added that the contributors frequently go beyond Haymes' work and had ample opportunity to rectify Haymes' 'omission'. For example, in only two other places did Tidball refer to baptism: in mentioning Haymes' discussion of baptism and membership in one sentence, p.8, and in a discussion starter question on p.17 about whether believers' baptism will become optional if Baptist understanding of the Church has a clear centre but blurred edges. The only discussion of baptism of any size is provided by Beasley-Murray's concluding essay, which examined the contemporary situation with little reference to Haymes. He interestingly discussed baptism as the sacrament of the gospel of the Kingdom, G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Confessing Baptist Identity', in Slater (ed.), *Baptist Identity*, 83-84.

internal Baptist controversy, or a reflection of its declining importance in Baptist theology. Or it could be a combination of these.

### **1996: Three Important Studies.**

Three important studies appeared in 1996 which provide a fitting climax to Baptist thought on baptism this century and each reflect the impact on Baptist thought of the Christian initiation debate.

#### **Baptism and Re-baptism.**

*Believing and Being Baptized* has within in it the potential of being one of the most important documents this century on the Baptist understanding and practice of baptism. Building on nearly ten decades' discussion and development in the theology of initiation<sup>223</sup> it paves the way for future Baptist reflection both within the BU, the BWA and national and international ecumenism.<sup>224</sup> It is further intended to help ecumenical partners understand what is often perceived as Baptist awkwardness over baptism within ecumenical discussions, the majority of paedobaptists viewing the Baptist position as pedantic and disruptive of further developments. It states, 'there remains a need to examine further the issues that arise when someone is baptized who has already been "baptized" as an infant. Is this "re-baptism", or baptism for the first time? Should it be encouraged, discouraged or even prohibited in an ecumenical

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<sup>223</sup> The very first line of the text reads, 'In this century Baptists have produced a good deal of material on the theology of baptism, *affirming that the fulness of baptism* is expressed when the person baptized is a believer making a conscious profession of faith', *Believing and Being Baptized*, 7. The italicized section reflects awareness of the ecumenical situation which is the context in which and for which this document was prepared.

<sup>224</sup> The fruit of three years work by a group of nine members of the Doctrine and Worship Committee under the chairmanship (and editorship) of Dr. Paul Fiddes, Principal of Regent's Park College, and the product of seven previous drafts, see *Believing and being Baptized*, 7-8. It was presented to and unanimously accepted by the BU Council on November 7-8, 1995. The committee comprised Rev. Dr. Paul Fiddes, Mrs. Faith Bowers, Committee Secretary, a member of Bloomsbury Central Church and sub-editor of the *BQ*, Rev. Gethin Abraham-Williams, General Secretary of the Covenanted Churches in Wales, Rev. David Coffey, ex officio, General Secretary of the BU, Rev. Christopher Ellis, Rev. Dr. Brian Haymes, Rev. Dr. Peter A. Hicks, Director of Ministry at London Bible College, Rev. Keith Jones, Rev. Douglas McBain and Rev. Dr. Nigel Wright, minister of Altrincham Baptist Church. Rev. David Rowland, minister of Botley BC, was also part of the committee in the earlier days of the project. It was first circulated in 1995 and then published in 1996, from which all quotations are taken.

situation? What is the relation of the two rites to each other, to salvation and to church membership?'<sup>225</sup>

Whilst the majority of the committee were able to accept that grace and faith could be recognized as present at all stages of Christian nurture 'in different forms and proportions', they could not, however, 'regard anything but believers' baptism as *baptism* in the proper theological meaning of the term'. The rite of infant baptism, therefore, could not be regarded as 'baptism' because not enough of the New Testament understanding of baptism could be applied to it.<sup>226</sup> What the report did, then, was advocate the mutual recognition of initiation into the Church of Christ of those baptized as infants and confirmed, whilst firmly dismissing the possibility of a 'common baptism'.<sup>227</sup> This marks a significant shift from that advocated throughout the larger part of the twentieth century, where the actual act of believer's baptism has been understood to be one <sup>of</sup> the major stumbling blocks to ecumenical progress, and this position of mutual recognition of initiation is consonant with the BU's official involvement in CTE and CCBI.

<sup>225</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 7. These issues are not new and have existed within Union churches since the seventeenth century, but amongst Baptists more intensely since the early 1960s and the rise of LEPs. The immediate background to *Believing and Being Baptized* is also, more narrowly, the completed Baptist-Methodist *Concordat* of 1991 and the Baptist-URC discussions which were still in process when the report was being compiled. See chapter 8 above.

<sup>226</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 17, italics theirs. See the whole of section IV 'Dimensions of believers' baptism not present in infant baptism', pp.17-20. In the same way that believer's baptism was seen to be in accord with the New Testament rite of conversion-baptism (so p.10, 'the act of baptism is *normally* to be received near the beginning of entrance upon Christian discipleship', thereby, p.14, possessing 'normative status'), so too the method of immersion has normative status, though in exceptional cases such as 'age or infirmity or handicap' we 'must surely focus on baptism itself rather than the particular mode'. While immersion is normative because it portrays a 'going down' into death with Christ and a 'coming up' in resurrection, sprinkling can symbolize the pouring or anointing of the Spirit, p.29.

<sup>227</sup> The key to the whole document is summed up in the statement that, 'Baptists can share in a *mutual recognition of others as being members of the Body of Christ*, regardless of the mode of initiation in their church tradition. Being in the Body of Christ, and not baptism itself, is the basis of unity. The work of the Holy Spirit, indwelling those who are in the Body of Christ, is recognized experientially in others through their exercise of faith and other spiritual gifts and by the production of Christ-like fruits of life, not by the evidence of having taken part in a particular ritual act', *Believing and Being Baptized*, 21. Later the committee affirmed, 'While we believe that the *proper* place for baptism is at the moment of making personal allegiance to Christ, we can affirm that God freely uses a variety of traditions to incorporate persons into the Body of Christ', p.22.

The report's discussion is based on the assumption that Baptist churches practise open membership, the committee taking the opportunity to ask 'seriously whether a membership "closed" to all except those baptized as believers takes sufficient account of the work of God's spirit among all the Christian churches'. This again is indicative of another shift in emphasis since the turn of the century when open membership was widely regarded as an aberration and a betrayal of true Baptist principles. The committee acknowledged the constraints of churches' Trust Deeds, and clearly approved of closed membership churches' adoption of associate membership, asking them 'to consider how they might find creative ways to reduce the effect of this distinction between kinds of membership, as far as is possible within legal restraints'. They commended open membership or closed membership with a supplementary roll as a 'normative practice', though they recognized that different people would come to different answers to this matter and that 'what is not freely accepted may have little spiritual significance'. Open membership churches which accepted candidates who had never been baptized by any means were strongly criticized: 'What had originally begun as a desire not to "unchurch" others who had previously been members of other churches, has become a lack of conviction about baptism for the "unchurched"'. There then followed an urgent appeal for the reappraisal of baptism within Baptist church life and practice, urging, 'that churches re-consider the place of baptism within Christian discipleship, and do not any longer accept without baptism those who have not as yet been initiated in any way into membership of the Church of Christ'.<sup>228</sup>

The net result of all this was that it needs to be 'openly admitted that we are living in a situation where there are two views of baptism, and where this is likely to be the case into the foreseeable future'. Therefore, Baptists, the committee believed, ought to live and work together with other Christians as sensitively and with as much mutual affirmation about baptism as possible, something possible only because 'the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ does not depend upon a particular practice of

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<sup>228</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 28-29.

baptism', for baptism falls within what they describe as 'penultimate' as opposed to 'ultimate' issues.<sup>229</sup>

The implications of all this for pastoral practice are considerable, and the committee set out to provide guidelines based on the theological foundations they had set out which would take into account the many different backgrounds and spiritual needs of those who will seek baptism within a Baptist church. Five potential procedures were outlined. First, baptism followed by membership would apply to someone converted from a totally secular background. Secondly, someone infant baptized but never confirmed could also be baptized, though evidence of the Spirit's work since infancy might allow a profession of faith with the laying on of hands with membership following. Thirdly, someone baptized in infancy and brought up in a Christian family and congregation would be offered an affirmation of the work of God with the laying on of hands in place of baptism, which would be allowed if the candidate persisted. Fourthly, if the same situation as scenario three pertained but confirmation had also taken place, stronger encouragement would be given to recognize the work of God in the whole process of Christian nurture, and a further act of laying on of hands for a renewal of the Spirit and deeper union with Christ at the moment of reception into membership would be offered, though baptism could still be administered if the request was being made in all good conscience. The only exception to this exercise of individual freedom of conscience would be where the local congregation had willingly and voluntarily accepted restraint in its baptismal practice due to ecumenical involvement. Finally, the request for baptism by one already believer's baptized, even though little meaning could be found within the original act, should be declined, and the minister should explain that baptism involved not solely the subjective faith of the believer, but the enabling grace of God. Here, the overt sacramentalism of the committee came to the fore as they explained that 'Whatever the degree of faith and trust the candidate might have, God can still use the act of baptism to begin to draw

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<sup>229</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 24.



someone to himself, and a believer should be encouraged to look back and find that prevenient grace of God at work'. To such an enquirer, the minister and congregation should encourage a public confession of faith with the laying on of hands for a new filling with the Spirit.<sup>230</sup>

The committee defended itself against the charge that the middle three guidelines contradicted their previously declared position that believers' baptism alone was baptism in the fullest sense, on the grounds that the guidelines were offered 'because we recognize different stages in the journey of salvation and affirm the freedom of God to use whatever outward acts he will to draw people to himself' and 'we want to share in the healing of a broken church'.<sup>231</sup>

The reason why other Christian churches regarded anything resembling re-baptism as scandalous was the connection of baptism with entrance into the Church. To 're-baptize' appears to un-church those baptized in infancy. Such problems, the committee believed, could only be met by pastoral sensitivity and the following of the guidelines they had set out. But, they maintained, there are other ways of belonging to the Church than membership. Some may be 'in the Body of Christ' in a different kind of way, before being baptized as believers, and such need not be considered as excluded. Thus, incorporation also was to be understood as a process rather than as a single moment of crossing a threshold. 'The fact that we permit baptism, as believers, of those baptized in infancy (for those who request it) may well remain an offence,

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<sup>230</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 24-29, quotations from pp.27-28. On the fifth procedure, the committee defended their recommendations from the charge of inconsistency with the previous scenarios with the justification that, 'In the case of someone receiving believers' baptism there is at least the *potential* for exercising some personal trust in God', for, looking back later, a person may in fact incorrectly be judging the original baptism as 'empty' or 'meaningless'. 'Moreover, when God offers his grace in the baptism of someone of responsible age, rather than a very young infant, he gives "enabling grace" in the sense of helping someone to make personal decisions and to meet demands laid upon his or her life'.

<sup>231</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 28.

but it is an offence that derives from the sadly broken state of the Church Universal'.<sup>232</sup>

When Dr. Fiddes presented the document to the BU Council in November, 1995, the ensuing debate revolved around the recognition that the document itself also marked a stage on a journey not the arrival at a destination. Dr. Arnold Baines expressed his appreciation for the report, speaking of baptism as a sign and a reality: the sign was of water which signified death and resurrection, the reality being justification by faith. The one negative comment reported came from Roger Nunn who argued that it was time that the assertion that infant baptism was no baptism should be dropped, despite the findings expressed within the report itself. *Believing and Being Baptized* was unanimously accepted by the Council,<sup>233</sup> and can be taken as the 'official' position of the BU on the issues discussed.

### **The Declaration of Principle.**

The four Principals of the English Baptist Colleges presented their contribution to 'the current debate on Baptist identity' and as a document to be considered in preparation for the Denominational Consultation of September 1996.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 37-38. Pages 39-47 of the document address the issue of 'The child and the Church'.

<sup>233</sup> 'Document on "re-baptism" marks a stage on the journey', *BT* November 23, 1995, 2. Dr. Baines was representative of the Buckinghamshire Association. It is clear from the *Baptist Times* report that initially the Council was only being asked to 'receive' not 'accept' the report, but it is evident that after the intervention of Rev. Tony Peck, Secretary of the YBA, and others, the Council, in the end, did accept it.

<sup>234</sup> The words are David Coffey's, 'Foreword', in R. L. Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare. A study of the Declaration of Principle* (1996), 6. The authors stated: 'We believe that the Declaration, as it stands, is an important affirmation. We have no desire to change it but wish that it be better known and understood because we believe something important is here for our present and future life'. This study is based on the current revised edition of the Declaration of Principle (1938). Published in June 1996, this was followed in October by Douglas Sparkes' *The Constitutions of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (1996), which provides the history of the BU's constitutions and declarations of principle going back to original constitution of 1813. In 1904, at the suggestion of J. H. Shakespeare, the Declaration of Principle had taken on the form of the threefold structure of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), see Sparkes, *Constitutions*, 21; Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 20-22. The pattern of the Great Commission is followed throughout the Principals' study, Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 27-52, which sets out their discussion of the three sections of the Declaration.

The Principals took up the language of covenant as the basis of the BU,<sup>235</sup> affirming that the Declaration is a 'covenant document' which was more than adequate as 'The Basis for this Union'.<sup>236</sup> Whilst they declined to see the Declaration as a confession of faith<sup>237</sup> they did see it as theological, identifying an authentic expression of Baptist ecclesiology. 'We cannot fail but notice its crucial trinitarian reference to baptism as baptism into the life of God'.<sup>238</sup>

On the second Principle,<sup>239</sup> dissatisfaction was expressed with the standard threefold reasons offered for the significance of believers' baptism because Baptists so

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<sup>235</sup> The use of covenant to explore the horizontal relationship of believer to believer was earlier used in *The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (1994), prepared jointly by the Faith and Unity Executive Committee and the Doctrine and Worship Committee. On the objections to this horizontal usage and its development, see *Something to Declare* 12-15. The concept of covenant had earlier been explored in *A Call to Mind. Baptist Essays Towards a Theology of Commitment* (1981), and *Bound to Love. The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission* (1985), both written by Keith W. Clements, Richard L. Kidd, Paul S. Fiddes, Roger Hayden and Brian Haymes, who examined the theology of commitment and covenant respectively, neither of which, however, discussed baptism at any length. For examples see the 'Introduction' in *Call to Mind*, which referred to 'Christian initiation' as a 'means of identification *with* Christ by faith, p.8, italics original, whilst Haymes discussed baptism as 'a fruitful sign', a meeting place between God and man, 'On Being the Church', 59; and in *Bound to Love*, Kidd, 'The Documents of Covenant Love', 48, who spoke of 'the sacramental worship of baptism'. Only two works had previously discussed the theme of covenant, K. C. Dykes, Principal of the Manchester Baptist College, 'The Biblical Doctrine of Church and Covenant', *The Fraternal* 76 (April, 1950), 16-18, and Paul H. Ballard, 'Baptists and Covenanting', *BQ* 24.8 (October, 1972), 372-84, though, again, in neither did baptism figure prominently.

<sup>236</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 54. The Declaration of Principle opens 'The basis of this Union is:'.

<sup>237</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 15-16 and 24-25.

<sup>238</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 24. They continued: 'By Christ, and in the Spirit, we come to the Father. We are baptised into the life of the triune God and live to share God's mission', p.25.

<sup>239</sup> The Declaration's statement on baptism was taken by the Principals to be a fusion of Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 15:3 and possibly Acts 2:38. This section was prepared by Rev. Michael Quicke, Principal of Spurgeon's College, though all the sections were agreed on by the whole group and finally edited by Rev. Dr. Richard Kidd, Principal of Northern Baptist College. See the 'Editor's Introduction', Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 8-9, for the origins and process of compilation of the study. The authors noted that the ordering of the Declaration of Principle placed believers' baptism as a secondary issue dependent on the primary convictions of the absolute authority of Christ, the revelation of scripture and the liberty of each church under the Spirit, 'Our strongest Baptist distinctives lie in our ecclesiology which emerges from our obedience to Christ and our listening to Scripture. It is the radical view of the church, rather than a particular view of baptism that is critical for Baptist principles. Only when we recognise the priority of the Baptist way of being church, can we then make a declaration about the significance of what believers' baptism means about belonging to Christ and joining his church', p.37.

concentrated on Christ's command, Jesus' example and the practice of the early Church that they failed to explain the connection between Christian baptism and the person and work of Christ: 'Practice can be emphasized at the expense of New Testament theology'.<sup>240</sup> The greatest strength of the second principle was that it combined Matthew 28:18-20 with 1 Corinthians 15:3's powerful christological statement, which refused to allow this to happen: 'By all means we should begin with the Great Commission but it is essential that we move on into deeper places of the salvation of Christ and how this relates to baptism itself'.<sup>241</sup> Baptism is immersion in water 'into' not just 'in' the name of the Trinity, which, they believed, indicated 'how much Christian baptism is a personal movement with dynamic incorporation into fresh commitment'. The very word *into* strongly suggested a "'coming-into-relationship with". Something powerful is happening both to the individual concerned, but also to the whole community which itself belongs to the Name'. Baptism into 'the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' enables seeing 'the act of believers' baptism in its profound dimensions as incorporation into rich fellowship with God. Here there is a participation in life in God, a sharing in divine life where water in baptism, and baptism in the Spirit clearly interweave'.<sup>242</sup> This baptism into the Name also provides evidence of ownership, and is also a profession of repentance towards God and faith in Christ, for 'Here is the totality of new birth and new life which immersion in the Name and by the power of the new owner demonstrates', it being a call to a new lifestyle.<sup>243</sup>

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240 The fact that at the close of the period of study, after nearly a century of investigation, there continues to be the maintenance and propagation of a depleted theology and practice of baptism reflects the distance that exists between the most eloquent theologies of baptism and grass-roots belief.

241 Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 39.

242 Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 40-41.

243 Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 41-42. It was this point in particular which was highlighted by George Beasley-Murray in his highly commendatory review of the book, '*Something to Declare*', *BQ* 37.2 (April, 1997), 99-100.

Use of 1 Corinthians 15:3<sup>244</sup> emphasizes that 'the christological heart of baptism is not related to any one single moment of Christ's life. Rather baptism relates to the whole redemptive action of God in Christ involving the cross with his dying for our sins, the burial, and the resurrection'. The second clause of the Declaration uses this passage to define the nature of saving faith in Christ, for it widens the focus beyond just the repentance and faith of the baptized to embrace the whole work of Christ.<sup>245</sup> Baptism, then, is more than a sign, for 'We should anticipate that the Holy Spirit may both give and be given in baptism,' as 'In Scripture, everything that is attributed to faith can be attributed to baptism also: union with Christ, participation in his death and resurrection, becoming a child of God, giving of the Spirit, inheritance of the kingdom and salvation'.<sup>246</sup> The Principals endorsed *Believing and Being Baptized's* description of the interaction between grace and faith as a journey/process which varies from person to person. What is common to the development of all Christians is the three tenses of salvation: *have been saved, being saved, shall be saved*. 'Baptism is then regarded as a decisive moment in the process of being saved, whenever the process of salvation actually began'.<sup>247</sup> The Principals concluded that by its combining part of the Great Commission with the life and work of Christ 'this clause provides a dynamic basis for Baptists as we go on working and thinking through our baptismal life and witness together'.<sup>248</sup>

Dr. Nigel Wright applauded the study though he felt that it highlighted the deficiencies of the Declaration which he believed needed rewriting. On baptism he

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<sup>244</sup> Particularly 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'.

<sup>245</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 43.

<sup>246</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 44. The Principals concurred with *Believing and Being Baptized* which stated: 'As a person comes in faith to the baptismal pool, the triune God meets him or her with a gracious presence which transforms his or her life. Of course, a relationship between the believers and God has already begun before the moment of baptism, but this is now deepened in a special moment of encounter', p.9.

<sup>247</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 44-45.

<sup>248</sup> Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare*, 45.

accused them of 'some fancy footwork to minimise the absolutism of this clause', which, at face value, leaves Baptists and others baptized as believers as the only genuinely baptized people in Christendom. Further, as it defined baptism as necessarily immersion the Mennonites were also excluded. 'Most of us would hold views more nuanced than this. But by a deft movement the Declaration is absolved of its absolutism by redefining the meaning of the word "is". So clause 2 becomes a norm rather than an absolute'.<sup>249</sup>

### A Radical Departure.

*Reflections on the Water*<sup>250</sup> is a radical departure as far as English Baptist work on baptism is concerned in that it is deliberately less biblical and more theological<sup>251</sup> in

<sup>249</sup> N. Wright, 'Declaration of Principle', *BT* August 29, 1996, 6. The second part of this two-part examination of the book was by Rev. Dr. Ted Hale of Abbey Centre BC, Northampton, who criticized the booklet's position on covenant as unbiblical, pp.7 and 12. The only other reference to the booklet is brief mention of it by Rev. Ann Luther of Clapham BC, 'Where do you think you are going?', *Mainstream Newsletter* 58 (January, 1997), 22-24, whose only mention of baptism came in connection with David Coffey and Darrell Jackson's open letter on the decline in the number of baptisms, 'An Open Letter from the Evangelism Office', *BT* October 31, 1996, 5, which itself casts, at the least, shadows of doubt over the effectiveness of this officially sponsored movement towards highlighting and deepening the awareness of Baptist Identity.

<sup>250</sup> Written by six Baptists and one Anglican, *Reflections* was the fruit of a six year period of discussion and mutual reflection, the essays having been designed as a sequence, though this did not mean the contributors agreed on everything, see Fiddes, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, 5. *Reflections* benefits from the addition of a reflection on the essays by the Anglican Professor Christopher Rowland of Oxford University, who described himself as in 'critical solidarity' with the contributions and himself 'an erstwhile crypto-Baptist who has never entirely shed these sympathies', p.6.

<sup>251</sup> This departure from the norm of a biblical approach is made explicit by Fiddes in his 'Introduction', 2, 'Though this is not...a polemical volume, the Baptist essayists do believe that the reflections can best be seen when it is believers who are baptized... The writers are so enthusiastic about the richness of meaning and experience in believers' baptism, that they are bound to point out that this is why Baptists baptize believers *instead of* children, rather than *in addition to* children. In this way they hope to make a contribution to the *ecumenical* debate about baptism through a different strategy from the usual cross-currents of argument about scripture and tradition', italics his. The 'reflections' referred to in the first sentence of the quote are set out on p.1, 'As an event rooted in the material world and in human community, which expresses salvation in Christ and immersion into the very Spirit of God, baptism will reflect the image of the triune God, and it will reflect aspects of society and nature that are His creations. It is these implications that the writers want to follow up. They believe that baptism offers a crucial perspective on God, the natural world, the church, social groups, and politics'. Ellis also made this explicit, Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', 43 n.5, 'Here this exploration takes place within a discussion of historical theology, but a thorough treatment would need to interact more fully with the Bible'. If past experience is anything to go by, this admission will either/or or both/and limit the impact of the book amongst Baptists and be the cause of criticism.

its approach,<sup>252</sup> its aim being to raise the question of what believers' baptism says about the nature of God and the world.<sup>253</sup> Its intended ecumenical significance was brought out by Roger Hayden's reference to the writers' attempt 'to speak about baptism in a different way from the usual ecumenical debate. We aim to place baptism in the context not only of the church but also of the wider society and the natural world, and we believe that this could prove creative, not just for Baptists, but for the whole Church of Christ'.<sup>254</sup>

The tone for all that follows is set in Fiddes' 'Introduction' and his remark that the first six contributors 'are all Baptist ministers, and they gladly affirm that for them the gracious activity of God and human response to His gift of salvation is *best* focused in the baptism of believers, that is, in the baptism of Christian disciples who can make

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<sup>252</sup> As well as the contributions by Christopher Ellis and Paul Fiddes discussed under 'Sacramental Interpretations', Roger Hayden contributed a short history of what happens in the practice of believers' baptism, 'Believers Baptized: An Anthology', 9-21. Brian Haymes developed Fiddes' use of 'conflict' as one of five motifs connected with baptism, in his argument that baptism into Christ has ethical consequences which are both personal and social: an event with political significance, 'Baptism as a Political Act', 69-83. Richard Kidd explored how Baptists can overcome the exclusiveness of believers' baptism, developing his idea that as a 'living sign' and a mark of Christian identity baptism acquires new meanings in different cultural contexts, 'Baptism and the Identity of Christian Communities', 85-99. Hazel Sherman examined the implications of sharing in the life of a personal God, 'Baptized - "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"', 101-16. These were followed by Christopher Rowland's 'A Response: Anglican Reflections', 117-34, and Kidd's 'In Conclusion: Continuing the Dialogue', 135-37.

<sup>253</sup> Fiddes, 'Introduction', 1, italics his. He explained that these 'wider realities...can be seen *reflected in* these waters. As an event rooted in the material world and in human community which expresses salvation in Christ and immersion into the Spirit of God, baptism will reflect the image of the triune God, and it will reflect aspects of society and nature that are His creations'. It is these implications which the writers follow up. A decade earlier Keith Clements in 'Baptism', in C. Davey (ed.), *British and Irish Churches respond to BEM* (1988), 20-21, had written, 'The exposition of baptism in BEM stresses the universal implications for the Christian and the church in the life of the world, the sign of a new life and a new world in the midst of the brokenness of the old, a liberation into a community where the old divisions are being transcended, and a way of life where the will of God is to be realized in every sphere of activity. Relatively few of the British responses have made explicit reference to these dimensions of baptism. The impression overall is that the chief concern about baptism lies in the traditional areas of the relation of the baptized to Christ and to the church, and of the churches to each other, rather than in relation of the baptized to the life of the world as a whole. None of the responses, it appears, reflected on what the ethical dimensions of baptism specifically are in Britain today in our own context of conflict, violence and deprivation... Perhaps reflection on the ethical dimension will be more evident in the "reception" process rather than the "response" stage'.

<sup>254</sup> R. Hayden, 'Believers Baptized: An Anthology', in *Reflections*, 20.

their own profession of faith'.<sup>255</sup> The authors' position here reflects the minority though growing position amongst Baptists that believer's baptism is parallel to infant baptism and confirmation after conversion.<sup>256</sup>

It is impossible to predict the impact *Reflections* might have on the future development of Baptist thought. However, on the basis of the basic direction of Baptist thinking towards a greater openness to discriminate infant baptism and confirmation as a legitimate alternative mode of initiation into the Church, it possesses great potential. But if past experience is anything to go by, many Baptists, the majority of whom are conservative evangelical, are not likely to be happy with its progressive theological approach or its sacramentalism and could well regard it as a piece of esoteric theologizing and give little further thought to it. Time will tell.

The period from 1900 to 1996, then, concluded with three important studies, each of which clearly reflect the fact that Baptist thought on baptism has not only been influenced by ecumenical and theological developments, but has increasingly been seen to provide a Baptist apologetic for the continuation of believer's baptism within the context of the British Church at the close of the twentieth century. *Believing and Being Baptized* is representative of the attempt by Baptists to address the major contemporary ecumenical problem which has arisen because of the diversity of views on Christian initiation, namely re-baptism, and it was written for those Baptists involved ecumenically, containing little that is likely to interest non-ecumenically-minded Baptists. *Something to Declare* is evidence that Baptists are seeking to address the contemporary situation without losing their heritage or compromising their principles. Finally, *Reflections on the Water* is proof that Baptist theologians are

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<sup>255</sup> Fiddes, 'Introduction', 1, italics added. This is immediately followed by, 'But in fact all denominations of the Christian Church, not just Baptists, practise the baptism of believers'. This is too absolute, as the Quakers and Salvation Army do not practise any form of baptism.

<sup>256</sup> Fiddes later writes, 'As society becomes more secular, or multicultural, many of those coming into Christian faith will inevitably be coming within the fellowship of the Church for the first time, and will be baptized as believers. It may well be that the *normal* mode of baptism will soon be as it once was in the early days of the Church, when it was a minority group in the pre-Christian Roman Empire' - Fiddes, 'Introduction', 1, italics added.



not content to be merely reactive in their thinking on baptism, nor are they stuck in a timewarp simply restating the arguments of past generations, but that they wish and are able to think creatively, and therefore able to contribute towards the developments which will take place in both baptismal theology and practice in the twenty-first century. It is also worthy of note that each of these volumes is the result of group study and reflection. The fact that many of the contributors to these three volumes have been involved in at least one<sup>of</sup> the others, and all of the writers are, to varying degrees, either actively involved in or open to ecumenical developments, further supports the contention that the ecumenical dimension has been and continues to be the primary influence on the Baptist theology of baptism and it is ecumenically-minded Baptists who are producing what work there is on baptism. By mid-1997 responses to the three documents have been minimal, which could suggest a relative lack of interest in baptism, despite the renewed interest in so-called 'Baptist Identity' being stressed at the present time by the BU, or it could simply be because all three are recent publications and there has been little time for any response.

## **PART SIX**

### **Chapter Ten**

#### **The Practice of Baptism: 1900-1996.**

The following discussion of the practice of baptism will seek to answer the question of the extent to which the practice of baptism has been affected by the theological and ecumenical developments which have taken place this century.

#### **Introduction**

In 1910 W. T. Whitley rued the fact that, 'Our actual practice as regards baptism itself is not recorded in any history, but is traditional and handed down by eye-sight'. He continued: 'this is a singular omission, and a chapter on what really occurs, and on the variations in practice at various times and places, is badly needed'.<sup>1</sup> Whilst there have been a number of essays and orders of service written discussing and setting out contemporary practices<sup>2</sup> such a study as Whitley envisaged has never been produced.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. T. Whitley, 'The Baptist History We Need (Continued)', *The Fraternal* no. 4.3 (September, 1910), 75.

<sup>2</sup> These Manuals are, G. P. Gould and J. H. Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers* (n.d. [1905]); F. B. Meyer, *Free Church Service Manual* (n.d. [c1911]); M. E. Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual* (n.d. [1927]); D. T. Patterson, *The Call to Worship* (1930); E. A. Payne and S. F. Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* (1960); A. Gilmore, E. Smalley and M. J. Walker, *Praise God. A Collection of Resource Material for Christian Worship* (1980); *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* (Oxford, 1991). It is worth noting that *Come Let Us Worship. A Book of Common Worship for Use in Free Churches*, published by the Kingsgate Press in 1930, with a preface by and so probably edited by F. C. Spurr, contained no service for baptism, though it did contain a service for the Lord's Supper. This is surprising after the Manuals by Gould and Shakespeare and Meyer, each of which, though prepared for use in Free Churches, did include a baptismal service for believers. The first articles to deal with this issue were F. C. Bryan's, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation' in F. C. Bryan (ed.), *Concerning Believers Baptism* (1943), 65-78; B. Green, 'The Authority for Baptising', *The Fraternal* 119 (January, 1961), 19-22; various parts of A. Gilmore (ed), *The Pattern of the Church. A Baptist View* (1963), *passim*; J. R. C. Perkin, 'The Interviewing of Candidates for Baptism and Membership', *The Fraternal* 135 (January, 1965), 23-2. However, these articles discuss contemporary practice not the history and development of the practice of baptism.

<sup>3</sup> The only partial exception to this is Rev. Dr. Raymond Burnish's Nottingham PhD dissertation which was published by the Alcuin Club No.67, *The Meaning of Baptism. A Comparison of the Teaching and Practice of the Fourth Century with the Present Day* (1985), especially chapters 7-8. This study examined in detail Baptist catechetical material produced

The result of all this is that there are many important questions which cannot be properly answered, leaving us with an incomplete picture of the pre-baptismal preparation, the service itself and post-baptismal care. The extant evidence is often incidental and has to be gleaned from a wide variety of sources. Therefore, a caveat on all statements must be made that the evidence adduced for any particular practice of baptism cannot necessarily be taken to have been normative. However, especial weight has been given to those writers whose position put them in a position to have widespread knowledge of denominational practices. Even the use of oral tradition has its limitations, as it too can be highly selective and subjective, and errors occur, particularly relating to date, especially the further back the memories go. With this in mind, however, an attempt has been made to indicate baptismal practice and how some Baptists have sought to apply their theologies of baptism.

### **Pre-Baptismal Preparation.**

There always appears to have been some sort of pre-baptismal procedure to ascertain the fitness of a candidate. In the twentieth century this has taken a number of forms. In 1928 Ronald W. Thomson<sup>4</sup> was interviewed by two deacons who ascertained his suitability for membership and the sincerity of his desire for baptism.<sup>5</sup> In other places the interview would have been taken by the *minister*. A different and probably complementary pattern was followed in the Downs Chapel, Clapton, which, every few years, held a series of special services lasting a week to ten days, intended to quicken and deepen the spiritual life of members, drawing outsiders in and

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between 1960 and 1980 and so partially filled the lacuna identified by Whitley, though it must be noted that Burnish used only a selection of the most common studies.

<sup>4</sup> All recollections from Ronald W. Thomson, who was, after five pastorates, Minute and Committee Secretary of the BU from 1958-60, Assistant General Secretary of the BU from 1960-71 and Secretary of the Psalms and Hymns Trust from 1958-77, are taken from a recorded interview conducted in September 1990.

<sup>5</sup> It was normal practice that interviews for church membership were conducted by several deacons, and it appears that this procedure was often followed with regard to an applicant's suitability for baptism. See Arthur Newton, Treasurer of the LBA, 'The Duties of Deacons and the Method of Their Election', an abbreviated account of a paper presented to the quarterly meeting of the LBA on January 7, 1913, *BT&F* July 11, 1913, 523.

bringing youngsters to a decision for baptism and church membership.<sup>6</sup> However, by far the most common procedure was to use baptismal classes.<sup>7</sup> These have usually been led by the minister and once satisfactorily completed the baptismal service follows, though some have warned that attendance at such classes should not automatically lead to baptism.<sup>8</sup> Baptismal preparation classes are undoubtedly the norm, though they have varied in length and content,<sup>9</sup> and the importance attached to

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- 6 W. M. S. West, *To Be A Pilgrim. A Memoir of Ernest A. Payne* (Guildford, 1983), 9-10. Other meetings too were held, including mid-week Young People's Meetings and mid-week services, during which baptism was one possible subject among many. Shortly after his settling at Bugbrooke and Heyford, probably around early 1929, Ernest Payne himself organized a Wednesday evening young people's class which provided a steady procession of candidates for baptism and church membership, no doubt following the pattern of his earlier experiences of such groups. It is unlikely that Payne was ~~not~~ alone in doing this, see West, *To Be A Pilgrim*, 39.
- 7 R. W. Thomson, September 1990, believed that baptismal classes were not common early in the century. However, it should be noted that his knowledge is mainly of those areas in which he served as minister, in London and the north Midlands, and there is a certain amount of evidence which suggests that baptismal classes were more widespread than he and others believed, though exactly how widespread it is not possible to determine. Eg, in 1927 Wheeler Robinson spoke approvingly of baptismal classes, saying that they were held 'wherever a Baptist minister faithfully discharges his duty', though it was a duty often neglected by ministers. He pressed that they should be held occasionally when needed, giving instruction as to church membership and discipleship, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and in this the minister would follow 'no prescribed form', H. W. Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (1927), 93 and 98 n.1.
- 8 L. H. Marshall warned against making the act of joining the church too easy, expressing his opinion that 'Compulsory attendance at a Church preparation class and baptism at a public service are obstacles that may quite reasonably be placed in the path of the young aspirant to fellowship with the Church of Christ', see 'Baptists and Church Membership', *BT&F* October 31, 1924, 712. It would seem reasonable to infer that the church preparation class spoken of by Marshall contained some teaching on the nature and importance of baptism.
- 9 F. C. Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', in F. C. Bryan (ed.), *Concerning Believers Baptism* (1943), 67, expected such preparation classes to last from 3 to 6 months, a view which had considerably changed twenty years later, when Dr. Morris West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', in A. Gilmore (ed.), *The Pattern of the Church* (1963), 35, envisaged the need for only 3 to 4 classes before baptism and 'a greater number afterwards to make clear to the new church member the responsibilities of belonging to the Church'. E. A. Payne, 'Baptism and Church Membership among the Baptists', *Theology* 55, no.383 (May, 1952), 172, noted the content of these classes as extending 'over many weeks', covering the main Christian doctrines, the principles of Christian conduct, the cultivation of personal religion and the special tenets of the Baptists. R. E. O. White, *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation* (1960), 162-63, proposed that the capacity of the hearer should always govern the length of instruction, and that this would be followed by a course of more advanced instruction which would last indefinitely. In 1981, as part of his doctoral research, Dr. Raymond Burnish surveyed 330 Baptist ministers on the material and practices they adopted, *Meaning of Baptism* (1985), xiii-xiv. The subjects used in the 'syllabuses' either before or after baptism are set out on pp.146-47, and his breakdown of the responses revealed that the number of meetings held before baptism could vary from 1-4 to 10+ and that the duration of pre-baptismal classes could be between 1-6 months, with 'Others' (unspecified) also mentioned and others noting that they varied, p.223 n.4. Burnish, pp.146-66, also provided a detailed

them is reflected by the increasing number of study materials published<sup>10</sup> and privately prepared,<sup>11</sup> and also the care and innovation used.<sup>12</sup> Many of these studies have combined baptismal preparation with preparation for membership<sup>13</sup> and have often also included more general material on Christian discipleship.

Whilst baptismal preparation classes have remained the norm, several have challenged them on the grounds that such a practice is unbiblical, and, in turn, have

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study of both the theology and liturgy of baptism as reflected in the most widely used Baptist catechetical material from 1960-1980.

- <sup>10</sup> The publication of such study materials appears to have arisen largely since the 1950s and has increased significantly in number over the last two decades as the Christian book market has grown rapidly. See S. F. Winward, *The New Testament Teaching on Baptism in the Form of Daily Bible Readings for the Instruction of Candidates for Baptism* (1952), this was revised, updated and edited by Michael Quicke in 1995 as *Countdown to Baptism. The New Testament teaching on baptism in daily readings*, and also Winward *Your Baptism. A booklet for the instruction of candidates for baptism and church membership* (1969); J. R. C. Perkin, *Divine Encounter. An Outline for Discussion of Believer's Baptism* (1965); R. E. O. White, *Invitation to Baptism. A Manual for Inquirers* (1962), and his *Christian Baptism. A Dialogue* (1977); *Church Membership* (1972) and *To Be A Christian* (1981), both published by the Education Committee of the East Midland Baptist Association; David F. Neil, *The Way of Christ. A study booklet for new Church members* (1973); Frank Rinaldi, *Stepping Out. Preparing for believer's baptism*, one of the Bible Society's 'Beginnings' series of study booklets, (1985); *AIM 3. AIM Discipleship* (1992); Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Disciples. A course for new Christians* (1996). One of the most widely used booklets in baptismal preparation has been *Believe and Be Baptized* (1970) by the Brethren writer, Victor Jack, see, eg, J. J. Brown's endorsement of it, 'Booklets for Witnesses...', *BT* March 29, 1973, 4. One further book which deserves mention was written by Rev. Stephen Gaukroger of Stopsley BC, Luton, *Being Baptized* (1993), which was a popular practical guide intended to help baptismal candidates in their personal preparation and also for ministers to use as a basis for preparation classes.
- <sup>11</sup> Many ministers have produced their own study materials, eg, Rev. Lewis Misselbrook, *Food for Faith. A course for converts and others who want to grow in faith and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ* (n.d., probably 1980s); Rev. Harry Godden, 'Baptism in the New Testament and Now', a series of 6 studies which he developed over three pastorates from 1969 to the early 1990s; Rev. Brian Stenner of Welwyn Garden City, 'Baptism and Church Membership Enquirers Class' (1991); and Anthony R. Cross, 'Baptism: A Series of Studies for those baptized on profession of faith' (1996). Burnish, *Meaning of Baptism*, 223 n.4, noted the practice of ministers preparing and using their own material.
- <sup>12</sup> Eg, Dr. Ray Burnish, 'Early risers in the Early Church', *BT* August 18, 1983, 4, who suggested that fresh ideas, perhaps drawn from the baptismal practice of the early Church, might serve to make the preparatory period before baptism even more spiritually significant and encouraging to the candidates.
- <sup>13</sup> This dual preparation was advocated by, eg, West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', 34-35. Liturgically this is witnessed to by a service incorporating baptism with reception into membership at the Lord's Table, often accompanied with the laying on of hands. On this see 'Liturgical Developments' below.

themselves been criticized.<sup>14</sup> George Beasley-Murray maintained that as in the New Testament baptism was the climax of conversion and, as the gospel preceded doctrine, so baptism should precede teaching.<sup>15</sup> Though a number have advocated and practised baptism immediately after conversion, they have been few, even though they have sought to be true to the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', 35, 'Large numbers of Baptist members have come into the Church with all too little preparation. Some, it transpires, have been baptized without any preparation at all and have received little teaching afterwards'.

<sup>15</sup> Beasley-Murray, 'The Sacraments', *The Fraternal* 70 (October, 1948), 3-7. On p.5 he argued that if Baptists feared to baptize converts straightaway, then they needed to recognize that in doing so they had changed the nature of baptism. The New Testament declared that it was the transition of the believer from one world to another, from life estranged from God to life in Christ, and whatever else baptism might bring a year after conversion, it could not bring that. To teach that would be to head for Romanism. But once baptism was regarded as part of conversion, the moment of supreme surrender rather than the expression of a believer's obedience, Baptists would again be free to teach the New Testament doctrine of baptism. L. J. Newman of Truro, 'A Baptismal Candidates Complaint', *BT* April 8, 1948, 6, concurred, urging that belief was the sole requirement for baptism. Preparation classes and visitation for church membership were necessary, but the test for believer's baptism was surely, 'If thou believest with all thy heart, thou canst'. Beasley-Murray developed his views on immediate baptism in his 'The Church of Scotland and Baptism', *The Fraternal* 99 (January, 1956), 9, where he accepted the Report's claims that baptism was a dying with Christ, a union with Him, a recreation in Him, a subjection to His total Lordship over body and soul, only on the condition that 'baptism and conversion be viewed as an indivisible unity of experience'. See also his 'The Saving Experience', *BT* May 7, 1959, 8-9, being an address to the Baptist Assembly; 'The Spirit is There', *BT* December 10, 1959, 8; and *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (1966), 37.

<sup>16</sup> See 'An Impressive Baptism', *BT* October 28, 1943, 5, which reported that after baptizing four candidates, Rev. W. R. Watkins baptized a married woman who had responded to his appeal at Zion church, Forge Side, Blaenavon, on Sunday October 12; W. G. Channon, *Much Water and Believers Only* (1950), 52; S. F. Winward, *New Testament Teaching on Baptism*, 33, 'Baptism should follow on conversion without undue delay', commenting on the baptism of the Philippian jailor and his household in Acts 16:25-34. This practice was, however, repudiated by F. C. Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', in *Concerning Believers Baptism*, 66, 'Better a man should not be baptized than that he be baptized in a hurry, with an imperfect grasp of what it means, and then should fall away'. Channon disagreed, *Much Water*, 20-21, arguing that prompt obedience to baptism would lessen the likelihood of a person falling away; Emily Venis Robinson of Bromley, Kent, 'Adequate Preparation for Baptism', *BT* July 4, 1946, 8, believed that the response to an invitation given at the end of a service should be a private talk with the minister or an experienced member and not immediate baptism. 'Let's have a world-wide day of baptism', *BT* September 6, 1990, 1 and 9, reported a service at Coombe Bissett BC, Salisbury, led by Pastor Ken Davies, in which three were baptized who had been through preparation classes, but a further seven were baptized following an appeal for baptism. This service was arranged to co-incide with the mass baptisms at the 16th BWC in South Korea, see 'Korean Baptismal Service', in Wendy E. Ryan (ed.), *Together in Christ. Official Report of the Sixteenth Congress* (McLean, n.d., but 1990 or 1991), 91-96, [a photograph at the front of the book claims that 8,000 were baptized]. See also the report of the first baptismal service in the Archibald Brown Memorial BC, Clacton-on-Sea on August 11, 1929, when, after baptizing those prepared for baptism, Rev. Daniel Hayes invited others who 'desired publicly to confess Christ in Baptism' to come forward, and a further 14 were baptized immediately, 'An Unusual Baptizing Service', *BT* August 22, 1929, 636.

The most contentious and still unresolved issue is who decides the fitness of a candidate for baptism.<sup>17</sup> Many have maintained the trend evident in the nineteenth century<sup>18</sup> of separating baptism from both the church and membership.<sup>19</sup> They have, though, been strongly challenged by others who have maintained that the application is to be submitted to the church because, in most instances, membership is regarded as following baptism, or that the minister has desired his own judgment to be confirmed by the church.<sup>20</sup> Bernard Green argued from the observation that the Apostles baptized as leaders of the church authorized by Christ, therefore baptism was a church ordinance,<sup>21</sup> and that visitors should be carefully chosen and prepared for their task.<sup>22</sup>

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17 The various procedures were discussed by West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', 36-37.

18 On which see chapter I above.

19 Eg, C. Williams, *The Principles and Practices of the Baptists* (1903<sup>2</sup>), 34-35, who remarked that on the whole Baptist churches did not interfere with the minister's freedom in baptizing those who asked for baptism on profession of their discipleship, adducing support for this from Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and Ananias' baptism of Saul in Acts 9. He added, 'there is nothing in the nature of baptism to make the consent and approval of the church necessary to its validity; and that evangelists may properly claim the right, which was unquestionably exercised by evangelists in the apostolic age, to baptize any individuals who may make to them a credible profession in the Lord Jesus Christ'. See also L. R. Smith, 'A Baptismal Candidates Complaint', *BT* April 8, 1948, 6, according to whom the only suitable interviewer was the minister, as this was a matter between a believer and Christ, and the Pastor was the only one deemed to have sufficient authority to examine a believer's profession of faith.

20 E. A. Payne, 'Baptism and Church Membership among the Baptists', *Theology* 55, no.383 (May, 1952), 171. See also White, *Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, 310 and 313, who argued that the church alone, being the recipient of the authority of Christ, should decide whether to grant baptism in individual cases. See also his *Invitation to Baptism*, 56. Dr. Morris West, *Baptist Principles* (1960), 33, noted with disapproval that some churches allowed people to be baptized at the discretion of the minister without reference to the church meeting, then, at a later date, would ask the meeting to decide the suitability of that person for church membership. 'It is doubtful, in the extreme, whether this reflects the practice of the Apostles - certainly it is against the church practice from the second and third Christian centuries'.

21 Rev. B. Green of Mansfield Road, Nottingham, 'Authority for Baptising', *The Fraternal* 119 (January, 1961), 19-20. According to Green the pattern to be followed ought to be: upon conversion, a person would ask for baptism and be seen by the minister who, through personal interview and/or enquirer's classes, ascertained the genuineness of the confession. The enquirer's name was then taken to the church through the deacon's and church meetings, and a visitor or visitors were appointed. The visitor's task was to obtain the person's testimony, which was then passed on to the church, and to commend the person to the church. At this stage, others and the minister could speak on the person's behalf, then the church would accept the application or not. This ordering ensures that everything is, as it should be, in the setting of the life of the church. Baptism thus becomes in a real way a sacrament of the

A lesser and also unresolved issue is what is the appropriate age for baptism. Consistent with the belief in *believer's* baptism and doctrine of the Church, many have held that when someone is old enough to believe they are also old enough to be baptized, though there have always been a significant number of opponents. Proponents of the former view stress the necessity of faith not age,<sup>23</sup> often referring to 'the years of discretion',<sup>24</sup> and would have whole-heartedly agreed with R. G. Ramsey's statement that, 'as soon as a response has been secured, which is an

church, because the minister at no point acts in his own name but in the name of the church. From the start it is the church which is involved'. Also on the necessity of the church's approval for baptismal candidates, see J. B. Middlebrook, 'Baptism and the Church', in *Concerning Believers Baptism*, 55; C. J. Pike, *Under Christ's Control* (1950), 23. At the reception into membership, which ideally followed baptism and preceded communion, Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 138-39, suggested the minister address the congregation: 'Beloved brethren: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in accordance with the decision of the Church Meeting, we are now to receive into membership...'

22 Green, 'Authority for Baptising', 21-22. Green noted that the office of visitor was under attack, some churches having dispensed with them altogether, others questioning their necessity. Green found biblical justification for visitors in the roles played by Ananias and Barnabas in introducing Saul to the church (Acts 9), and 'Although we cannot argue from this incident that a church visitor was appointed, it is clear that some discussion took place about Saul and his conversion before he was received into the church. The development of the office of visitor within our Baptist churches derives from such records'. 'Baptism then takes place on the authority of Christ, given to the church and expressed through the action taken on its behalf by the minister and visitors, as authorised by the church meeting'. Three valuable by-products followed: a fuller meaning to baptism; a stronger conception of church membership; and a truer understanding of the pastoral responsibilities of the church. Green also stated that he would not withhold baptism from someone if he and the church were sure 'as far as is humanly possible' that the candidate was genuinely converted. With this assurance, the church would be able to give its blessing and welcome, and the candidate could proceed at once to baptism and reception into membership. J. R. C. Perkin, 'Interviewing of Candidates for Baptism and Membership', *The Fraternal* 135 (January, 1965), 23, advocated the combined visitation for the purpose of baptism and membership, and criticized those churches who took a more casual approach to this matter, stressing that their appointment required careful consideration, and that interviews be thorough and meaningful and reports frank and helpful. On the responsibilities of visitors see, eg, Rev. J. O. Barrett, *Suggestions for Visitors to Candidates for Church Membership* (n.d.), a copy of which has not been located [on Barrett see E. A. Payne's biographical booklet, *A 20th Century Minister. John Oliver Barrett, 1901-1978* (privately printed, n.d.); and E. A. Payne, 'John Oliver Barrett, 1901-1978', *The Fraternal* 183 (March, 1978), 27-30]; and Fred Bacon, *Church Administration* (1981<sup>1</sup>), 44-45.

23 Eg, C. F. Aked, minister at the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, New York, formerly minister at Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, 'The Place of Baptists in the Life of the World', *BT&F* June 12, 1908, 415; C. Williams and W. T. Whitley, *A Baptist Catechism* (n.d.), 10, being a penny tract revised by Dr. Whitley; T. V. Tymms, *The Evolution of Infant Baptism and Related Ideas* ([1912]), 500-01; F. C. Spurr, 'A Baptist Apologetic For To-day. IV - Our Present Positive Message', *BT* November 5, 1925, 784; Dr. Charles Brown, 'Dr. Whale and Infant Baptism', *BT* February 19, 1942, 88; Pike, *Under Christ's Control*, 10; Mr. Richard Terry, 'The proper age for baptism?', *BT* August 8, 1974, 6.

24 Eg, F. C. Bryan, 'The Sacraments', in F. C. Bryan *et al*, *Things Most Surely Believed* (1944), 72. That this line of reasoning has a lower, though unfixed, limit is reflected in the anonymous writer who queried the baptism of a 6 year old asking whether it could have reached 'years of



intelligent, if simple, acceptance of the Gospel. the individual has reached the stage at which the New Testament says baptism can be administered'.<sup>25</sup> When a youth has been baptized many have distinguished between baptism and participation in church business,<sup>26</sup> though Dr. George Beasley-Murray declared that, whatever the age for baptism, 'the time for joining the church is surely at baptism', because there was no theological, scriptural justification or even practical necessity for its delay, for 'To be baptized to Christ is to be baptized to his Body. And to be accepted by Christ into his church, but not by the local church in which one is baptized, would be preposterous'.<sup>27</sup> Others have avoided discussion of a specific age for practical and pastoral reasons, preferring instead to look at each case on its own terms.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the view that faith not age is determinative for baptism has dominated the written sources throughout the century, much practice is unwritten and many pre-teen youths have been deferred from baptism until teenage years.<sup>29</sup> In recent years

discretion', see 'Baptism', *BT* July 14, 1988, 11. Southern Baptists are known to baptize children at this sort of age, a practice which has not been repeated in Britain.

- 25 R. G. Ramsey, 'Baptism and the Great Commission', in Bryan (ed.), *Concerning Believers Baptism*, 37. So too Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 17, stressed that it was not adult baptism but 'the baptism of those who are committed to following Jesus and who want to be obedient by being baptized', and that these could be teenagers or children 'but they could not be babies, because babies are incapable of such commitment'.
- 26 J. Mountain, *My Baptism and What Led to It* ([1904]), 121. He then quoted approvingly Spurgeon's comment that 'they ought not to be permitted to take part in the business of their church, until they have reached years of maturity'.
- 27 G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'A Baptist Interpretation of the Place of the Child in the Church', *Foundations* 8 (April, 1965), 157-58. After discussing various arguments for the right age for the baptism of the young, for whom alone age was a problem, he concluded, 'There is no theological bar to a child with a faith being baptized, and in a secularized world that is loaded against a life of faith in God there is much to be said for taking the yoke of Christ in early days'. Thus, there existed no 'proper age for a declaration of faith', if by that was meant 'a standard age at which to be baptized and join the church. The age for a declaration of faith is the time when one has a faith to declare, and that varies immensely'. True faith had to be discerned, and the difficulty that this brings to ministers led Beasley-Murray to appeal to the idea of the catechumenate, pp.158-59. See also Beasley-Murray's *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (1966), 106-07. For a similar position see West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', 37-38.
- 28 Eg, Channon, *Much Water*, 22 and 24, who, generally speaking, felt it inadvisable to baptize anyone until they were in their teens, though it would be 'folly to lay down any hard and fast rules', for each case needed to be considered on its own merits.
- 29 Eg, Jackie Butler who sought baptism at Wallingford BC, Oxfordshire, when she was converted aged 9 but baptism was constantly put off until she was 12. Her father, the church

psychological and developmental studies have been used to justify such a position. Terry Griffiths emphasized a converted and committed discipleship, therefore late adolescence was the generally normative age at which baptism was appropriate, it being 'an inappropriate response for children to make'.<sup>30</sup> Griffiths rejected the argument of an 'age of understanding' or 'years of discretion', usually reckoned to occur in early adolescence (12 to 15 years), stating that these fit better with the individualistic and atomistic spirit of Western culture, which has also contributed towards the acceptance of the modern practice of divorcing baptism from membership, something he also rejected. Instead, he favoured the emphasis on reaching an 'age of responsibility' (between 15 and 18 years of age). The decision to baptize in adolescence involved both the individual and corporate dimensions, an owned faith being prerequisite, and for there to have been some resolution of the quest for personal identity marked by the abandonment of an affiliative faith and for cognisance to have been taken of the consequences of this once-for-all act. 'Youthful desire and enthusiasm are not enough to qualify for baptism'. Whilst each case needed to be judged on its own merits as individuals varied greatly in their maturity, his argument indicated late rather than early adolescence.<sup>31</sup> In agreement, Paul Beasley-Murray declared his own view that 'it is not sufficient for a prospective baptismal candidate to love Jesus as their Saviour - rather they must be able to own him as Lord', which itself should involve some understanding of the call for discipleship to be the costly way of the cross. Mid-adolescence, then, 'might be regarded as the

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secretary at the time but now minister at Ferndown United Church, Bournemouth, Rev. Godfrey Butler, reported that such a delay of baptism was the norm. Details from discussion with Mrs. Jackie Cross and Rev. Godfrey Butler. Though just one example this seems to be common practice which goes back many years.

<sup>30</sup> Griffiths, *The Case for Believers Baptism* (1990), 51-55, quote from p.51.

<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, *Case for Believers Baptism*, 54-55. In this, Griffiths was making a radical departure from the majority opinion, elevating maturity of faith over simple faith, and certainly running the risk of separating conversion from baptism.

earliest period when baptism might be meaningful, rather than any other earlier stage'.<sup>32</sup>

Such views, however, go against the normal practice which is witnessed to ~~the~~ by the fact that many Baptists, including many leading figures, have been baptized between the ages of 8 and 15.<sup>33</sup> This issue, though sometimes vigorously debated, remains an open one, with the continued practice of the different options by different ministers and churches.

### **The Baptismal Service.**

In 1927 Wheeler Robinson observed that Baptists had no prescribed form for either communion or baptism, or worship in general,<sup>34</sup> a point confirmed in 1979 by Ernest Payne's comment that 'Baptists have no standard, authorized procedure'.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Dakin reported that baptism was normally preceded by a preaching service, which would comprise a special word of exhortation to the candidates or a special presentation of the gospel or an exposition of the meaning of baptism. He also remarked that, 'Naturally, in the years, experience has fixed the details of the ceremony so that in a well-conducted church it proceeds reverently and without unseemliness', and the

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32 Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon's College, 'Children, Faith and the Church', *BT* March 12, 1992, *II*.

33 Eg, Dr. Townley Lord who was 11, see R. Terry, 'The proper age for baptism?' *BT* August 8, 1974, 6; Dr. Ernest Payne was 15, see West, *To Be A Pilgrim*, 10; Dr. Derek Tidball was also 11, see Patricia Raven, 'We have lost our bridges to the outside world. Profile of the President', *BT* May 3, 1990, 10. Several correspondents in 1970 noted the baptism of believers from the ages of 8 (to over 80), see the various contributors, 'Baptised at 8 - and over', *BT* July 16, 1970, 3; 'St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex', *BT* November 10, 1994, 16, which reported the baptism of Rebekah and James Wilson, aged 9 and 10, by their parents Richard and Anna Wilson, Richard being an elder in the church.

34 Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 118.

35 E. A. Payne, 'Baptists and Christian Initiation', *BQ* 26.4 (October, 1975), 147. This view was earlier expressed by Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 74, 'there is considerable variety of practice among ministers as to the nature of the service and the mode of administration'; and was independently substantiated by the study of A. E. Peaston, *The Prayer Book Tradition in the Free Churches* (1964), 122, who stated, 'Baptists...have never displayed any real liking for prayer-book worship', and this despite moves in the liturgical direction by an increasing number of Baptists, particularly 'ecumenical' Baptists.

variations did not matter 'so long as the main symbolism...is retained'.<sup>36</sup> However, it would seem reasonable that the increasing number of printed orders of service and Ministers' Manuals and the inroads of the liturgical movement into Baptist life<sup>37</sup> have influenced a growing number of ministers and churches towards a more standardized form of service or at least put down in print what was already a fairly common order, though these statements cannot be made into generalizations.

The time of the baptismal service, as so many details, has varied greatly. Regarded as primarily a public witness,<sup>38</sup> it has been held on Sunday mornings or Sunday evenings,<sup>39</sup> sometimes even in the afternoon,<sup>40</sup> or at which ever service was believed

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36 A. Dakin, *The Baptist View of Church and Ministry* (1944), 32-33.

37 See the section below on 'Liturgical Developments'.

38 L. H. Marshall, 'Baptists and Church Membership', *BT&F* October 31, 1924, 712, described baptism as 'a public service', a declaration of the gospel, possessing evangelistic qualities and a church rite. Some, though, opposed weeknight services, eg. A. C. Underwood, 'Conversion and Baptism', in J. H. Rushbrooke (ed.), *The Faith of the Baptists* ([1926]), 34, who exhorted Baptists to 'make more of believer's baptism, not less. Let it not be administered, except for special reasons, at a week-night service, as though it were something that needed to be tucked away in a corner'. Others opposed week-night services because they were poorly attended, eg. the letters by Robert Anderson and John Benoy, 'Baptismal Services', *BT&F* September 13, 1901, 622, the latter himself having been baptized on a Wednesday evening in 1859, and Melville Evans, 'Our Baptist Testimony', *BT* July 25, 1935, 552. However, Rev. M. J. Sheen of Halesowen, 'Baptisms', *BT* September 20, 1990, 15, took exception to the public baptisms of the 10,000 baptized at the 1990 Baptist World Congress in Seoul, South Korea, arguing that in the New Testament references to baptism as a 'public witness' were noticeable by their absence. This was a response to David Coffey's comment on the event (which he had attended), reported in 'Moving witness', *BT* August 30, 1990, 3, 'If, amongst other things, baptism is meant to be a public witness then this was the most public witness that one could wish for'. The biblical basis for this view of a public witness, however, was supported by Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray's remark that, 'In many of our churches baptism is seen as first and foremost a public confession of faith. While this is certainly an element in Christian baptism (see 1 Tim 6:12), it is only part of what baptism is all about, as Rom 6:3-4 would clearly indicate', in 'Reforming baptism', *BT* February 28, 1991, 11. This understanding of baptism represents the mainline Baptist view, see also the report heading 'From *public* baptism to service overseas', *BT* September 20, 1990, 13, italics added.

39 Bryan White, details of whom are unknown, 'Let's put baptism back in its place', *BT* August 9, 1979, 6, who argued that, because baptism was often followed by reception into membership and communion, it was more convenient to hold the service in the morning, preferably at a family service so the whole church fellowship could attend.

40 As at Southwick, Wiltshire, in the historic open air baptistry, at 3pm, followed by a tea and a 5pm consecration service in the church, 'We'll be baptised in the open, they decided', *BT* July 4, 1968, 1. See also the report of the service, 'Seven Baptised in Historic Baptistry', *BT* July 18, 1968, 1, the service having been conducted by Rev. David Fraser on Sunday July 14.

would have the largest congregation.<sup>41</sup> Whilst many advocated Sunday, others supported mid-week baptismal services,<sup>42</sup> and others recognized the appropriateness of Easter Sunday morning.<sup>43</sup> The norm has been for baptisms to be the climax of a service, though, as with communion, some churches have held them after the close of the main service.<sup>44</sup>

The most important part of any baptismal service has been the candidate's profession of faith. This has taken various forms: either through a formal personal testimony,<sup>45</sup> or in the form of questions put to the candidate by the presiding

<sup>41</sup> Eg, F. C. Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 74. Sunday evening was also favoured for this reason by Cyril Black, 'If I Were Dictator of the Baptist Denomination', *BT* March 28, 1940, 201; Rev. Ralph W. A. Mitchell, 'The Evangelistic Use of the Baptismal Service', *BT* December 16, 1943, 6.

<sup>42</sup> See Douglas Jackman, 'An Open Letter to a Pastor from the Parent of a Baptismal Candidate', *BT* December 3, 1936, 43, who thanked a compliant minister for acceding to his wish for 'a simple weeknight service' to avoid 'the inquisitive crowd, gaping and tittering, drawn by a throw-away handbill, making a solemn and beautiful service a circus spectacle rather than... "a meeting for worship"'. In the 1930s under F. T. Lord, Bloomsbury Chapel held Thursday night baptismal services, information verbally from Mrs. Marjorie Wilkerson (née Brown), a member of Zion BC, Cambridge, who was baptized at Bloomsbury in 1930. See also Hugh C. C. McCullough of Pier Avenue BC, Clacton-on-Sea, 'Baptism and Evangelism', *BT* March 1, 1945, 6, who stressed baptism's role as an evangelistic witness, and also advocated open air baptismal services at least once a year; Boston BC in Lincolnshire, altered the time of its service so that other churches could attend, 'Mid-week Baptism so others could attend', *BT* February 4, 1965, 12.

<sup>43</sup> This practice was followed by Rev. Cecil Thompson of Clarence Park, Weston-super-Mare, Rev. William J. Griffiths of Rumney Cardiff, and Rev. Donovan Evening of London Road, Portsmouth, as noted by G. Henton Davies, at the time tutor of Bristol Baptist College, 'Easter Baptisms', *BT* May 7, 1942, 224. Davies here called for all Baptist churches to open their baptistries the following Easter Sunday morning and communicate the new members in the evening.

<sup>44</sup> So Patterson, *Call to Worship*, 156, 'If the service is to take place at the end of the morning or evening worship', and he then suggested that the minister reads some Scripture to start the baptismal service. This practice was censured by the Editor of 'The Christian Advocate', 'A Liturgical Scholar on Baptism', *BT* January 14, 1943, 5.

<sup>45</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers* (1992), 14, 'it is customary in many Baptist churches for baptismal candidates to give personal "testimonies" to God's saving power in their own lives: for, although baptism itself is a confession of faith, it is considered good to give opportunity for candidates to articulate this confession and tell what Christ means to them'. See also Channon, *Much Water*, 63; 'Boatman's Happy Day', *BT* May 17, 1990, 11; 'Testimony to the changes', *BT* August 23, 1990, 3; 'Advanced years no barrier to baptism', *BT* September 20, 1990, 13. Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 33, advocated a personal testimony but also noted that under the strain of the event, some 'sensitive candidates' might wish to make their verbal testimony by means of responding to a question. Rev. Ralph W. A. Mitchell, 'The Evangelistic Use of the Baptismal Service', *BT* December 16, 1943, 6, also suggested the use of questions for the sensitive candidate unable to give their own testimony. Gaukroger, *Being*

minister,<sup>46</sup> and not infrequently both.<sup>47</sup> This has been followed by a 'formula' spoken over the candidate immediately prior to the act of (single) immersion,<sup>48</sup> which incorporates reference to the Trinity, following Matthew 28:19. Typical is that suggested by Payne and Winward: 'On thy profession of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen'.<sup>49</sup> It has also been the practice of some to give a

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*Baptized*, 41-43, set out some practical advice on preparing a testimony, and highlighted it as an effective evangelistic tool, pp.49-50.

- <sup>46</sup> Such questions were first recorded in Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 132. To those being baptized the minister says: 'Forasmuch as you now present yourselves for Baptism, it is necessary that you sincerely give answer, before God and his Church, to the questions which I now put to you'. Then to each candidate: 'Do you make profession of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?...I do... Do you promise, in dependence on divine grace, to follow Christ and to serve him for ever in the fellowship of his Church?...I do'. See also Gilmore, Smalley and Walker, *Praise God*, 139; *Patterns and Prayers*, 100-01; Gethin Abraham-Williams and Keith G. Jones, 'The Baptist Union of Great Britain', in E. Welch and F. Winfield, *Travelling Together* (1995), 72-73, originally published as 'The Baptist Union' in the CCLEPE document *Ministry in Local Ecumenical Projects* (1985), 34-37 (being included amongst unofficial statements written by officers of the main denominations on behalf of their traditions). No such questions were included in the earlier manuals which suggests that this practice either originated in the latter half of the century, or only became common in mid-century. The latter, more cautious, conclusion is to be preferred as it is well-known that just because a practice is unrecorded does not mean it was unknown, simply that sources for it have not survived/been found.
- <sup>47</sup> Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 43-44, commented that, 'Sometimes, in addition to giving a testimony (or instead of it) the baptism candidate may be asked to make certain promises...'
- <sup>48</sup> F. F. Whitby, *Baptists Principles from a Layman's point of view* ([1908]), 66, made explicit that there was only one single immersion as opposed to the triple immersion practised in the Greek Orthodox Church, which he viewed as a corruption of the ordinance.
- <sup>49</sup> Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 133. See also Gould and Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers*, 47; F. B. Meyer, *Free Church Service-Manual*, 26; Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 33; D. T. Patterson, *Call to Worship*, 158; Gilmore, Smalley and Walker, *Praise God*, 139; *Patterns and Prayers*, 101. A trinitarian form for the questions was also advocated by Stephen Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', *The Fraternal* 123 (January, 1962), 11, who followed this with a vow of allegiance. Rev. A. J. Barnard, who moved from Victoria Street, Windsor, to Hall Green, Birmingham, in 1947, 'The Use of Symbols in the Baptist Church', *The Fraternal* 64 (April, 1947), 16, spoke of his use of three questions. The first concerned faith in the triune God, the second concerned repentance and faith, the third concerned fellowship in the church.

promise to each candidate,<sup>50</sup> a passage of scripture intended to be of encouragement and guidance to them.<sup>51</sup>

For over half a century ministers have dressed formally for baptism, either in waterproofs and gown or simply the gown,<sup>52</sup> and formal baptismal wear appears to have been the norm for candidates too.<sup>53</sup> But since about the 1960s,<sup>54</sup> and a growing

- <sup>50</sup> Channon, *Much Water*, 63; P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity*, 107. This has been the regular practice of, eg. Rev. D. Keith Blades at New Road BC, Bromsgrove, 1978-96, though how far back it goes is unknown.
- <sup>51</sup> Several Baptists have also reintroduced the ancient practice of including the renunciation of the devil/evil in the baptismal service. See S. F. Winward, *Your Baptism* (1969), 45, in the form of the question, 'Do you turn to God in Christ, repent of your sins and renounce evil?' He was supported by R. F. G. Burnish, 'Baptismal Preparation - Past, Present and ...?', *The Fraternal* 195 (April, 1981), 13-14; also N. Wright, *The Fair Face of Evil. Putting the Power of Darkness in its Place* (1989), 125.
- <sup>52</sup> The waterproofs consisted of baptizing trousers with galoshes, waterproof vests with sleeves and a baptising gown, with the option of waterproof sleeves, see eg. the advertisements in *BH* 1929, xi; 'Baptismal Outfits', *BH* 1938, XXIII, which also referred to candidates' gowns in black or white; 'Henry Keen', *BH* 1940, XL; and Rev. Sidney H. Davies of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 'Baptismal Outfit Wanted', *BT* June 26, 1947, 7.
- <sup>53</sup> Candidates' gowns could be either black or white, see the advertisement in *BH* 1929, xi. Joy Males, 'Whatever shall I wear?', *BT* July 25, 1985, 6, recollected white gowns for women made of heavy winceyette that did not become transparent, with painted wooden buttons down the front. Others, she noted, recalled gowns of 'sombre black' with detachable white collars, buttoned high at the neck, of 'puritanical appearance' and not very practical. Many of the women's gowns were weighted down, some had loops to slip around the ankle. Perkin, 'The Principles and Practice of Believers' Baptism', *BT* June 11, 1959, 6, recommended that candidates wore white, with the men wearing black gowns and the women three-quarter length royal blue cloaks, decorated in silver with the Kai-Rho. Perkin cannot here be taken to be representative in these views, but was clearly influenced by liturgical developments and other traditions. However, male candidates in the early decades of the century could also wear casual clothes, so R. W. Thompson, September 1990, who recalled that most churches owned heavy white cloth garments, weighted around the hems for the women, whilst men and boys were allowed to wear flannel trousers and a tennis shirt.
- <sup>54</sup> The date cannot be accurately determined, but the 1960s saw a marked shift towards the wearing of casual clothes. The charismatic movement (which originated in the early 60s) has greatly influenced Baptist churches and has also led to less emphasis on what is worn in church, the idea of 'Sunday best' being an idea which has all but disappeared, it now being spoken of generally only by the older generations.

casualness of dress within society,<sup>55</sup> particularly for men,<sup>56</sup> the move has been for ministers and candidates to dress down.<sup>57</sup> The overwhelming bulk of the discussion of baptismal wear has revolved around practical issues, with little attempt to use robes to enhance the meaning of the rite.<sup>58</sup>

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55 The movement towards a greater casualness could already be seen in the 1940s with F. C. Bryan's comment, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 72, that 'girls' were to wear simple white dresses, whilst 'men' should wear a simple black gown. Later he wrote, 'The voluminous white garments of antique pattern and the rusty black clothes, almost green with age, in vogue still in some churches should surely be scrapped. It prevents young people from being at their ease if they are unbecomingly dressed, and it is a reflection on what the Church deems fitting. See Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 'What to wear', 45-46, 'these days people are usually baptized in their own clothes'.

56 Joy Males, 'Whatever shall I wear?', *BT* July 25, 1985, 6, lamented that men continued to wear white shirts and trousers and jeans, and remarked that in the mid-1980s women's gowns tended to be made of Italian cotton, reflecting the fact that it is still common for women to wear special baptismal dresses of thick white material and weighted at the hem, though many also dressed down. Abraham-Williams and Jones, 'The Baptist Union of Great Britain', 72, reported that women dress in a simple gown with weighted hems and the men wear white shirts and trousers.

57 Ron Meloy, Secretary of Central BC, Stratford, London, 'Baptismal Waders', *BT* June 9, 1994, 9, reported the continued use of black waders and gown by their minister, Rev. K. D. Saunders (a non-accredited minister) and appealed for help in purchasing new waders, which he had discovered, after consulting the LBA, BU and advertisements in the *BT*, were no longer made. He noted the rarity of this, 'I gather these days that ministers and pastors do not wear any special attire for baptism'. This is supported from countless photographs which appear in the *BT* every year. Others, whilst clearly a minority, still 'dress up', eg, Rev. Chris Ellis of Cemetery Road, Sheffield, who wears a white gown, see the report and photograph in 'Zairean Baptism in UK', *BT* June 20, 1996, 16.

58 An exception to this was Ray Burnish, 'White robes told of new life', *BT* September 8, 1983, 4, who argued that white robes enhanced the meaning of baptism because, though purely symbolic, they speak of purity and new life.



It is clear that the minister, as the representative of the church,<sup>59</sup> has ordinarily been the administrant of baptism,<sup>60</sup> though, with a few exceptions,<sup>61</sup> Baptists have permitted the 'lay' administration of the rite,<sup>62</sup> particularly when there was no minister or no minister could be found to conduct the service, in which case it was possible for a deacon, elder or perhaps lay preacher, appointed by the church meeting, to conduct the baptism.<sup>63</sup> Whilst offensive to their ecumenical partners who do not accept the lay

<sup>59</sup> 'The Baptist Doctrine of the Church', *BQ* 12.12 (October, 1944), 444, 'It is the church which preaches the Word and celebrates the sacraments, and it is the church which, through pastoral oversight, feeds the flock and ministers to the world. It normally does these things through the person of its minister, but not solely through him. Any member of the church may be authorised by it, on occasion, to exercise the functions of the ministry, in accordance with the principle of the priesthood of all believers, to preach the Word, to administer baptism, to preside at the Lord's table...'. C. Williams, *Principles and Practices (1903)*, 19 and 34-35, argued that the lay administration of baptism proved that baptism was not a saving ordinance and that evangelists such as Philip and Ananias, could legitimately claim the right to administer baptism which supported his own argument that baptism was not a church rite.

<sup>60</sup> See the Minister's manuals all of which refer to the minister, eg, Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 25-33, and Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 127-35.

<sup>61</sup> Eg, J. H. Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads* (1918), 158-59, who, in his desire for unity and citing the Committee on Faiths' article on the ministry (Oxford, 1916), envisioned that the 'ministration of the Sacraments' would have to be carried out by an ordained minister. It is quite possible, however, that the theory was one thing but the actual practice another; and Neville Clark, at the time minister of Amersham-on-the-Hill Free Church, 'The Fulness of the Church of God', in Gilmore (ed.), *Pattern of the Church*, 109, believed that 'only the ordained minister, called, trained, tested, and commissioned, may rightly preach the liturgical sermon and dispense the dominical sacraments'. R. W. Thomson, September 1990 interview, recalled that the conducting of baptism in and around the London area, often in line with the Spurgeon tradition, was always conducted by a minister. During an interregnum a deacon was often asked to conduct the communion, yet at no time, he said, was a deacon encouraged to conduct a baptism. It is possible, then, that this procedure could have been more widespread than the number of extant sources suggest.

<sup>62</sup> So W. T. Whitley, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments* (1903), 72-73 and 244; Whitby, *Baptist Principles*, 54-55 and 71; T. V. Tymms, *The Evolution of Infant Baptism and Related Ideas* ([1912]), 500; F. B. Meyer, *Peter, Fisherman, Disciple, Apostle* (n.d. [1919]), 169; Robinson, *Life and Faith of the Baptists*, 124. Baptists also maintained the legitimacy of the lay administration of the Lord's Supper, see, eg, T. R. Glover, *The Free Churches and Re-Union* (Cambridge, 1921), 43-44, and G. Laws, 'Baptists and Their Ministry. Reflections of Dr. T. R. Glover's Articles', *BT&F* December 21, 1923, 882.

<sup>63</sup> Whitley, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 102, stated that there was a convenience and orderliness in having baptism and communion administered as a rule by ministers but there was no reason or scriptural precedent for confining it to them, see also pp.121, 133 and 176. See also the 1938 *Reply of the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland to the letter of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches*, appendix C, 'Christian Reunion', in E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers* (1952<sup>2</sup>), 150; Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 72-76, and also his 'The Sacraments', in Bryan *et al*, *Things Most Surely Believed*, 73-74; Dakin, *Baptist View of the Church and Ministry*, 41; Theodore M. Bamber, 'The LBA President On Baptist Belief', *BF* April 18, 1946, 6; *The Doctrine of the Ministry* (1961), 16.

administration of baptism <sup>except in extremis</sup> the practice is wholly consonant with the Baptist belief in the priesthood of all believers.<sup>64</sup>

It would seem that for the larger part of the century ministers administered baptism unassisted, the only help being from assistants, probably deacons, who would help the candidates to and from the water,<sup>65</sup> though sometimes the candidates have chosen their own assistants.<sup>66</sup> However, over the last two decades it has increasingly become the practice for the minister to be assisted in the baptistry, though it is unclear precisely when this began.<sup>67</sup>

The commonest mode of immersion was reported by Bryan who said that the candidate is 'lowered into the water so that he lies down face upward, with the water

<sup>64</sup> Eg, Rev. William H. Jones of Woodborough Road, Nottingham, 'The Priesthood of All Believers', *BT* May 1, 1930, 309. Advocacy and defence of the legitimacy of the lay administration of baptism also supported the Baptist rejection of sacerdotalist claims which had been pressed to such effect by the Tractarians and which was one of the disagreements Baptists had with the reunion movement in general and the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 in particular. Baptists would not relinquish their position in favour of a sacerdotalist understanding of either the ministry or the sacraments, see 'The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland', in L. Hodgson (ed.), *Convictions* ([1934]), 63, 'We do not confine the administration of Sacraments to ordained ministers'. (The text continues, 'nor stipulate for the laying on of hands'). See also the similar points made by S. J. Price, 'Laymen and Reunion', *BQ* 5.7 (July, 1931), 291-92 and 294.

<sup>65</sup> So Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 73, 'The only movement in the building should be at the baptistry, and the only persons in any central or conspicuous position, the candidates and the minister'. It is unclear whether this is the meaning of Jamie Wallace's comment that the deacons' privilege included 'assisting at Baptisms', though this could mean assisting in the actual act of baptism. See Jamie Wallace, *Someone is Watching You* (1965), 16. This is supported by photographs of baptismal services, eg, the picture accompanying the report of the first televised baptismal service from Richmond BC, Liverpool, which took place on May 31, 1959, on the ABC channel. The picture has Rev. Stanley Turl of West Ham Central Mission above the baptistry in the pulpit, and Rev. Kenneth Witting, minister of the church, in the baptistry (the Rev. Ronald Goulding of Haven Green BC, Ealing, introduced the service), see 'First Ever Baptist Service on Television', *BT* June 4, 1959, 1; and the widely used picture of a 1965 baptism in the open baptistry at Southwick, Wiltshire, reproduced in Faith Bowers' *Who are the Baptists?* (1978), and also in Roger Hayden's CTP manual *English Baptist History and Heritage* (1990), 100. (Details and dates of all televised Baptist baptismal services up to that time were reported in 'First TV baptism', *BT* April 11, 1996, 8).

<sup>66</sup> Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 48, called them the towel holders. See also J. R. C. Perkin, 'The Principles and Practice of Believers' Baptism', *BT* June 11, 1959, 6.

<sup>67</sup> This is supported by numerous photographs accompanying the reports of baptismal services in the *BT*. Eg, 'Back to the pool seventy years on', *BT* September 14, 1989, 3; 'Tennis player baptised', *BT* July 25, 1991, 16; 'Baptised in the pool he built', *BT* June 1, 1995, 16.

just flowing over him, as if he were being laid in a grave'.<sup>68</sup> However, some have baptized the candidate kneeling, the head bowing forward into the water 'as if bowing in utter surrender and submission',<sup>69</sup> and it was not unknown for the candidates, with the minister's hand on their head, to be gently pressed down into the water.<sup>70</sup> Whichever method was adopted, Bryan pleaded, 'let the movements be reverent and dignified, without jerkiness, plunging, or any other uncouthness that would mar the suggestiveness of the symbolism - a believer being buried to a life of sin and self, and rising from the grave to a new life in Christ'.<sup>71</sup> On occasions, due to special circumstances (usually age, infirmity and/or illness), candidates would be baptized by affusion, water being taken from the baptistry and poured over the head.<sup>72</sup>

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68 Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 75-76, who referred to this as 'The mode of baptizing common amongst us'. See also Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 31 and 47.

69 See also Rev. Ernest Price of the Church of the Redeemer, Birmingham, 'The Mode of Baptism', *BT* February 11, 1943, 6, who was supported by Dr. William Robinson, the Churches of Christ Principal of Overdale College, Birmingham, but opposed by Rev. Fred H. King of Worthing, 'The Mode of Baptism', *BT* February 25, 1943, 4, 'As the body of Jesus was reverently laid in the garden, so the disciple commits himself absolutely to the hands of the baptiser, as he is reverently laid in the watery tomb, to be immediately followed by the resurrection to newness of life'. Rev. George E. Page of London (details of whom are unknown: he does not appear to have been accredited or even perhaps BU), 'The Mode of Baptism', *BT* December 6, 1945, 6, noted that the prone position had been introduced by Rev. S. Blundell in 1897, and that at times ministers had placed their hands on the candidate's neck and gently lowered them forward. Rev. Walter Fancutt of Andover, 'Testimonies to Baptism', *BT* December 27, 1945, 6, reported that he had been baptized by Rev. W. A. Phillips at Farnborough in 1932, in the kneeling position (in the Paulician manner) going forward, and that this had been Phillips' normal method. R. Burnish, 'Backwards or forwards?', *BT* September 1, 1983, 4, claimed that kneeling represented homage to Christ. Though the physical method did not effect baptism, he remarked that the method was probably chosen by the minister with reference to the shape of the baptistry. He also noted candidates baptizing themselves at the minister's direction. Kneeling was also shown in a photograph attributed to the 'late 1960s' which accompanied Dr. Arnold Baines' 'The Laying on of Hands', *BT* December 9, 1993, 12; and reported in A. Correspondent, 'As three young people make their witness', *BT* May 30, 1974, 1, the report of the open air baptism of three students from Sussex University.

70 So in a picture from Newbury BC, accompanying the write-up, 'Baptistry used - after 70 years', *BT* March 18, 1965, 7.

71 Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 76. He continued, 'So administered the rite can be profoundly impressive. It has been used by God again and again as a means of grace to the candidates and a means of bringing others to decision for Christ and to incorporation into His Church'.

72 See 'Testimony to the Changes', *BT* August 23, 1990, 3, being an account of 91 year old Sophie Leal's baptism at Willesden Green BC, baptized by the minister, Rev. Philip Robinson. This led to the baptism of two other elderly people at Burnham-on-Crouch BC, by Rev. Graham Licence, 'Affusion baptism leads to two more', *BT* November 22, 1990, 3. This was

Sometimes the congregation have stood 'around the candidate at baptism'<sup>73</sup> but ordinarily they have remained seated.<sup>74</sup> Following each immersion,<sup>75</sup> the minister would sometimes pronounce a blessing, Payne and Winward suggested that either the choir or congregation could sing after each baptism, or, at the conclusion of the baptisms, one of the baptismal sentences from the hymnbook (*BCHR*) or the verse of a hymn or the doxology could be said.<sup>76</sup> The post-baptismal hymn varied, but suggestions included the *Te Deum*,<sup>77</sup> the *Doxology*,<sup>78</sup> 'Beneath the Cross of Jesus',<sup>79</sup> 'Praise to God, Almighty Maker',<sup>80</sup> 'Buried with Christ! Our glad hearts say',<sup>81</sup> and

also the mode adopted by the present writer for two elderly ladies who expressed fear of water, at a baptismal service at Zion, Cambridge, on Sunday December 1, 1991.

- 73 Dakin, *Baptist View of Church and Ministry*, 34. This was the usual practice of Calne BC, Wiltshire prior to the present writer's induction there in April 1994.
- 74 Implicitly, Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 73. The new New Road BC, Bromsgrove (built 1990), mounted a large convex mirror over the baptistry (sited in the front left corner of the sanctuary) so that the seated congregation could see the baptisms.
- 75 Rev. W. D. Jackson, Metropolitan Area Superintendent, 'The Keynote Address. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism', in A. T. Ohrn (ed.), *Tenth Baptist World Congress* (Atlanta, 1939), 64, recounted that for years he had taught baptismal candidates that when they had been raised from the water, to stand for a moment with their faces looking upwards.
- 76 Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 133. Some editions of the *BCHR* contained no specific baptismal sentences, though Payne and Winward could have been referring to sentences from the baptismal hymns themselves, nos. 469-484. Under *BCHR* no.482, W. W. Sidey's 'Buried with Christ! Our glad hearts say', which was recommended for use during the administration of the rite, a note suggested sentences from the 'Chant Section', nos. 129 and 140 to 143. Not all editions of the *BCHR* included the Chants and Anthems section, and there were some editions containing only the Chants and Anthems. The later 1962 *BHB* included only one entry of relevant scriptural baptismal verses, see no.874
- 77 Perkin, *Divine Encounter*, 8, being *BHB* 778.
- 78 Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 133. It was printed on the inside front cover of both the music edition and words edition of the *BCHR*.
- 79 *BCHR* 237, 'A Member of the Staff', 'Household Baptism at Spurgeon's Orphan Homes', *BT* October 19, 1943, 10.
- 80 *BHB* 299 by William Robinson, the Churches of Christ scholar and former Principal of Overdale College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 'Anglicans and Baptists Share in Baptismal Service', *BT* December 13, 1962, 1-2, being the account of a service at New Southgate BC, North London, where Rev. Michael J. Walker and the Rector of Friern Barnet, Rev. John Adams shared in the baptism of one Anglican woman and eight Baptists, in which they adopted the 'customary Southgate baptismal service' with the Book of Common Prayer's order for baptism for such 'as of riper years', using the baptismal preamble from Payne and Winward's *Orders and Prayers*. It was increasingly common for united baptismal services to be held, eg, 'Anglican Vicar Baptises in BC', *BT* November 19, 1959, 12, at London Road, Portsmouth, a service where, Baptist minister, Rev. A. J. Tugwell baptized 6 candidates, and

more obscurely, 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life'.<sup>82</sup> However, the most popular of all baptismal hymns has been 'O Jesus I have promised',<sup>83</sup> which could be sung before or after the act of baptism.<sup>84</sup> Usually an appeal has been given before the final hymn, and those responding would be asked to come and stand in front of the baptistry whilst the closing hymn was sung,<sup>85</sup> or to see the minister after the service or to go to a room for counselling.

Whilst rare early in the century,<sup>86</sup> the laying on of hands has become more common,<sup>87</sup> not least through the influence of the liturgical and charismatic

the Rev. Donald Chapman baptized one lady from St. Jude's church, Southsea; 'Baptists and Anglicans to Unite for Baptismal Service', *BT* February 22, 1962, 8, being a joint service between Shirehampton BC and St. Mary's, Shirehampton.

- 81 Gould and Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers*, 59, printed hymn no.8, but *BCH* 502. The benediction 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee' was also sometimes sung, so Patterson, *Call to Worship*, 159, based on Numbers 6:24-26.
- 82 So Dakin, *Baptist View of Church and Ministry*, 33; and R. W. Thomson, September 1990. 'Be thou faithful' is in neither the *BCH* or the *BCHR*.
- 83 This first appeared in the *BCH* in 1900, no.505, *BCHR* 473, *BHB* 298 and *BPW* 352. It was written by the Anglican clergyman, John Ernest Bode, when his daughter and two sons were confirmed, details in R. W. Thomson (ed.), *The Baptist Hymn Book Companion* (revised, 1967), 238.
- 84 In the early years it preceded the baptisms, Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 32; confirmed by Ronald Thomson, interview in September 1990, in which he said that this 'seemed to be so in every church that I knew'. See also Dr. F. T. Lord, 'Why I Am A Baptist', *BT* June 2, 1955, 2, who noted it was used 50 years previously; Dr. J. R. C. Perkin, 'The Principles and Practice of Believers' Baptism', *BT* June 11, 1959, 6 and his *Divine Encounter*, 8 and 13; Ian M. Mallard, 'The Administration of Baptism', *The Fraternal* 171 (September, 1974), 38, who also suggested 'At the name of Jesus'. J. B. Skemp of Durham, 'A Scottish Report on Baptism', *BT* November 3, 1955, 7, added that the following hymn, *BCHR* 474, 'Around Thy grave, Lord Jesus' was rarely chosen. He also criticized the *BCHR* and baptismal services for the way they suggested that Baptists believed baptism to be only a sign of discipleship, and therefore that it was 'No wonder that we then go on to regard it as a kind of "optional extra" for converted Christians'. 'O Jesus I have promised' was also sung at the first televised baptismal service. The whole service was criticized by the *BT* for being overly subjective, focussing on the believer's hearing of the Word, his faith and obedience, there being no word about the gift of the Spirit and no prayer before the sacrament, 'First Ever Baptism Service on Television', *BT* June 4, 1959, 1. 'O Jesus, I have promised', being a subjective hymn in the sense of personal, and the most popular baptismal hymn reflects the tendency of much Baptist theology towards a subjective and, by extension, individualistic interpretation. This tendency was also criticized by Stephen Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', *The Fraternal* 123 (January, 1962), 8.
- 85 So 'An Impressive Baptism', *BT* October 28, 1943, 5, and Rev. Ralph W. A. Mitchell, 'The Evangelistic Use of the Baptismal Service', *BT* December 16, 1943, 6.
- 86 Whitley, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 52, acknowledged the New Testament practice, whilst Robinson, *Baptist Principles* (1925), 28, remarked that some New Testament practices, such as the laying on of hands, 'Baptists in general no longer continue'. W. E. Blomfield, 'Church Reunion. Impasse', *BT* October 22, 1925, 747, acknowledged the four passages in the

movements where it figures prominently,<sup>88</sup> and has been understood as the recognition of the seal of the Spirit and commission for work in the priesthood of all believers.<sup>89</sup> Gaukroger explained, 'The leaders lay their hands on the person's head and pray, "May God bless you and fill you with His Holy Spirit as you are baptized", or something like that', linking this act and prayer with 'a definite anticipation that God will work in the life of the individual in his or her baptism'.<sup>90</sup>

### **Post-Baptism.**

What becomes immediately clear is that Baptists have paid little attention to post-baptismal issues, and the majority of what they have written has focussed on receiving the candidates into membership. This was particularly the case in the early decades of the century.<sup>91</sup>

New Testament where the laying on of hands is mentioned and that the practice had 'not been uncommon amongst Baptists', but remarked that 'Its cessation is probably due to a revolt against what seem semi-magical conceptions'.

87 See, eg, the photograph of the laying on of hands whilst in the baptistry following immersion in 'First baptism for church plant', *BT* June 29, 1995, 16.

88 See below on 'Liturgical Developments'.

89 This was the explanation given by the Sussex University Chaplain, Rev. Geoff Whitfield, see A. Correspondent, 'As three young people make their witness', *BT* May 30, 1974, 1.

90 Gaukroger, *Being Baptized*, 54.

91 This is perhaps nowhere more clearly reflected than in Bryan's 'practical' essay, whose limits are fairly reflected in the title, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', the visitation referring to the interview with a view to membership, pp.76-78. On p.77 Bryan suggested that the duties of the visitors included 'some responsibility for keeping in touch with the new member', though this was far from any kind of post-baptismal classes or formally arranged nurture. Perkin, 'Interviewing of Candidates for Baptism and Membership', 28-29, wrote, 'The whole business of instructing, interviewing and admitting new members through baptism is an area of church life where we must reform and systematise if we are to do our work effectively'. He suggested that those who recommend someone for membership should also be responsible for the after care. Whilst informal care as suggested by Bryan and Perkin might have happened in some instances, the idea has only been developed in the proposal of R. Burnish, 'Inquisitors or Befrienders?', *BT* August 25, 1983, 4, who suggested the use of sponsors at the baptism who would promise to undertake special care for the baptized after baptism. The sponsors were addressed in the baptismal service: 'CB or EF do you, as A's church sponsors undertake a special relationship with him (her) expressed through prayer, interest, and encouragement to aid his (her) nurture and growth in grace?' Burnish, 'Baptismal Preparation', 16, criticized the booklet by J. O. Barrett, *Church Membership: Suggestions for Visitors to Candidates* (1970), for omitting any hint of a continuing relationship between the visitors and the candidates until his last paragraph. Burnish, 'Baptismal Preparation', 17, urged that as soon as a person expressed any form of commitment they should be linked with a mature Christian who would nurture them in the Christian faith before and beyond baptism.

It has been the practice for baptismal candidates to be given a baptismal card, certifying that baptism has taken place, when and where, and which could be sent to an inquiring church on a request for transfer of membership.<sup>92</sup>

When baptism was to be followed by church membership, whether in an open or closed church, the reception into membership usually took place at the next communion service, when the candidate was extended the 'right hand of fellowship'.<sup>93</sup> This could take place up to several weeks after the baptismal service, though frequently the service of baptism took place in the morning and was followed by an evening communion at which the candidate would be welcomed into membership.<sup>94</sup> If the candidate was still a youth then attendance at the church meeting was often put off until he or she was deemed to be of a suitable age. Thomson recollected that in his own church, Dawes Road, Fulham, that age was 18, though in other churches youthful members were allowed to join the church but were usually unable to vote.<sup>95</sup> For example, on the eve of his 15th birthday in February 1917, Ernest Payne' joined

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92 These were sold by the Kingsgate Press, who also sold infant dedication cards, but there is no evidence to suggest when they were first introduced.

93 Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 98-99; Middlebrook, 'Baptism and the Church', in *Concerning Believers Baptism*, 57; and P. R. Clifford, *The Christian Life* (1954), 38. Thomson, however, implied that this was not always the case, interview September 1990.

94 This is supported by a criticism of churches which covered their baptistries by S. F. Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', 10. He noted that two arguments used against the combined baptismal-membership-communion service were that it was impractical because the communion table was situated on top of the baptistry and there was insufficient space or time. He countered the former by recommending the baptismal service in the morning followed by the laying on of hands, and communion in the evening, the latter he refuted from his own experience that a baptismal-eucharist usually took about an hour and a quarter. According to Dr. West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', 39, more and more churches were following the pattern of baptizing candidates and receiving them into membership at a communion service on the same occasion. So also Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 127, '*Since we are baptized into the Church, it is desirable that Baptism should, if possible, be followed by the Lord's Supper, at which the reception of new members should take place*', italics theirs; and Rev. Stanley Voke of Walton-on-Thames, in 'The Biblical Doctrine and Experience of Koinonia', *The Fraternal* 139 (January, 1966), 17-18.

95 Thomson, interview September 1990. Mountain, *My Baptism*, 121, wrote, 'And I see no reason why children of even tender years - if they give credible evidence of intelligent faith in Jesus - should not confess that faith in baptism, and be admitted to the Communion Table...' To which he added, quoting Spurgeon, 'although they ought not to be permitted to take part in the business of their church, until they have reached years of maturity'.

the Downs Chapel, Clapton. He was given the right hand of fellowship at the evening communion service, but it was not until five months later that he was baptized.<sup>96</sup>

R. C. Ford recorded that several Yorkshire churches practised the custom of reading the church covenant to newly welcomed members, writing, 'These two may be taken as samples of many more of which', Ford admitted, 'we possess no details'.<sup>97</sup>

Consistent with his position on the immediacy of baptism, George Beasley-Murray advanced the view that there should be teaching after baptism, and he believed it should cover 'a prolonged period and not simply a few classes'.<sup>98</sup> Others have concurred. Theodore Valentine attributed the loss of so many young people to the complete lack of post-baptismal care. In the process he mentioned six, eight or twelve baptismal preparation classes, and continued, 'However it is done, let as much care and prayer be given to the training of young church members as to those who have asked to be baptised'.<sup>99</sup> Other correspondents have also stressed the need for pre- and

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<sup>96</sup> West, *To Be A Pilgrim*, 10. Many would assent to Bryan's position, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 76, 'There should be a virtual assurance in [the minister's] mind that the candidate will be accepted [into membership], for no little damage may be done if the Church puts him back. Far better take the responsibility of keeping the candidate back a little longer than go forward with a doubtful case...', and this would have been especially so with a youth.

<sup>97</sup> R. C. Ford, *Twenty-Five Years of Baptist Life in Yorkshire, 1912-1937* (1937), 50. He cited the 1908 history of Bethel Church, Shipley, which reported this as the practice under their minister, Rev. David Kentfield, but by 1937 the custom had been abandoned. In 1927, such a practice was also the norm at Hope Church, Hebden Bridge.

<sup>98</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'A Baptist Interpretation of the Place of the Child in the Church', *in Foundations* 8 (April, 1967), 157. This paper was originally presented to the Commission on Baptist Doctrine of the BWA meeting at Hamburg, August 1964.

<sup>99</sup> Rev. T. Valentine, 'Post Baptismal Care', *BT* August 5, 1954, 6. See also Rev. Dr. William Speirs of Derby, 'Post-Baptismal Care', *BT* September 2, 1954, 7, and *The Child and the Church* (1966), 45, argued that, whatever else it included, post-baptismal training should equip young members for their responsibilities in the business of church meetings.



post-baptismal care,<sup>100</sup> though it must be admitted that this is a much neglected area of baptismal practice.<sup>101</sup>

### **Baptistries.**

From the earliest times Baptists have baptized wherever there is water, and whilst the vast majority of Baptist church buildings have baptistries, several historic churches have external ones.<sup>102</sup> Open air baptisms have been frequently held either because of necessity<sup>103</sup> or intentionally to highlight baptism as a public witness and evangelistic opportunity.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> 'Ex-Church Officer', 'Post Baptismal Care', *BT* August 12, 1954, 6, argued that such should be given 'prayerful and careful consideration'; and Rev. George Neal, 'The Sacraments: more than mere symbols', *BT* July 18, 1996, 10. Rev. L. J. Wisewell of Walmer BC, Kent, spoke of post-baptismal care as an after-care clinic, 'Our After-Care Clinic', *BT* September 28, 1961, 10.

<sup>101</sup> R. Burnish, *Meaning of Baptism*, 223, n.4, noted that the number of meetings after baptism could range from 1-2, to over 4, whilst a considerable number never met after baptism, and a number had some other unspecified number of meetings. He also noted that the duration of these post-baptismal classes could vary from 1 month to over 6.

<sup>102</sup> Eg, Monksthorpe in Lincolnshire and Southwick in Wiltshire. For Monksthorpe, see John Barfield, 'The little church that time forgot', *BT* November 15, 1990, 8. In 1968, the open air baptistry at Southwick, Wiltshire, was used for the first time since 1953. It had been built up and restored in 1937, see 'We'll be baptised in the open, they decided', *BT* July 4, 1968, 1.

<sup>103</sup> The drought in 1976 proved a test to churches' ingenuity in finding alternative locations to hold baptismal services, which included the use of public and private swimming pools, rivers, the sea and even well water brought to fill a baptistry in a tanker, see 'Steady stream of baptism despite drought', *BT* September 16, 1976, 7, and 'Saving water meant a greater witness', *BT* October 14, 1976, 13. During WWI Baptist chaplains conducted open air baptismal services wherever the troops were, eg. in a French stream, A. B. Kinsey, 'A Baptism at the Front', *BT&F* December 29, 1916, 808; A. J. White, C.F.U.B. (Baptist), Garrison Chaplain, 'Interesting Baptismal Services', *BT&F* March 28, 1919, 182, reported the baptism of three in the open sea in Alexandria; another baptism took place in a French bath house, D. O. G. (Griffith of Brecon), 'A Baptism at the Front', *BT&F* May 26, 1916, 327. During WWII baptismal services continued undaunted, even when bombing meant they took place in the ruins, see 'A Baptismal Service at Tyndale Bristol', *BT* August 21, 1941, 413. See also, eg, 'A Blitz Baptism at Upton', *BT* June 26, 1941, 315; and 'They Built Their Own Baptistery', *BT* May 3, 1945, 3.

<sup>104</sup> Eg, 'Witness at the Plaza', *BT* October 12, 1989, 3. Baptist evangelist, Rev. Vic Jacopson, has regularly baptized converts at the Glastonbury Pop Festival in oil drums, see 'No follow-up for travellers', *BT* June 29, 1989, 16, and Lewis Misselbrook, 'Church planting in Glastonbury', *BT* April 4, 1991, 6. Numerous reports underscore the frequency of open air-evangelistic baptisms: in the sea, 'A Baptism in the Sea', *BT* August 4, 1949, 5, and 'Baptism in the Sea at Ramsgate', *BT* August 31, 1950, 5; in rivers, 'River Baptism in a Suffolk Village', *BT* June 16, 1927, 434, a Whit Sunday baptismal service in the River Lark, and 'A Baptism in the River Ely', *BT* September 22, 1949, 8; in swimming pools, 'Witness at the Plaza', *BT* October 12, 1989, 3, and 'Portable swimming pool becomes baptistry', *BT* October 18, 1990, 11; and even in a cow trough, 'Nine people baptised in a cow trough', *BT* July 28, 1988, 3. a

The major source for information on twentieth-century baptistries is the section entitled 'Architectural Descriptions and Illustrations of New Chapels, &c', which has been included in many, but by no means all, editions of the *Baptist Handbook*.<sup>105</sup> This shows that the position of the baptismal font has varied widely and that there are two types of baptismal font: covered and open. Covered baptismal fonts have been situated centrally under the communion table<sup>106</sup> or in the floor in front of the table,<sup>107</sup> or under the choir area,<sup>108</sup> and one was even concealed behind a blue velvet curtain.<sup>109</sup> Open baptismal fonts were variously located, centrally behind the dais or rostrum,<sup>110</sup> in front of the pulpit with the communion table,<sup>111</sup> centrally in the chancel,<sup>112</sup> or to one side.<sup>113</sup> A number of churches have a raised baptismal font in order to aid visibility.<sup>114</sup> A number

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baptism conducted by Rev. Frank Rinaldi, assisted by an elder, Mr. Neil Swettenham, at Melton Mowbray.

- <sup>105</sup> The details included in this section has varied greatly from report to report and year to year. Many of the descriptions excluded reference to the baptismal font and many omitted whether the baptismal font was covered or open. The 'Architectural Supplement' became less frequent from the early 1940s onwards.
- <sup>106</sup> Eg, Union Church, Beeston (Baptist-Congregational), *BH* 1900, 364; Wyclif Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne, *BH* 1901, 358; Blackhorse Road, Walthamstow, *BH* 1902, 375; Horton Grange Road, Bradford, *BH* 1903, 371; St. Andrew's Street, Cambridge, *BH*, 1903, 375; Emsworth, *BH* 1913, 509; Webster Street, Coventry, *BH* 1923, 295; Wharf Road, Grantham, *BH* 1923, 296; East Plumstead, London, *BH* 1925, 323; Aylesham Church Hall, Kent, *BH* 1929, 327; Eastern Avenue, Ilford, *BH* 1930, 332; Horseferry Road, Westminster, *BH* 1935, 338; Morden Baptist Free Church, *BH* 1935, 339; Devonshire Avenue, Southsea, *BH* 1937, 356; Brighton Road and Church Hill, Newhaven, *BH* 1938, 364; West Watford Free Church (Baptist), *BH* 1958, xi; Northolt Park, *BH* 1959, iii.
- <sup>107</sup> Eg, Romsey BC, Hampshire, refurbished in 1992; Calne BC, refurbished in 1994; Ferndown Free Church (Baptist-URC), newly installed into a former URC building in 1996. This kind of placement allows great flexibility of use for the sanctuary.
- <sup>108</sup> Eg, Pier Avenue, Clacton-on-Sea, *BH* 1929, 327-28; Hounslow Town, *BH* 1930, 331; Wood Green, London, *BH* 1930, 332; West Worthing, *BH* 1938, 358.
- <sup>109</sup> South Oxhey BC hall, Watford, either side of which were a vestry and committee room, *BH* 1958, ix.
- <sup>110</sup> Church End BC, Finchley, *BH* 1938, 357; Emmanuel, Falmouth, *BH* 1941, 349; Crawley BC, *BH* 1958, iii.
- <sup>111</sup> Brownhill Road, Catford, *BH* 1904, 374; Undercliffe Road BC, Felixstowe, *BH* 1927, 355; Mill End BC, Hertfordshire, *BH* 1962, iii; Easthampstead BC, *BH* 1963, iii; Victoria Drive, Bognor Regis, *BH* 1966, iii; John Bunyan BC, Cowley, Oxford, *BH* 1966, vii.
- <sup>112</sup> Eg, Abbey Road, St. John's Wood, *BH* 1936, 360; King's Langley, Hertfordshire, *BH* 1938, 365.
- <sup>113</sup> Eg, Hearsall BC, Coventry, *BH* 1962, v; Westbourne Park, Paddington, *BH* 1963, vii.

of churches have located changing rooms for the minister and candidates through a passage under the pulpit,<sup>115</sup> others to one side,<sup>116</sup> and some have used screens behind which the newly baptized could pass.<sup>117</sup>

Perusal of the details supplied in the *Baptist Handbook* suggests that more baptistries are covered than open. The reason for this appears to be more utilitarian than theological, for it is safer, allows greater flexibility in the use of the building and, as many Baptist buildings are limited for space, it uses the space available to the full. For example, the open baptismal window, which pictures the descent of the Spirit and the cross of Christ, to be under the small, steel framed steeple on the corner of the main road and side road, and because this location was the only one which provided backlight for the window and was nearest to the outside drainage to which water is pumped.<sup>118</sup> Practical considerations dominate matters in newly formed churches, often church plants, which often meet in temporary or rented accommodation, who usually rent portable baptistries or have even constructed their own.<sup>119</sup>

- 114 Eg. King's Langley, Hertfordshire, whose baptismal window is slightly raised above the chancel floor, *BH* 1938, 365; the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington Butts, London, has an elevated glass-fronted baptismal window situated above the pulpit in a central position, *BH* 1959, xi; and New Road Oxford, placed in the front left corner, refurbished in 1982.
- 115 Eg. Ebenezer Chapel, Bury Road, Haslingden, *BH* 1902, 357; Brownhill Road Baptist Church, Hither Green, *BH* 1902, 362; Webster Street, Coventry, *BH* 1914, 507.
- 116 Eg. Morecambe Baptist Church, *BH* 1900, 381, being advance notice of the church's design; and St. John's Free Church, Tunbridge Wells, (James Mountain's church), *BH* 1902, 372.
- 117 Eg. Broadway Chapel, Chesham, *BH* 1902, 349.
- 118 Information from Mr. Fred Cross, an elder of the church at the time, who supervised much of the building project. The previous church building, built in 1978, had situated the open baptismal window to the right of the staging platform beneath a stone cross, the reasons for its location being next to a large window and for access into the vestry-come-changing room.
- 119 ~~With~~ The increase in emphasis on church planting which occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s, and the fact that many such congregations meet in hired premises, led Jaya's Company of South Brent, Devon, to manufacture a portable, self-assembly rectangular pool, made from plywood panels mounted on a timber frame and a blue flexible PVC liner. The same company also offered a compact water heater which could be hired or bought. See 'Self-assembly baptismal window takes a bow', *BT* March 23, 1995, 12. A similar raised, timber-frame pool was designed by a member of Padiham BC, Lancashire, Mr. Jim Barton, see 'Home-designed

Some, however, have severely criticized the utilitarian approach and especially closed baptistries and have sought to use the careful placement of the pool and the open baptistry as means of either aiding worship or, perhaps more importantly, supporting the church's theology. F. C. Bryan believed it to be a great aid to worship if the baptistry was so built that the steps led straight up through the door and out of the chapel, for this would reduce unnecessary movement which would distract people. He also expressed the desirability to have the baptistry filled and the water raised to the required temperature well before the service began, so that no-one would need to attend <sup>to</sup> it during the service.<sup>120</sup> After reading *Concerning Believers Baptism*, Tait Patterson suggested that the editor consider adding another chapter, with suitable illustrations, on how to build a baptistry and how to furnish robing-rooms, as 'Ofttimes the service is distorted by the inconvenience of the baptistery and the difficulty of reaching a robing-room', and he wondered why the BU Council did not insist on an ideal baptistry for every new building opened with their aid.<sup>121</sup>

Keith Jones identified two major influences and a third minor one on Baptist architecture, which, he believed did influence worship. The first influence was the 'misterium tremendum', exemplified in the 'mock-gothic proportions of many 19th century Baptist buildings'. Secondly, was the Greek gymnasium where the austere building is seen as 'the place of education and oratory', where the baptistry is hidden and the communion table small, dominated by the pulpit. Thirdly, and more recently, was the 'secular "space"', being cost-effective but featureless, indistinguishable from the Scout Hut. He rejected each of these for the starting point of the Upper Room where 'our worship is based as a community around the three realities of the Word, the Table and the Baptistry'. Practically, this could be achieved by the congregation

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baptistry', *BT* November 29, 1990, 9. Northolt Grange BC, London, which usually used a local swimming pool, brought a small swimming pool into the church, 'Portable swimming pool becomes baptistry', *BT* October 18, 1990, 11. Mexborough BC, which first met in a public house and then moved to a portacabin, hired a portable baptistry for its first baptismal service, see 'Mexborough. Baptism is a first', *BT* July 9, 1992, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Bryan, 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 73.

<sup>121</sup> D. T. Patterson, "'Concerning Believers Baptism'", *BT* April 13, 1944, 6.

gathering around the word, table and baptistry, neither one of these dominating the others, adding a plea 'to uncover our baptistries (and light them more effectively)...if we really believe Baptism to be important'.<sup>122</sup>

Theological arguments, however, have been voiced more often. At their most basic, Baptists have thought little beyond the necessity of the baptistry for total immersion and its symbolism as a grave.<sup>123</sup> The candidate descends into the watery grave, is immersed, dying with Christ and to sin, and then emerges, rising with Christ to a new life. The candidate leaves the baptistry having literally 'passed through'<sup>124</sup> the baptismal waters. For this reason most baptistries have steps at either end. Gilbert Laws likened the baptistry to 'the mighty preacher..., [who] has continually spoken of the difference between nature and grace, and forbidden us to regard culture, amiability and good manners as the equivalent to a regenerate heart'.<sup>125</sup> The majority of twentieth-century baptistries have been situated on the communion platform in front of the pulpit and this emphasizes 'the centrality of the Word of God'.<sup>126</sup> W. T. Whitley, who denied any special benefit or efficacy obtaining from the administrator, similarly denied the sanctity of special places. 'Worship is acceptable not according to liturgy, celebrant, and hallowed walls, but according to the temper of the

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<sup>122</sup> K. G. Jones, 'Architecture and Worship', in K. G. Jones *et al*, *Christian Worship. Some Contemporary Issues* (YBA: Leeds, revised 1989), 11-12.

<sup>123</sup> 'A Coffin', 'Baptistry', *BT* November 29, 1934, referred to the 'coffin-shaped' baptistry at Milford-on-Sea, built in 1816, though Charles F. Perry, 'Christian Baptism and the Campaign', *BT* August 31, 1933, 586, objected to the grave-like shape of the baptistry. Most baptistries are straight with steps at each end, but there were variations. Cheriton, Folkestone, J. C. Carlile's church, had a T-shaped baptistry which was situated in the chancel, *BH* 1908, 513; Yardley, Birmingham, had an elliptical one, *BH* 1967, v; New Road, Bromsgrove, built 1990, is elliptical with the steps at each end curving into the main pool; Wellingborough BC had an open octagonal, marble-lined baptistry, *BH* 1901, 371.

<sup>124</sup> 'To pass through the waters of baptism' is a standard Baptist phrase used to describe the rite. It is surprising, then, how seldom it has been recorded, though many 'traditional' phrases and practices are so common that few think about mentioning them or writing them down. See, eg, Cecil Henry Ellis, 'My Baptism', *BT* January 28, 1926, 67.

<sup>125</sup> G. Laws, 'Denominational Self-Consciousness. The Crying Need of Baptists To-day', *BT&F* July 20, 1923, 518.

<sup>126</sup> Eg, 'Emmanuel Baptist Church, Gravesend', *BH* 1966, v.

worshippers',<sup>127</sup> a fact which led to baptism being administered anywhere it was deemed appropriate, whether in a baptistry or the open air. However, the norm, for obvious reasons, has been in church and the specially built baptistries.

However, several have sought to address this lack of attention to the theology of the baptistry. A. J. Barnard impressed that, 'The cynosure of all eyes should be the pulpit, the baptistry and the table. They should be placed in closest juxtaposition'. For him, closed baptistries were to be deplored, arguing that in many churches 'with a little skill and design they could be rendered permanently open, a silent witness to the open confession of repentance and faith in Christ'. A number of churches had stained glass windows depicting the descending dove, whilst others had this on the wall behind the baptistry. 'This has more than an artistic service; it is a silent testimony to the gift of the Spirit so closely associated with baptism'.<sup>128</sup> His own preference was that where it was convenient candidates should enter from one side of the baptistry and come out the other 'as a sign of passing through from death to life'.<sup>129</sup>

T. A. Bampton similarly criticized closed baptistries when he regretted that 'usually' they were under the floorboards as though Baptists were ashamed of the sacrament which distinguished them from fellow Christians. Ancient baptistries were prominent, therefore, 'an uncovered baptistry is a fine testimony to the most solemn and joyful initiatory rite known to man'.<sup>130</sup> Another writer criticized the continuing practice of

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<sup>127</sup> Whitley, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 102, commenting on John 4:19-24.

<sup>128</sup> A. J. Barnard, 'The Use of Symbols in the Baptist Church', *The Fraternal* 64 (April, 1947), 13. According to Stephen Winward, *The Reformation of Our Worship* (1964), 66, 'Whether near the entrance or at the centre of the building, the baptistry should always be conspicuous', a point he reiterated in almost identical words in 'Embodied Worship', in *The Renewal of Worship*, 49.

<sup>129</sup> Barnard, 'The Use of Symbols in the Baptist Church', 16.

<sup>130</sup> T. A. Bampton of Frome, 'Baptists and Their Baptistries', *BT* February 6, 1947, 7. An open baptistry was clearly favoured by Channon, *Much Water*, 1; Rev. S. E. Leslie Larwood of Welling BC, Kent, 'Buried With Christ', *BT* April 11, 1963, 5. The example of the Early Church and the baptistries which they built, several noted, supported the mode of immersion, Eg. Flight Lt. H. W. Wheate, 'A Fifth Century Baptistry', *BT* July 5, 1945, 7, writing about, and supplying pictures of the 5th century church in Apollonia, near Cyrene; R. B. Hannen, 'A

constructing baptistries with which, he claimed, it was impossible to make the service impressive, adding, 'When planning a place of worship, one of our first considerations should be the baptistery and robing rooms, especially the necessity of having an open baptistery, which is a visible sign, not only of our practice, but of the central facts of the Gospel'.<sup>131</sup>

A common explanation for closed baptistries, concealed beneath the rostrum, was that there was not room for them to be given their own place. To counter this, G. W. Rusling declared that 'we have to keep before our minds the primary purpose to which the sanctuary is dedicated. Only if we have right priorities in our *thinking* is there much hope of right priorities in design'.<sup>132</sup> He argued that, 'To bring the baptistery into a good composite relationship with the pulpit and the table seems to present a problem in some schemes though the difficulties usually disappear when adequate space is allowed. To hide it under the platform 'is very hard to justify among us who have a distinctive witness to bear about Believers' Baptism!' He asked whether Baptist buildings should be complicit with open membership churches bringing the charge on Baptists that people could join them without being baptized at all. 'An open baptistery is preaching all the time, even when not in actual use. It is an abiding witness to the necessity of conversion and to all that wealth of truth which the New Testament associates with our new birth through the saving acts of God. It is a constant reminder to the church of its evangelistic commission. We should be eager to keep it in sight to bear its witness'.<sup>133</sup>

The newly built Baptist Church Centre in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, placed the open baptistry at the entrance of the worship room signifying the way by which

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6th Century Baptistery', *BQ* 13.2 (April, 1949), 87-89. See also H. Martin, 'Baptism in the Fourth Century', *BQ* 13.8 (October, 1950), 370-372.

131 By the Editor of 'The Christian Advocate', 'A Liturgical Scholar on Baptism', *BT* January 14, 1943, 5.

132 G. W. Rusling, *Baptist Places of Worship* (1965) 9-10, on e of the Living Issues series of booklets.

133 Rusling, *Baptist Places of Worship*, 13-14.

people enter the Church.<sup>134</sup> In the first of a series on worship, Dr. Henton Davies examined the importance of the sanctuary as the place of worship, dividing the sanctuary into three principal parts - the place for the Bible, namely the pulpit, then the rostrum for the communion table and baptismal pool, and then the pews/seats for the worshippers. In the second, 'Between the two "ends"', he located the communion table standing over or adjacent to the baptistry, this signalling and port~~ing~~<sup>aying</sup> the victory of the cross over sin and death.<sup>135</sup>

### **Closed or Open Communion.**

In the seventeenth century most Baptists practised strict/closed communion, that is, only baptized believers could share in communion. However, from the earliest days there were those who believed that the question should be left to the individual to decide. Controversy was the inevitable outcome, advocates of open communion arguing strongly against the strict practice,<sup>136</sup> and there were from the 1640s and 50s Independent churches which practised open communion.<sup>137</sup> In the eighteenth century the great majority of Baptist churches were closed membership and closed communion,<sup>138</sup> and though closed communion predominated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the century progressed more and more churches opened up

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<sup>134</sup> 'This plan puts baptism at the front door', *BT* March 18, 1976, 6.

<sup>135</sup> G. Henton Davies, former Principal of Regent's Park College, 'Letting Down the Ladder', *BT* October 8, 1992, 18.

<sup>136</sup> Such as John Bunyan opposed by William Kiffin in the seventeenth century; Daniel Turner, J. C. Ryland, Robert Robinson and John Ryland were opposed by Abraham Booth and Andrew Fuller in the eighteenth; details of which see R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (1986), 130; and Robert Hall against Joseph Kinghorn in the nineteenth, on which see M. J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table* (1992), 42-70 and 70-83; and J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (1994), 61-69.

<sup>137</sup> Though in a minority, these included Bunyan's Bedford church, and the originally Independent congregation meeting at Broadmead, Bristol, which in time became increasingly Baptist. See B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (1996<sup>2</sup>), 10. On p.11, White stresses that these churches were not the norm amongst Particular Baptists.

<sup>138</sup> So W. T. Whitley, reference unrecorded, cited by the *Report of the Special Committee Appointed by the Council on the Question of Union between Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians* ([1937]), 18.



their tables.<sup>139</sup> By 1877 John Clifford bore testimony that over the preceding fifty years all General Baptist churches had come to practise open communion<sup>140</sup> and that the number of open membership churches had also increased,<sup>141</sup> a fact which led to considerable tensions within the Connexion. By 1883 Clifford claimed that two out of every three of the leading Particular Baptist churches were open membership.<sup>142</sup> This movement meant that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Charles Williams could write that the majority of Baptists practised open communion.<sup>143</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century, open communion was strongly advocated by some of the denomination's leaders,<sup>144</sup> for which they were accused of breaching the great commission.<sup>145</sup> But Dr. Charles Brown's comment that the Strict

<sup>139</sup> The most infamous incident was connected with the Particular Baptist St. Mary's, Norwich, when the opening of communion in the face of trust deeds led to a protracted law suit which split the church and had to be resolved by the Master of the Rolls. See, eg, C. B. Jewson, 'St. Mary's, Norwich', *BQ* 10.7 (July, 1941), 398-406; E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (1959), 87-89; Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, 36-41.

<sup>140</sup> J. Clifford, *GBM* December 1877, 448, cited by J. H. Y. Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism: The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891', Part II, *BQ* 34.4 (October, 1991), 166. E. A. Payne, 'Intercommunion from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries', in D. Baillie and J. Marsh (eds.), *Inter-Communion* (1952), 99, 'During the nineteenth century...most Baptist churches adopted "open communion", in common with the other Free Churches'.

<sup>141</sup> See Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism II', 166-67, who cited Clifford's list including the following churches: Bloomsbury, Regent's Park, Hampstead, Clapton and Campden Road, all in London; Broadmead and Tyndale, Bristol; St. Mary's, Norwich; whilst all the Birmingham churches, except the New Connexion one, were open, as were all but one of the new churches founded by the LBA.

<sup>142</sup> J. Clifford, *GBM* February 1883, 53-54, cited by Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism II', 167. It was these facts which led members of both traditions to question the need for continuing separation and which paved the way for the amalgamation of the two denominations in 1891. For details of the 1891 union see Briggs, *Nineteenth Century*, 96-157, and his fuller discussion in 'Evangelical Ecumenism. The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891. Part I: A Process of Courtship', *BQ* 34.3 (July, 1991), 99-115; 'Evangelical Ecumenism. The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891. Part II: From Courtship to Marriage', *BQ* 34.4 (October, 1991), 160-79.

<sup>143</sup> C. Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 25. Confirmed by Whitby, *Baptist Principles*, 41-42. On this whole question in the nineteenth century, see M. J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table*. There is little to doubt that a powerful force in this movement had been the support of Charles Spurgeon, who, however, rejected the practice of open membership.

<sup>144</sup> Eg, C. Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 25-26; Dr. Charles Brown, 'Christian Unity', *BT&F* January 31, 1919, 56, a sermon preached at Ferme Park on January 19. See also Whitby, *Baptist Principles*, 42-43.

<sup>145</sup> The divine order set down in the Great Commission was discipleship, baptism, teaching to observe all things Christ commanded and consequently observing the commandment 'This do

Baptist position had all but vanished from English life,<sup>146</sup> must be contested in the light of the recognition by the 1937 *Report of the Special Committee* that the advocates of closed communion and closed membership made up 'a substantial minority of the total body of Baptists in Great Britain'.<sup>147</sup> The 1951 BU report, *The Lord's Supper*, acknowledged the continued existence of closed membership but proceeded to ask whether maintenance of a 'closed Table' was not fundamentally incompatible with the general Baptist understanding of the Lord's Supper as set out in the report itself.<sup>148</sup>

So by mid-century, the overwhelming majority of Baptist churches practised open communion, and this is reflected by the comparative lack of material discussing the issues and the few writers who continued to discuss closed communion.<sup>149</sup> To the present, it has effectively disappeared from discussion within the BU.

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in remembrance of Me'. This accusation was reported in both C. Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 26. Similarly, see Whitby, *Baptist Principles*, 42-43.

<sup>146</sup> C. Brown, 'Christian Unity', *BT&F* January 31, 1919, 56.

<sup>147</sup> *Report of the Special Committee*, 17. This is confirmed by R. C. Ford, *Twenty-Five Years*, 41, who could only say that churches practising open communion were 'far more prevalent' than closed communion churches. Useful discussions of the open-closed communion debate are provided by the *Report of the Special Committee*, 14-23; and E. F. Clipsham, 'Should His Table be closed to the non-baptized', *BT* March 10, 1966, 8, who asked whether it was possible that both open membership BCs and open communion-closed membership BCs were right in the sense that they both expressed important truths that must not be ignored.

<sup>148</sup> R. L. Child (ed.), *The Lord's Supper. A Baptist Statement* (1951), 13-26. The report advocated the open communion position, recognizing that the Lord's Table belonged to Christ alone and therefore recommended that 'we...welcome to it in His Name all who sincerely love Him, no matter to what branch of His Church they may belong?' pp.33-34. See also p.32, after having reported the divergences of opinion on the terms of communion, 'We record [these statements on the difference amongst Baptists concerning open or closed communion] as expressing that liberty of conscience which we believe to be one of the most precious gifts of the Gospel, and we conclude that as no uniformity exists among Baptists in this matter, so neither should any attempt be made to impose it. They are finally answerable not to one another but to their Master'. Dr. Percy Evans used this position when he advanced that the cause of intercommunion between denominations would be most effectively furthered by the growth and practice of open communion among the Free Churches. See P. W. Evans, 'A Baptist View', in Baillie and Marsh (eds.), *Inter-Communion*, 195. The whole of this article is a helpful overview of the history and practice of open communion and intercommunion, effectively being in itself an advocacy of open communion, pp.185-195. Interestingly, the *Baptist Church Rules* (n.d., but 1950s), 3, assumed open communion, with no mention whatever of closed communion. This further supports the decline of this point of view.

<sup>149</sup> One of the few references is to be found in N. Clark's *Call to Worship* (1960), which suggests closed communion on pp.50 and 59, though he does not clearly state it.

### Closed or Open Membership.

It is not the purpose here to offer a detailed examination of the theological debate concerning closed or open membership, merely to plot the changes in practice amongst Baptist churches which have taken place this century.<sup>150</sup> As it had influenced the move to open communion, so too the recognition of the wider Church led churches and individuals to advocate and practise open membership. With the growing closeness between denominations reflected, for example, in the Free Church movements, it is clear that the growth of 'ecumenism' was exerting a considerable influence on Baptist theology and practice, which was reflected in the growing number of 'union' churches,<sup>151</sup> and that, conversely, the move towards open membership was regarded as being a step towards closer co-operation or even federation with other Free Churches.<sup>152</sup>

However, this 'ecumenical gesture' could lead, and often has led, to the diminution of baptism amongst Baptists when believers have been accepted into membership who have never been baptized,<sup>153</sup> a practice which George Beasley-Murray described as a 'dismal feature' of Baptist life, though the motive was 'unquestionably good' seeking 'to give practical expression to the conviction that the Church of Christ is

<sup>150</sup> Whilst it is clear that even in 1937 there continued to be churches and ministers who both favoured and practised closed communion and membership, see *Special Report of the Committee*, 22-23, they were few indeed and no record of their continued existence within the BU beyond this point has been discovered.

<sup>151</sup> On which see chapters 3 and 5 above.

<sup>152</sup> C. T. Bateman, *John Clifford* (1902), 133, reported Clifford's conviction in the late 1880's early 1890s that a move towards open membership would go far towards bringing Congregationalists and Baptists closer together; and *Report of the Special Committee*, 16, 'it would be easier for Open than for Close Membership Baptists to unite with Congregationalists or Presbyterians'. In his letter to the Merseyside Baptists ministers' fraternal in which he encouraged them to make public their opposition to the Union and Reunion issues in 1941, R. W. Black wrote, 'The day *may* come when Baptists can join a United Church without disloyalty to truth. But that day is not yet. For the present, "open membership" is the utmost concession we can make', in H. Townsend, *Robert Wilson Black* (1954), 112, italics his. In a similar way, J. H. Shakespeare, *Churches at the Cross-Roads* (1918), 135, had earlier seen open membership as a step towards Free Church federation

<sup>153</sup> *Believing and Being Baptized*, 29, 'What had originally begun as a desire not to "unchurch" others who had previously been members of other churches, has become a lack of conviction about baptism for the "unchurched"'.

larger than the Baptist denomination'. While being 'a happy development from the ecumenical point of view', its obvious danger was allowing young people, brought up in a Baptist church, to be welcomed into membership without baptism.<sup>154</sup> If open membership should continue, 'let it be clearly understood that it is solely for *members of other Churches* transferring into a Baptist Church', thereby restricting open membership to what it was intended to be, 'an act of Christian charity and fellowship among the Churches, in recognition that other communions are as truly Christ's and as truly Church as Baptists are. But young people confessing their faith and converts from without should never question the need for baptism; they should refrain from both Church membership and participating in the communion service until they have submitted to baptism'.<sup>155</sup>

The latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth saw an increasing number of churches throughout the country open first their communion tables and then their memberships.<sup>156</sup> Whilst the number of open membership churches were comparatively few in the early decades of the century,<sup>157</sup> by 1947 Dr. Underwood could comment that most of the churches in London and the South were

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- <sup>154</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*, 86-88. He continued, 'In such circumstances it has apparently never entered the heads of leaders of the communities what a strange phenomenon it is that Christians should wish to receive the sacrament of the Church's continuing life (the Lord's Supper), but not the sacrament of initiation into the Church, and how irregular it is to permit it to happen... Nor is it realized that in these circumstances baptism has been made a purely private option for the Christian who wants it...for this is a matter of individual judgment!'
- <sup>155</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*, 88, his italics in the first quotation. Similarly, whilst recognizing the existence of 'many' open membership Baptist churches, F. C. Bryan, minister of the open membership Tyndale BC, Bristol, pressed that 'it would be fatal for the ordinance to be treated in a take-it-or-leave-it-as-you-please spirit, by which the solemnity and significance attaching to it in the New Testament and in the past history of our churches would be utterly destroyed', 'Preparation, Administration and Visitation', 65. See also Alec Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity*, 78-80.
- <sup>156</sup> Payne, *Fellowship of Believers* (1952<sup>2</sup>), 82. To the open membership churches already mentioned above in John Clifford's list can be added Union Chapel, Manchester (f.1842), Blenheim Union Chapel, Leeds, founded in 1848, and the old Accrington church when it moved to Cannon Street in 1874 under Charles Williams, on which see A. C. Underwood, *A History of English Baptists* (1947), 207-08.
- <sup>157</sup> See C. Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 35. This situation still pertained two decades later, see Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 120. This is confirmed by R. W. Thomson, interview September 1990.

open, though the movement in the North, and particularly Yorkshire, had made little headway.<sup>158</sup> The number of churches opening their membership has continued to increase,<sup>159</sup> as has the number of churches with closed membership and a communicant membership,<sup>160</sup> but many (perhaps the majority) of newly formed

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<sup>158</sup> Underwood, *History of English Baptists*, 207-11. This is illustrated by the fact that, from its founding in 1865, the LBA accepted open membership churches into fellowship, whilst the YBA refused to admit into fellowship the church at Blenheim, Leeds. Not until 1887 was a compromise suggested by Dr. Edward Parker and accepted by the Association which then recognized 'only the baptised members of the Church', and on this understanding the church was welcomed into the association, see John Haslam, 'The Yorkshire Baptist Association', in C. E. Shipley (ed.), *The Baptists of Yorkshire* (1912), 313. This practice continued throughout the period up to 1937, when R. C. Ford reported that Yorkshire Baptists' reluctance to open the membership of their churches was due to their fear that their Baptist character and witness would be jeopardized, see Ford, *Twenty-Five Years of Baptist Life in Yorkshire* (1937), 41-42. See his whole discussion of the membership issue on pp.41-45. In 1898 the YBA had responded to J. H. Shakespeare's launching of the Twentieth Century Fund by resolving that it would 'have no hand in the formation or maintenance of Churches having what are termed "mixed memberships"', p.62. A few of the churches in the Sheffield area, Ford reported, did have open memberships, whilst other churches had a roll of 'communicant members', p.68. It would appear, however, that by 1937 even the YBA was more diversified than at the beginning of the century, so Ford could happily conclude, 'Churches that were originally General Baptist, and churches whose terms of membership permit the enrolment of unbaptized Christians now meet in hallowed fellowship with the disciples of William Gadsby', p. 70.

<sup>159</sup> Eg, Theydon Bois BC was an open communion church from its founding in 1889 (previously it had been a Baptist Mission, f.1888), and it adopted open membership in 1921 after a Mr. Tidball, a Congregationalist, had been elected to the diaconate, see David Walling, *Chapel on the Green. A Short History of Theydon Bois Baptist Church* (Theydon Bois, 1994), n.p., but pp.4 and 8; Berkhamsted BC (a General BC, f.1722) adopted open membership in 1970, though it was required that the minister had been baptized by immersion and 75% of the diaconate, see Owen Wright, *Baptists of Berkhamsted* (Berkhamsted, 1990), 53, and Minutes of a Deacon's Meeting held on January 6, 1970, kindly supplied by the secretary, Mr. Owen Wright, in a detailed letter, January 19, 1991; New Malden, Surrey (f.1862), opened its communion in 1899 and its membership in 1986, see W. John Maggs, *New Malden Baptist Church. 125 Years. A History from 1862 to 1987* (New Malden, 1987), 18-19 and 78.

<sup>160</sup> Eg, the Baptist Tabernacle, Swindon, which in 1965, after several years discussion, instituted associate membership, and this was the first step towards its joining Central Churches, Swindon, later known as Central Church, Swindon, see H. Dunscombe, *Footprints of Faith* (1988), 48. This is also the practice of the church at Newcastle-under-Lyme, information from J. H. Y. Briggs.

churches have been open membership from their opening,<sup>161</sup> so much so that it is now widely recognized that they comprise the majority of Baptist churches.<sup>162</sup>

Within the extant literature of the first half of the century it was the proponents of open membership who were most vocal because it was they who were arguing for the minority and less-established position.<sup>163</sup> For them it was personal faith not baptism which counted for membership<sup>164</sup> and it was a matter for the individual's

<sup>161</sup> Eg, New Milton, Weston-Super-Mare, see *Fifty Fruitful Years. A Short History of Milton Baptist Church, Weston-super-Mare, 1926-1976* (Weston-Super-Mare, 1976), n.p., but p.13; Salisbury Road, Plymouth, (f.1907), see David W. Johns, *From 1907-1987* (Plymouth, 1987), n.p.; Amesbury, near Salisbury (f.1991), see *Amesbury Baptist Church. Doctrinal Basis. Constitution. Covenant of Membership*, 5; and the Friars Congregation, an independent congregation which separated from its mother church, Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay, in 1991, *Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay Baptist Church. Friars Congregation Constitution and Rules* (1991), '1. MEMBERSHIP (a)'.

<sup>162</sup> So *Believing and Being Baptized*, 28, which was written from the assumption that Baptist churches are of the "open membership type" and called upon 'all readers of this report to ask seriously whether a membership "closed" to all except those baptized as believers takes sufficient account of the work of God's spirit among all the Christian churches'. This remark would include closed membership churches with a supplementary membership.

<sup>163</sup> See, eg, 'United Union Meetings', *BT* September 26, 1935, 696; 'A General Baptist' from London, 'Church Membership', *BT&F* August 6, 1925, 565; H. E. Stickler, 'The Future of Denominationalism', *The Fraternal* 4 (October, 1931), 18; G. H. Ruffell Laslett of Watford, 'Christian Unity', *BT* October 27, 1932, 740; J. B. Skemp of Bilston, Staffs, 'Our Baptist Testimony', *BT* September 26, 1935, 696; G. and S. Morris of Ashford, Kent, 'Open or Closed Membership', *BT* May 5, 1966, 4.

<sup>164</sup> J. E. Compton, *The Place of the Sacraments in the Baptist Church* (1910), 6-7, 'in support of the open-membership view it is pointed out that in the New Testament baptism stands related to faith in Jesus rather than membership with an organised society', a position justified by appealing to the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. See also pp.8-9. J. H. Rushbrooke, 'The Church as a Divine Society', *BT&F* April 12, 1918, 226-27, a paper read at the annual meeting of the LBA. H. Cook, *The Why of Our Faith* (1924), 82. Cook succeeded Charles Brown as minister of the open membership church at Ferme Park (1925-39), and later in his 'Must We Die Out?', *BT* April 2, 1936, 259, he wrote, 'Many of us belong to Churches that are Baptist in their witness, and yet welcome gladly to the full privileges of their membership all who love the Lord Jesus whether they are baptised by immersion or not'. R. G. Ramsey, minister at Ferme Park from 1939-43, 'Church Membership', *BT* August 30, 1928, 628, argued, 'Baptism is not Church membership. It is the symbol by which we pledge our personal discipleship to Christ, Church membership is our pledge to service'. J. P. Ede, a personal member of the BU, 'If I Were Dictator of the Baptists', *BT* July 11, 1940, 439, suggested the standardization of entry into church fellowship on the basis of profession of faith because, 'Baptism must remain a voluntary act, and on that account would not be made a condition of church membership. An "outward visible sign" must not be allowed to take the place of "inward spiritual grace". If the rite determined membership this would entail the expulsion of some of our present church members and the refusal of admission by transfer from non-Baptist Free Churches'. Such an act, he added, would also dispose with the anomaly of open and closed communions.

conscience,<sup>165</sup> and they rejected the accusation<sup>166</sup> that open membership betrayed Baptist principles.<sup>167</sup>

The move towards open membership has been blocked in many cases by clauses within Trust Deeds and sometimes by a refusal to change,<sup>168</sup> but several ways round

<sup>165</sup> Eg, J. E. Roberts at the 1916 Assembly, 'Christian Unity - Our Relation to Other Churches', *Supplement to the BT&F* May 12, 1916, III; N. H. Marshall, *Conversion or the New Birth* (1909), 373. In this they were following the lead of John Clifford and the Westbourne Park constitution which he had written, Article 2 of which stated that, 'Every applicant for membership is urged to consider the Lord's will on this subject, but the rule followed is "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind", and act according to his judgment of the Master's teaching. The whole question is left to the individual conscience', J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford* (1924), 45. C. Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 35, applied this same argument for the rights of individual churches to decide for themselves, a position on which H. W. Robinson, 'The Place of Baptism in Baptist Churches To-day', *BQ* 1.5 (January, 1923), 213, concurred.

<sup>166</sup> Made by, eg, ~~E. W.~~ E. W. Probert of Grantown-on-Spey, 'Our Baptist Testimony', *BT* September 12, 1935, 664. W. T. Lea, *The Place of Baptism in the Baptist Church* (1911), 15-16, 'We are doing no man an injustice by enforcing baptism as the condition of membership...We are coercing no man's conscience. We are denying the discipleship of no man. We are keeping no man out of the Church. We cannot do that, the Baptist Churches and all other Churches are open to any man on conditions, and the man who is sincerely anxious to join our Church will accept our conditions and pay our price'. Later, he continued, 'Let our testimony be untainted by compromise and let us continue to place baptism in the Baptist Church where it has been placed from the very beginning, placed there as we believe by our Lord Himself, in the forefront of our Church life, as the authoritative condition of our membership'. See also F. C. Spurr, 'Rev. F. C. Spurr's Correspondence: Baptism and Reunion', *BT* June 29, 1939, 510; Eric F. Knight, 'A Reconsideration of the Sacraments', *The Fraternal* 82 (October, 1951), 9; B. Green, 'The Authority for Baptising', 20; A. S. Cooper of Thornbury, 'Open Membership', *BT* April 14, 1966. However, Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 120-21, conceded that the peril of open membership was lessened when the minister was a convinced Baptist, a point he reiterated in 'The Place of Baptism', 213.

<sup>167</sup> So, eg, J. Lewis, 'Baptised into Jesus Christ', *The Fraternal* 19.3 (December, 1927), 15, who declared himself to be a 'Baptist Christian' and that it was 'our' duty to uphold Baptist principles, but this did not lead him to 'plead for "close membership" churches'. In fact, 4 of his 5 pastorates had practised open membership. H. W. Robinson in Robinson and Rushbrooke, *Baptists in Britain* (1937), 31, who described open membership as an 'anomaly', but later, 'The Place of Baptism', 214, conceded that 'If you have a convinced Baptist at the head of an open-membership Church [such as John Turland Brown at College Street, Northampton], I do not think you need fear the issue'. He then added, 'But are all Baptist ministers convinced Baptists?' noting a report he had heard of three suitable candidates being refused baptism by a Baptist minister in a Baptist church 'on the grounds that believers' baptism by immersion might offend certain paedo-baptist worshippers!'

<sup>168</sup> Eg, Zion, Cambridge, membership of which, according to the Trust Deed of October 28, 1845, stated that 'The Chapel...and other premises hereby conveyed to be used for an assembly for a place of meeting for Religious Worship by a certain Church Society or Congregation of Evangelical Protestant Dissenters of the Particular Baptist Denomination holding the principles of open communion now assembling and meeting together therein...', there being no reference to baptism as a qualification for membership. The 'Rules of the Church of Christ of the Baptist Denomination Assembling for worship at Zion Chapel, Cambridge', agreed at the church meeting on March 7, 1859 and revised November 29, 1899, agreed that the church should practise open communion but closed membership, see section II. During the pastorate of Rev. Vellam Pitts (1931-46) the conditions of membership were

this have been found. Some churches, like Harvey Lane (from 1845 Belvoir Street), Leicester, during Robert Hall's ministry (1808-26), have developed a communicant membership,<sup>169</sup> where such members were barred from voting in deacon's elections and usually for the appointment of a new minister. However, in May 1918 the church meeting accepted the communicant members into full membership, despite the fact that the Trust Deeds<sup>170</sup> of the church stipulated closed membership.<sup>171</sup> Little, however, has been written on this subject.<sup>172</sup>

Another means of joining a Baptist church is by a letter of transfer.<sup>173</sup> As the number of open membership churches increased, this became an increasing problem

queried in a letter from Mr. Pitts to M. E. Aubrey, January 27, 1940. On behalf of Mr. Aubrey, the BU Solicitors, Ellis and Fairbairn, replied, stating that, in their opinion, this phrase implied closed membership, because, 'It is clearly, and always has been, a principle of the Particular Baptist Denomination that one of the qualifications for Church membership is [baptism by immersion on profession of faith], and in cases where the intention is otherwise it is usual for the Trust Deed to contain a provision that membership is open...', letter to Mr. Pitts, February 1, 1940. When the issue arose again in 1990, Mr. John Barfield of the BU Corporation, the church's trustees, disagreed with Ellis and Fairbairn's interpretation, noting the amalgamation of the General and Particular Baptists in 1891, writing, 'It is clear that the majority of Baptist Churches today are permitted by their Trusts to admit all Believers by Profession of Faith', a position shared by the BU's present Solicitors, Cameron's, adding, 'we would argue that the practice of the Denomination has changed since 1940', letter to Rev. A. R. Cross, March 28, 1990. The church meeting, however, did not open its membership.

- <sup>169</sup> S. Mitchell, *Not Disobedient...A History of United Baptist Church, Leicester* (Leicester, 1984), 158. It is interesting that Hall's church at Harvey Lane did not practise open communion in his time as pastor and during his controversy with Kinghorn. The church did not open its Table until the beginning of 1827 shortly after the arrival of the next pastor, J. P. Mursell, p.58. The origin of both the term and the practice of communicant membership, as far as Harvey Lane was concerned, was when Hall established what was known as 'the little church', a group of paedo-baptists who were worshippers but not full members of the church, to whom Hall administered the Lord's Supper separately, p.51. The origin of the term and idea of 'communicant membership' is uncertain.
- <sup>170</sup> On Trust Deeds, see Appendix 2 'Trust Deeds' below. Here, the variations in practice and procedure are discussed.
- <sup>171</sup> S. Mitchell, *Not Disobedient*, 158, and for the relevant section of the Trust Deed, p.79. It is also called 'associate membership', eg, *Believing and Being Baptized*, 28, which, noting this practice, encouraged these churches 'to consider how they might find creative ways to reduce the effect of this distinction [between full and associate members] between kinds of membership, as far as is possible within legal restraints'.
- <sup>172</sup> Of communicant members, Rev. James Jones, 'Communicant Members', *BT* October 3, 1946, 9, merely noted they were those who, apart from baptism, supported the Baptist witness by their presence, service and money. It is unclear whether this is the James Jones of Tewkesbury, Cardiff or Milford Haven. Communicant members were only briefly discussed by F. Bacon, *Church Administration* (1981<sup>1</sup>), 45.
- <sup>173</sup> The procedure was discussed by Bacon, *Church Administration* (1981<sup>1</sup>), 45. This practice has not gone unchallenged. Eg, in 1911, Lea, *Place of Baptism*, 4-5, remarked, 'We have little to



unless the closed churches were prepared to accept the applicants' prior membership in an open Baptist church,<sup>174</sup> which many were not prepared to do.<sup>175</sup> This whole matter was increasingly thrust upon churches as the population became more mobile, and as more churches opened their memberships.

The theological issues have been regularly debated throughout the century,<sup>176</sup> with little development in either of the arguments. Such discussions, however, have

gain and perhaps much to lose by relaxing our strict rule'. Lea then claimed that Baptist Churches only rarely received such applications for membership, and reported, 'I am enabled to say concerning the largest open Church in London, whose Pastor is one of our most popular ministers, that "the number of those who join on profession without baptism is very small indeed"'.<sup>174</sup>

174 This was expressed by Whitby, *Baptist Principles*, 90, 'We recognise membership of other Churches of our own faith and order, and a member of a Baptist Church - who has been baptised on a profession of faith - is eligible for membership in any Baptist Church the world over, on being formally transferred'. In this, however, Whitby was overly optimistic. A. Gilmore, 'Baptist Churches Today and Tomorrow', in Gilmore (ed.), *Pattern of the Church*, 144-45, believed that those baptized in infancy and in full membership with their previous church should be allowed to transfer their membership as though they were coming from another Baptist church, though it should be added that this has not always happened. Queen's Road, Coventry, accepted new members by transfer as early as the time of W. W. B. Emery's ministry (1906-13), if not before, see Binfield, *Pastors and People*, 145.

175 See, eg, the letter from 'Layman', 'Baptists and Intercommunion', *BT&F* May 9, 1919, 276, whose wife, a Wesleyan Methodist, had been welcomed into membership of a large and influential Baptist church near London, but on moving to Yorkshire had found that all fourteen Baptist churches in the town practised strict membership and twelve of them strict communion. 'The demand for immersion in her case she regards - quite justifiably in my opinion - as a reflection upon the validity of her previous Christian fellowship, just as the majority of our ministers regard the demand for reordination (or as I should view a demand for "confirmation") in order to obtain recognition by the Church of England'. The options, he felt, left open to them were either to leave the Baptist denomination or to remain absentee members from the London church. He concluded, 'Let union, like charity, begin at home! How can we expect other Churches - either Free or Established - to recognize our Churchmanship when so many of our own Denomination refuse to admit theirs?' This similar situation arose in Zion, Cambridge (closed membership) in the early 1990s, when a young man, baptized as an infant and raised in the Catholic Church, and married to a Baptist, was denied membership unless he was re-baptized. This he did not do. Details from personal knowledge. Sometimes, however, the opposite situation arose, see Ruth E. Trevithick of Ealing, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* July 18, 1957, 6, recounted how, on moving to London from South Yorkshire, she had been unable to find a closed membership Baptist church to which she could transfer her membership. Did this mean, she asked, that she and her husband took their membership too lightly? Why should anyone wish to be identified with a Baptist church if they did not agree with Baptist principles? She then suggested that only closed membership churches should be called 'Baptist', whilst others should be called 'Union' churches.

176 Eg, the addresses given to the Worcestershire Association respectively in 1910 and 1911 by Compton, *Place of the Sacraments*, arguing for open membership, and Lea, *Place of the Sacraments*, arguing for closed membership. W. A. Page of Gravesend, 'The Basis of Church Membership in the Baptist Body', *Supplement to the BT&F* October 20, 1911, III (open), opposed by Rev. Humphrey Chalmers of Redhill, Surrey, Rev. W. H. Millard of Clydebank, Mr. J. Bown of Hove and Mr. Fred Barrett of Leeds, all in 'The Basis of Church Membership in the Baptist Body', *BT&F* November 3, 1911, 692. In 1957 the membership issue was

subsided in recent years not least because the majority of churches now practise either open membership or closed membership with a supplementary roll. However, the development and growth of open membership churches has led to a number of anomalies. Whilst accepting the practice of open communion, Wheeler Robinson rejected the suggestion that the question of membership should be handled in the same way, for, if it did, 'Our dictionaries might then define a Baptist Church as the only one which did not make baptism a condition of admission!'<sup>177</sup> This, however, is not wholly true, as unbaptized members were known in Congregational churches,<sup>178</sup> and neither the Society of Friends nor the Salvation Army practise either sacrament. A number of other anomalies have also arisen in practice. In both open and closed membership churches candidates have been baptized but have not then proceeded into membership of the church,<sup>179</sup> and it has been common practice for candidates from other denominations to have been baptized and to have remained in membership with

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debated in the *BT* from June to September - arguing against open membership, Rev. G. Leigh Hunt of Coulsdon in Wales, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* June 20, 1957, 7; Ruth E. Trevithick of Ealing, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* July 18, 1957, 6; Norman A. Quick, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* July 25, 1957, 6; and, W. H. Millard of Tyronen, Montrose, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* August 8, 1957, 4; and for open membership, Mr. W. D. Black of Edenbridge, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* July 11, 1957, 7; 'C.L.' of Devon, an 'Open Baptist yet Baptist!', and J. W. Ashley Smith of Wigan, both in 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* August 8, 1957, 4; and F. J. Smart of Buckhurst Hill, 'Closed or Open Membership', *BT* September 5, 1957, 7.

<sup>177</sup> Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 120-21. Also Rusling, *Baptist Places of Worship*, 13-14, who stated that open membership churches brought upon Baptists the charge that it was possible to join a Baptist church without being baptized at all, a position that was in error as baptism and church membership belonged together. *Report of the Special Committee*, 15, noted that the figures from all BUGB&I churches (excepting Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Huntingdonshire and the East Midland Association) from 1903-32 showed that in almost all instances where figures were available for members joining by profession of faith without baptism 'the figures show a tendency to rise'.

<sup>178</sup> See Dr. Albert Peel, Editor of *The Congregational Quarterly*, 'Why I Worry About the Baptists', *BT* May 26, 1938, 409; F. C. Spurr, 'Rev. F. C. Spurr's Correspondence: Baptism and Reunion', *BT* June 29, 1939, 510, reviewing B. L. Manning's *Essays in Orthodox Dissent*, quoted him as saying, 'Some Congregationalists haven't been baptised...'; 'Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians', *BT* May 30, 1946, 10, which reported the re-issue of E. J. Price's 1933 booklet *Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians* (1945 edition), 24, which recorded the fact that 'Congregationalists do not, in general, insist upon Baptism as essential for Church-membership, though many do'.

<sup>179</sup> J. B. Middlebrook, 'Baptism and the Church', 55, though he said this was rare and not at all typical.

their own church.<sup>180</sup> The presence of unbaptized deacons has also arisen,<sup>181</sup> though this has usually been compensated for by Trust Deed stipulations that the majority of deacons must be believer-baptized.<sup>182</sup>

The two positions on membership have not developed significantly in spite of centuries of, at times heated, debate. Advocates of closed membership appeal to the New Testament precedent of baptism as an act of initiation into the Church, whilst open membership advocates have been able both to recognize and to take into consideration the existing divided state of the Church on baptism and its rightful subjects, and at the same time clearly acknowledge the primacy of faith over the rite of baptism.<sup>183</sup> Both views illustrate the point already made that the majority of

<sup>180</sup> Reported by Middlebrook, 'Baptism and the Church', 55-56. Often baptismal services have been shared with an/other denomination(s), eg, 'Not Baptists But Baptised', *BT* June 23, 1960, 16, being an Anglican and a Methodist baptized by Rev. Eric J. Metcalfe at Sale BC, and Rev. E. D. Mathews (correct spelling) of Combe Martin, who baptized two life-long Congregationalists and a Presbyterian; 'Baptists and Anglicans to Unite for Baptismal Service', *BT* February 22, 1962, 8; 'Baptismal Service with local Methodists', *BT* January 12, 1967, 13; and Baptist ministers have often been willing to baptize members from other denominations who were refused baptism (seen as re-baptism) within their own Churches.

<sup>181</sup> E. A. Payne, *Fellowship of Believers* (1944<sup>1</sup>), 69, observed that the 'widespread opening of membership' had led to the presence of deacons and leaders who had never been baptized, pp.83-84. In his defence of open membership, Richard Jewson, J.P., of St. Mary's, Norwich, 'If I Were Dictator of the Baptists', *BT* May 16, 1940, 319, noted that the church's senior deacon had never been baptized and that he had worked with him on the diaconate for over twenty five years, 'and a more loyal, hard-working, and faithful colleague it would be difficult to find. If he were crossed off our membership roll to-day it would be a great loss to our church, and, further, would have far-reaching repercussions', later quoting the words of Jesus, 'for he that is not against us is for us'. Keynsham BC (f.1807) opened its table and membership in 1883 and opened its diaconate in 1908, see Russell Leitch, *The History of Keynsham Baptist Church* (Keynsham, 1985), see pp.53 and 56, and p.63 respectively. That this is no isolated case is shown by the present Secretary at Calne (open membership), Mr. Terry Mills, who was baptized as an infant in the Methodist Church, and who has not been believer-baptized.

<sup>182</sup> See Bacon, *Church Administration* (1981<sup>1</sup>), 175, Note 6.

<sup>183</sup> It needs to be noted that the reason for the existence of both traditions within Baptist life is because what was taken as read in the New Testament, that all believers were baptized on conversion, had become separated down through the Christian centuries, not least by Baptists. Therefore, both parties were able, with justification, to appeal to New Testament precedent for their positions. It should also be pointed out that the linking of baptism with church membership was an oft repeated position of many Baptists. This is most obviously the rationale behind the closed membership position. But such views have failed to differentiate between the fact that in the New Testament baptism was the completion of the conversion process, nor do they differentiate between conversion-baptism into the Church universal from entry into a local church fellowship. This matter has virtually never been directly raised or addressed by Baptists. One of the few who has was L. G. Champion, *Baptists and Unity* (1962), 81, 'Membership in the church is then not dependent upon the individual's decision to

Baptists have been unable to deal adequately with the fact that in the New Testament baptism was both an act of God and an act of the believer, a means of grace and a profession of faith, an ordinance and a sacrament, an individual but also a corporate act, an inward and an outward matter, initiatory yet a sign of discipleship and a pledge of allegiance, a part of conversion as well as a witness to the decision of faith, an act of obedience in the present but also an eschatological rite. Ernest Clipsham suggested that both closed and open membership churches were right in the sense that they both expressed important truths which should not be ignored. Closed membership declared the fact that as God owned the sacraments, therefore the Church had no right to dispense with his ordinances, and also testified to the conviction of the Church as the fellowship of believers. In contrast, open membership maintained that since God had accepted paedobaptists into His Church, then Baptists had no right to unchurch them. To deny to membership those who were invited to the Lord's table was to imply that they were good enough for the Lord, but not good enough for Baptists. Both practices, he claimed, were right in what they affirmed, but wrong in what they denied, and he believed that it was not impossible to combine the positive insights from both traditions.<sup>184</sup>

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join a particular local congregation; it derives from his incorporation into Christ whereby he is made to share in the whole life of the body'. It was also discussed by E. F. Clipsham of Ashford, 'Should His Table Be Closed to the Non-Baptised', *BT* March 10, 1966, 8, and E. A. Payne, 'The Rise and Decline of the Downs Chapel, Clapton', *BQ* 27.1 (January, 1977), 34-35.

<sup>184</sup> E. F. Clipsham of Ashford, 'Should His Table Be Closed to the Non-Baptised', *BT* March 10, 1966, 8. He cited the covenant of 1780 from the church at New Road, Oxford, which practised open membership and an open table, but it did so without regarding baptism as optional, while still recognizing a genuine difference of opinion among Christians on the subjects and mode of baptism. This is printed in Payne, *Fellowship of Believers* (1952<sup>2</sup>), 79-80.

## Liturgical Developments.

### 1900 - 1937.

Teresa Berger has traced the antecedents of the Liturgical Movement on the European continent during the Enlightenment and particularly the nineteenth century, where, in Britain, it gained wide influence in the 1830s through the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement.<sup>185</sup> Though its very association with the Tractarians alienated the vast majority of Free Churchmen, its influence eventually began to permeate, often unnoticed, into the life of the churches. Early Baptist liturgical pioneers in this include Henry Bonner, minister of Hamstead Road, Birmingham, who introduced 'liturgical' worship to his congregation, and in 1884 issued a service book for use in the church,<sup>186</sup> and F. B. Meyer, who incorporated a limited measure of congregational response in the services of Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road.<sup>187</sup> It must, however, be recognized that a survey of the controversies which often accompanied the introduction of such materials and the advocacy of a Baptist 'liturgy' reveals that what was usually perceived by 'liturgy' was the introduction of 'set' prayers.<sup>188</sup> However, it must not be overlooked that the two denominational hymnbooks of 1900

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<sup>185</sup> Teresa Berger, 'Liturgical Movement', in N. Lossky *et al*, (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1991), 616-618. See also H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England. The Ecumenical Century, 1900-1965* (1965), esp. ch 1, 'The Continental Liturgical Movement and Its Influence', 13-49, for its influence specifically in England see pp.38-47.

<sup>186</sup> See the Preface to F. C. Spurr's *Come Let Us Worship* (1930), vii-x.

<sup>187</sup> His biographer, W. Y. Fullerton, *F. B. Meyer. A Biography* (n.d.), 76, commented on the reason for the church's non-denominational status and revised liturgy, 'that it might embrace all sections of the Church of Christ'. See also Ian Randall's 'Mere Denominationalism. F. B. Meyer and Baptist Life', *BQ* 35.1 (January, 1993), 19-34, especially pp.20-21 and 26-27, where Meyer's character as an 'undenominational Baptist' is explored, particularly, though not solely, in his views on baptism. It should not be forgotten that Christ Church, Westminster Bridge was, in Randall's words, p.26, 'a Free Church which united Baptist and Congregational ingredients', and which met in the Congregational building which installed a baptistry for F. B. Meyer's pastorate. The morning and evening services, which drew the largest crowds, were more liturgical than the afternoon services in which Meyer was less austere and more informal, see Fullerton, *F. B. Meyer*, 111. See also J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982), 145; M. J. Walker, 'Baptist Worship', in Clements (ed.), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 23.

<sup>188</sup> Eg, see the various letters in the *BT&F* from January 5 to April 12, 1912 under the title 'A Plea for a Baptist Liturgy'.

and 1933, and the various service books, introduced a wide variety of 'liturgical' material, not just new hymns and chants, to the Baptist constituency.<sup>189</sup> Michael Walker observed: 'That there was a more general move to order and dignity in worship is evidenced by the appearance of ministers' "manuals" that gave form to the celebration of the sacraments and introduced their users to the catholic treasury of prayer'.<sup>190</sup>

The earliest two manuals were both prepared for use in the Free Churches and as such can be legitimately described as 'ecumenical'. The first appeared c.1905 and was compiled by G. P. Gould and J. H. Shakespeare<sup>191</sup> and suggested that the baptismal liturgy be introduced by the minister reading a prepared address, either in full or part, which began: 'We gather here to fulfill a commandment of God: not to discuss its terms'. The authors then described the need to defend the mode of immersion and to explain the rise of infant baptism as of apologetic interest only and out of place 'when

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<sup>189</sup> See the overview by A. E. Peaston, *The Prayer Book Tradition in the Free Churches* (1964), ch.VIII, 122-130.

<sup>190</sup> Walker, 'Baptist Worship', 23. However, Walker is mistaken if in mentioning M. E. Aubrey's *Minister's Manual* (1927) he is implying that this was the first from a Baptist. Two prior manuals originated from Baptist pens, both intended for Free Church use, and were by that very fact 'ecumenical' - see below. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 44-45, linked the growing number of such manuals with the discussions of worship in the denominational journals and newspapers as the only substantial evidence of the growing influence of the Liturgical Movement on the Free Churches in the first three decades of the twentieth century. No substantial books on the subject came from the Free Churches until Nathaniel Micklem edited the volume *Christian Worship, Studies in its History and Meaning* in 1936, to which H. W. Robinson contributed an article on 'The Old Testament Background', pp.19-34.

<sup>191</sup> The BLC lists it under the title *An Order for the Solemnization of Matrimony, together with an Order for the Burial of the Dead, to which are added Hymns suitable for the Marriage and Burial Services* (n.d.), and it records it as being 32 pages long. The edition used here is G. P. Gould, the President of Regent's Park College, and J. H. Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers containing an Order of Service for the Solemnization of Matrimony, also for the Burial of the Dead, The Dedication of Infants, and the Baptism of Believers, to which are added Suitable Hymns for each of the Services* (n.d.), which is 59 pages long, published jointly by James Clarke & Co and the Kingsgate Press. BLC lists its entry as c.1905 and the precise nature of the relationship between the two is unclear. It is possible that the latter volume is a later expanded edition, though there is no mention of this in the BLC, and if this is the case then its date of publication is unknown. This 'later' volume is the one from which all references are taken.

we come to the baptismal pool',<sup>192</sup> neatly side-stepping and moving away from controversy.<sup>193</sup>

The second manual was arranged by F. B. Meyer.<sup>194</sup> Unlike the sermon supplied by Gould and Shakespeare's, Meyer's addressed itself directly to the fact that believer's baptism differed 'from the ceremony which is often called Baptism in two particulars', namely, the subject and mode of baptism.<sup>195</sup> This was made possible by the inclusion of a section on the baptism of children by the Paedobaptist, Elvet Lewis.<sup>196</sup>

The first wholly Baptist manual was prepared by M. E. Aubrey in 1927.<sup>197</sup> No address was supplied, but Aubrey put forward six elements for the sermon on the meaning of baptism: it was an act of obedience to a dominical command; a distinctive act in which the believer confessed his faith in God and commitment to service; an act whereby one joined 'the company of all who, receiving God's grace in Christ, have submitted themselves to His will'; an imitation of Christ; a declaration that the believer entered into new gifts of grace, since baptism was an outward and visible

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<sup>192</sup> Gould and Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers*, 41-42, 'But when we come to the baptismal pool it is not to offer an apology for what we do there, or to engage in controversy with those from whom we dissent, but to rejoice with great joy in the fulness of meaning which the ordinance has for us'.

<sup>193</sup> A three point message on the ordinance followed which saw baptism as a profession of discipleship, the declaration of salvation received, and an act of obedience, see Gould and Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers*, 41-45.

<sup>194</sup> F. B. Meyer, *Free Church Service-Manual* (n.d. [1911]), published by the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches. Though undated the slim volume appeared in 1911.

<sup>195</sup> Meyer, *Free Church Service-Manual*, 23-24. Meyer described baptism as a badge of discipleship, indicative of the break with the old life and the beginning of a new and better one and as a profession of belief in the salvation won by Christ through his life, death, burial and resurrection. It ended with an epiclesis and the benediction from Jude 24-25. An interesting note is appended to the order of service as an 'N.B.', p.26: that it is 'desirable that before this ordinance is administered, the mode of its administration should be carefully explained to the candidates, so that they may not be taken unawares, but pass through it with composure and comfort'. It is unclear whether this comment suggests the general absence of baptismal preparation classes or not, for it would be reasonable to suppose that were such classes held such matters as the actual act of baptism itself would be both described and explained.

<sup>196</sup> Meyer, *Free Church Service-Manual*, 40-45.

<sup>197</sup> M. E. Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual* (n.d. [1927]), 25-33. The edition used here is the revised version of 1940 (BLC dating).

sign and seal of the inward and invisible grace of baptism into Jesus; and a symbolic declaration of death to sin and resurrection to a new and regenerate life of obedience.<sup>198</sup>

Two further Baptist manuals were produced, both in 1930, by F. C. Spurr and Tait Patterson. The former was a 'new and thoroughly revised' edition of Henry Bonner's service book by one of Bonner's successors at Hamstead Road, which did not contain an order for baptism or infant dedication, though it did provide a service for communion.<sup>199</sup> Patterson's manual provided a brief order for baptism, incorporating mainly Scripture readings, and, in contrast to previous services, invited the congregation to stand throughout the baptism(s) 'in reverent and prayerful silence'.<sup>200</sup> Both books, and the 1937 volume *Readings for Worship* by J. Isaiah Jones of Christ Church, Aston,<sup>201</sup> exemplify the contention that at this time the 'Baptist liturgical movement' was primarily concerned with participatory corporate prayer.

The publication of these manuals is clear evidence of a movement within the denomination towards a greater degree of standardization within worship,<sup>202</sup> though this can in no way be claimed for the whole of the denomination. There can be no doubt that a great many ministers used only parts of such orders for services, supplementing them with their own material, as was accommodated by the rubrics in the manuals at specific places. What these manuals do provide evidence of is a more

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<sup>198</sup> Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 29-30.

<sup>199</sup> F. C. Spurr, *Come Let Us Worship: A Book of Common Worship for Use in Free Churches* (1930), 'Preface', vii.

<sup>200</sup> D. T. Patterson, *The Call to Worship. A Book of Services* (1930), 156-159. The fourth edition of 1947 is used here.

<sup>201</sup> See Peaston. *The Prayer Book Tradition*, 130.

<sup>202</sup> There were few dissimilarities in the orders of service presented in the 4 manuals. See, eg, Aubrey, *A Minister's Manual*, 25-33: Scripture, Address, Prayer, Immersion (sung/organ verse), Benediction. The only variations were that Gould and Shakespeare, *A Manual for Free Church Ministers*, 45, added a hymn between the address and prayer, whilst Patterson, *Call to Worship*, 158-59, added a hymn and scripture sentences between the prayer and immersion, and an optional verse between the sung verse or the blessing from Numbers 6:24-26 and the benediction.



deliberate structuring of worship services. Equally, it can little be doubted that many continued to use familiar forms not directly reflected in the published manuals, especially as Meyer, Shakespeare and Spurr were known advocates of both reunion and the introduction of 'liturgy' into Baptist worship and were held in suspicion by many more conservative Baptists who were still antagonistic towards anything approximating to ritualism, sacerdotalism or Catholicism.<sup>203</sup> These manuals also introduced material from other Christian traditions, often not explicitly, but paving the way for later developments in the liturgical movements' influence within Baptist circles.

The major sources introducing non-Baptist material into Baptist worship and which gained widespread popularity and use were the two new Baptist hymn books of 1900 and 1933. Eighteenth-century Baptists had pioneered the incorporation of hymns from other traditions into their hymn books<sup>204</sup> and this practice continued when *The Baptist Church Hymnal*<sup>205</sup> included metrical litanies, chants and anthems. Many of the older Baptist hymns disappeared and surprisingly few hymns by Baptists were retained.<sup>206</sup> The section on baptism totalled seventeen hymns, only five of which were by Baptists.<sup>207</sup> *The Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* contained sixteen baptismal

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203 And this despite the fact that Meyer clearly came from the theologically conservative wing of the denomination, as did Spurr, who had been the BU Missioner from 1890-1904, see *BH* 1935, 250.

204 J. O. Barrett 'Hymns Among the Baptists', in H. Martin (ed.), *A Companion to the Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* (1953), xxiv.

205 The chairman of the Editorial Committee for the *BCH* was Dr. S. G. Green, Principal Emeritus of Rawdon College and first Book Editor, then Secretary of the Religious Tract Society, see J. O. Barrett, *Rawdon College (Northern Education Society), 1804-1954. A Short History* (1954), 27-28. He was ably assisted by John Clifford, George Hawker, Edward Medley and J. R. Wood.

206 E. A. Payne, 'Baptists and Their Hymns', in R. W. Thomson (ed.), *The Baptist Hymn Book Companion*, (revised edition, 1967), 20-21.

207 *BCH* 490 - 'In all my Lord's appointed ways', John Ryland (1753-1825); *BCH* 494 - 'Hast Thou said, exalted Jesus', John Eustace Giles (1805-1875), written in 1830 at Salter's Hall, London, when, during a serious illness, Giles was anticipating the baptism of several persons. Originally the hymn had six verses, the full text of which can be found in the 1879 *Baptist Hymnal*, see Martin (ed.), *A Companion to the Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)*, 124; *BCH* 498 - 'Glory to God, whose Spirit draws', B. W. Noel (1799-1873), written in 1853 when minister at John Street Baptist Church; *BCH* 500 - 'Dear Master, in Thy Way', John Thomas

hymns, only five by Baptists, a sixth having been altered by a Baptist.<sup>208</sup> Of these only two were new additions, including the one altered.<sup>209</sup>

Two *Companions* were produced to accompany the *BCHR*, the first in 1935, the second eighteen years later, edited by the ecumenist Hugh Martin.<sup>210</sup> The former provided introductory essays, which were not solely historical sketches, and helps to the use of the hymn book, and included several pages under the heading, 'Through the Year in Church Life',<sup>211</sup> reflecting and encouraging the growing use of 'liturgy' amongst the churches.

In 1927 Wheeler Robinson commented that Baptists needed 'an "Oxford Movement" of their own order' and that such would recapture a nobler Church-consciousness and that this would doubtless bring some changes not only in polity but also in worship.<sup>212</sup> The radical nature of such a statement can only be fully realized when the strength of the Baptist reaction against Tractarianism is remembered,<sup>213</sup> and

(1859-1944), written in 1900. Thomas ministered in Huddersfield, Myrtle Street, Liverpool and Sutton; *BCH* 502 - 'Buried with Christ! Our glad hearts say', William Wilson Sidey (1856-1909), written in 1900 when minister in Tottenham. Of the remaining hymns, 4 were by Congregationalists, 5 by Anglicans, 1 by an Anglican who later became a Catholic, 1 Brethren and 1 Presbyterian.

<sup>208</sup> *BCHR* 472 - 'Hast Thou said'; *BCHR* 475 - 'Jesus, and shall it ever be', by the Presbyterian Joseph Grigg, written in 1765, altd. by Benjamin Francis (1734-1799), who was trained at Bristol Baptist College, and ministered at Sodbury, then in 1757 at Horsley for forty two years till his death. His alterations were generally considerable; *BCHR* 476 - 'Glory to God'; *BCHR* 480 - 'Dear Master, in Thy Way'; *BCHR* 428 - 'Buried with Christ!'; *BCHR* 484 - 'Master, we Thy footsteps follow', Frederick Arthur Jackson (1867-1942), written in 1932 whilst at Campden, Gloucs.

<sup>209</sup> John Ryland's hymn was omitted. The remaining hymns were made up of 6 by Anglicans, 2 by Congregationalists, and 1 each by an Anglican come Catholic and Brethren.

<sup>210</sup> Carey Bonner and W. T. Whitley (eds.), *A Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal Revised* (1935); H. Martin (ed.), *A Companion to the Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* (1953). The latter included contributions from J. O. Barrett, Frank Buffard, B. Grey Griffith, J. O. Hagger and the editor himself.

<sup>211</sup> Bonner and Whitley, *A Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal Revised*, 124-25.

<sup>212</sup> Robinson, *Life and Faith*, 174.

<sup>213</sup> So N. Clark, 'In the Study', reviewing S. F. Winward's *Teach Yourself to Pray*, (1961), *BQ* 19.7 (July, 1962), 320, 'in one sense the story of Nonconformist worship at the middle of the nineteenth century is the story of reaction to the Oxford Movement...This influence of the worship of the Church of England upon that of the Free Churches whether *positively or negatively is one of the continuing factors in the historical scene*', italics added.

is evidence of how far Baptist thinking had progressed in nearly a century. This was further reflected nine years later when J. O. Barrett took up Robinson's challenge,<sup>214</sup> providing further evidence within the denomination of how seriously Baptist worship was being reassessed.

### 1938 - 1966.

Liturgical developments in mid-century were reflected in several areas: a growing consciousness on the part, chiefly it must be said, of ministers who began to think more liturgically about the actual conduct of worship, the numbers of articles and books which dealt either directly with Baptist liturgy or the subject of worship, the revision of several service manuals, a number of catechetical booklets, and the participation by a number of Baptist leaders in liturgical groups.

The 1948 statement on 'The <sup>Baptist</sup> Doctrine of the Church' described the general pattern of Baptist worship as 'in the Reformed tradition and....not generally regulated by liturgical forms. Our tradition is one of spontaneity and freedom, but we hold that there should be disciplined preparation of every part of the service'.<sup>215</sup> Ernest Payne confessed, 'Not many Baptists...have a reasoned theory or theology of worship',<sup>216</sup> and this fact was itself illustrated by Baptist hesitation and even disdain of the word 'liturgy' itself,<sup>217</sup> and by the outspoken disapproval of the liturgical movement by the BRF, who saw it as a betrayal of the denomination's evangelical stance. Both the ecumenical and liturgical movements, it was asserted, were evidence of increasing liberal trends within the denomination which over-emphasized the sacraments. This

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214 J. O. Barrett, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, then, from 1949, General Superintendent of the North Eastern Area, 'An "Oxford Movement" Amongst Baptists', *The Fraternal* 22 (April, 1936), 9.

215 'Baptist Doctrine of the Church', 442.

216 Payne, *Fellowship of Believers* (1952<sup>2</sup>), 100. Payne also provided an important study on 'The Free Church Tradition and Worship', *BQ* 21.2 (April, 1965), 51-63, which dealt with recent Baptist developments on pp.60-61, reprinted in Payne's *Free Churchmen. Unrepentant and Repentant and other papers*, (1965), 15-29, being a lecture that had been given at the Swanwick Conference on Worship, November 12, 1962.

217 West, *Baptist Principles*, 22.

had led to dialogue with other traditions and a resulting shift in Baptist thinking on baptism, where it was now being suggested that there existed a direct link between the rite of baptism and the gift of the Spirit.<sup>218</sup>

Two figures stand out in particular in their commitment to the liturgical renewal of Baptist worship. The first was Neville Clark, whose writings incorporated not just abstract theorizing but the fruits of the regular leading of worship. He wrote, 'as a Baptist to Baptists',<sup>219</sup> remarking that of all the major denominations it was probably the Baptists who had been least affected by the liturgical movement. 'Our worship is the result of the interplay of many curious historical factors; our tradition is strangely tangled; our cherished emphases are sometimes more fortuitous and often more recent than we imagine'.<sup>220</sup> The two sacraments, he insisted, belonged together, baptism, laying on of hands and first communion being the pattern of Christian initiation. The liturgy, he pressed, provided the ground plan for pre-baptismal instruction and church membership, and in countless ways would also be the governing and determinative factors for the whole life of the Church and the whole existence of the baptized.<sup>221</sup> The goal, then, towards which the catechumenate moved 'in any church practising only believers' baptism' was the baptismal eucharist.<sup>222</sup>

The second figure was Stephen Winward, who produced two books of responsive prayers and readings<sup>223</sup> and presented the Whitley lectures in 1963, arguing that

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218 *Liberty in the Lord*, 34-36.

219 N. Clark, minister at Amersham-on-the-Hill Free Church, *Call to Worship*, Studies in Ministry and Worship no.15, G. W. H. Lampe and David M. Paton (eds.), (1960), preface.

220 Clark, *Call to Worship*, 9 and 31.

221 Clark, *Call to Worship*, 54.

222 Clark included an order for this service which he had used, Clark, *Call to Worship*, 58-59.

223 Neither of which dealt with baptism, S. F. Winward, *Responsive Praises and Prayers for Minister and Congregation* (1958), reviewed in *BT* September 18, 1958, 2, and *Responsive Service Book* (1965), reviewed by Walter Bottoms, 'Orders for Worship', *BT* February 10, 1966, 6. Winward was minister at Highams Park, Walthamstow (1938-1966), after which he moved to Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, where he was to make perhaps the most valuable contributions of any Baptist in the area of liturgy.

worship should be understood as a dialogue which did not consist in words alone. This was exemplified by the sacraments where, 'The Lord acts through that which is done by his people with water, and with bread and wine, in obedience to his ordinances'. In language reminiscent of Brunner, Winward held that only when they were understood in terms of personal encounter and dialogue, could the nature of sacramental grace be rightly understood. In both, God met the believer through Christ in the Spirit, calling for the response of repentance, faith and allegiance. 'Both alike are intended to be encounter, word and answer'. Baptism is the sacrament of the word of God which had already been spoken to the catechumen through the preaching and teaching of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. Having been born anew the catechumen responded in repentance, faith and promise to God's initiative. The baptismal rite itself was both spoken and enacted word.<sup>224</sup>

In 1963, both Clark and Winward contributed to the controversial *The Pattern of the Church*, in which the four authors critically examined Baptist worship in the light of liturgical developments. Dr. West noted that 'there is today a developing movement within the denomination towards a fuller and richer understanding of worship'.<sup>225</sup> Clark declared that 'In the end, all roads lead at last to liturgy. It is at this point that the heart of the Church is unveiled; it is here that reform is most urgent and crucial'.<sup>226</sup> Gilmore encouraged a new approach to worship and this included a new understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. On baptism he wrote, 'From being simply a personal matter connected with decision or the experience of conversion, baptism must come to be regarded as the great act of initiation whereby a man is made a member of the Church of God'.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Winward, *Reformation of Our Worship*, 27-28. It was reviewed by B. Gordon Hastings, *BT* March 4, 1965, 7.

<sup>225</sup> West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', in Gilmore (ed.), *Pattern of the Church*, 28, but see the whole discussion on pp.27-30.

<sup>226</sup> N. Clark, 'The Fulness of the Church of God', in Gilmore (ed.), *Pattern of the Church*, 108

<sup>227</sup> Gilmore, 'Baptist Churches Today and Tomorrow', in Gilmore (ed.), *Pattern of the Church*, 118-19. He also argued that baptism should also always take place before communion, p.125.

Alongside a number of other books and articles which dealt with the overall subject of worship and in varying degrees baptism,<sup>228</sup> several older service books were revised and reprinted in the 1930s and 40s,<sup>229</sup> whilst Stephen Winward collaborated with Ernest Payne in the preparation of what was to become the standard minister's manual for over thirty years, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship*. It also marked a radical departure from previous manuals in that it presented services for 'Christian initiation' - baptism-membership-communion with the option of the laying on of hands, as well as a service for the dedication of children.<sup>230</sup> The importance of *The Baptist Hymn Book* (1962) is also difficult to overestimate, providing not just hymns for many and various occasions, including four for the presentation of infants,<sup>231</sup> seventeen for baptism<sup>232</sup> and three baptismal sentences,<sup>233</sup> but also a section for

- <sup>228</sup> Eg, R. P. Martin's 'The Composition of 1 Peter in Recent Study', *Vox Evangelica* I, (1962), 29-42, 'Aspects of Worship in the New Testament Church', *Vox Evangelica* II, (1963), 6-32, and *Worship in the Early Church* (1964). The latter was reviewed along with Winward's *The Reformation of Our Worship* by D. D. Black, *BQ* 21.3 (July, 1965), 138-39.
- <sup>229</sup> D. T. Patterson's *The Call to Worship* (1938<sup>3</sup> and 1947<sup>4</sup>); M. E. Aubrey's *A Minister's Manual* (revised and enlarged 1940). Patterson was positively though briefly reviewed in *BQ* 9.4 (October, 1938), 256, and Aubrey even more briefly in *BQ* 10.4 (October, 1940), 240.
- <sup>230</sup> Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 123-127, 127-135 and 135-138 respectively. Payne and Winward's order of service suggested the following pattern: Baptismal hymn, Selection of scripture readings, Sentences explaining and setting out the meaning of baptism. Questions to the candidate(s), Prayer, Immersion followed by the Blessing or Hymn sung by the choir and/or congregation and/or one of the baptismal sentences from the *BHB*, Prayers, Hymn and Blessing (unless the normal order of worship be continued), pp.128-35. This order was more complex than the ones provided in the earlier manuals, and paved the way for the more complex and liturgically detailed orders of service to be found in *Praise God and Patterns and Prayers* (see below). *Orders and Prayers* also contained an important introductory essay on the subject of worship, ix-xxii, which, on the ordinance of believers' baptism explained, 'In the order for Believers' Baptism...it is not sufficient to set forth the response required of the candidates; a whole, balanced service must also declare the divine action and promises', xix. It was positively reviewed by Walter Bottoms, 'New Manual for Ministers', *BT* December 29, 1960, 7, and Neville Clark, 'Radio Review of New Manual for Ministers', *BT* January 19, 1961, 4, 8. This has been without doubt the most widely used and influential of all Baptist service manuals. Its wide use is referred to, eg, by K. W. Clements, 'Editorial', *BQ* 28.7 (July, 1980), 291.
- <sup>231</sup> Including Hugh Martin's hymn 'Christ who welcomed little children', *BHB* 284.
- <sup>232</sup> Hymns by Baptists included the American Frank William Boreham's 'Eternal Father, whose great love -', *BHB* 288; B. W. Noel's 'Glory to God, whose Spirit draws', *BHB* 290; John Philip Giles' 'Here, in this water, I do vow to Thee', *BHB* 291; Joseph Griggs' 'Jesus, and shall it ever be', *BHB* 293, altered by Benjamin Francis; Hugh Martin's 'Lord Jesus, in Thy footsteps', *BHB* 295; Frederick Arthur Jackson's 'Master, we Thy footsteps follow', *BHB* 296; and Benjamin Beddome's 'Witness, ye men and angels, now', *BHB* 304.

private use, and one containing canticles, psalms and selected scriptures for congregational chanting or alternate reading. Catechetical materials began to be published in the early 1950s,<sup>234</sup> coinciding with a growing emphasis on the need for a Baptist catechumenate,<sup>235</sup> though this idea never took off.<sup>236</sup>

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- 233 These (*BHB* 305), it was recommended, were suitable for singing by the choir or by the congregation as a whole, as the candidate emerged from the water, and were taken from Numbers 6:24-26, Revelation 2:10 and 5:13, see R. W. Thomson (ed.), *The Baptist Hymn Book Companion* (1967<sup>2</sup>), 241-42.
- 234 Other important catechetical material was produced by S. F. Winward, *The New Testament Teaching on Baptism, in the form of daily Bible readings for the instruction of Candidates for baptism* (1952), eleventh impression 1982; P. R. Clifford, *The Christian Life. A Book about Baptism and Church Membership* (1954); R. E. O. White, *Invitation to Baptism. A Manual for Inquirers* (1962), which was still being reprinted in the 1980s; it is possible to include here R. L. Child's *A Conversation About Baptism* (1963); J. R. C. Perkin, *Divine Encounter. An Outline for Discussion of Believer's Baptism* (1965); S. J. Wallace, *Someone is Watching You (a way of looking at Church Membership)* (1965); P. J. Goodland, P. J. Hetherington, J. L. Pretlove and D. J. Warner, *Faith and Life. Practical Lessons in Christian Living* (1966), a church membership preparation course prepared by the Radlett Fellowship.
- 235 Though not unknown before 1960, the idea of the catechumenate came to prominence in an article by G. W. Rusling, Vice-Principal of Spurgeon's College, 'The Status of Children', *BQ* 18.6 (April, 1960), 250-51, and was advocated by *The Child and the Church* (1966), 9-10, 14, 22-25, which, p.34, understood infant dedication to be the moment when the child was added to the church's catechumenate. D. F. Tennant, Head of the Church Education Department, Westhill College, Birmingham, 'The Child in Communion - An Enquiry', *The Fraternal* 173 (May, 1975), 18 and 26, stated that 'Baptism signifies the transfer from catechumenate to membership of the Body'. The number of those who advocated it rapidly increased. See also G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), 373, 394; the contributors in A. Gilmore (ed.), *The Pattern of the Church* (1963), eg, West, 'Baptist Church Life Today', p.18, and Winward, 'The Church in the New Testament', p.60; A. Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity* (1966), 101. The idea was, eg, opposed by the conservative evangelical Radlett Fellowship, *The Gospel, the Child and the Church* (1967), 18-19.
- 236 D. F. Tennant, 'A Critical Look at Present Baptist Practice Regarding Children and Worship in the Light of Recent Thinking on Christian Nurture', *The Fraternal* 189 (October, 1979), 4, 'Some have tried to resurrect the "catechumenate" but without success'. He made the same point in his 'Anabaptist Theologies of Childhood and Education. (1) The Repudiation of Infant Baptism', *BQ* 29.7 (July, 1982), 299.

Baptists were also officially represented in the newly formed Joint Liturgical Group (JLG)<sup>237</sup> in 1963 by Stephen Winward and Neville Clark.<sup>238</sup> The unofficial conference on worship and liturgy held at Swanwick in November 1962 also showed that the liturgical movement had gained significant ground within Baptist circles,<sup>239</sup> so much so that, in 1966, Alec Gilmore could confidently write, 'The growth of the liturgical movement everywhere is an indication of the way things are going', and this was reflected in the increasing appreciation of the sacraments.<sup>240</sup>

Comparison of three orders for baptism, by J. R. C. Perkin,<sup>241</sup> Stephen Winward<sup>242</sup> and Alec Gilmore,<sup>243</sup> published between 1959 and 1966, show that the influence of the liturgical movement had led to a greater complexity in the baptismal service which included a larger number of components than ever before and reflected the

<sup>237</sup> The JLG is a joint venture between the Church of England, the Episcopal Church of Scotland, Baptist Union, Presbyterian Church of England, Methodist Church, Congregational Union and Church of Scotland. The JLG has played an important part in helping British Churches find common forms of worship and has provided a body through which British Churches have participated in the search for internationally and ecumenically agreed English liturgical texts, so Donald Gray, the Anglican chairman of the JLG, 'Foreword' *Confirmation and the Re-affirmation of Baptismal Faith* (1992), 7. This and other books mistakenly record the establishment of the JLG as 1965, when its first meeting was actually October 10-11, 1963, see its founding 'Statement', R. C. D. Jasper (ed.), *The Renewal of Worship* (Oxford, 1965), n.p..

<sup>238</sup> 'Churches to Talk of Liturgy: Joint Group Formed', *BT* December 19, 1963, 1. S. F. Winward contributed an article to the JLG's first publication, see Winward, 'Embodied Worship', in R. C. D. Jasper, *The Renewal of Worship* (1965), 42-57, in which he sought to draw together the inward and outward components of worship.

<sup>239</sup> 'Churches to Talk on Liturgy', *BT* December 19, 1963, 1. Rev. Eric Sharpe of Oxford chaired the meetings, and though considerable interest was aroused, some eighty ministers attending and a booklist was published, it was decided not to form a separate liturgical group within the denomination. This meeting was negatively linked together with the publication of *The Pattern of the Church* as evidence of the existence within the Baptist Union of a 'liturgical movement and sacramental fellowship', see *Liberty in the Lord*, 45. Eric Sharpe's interests were later shown in his contribution to the Living Issues series of booklets published by the BU, *Treasures of Christian Worship* (1964).

<sup>240</sup> Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity*, 48.

<sup>241</sup> Rev. Dr. J. R. C. Perkin, 'The Principles and Practice of Believers' Baptism', *BT* June 11, 1959, 6. The order of service he had adopted for the past three years at Altrincham BC lasted 90 minutes for 4 candidates. In 1965, Perkin provided another outline service, containing still more components, see his *Divine Encounter*, 15.

<sup>242</sup> Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', 11.

<sup>243</sup> Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity*, 73-74.



broader interest in Christian initiation.<sup>244</sup> Whilst at this time such complex services would have formed only a minority practice of baptism, membership and eucharist, their influence within the local churches depended almost entirely upon the inclinations and interests of the minister of the church.<sup>245</sup>

### 1967-1996.

From the mid-1960s to the present Baptists have, if anything, increased their interest in worship, an interest which has operated at various levels. This has in part been forced upon churches by the many changes within society which have accelerated in practically every area of life. This has caused churches many problems as change has become one of the most contentious issues within contemporary church life.<sup>246</sup> Change has affected most areas of Baptist worship, though, it must be noted, there is little to no evidence that such factors have significantly affected the practice of baptism.

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- 244 Perkin's baptism-reception into membership-communion service contained 24 distinct parts. Winwards baptism-reception into membership-communion service also contained 24 distinct parts, whilst Gilmore's baptismal eucharist contained 5 main sections totalling 24 parts.
- 245 'Baptism and Membership', *BT* November 1, 1962, 2, being the account of a service of baptism, communion and admission to membership in one service, led by Rev. Ian Mallard, following a pattern similar to that outlined by Payne and Winward noted above, at Broad Clyst, Exeter.
- 246 The whole issue of change has been with the churches since the 1960s, when the rate of change in both the Church and society accelerated. Writing specifically on the issues involved peaked in the 1980s and early 90s. Baptist studies on the issue of change include Rev. Douglas McBain, minister of Lewin Road BC, Streatham, *No Gentle Breeze. Baptist Churchmanship and the Winds of Change* (Mainstream, 1981); Nigel Wright, tutor at Spurgeon's College, *The Radical Kingdom. Restoration in Theory and Practice* (Kingsway, 1986), *Challenge to Change. A radical agenda for Baptists* (Eastbourne, 1991). *Challenge to Change* was highly recommended by Dr. Derek Tidball in 'An Extended Review of Nigel Wright's Challenge to Change', *Mainstream Newsletter* 39 (April, 1991), 2-3, and a study guide was provided for it by Rev. Steven Hembery of Crawley BC and Rev. Roy Searle of Enon BC, Sunderland, 'Challenge to Change. A Study Guide', *Mainstream Newsletter* 42 (October, 1991), 8-14. See also Stephen Gaukroger, minister of Stopsley BC, Luton, with David Cohen, General Director of Scripture Union in England and Wales, *How to Close Your Church in a Decade* (1992); Rev. Nick Mercer, Assistant Principal of London Bible College, who some years later entered the Anglican ministry, 'Coping with Change', *The Fraternal* 234 (April, 1991), 3-7. Clearly the matter of change was high on the agenda of evangelical and evangelical-charismatic Baptists, a fact supported by the many essays printed in the *Mainstream Newsletter*, eg. Rev. Dr. D. Tidball of Mutley BC, Plymouth, 'Questions for the Present Time', no.20 (September, 1985), 2-4; Rev. Rob Warner of Herne Hill BC, 'Worship and Culture (Part 1)', no.36 (April, 1990), 6-11 and 'Part 2', no. 37 (July, 1990), 6-10, and also Warner's *21st Century Church. Why Radical Change Cannot Wait* (n.d., but c.1993-94).

*The Liturgical Movement.*

Whilst many Baptists have continued to be resistant to 'liturgy' *per se*, a growing number of Baptist ministers and churches have welcomed liturgical developments,<sup>247</sup> many of them fuelled by personal ecumenical involvement and/or simply the growing openness amongst the denominations to influence from one another. Over the last three decades the number of opportunities for inter-denominational contact have increased, with a flourishing array of Christian conferences, retreats and holidays, chief amongst the latter being Spring Harvest.<sup>248</sup> Further, with increased population mobility, people tend to join churches like their previous one, whether or not it is of the same denomination,<sup>249</sup> and this has increased the cross-fertilization of ideas.

Since the 1960s Baptists have continued to develop liturgically, though not as uniformly as those of the previous period had imagined and hoped. In 1972 Stephen Winward wrote specifically of baptism, though it applies more generally to other forms of Baptist worship: 'Baptists have no prescribed liturgy, but administer the rite in the threefold context of the fellowship, the word, and the prayers. Baptism is not regarded as a private or domestic occasion, but is administered in the setting of the congregation at worship, and of the reading and preaching of the word'.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Eg, see the whole volume of *The Fraternal* 165 (September, 1972), which was entirely given over to Christian worship, especially S. F. Winward's, 'Recent Trends and Developments in the Liturgical Movement', 5-11, but there was not a single reference to baptism in the whole issue. Baptism/initiation has never received the attention which communion/eucharist has received by Baptists writers on worship.

<sup>248</sup> The importance of Spring Harvest is discussed by D. McBain, *Fire Over The Waters* (1997), 134-40.

<sup>249</sup> This point was clearly made by the report *Signs of Hope. An examination of the numerical and spiritual state of churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, prepared by a Working Group set up by the BU Council in 1977 and received by the Council in March 1979, p.33, which, discussing geographical and social mobility, noted that 'many of our churches include members who have come from other traditions, often in sizeable numbers...It remains...that very many of those who have been baptised in our churches settle with their families in churches of other orders'.

<sup>250</sup> S. Winward, 'Baptism: 5. Baptist', in J. G. Davies (ed.), *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (1972), 50.

Baptists continue to prize highly their freedom of worship, freedom, that is, from prescribed liturgical forms,<sup>251</sup> so that there continues to be 'a wide variety of practice, from liturgical formality to charismatic exuberance, from reformed traditionalism to ecumenical experiment'.<sup>252</sup>

Three major factors can be identified which have influenced Baptist worship: the liturgical movement, the charismatic movement and the Baptist (reformed) tradition.<sup>253</sup> Because of its conservative nature the latter of these has not introduced anything new into Baptist worship and so attention will be focussed on the first two.<sup>254</sup>

Liturgical developments have themselves taken place at two levels: through the various formal expressions of the liturgical movement such as the JLG and specifically liturgical texts, and through a growing general interest in worship which certainly has been fed by the former but which is separate from it.

The JLG has played an important role within British Church life and a number of Baptists have been key figures within it.<sup>255</sup> Since 1965 the JLG has published a

<sup>251</sup> So *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship. A guidebook for worship leaders* (Oxford, 1991), 'Preface', v, 'Baptists have their roots deep within the Free Church tradition. Therefore the freedom of the Holy Spirit is a significant factor in their worship, and they do not have a fixed liturgy or approved prayer-book. This does not mean that worship has no shape or basic content, or that preparation and forms are despised'.

<sup>252</sup> *Patterns and Prayers*, 'Preface', v. Details of such ecumenical experiment with regard to baptism have been discussed in detail in chapter 8's discussion of LEPs. In fact, *Patterns and Prayers*, the most recent service manual, discusses 'Flexible Patterns', 'Rich Variety' and 'Different Influences' at the beginning of its opening essay on 'Christian Worship', pp.1-4.

<sup>253</sup> Ruth Gouldbourne, Associate Minister at Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, and from 1995 tutor in Church History at Bristol Baptist College, 'Praise and Prayer', *BQ* 35.2 (April, 1993), 91-92, identified four categories of change: the ecumenical movement, the rise of charismatic renewal, changes in attitude towards liturgy and the general differences in society. As such she is in agreement with the influences identified here and above.

<sup>254</sup> It should be recognized that any divisions for the sake of convenience or clarity can give the false impression that the two are separate things, whereas the actual situation is far more complicated and the various influences frequently overlap.

<sup>255</sup> Chiefly Neville Clark, Stephen Winward, Chris Ellis of Central Church, Swindon, later Cemetery Road, Sheffield, and Paul Sheppy of Barnoldswick. The latter two were involved in the JLG's *Confirmation and Re-affirmation of Baptismal Faith* (Norwich, 1992). This provided for those coming to confirmation, those needing to reaffirm their baptismal faith and

number of books which have dealt with initiation. For example, *Initiation and Eucharist* asked whether sufficient theological agreement existed to make possible the increasing adoption of recognizably common structures for the two sacraments.<sup>256</sup> It claimed that a wide measure of mutual recognition of baptism already existed across denominational frontiers, specifically in terms of the use of water and the trinitarian formula, and it sought to build on this minimal base. It also identified the total rite of Christian initiation as baptism, confirmation and first communion.<sup>257</sup> The JLG also keenly advocated use of the liturgical calendar and lectionary. For example, Neville Clark asserted that baptism 'should be tied closely to the Epiphany Festival' and that at Pentecost the 'baptized move forward from their baptism, the subject for year one being the life of the baptized.'<sup>258</sup>

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those being recognized as members by the several participating churches, the third provision being useful for those coming from denominational churches to membership in an LEP. This document was itself stimulated by an earlier collection by Hugh Cross, at the time the BCC's ecumenical officer, for use in churches with joint Anglican and Free Church membership, see the letter to James M. Cassidy from Rev. Michael Vasey, a member of the JLG and the Anglican Liturgical Commission, cited by Cassidy, 'Membership of the Church', 'Part 1: The L.E.P.s', chapter 2, 'Denominational Membership', under the heading 'Joint Confirmation' see p.55, n.155.

- <sup>256</sup> N. Clark and R. C. D. Jasper (eds.), *Initiation and Eucharist. Essays on their Structure by the Joint Liturgical Group* (1972), 'General Introduction', 8. This had developed from the BCC's report *Areas of Ecumenical Experiment* (1968), recommendation 9: 'That the [JLG] be asked to draw up an agreed form of service for Baptism as a basis for further discussion', see *Initiation and Eucharist*, 9.
- <sup>257</sup> *Initiation and Eucharist*, 11 and 13 respectively. The language of the initiation section is strongly suggestive of Neville Clark's style, though this cannot be proved. Liturgically, a recommended pattern of Christian initiation would include, pp.14-20: 1. The Scriptural warrant. 2. The act of renunciation. 3. Prayer at the font or baptistry. 4. The act of baptism, which would include use of questions to elicit a profession of faith and commitment. 5. The laying on of hands/anointing with chrism.
- <sup>258</sup> N. Clark, 'The Lectionary', in R. C. D. Jasper (ed.), *The Calendar and Lectionary* (Oxford, 1967), 21-22 and 24 respectively. The appropriateness of certain times of the Christian calendar was also acknowledged by Rev. Paul Beasley-Murray, who noted that baptism was particularly fitting at Advent, that Lent was a period of preparation for baptism, that Easter was appropriate for the renewal of baptismal vows and Easter Sunday as a day for baptism, Epiphany as an opportunity for expounding the meaning of baptism in the ongoing context of the Church's mission in the world, whilst Mothering Sunday was a day when those baptized as believers could be invited back to the church. See P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity. A Guide for Today's Worship Leaders* (Eastbourne, 1991), 127, 151-52 and 161, 163, 148, 149, 152 respectively. Epiphany was similarly identified as an occasion for baptism by S. Winward, *Celebration and Order. A Guide to Worship and the Lectionary* (1981), 31. Gilmore, Smalley and Walker (eds.), *Praise God*, outlined the Christian year, and noted the appropriateness of the first Sunday in Advent as a baptismal service, 'the baptized being brought into the community of hope that awaits the coming of Christ'; of Epiphany as an opportunity for expounding the meaning of baptism, including fitting prayers; and Easter day

There have been a considerable number of books and booklets seeking to further the impact of the liturgical movement amongst Baptists, but those that did mention it generally contained only cursory references to baptism.<sup>259</sup> The seemingly peripheral place which baptism/initiation has played in this subject is further reflected by the *Worship File*, first published in the autumn of 1992, which provides resource material for worship leaders, produced by Baptist Publications.<sup>260</sup> The *File*, whilst largely dependent upon the contributions of the readership and reflecting the growing interest in and importance attached to worship and the adequate provision of worship materials, nevertheless has provided material on baptism on only six occasions.<sup>261</sup> But by far the most important contributions to Baptist worship in this period have come from the two service manuals and the new hymn book.<sup>262</sup>

for a baptismal communion, whilst Holy Saturday (an Easter eve vigil) was a fitting occasion for the renewal of baptismal vows, see pp.3; 14 and 16; 21, and 27-28 respectively.

- <sup>259</sup> Eg, Rev. Michael Taylor, Principal of Northern Baptist College, *Variations on a Theme. Some guidelines for everyday Christians who want to reform the Liturgy* (1973), who made only a few historical references to the baptized, eg. 29, 51 and 80-81; Rev. Jamie Wallace of College Street, Northampton, *What Happens in Worship* (1982), which contains one reference to baptism, p.12, and one to infant dedication, p.41; Winward, *Celebration and Order*, 31; and Rev. W. E. Whalley (ed.), *Christian Worship - Some Contemporary Issues* (1984, slightly revised 1989), published by the YBA, which included references to baptism in only 3 of the 7 essays, eg, p.2 'the sacraments', p.9 the closed-open communion debate, and pp.11-13 on the place of the **b**aptistry in Baptist architecture (page references are the same in both editions).
- <sup>260</sup> The original editorial committee comprised Chris Ellis of Cemetery Road, Sheffield, Bernard Green former General Secretary of the BU, Stuart Jenkins, minister at Cheadle Hulme, Keith Jones, Deputy General Secretary of the BU, Mike Nicholls, minister at Bromley, and Tony Turner, tutor at Bristol Baptist College. It should be noted that the editorial committee has considerably changed over the years, the present committee being noted in each issue.
- <sup>261</sup> One of these occurred in a hymn by Chris Ellis on Matthew 28:16-20, v.3 'This is news you can share./ teaching all how to care./ Baptize those who will dare./ Here is your vocation:/ telling every nation', *Worship File* 1 (Autumn, 1992), M8; a baptismal hymn by Miss Stella Read, Librarian at Bristol Baptist College and a member at Horfield BC, Bristol, set to the tune 'Mit Freunden Zart', verses 2 and 4 declare: 'To show himself as one with us,/ Christ came for John's baptizing,/ And I would be as one with him,/ In dying and in rising./ This water shows my death to sin,/ My coming forth, life to begin,/ The new birth symbolising. (v4) Christ joins me to his body now,/ That bonds be broken never:/ His earthly family be mine,/ Their strength my strength for ever./ Christ's life to live, his light to shed./ His Kingdom in this world to spread./ This be our great endeavour', *Worship File* 4 (Autumn, 1993), O17; another occurred in a report that some churches use a covenant service 'as a significant date for the act of Believers' Baptism', *Worship File* 9 (Winter, 1995), S85; Bernard Green, 'Preaching from Passiontide to Pentecost', believed this season to be a good one for preaching on baptism, whilst Rev. John Tattersall of Burton Latimer, advocated an Easter Sunday evening baptismal service, which included reference to baptism in the prayer of confession, *Worship File*, second series 1 (February, 1996), 4 and 19-20 respectively; and an opening prayer at a baptismal service, Rev. Ian Green of Walsworth Road BC, Hitchin, *Worship File* second services 2 (May, 1996), 37.

*Praise God*<sup>263</sup> identified five essential elements to the whole process of Christian initiation: 1/ the reading of Scripture and the reasons for engaging in Christian initiation; 2/ profession of faith and commitment; 3/ prayers, including an invocation of the Spirit; 4/ baptism in the name of the Trinity, possibly with the laying on of hands; 5/ reception into membership and admission to communion.<sup>264</sup> The accompanying 'Statement'<sup>265</sup> set out the benefits promised by the Lord,<sup>266</sup> attributing them to those receiving believers' baptism *and* becoming members of his church.

*Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*<sup>267</sup> is notable for its attempt to reflect the varied patterns and styles represented within BU churches,<sup>268</sup> seeking to

262 In 1974, the Psalms and Hymns Trust published *Praise for Today* as a supplement of modern hymns to the 1962 *Baptist Hymn Book*. It was edited by (Music) Rev. Eric P. Sharpe and (General) Rev. R. W. Thomson. Whilst recommending 10 hymns for Holy Communion, it included none on baptism.

263 Rev. Alec Gilmore, General Secretary of the United Society for Christian Literature, Rev. Edward Smalley, Eastern Area General Superintendent, and Rev. Michael Walker was minister of Beckenham BC, (eds.), *Praise God*. For the factors leading up to its publication and its origins in January 1977, see 'Introduction', *Praise God*, p.xi. Notice of its publication was given by M. J. Walker, 'Praise God: A New Service Book', *BQ* 28.7 (July, 1980), 314-21. Here Walker noted the many changes in worship which had taken place since 1960: a greater variety of gifts and methods in public worship; the charismatic movement; the liturgical movement; new Bible translations; and changes of worship patterns in other churches and the resulting mutual influence of denominations upon each other, pp.314-16. It was reviewed by W. Bottoms, 'For all who lead our worship today', *BT* March 27, 1980, 4.

264 *Praise God*, 137. Surprisingly for Baptists, *Praise God* recognized five sacraments and ordinances: Sunday worship, infant dedication and thanksgiving, Christian initiation, Christian marriage and Christian burial, see Section III, pp.121-66.

265 Walker, 'Praise God: A New Service Book', 320, referred to the 'Service of Baptism', not 'Christian Initiation', and that the norm is baptism, reception into membership and communion. He noted that the order provided in no way varied from that in Payne and Winward's *Orders and Prayers*, though it was shorter and simpler. This perhaps explains why exactly twice the number of pages were given over to infant dedication and thanksgiving, the newer/less established rite, than Christian initiation, see 'Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving', pp.129-36, 'Christian Initiation', pp.137-40.

266 These were in baptism the believer became one with Christ through faith, sharing his death and resurrection, the washing of the body with water being a sign of the cleansing of the whole of life and personality. It marked the reception of the Spirit and was an act of obedience, making a personal confession of faith and becoming part of 'the one holy, catholic and apostolic church'. The rubric noted that some ministers might prefer to conduct the baptism at the beginning of the service, using the sermon as an opportunity to charge the newly-baptized, and that an appeal for those thinking of baptism should either come forward or to meet him in the vestry afterwards, adding that this was 'not necessarily with a view to being baptised at that moment'. See *Praise God*, 139.

267 It was well-received by reviewers. See Peter Tongeman, 'A book whose value far exceeds its price', and David Dewey, 'Ring the changes in the past 30 years', both *BT* April 25, 1991,

accommodate these variations by offering two patterns for the whole process of initiation,<sup>269</sup> followed by material for each of the constituent elements.<sup>270</sup> Like its immediate predecessors, the pattern of believers' baptism and reception into membership at the Lord's Supper was advocated, as was 'the laying on of hands', whether in the baptistry or before or after reception into membership, because they 'all relate to our one initiation into the Body of Christ'.<sup>271</sup>

In line with the new emphasis on initiation rather than just baptism, the section dealing with it in *Baptist Praise and Worship* was headed 'Baptism and Membership' and contains sixteen hymns,<sup>272</sup> only ten of which are about baptism.<sup>273</sup> The greatest

10, and Bernard Green, "Why a new manual on worship?", in the same issue but p.XII; Stuart Jenkins, 'Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship: A new book for Baptist worship', *The Fraternal* 232 (October, 1990), 15-16; Ruth Bottoms, 'Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship: A Reflection', *The Fraternal* 240 (October, 1992), 25-26. Much of the work for *Patterns and Prayers* had been done by the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship, with the consultative help at various times from the Federation of Lay Ministries, the BMS, College Principals, General Superintendents and various individuals informed about worship developments in churches experiencing spiritual renewal. The idea originated in the BU's General Purposes and Finance Committee in January 1988 - for full details and those involved see the 'Preface', *Patterns and Prayers*, v-vii.

- 268 P. Tongeman, 'A book whose value far exceeds its price', *BT* April 25, 1991, 10.
- 269 The first pattern is for a single service of baptism, reception into membership and communion, the second a baptismal service on its own, which would be followed by a subsequent service at which the newly baptized would be received into membership, *Patterns and Prayers*, 93-95. The first pattern comprises 21 parts, the second pattern is made up of 20 individual parts. Both these services reflect the greater complexity which has been incorporated into baptismal services due to the influence of liturgical developments.
- 270 The two patterns are followed by 'The Laying on of Hands', pp.102-04, and 'Reception into Membership', pp.104-07. Three patterns for 'The Lord's Supper' are set out on pp.69-75. All in *Patterns and Prayers*.
- 271 *Patterns and Prayers*, 93. These elements might take place in a single act of worship or may be divided between morning and evening services or between consecutive Sundays. Reception into membership, it was recognized, is not always linked directly with baptism but could follow a profession of faith or membership transfer.
- 272 The most notable fact about this section is its inclusion of ten new, twentieth-century hymns, only 2 of which are identifiable as being by Baptists (the denominations of the remaining 20th century hymn-writers are uncertain): *BPW* 416 by Benjamin Beddome, 'Witness, both earth and heaven now', an altered version of *BHB* 304 'Witness, ye men and angels, now!'; and Rev. Peter Tongeman, General Superintendent for the South Eastern Area and, in 1995-96, President of the BU, *BPW* 410 'For me to live is Christ'. Based on Philippians 1:21-22, Tongeman's hymn is not a baptismal hymn. A third hymn, *BPW* 415, 'May we learn to love each other', has a second verse added by Rev. Dr. Michael Ball of Sutton BC, but this is a hymn on membership.
- 273 *BPW* 402-405, 407, 408, 412, 414 and 416.

potential contribution of this section to Baptist worship lies in its provision of ten readings, of which four relate to baptism.<sup>274</sup>

In 1972 Stephen Winward recognized the impact of the new perspective on Christian initiation: 'In some churches, the laying on of hands after baptism...has been restored. The practice of baptizing at the Lord's Supper is also on the increase. The desire to enrol the candidates as members of the church at the baptismal service itself is one outcome of the new emphasis upon baptism as initiation into the body of Christ'.<sup>275</sup> This still applies over twenty five years later, as services of baptism, reception into membership and communion have become more common,<sup>276</sup> though many churches still remain unaffected by this liturgical development.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> BPW 417-420. The first three of these are responsive readings.

<sup>275</sup> Winward, 'Baptism 5. Baptist', 50.

<sup>276</sup> Walker, 'Praise God: A New Service Book', 315, 'Conversion, baptism and admission to church membership are more clearly seen as a unity and, even where baptism, reception into membership and communion are not celebrated in the one service there is at least the recognition of a sequence and the fact that the events, though separated by time, nevertheless hold together'. Similarly P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity*, 59, noted that this practice was one of several possibilities, there being no *one* way in which new members are welcomed into the fellowship; and R. Hayden, 'Believers Baptized: An Anthology', in P. S. Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water* (1996), 19, commented, 'This single liturgical act is now current practice for many Baptist congregations'. That this is no mere theoretical exercise is shown by 'Baptism of David Nutter and Reception into Church Membership at the Lord's Table', being a printed order of service prepared by Baptist liturgist, Dr. Paul Sheppy, Secretary of the JLG, which was held at Barnoldswick BC on March 5, 1992, on the first Sunday of Lent. This complex order comprised 4 main sections and a total of 27 parts. See also the services set out in *Orders and Prayers*, 127-61 (this material could be used for separate services or for one service of baptism-membership-communion); *Praise God*, 138; and *Patterns and Prayers*, 93-94.

<sup>277</sup> A. Gilmore, E. Smalley and M. J. Walker (eds.), *Praise God. A Collection of Resource Material for Christian Worship* (1980), 137, noted that 'Among Baptists of late there has been a growing tendency to bring closer together the act of baptism, reception into membership and admission to communion', but later added that this was 'by no means universal, many ministers and churches preferring to separate baptism and reception into membership either by several hours on the same day or perhaps even by several weeks'. Also Michael Walker, 'Baptist Worship', in Clements (ed.), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 25, 'the uniting of baptism, communion and reception into membership into one liturgical act is practised in a number of our churches'. He continued: 'But there would still be many who see it as nothing more than an example of liturgical exotica and happily continue to sunder conversion, baptism, communion, church membership and, more recently, the gift of the Spirit one from the other'.



*Biblical Worship.*

Since the 1960s there has been a growing interest in worship from the biblical perspective. A leader in this field has been Prof. Ralph P. Martin.<sup>278</sup> A leading evangelical biblical scholar, Martin has written numerous books and articles on worship and other New Testament subjects, many of which have included discussion of baptism.<sup>279</sup> These scholarly works, whilst known, do not appear to have altered Baptist baptismal practice, though they have clearly provided an academically respectable biblical basis for believer's baptism.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Martin, who left his position as lecturer in New Testament at Manchester University in 1969 to become Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, had served BCs in Gloucester and Dunstable from 1949 to 1959, becoming a tutor at London Bible College until 1965 before taking up his appointment at Manchester. In 1988 he returned to Britain, becoming Professor in the Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield University, during which time he served the church at Norwood Avenue, Stockport from 1988-93, and then as Associate Minister at Scarisbrook New Road, Southport, from 1993-95, shortly after which he returned to the USA.

<sup>279</sup> Martin's *Worship in the Early Church*, originally 1964, was revised in 1974. See also his *The Worship of God. Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids, 1982). His articles on worship include 'Patterns of Worship in New Testament Churches', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (1989), 59-85, being an inaugural lecture given at Sheffield University in May 1989, and 'New Testament Worship: Some Puzzling Practices', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Summer, 1993), no.2, 119-26. A number of his other books and commentaries also discuss New Testament baptism: *The Family and the Fellowship. New Testament Images of the Church* (Exeter, 1979), 76-81, 127-28; *Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty. An Expository Commentary with a Present-Day Application* (Exeter, 1972), *passim*; *Colossians and Philemon*, New Century Bible Commentary series, (1973), *passim*; *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40, (Dallas, 1986), 28, 131-32; *1, 2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Themes, (Dallas, 1988), *passim*; *New Testament Foundations. A Guide for Christian Students. Vol.1: The Four Gospels* (Exeter, 1975), 179-80; *Vol.2: Acts-Revelation* (Exeter, 1978); *The Spirit and the Congregation. Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids, 1984); *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Atlanta, 1991). It should be noted that Martin's Festschrift was entitled, *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church. Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin*, M. J. Wilkins and T. Paige (eds.), (Sheffield, 1992). This volume contains a brief biographical outline of Martin as well as his *curriculum vitae*, pp. 21-32, and 'Personal Reminiscences' by Prof. Leslie C. Allen, pp.33-36.

<sup>280</sup> This interest in biblical worship is also evinced in H. H. Rowley's *Worship in Ancient Israel. Its Forms and Meaning* (1967), being the Edward Cadbury Lectures delivered at the University of Birmingham in 1965; Dr. Barrie R. White, Principal of Regent's Park College, 'Worship among the English Baptists Today', *Mainstream Newsletter* 33 (July, 1989), 3-6; Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Worship and Wineskins', *Third Way* (May, 1991), 20-22. Only the latter of these mentioned baptism at all, and that briefly. Such brief references to baptism, or none at all, is typical of much of the material from Baptists on worship at this time. However, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Worship and the Sacraments', in *The Second Holdsworth-Grigg Memorial Lecture, Whitley College: The Baptist College of Victoria* (Melbourne, 1970), n.p.. Discussion of baptism is also to be found in Raymond Brown, *Christ Above All. The message of Hebrews*, in the Bible Speaks Today series, (Leicester, 1982); and Donald Guthrie's books, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, 1957, 1990<sup>2</sup>), *A Shorter Life of Christ* (1970), *Jesus the Messiah* (1972), *Galatians*, New Century Bible Commentary series, (1973), *The Apostles* (1975), *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, 1981),

A figure who spans the academic and the popular is Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray. In his *Faith and Festivity* he noted two purposes of baptismal services: the evangelistic which understood baptism as a proclamation of the Gospel, and that which directed the preaching at the candidates themselves, emphasizing discipleship. He believed that the *second*, which is increasingly popular not least because it is represented in many books of orders of service, no longer sees baptism as the climax of the service, but rather as leading to the celebration of the Lord's Supper where the candidates are received into membership. Its emphasis on the corporate dimension, baptism being the rite of initiation, means that baptism leads to communion. But the first model also had much to commend it, for it emphasized baptism as the moment for confessing faith, and enabling<sup>ing</sup> baptismal services to be occasions for the proclamation of the gospel. For this reason, on pragmatic grounds, Beasley-Murray favoured this tradition.<sup>281</sup>

### *The Influence of Charismatic Renewal on Worship.*

The charismatic-renewal movement has also had a major influence on Baptist worship.<sup>282</sup> A central emphasis within the charismatic tradition is the immediacy of

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*Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, 1983). Dr. Guthrie was lecturer in New Testament at London Bible College from 1970 to his retirement. His origins were amongst the Strict Baptists in Suffolk, though he later joined the BU. For many years he was a deacon at Stanmore Road, and in his retirement he was moderator at Rayners Lane, North Harrow. Details from a conversation with Dr. Derek Tidball, the present Principal of LBC. For a tribute to Guthrie see Peter Cotterell, 'Dr. Donald Guthrie, 1916-1992', *LBC Review* (Autumn, 1992), 2.

<sup>281</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity*, 103-05. His suggested order of service reflected the clear influence of liturgical developments, including 7 (possibly 8) sections, made up of 23 parts, see pp.106-07. He then discussed each major section of the service, pp.107-16.

<sup>282</sup> See D. McBain, *No Gentle Breeze*, 14-16. McBain believed that the effect of the charismatic movement on the patterns of worship was actually anticipated in Payne and Winward's introductory essay in *Orders and Prayers*, in which they wrote, 'This element of congregational participation needs to be restored to our churches today, which, apart from the singing of hymns, is often the monopoly of the Minister. The scriptural doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has implications for worship which for too long have been ignored. As the fellowship of the Holy Spirit the local church should endeavour to develop a truly congregational worship, utilising the spiritual gifts of all its members', pp.XII-XIII. A less than positive assessment of the movement was presented by Michael Walker, 'Baptist Worship', in Clements (ed.), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 27-29.

the inspiration of the Spirit.<sup>283</sup> and this makes somewhat paradoxical the observation that the movement has also led to a greater appreciation of liturgy.<sup>284</sup> A further benefit of this movement is its ecumenical dimension, for it transcends denominational boundaries and has indirectly contributed to the ecumenical life of the British Church, though charismatic churches have often not become involved in official ecumenical bodies.<sup>285</sup> However, there is no evidence that as a movement it has contributed in any significant way to the conduct of baptismal services, except in the practice of the laying on of hands which is widely practised in charismatic circles.

### *The Laying on of Hands.*

The place of the laying on of hands within the baptismal rite was reintroduced into Baptist worship,~~and~~ largely due to the advocacy of Payne and Winward,<sup>286</sup> and it has been further developed by both the liturgical and charismatic movements,<sup>287</sup> though it is not confined to either grouping.<sup>288</sup> In the former category, it is often the

<sup>283</sup> So the Report of the Working Group set up by the BU Council to study the Movement for Charismatic Renewal, received by the Council in March 1978, edited by Alec Gilmore, printed in P. S. Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal. A Baptist View. A Report received by the Baptist Union Council with commentary by Paul S. Fiddes* (1980), 4, 'the most characteristic feature of charismatic renewal is spontaneity of praise'. For the background and origins of the Report, see D. S. Russell's 'Foreword', n.p., and p.4.

<sup>284</sup> So Nigel Wright, 'Introducing Believers' Church Anglicanism', *BT* April 25, 1991, 8, 'not a few Baptists of charismatic inclination are coming to appreciate the whole notion of liturgy and the value of freedom within a structure of worship that provides rhythm, balance, theological depth and dignity to their praise'.

<sup>285</sup> See 'Ecumenical Dimension', in the 'Report' in Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal*, 7, 'there has been a very marked growth in toleration of those Christians of other communions who are involved in charismatic renewal. During charismatic meetings there has been much sharing and participation with other Christians and traditional hostility, for example to Roman Catholics, has disappeared. A common experience has accomplished rapidly what many years of patient discussion and explanation has failed to do'. The Report then continues: 'But this ecumenical experience has not at the same time increased the support of charismatic Baptist churches for such ecumenical bodies as the [BCC] and [WCC]'.

<sup>286</sup> This indebtedness to Payne and Winward was expressed by Dr. Arnold Baines of Chesham, 'The Laying on of Hands', *BT* December 9, 1993, 12. See Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers*, 135-36.

<sup>287</sup> The charismatic movement has been an influential advocate of the use of the laying on of hands in water baptism, in prayer for the 'baptism of the Spirit', healing, commissioning and 'deliverance'.

<sup>288</sup> Eg, the present writer, who would not be described as either involved in the liturgical or charismatic movements, has prayed over baptismal candidates with the laying on of hands

ecumenically-minded ministers and churches that reflect the influence of the liturgical movement in their practice,<sup>289</sup> and both *Praise God* and *Patterns and Prayers* have provided material for a service of the laying on of hands.<sup>290</sup> When the Old Baptist Union joined the BU in 1993, Arnold Baines wrote of the laying on of hands, a practice still continued by the Old General Baptists, 'No one supposes that the grace promised in this ordinance differs from the grace of baptism...'.<sup>291</sup>

Paul Beasley-Murray has provided perhaps the fullest (though still brief) discussion of this. From acknowledging its biblical basis and the variations in its practice amongst Baptist churches, he argued that its purpose is 'to invoke the Spirit to come and fill the candidates with fresh power for service. As the candidates have been baptised in water, so fresh baptism of the Spirit is requested. Clearly the candidates have already received the Spirit, but now they desire yet more of Him'. Theologically, the ceremony, following *Praise God*, is a form of 'lay ordination', the candidates being set apart for service.<sup>292</sup> Beasley-Murray linked the laying on of hands with the formal welcoming of candidates into church membership, arguing that it provided a fitting climax by means of its 'loving solemnity', whereas extending 'the right hand of fellowship' was 'something of an anti-climax'.<sup>293</sup>

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whilst still in the baptistry immediately after the immersion, and in this practice he is not alone, finding adequate justification for the practice in scripture alone.

<sup>289</sup> Eg, the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes, has adopted a form of service which unites baptism with the laying on of hands, reported by Dr. A. Baines, 'The Laying on of Hands', *BT* December 9, 1993, 12. A second example is the Church of Christ the King, Milton Keynes, where the laying on of hands in confirmation takes place immediately after baptism by immersion, see 'Milton Keynes', *BT* July 27, 1995, 15.

<sup>290</sup> See *Praise God*, 137, and *Patterns and Prayers*, 102-04. In both instances the act followed baptism once the candidate(s) and minister had changed, and was a part of their reception into membership, *Praise God*, 140, *Patterns and Prayers*, 94, though the latter included the laying on of hands following baptism if the service did not include reception into membership, p.95. In neither manual were hands laid on the candidate in the water, either before or after the act of immersion.

<sup>291</sup> A. Baines, 'The Laying on of Hands', *BT* December 9, 1993, 12. See also Baines' letter, 'Laying on of Hands', *BT* February 3, 1994, 6.

<sup>292</sup> See *Praise God*, 140.

<sup>293</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity*, 114-16. He cites Acts 8:17; 19:6; Hebrews 6:2.

The laying on of hands, then, has become a common part of Baptist sacramental worship, though it must be added that there is still no unanimity on its significance and no standardized place for it within the sacramental act.<sup>294</sup>

*Conclusion.*

Christopher Ellis described one of the benefits of the liturgical movement as bringing 'the sacraments into the centre of the church's life. For those practising infant baptism this has meant infants being presented in the main services, and for Baptists there has been an increased emphasis on the link between baptism and church membership. There are three parties in the sacramental partnership: God, the person being baptized, and the people of God. This recognition encourages an acknowledgement of the function of the sacraments within the life of the church'.<sup>295</sup> Only a qualified agreement can be given to this assessment. In certain contexts it has much to commend it, for within the ecumenical and liturgical scene it is unquestionably true, but, as many Baptists continue to remain outside (though admittedly not uninfluenced by) these movements, it is not wholly true. Baptism continues to be regarded with ambivalence by many Baptists, a fact supported by the 15% decline in the number of reported baptisms from 1994 to 1995, a downward trend which began in 1990.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> P. Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity*, 106-07, 'Customs vary as to when this rite is carried out. It can take place in the waters of baptism, immediately after baptism itself. This gives a sense of immediacy. The disadvantage is that the candidate is still recovering from having been dipped under the water. It is probably better to give the candidates time to get changed'. For its administration before baptism, see 'Hands together, eyes open', *BT* December 15, 1988, 1, reporting the baptism of Mike Kozak at Didcot BC, having his eyes open during the prayer preceding baptism with the laying on of hands administered whilst he knelt. The laying on of hands immediately after the act of immersion was the present writer's practice at Calne BC, Wiltshire. For its use after leaving the pool or at communion when the candidate is received into membership, see, eg, 'Service was a show case for Baptist rites', *BT* October 4, 1990, 7, reporting a service conducted by the minister of Westbury-on-Trym BC, Bristol, Rev. Peter King, including infant dedication followed by believers' baptism, the latter being 'followed by the laying-on of hands to commission the candidates for service and reception into membership'.

<sup>295</sup> C. Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God', in Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water*, 26.

<sup>296</sup> D. Coffey and D. Jackson, 'An Open Letter from the Evangelism Office', *BT* October 31, 1996, 5. See also 'Annual Baptisms Drop Below 4000', p.1. 1996 only saw an 18% fall in baptisms, whilst the first 4 months of 1997 have showed a 13.6% increase from 1996, which,

Whilst a considerable number of liturgists and service manuals have paid great attention to the baptismal liturgy, there continues to be a wide difference between these and much of the baptismal practice within local churches. Agreement must, therefore, be given to Michael Walker's observation concerning Baptist baptismal practices, that 'We have a theology in search of an adequate liturgy'.<sup>297</sup> Assent can also be given to the summary offered by the American, John E. Skoglund:

Baptists have not been at the centre of the movement for liturgical renewal. Individuals have participated in liturgical conferences and have written on the issues of worship, but for the most part church life has not been greatly influenced. The freedom allowed in worship in Baptist congregations has afforded opportunities for a number of experiments. Baptist worship can be readily adapted to such informal gatherings as house-churches, to services with high lay participation, and to other experimental forms.<sup>298</sup>

### **Pioneers in the Baptism of the Handicapped.**

A group of Baptists, under the inspiration<sup>of</sup> Faith Bowers, have pioneered ministry to the handicapped, a work that has crossed denominational boundaries.<sup>299</sup> In September 1983 the BU Working Group on Mental Handicap and the Church was set up,<sup>300</sup> bringing together people such as Faith Bowers and her husband, Brian, who have a handicapped son, with professionals including health workers, educationalists,

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if the trend continues, suggests a total in the region of 4,100 for 1997, as opposed to 3,965 in 1995. See 'Early jump in baptisms', *BT* May 22, 1997, 1. This report suggested one possible reason for the upturn as 'an increase in the number of churches reporting their baptisms following last year's coverage of our lowest ever reported figures'.

- <sup>297</sup> M. J. Walker, 'Another Perspective on Baptist Identity', (unpublished, 1988-89), 14.
- <sup>298</sup> J. E. Skoglund, 'Baptist Worship', in Davies (ed.), *Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 67. Skoglund's final remark, however, does not seem to be likely in the foreseeable future at least: 'In this Baptists may make in the future a significant contribution to liturgical renewal'. It should be noted that Skoglund's comments are on behalf of Baptist<sup>world-wide</sup>, though they certainly reflect British Baptist practice.
- <sup>299</sup> So Bernard Green, 'Foreword' to Faith Bowers (ed), *Let Love Be Genuine. Mental Handicap and the Church* (1985). F. Bowers, 'The Story of BUild', *The Fraternal* 242 (April, 1993), 8, 'The numbers needing such groups are not great, so they lend themselves to inter-church activity, whether denominationally or ecumenically'. BUild publishes three newsletters a year and organizes day conferences.
- <sup>300</sup> So Bryan George, Education Advisor for the BU, in his 'Introduction' to Bowers (ed.), *Let Love Be Genuine*, 1.

chaplains and ministers. The work, which began in 1984, became known as BUild, 'the Baptist Union initiative with people with learning disabilities', in 1991.<sup>301</sup>

The work of BUild has covered many areas of handicap,<sup>302</sup> not least baptism.<sup>303</sup> Faith Bowers<sup>304</sup> implicitly accepts the necessity of preparation classes for baptism and church membership, and, through anecdotal evidence, their value, especially but not solely when pitched at an appropriate level for candidates with a mental handicap.<sup>305</sup> BUild has also sought to provide such materials for use in churches,<sup>306</sup> and has raised awareness of the issues facing the handicapped within Baptist and other churches which have often precluded them from such things as baptism and church membership. That BUild has already made an impact<sup>307</sup> is shown by the

301 See 'New name as group grows in influence', *BT* January 17, 1991, 5. A slightly fuller, though still brief, history of the group is supplied by F. Bowers, 'The Story of BUild', 7-9.

302 This is clear by the wide variety of subjects discussed in *Let Love Be Genuine*.

303 The following essays by Baptists in *Let Love Be Genuine*, all refer to baptism: 'The Hospital Chaplain', by Judy Martin, a member of Carshalton Beeches Baptist Free Church and Venture Scouts leader, 35-36; 'Include Them Out?', by Rev. Michael Taylor, Director of Christian Aid, 46-50; 'Should She Be Allowed?', by Rev. Tom Rogers, Secretary for Evangelism for the BU, 51-53; 'With Understanding', by Rev. George Neal of Acocks Green, Birmingham, 53-54; 'Where Ministers Fear to Tread. Some Lay Thoughts', by Faith Bowers, 55-64; 'What doth hinder...?' and 'Alan's Baptism', by Rev. Jim Clarke of West Watford Free Church, pp.83-86; 'Stephen's Baptism', by Barbara Crowe MBE, a member of Avenue BC, Westcliff on Sea, pp.86-88; and 'Exploring Together', by Rev. Barbara Stanford, Assistant Minister of Bloomsbury Central BC, London, pp.88-91. Also see F. Bowers, *Who's This Sitting in My Pew?* (1988), 72-95.

304 Faith Bowers is a member of Bloomsbury Central Church, London, and sub-editor of the *BQ*.

305 Bowers, *Who's Sitting*, 78, 91. She noted at least one instance where Stephen, a Downs Syndrome 18 year old, benefited from 'the normal baptismal class...and this was clearly right for him, even if he could not understand every word', pp.92-93.

306 See the booklets F. Bowers, *Knowing Jesus*; F. Bowers, Ena Robertson, a head teacher in north London and member of Winchmore Hill BC, and Susan Wright, a special needs teacher and member of Tonbridge BC, Kent, *The Church*; E. Robertson, *Following Jesus*; and S. Wright, *Joining the Church*; all published by BUild in 1991. The fourth booklet introduced baptism and communion within the context of joining the church. See also the accompanying leaflet 'Guide to Using the Discipleship Booklets with People with Learning Disabilities' (1991). The booklets were linked with the BU's *AIM 3* programme.

307 At the time of its change of name to BUild, the Group's Secretary, Rev. David Clark of Hall Green, Birmingham, was reported as saying, 'I sometimes wonder if Baptists find particular difficulty in understanding this field because we are very wordy people. If people are not very good at "confessing with their mouths" we have problems. However, in BUild, we do see a considerable change in the attitudes of churches all over the country over the last few years. We are finding that churches are starting clubs for people with learning difficulties'. See 'New name as group grows in influence', *BT* January 17, 1991, 5.

number of reported baptisms of handicapped people within Baptist churches,<sup>308</sup> discussion of the issues by Baptist authors,<sup>309</sup> and notes on the practicalities of baptizing handicapped people in *Patterns and Prayers*.<sup>310</sup>

### Conclusion.

The adequacy of much baptismal preparation has been called into question from time to time. In his 1939 BWA Commission Report based on responses received to a questionnaire distributed amongst Alliance members before the Sixth Congress, Wheeler Robinson suggested that the BWA could render useful service by compiling an adequate syllabus for baptismal candidates, and failing agreement on this, alternative booklets could be produced for use.<sup>311</sup> Other writers have similarly observed that Baptist baptismal practice was not what it should be.<sup>312</sup> It was also claimed that there had been a decline in the preaching on baptism, and this had in part

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308 See, eg, 'Spelling it out in baptism', *BT* May 31, 1990, 6; 'Paraplegic baptismal challenge overcome', *BT* May 16, 1991, 16; 'Baptism: "a very special occasion"', *BT* March 26, 1992, 20; 'Baptism evokes Bible incident', *BT* March 18, 1993, 16; 'Determination of MS baptismal candidate', *BT* October 14, 1993, 15; 'Electric hoist for baptismal service', *BT* September 1, 1994, 16.

309 Eg, T. Griffith, *Case for Believers Baptism*, 59; P. Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers* (1992), 22; and *Believing and Being Baptized* (1996), 45, in section XI 'Different ways of belonging', which concluded, 'We do not think...that baptism should be the *only* way that those who are severely disabled can be received and accepted within the Body, be affirmed as being in Christ, and be there for others to learn from', italics original.

310 *Patterns and Prayers*, 97. This focussed primarily on the mode suitable for a person with an illness or disability, stating, 'The most appropriate means for the person concerned should be used, and informed medical advice should be sought and followed where necessary', be it the pouring of water over the head of the candidate whilst they are in the water or even being lowered into the water in a chair. 'In cases of mental handicap, care must be taken to find a means by which the candidate can appropriately make a declaration of faith'.

311 H. W. Robinson, 'The Baptist Contribution to Christian Unity', in J. H. Rushbrooke (ed.), *Sixth Baptist World Congress* (Atlanta, 1939), 116. The questions used are recorded on pp115-16.

312 White, *Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, 280; Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', 8-11; Rev. W. E. Moore's (a tutor at Northern Baptist College) review, '*Baptism Today and Tomorrow* and *Baptism and Christian Unity*', *BQ* 21.8 (October, 1966), 383, who believed that the two books by Beasley-Murray and Gilmore would 'serve as a vital check on the "maladministration of baptism" in our own denomination as well as in others'.



contributed towards the situation.<sup>313</sup> By mid-century, the results of Baptist theological reflection and discussion had begun to filter down into the churches and baptismal practice and examination of both the theory and practice of baptism reflect the attempts of many to apply the lessons of the theologians and liturgists, but also the resistance of others to any change either from within or without Baptist circles. However, the registered decline in the number of baptisms from 1990 to 1996, has prompted David Coffey and Darrell Jackson to raise serious questions concerning both the state of the denomination and the place of baptism within Baptist life. These include what these statistics say about the traditional views of believing and belonging in the local Baptist church. Does this situation reflect a changing demographic, that people are now coming to faith at a later age? Whilst Baptists have usually seen baptism as 'a defining event in the life of the believer', are Baptist churches now attracting people into their churches who do not share this understanding of baptism? Do Baptists still consider the call to baptism to be an essential part of conversion and are people now coming to faith without expressing their conversion in baptism? And how can people be encouraged to move from congregational attendance to committed discipleship expressed through baptism and membership?<sup>314</sup> These questions reflect contemporary changes in attitude towards both faith and commitment,<sup>315</sup> the decrease in denominational loyalty whereby people moving from one district to another tend to go to a church of similar type to their

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<sup>313</sup> Rev. Ralph W. A. Mitchell, 'The Evangelistic Use of the Baptismal Service', *BT* December 16, 1943, 6, 'It is painfully evident from our statistics that many Baptists have grown neglectful of the scriptural ordinance of baptism'. The appeal to the evangelistic use of baptism like that by Mitchell who stated that 'the baptismal service has been the greatest agency in his ministry in precipitating decision for Jesus', was criticized by Winward, 'The Administration of Baptism', 8, 'there is very little, if any, direct teaching in the New Testament about baptism as witness - unless we start off with the assumption that confession and witness are synonymous terms.' This is not to suggest that Winward would not have agreed with Mitchell's point about the lack of preaching on baptism.

<sup>314</sup> David Coffey and Darrell Jackson, 'An Open Letter from the Evangelism Office', *BT* October 31, 1996, 5.

<sup>315</sup> Eg, see Grace Davie's study *Religion in Britain since 1945*, in the Making Contemporary Britain series from the Institute of Contemporary British History, (Oxford, 1994), which is significantly subtitled *Believing Without Belonging*.

previous one rather than to one of the same denomination, and present Baptists with a challenge as they prepare to enter the twenty first century.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> David Coffey and Darrell Jackson, 'An Open Letter from the Evangelism Office', *BT* October 31, 1996, 5, wrote: 'Decreasing numbers of reported baptisms may not beckon us into the future as did the dreams and visions of the Denominational Consultation but God may be speaking as clearly through the former as he is through the latter. How do we hold our dreams and visions alongside damning statistics?'

## Conclusion.

The purpose of this study has been to examine the breadth, depth and variety of the theology and practice of baptism as practised by twentieth-century Baptists. The result of dividing the period into three has been justified as each has exhibited distinct emphases. From 1900-1937 the focus of attention, as in the nineteenth century, was on the mode and subjects of baptism, though there were those, most prominently Wheeler Robinson and A. C. Underwood, who were beginning to recognize the importance of the theology of baptism. Between 1938-1966 this emphasis was developed, principally by the contributors to *Christian Baptism*, chief amongst whom were George Beasley-Murray and R. E. O. White. However, from 1967-1996 attention moved away from baptism to the wider discussion of the ecumenical developments taking place, in which baptism occupied an important but by no means predominant role. A simple comparison of the titles of the books, articles and essays written in each of the three periods shows that baptism now no longer occupies the prominent place that it once did. Whereas in both earlier periods it was very much in the forefront of Baptist thought and was discussed as an important subject in its own right, it is so no longer. This gives added credence to the suggestion that Baptists view baptism pragmatically, a point supported by the fact that discussion of baptism is now often found within discussions of other related subjects which are regarded as more important.

A survey of the discussion of baptism over the last three decades reveals the fact that the overwhelming majority of Baptists writing on baptism have done so within the ecumenical context, which leads us to conclude that Baptists hold an ambivalent attitude towards baptism. On the one hand, when debating the issue with paedobaptists, they have defended, sometimes vehemently, the confining of baptism to believers by immersion and denied the validity of infant baptism. On the other hand, when not involved in such discussion they have, like the Baptists of the

nineteenth century, made little of the rite. In fact, it has been an oft repeated criticism by Baptist scholars and leaders that baptism has not held the place in Baptist life or thought that it should.<sup>1</sup> Further, Baptists are essentially pragmatists, emphasizing not so much what is true but what works and what feels good.<sup>2</sup> Their theology of baptism is subordinated to their evangelistic enthusiasms, for they emphasize the importance of conversion but not the act of initiation into the church.

The present study has shown conclusively that there is no single Baptist theology or practice of baptism, only theologies and practices, and this diversity accords with Baptist ecclesiology which continues to tend towards independency, each local church and individual minister exercising their liberty in the administration and interpretation of Christ's laws. These theologies and practices vary widely in their theological sophistication, in their complexity and expression, though there are fewer variations in the practices of baptism than there are in the theologies, although in the last thirty years LEPs have introduced a greater variety of baptismal practice. It is significant that these variations in theology and practice have been able to coexist within one denominational body in a creative tension,<sup>3</sup> and this fact needs to be recognized by Baptists and could enable the continued and deeper and more widespread development of Baptist involvement within the ecumenical movement.

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<sup>1</sup> This was one of the criticisms levelled against Baptists in 1953 by the Presbyterian J. M. Ross, 'The Theology of Baptism in Baptist History', *BQ* 15.3 (July, 1953), 100, who remarked on the difficulty facing paedobaptists who tried to discover the Baptist position on many issues related to baptism and to the rite itself, 'The task has not been altogether easy, because the doctrine of baptism does not occupy a central place in Baptist theology'.

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, Brian Haymes, *A Question of Identity* (1986), 4, who drew attention to 'the rise in the last fifteen years of what I call "non-rational conservatism". By this frail phrase I mean an attitude to Christian truth and life that places great store by "feeling right"...', noting that it becomes 'easy prey to the rising contemporary dogmatic neo-biblicism'. In these comments, Haymes sums up so well the Baptist tendency towards anti-intellectualism and what we have described as pragmatism.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny that there is not friction within the BU over either the theology of baptism or its practice, as this study has shown it to be a constant feature of Baptist life this century. Those churches and ministers who could not accept this diversity have left the BU, most recently following the Assembly decisions of 1989 and 1995, though it should be noted that those who left the BU did so over the primary issue of ecumenical involvement, of which the issue of baptism was but a part.

It has also been seen that Baptists have now generally accepted the word 'sacrament', whereas, for over half the century, the word was regarded with suspicion and frequently rejected. However, by mid-century Baptist sacramentalists had claimed back the word for use amongst Baptists, even if this has not always led to an accompanying sacramental theology. Amongst many Baptists the word 'sacrament' is used but the theology attached to it continues to be largely symbolic,<sup>4</sup> though a sacramental theology is increasingly common, chiefly amongst the theologically literate, ecumenically committed and liturgically oriented. This is nowhere more clearly evinced than in the growing practice of services of baptism-membership-communion, often with the laying on of hands. Further, it should be noted that over the last thirty to forty years anti-sacramentalist writings have all but disappeared.

It is also significant that Baptist attitudes towards infant baptism have changed drastically. Whilst many continue to repudiate it outright, others have become more accepting towards it, as reflected in the mutual recognition of it for the sake of preserving the right of conscience of individual believers. But the biggest surprise has been the apparent *volte face* of their leading scholar, Dr. George Beasley-Murray, whose attitude has softened to one of recognizing in certain circumstances the 'possibility' of acknowledging the legitimacy of infant baptism.

The main purpose of this thesis was to see whether or not Baptist baptismal theology and practice has developed and to identify what these influences have been

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard see George Beasley-Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (1966), 14, who quoted the American Baptist, R. E. Neighbour, 'The Moral Significance of Baptism', *Review and Expositor* 6 (1911), 420, 'An intelligent Baptist, if he ever permits himself to speak of "the sacrament of baptism" does so thoughtlessly. In the Baptist estimate of the value of the ordinance we deny its efficacy as a means for the transmission of grace; on the other hand we insist on its utility simply as a beautiful and expressive symbol of certain basal facts in the redemptive mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with certain correlated and dependent issues'. Beasley-Murray then commented, 'It is my impression that most Baptists...would still subscribe to that statement, but that a majority of their theologians would repudiate it. The theologians, however, appear to exercise little influence on the preaching and administration of baptism in the churches'. A decade later, this assessment was affirmed by J. F. Matthews, *Baptism. A Baptist View* (1976), 18, and this study contends that it is still applicable to the present position of Baptists on baptism.

and in what directions they have taken Baptist thought and practice, not forgetting that these developments have varied from church to church and writer to writer.

Changes in society have clearly, though indirectly, affected baptism and related issues, particularly communion and membership, forcing many churches to reconsider and even alter their constitutions, if not their Trust Deeds when possible.<sup>5</sup> As people have become more mobile, the composition of churches has changed and there is greater fluidity in membership. Denominational loyalty has also decreased as people now look for churches to their liking rather than those of the same denomination.<sup>6</sup> Those loyal to one tradition tend to be amongst the older generations, and it is evident that the younger generations are impatient with and intolerant of the exclusivity of the past, and have worked for the breaking down of old denominational barriers and have displayed a greater willingness to experiment both theologically and practically. This is also seen in LEPs. Attitudes in society are now generally pragmatic, and this pragmatism has also influenced attitudes amongst Christians, not least towards doctrines and practices, including baptism, which is increasingly treated less dogmatically.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the individualism, so characteristic of Baptists in the nineteenth century, has, if anything, become more ingrained in both British society and church life.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2 'Trust Deeds'.

<sup>6</sup> This practice has been most recently criticized by D. McBain, *Fire Over The Waters* (1997), 186-87, under the heading 'Church Commitment'.

<sup>7</sup> In his survey of the articles published in the *BMJ* during three periods, 1947-51, 1967-71 and 1987-91, Peter Shepherd, 'The Baptist Ministers' Journal, 1946-1992', *BQ* 35.5 (January, 1994), 253-54, observed a growing pragmatism in approach to subjects, with fewer doctrinal subjects being covered and theological reflection being more practical and less dogmatic, concluding, 'Christian doctrine would appear to be a less central concern for Baptist ministers today, and theology is primarily of interest when it sheds light on a particular aspect of ministerial activity or serves some practical purpose'.

<sup>8</sup> This confirms the legitimacy of the line of approach adopted from comparison with David Bebbington's work on Evangelicalism. Nigel Wright, "'Koinonia" and Baptist Ecclesiology. Self-Critical Reflections from Historical and Systematic Perspectives', *BQ* 35.8 (October, 1994), 367, referred with approval to R. C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (1946), 110, who argued that individualism had invaded the church in the 18th century in the wake of the Enlightenment. See the whole of the discussion of other Baptist writers on individualism by Wright, pp.366-70.

emphasis placed on baptism continues to centre on the candidate, their decision to be baptized and their personal testimony to what God has done in their lives, and is reflected in the most popular baptismal hymn being 'O Jesus, *I* have promised'. This individualism has meant Baptists have continued to find difficulty in expressing the prevenience of God's grace and the corporate dimension of the rite. Whilst Baptists whole-heartedly believe that salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), this is rarely emphasized in the baptismal rite. The corporate dimension continues to revolve around the congregation as predominantly spectators of that which the candidate is doing. The fact that the overwhelming majority of Baptist churches practise either open membership, or closed membership with the offer of associate membership to those not baptized as believers, has further increased the tendency to focus on the candidate's decision to be baptized. Baptism separated from entry into church membership has further reduced the corporate aspect, and this despite the protestations of the denomination's scholars who have criticized both the practice of permitting into membership those never baptized by any means and the perpetuation of separating baptism from initiation into church membership. It is also enigmatic that while open membership, which is a recognition of the status of Christians from paedobaptist traditions, has become the norm, this has not led to the acceptance of infant baptism as a valid form of baptism, as is reflected in the Baptist refusal to recognize a 'common baptism'. This has led to a position which is effectively inimical to ecumenical accommodation whilst practising something akin to it, a pattern which can also be seen in the position of Baptist congregations involved in LEPs which make accommodations to infant baptism whilst still maintaining an exclusive validity for the practice of believer's baptism.

The single most important ecclesiastical development in the British Church has already been mentioned, and is the rise and growth of the ecumenical movement. This has taken place at formal and informal levels. Formally, Baptist involvement has been through national bodies such as the Free Church movement, BCC and CTE/CCBI, and through international organizations such as F&O and the WCC, but also locally

in Union churches. LEPs and councils of churches. Despite vigorous opposition from within, the BU has remained at the centre of national ecumenical schemes since their origins in the 1890s' Free Church movement, and internationally since the early 1930s. Informally, Baptists have benefited from the increase in the amount of contact which Christians have one with another through parachurch organizations, Christian conferences such as Spring Harvest, and through the growth of a Christian sub-culture which includes conferences, holidays, newspapers, magazines and a whole book industry all of which aid the cross-fertilization of ideas. As a result, Baptists have opened first communion then their membership (or added a supplementary roll), re-introduced a rite for their children,<sup>9</sup> and have rediscovered the sacramental and liturgical aspects of not just baptism but Christian initiation. This interaction has not been one-way, for example, there is an Anglican 'Movement for the Reform of Infant Baptism' (MORIB, f.1986 ),<sup>10</sup> and there are a growing number of Anglican clergy advocating the practice of discriminate infant baptism.<sup>11</sup>

More than at any time before, the BU is open to the development of ecumenical relationships, and this has been assisted by a considerable amount of baptismal pragmatism. Whereas in previous generations, for example, the 1930s, movement towards a United Church in England foundered principally on the twin rocks of baptism and episcopacy, since the mid-1960s both matters have become marginalized in ecumenical discussions which now focus primarily, not on questions of theology, but on structures and agreements, how to implement these and on how further unity can be achieved. This pragmatism is most evident in the baptismal policies of LEPs where the onus is on finding ways in which it is possible to practise both forms of baptism rather than solving the many theological and practical difficulties concerning

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<sup>9</sup> T. L. Underwood, 'Child Dedication Services among British Baptists in the Seventeenth Century', *BQ* 23.4 (October, 1969), 164-69, argued that seventeenth-century Baptists practised a rite of infant dedication.

<sup>10</sup> On which see C. Owen (ed.), *Reforming Infant Baptism* (1990).

<sup>11</sup> Eg, J. Capon, 'Chester C of E clergy reject indiscriminate baptism', *BT* June 20, 1991, 2.



the rite. In this the BU is only in a position to advise as it has no powers to make multi-lateral decisions, though a move in this direction is evident in the concordats with the Methodists and URC .

The *Baptist Times* has been an accurate barometer reflecting ecumenical developments, Baptist ecumenical interest and involvement and also the place that baptism has held within this process and Baptist life more generally. Periods of intense ecumenical activity have, up until late 1960s, always been accompanied by a considerable and often heated debate of the baptismal issue in the *Baptist Times*. However, since the early 1960s the issue of baptism has moved from both the centre of the ecumenical debate, with the exception of *BEM* which made very little impact on domestic Baptist theology or practice, and also towards the margins of the Baptist agenda. This is shown by the observation that the majority of references to baptism now occur in reports of baptismal services and in relatively little debate about its meaning.

The practice of baptism has witnessed a number of significant developments, chiefly through the influence of liturgical scholars, not all of whom can be placed within the liturgical movement itself, as a number of them owe more to biblical studies than the liturgical movement *per se*, though hard and fast distinctions cannot be made. This is reflected in the development of services reflecting the whole process of Christian initiation (baptism-membership-communion) emphasizing the greater use of the laying on of hands, though much of the practice in local churches continues to be essentially conservative in form and content.

The discipline of biblical studies, which traverses denominational barriers and therefore has an 'ecumenical' dimension to it, has also influenced Baptists, though to a lesser extent than perhaps it should. The leading British scholar on initiation in the present generation is the Presbyterian, Dr. James Dunn of Durham University. Whilst Baptists have had their own New Testament scholars, George Beasley-Murray, Ralph P. Martin, Donald Guthrie and Paul Fiddes, it has been Dunn's three volumes which

have made the most impact in theological circles.<sup>12</sup> Baptists have continued to separate baptism from conversion, often by years, in spite of the arguments of these and other scholars that New Testament baptism was conversion-baptism. This can be attributed as much to Baptist belief in the individual's right to decide when and whether they will be baptized, as to a lack amongst Baptists of emphasis on baptism in preaching and discipleship training. Theological studies, then, have made relatively little impact on the beliefs of 'ordinary Baptists' and have only influenced the baptismal practice of theologically literate ministers and those liturgically informed.

Further, since 1967, there have been proportionally fewer Baptist works specifically on baptism than at any other time this century. This fact is quickly established by even a cursory survey of the bibliography, which shows that discussion of baptism now largely takes place within the study of other subjects, the majority of which are broadly ecumenical. The reasons for this are unclear. It could be that some Baptists feel confident that all that could be said has been said: perhaps this is true for some. It could reflect a lack of interest in baptism: this is possible because other matters have come to be regarded as more pressing or important, such as the ecumenical and charismatic movements in their various expressions, issues of worship, the place of the child in the church, matters concerning change within the church and questions of the survival of the local church in the midst of the decline of church attendance across all denominations.<sup>13</sup> Or it could be that baptism has slipped from the denominational and ecumenical agendas to a minor position when compared with the place it once held. In all probability it is a mixture of all these elements.

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12 J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today* (1970), *Jesus and the Spirit. A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (1975) and *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (1977).

13 Shepherd, 'The Baptist Ministers' Journal', 254, noted that 'Recently there seems to have been an increase in articles dealing with problems and questions in contemporary church life, such as restorationism, church management and congregational church government, probably reflecting the increasing variety and change in church practice', whereas in his first period, 1947-51, 'the sacraments were a recurring theme'.

The charismatic movement has also proved to be an important factor in breaking down denominationalism, and though baptism/initiation has been important in the second and fourth waves, it has not significantly affected the theology of baptism other than its positive reinforcement of the role of the Spirit in conversion and in heightening the candidate's expectation of a definite experience at the time of their baptism. Negatively, it has intensified the individualism associated with baptism.

The key issues on the ecumenical agenda now appear to be predominantly organizational, whereas for the larger part of the century they were theological. Here again, Baptist pragmatism is evident. Whilst they believe that baptism is the immersion of believers in the name of the Trinity, as stipulated in the second Declaration of Principle, nevertheless there are a growing number of Baptists, leading figures amongst them, who are no longer prepared to interpret this in exclusive terms. The goal of LEPs is unity, and the means to achieving it is baptismal accommodation, allowing two different patterns of initiation to co-exist. The advantages of such accommodation is that it respects the convictions of others and shows the value placed on unity. The disadvantage is that it has alienated other Baptists who have often not seen that there is a problem with denying the initiation patterns of paedobaptist churches. The theology behind baptismal accommodation has been carefully thought through and honed over many years of theological and practical discussion which first began in the seventeenth century and the mixed communion and membership churches and the Bunyan tradition, through Union churches, into the twentieth-century discussions at local, national and international levels. Despite the assertions of its opponents, baptismal accommodation makes a serious attempt to grapple with issues of ecclesiology and initiation, but in a way that its opponents are unwilling to accept. The anti-ecumenists tend not to recognize the ecumenical context of all modern-day theology and practice. What both the ecumenists and non-ecumenists are struggling with is a dialectic, both striving to affirm seemingly contradictory beliefs, and what sets them apart is the weight they give to these beliefs and the balance they strike between them. These beliefs include ecclesiology and the

nature of the unity of the Church, the grace of God and the response of the believer, the individual and the corporate dimensions of faith, the place of the child in the Church, and the right of conscience for all believers in regard to faith and practice. Neither the ecumenists nor the anti-ecumenists see infant baptism as valid in itself, but the former accept infant baptism's potential as validated when completed by confirmation.

Denominationally and ecumenically it appears that there is a certain frustration that theological issues have held back real progress for too long and so ecumenical debate tends now to shy away from those areas where it is known that progress will not be made easily, amongst these are baptism, episcopacy and the church-state relationship, each of which used to be major stumbling blocks as far as Baptists were concerned to the emerging ecumenical movement, and none of which has been satisfactorily answered. Once it became evident that the believer's baptism-infant baptism debate was not going to attain a consensus, the ecumenical movement adopted the search for convergence in which there is a certain amount of pressure exerted on participants to agree. This was seen in *BEM* which has an element of 'the majority wins the day' about it. In Britain, ecumenism seems to have abandoned the detailed study of the biblical and theological study of baptism in favour of a *modus vivendi*, common baptism. However, Baptists to date have rejected this as a possibility, though they continue to subscribe to the idea of the mutual recognition of different patterns of baptism on the grounds of the liberty of conscience of individuals and churches as practised in LEPs.

It is also clear that much depends on the convictions of the ministers within the churches, many of whom have taken upon themselves the prerogative of determining the church's baptismal policy, manifested in the task of deciding the fitness of candidates, interviewing, preparing and administering the rite. In the early years it was individuals such as J. H. Shakespeare and Hugh Martin who pioneered ecumenical involvement and without their stubborn advocacy it is unlikely that there

would be today the number of Baptists involved at all levels of the ecumenical developments both internationally, nationally and locally. It is an irony that whilst many Baptists have been opponents of ecumenism or just sceptical towards Baptist involvement in it, nevertheless Baptists have been some of the pioneers of the movement and have held leading positions within it.<sup>14</sup> Individual Baptists have also led the way in the liturgical movement, chiefly Stephen Winward and Neville Clark, and also in the charismatic and renewal movements, such as David Pawson.

As far as Baptists are concerned, a century of baptismal debate and controversy, both internal and external, discussion and developments, seems to have created a schizophrenic denomination in which the only ones apparently interested in the theology and practice of baptism appear to be those involved within the ecumenical movement. Further, Baptists are themselves no nearer consensus in answering the most important theological question than they were at the beginning of the century - is baptism a mere symbol however important a one, or an effective rite? No one side has convinced the other and Baptists are left with theologies and practices of baptism/initiation.

To date, the BU maintains that the mutual recognition of baptism as a concession to the liberty of conscience which they defend for all believers is, at present, the only tenable way forward for Baptists in the ecumenical movement.

One of the consequences of all these observations for the future of Baptist ecumenical involvement was spelled out by George Beasley-Murray when he wrote,

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<sup>14</sup> These would include J. H. Shakespeare, H. Martin, Ernest Payne, David Russell, Morris West and George Beasley-Murray. The degree of Baptist involvement within the ecumenical movement at all levels has been frequently underestimated, often misrepresented and simply unknown, and forms the basis of a forthcoming article in the *BQ* by A. R. Cross, 'Service to the Ecumenical Movement: The Contribution of British Baptists', which catalogues many Baptists, ministers and lay men and women, and their positions within various local, national and international ecumenical bodies.

'In reality there is no such thing as a Baptist theology of baptism, accepted by all Baptists; *what they do not themselves possess they should not demand of others*'.<sup>15</sup>

Writing in 1989 Dr. David Russell said, 'The past 50 years, then, have witnessed a greater involvement of some Baptists in the ecumenical movement, but a continuing reticence and even opposition on the part of others. The principles for which Baptists stand, not least that of believers' baptism, have become matters of increasing theological debate in ecumenical circles and are recognised as of no small importance in the search for that convergence of belief and practice leading to consensus and to that visible unity of Christ's Church which, in all its diversity, is a sign and instrument of God's mission in today's world'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Problem of Infant Baptism', in *Festschrift Günther Wagner*, ed. by the faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüslikon, (Berne, 1994), 7, italics added.

<sup>16</sup> D. S. Russell, 'The Ecumenical Role of Baptists', 13, unpublished version of the essay which appeared in F. H. Littell (ed.), *A Half Century of Religious Dialogue, 1939-1989* (New York, 1989), 112-131.

## Appendix 1

### Sources.

It is always important for any historical research to be conscious of the types, extent and limitations of the sources that are available to it. The aim of this present study is to examine as broadly as possible the understanding of baptism amongst English Baptists in the twentieth century.

The sources that have been available have been many and varied. Much has been written by Baptist scholars on baptism and associated themes, including the Church, conversion, evangelism, the ecumenical movement, the Lord's Supper, Baptist principles and contemporary issues. These have taken the form of academic books and papers, including scholarly articles and commentaries. Official BU documents of the consensus and creative kind contain much that is important and informative on the present position of the BU and churches within its membership. Many of these sources have provided a wealth of material; however, 'theological' and 'official' works are not always representative of the 'popular' understanding of baptism. In fact, they are often written in order to challenge popular views. So, for example, Dr. George Beasley-Murray's *Baptism in the New Testament*, which continues to be printed over thirty years after its first appearance, is undoubtedly the single most important and detailed study of baptism by any Baptist this century. However, despite Beasley-Murray's breadth of Church involvement in Britain and America, as a local church minister, Baptist College Principal, leader within the BU and participant in the national and international ecumenical scene, and scholar, his book has tragically made less lasting impact within local churches than it deserved. However, this book contains so much information that it cannot be overlooked or dismissed. Perhaps it is true that the influence of such works take years (decades?) to filter down into the mainstream of denominational life?

The same observations apply to books and articles written by ministers which themselves vary from the academic to the popular. Greater weight, though, has been placed on the works by those who have wide knowledge and experience of Baptist life and whose writings have reflected this. Laymen, too, have written several books and a number of articles and these need to be weighed carefully as to their representative character.

The present study, however, has put great store on the *Baptist Times* and its predecessor the *Baptist Times and Freeman*, for there is no other extant source which contains so much information on baptism and related issues from so many varied sources, from minister to layman, from scholar to ordinary church member. The material includes detailed articles specifically on baptism by 'professional' scholars and ministers and laymen alike, reactions to those articles, reports of contemporary beliefs and practices, and many letters on matters regarded as important by correspondents. Whilst it cannot be taken for granted that such views are always representative of the breadth of contemporary opinion within the BU, for some are undoubtedly idiosyncratic and even extreme, nevertheless the denominational newspaper is the only major source which provides such a broad base of Baptist thought, reflection and opinion. Further justification for the weight put on *The Baptist Times* comes from the recognition, borne out throughout the study, that it has generally been an accurate barometer of the place baptism has occupied in Baptist thought.

The importance, then, of the *Baptist Times* has meant that use has been made of even brief letters precisely because they reflect popular and potentially widespread opinion, for during the course of the research for this study it has become clear that many Baptists at grass-roots level have a very simple, even minimalist, understanding of baptism, which focusses on baptism as an act of obedience and a profession of the candidate's personal faith.



Local church histories, constitutions, baptismal policy agreements, personal correspondence, baptismal class material, College course notes, church magazines and the like, though sketchy, have been used where available. Sadly, much material, though sought after, was not forthcoming or was simply untraceable. It will also be clear that brief statements in tracts, pamphlets, Bible study aids, publicity matter and dictionary-entry-type material have also found a place. It could be argued that such material is too brief to provide any useful information on baptism, but, as has already been noted, experience and the course of research has shown that all too often this is the level of many Baptists' information on and understanding of baptism. Therefore, this kind of material has been included.

Some use has been made of oral tradition. However, such has been sparingly used for a number of reasons. First, recollections are often difficult to verify, so their representativeness cannot be assessed. Second, recollections tend to be vague on details, characters and, not least, dating.

Finally, it must be recognized that popular views of baptism are often so widespread that they are frequently assumed rather than recorded. 'Popular' views of baptism have not been defended by any major treatises, but are to be found in apologetic tracts, sermons at baptismal services, material for ministers preparing baptismal candidates, hence the importance of these sources. This fact makes a study like this difficult. At times the present study has remarked on what the popular view has been or is and this has been done recognizing that there is a substantial element of subjectivity involved, though with the rider that such comments have never been made lightly and have arisen from the course of the present research which has sought to read as much as is available on the subject by Baptists this century. Conjecture, though, has been kept to a minimum and generally the rule has been to record and assess only what has been uncovered during the course of the study.

## Appendix 2

### Trust Deeds.

The whole of the debate concerning the terms of communion and membership could not take place in isolation from individual church's Trust Deeds.<sup>1</sup> From 1837 to 1840 an attempt was made by the Southern Association to get the BU to draw up a Model Trust Deed, but this ended in failure. It was not until May 1850 that such a Model Deed was adopted by the Baptist Building Fund, and it quickly became the standard form of Deed in Particular Baptist Churches for three or four decades. In 1855 the General Baptist New Connexion published its own Model Deed. This was followed in Yorkshire in 1888 when the Association adopted its own Model Deed which ignored the doctrinal issues which distinguished the Particular from the General Baptists and left open the question of membership, baptism and communion.<sup>2</sup> In 1892, when the General and Particular Baptists of Lancashire and Yorkshire united, the Model Trust Deed was altered, allowing the individual churches the right to decide the communion question for themselves, but setting down that 'always the Church should consist only of baptised believers'.<sup>3</sup> It was this view which predominated in the North well into the present century. This Trust Deed was itself shortened and simplified in 1907.<sup>4</sup> It also sought to reintroduce closed membership and to assume closed communion though it

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of the place of Trust Deeds in Baptist life was discussed by S. J. Price, 'Baptist Trust Deeds', *BQ* 5.3 (July, 1930), 102-110; *BQ* 5.4 (October, 1930), 172-176; *BQ* 5.5 (January, 1931), 209-219.

<sup>2</sup> Keith G. Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed: A Yorkshire Perspective', *BQ* 33.3 (July, 1989), 113. Other details on the 1888 Deed are to be found on pp.111-12, and Jones also contests S. J. Price on several dates, specifically 1855 not 1854 for the New Connexion Deed, and 1888 not 1889 for the YBA Model Deed.

<sup>3</sup> J. Haslam, 'The Yorkshire Baptist Association', in C. E. Shipley (ed.), *The Baptists of Yorkshire* (1912), 313-14. On the YBA and Trust Deeds see Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 103-118.

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is based largely on the account by Price, 'Trust Deeds', 172-176. For the background to the 1850 Model Trust Deed and the role played in Parliament by Sir Morton Peto in passing the Act which made possible the simplification of the duties of trustees to Nonconformist chapels making easier the appointment of new trustees, see E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union* (1959), 77.

did provide for church members to allow open communion should they wish so to do.<sup>5</sup>

As a direct result of the fusion in 1891 of the Particular and General Baptists, the BU Council and specially appointed committees met throughout the 1890s to consider the issue of a Model Trust Deed which would be suitable for the whole denomination. In 1902 the Council reported to the Assembly that there were two Model Trust Deeds, one for when the BU Corporation were to be the trustees, the other for when other persons were nominated as trustees.<sup>6</sup> The Model Trust made provision for churches to be either open or closed in communion and/or membership, the appropriate clauses to be included or excluded as required, though it was not possible for a change in practice if the issue was stipulated in the original Trust Deed. Whether practising open or closed membership, in both cases baptism was understood to be believer's immersion and nothing else.<sup>7</sup> This Model Trust Deed, Seymour Price reported in 1931, was widely used and he expressed his opinion that 'matters of domestic concern, such as "open" or "close" communion and membership, are advisedly left to the judgment of the individual church'.<sup>8</sup> Clauses were included or excluded, as appropriate, governing the eligibility for elders or deacons, but the minister had to have been immersed on a confession of faith and also be an advocate of the doctrine and practice of believer's baptism.<sup>9</sup> The model form was gradually evolved by

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<sup>5</sup> For details of the *1907 Model Deed of the Building and Extension Fund of the Yorkshire Baptist Association*, see Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 112-13.

<sup>6</sup> See Price, 'Trust Deeds', 209-215. The Model Trust was printed as an appendix in C. Williams' second edition (1903) of *The Principles and Practices of the Baptists*, 127-133.

<sup>7</sup> The relevant section reads, 'and having been immersed on a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and maintaining and practising the doctrine and rite of the Immersion of Believers and no other Baptism', Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 128. Clarence Fry of Liverpool, "'Union of Baptists and Congregationalists" and "Baptist Principles"', *BT* October 9, 1930, 706, lamented the BU Trust Deed's clause which left open the membership of churches rather than laying down that all of them should be closed.

<sup>8</sup> Price, 'Trust Deeds', 210 and 217.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Principles and Practices*, 128.

varying and adding to earlier versions until 1936 when the *Forward Movement Model Deed for Churches and Halls* was prepared, and which remained in use until 1951.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1940s and 50s a series of *Baptist Church Rules* were published on behalf of the BU, in which provision was made for either open or closed membership, and that in the case of the former members were 'usually received after baptism by immersion, but the Church welcomes to full membership all who conscientiously follow our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>11</sup> When closed membership occurred in the context of open communion, the *Rules* recommended a Communicant Roll be kept containing the names of all those wishing to be affiliated to the church but who had not been baptized by immersion, and that the church should decide what powers, if any, should be given to them.<sup>12</sup> The ordinance of believer's baptism was to be administered as required, all believers being admitted whether or not they desired church membership.<sup>13</sup>

A second set of Church Rules were published in the 1950s, probably following the *Fuller Trusts*, though this is not clear.<sup>14</sup> Again, both open and closed membership rules were catered for, and in the case of the former members were 'usually received after baptism by immersion', all applicants being asked to consider the New Testament teaching on baptism. In the case of closed membership, again a Communicant Roll was recommended, the church having to decide what powers be extended to communicants but these could not extend to matters covered by the Trust

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<sup>10</sup> See Mr. Richard Fairbairn, 'Baptist Model Trusts', *BT* September 7, 1961, 10. The development of the 1936 Model Deed was a result of the impetus of establishing new BCs stimulated and encouraged by the Forward Movement and was intended to aid this process, see Payne, *The Baptist Union*, 203-04.

<sup>11</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (1944), 1, 'II Membership a)'.  
 11

<sup>12</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (1944), 2, 'II Membership b)'.  
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<sup>13</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (1944), 3 'III Ordinances b)'.  
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<sup>14</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (n.d., [1950s]), 'Notes', which refer to the *Fuller Trusts* and the forthcoming *Fairbairn Trust* of 1962.  
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Deed.<sup>15</sup> As with the earlier *Rules*, baptism was to be administered irrespective of whether the candidate was applying for membership. However, in open membership churches, it was now only 'usual' that the majority of deacons would be baptized members.<sup>16</sup>

During these developments the YBA had continued to be active over the matter of Trust Deeds. The 1907 Deed remained in use until 1941, when it adapted the 1936 BU Model Trusts. Earlier YBA trusts had referred to baptism by immersion, but now 'and no other Baptism' was added, and any appointed minister was required to be an immersed believer and one who maintained and practised the rite of believer's immersion and no other.<sup>17</sup> But now, the Deed allowed for the adoption of either open or closed membership, but, if open, two thirds of the diaconate had to be baptized believers.<sup>18</sup>

Up until the mid-1920s the only way to change Trust Deeds had been by a Private Act of Parliament, which a number of churches did.<sup>19</sup> From the mid-1920s to 1951 Trust Deeds could only be changed by a Charity Commission Scheme, which was also required if the original Trusts were missing or if the church had no Trustees, the Commission preparing various Model Baptist Trusts to ease their own tasks.<sup>20</sup> But in 1951 Parliament passed the Baptist and Congregational Trusts Act, which for the first

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<sup>15</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (1950s), 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> *Baptist Church Rules* (1950s), 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> 1941 Model Deed, clauses 4 (e) and 6 respectively, cited by Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 114 nn.41-42.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 114. Jones noted that the 1941 Deed was the last in the line of Association deeds, succeeding years either adapting the 1941 Deed or using the BU's Model Trust Deed.

<sup>19</sup> See, eg, the discussion of this matter in the section on 'Union Churches', in chapter 3 'Ecumenical Developments', which records the Private Act of Parliament which enabled Wells Baptist and Congregational churches to unite to form Wells United Church in 1919.

<sup>20</sup> Information from a letter from Mr. John Barfield of the BU Corporation, July 19, 1991. These Model Trusts were variously named after the churches for which they were first devised, eg, Wolverhampton, Boscombe and Trealaw.

time allowed the Trust Corporations of the two denominations to act as Sole Trustee, whatever number had been stipulated in the Foundation Deed, and also permitted the two denominations to produce Model Trusts which could be deposited with the Charity Commission. For the first time the Baptist and Congregational Unions were officially recognized by Parliament, receiving power to approve their own trust corporations for certain purposes, to set up model forms of trust deeds and to vary them from time to time and even to accede to individual churches' requests to adopt the model form in place of an existing one, thereby enabling churches to modernize out-of-date or inadequate trusts. In order to preserve the Baptist character of the Trusts, the Act provided that the Model Trust could over-ride the old trusts except when dealing with the qualifications of members, elders, deacons and ministers, doctrinal matters and the identity of the ultimate beneficiaries in the event of the total dissolution of the church.<sup>21</sup> The *Forward Movement Trusts* were, therefore, revised in 1951 and became known as the *Fuller Trusts*.

The *Fuller Trusts* of 1951<sup>22</sup> were similar to the 1941 YBA Deed, though they eased the doctrinal requirement for membership,<sup>23</sup> upholding Foundation Deeds which stipulated closed membership, but the requirement for the diaconate was reduced from two thirds to a simple majority.<sup>24</sup>

This was the position until 1960 when the Charities Act of that year was passed. At this time, it was felt that the *Fuller Trust Deed* was not adequate for the new situation,<sup>25</sup> and so the opportunity was taken by the BU to alter the Model Trust. The

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21 Payne, *The Baptist Union*, 253-54. See also the discussion of the impact of the Act by R. Fairbairn, 'Baptist Model Trusts', *BT* September 7, 1961, 10.

22 Here Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 115, needs to be corrected when he wrongly dates the *Fuller Trusts* as 1956.

23 So Jones, 'The Authority of the Trust Deed', 115.

24 *Baptist Model Trusts for Chapels and Halls (Fuller Trusts)*, (1951), clauses 16 (a) and (b) and 16 (c) respectively.

25 Details of these inadequacies, none of which had a bearing on baptism or membership, were set out by R. Fairbairn, 'Baptist Model Trusts', *BT* September 7, 1961, 10.

*Fairbairn Trusts*, as they became known, had to go before the Baptist Assembly in both 1961 and 1962 before they could be adopted.<sup>26</sup> Here it was stipulated that the premises could only be used 'for maintaining and practising the doctrine and rite of the Baptism of Believers and no other Baptism', and that all ministers must have been 'immersed on a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and maintaining and practising the doctrine and rite of the Immersion of Believers and no other Baptism'.<sup>27</sup> The Trusts could not be altered on 'the doctrines to be held and proclaimed', and this meant that if a Foundation Deed required closed membership then that could not be changed. Further, if the membership was not closed then 'all or at least a majority' of the deacons and elders 'shall nevertheless at all times consist of persons who have been baptised that is to say immersed upon a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ', and should the church need a moderator, he should have been baptized 'as aforesaid'.<sup>28</sup>

In all of this, it was never the case that where a Trust Deed stipulated one term of membership, whether open or closed, the adoption of the Model Trust Deed could change this, which is why both the *Fuller* and *Fairbairn* Model Trusts had either/or clauses.

However, the 1969 ~~Act~~ Sharing of Church Buildings Act made it possible for Paedobaptists and Baptists to share the same building for worship provided that the managing trustees of the building(s) concerned were persuaded that the church in question was fully desirous of proceeding with the agreement. Under the Act, then, it became possible for two or more local congregations to come together into one worshipping community, legally retaining their separate identities, which left it open for them to revert back to those identities should they wish to do so, but in fact and

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<sup>26</sup> See front cover of *Baptist Model Trust for Chapels and Halls (Fairbairn Trusts)* (n.d., but 1962), n.p., but front cover.

<sup>27</sup> *Fairbairn Trusts*, 3, 3-4 respectively.

<sup>28</sup> *Fairbairn Trusts*, 8 and 10 respectively.

experience they would become one body.<sup>29</sup> The Act granted permission for the observance of the rites and practices of all participating denominations, thereby allowing a Baptist church's premises to be used for infant baptism, provided that a shared buildings agreement had been signed and one or more of the signatories represented a paedobaptist tradition.<sup>30</sup> Without this Act the developments which have taken place in LEPs could not have happened.

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<sup>29</sup> Rev. E. Bruce Hardy of Great Bookham, Surrey, 'Trust Deeds Need Not Be A Hindrance', *BT* August 6, 1970, 3. See also Rev. S. Gordon Jackson, of Castleton near Cardiff, 'How Act Works for sharing buildings', *BT* June 25, 1970, 6.

<sup>30</sup> It should also be noted that Union churches and churches in the Bunyan tradition always operated under Trusts which allowed both forms of baptism.



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